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Rites of
Passage

A JOURNEY THROUGH HUMAN LIFE

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SAARC Culture is an annual research journal of the SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo. It seeks to provide a platform to the academics, practitioners, policy makers 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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CONTENTS

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

It is with great pleasure that I extend my warmest greetings to all who have contributed to and will peruse the pages of the latest publication of the SAARC Cultural Centre. As the Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre, it is my honour to introduce this significant work on a theme close to the heart of our shared cultural heritage:

"*Rites of Passage of the SAARC Region.*" This publication encapsulates a comprehensive exploration of the rites of passage prevalent in our diverse and vibrant SAARC region. Within its pages, you will find a rich tapestry of scholarly insights and academic discourse on four pivotal stages of human life: traditional birthing rituals, initiation rituals marking the journey to adulthood, wedding rituals symbolizing the union of souls, and funeral rituals signifying the final rest or the commencement of a new journey. The importance of this publication cannot be overstated. It serves as a beacon, illuminating the profound significance of rituals in guiding individuals and communities through life's myriad transitions. By delving into the intricate fabric of these rituals, we gain a deeper understanding of the cultural ethos that binds us together as members of the SAARC family.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the academics, scholars, and contributors whose dedicated efforts have enriched this publication. Your research, insights, and expertise have played a pivotal role in shaping this publication into a valuable resource for scholars, students, and enthusiasts of cultural studies alike. As we embark on this journey through the *"Rites of passage of the SAARC region"*, may this journal serve as a catalyst for further exploration, dialogue, and appreciation of our shared cultural heritage.

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EDITOR'S DESK

The SAARC Region is known for its rich traditions and cultural practices that encompass every aspect of human life. Among these traditions, the Rites of Passage holds great cultural and religious importance and continues to be an integral part of an individual's identity and heritage. From birth to death, an individual's life is regulated by these transitional markers earmarking their transition from one stage to another.

The *"Rites of Passage of the SAARC Region"*, showcase a rich diversity of customs, beliefs, and practices deeply rooted in the cultural and historical backgrounds. Despite the diversity, there is a degree of similarity among these birth ceremonies, marriage rituals and funeral practices. The expressions may be different but it exists in all societies.

Considering the shared belief and interconnected histories that the SAARC Member States have in common, the SAARC Cultural Centre releases the SAARC Culture, Volume (8) on the topic *Rites of Passage of the SAARC Region.* The objective of the journal is to explore the multifaceted dimensions of these rituals and shed light on their role in shaping the social, cultural and spiritual dynamics of South Asian communities.

This volume contains articles from various parts across South Asia on rituals that range from birth, marriage and death. These articles highlight the relevance and contemporary implications of rites of passage among South Asian communities. This volume celebrates the rich cultural heritage of South Asia and aims to contribute towards a deeper understanding and appreciation of the social, cultural and spiritual significance of rites of passage in South Asia

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THE BIRTH OF A KIN: A STUDY OF TRADITIONS AROUND THE BIRTH OF A NEW CHILD AMONG THE APATANIS

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ABSTRACT

Every society and culture have different traditions to welcome their newborn babies. These traditions mark an important passage of life, for both the child and the parent. This paper is based on an ethnographic study of the Apatani tribal community of Arunachal Pradesh, in the extreme northeast of India. This small indigenous community with their remarkable eco-agriculture and unique and rich traditions has kinship ties and reciprocity for their sustainable way of life. In Apatani tradition, a child is welcomed to the clan and integrated into their kinship ties through ten days long *Niipo Aping Honii* ceremony. Apatanis follows a dual lineage system. While the patrilineal clan is the close kinship group where the child is born, the extended matrilineal kinship groups called *Alii Diinii, Diirang, Lache, Kuting, Gyasi*, etc., are the kinship ties that the mother from another clan introduces the child to. Thus, during these ten days, the women from extended kinship groups visit the child with gifts and blessings. They acknowledge the birth of a new child and mark the establishment of a new kinship tie to their network of relations. This network of relations is the support system channelled through reciprocal exchanges of gifts and goodwill. Thus, a child newly born to a clan, through these birth ceremonies, becomes a member of the clan and community. This paper argues that the birth ceremonies are not a mere celebration of a new life but an occasion of addition and continuity of kinship ties, which is the signature feature of the tribal community. Therefore, the birth of a child signifies the continuity of traditions, relations and lineage. A newborn baby is seen as kin who embodies all the promises and prospects of new kinship ties.

Keywords: Ritual, Arunachal Pradesh, Apatani

INTRODUCTION: RITES OF PASSAGE

The advent of human life, a transformative event that marks the beginning of an individual's journey, has long been accompanied by a rich tapestry of rituals and traditions across cultures and eras. In traditional tribal societies, these rituals, deeply embedded within the community's social and cultural fabric, serve not only to celebrate the arrival of a new life but also to provide a framework for understanding and navigating the profound changes that childbirth brings. Birth rituals also play a pivotal role in social cohesion and the transmission of cultural values, reinforcing social bonds (Radcliffe-Brown 1935) and transmitting cultural heritage from one generation to the next.

These rituals offer a window into the community's understanding of the world and its place within it. Lévi-Strauss (1969) argued that birth rituals play an important role in integrating newborns into the community and their kinship group. It presents occasions for reciprocal exchanges of gifts and services between mother's and father's kin. It helps in maintaining the social order (Radcliffe Brown 1935), stability and solidarity among the kin, while on the other hand for the child it creates a sense of belongingness and identity status of the child in their social organization (Kundu, and Tarafdar 2013). The complementary filiation between the mother's and father's kin group through their affiliation to the newborn child strengthens this kinship relations Thus it helps in the introduction and integration of the child into the wider network of kinship. These ceremonial events create occasions where the kins could acknowledge and legitimatise the inclusion of a new member.

Further, many thinkers focus on the 'traditional care aspects' of tribal society (Shah, and Dwivedi, 2013). Pandey and Tiwari (2001) discuss that these traditions provide a sense of well-being for both the child and the mother. Birth ceremonies are also occasions for understanding the kinship roles and responsibilities in providing caregiving, especially when the child and the mother are in vulnerable conditions. This also reinforces their kinship bonds and relations. Shah and Dwivedi (2013) present another aspect of these traditions focusing on 'traditional newborn care practices'. The authors give an example from the Irular tribal community in Tamil Nadu where *'Koozhi Kolu'*, meaning traditional newborn care practice, where the group of kin women provide care and support to the child and

the mother. Thus, these rituals serve to strengthen community bonding by providing an opportunity for the community to celebrate and support the new family; transmit cultural values and traditions from one generation to the next; protection of mother and the child to provide a sense of comfort and support to both during a time of significant emotional and physical change; marking transitions or passage from one stage to another; integration of the child to kinship web and the cultural and spiritual context. These rituals offer a sense of continuity and connection, connecting the newborn to their family, community, and heritage.

This paper focuses on the Apatani community where a few key features of the birth rituals or traditions around the birth of a child differ a little bit. The highlights are more on the establishment and reinforcement of kinship ties, largely after the birth of the child. Except for a few dietary restrictions or so there are not many traditions associated with the pre-natal period. There is no naming ceremony of the child nor there is any specific role of a midwife apart from helping in delivery and cutting of the umbilical cord. However, like in many other societies, there is a sense of pollution associated with blood and other discharges of the delivery process. The mother is considered unclean and is not allowed to touch utensils for an assigned period.

The paper is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Field interviews were conducted using an interview guide with knowledgeable women and men of the Apatani community. The birth rituals or rather the birth traditions in the case of the Apatani community mean many things for the family and the community. These traditions reinforce cultural cohesions and strengthen the kinship ties established during the marriage of the couple. It is also an important stage of transition for both the parents as they transition into parenthood as well as newer roles and responsibilities towards their family and kin.

APATANI SOCIETY

The Apatani community is a small but prominent tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, with a population of 43,777 (22,523 females and 21,254 males). They are known for their unique cultural practices, such as their highly efficient sedentary wet rice cultivation, natural resource management, and their

traditional villages which are densely organized and picturesque. The Ziro Valley is their homeland, which is also one of the first district headquarters in the state.

Apatani society is a close-knit endogamous society divided into 74 exogamous clans. There are five main traditional village clusters Hangu, Hari, Biila, Hiija, and Diibo. The village clusters are then further sub-identified into smaller groups of villages and then into clan villages. The society is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal with a subjugated position of women in all social and political spheres. They have their customary laws and belief system which they have been maintaining since despite several erosions due to the coming of new governance and judiciary system, and the coming of new organized religious groups. While in the past agriculture, animal husbandry and small trade were the main economic activity; at present a large number of Apatanis have taken government jobs, and it is considered that Apatanis have the highest number of high-ranking official posts in the state. Apart from government jobs people have taken up small businesses, contractual works, other occupations such as poultry farms, driving trackers (local mode of transportation), restaurants, photocopy and computer typing and printing shops, flower nurseries, and similar livelihood sources which were earlier not available. However, a large number of households continue their traditional rice cultivation in their agricultural fields and continue to maintain their kitchen gardens, bamboo gardens, pine groves, and forest patches for subsistence use. In the past few decades, a good number of Apatanis have converted to different sects of Christianity and Hinduism, and also have associated themselves with Doni Poloism (a re-organized and institutionalized form of religion based on the traditional belief system of the Tani group of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh).

It is important to note however, that despite the substantial transformations that the community went through within the past few decades in terms of the entire shift in governance and administration with the coming of the Indian government, the changes in economic structure, religious changes, and changes in attitude and worldview due to modern education, exposure and interaction with the outside world, and introduction of modern technologies and media; the community has still managed to maintain most of their age-old traditions, and the integrity of their identity. While several factors have played an important role in this such as the integrity of their ancestral land

and territory, their belief system, etc., one important aspect which is also an important component of this paper is the strong social cohesion that has been maintained through their closely tied linkages of kinship lineage system, social relations, and constant transaction of resources as a gift through those linkages. This paper looks into the traditions associated with the birth of a child, and how their traditional customs, beliefs and practices weave a newborn child into their network of kinship ties. This study found that in recent times, especially when the community is going through so many changes, these linkages have evolved into newer organizations and systems which try to accommodate newer forms of relations as well as expressions of endearment and support.

APATANI KINSHIP SYSTEM: *HENII-MYANII*

Henii-Myanii means the ones who care and the ones who contribute. Although Apatani society is a patriarchal society it follows the double descent system in kinship formation. To understand Apatani society it is necessary to understand the structures of relationships and kinship networks with both the living and non-living beings. According to Radcliffe Brown (1952), "Kinship terms are like signposts to interpersonal conducts or etiquette, with the implication of appropriate reciprocal rights, duties privileges and obligations. It is their complex network of relationships with different entitlements, roles, and obligations or responsibilities towards each of their kin that makes Apatani society a very close-knit society. Every social and customary occasion throughout a community member's life cycle requires an invocation of these kinship ties.

They maintain this close relationship with their ancestral spirits, other benevolent and malevolent spirits, and deities who dwell along with them in their social and natural landscape. During every ceremonial event and annual festival, they call upon their respective relatives and spirits to visit their respective clan villages to receive gifts and feast reciprocate with blessings in return. These blessings are reiterations of promises of protection and support during and from untoward incidents, disease or sickness, natural calamities, and at the time of conflicts. In this way, each of these relationships function as a support and care network within the community that takes part in every major event and development of a person, or kin.

Therefore, the process through which kinship ties are established

becomes necessary to identify the group or category of kin, which in return will ascribe different status, roles and responsibilities to each kind of kin. There are few customary rules through which kinship relations are formed among Apatanis and based on that there are three means of kinship formation among the Apatanis:

1. By virtue of birth within a clan or Consanguineal kin or the family of orientation:

Among the Apatanis, as a patrilineal society, the clans are organised on the male line (agnatic). This agnatic group of kins forms a clan *(halu)*, and each clan constitutes a separate village *(lemba)* named after a common male ancestor. Within the clan, each consanguineal member is a clan brother *(ate)* or sister (a*ta*) and the sister-in-law who comes from another clan village is addressed as *achi*. Each household *(ude)* is a nuclear family, which along with the immediate families forms the family *(uru)*, family group *(halu-uru or tulu)* and so on. For all purposes, the clan is the main social unit and identifier. Clan villages are then further grouped into larger village clusters or as the main village, the original ancestor of the clan group. These village clusters are then further grouped into collectives of villages that act as political and social allies *(asso)* (Haimendorf 1962).

2. By marriage or affinal kinship or family of procreation:

Relations formed outside the clans are formed through exogamous marriage. A lot of care is taken that marriage does not happen between close cousins either; descendants of up to six generations are considered as relatives forbidden from matrimony, though not rare. Thus, affinal relations are formed with the furthest villages which results in the further spread of the kinship network.

3. Virtual kins also known as artificial kins or kinship formed by ceremonial friendship:

This is a very special relationship of friendship formed between two individuals from far-off villages through special ceremonies and the exchange of gifts. Takhe Kani (1993) lists two such friendships - *bunii ajing* and *piinyang ajing*. They take the oath of looking after each other's safety and well-being and help each other through thick and thin. These relations are so important that a father would divide and pass on these

*ajing*s (friends) among his son(s) to continue the relationship.

SIGNIFICANCE OF MATERNAL OR UTERINE LINE OF DESCENT

While the descent line is identified on both male and female lineage lines, it is the maternal line of kinship and relations that plays a more significant role in following affinal relations, roles, and responsibilities. The female member's brothers and her maternal uncles play a significant role throughout a woman's and her children's lives. This material and affinal kinship relation descent is traced for five generations on both parental descent lines. Cross-marriages between or across these relations and kinship units are prohibited as they are close kin.

As mentioned earlier, gifts and resources are circulated across and through these kinship lines of both affinal and agnatic clan relations. The entitlement of these gifts depends upon the nature of the relation, order of age and occasion or cause of the situation which necessitates the giving. For instance, a marriage is consummated with the giving of *'ari'* (loosely translated here as a marriage gift). These gifts are presented by the groom to the bride's male kin in order of kinship relation with her. The term '*ari*' has multiple meanings based on its usage. It could mean both ritual gifts associated with certain ceremonies such as marriage, as well as the relational value or meaning of a relation. Thus, the one who receives this '*ari*' enters into a particular kinship tie with the groom and his kins. This also assigns the kinship status towards all the offspring to be born of the couple.

There are three groups of relations - the *diirang*, are the parents of the bride who receive the lion's share of the gift, the *Lache*, are the brothers or close family brothers or clan brothers, and the *mechu*, the selected close relatives or clan relatives who receive marriage gifts. It is through this giving and receiving of gifts that two different clans enter an affinal kinship relation contract. While these select gift receivers are entitled to similar gifts and services in all future events from now on, they also become responsible and obliged to look after the well-being of the couple, particularly the wife and her progeny. Further, depending on the generation and distance in the kinship relation, the select maternal uncles (usually and including the *lache* and *mechu*) are also identified into four categories. They are entitled to receive specific gifts of meat portions of any sacrificial animal, voluntary

labour services, and alliances during every festival or during times of need.

These relations are named after the name of the gift itself. The close or select maternal uncles who receive the most prized portions of the meat are called *alii*, next is the *kobu-koro*-the closest or immediate uncles who received their mother's *ari* (marriage gift), then *gyasi*, the maternal uncles of the second or next generation, and then the *lyio-panyi* of the third or fourth generation. The remaining more generic relatives are grouped as *kuting*, who usually receive a smaller portion of the gifts. To receive and be entitled to gifts is a matter of honour and responsibility. Often one is responsible for more than one relative. They provide support in times of conflict, unnatural events or famine, in organising festivals, some expensive rituals, or in organising ceremonies during the time of birth, marriage, death, construction of houses or during times when someone needs help in the form of labour or taking up the responsibility of orphaned kins.

When a couple is married, several ceremonies at different stages are organised, such as *riitu pinii* and *eli banii*, where the close kin and clan kin of the wife fill the rice granaries of the couple. In the past, rice grain was also used as currency for trading. Apatani believes in the continuation of their life journey even after death when one continues to live in *neli* (loosely translates as the world of departed/dead people). Therefore, at the funeral of a dead person, all the close kin, relatives and friends would once again bring the best of gifts such as food items, alcohol, shawls, traditional swords, and sacrifice of valuable animals, as supplies for continuation and starting of life in another world.

Having these large groups of assigned kinship relations helps in sharing responsibility. These kin are the first set of relations who are directly concerned with the welfare and well-being of a person. Similarly, during the entire life cycle, the close kin would always be around to help each other. When a child is born, the maternal uncles of both parents pay a special visit with gifts of valuable items such as traditional beads and metal necklaces, and preserved bacon which used to be considered the most valuable meat. In this way, the new baby is introduced to and acknowledged by their uncles and aunts, and a new bond of kinship is established.

BIRTH TRADITIONS

Every birth ceremony encompasses two different phases of different sets of traditions and norms i.e. the traditions related to before and after the delivery of the child. There are different sets of rules and customary beliefs among the Apatanis that are followed by the parents as well as their respective secondary and tertiary kin during these different phases. However, as mentioned earlier these norms are not unique only to Apatani, their variations are observed among different communities across the country and the world.

PRE-NATAL TRADITIONS

As soon as it is realised and confirmed that a woman has conceived or is pregnant, both parents have to follow certain traditions, perform certain rites and maintain certain taboos.

It is important to note that while it is not compulsory there are a few rituals that may be performed by a priest to ward off any evil spirits lurking around and might harm the child in the womb or the mother (please see discussions below for more details regarding these beliefs). The first rite that is performed by the parent is called *ago pilya*, an offering to a house spirit for the protection and well-being of the mother and the child. During the ritual, a chicken is sacrificed, and the liver of the sacrificed chicken is studied to determine the gender of the child. Rites or offerings of prayers like *kharung*, simple Use *ui* (house rites), and *chantung* (protector deity) are performed to strengthen the womb or if the mother is not well (Kaning 2008:79). Similarly, if there is any complicity during the delivery or if the delivery is delayed, it is believed that this is happening due to the malevolent spirit *hiiri.* Therefore, a rite to appease this spirit is performed by the priest by sacrificing and offering a pig to the spirit (Kaning 2008:80). Even certain kinds of dreams are taken for serious consideration for interpretations for consideration of the performance of certain rituals. Often dreams are also considered for the indication of gender, example if there are dreams of traditional knives (*nyatu-ilyo*) or hunting baskets *(lyecha-lyera)* associated with men then the child might be a boy and similarly if the dream is of *Pinta-Liia* (different types of ladle made of gourd skin and canes) associated with women then it might be a girl (Monia 2018:42).

It is believed that the attitude and behaviour of the parents will have

a direct impact on the character and behavioural traits of the child (Gyati 2018:21). Therefore, there are a few important restrictions or taboos that are to be followed by the parents during the period of pregnancy. For instance, the restrictions on food. The parents are not to eat any spotted animals otherwise the child will bear spots on the body. The husband does not burn iron or do any painting and the wife should avoid weaving any pattern or designs otherwise the child will have black marks on their body. The parents should not attend negative incidents or events such as funerals, cases of accidents or suicides, they should not witness such events otherwise the child will have squint eyes.

Killing of specific kinds of animals is restricted for the parents as it is believed that their attributes would come to the child. For instance, they are not to kill or eat snakes otherwise the child will be born with a fork-like tongue. A pregnant woman is not allowed to serve the food by themselves, even her food is to be served by their husband or other female relatives who are around to assist her. It is believed that child will develop covetous attributes and have uncontrolled hands which may lead him/ her to steal (Rana 2018:21)

During the pregnancy the mother might desire certain kinds of food, sometimes some very unique food items, it is believed that all her desires should be fulfilled otherwise the child will have excessive salivation (*rie binii*) (Monia 2018; Rana 2018)

DELIVERY

Several care are taken during the time of delivery. Any male member or children are not allowed to be around during the labour pain. Only the midwife and the priest are allowed to be around to help the mother. The mother pushes the baby into a kneeling position as she holds on to the ropes securely tied to ceiling poles.

The midwife cuts the umbilical cord with sharpened *yabing*, a variety of bamboo which is considered to be non-septic. The wounds or placenta cuts are covered with ash powder of *tarko* wood. The placenta and cut-out umbilical cord are disposed of in the restroom. The child is bathed with warm water in *niire piichang*, a large clay pot separately kept for the purpose. This pot is passed upon by the neighbours whenever necessary. As soon as the child is born, the father would insert a stick at the opening

of the husking corner of the house, in a way of blocking the opening. This was done to prevent any evil spirits from coming. This stick is kept for the remaining ten days (Monia 2018:44).

POST BIRTH TRADITIONS

The baby is washed on a large clay pot called *niire piichang*, which is particularly kept only for this purpose. The mid-wives or the *khiinii pinii* (translates into the one who cuts the umbilical cord) help the mother throughout this process.

CLAIMING THE CHILD

According to Apatani tradition, and also according to many other tribes in Arunachal, the child has to be claimed as soon as they are born before other spirits claim them. These beliefs have been deep-seated in traditional beliefs since time immemorial. According to Apatani oral traditions during our ancestral time when humans, animals and spirits (benevolent and malevolent) lived together, they used to communicate with each other and humans could see the spirits. However, these relations with different sets of spirits were complex, while the benevolent spirits were there to protect and help humans, the malevolent spirits were in constant conflicts and competition for power, rights and opportunities. It was during the period when *Abotani*, the forefather of the Tani group of tribes including the Apatani, was trying to raise his offspring but all his attempts to impregnate failed. Frustrated, *Abotani* threw his semen which accidentally impregnated *Donyi Yayi Chunji*, the daughter of the Sun. The unaware *Donyi Yayi Chunji* was unable to state who is the father of the child she was carrying. Seeing this all the spirits started claiming the child to get married to her. Seeing this clamour, the father decided to set up a series of competitions to determine the rightful father of the child. *Abotani* had to fiercely fight against all the powerful spirits and win the competition to establish his claim and finally married *Donyi Yayi Chunji*. Apatanis believe that though over the period human and spirit worlds got separated, the evil spirits are still looking for opportunities to harm humans and cause misfortune. Therefore, according to Apatani beliefs, a child is named as soon as they are born to claim the child before the evil spirits do.

NAMING AND *LLINGA-LANGA*

Therefore, the parents keep the names of the children in advance before birth. Often, they are named after the grand or great-grandparents. This is done to make the claim on the child for humankind, before the spirit makes its first move and name and claim the child for the spirit world. It is believed that when the child is claimed by the spirits before they are claimed by the parents, the child suffers from chronic mental or physical illness and might not even survive for long (Rana 2018). In Apatani tradition, the naming order is in reverse, here the surname comes first followed by the first name. For instance, in Hibu Kunya, Hibu is the clan name and Kunya is the first or actual name of the person.

Simultaneously, another important step in the claiming of the child is when as soon as the child is born the mother ties *Llinga-langa* (bearings of body). This is made of a twisted thread made of black and yellowish saffron colours threads traditionally made from a particular animal fur hair of *siibang-siikhii* (Kaning 2008: 81) but nowadays it is made from simple wool. The tying of a thread on wrists is called *ala-langa*, on the calf is *ali-lIinga*, and on the hip is *erey-biyang*. This is to protect the baby from any evil spirits (Kaning 2008:80) and symbolizes the introduction of the newborn baby into the realms of the human world (Landi 2018:44).

Thus, through these beliefs and actions, the first ties of familial kinship are established by the parents who claim the child as their own. By this, they bring the child to the family, to the clan and the entire community. By this, a newborn child is woven into the community fabric of kinship, family and identity.

NIIPO APING HONII: FEAST OF BIRTH

It is important to mention here that this tradition of holding a feast has tremendously changed over the period. While in earlier days traditionally only clan elderly women were invited for a meal, the number of guests were only a group of eight or nine women. This number and types of guests invited have changed as today the number has increased even to a hundred guests, so much so that Community-Based Organizations had to put restrictions on such practices. They argue that the original meaning of *niipo aping* is being diluted by such practices. This feast of birth of a newborn baby is the time

when the baby is introduced formally to the clan community. As the days of delivery come closer, the parents start preparing for the feast. Different kinds of meat such as pork, beef and eggs are arranged, and different varieties of smashed chilli flakes (*yormii*) are prepared in advance for the feast. As the baby is born, either on the same day or the next day, depending on the preparation by the parents, elderly female clan members are invited to the feast.

Traditionally, men or young boys are strictly restricted from attending the *niipo aping*. These female kins from the paternal clan of the baby thus get introduced to each other, blessings are showered on the child and wisdoms are shared with the mother. After the meal, all the guests are given three pieces of meat. The *khiin-pinii-bo*, the midwife, receives the largest piece of pork for her assistance and help. However, in the past three decades, kin from the maternal line and female folks of close friends of parents also started coming for the *niipo aping* feast. They would come with small gifts for the new child and a few delicious food items for the mother. In return, they receive the meal and pieces of meat. This feast became the occasion when relatives from faraway villages and clans could come and see the child. While traditionally the meal was a simple feast for close kin at present the feast is being organized at a larger scale with varieties of food items and drinks to entertain guests. Soon the birth feast became an extravagant and expensive affair for the family. So much so that different kinship-based 'fund associations' such as '*diin-banii*' started giving financial 'gifts' to parents to organize the feast (Mossang, and Yomso 2022).

But many families started feeling such feasts becoming unaffordable so much so that the All Apatani Women Association of Ziro (AAWAZ) and several other village-level committees had to put restrictions on such feasts. They passed resolutions urging the community members to follow the traditional and customary norms/laws (*ditung-potung*) (Rimi, 2021).

THE KINSHIP CLAIMS: THE TEN-DAY TABOO PERIOD

After the delivery, *Iinga anyo*-a nine-day plus one more day period of taboo starts. This is an age-old tradition during which the parents are to refrain from certain normal activities. This taboo period also imposes restrictions on people who are visiting the house during the period. This period is marked by the '*pussung du*', the erection of a bamboo stick on the

entrance of the house. This is the marker that the family is observing the *Iinga anyo* period and taboos. This means visitors need to be careful and respect the tradition. A person who has been to a funeral or a place where a dead body is kept, cannot visit the house with a newborn baby afterwards on the same day. They can enter the house only on the next day. A person who has gone hunting or has spent some time in the forest cannot enter the house immediately. They have to spend some time in another house in the neighbourhood where they can warm themselves first. It is believed that such a person is being followed by evil spirits and they might enter the house along with the person causing illness and misfortune for the baby.

In many ways, one could interpret these restrictions as a quarantine period where people are observing some form of social distance to protect the newborn baby and the mother whose immune system is still weak and is recuperating. This practice of taboo period is observed among many other tribes in Arunachal such as among Miji, Adi, Nyishi, Galo, etc. The duration might be a little different, and the norms and traditional explanations of this practice might be a little different from tribe to tribe but they all agree that the newborn child is vulnerable and the spirits which cause illness and misfortunes might take advantage of the situation. Among the Apatani, this period is nine days long when they follow strict rules. This is also the assigned period when after their clan members have visited the child it is the turn of the extended kin to visit the child. This is a period when the child is claimed into the kinship ties, with gifts and blessings.

a. Restrictions on Parents

The parents maintain a ten-day taboo period during which both the father and the mother of the new child have to follow several restrictions. Landi Monya (2018) interprets these ten days as 'maternity-rest'. During this period, the mother is restricted from most of the household chores such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc. So much so, she cannot even serve food to herself. All these works are done either by the father or by other female relatives. It is believed that if the mother fails to follow through and serve by herself the food, the child will grow up with a tendency to steal. The mother is not even allowed to set her foot on the ground or touch the soil, which means she cannot do any agricultural activities. She with her baby are to stay at home even if the baby's linen is not to be dried outside to avoid any sickness of the child.

Similarly, the father is restricted from doing any work which would require him to use his machete. He is restricted from visiting the forest or causing any harm to any vegetation or animals during the period. Failing these restrictions, the child will have stunted development. So, he is free of most of the manly responsibilities, which means he can focus on helping the mother in taking care of the child. For both parents, this is the period where they are actually free from their other day-to-day responsibilities and where they can entirely focus on the newborn child and nurture their relations.

b. The visitation of the kins

During these ten days, the close kin from the maternal sides of both the parents would visit, particularly on the third day. What is important to note is that this visitation is done only by female kin, the wives of the kin. This is the time when they first meet the newborn child and give their blessings. They bring the gift of delicious food such as rice, vegetables, meat and eggs. This food ensures the nutritious consumption by the mother.

These gifts and visitation are the reflection as well as the signifier of the complexity of kinship network- and their meanings. One reinforces or builds the kinship ties just as at the time of marriage. Here, different statuses and levels of the closeness of their kinship ties are depicted through the gifts they bring for the child. For instance, the closest or the immediate maternal uncles and aunts, the *alii* and the *diirang*, from both parent sides but particularly from the mother's side, would also bring gifts such as a Tibetan bell, the *maji* a bronze plate or the *talo*. The rest of the relatives of the *lache*, the *gyashi*, and so on may bring valuable beads strung on threads. These items would become the property of the child when they grow up.

Now there are several rules to follow here. As mentioned, it is the female kin who make the first visit by norm during the period. If they, for some reason missed the third day then on the next odd days such as the fifth, seventh and ninth day (not on any even days), they can visit the child. Another set of important numerical rules applies to the gifts brought by the kins. The number of beads given as a gift should always be in pair(s) i.e. it should be either two pieces of beads or four, six, eight, and so on but never in odd numbers. Further, when *maji* and *talo* are gifted

they should be strung on threads on both sides of the *maji* or *talo*, there should be beads on both sides the *maji* or the *talo,* in pairs as mentioned earlier, always. Even the number of threads that are used to string these beads, *maji* and *talo*, are also counted in pairs- it should be two or four or six, and so on, in the count, never in the odd count. Otherwise, it is seen as incomplete or 'single' or 'unpaired'.

Fig.1.*Maji* or Tibetan Bell. Source: Photo taken by Tilling Namer

Further, another important signifier of different kinds of kinship relations is shown through the colour of the thread being used. The black colour thread is used if there are multiple kinship relations in the family. For instance, if there is a multiple marriage alliance between the *urus* or families from maternal and paternal sides. The yellowish saffron colour thread is used if there are no other kinship ties between the families or the *urus* of the parents.

SHAVING OF HAIR: *DENGE RENII*

On the ninth day, the mother and the child are brought out in the open sun, though they are still not allowed to touch the ground. On this day, the baby gets its first hair cut traditionally known as '*denge renii*'. The entire head is shaved of any hair except for a small elongated portion of the head in the front. Traditionally the hair is carefully gathered and used for spinning a thread which is later used as a thread around the waist of the girl child, also known as *lyacho*. As mentioned above, these ten days are the time when the child is under the constant watch and attention of the parents, and any possibility of interaction with spirits is avoided.

One could interpret this ten-day taboo or *Iinga anyo* as an incumbent period for the parents especially the mother to recuperate her health and give primary focus on the child. The mother for the next ten days is not allowed to touch any utensils at home. This means she cannot cook, so much so that she cannot serve herself any meal. All this will be taken care of by either the husband or any female relatives who would come and look after her. It is believed that if the parents break any rule, then it will have direct consequences on the child. For instance, if the mother touches the utensils and serves food by herself then the child will develop a habit of stealing as they grow up. For these remaining ten days, the mother cannot set her foot on the soil or the ground. She is to stay inside the house along with the baby. The baby is not directly exposed to the sun, not even the baby's clothing is dried outside but inside.

One important observation I made during this study is how this entire process revolves around the female members of the kinship network. Men are particularly restricted from participating during this period. They may assist in the background but they cannot participate directly. This further reinforces my observation about the significance of the female-oriented kinship lineage as argued in the previous section. This is contrary to the dominant belief and perception that hereditary and kinship lineage systems only run through the male line. This belief determines the normative social beliefs and social structure, or in other words, it argues for the establishment and maintenance of the patriarchal system in Apatani society.

CONCLUSION

Like all the rites of passage, in traditional tribal societies, birth rituals are deeply meaningful and rooted in spiritual beliefs and cultural practices. From a functionalist perspective, these rituals or practices play the function of building social cohesion within the community and strengthening kinship ties. For Apatanis, each of these traditions has its traditional-historical purposes and meanings. Their life right from conception to death is marked with acute consciousness of their belief in the parallel existence of the world of spirits and ancestors. Their careful interaction with the world of spirits and humans ascertains their holistic well-being.

Apatani traditions around the birth of a child begin with conception. The parents carefully thread their lives and follow many taboos to protect the child and the mother. The child has to be claimed as soon as they are born by the parents first. Then throughout ten days, through their numerous and intricate rites, the kins would lay their claim and acknowledge their membership to the community. Therefore, whenever a child is born it is the birth of a kin, an offshoot which will form its branches in time to come. The kinship ties work towards weaving these new kin into the kinship network.

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BIRTHING RITUALS AMONG YAKKURE AND HENANIGALA INDIGENOUS PEOPLE; THE VEDDAS IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Yakkure in Polonnaruwa and Henanigala in Ampara are two current Sri Lankan indigenous groups displaced by the Mahaweli and *Maduru* Oya Irrigational Development projects in the mid-20th century. Originally hunter-gatherers with minimal assimilation to other ethnic groups, they possessed a unique culture rich in traditions, customs, and notably, exclusive birthing rituals. The resettlement led to cultural assimilation and the adoption of Sinhalese cultural traits as a means of adapting to their new sociocultural environment. To gather and preserve traditional knowledge on birthing rituals linked with the indigenous medicinal system, this research was conducted from 2017 to 2020. A qualitative study design was employed to explore birthing rituals and associated rites. The data collection process involved interviews with 'Key Informants' and 'Specialized Informants' knowledgeable about birthing rituals. Thirteen interviews (6 specialized and 7 key informants) were conducted in Yakkure, and fourteen interviews (5 specialized and 9 key informants) took place in Henanigala. Additionally, six oral histories in Yakkure and five in Henanigala were conducted. Data analysis through coding and content analysis revealed traditional rites practised during pregnancy and childbirth in both communities. Yakkure villagers used mantras and a ritual called *Kala Mura Nawima* for fetal protection. Unique womb protection rites, including womb setting, womb massage, and herb use for dispelling impurity and purification, were observed. In Henanigala, blessings from *Na Yakku* (kin demons) were expected, and a specific childbirth place called *Kili Pela* (impurity hut) was created and disinfected with traditional medicinal plants. The ritual of *Divas Deviyo* was present among the Henanigala Vedda people. These indigenous knowledge systems are endangered due to resettlement, assimilation, and modernization, impacting cultural preservation. Traditional knowledge is not passed down to younger generations, who lean towards Western medicine. The traditional midwife (*winnambu amma*) has been replaced by the bio-medicinal midwife. Documentaries and ethnographies are essential methods to safeguard this invaluable indigenous heritage.

Keywords: *Y*akkure, Henanigala, Vedda People, Pregnancy, Birth, Rites

INTRODUCTION

Rituals and ritualistic performances have been universal elements in human societies, with roots extending back to the period of Homo neanderthalensis, our closest ancestor, who inhabited the Earth approximately 200,000 years ago (Haviland 1975, Relethford 2008). Throughout human history, rituals and associated practices have persisted and evolved, intricately linked with various facets of individuals' lives. These ceremonial acts serve as agents for human expression and collective bonding, offering consolation and a sense of order amidst life's challenges such as illnesses, uncertainties, natural disasters, and unfortunate incidents. Despite technological advancements and modernity, rituals remain integral components of societal frameworks. Their evolutionary path has adapted to changing geographical landscapes, societies, and cultures. Consequently, individuals in technologically advanced societies find themselves immersed in ritualistic practices, transcending social class, income disparities, and geographical boundaries. The continuity and demand for rituals across diverse demographics emphasize their significance in addressing fundamental human needs and aspirations. Whether in times of celebration, mourning, or existential reflection, rituals provide a universal language beyond individual differences. Thus, the multifaceted evolution of rituals throughout history hasn't eradicated them from societal frameworks; instead, it has shaped them into dynamic entities fulfilling diverse needs across various cultural contexts. Among these rituals, rites of passage hold significant importance, as they are associated with every individual in society, while the choice of other rituals is personal. In other terms, rites of passage can be identified as initial ceremonies, transitional ceremonies, life-cycle ceremonies, crisis rites and purification ceremonies (Norbeck and Alexander 2023).

French sociologist Arnold van Gennep, considered the first to examine these rituals (2011), discovered that all human societies use ceremonial rites to mark significant transitions in the social status of individuals. These rites highlight and validate changes in a person's status, particularly during life-transforming events such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Furthermore, he identified that these rituals support individuals in transitioning from one social or life stage to another without leaving them lost between the previous and new life stages. Specifically, these rituals provide support, helping individuals to find relief and calm themselves during transitional

life situations (Gennep 2019).

Gennep through his in-depth studies on the structures of rites of passage that were conducted in many of the societies around the world, has identified similar features without societal cultural or geographical differentiation. Those include periods of segregation, a liminal state of transition from one status to another, and the process of reintroduction to society with a new identity (Gennep 2011). These stages that were initially identified by Gennep were expanded upon by anthropologist Victor Turner (2017) in brief are as follows.

1. **Separation**: The phase in each rite of passage where the person going through a change is moved into a location away from the community (Victor 2017).

2. **Liminality**: The middle phase where the ritual is taking place. In the liminal phase, a person is no longer a member of their old identity, but they are also not yet a member of their new identity; they exist between two states (Victor 2017).

3. **Reincorporation**: After the initiate has completed the required ritual actions, they are allowed to return to society with their new status. In this phase, they are recognized as having a new identity and role in society (Victor 2017, 93-95).

Depending on the culture the individual belongs to these rites can be varied as in some cultures individuals are symbolically killed, reborn, and nurtured as they take new social statuses, and then re-introduces into society as new and different persons (Jayatilake 2007; Gennep 2011). Among the Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, and Veddas (Indigenous People of Sri Lanka), above mentioned structure of rites of passage is evident (Jayatilake 2004; 2007; 2011). At first "segregation" of the individual takes place as the common initiation stage of the rites of passage which undergoes rituals meant to strip their identities and separate them from their previous social statuses. This segregation period is well performed in the puberty rituals as the girl is segregated from society into a newly built hut or a separate room in the house as soon as her mother gets to know her attainment (Ananada and Nahallage 2018a, Jayatilake 2007). The next stage in many rites of passage transforms individuals to new social statuses through the liminal stage. Communities often consider this stage as exceptionally vulnerable

and/or dangerous because the individual becomes socially ambiguous as he or she faces two forms of status in this stage. In this stage, he or she cannot clarify his or her real status until they are welcomed by society with their new status. In this instance, they reemerge, often through formal ritual procedures, into the normal social fabric with a newly defined identity and a changed social status (Gennep 2011).

In various cultural settings, varieties of rites, rituals, and customs are performed during each stage of rites of passage such as pregnancy, birth, puberty, marriage, and funeral ceremonies. Each passage in an individual's life is identified as specific and highly significant, as during these periods, every individual, irrespective of gender, experiences a transitional period ultimately, upon achieving a new life status, individuals are reintroduced to society in celebratory fashion, sharing the joy of attaining their new life or social status.

Rituals associated with pregnancy and birth are considered pivotal in numerous cultures, serving as preparatory rites for individuals transitioning into motherhood and fatherhood. Simultaneously, these rituals symbolize the welcoming of a new member into the family, kin group, and society. This significance is particularly evident in traditional societies that lack technologically advanced medicinal systems to safeguard both the mother and the child. Additionally, the arrival of a new member is important to these societies due to their low population, rendering each crucial to the overall societal organization. In such contexts, environmental pressures, including pandemics, infections, and natural hazards, pose heightened risks to individuals, necessitating culturally embedded practices to enhance the well-being and longevity of both the mother and the newborn.

The Vedda of Sri Lanka represents the indigenous hunter-gatherer population of the island. Currently the word "indigenous" is used as a general term to refer to native or traditional people living in many countries all around the world. Indigenous people (IP) can be defined as *"Indigenous peoples are the descendants of those who were there before others, who now constitute the mainstream and dominant society. They are defined partly by descent, partly by particular features that indicate their distinctiveness from those who arrived later and partly by their view of themselves"* (Corry 2011, 18).

Sri Lankan indigenous people, the Vedda people have been recognized

as a distinct human race due to their cultural and biological uniqueness. Today, the majority of this group, who self-identified themselves as Vedda, speaks an Indo-European language and do not depend on hunting and gathering as their way of subsistence (Kulathilake, 2012; 2013; 2016). They have been identified as a group of people who are culturally and biologically diminishing due to their assimilation with other main populations of the country (Ananda and Nahallage 2022). Mechanisms of cultural change; acculturation and diffusion have affected their traditional cultural systems and have given birth to admixed cultural and biological features. The only indigenous group in Sri Lanka is now at the threshold of disappearing. They are admixing the mainstream associating with the globalisation process and seeking a way for tomorrow's world as the traditional way of life no longer facilitates them (Lund 2000; Ananda and Nahallage 2022). Nevertheless, some kind of cultural uniqueness is stored under the arms of the older generation as youngsters do not tend to protect their identity as well as their culture as it has not successfully enabled them to eliminate their hunger. Thus, the remaining indigenous uniqueness too is being disappearing rapidly (Ananda and Nahallage 2018b; 2018c). In the past, Indigenous groups were mainly found in many areas of the country. The habituation of the indigenous population seemed to be limited to a few regions in the mid-20th century (Dharamadasa and Samarasinghe 1990). As a consequence of the Mahawali Development Project in the 1960s, currently, they have been restricted to very few regions of Sri Lanka. At present indigenous people can be seen mainly in the Eastern, Uva and North Central Provinces of Sri Lanka including in the districts of Moneragala, Ampara, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and Badulla (Silva and Punchihewa 2011).

Significant literature on the socio-cultural aspects of indigenous people in Sri Lanka has been gathered by researchers worldwide, including those within Sri Lanka. The pioneering study in 1911 by esteemed Ethnologists C. G. Seligman and Z. B. Seligman marked a crucial discovery. They investigated 16 indigenous groups across the Eastern, North, Central, and Uva Provinces, including coastal Veddas on the Eastern coast. The Seligmans categorized these people into Veddas, village Veddas, and coastal Veddas, exploring their chronological status, social organization, family life, property and inheritance, religion, magic, rituals, art, craft, music, language, and sensory experiences (Seligman 2011). Subsequent studies by scholars like N. Wijesekara, James Brow (1970), Dharmadasa

(1990a; 1990b) Dharmadasa and Samarasinghe (1990), Jon Dart (1990), Thangaraja (1995), Obeyesekere (2002), Punchihewa and Silva (2011), among others, continued to focus on these indigenous communities and their socio-cultural backgrounds. Available literature provides an outline of their rites of passage. According to the literature, childbirth is regarded as critical by these people who are fully aware of its perils. To them, it has no phase of uncleanliness as it has with both Tamils and Sinhalese. During menstruation, women do not live apart from the rest. Death in childbirth is rare for the whole community as they know what is about to happen and all the women are there to give any help that they can (Williams 1956, 179; Ananda and Nahallage 2018a; 2018b; Jayathilake 2011). The birth of children is accepted as a natural result of marriage, Veddas, of course, seems to be ignorant of the biological factors involved. The pregnant woman usually stays with her mother or an aunt. Certain taboos are observed during pregnancy and the *Patta Yak* ritual (a ritual performed for a demon called *Patta*) is performed for the protection of the fetus. During labour, the woman goes to a separate room or a temporary shelter close to the hut. The mother or a married aunt assists with labour. Delivery is easy as the babies are usually light in weight. After delivery, the mother is fed for 2-3 days on a liquid diet sort of a broth made of the flesh of a monitor lizard (Wijesekara 1982, 6; Wijesekara 1987, 74). Food made from the *madu* plant (*Cycas nathorstii*) and macaque meat has been considered unsuitable except for monkey meat (Seligman and Seligman 2011). A week or ten days later the mother resumes her normal work. The infant is breastfed. No artificial foods are given. The child grows up with the mother for the most part. Very soon the child learns to be independent. Strangely, Vedda people are not known to have given birth to twins (Wijesekara1982, 6; 1987, 74). A naming ceremony takes place one month after the birth. In the early years, they were called by versatile names such as *thutha*, and *thuthi*. After a few years, they were called by their real names (Wijesekara 1987, 122-124; Meegaskumbura 1995, 91).

The traditions and customs practised during rites of passage are now on the edge of disappearance, with many of these practices already having vanished. At this crucial point, the collection of detailed information about culturally and biologically specific indigenous groups facing diminishment has become necessary. In this context, robust anthropological data on these indigenous groups is essential, particularly considering their rapid

assimilation into the main ethnic groups of the country. As evident the traditional way of life of these groups is no longer integrated into their contemporary way of life and is at risk of diminishing, particularly the few remaining older generations hold the last link to their precious cultural practices and customs, specifically the ritualistic aspects of their culture. As these indigenous groups were assimilated into new socio-cultural statuses and underwent resettlement in unfamiliar environments, they were forced to adopt and adapt to new socio-cultural norms. This often involves borrowing cultural practices and belief systems from neighbouring Tamil and Sinhalese communities, as their traditional forest-dwelling culture and ritualistic way of life are no longer beneficial to their forced transition into agriculture-based socio-cultural statuses. Consequently, even instead of their traditional rites of passage, they seemed to have borrowed new cultural practices from the predominant ethnic groups. Therefore, empirical research on the rituals associated with rites of passage is crucial for both understanding and preserving the cultural heritage of these indigenous groups. Such research provides an essential foundation for comprehending the difficulties of their evolving cultural landscape, documenting the borrowed practices, and safeguarding the unique rituals associated with their rites of passage.
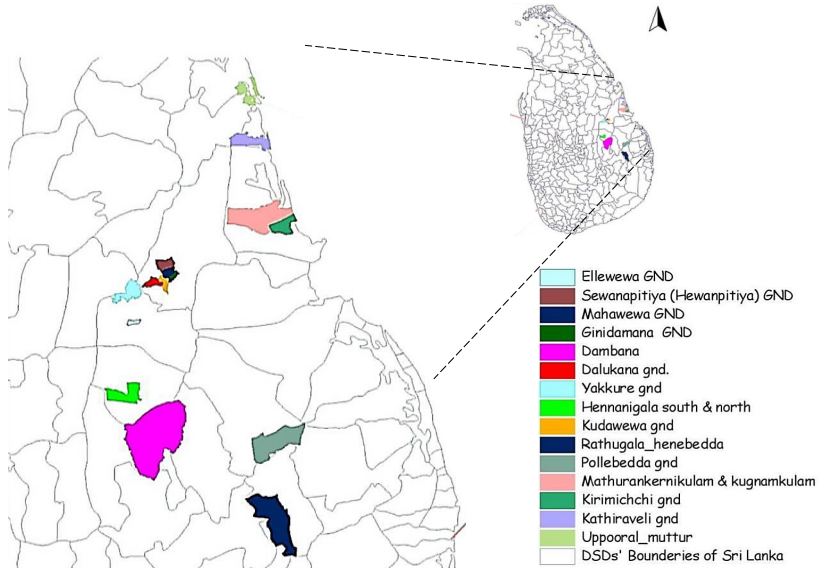
Fig.1. Current Indigenous habitations in Sri Lanka (Silva and Punchihewa, 2011)

The current study is focused on two geographic areas that have received relatively little attention from the Vedda settlements of Sri Lanka: Yakkure and Henanigala. Birthing rituals, as fundamental components of rites of passage, hold profound significance in anthropological perspectives, marking a transformative phase in the life of an individual within a community. In the context of the Yakkure and Henanigala Vedda people, their birthing rituals provide a unique lens through which anthropologists can examine the intersections of cultural practices, traditional knowledge, and the impact of external forces on indigenous communities. Moreover, this anthropological perspective helps unravel the intricate web of cultural heritage, indigenous medicinal systems, and the challenges posed by modernization and resettlement in the preservation of these invaluable birthing traditions.

METHODOLOGY

Study Setting

Two indigenous groups that have not been comprehensively studied about birthing rituals were selected as study areas, as detailed below.

Study Area I: In the 1980s, Kandeganvila, Dambana, and Kotabakiniya (In Uva Bintenna) indigenous groups were relocated to Hennanigala South in Mahaweli System 'C' under the Mahaweli Development Project. From then onwards they belong to the Eastern Province, Ampara district, Dehiathtakandiya Secretariat division and Paranagama Grama Niladari division. Henanigala South, Paranagama and Kalegama are the villages that belong to the Paranagama GN division. The population of Henanigala South division consists of 1930 people belonging to 485 families (GN Reports). But today only about 1450 people who belong to 320 families are descending from the Indigenous population (GN Reports) while others are Sinhalese by ethnicity. There are about 255 km from Colombo to Henanigala (See Figure 2).

Study Area II: Yakkure, situated in the North Central Province in Polonnaruwa district belongs to Dimbulagala Divisional Secretariat and Pahala Yakkure Grama Niladari division; is the second study area. They were relocated to their present locality (Pahala Yakkure), situated about 6 km away from their traditional lands (Parana Yakkure) in 1987 affected

by the Mahaweli Development Project. The population of Pahala Yakkure GN division is 380 which belong to 133 families (GN Reports). There are about 56 km from the main city; Kaduruwela to the village and about 284 km from Colombo to Yakkure (See Figure 2).

SAMPLING METHOD

The purposive sampling method was used for the data collection. This method of selecting individuals participating in the study was motivated by ensuring participants who can provide rich and unique cultural information and who are descendants of the Indigenous lineage.

Interviews were conducted by the researcher in a comfortable place according to the willingness of the informant. Personal data including the
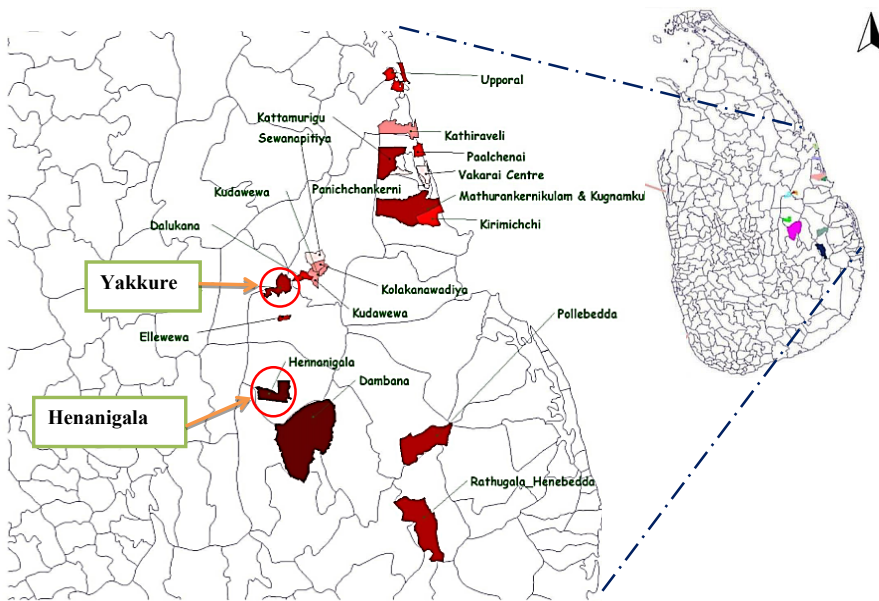
Fig.2. Yakkure and Henanigala villages

name was not collected. Informants were identified as 'key informants' and 'specialized informants' based on their knowledge of birthing rituals. Interviews with Key and Specialized informants were conducted until reaching the point of saturation or stopping criterion: the point at which no new ideas, significant data or information emerged within or across informants or groups (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Data saturation was reached after the 13th interview (with 6 specialized informants and 7 key informants) was carried out at Yakkure village. In Henanigala, data saturation was reached after the 14th interview (with 5 specialized informants and 9 key informants).

Oral history (a form of in-depth interviews) seeks to gather detailed information on a given topic; however, the focus is historical and concerns the past. The researcher spoke with respondents who previously had been exposed to a set of experiences. This information pertained to individuals' personal life experiences regarding birthing rituals, traditions, and customs. Subjects were typically asked to focus on specific events over periods. The inquiries centred around the birthing rites performed for them, how they conducted birthing rituals for their children, and subsequently, how birthing rites were carried out for their grandchildren. Through these retrospections, attempts were made to discover the patterns and transformations of birthing rituals (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2010). In 6th oral history conducted with Yakkure indigenous respondents and at 5th oral history conducted with Henanigala indigenous respondents' data saturation was reached.

Additionally, for the collection of quantitative data relevant to these people's present socioeconomic status, a questionnaire survey was conducted. A total sample of 193 respondents from Henanigala and a total of 107 respondents from Yakkure were randomly selected and participated in the study, ensuring voluntariness.

DATA ANALYSIS

Transcribe verbatims were translated from Sinhala to English by the researcher. Finally, transcribed data was analysed through Coding (Babbie and Benaquisto 2010) and Content analysis (Graneheim and Lundman 2004; Babbie and Benaquisto 2010). Memoing is also done for the analysis of these qualitative data (Babbie and Benaquisto 2010). Quantitative data was analysed using MS EXCEL and SPSS (version 16). Ethical clearance

was obtained by the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Medical Sciences at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (Ref No-18/18)**.**

Results and Discussion: Sociodemographic Background of Yakkure and Henanigala IP

In providing insight into the present socio-cultural and economic aspects of the Vedda people in ethnic terms, the Henanigala IP showed a significant presence of Sinhala individuals (59%), with 41% identifying as Vedi, the traditional ethnic identity of the indigenous people. In contrast, the Yakkure IG (Indigenous Group) was entirely Sinhalese. Religiously, all respondents in both groups identified as Buddhists (100%). This is due to the non-recognition of their religion as an established religion such as Buddhism, Hinduism, or Christianity.

Regarding spoken language, 45% of Henanigala IPs speak Vedi, 1% speak only Sinhala, and 54% can converse in both Sinhala and Vedi. In Yakkure, 100% of the IPs speak Sinhala. Occupation-wise, 56% of Henanigala IP were farmers, 24% engaged in labour work, and 8% in fishing. Yakkure showed a higher reliance on farming, with 73% of IP engaged in agriculture, while 19% worked as labourers. Income distribution in Henanigala revealed that 51% received monthly income, with varying amounts. In Yakkure, only 32% received monthly income. In Henanigala, 49% received seasonal income, predominantly from farming, while in Yakkure 68% relied on seasonal income.

Comparing monthly income figures, in Henanigala, 32% received between 5000-10000 rupees, whereas in Yakkure, 31% fell within the same income bracket. In Henanigala, 30% received 10000-15000 rupees, whereas in Yakkure, 36% fell within this range. Notably, Henanigala had a higher percentage (21%) receiving 15000-20000 rupees compared to Yakkure (8%). The income bracket of over 25000 rupees per month was higher in Yakkure (6%) than in Henanigala (5%). For seasonal income receivers, in Henanigala, 58% received between 100,000-125,000 rupees per season, while in Yakkure, 46% received 125001-150000 rupees. The percentage of those receiving less than 100,000 rupees was higher in Henanigala (11%) compared to Yakkure (6%). Only 11% of Yakkure and 18% of the Henanigala IP received the Samurdhi subsidy (monthly subsidy for low-income families). Additionally, 6% of Yakkure IP received a subsidy for

the treatment of kidney disease. These comparative findings underscore the socio-demographic and economic distinctions between the Henanigala and Yakkure indigenous groups, offering insights into their cultural and occupational dynamics. Specifically, their income is not adequate for the subsistence of their total family members, typically ranging from 4 to 5 members in each family. Therefore, they are confronting various economic difficulties, resulting in damage to their entire livelihoods.

BIRTHING RITUALS AMONG YAKKURE IP

The birth of a new member into a family stands as one of the most vital events in both traditional and contemporary societies, irrespective of cultural differences. However, the uncertainties surrounding childbirth are particularly higher in traditional societies, due to the nature of their lifestyles. Indigenous communities, traditionally hunter-gatherers, often dwelled in forest areas without permanent households, exposing them to constant threats from both natural and man-made consequences. Nurturing and protecting a pregnant woman for the entire gestation period of nine months create complex challenges for communities like the Vedda people, especially in the dense rainforests where Western medical facilities were often inaccessible. Instead, Sri Lankans, like many other societies, possessed their traditional medicinal systems, namely the Sinhalese traditional medicinal system and, later introduced from India, the Ayurvedic medicinal system. Many Sri Lankans, including individuals in Yakkure, have grandparents who never visited a hospital throughout their entire lives. In Yakkure, there are individuals in their 30s who were born in their own homes, receiving assistance from *winnambu amma*, the traditional midwife of the village.

Remarkably, the medicinal practices of the Vedda people differ from both of these systems, presenting a unique approach intertwined with rites of passage, rituals, traditional customs, hunting and gathering practices, and medicinal knowledge. These elements are intricately connected with a supernatural belief system grounded in a religious belief system. The entire cultural system of the Vedda people is inseparable from their religious belief system, predominantly centred around their belief in *na yakku*, kin relatives believed to transform into spirits after death. For instance, before a hunting expedition, the Vedda people engage in special rituals seeking blessings and protection from the *na yakku*, intensely desiring a successful

hunt for the day. In this context, rites of passage, notably childbirth, are profoundly linked to their religious belief system, with birthing considered the most significant as it is complicatedly associated with the lives of both the mother and the newborn.

In Yakkure, the very first individual who should be informed about the pregnancy is the girl's mother or mother-in-law. It was done secretly. Talking about this with others was prohibited. Informing her husband or other relatives and speaking directly about the pregnancy are also considered evil acts. Relatives are informed in the morning on an auspicious day. In addition, it is prohibited to speak about the pregnancy to individuals who participated in funerals or visited diseased persons, which are considered evil acts that will induce inhuman activities. There is a way to inform this auspicious matter to others implication such as "My mother you may have to cook an extra handful of rice to another mouth" as they believe that would decrease the affection of inhuman influence.

Next, they go to village *veda mahaththaya* (village doctor) and inform about the pregnancy after offering a sheaf of betel leaves to him. After observing of pulse, the doctor recommended special foods and practices that she should follow. Then pregnant woman's mother or mother-in-law can inform her about the pregnancy to their son-in-law or son by way of an implication "Son, daughter said that you may have to harvest 7 or 8 new fields". As soon as the husband is informed about his wife's pregnancy, he makes a vow to the *Paththini* deity.

In addition, the mother-in-law of the pregnant woman performs a rite called "*kalamura namiima*" (custom performed with a pot) in the third month of the pregnancy. She must be carefully prepared for the very first "*kala mura namiima*" without being impure (*killa*). First, they select a milk tree (e.g. jack tree) and clean around it. Before the sound of crows in the early morning mother- in -law with an elder woman (who has children) comes out from the front side of the house with a pot. Then this pot is placed between the forks of a selected tree. Again, in the 7th and 9th month of the pregnancy, this ritual is re-performed. The women who observe higher precepts (mother-in-law) are responsible for protecting these pots without damaging them by fall. The only one who has permission to break these pots is the husband of the pregnant woman. There is no exact time for this ritual, as he has to break all the pots after the delivery of the child. He must

be careful not to let anyone step on small pieces of broken pots. Then the vow made to the *Paththini* deity in the 3ʳᵈ month of the pregnancy is fulfilled between seven days after the delivery and if they are not able to fulfil the vow within seven days, they believe the child will experience bad results. This vow is a promise that they make to the deity. They promise a tribute (e.g. a basket of fruits, *kiri amma dhana* (almsgiving for elder women who have children etc.) and fulfilled after the vow made by them is fulfilled.

In the old days, when the fetus was three months old, pregnant mothers were called "*gabbara siriyawa*" (pregnant splendour) by all the relatives and villagers and did not use any of kin terms or other names to call or mention her. Villagers have considered a pregnant mother as an auspicious symbol and have given her an important place in various auspicious events in the village. The first harvest of the paddy field is placed inside the *vee bissa* (traditional paddy barn) by a pregnant woman, which is called *Vee Bissa Indul Kirima*. As well as the first portion of the strained *kohomba* oil (*Azadirachta indica*) is first offered to a pregnant woman. In addition, it is a special custom to offer the first milk of a cow to a pregnant mother and the first portion of the paddy harvest is also separated by her which is called "*akyala wen kirima*". After offering milk rice made from the first harvest of the paddy to the Lord Buddha and deities at an auspicious time, it is offered to a pregnant mother before others. In addition, the first fruit of a tree is also offered to a pregnant mother. Working along waterways, participates in ceremonial dances, bathing in the evening, eats when small children, cats and dogs are watching her, breaks eggs, breaks houses of *kumbala* (a kind of ant), watches demons or *yaksha* images and statues, listens to the delivery pain of another pregnant mother are prohibited acts for a pregnant woman.

Pregnancy cravings are highly accepted rites among these people and always attempt to fulfil pregnant mother's desires. By their belief if the mother is not concerned about the cravings her child becomes vicious. Moreover, the act of fulfilling a pregnant mother's desires is believed to be a meritorious act. The desire of the mother can vary from sweet, citrus, and bitter, tastes. According to the types of the desired food, they judge the child to be born. Craving more vegetables, fruits and sweets is a sign of a virtuous child and wild meat, fish and other types of animal foods are a sign of a grim child. When the villagers heard about a pregnant mother each family

sent special meals prepared for her. And tend to share meals until childbirth as pregnant mothers lose their desire to eat foods that are prepared in their own family.

In the seventh month of the pregnancy, a relative accompanied the pregnant mother to her mother's house for the delivery. Mother-in-law, her husband, several elder women and a midwife participate in this journey, and it is a tradition to travel with several men in front of the cart. This group carries a pingo called *dakum kada* consisting of goods that are enough for about 5 months such as *thala* (*Sesamum indicum*), *mun* (Green Gram- *Cicer arietinum*), *kawupi* (black beans), wild meat, bee honey, honey tree oil (*Madhuca loggifolia*), *kohomba* oil (*Azadirachta indica*) etc. This *pingo* is an invitation to her parents and midwife to perform the duties of the pregnant woman. As endogamy is practiced even inside the same village this custom is practiced.

A separate room or hut is used for childbirth. Houses of yakkure are very simple consisting veranda on the front side of the house and two or one small rooms in the proximity of the land. Most of the houses according to the owner's wealth have one room connected to the other room of the house for childbirth. Families that have no separate room for birth always have support from neighbouring families and they afford their room for the family in need. This separate room is called a "*wadumge*, *upange*, or *binge*, (labour room, birth house or cavern). It is built attached to the room of the house with higher walls until the roof and placing one small window without letting more sunlight enter the room. Therefore, it becomes the darkroom of the house.

The very first duty of *winnambu amma* is to prepare the labour room for the next delivery by applying cow dung on the floor and removing the dust and spider webs. She is always careful to engage in these duties when a pregnant woman is not in the house. In addition, she does not forget to apply ant-hill clay on the walls. Then *kohomba* (*Azadirachta indica*), *dehi* (lemon - *Citrus grandis*), *yak-naaran* (*Atalantia ceylanica*), and *Embul Dodam* (*Citrus grandis*) leaves are hanging on the roof of the labour room. Turmeric mixed with water and mustard are sprayed inside the room. Then *kohomba* leaves are scattered on the floor and on that *gal laha paduru* (mates made of *gal laha* plants) are spread. They hope to avoid inhuman looks through these arrangements of the labour room. Specifically, these

citrus family leaves confirm the avoidance of external germs and associated bacterial/viral forms.

Before childbirth, if there are any abnormalities in the behaviour of the fetus, as recognized by the *winnambu amma* or *veda mahaththaya* they use powerful mantra and womb massaging (using traditional herbal oils) to bring back the fetus to normal status. Also if the fetus is not in the right position, the womb setting is done using a traditional herbal mixture while chanting manthra.

As the *winnambu amma* always stays close to the pregnant mother after the 7th month of pregnancy when the delivery pain starts, the pregnant woman is taken to this room by her. Next pregnant mother is laid on the mat that is spread on the floor of the room. A rope called the labour rope (*wili lanuwa*) is tied to a girder in the room and lowered a pregnant mother can hold it while giving birth as an assistant to get strength. It is made of tree fibers. This is hung on the wall in an auspicious time facing an auspicious direction. This is done secretly as they believe if many people and their enemies knew this, they could perform black magic, which would result in the women becoming infertile in that house. Removing the rope or taking a labour rope into another house is prohibited which can result in inauspicious things. Strength and the persistence of the labour rope are examined by the midwife. Several elder women and *redi nanda* (a woman belonging to the washing caste) are summoned as the assistant to the midwife. In addition, the village doctor (*Veda mahaththaya*) is also informed about the parturition.

News of the childbirth that is taking place is spread among the king's relatives and neighbours except enemies of the family as they would do sorcery to delay the birth. This is believed to be done by symbolically closing the entrance of an employed cubbyhole of an iguana using clay while chanting a powerful mantra. This symbolically represents the disturbance made for childbirth. Thus, it is necessary to avoid informing enemies regarding childbirth.

When hearing the voice of the child, the father has to perform *kalamura nawime* ritual, which is performed by the mother-in-law at the 7th and 9th months of pregnancy. He goes to the milk tree and breaks all the pots that were retained between the forks of the tree. After his duty is finished, the midwife calls out loudly about the gender of the child. If it is a girl, she

says "*kambayak*" (camboy) or "*bath haliyak*" (rice pot) if it is a boy, she says "*aduma polla*" or "*udalla*" (mamotee). According to their belief, it could cause affect evil eye and inhuman looks if they directly say the gender of the child. Hanging the *kohomba* leaves, and spreading turmeric mixed water inside the labour room is done to prevent obstacles from inhuman and demons. After childbirth, *kohomba* leaves a boiled water bath and a *kohomba* oil massage is done for the mother. Also, if she gets convulsion (*walippuwa*) secret medicines are applied to the stomach and bandaged using banana plant fibers.

After all the duties that take place in the labour room, *Redi Nanda* gives new clothes to the child and mother. Moreover, she takes used clothes and is awarded with harvest (*bhawa bogha*) and other goods as a present. In addition, gratitude is shown to the midwife with *dakum* (gifts).

The time of childbirth is decided by the astrologer to make a child's horoscope. To mark the exact time of the birth, they have used a traditional way. As soon as the child is born, a fruitful banana tree is cut transversely. When an astrologer reaches the house, he can tell the exact time of childbirth by observing the extent of the growth of the banana pith *(kesel bada)*. Then he makes a horoscope for the child according to the birthing time.

Fig.3. Present houses in Yakkure. House in the left image is made similar to the traditional way of a house.

BIRTHING RITUALS AMONG HENANIGALA IP

A newly married couple that hopes to have a child makes a vow (*bharaya*) to their *Na Yakku* for a child. After the child's birth, this vow should be fulfilled through a ceremonial dance (*thowilaya*) dedicated to *Na Yakku*. At three months and six months of pregnancy offerings are made for *yakku* (demons) such as *Riri*, *Kadawara Riri*, and *Thumpali Yakku* and are pleaded for the protection of the child and mother. In addition to cure, the delivery pain mantra chanted to oil is applied and massaged, also chanted thread is tied around a hand, neck or around the belly of the pregnant mother. The birth of a new child takes place in a newly built hut called *kili geya* or *kili pela* (impure hut). Family members start to build this temporary hut around the 7th month of the pregnancy. Its roof is thatched by *Illuk* leaves and walls are made of tree barks such as *halmilla* (*Berrya cordifolia*), and *milla* (*Vitex pinnata*). When the woman gets labour pain (*vili rudawa*) and is close to giving birth to a child *winnabu amma* is summoned to help her with the delivery. Inside the *pela, Wili Lanuwa* (labour rope); made from strips of the *kala* tree (*kala patta-Derris canarensis*) is hanged onto one joist to facilitate the delivery. Under this rope *gal laha* mats (mats made of *gal laha* leaves) are placed on the floor to sit or to lay for the pregnant mother. A *pihiya* (knife) or a sickle is retained on the door of the *kili pela* for the protection of the pregnant mother and the child from evil spirits.

In addition, if the delivery takes a long time and the mother is not well limes are cut while chanting the mantra. A small knife is used to separate the child by cutting the umbilical cord. After the delivery in the *kili pela,* some of the families take the mother and the child to a separate place in the house. This is made attached to the house from the backside with a separate place to bath and wash cloths. A small canal is made from this room to the outside to send unclean water. The mother stays in this room with her child for 9 days until her bleeding is over. One woman goes with her when she needs to use the toilet. In addition, for her protection from demons' a sickle or small knife is used. The strips of the *Kala* tree are used to tighten the belly of the pregnant mother after the delivery. This is done for nine days to remove bad blood from the body of the mother.

One of the women in Henanigala explained her experience with childbirth as follows:

"My mother stayed in this separated pela more than a week after she gave birth to my younger brother. She bathed inside this room as there was a small pit in this room to bathe and wash clothes. If there was no space inside the house elders gathered and made, another wall attached to the main wall of the house in the backside, and it became a separate room in the main house. Tree barks were used for the walls and *Illuk* leaves for the roof. *winnambu amma* is already informed about the pregnant member of the family and when close to the delivery sometimes she comes to stay at that house. She spends a few nights like that until the birth. I did not use *kili pela* to deliver my child. Instead, I was admitted to the Dehiaththakandiya hospital. However, my father did a ceremonial dance for *Na Yakku* when I was pregnant. Now all of the duties of the pregnancy are done according to the instruction of the midwife (government). However, without her instructions also pregnant mothers can have their babies at the hospital" (Sudubandi, 2017, Per. Comm. 13 Sep.).

However, at present different rites are practiced. Making a vow to *Mahiyangana Samandevalaya* and *Katharagama Devalaya* is still practised. In the 7th month of pregnancy, *Angulimala* sutra is chanted to bless and protect the pregnant mother and her child. In addition, *pirith* chanted thread is provided by the village maternal clinic for pregnant mothers. In addition, some families of the village organize *pirith* chanting ceremonies in their own houses (which are held for about three hours).

Traditional customs associated with their previous lifestyle are no longer performed and practiced by contemporary Henanigala vedda people as the delivery of the child occurs at the government hospitals.

"Those days my mother was the *winnambu amma*. Always she had the *dunu pihiya* (small knife) in her hand and was ready to go to delivery at any time. Now soon after the pregnant mother gets delivery pain or before that on a given date she is taken to the hospital by a three-wheeler and brings the child to the house after two days. We bring up our children keeping *Na Yakku* in front of them (for the protection of the children) Therefore, we do not have to worry about our children. Now all have changed so what to do about that? " (Handuni, 2017, Per. Comm., 12 Sep.).

"I have heard from my mother that when they were living in the forest, they had to find a place in a cave that was well-covered and protected from the outside. When childbirth was close, the entire group would gather in a specific area selected based on resources such as the availability of food and water. The pregnant mother, accompanied by the *winnambu amma* of the group, would stay in the cave with

other women. Traditionally, men were responsible for hunting, while women engaged in gathering. Clothes, obtained through barter with Muslims or Sinhalese in exchange for honey and meat, were utilized for the needs of the newborn and the mother. All the *Na Yakku* believed to reside among them in the forest, were invoked to protect both the child and the mother. Blood was considered impure, prompting men to keep their distance to avoid capture by the malevolent forces known as *'kili.'* Medicinal plants and herbs were pre-prepared and kept on hand for immediate use when needed" (Sudubandi, 2017, Per. Comm., 12 Sep.).

THE RITUAL OF *DIWAS DEVIYO* DANCE FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Diwas Deviyo Nateema (dancing of Divas deity) is performed to prevent itches, worm diseases and various types of diseases in children. Tender leaves of the coconut tree and strips of banana plant are used to make *pan eliya* (the place where the offering is placed) for *Divas* deity. In this ritual, *Kiwulegedara* deity, *Bowala* deity, *Wiharagammana* deity, *Meegaha Pitiye Aluth* deity, *Punchi Aluth* deity and *Aluth* deity are summoned by mantra chanting. Each of the deities enters the exorcist's body one after one as summoned. Then exorcists get possessed and begin to dance depicting each of the deities' powers. (The dance of the exorcists while he is possessed by *Deivas Deviyo* is called *Diwas Deviyo Nateema* or dance of the *Divas Deviyo*, similarly, the dance of the exorcists when *Kiwulegedara* deity is possessed to his body is called the dance of the *Kiwulegedara* deity). From all of these deities, *Na Yakku* exorcist pleads blessings for their children.

CULTURAL CHANGE AND TRANSITION OF BIRTHING RITUALS

When Sarasin's conducted their research, (1880-1886) Vedda already had forgotten their traditional hunting and gathering life. They had described the changing structure of their culture as "we could not find any traces of them, in the remotest parts of the Island. All the Veddas have been induced to leave the rock caves, their old natural dwellings and to settle in small villages under the charge of the headmen of the adjoining districts" (Sarasin and Sarasin 1886, 291). This had been the situation about 20 years before Seligman's work, which later research accepted as the primary source for their studies. Seligman himself had indirectly stated this issue of Vedda

people's assimilations as well as the cultural change using the term "pure" (Seligman and Seligman 2011, 45-88). Thus, rites associated not only with birth but also with other life-transitioning periods have to be taken into consideration along with the changing habitation patterns of these communities. Initially, they habitat in the (1) dense rainforest, and later in (2) small villages, but still maintained a distance from other ethnic groups. The third habitation was after they were forcibly resettled into the (3) new villages within other ethnic groups, affected by the irrigational development projects. In the second habitation, it seemed that when Sinhalese headmen heard about the Veddas migrating to the nearest forest, they encouraged them to settle near the village. Specifically, Sinhalese villagers and kings have historically benefitted from the Vedda people, employing them as soldiers, honeygatherers, bodyguards, protectors, and in various other capacities within the villages and surrounding areas. In the third habitation pattern, they were forced to depend on paddy cultivation, and entering into the forest was prohibited due to the naming of those forest areas as reserves.

Therefore, the entire cultural system of the Vedda people must be explored and studied in terms of their habitation patterns and the extent of assimilation (Anandaa and Nahallage 2022). Currently, many new cultural traits appear to have diffused into their culture, especially when they were forcibly resettled into the new socio-cultural status. As their traditional cultural system is incapable of assisting the new lifestyle, they seem to have borrowed cultural traits from their neighbouring ethnic groups, especially from the Sinhalese. These shifts in cultural traits can be seen through the examination of their birth rituals as a special rite of passage. Yakkure, as evident, has now become more of a Sinhalese culture than that of the Henanigala. They have borrowed many Hindu and Sinhalese traditions and customs and have replaced them with their traditional ways of life. The cult of *Paththini*, a vow made to the *Paththini* deity at the beginning of pregnancy and as a wish to have children, is not an indigenous custom performed by the Vedda people. Additionally, the observance of higher perception by the mother-in-law or the mother of the pregnant woman during the *Kala Mura Naweeme* ritual has diffused from the Sinhalese Buddhist belief system. *Angulimala sutra* chanting is another custom famous among Sinhalese.

The cultural landscape of Henanigala still includes considerable traditional birthing rituals, specifically those connected with the religious

belief system. However, the influence of contemporary Sinhalese Buddhist midwives has greatly contributed to changing and shifting from their traditional customs to Sinhalese customs related to birth. Particularly, as one informant revealed, they have been asked to listen to the *Angulimala sutra* and to have *pirith* chanted threads tied in their hands by the midwife. According to Wijesekara, they have been passing a transitional period. They had shifted to the stage of cultivators (slash and burn cultivation) straight from the nomadic stage (hunting and gathering) and had missed the middle stage of animal husbandry or domestication (Wijesekara 1982, 19-22). Next, they leapt into modern society from the gathering stage. As they congealed instantly from historical life they did not acquire proper socialization which was necessary to the adaptation to their new way of life which eventually led to many troubles in their life and was a major factor for rapid cultural change (Wijesekara 1982, 19-22).

In anthropology, cultural change is a major concept, and it can result from various mechanisms. One such mechanism is diffusion, defined as the spread of a cultural item from its place of origin to other places (Titiev 1958, 446). Diffusion can be direct, forced, or indirect, depending on the nature of cultural interactions (Kottak 2004; 2012, p. 34). Another mechanism is acculturation, an ongoing exchange of cultural features resulting from continuous first-hand contact between groups, potentially leading to changes in the cultures of involved groups (Relethford 2008). Anthropologists use terms like substitution, syncretism, addition, deculturation, origination of new traits, and rejection to describe what may happen during acculturation (Haviland 1975, 366).

Major reasons for the acceleration of cultural change in the Vedda community include expulsion into dry zone forest areas, assimilation with neighbouring Sinhalese and Tamils, actions taken to civilize them, force to engagement in agricultural and occupational work, missionary activities, exploitation by traders, and epidemics (Census Report 1901; Wijesekara 1987; Spittle 2003, Seligman and Seligman 2011; Hill 1941; Ananda and Nahallage 2022). Spittle attributes their decline to government land policies, loss of traditional habituation, diseases, intermarriages, and famine (Spittle 1957; Brow 1978, 448).

Traditional knowledge is vital for a community's way of living. For the Vedda community, their traditional knowledge facilitated surviving in

the forest, not in a village. Transitioning into a new way of life left them ill-equipped to confront challenges and solve problems in the unfamiliar setting imposed on them. When examining changes in birthing rituals among Henanigala and Yakkure people, it becomes evident that cultural changes driven by diffusion and acculturation have significantly impacted these communities. The shift from traditional practices to those influenced by neighbouring ethnic groups and external forces has altered cultural landscapes, including birth rituals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the examination of birthing rituals among Henanigala and Yakkure Vedda communities reveals profound cultural changes influenced by diffusion and acculturation. These communities, traditionally engaged in hunting and gathering, have undergone significant shifts in their lifestyles, habitation patterns, and cultural practices over time. Among the Henanigala indigenous people, the birthing rituals reflect a blend of traditional practices and external influences. The emphasis on making vows to *Na Yakku* for a child, ceremonial dances, and the construction of temporary huts like *Kili Geya* or *Kili Pela* demonstrates the preservation of indigenous customs. However, the influence of Sinhalese Buddhist midwives and contemporary practices, such as chanting *Angulimala sutra* and using *pirith*-chanted threads, indicates the impact of acculturation.

On the other hand, Yakkure's birthing rituals present a more pronounced shift towards Sinhalese cultural practices. The adoption of rituals like the vow to the *Paththini deity, Kala Mura Naweeme*, and other customs associated with Sinhalese traditions reflects the diffusion of cultural elements from the majority Sinhalese community. The incorporation of Hindu and Sinhalese traditions in birthing practices signifies a significant disappearance from the Vedda's traditional ways of life. The transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyles to settled agricultural communities, coupled with external influences from neighbouring ethnic groups, has played a fundamental role in reshaping the cultural landscape of both Henanigala and Yakkure Vedda communities. The forced resettlement, engagement in agriculture, and exposure to modern societal structures have contributed to the erosion of traditional knowledge and practices.

In the context of birthing rituals, the Vedda communities have

experienced a transformation marked by a synthesis of indigenous customs and practices borrowed from the majority Sinhalese community. The complex interplay of diffusion, acculturation, and socio-economic changes has led to a cultural mosaic that is distinct from their original traditions. As these communities navigate through this period of cultural transition, it is essential to document and understand these changes for the preservation of their unique cultural heritage. While external influences have shaped their birthing rituals, the Henanigala and Yakkure Vedda people continue to maintain certain elements of their indigenous practices, providing a glimpse into the dynamic nature of cultural evolution in response to shifting socio-economic and environmental contexts.

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TRADITIONAL BIRTHING RITUALS AMONG THE TRIBES OF MADHYA PRADESH AND PARALLELS IN THE ANCIENT INDIAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

India is a land of rich tangible heritage and equally rich intangible heritage. The biological, spiritual and social progression of human life in India is tied into a string through the rituals and ceremonies from the stage when life is conceived up to its final departure from this transitory world. The *"ṣoḍaśa saṁskārs", ṣoḍaśa* = sixteen and *saṁskārs* = the processes by which an individual undergoes "purification" and "preparation" to be enabled to perform best in society, right from the stage when life is conceived in the womb till the death of that individual.

The Indian tradition emphasises also the psychological faculties and the well-being of the individuals. Thus, in *Ṛgvéda* (10.184.1 to 10.184.3) many passages are found that solemnize the desire to have a child, without specifying the gender. It is to construct a balance between the "Mind-Body-Nature". This is also evident in the *Garbh Upaniṣada*, written almost 4000 years ago, that calls the body fivefold in nature (the five elements), existing in the five, depending on the six supports (tastes of food), connected with the six qualities, (consisting of) seven *dhātus* (tissues), three impurities, having two *yonis* (sexes), and (nourished by) four kinds of food. The *saṁskārs* focus on creating this balance. *Charak*, an ancient author has dedicated chapters, "*garbhṇīparichaya*" that explain various aspects of the subject matter.

The present paper discusses the birthing rites (once) popular, as songs, legends, rituals, and customs among the tribes of central India that are the popular expressions of the classical textual codes.

Key Words: *Ṛgveda, Charak, Saṁskārs, Tribes, Garbhṇīparicha*

INTRODUCTION

Birth is an important event of rites-de-passage. It is a biological event in the life cycle that is celebrated and accorded meaning across cultures through associated rituals linked to individual and community development. These rituals showcase the belief systems of the communities. Van Gennep envisioned life in society as a house with many rooms, in which the individual has to be convened formally from one defined position to another. From this perspective, life is not a matter of gradual development and change but rather consists of a series of abrupt and ritualized transitions. He pointed out that, when the activities associated with such ceremonies were examined in terms of their order and content, it was possible to distinguish three major phases: preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and post-liminal rites (rites of incorporation)[1].

Well, in the Indian context, none of these rituals are abrupt or visualised as separate epochs taking place in one's life. They are rather well planned, strung together and associated with the four *"āśramas[2]"* and the *"puruśārthas[3]"*. These rites are to ensure a balance between the "mind" "body" and "nature". Why this balance needs to be created? The answer is found in the *ślokas* of *Garbh Upaniṣada*. This ancient text is dedicated to elucidating the physiological knowledge and calls the body fivefold in nature (the five elements), existing in the five, depending on the six supports (tastes of food), connected with the six qualities, (consisting of) seven *dhātus* (tissues), three impurities, having two *yonis* (sexes), and (nourished by) four kinds of food[4].

In the next set of *ślokas*, the *Garbh Upaniṣada* sets the corresponding elements of nature to the physical body of human beings, as "there the earth is to support, water is to consolidate, fire is for light, air is for movement, and ether is to provide space. Separately, the ears are to receive words, the skin for touch, the eyes to see form, the tongue for taste, and the nose for smell. The genitalia are for pleasure and *apāna* for evacuation. One cognises with the *"buddhi"* (intellect), envisions with the *"manas"* (mind), and speaks with *"vāk"* (words)." One of the important ancient Indian texts, the *Suśruta Samhitā*, which is taken as a base in this article, elaborates all aspects of the various stages, the *garbhādhāna[5]*, *prasuti[6]* etc associated with the birth. The *saṁskārs* focus on creating balance and consolidating these ideals. Besides the rituals and customs, the Indian tradition emphasises also

the psychological-emotional faculties and the well-being of the individuals. Thus, in *Ṛgvéda*[7] (10.184.1 to 10.184.3) many passages are found that solemnize the desire to have a child, without specifying the gender of the child.

> *"Viṣṇuryoniṁ kalpyatu tvaṣtā piṅśatu/ Ā siñcatu prajāpatirdhātā garbhaṁ dadhātu tē/ ṅarbhaṁ dhēhi sinīvāli garbhaṁ dhēhu saraswati/ Ṅarbhaṁ tē aśvinau dēvāvā dhattaṁ puṣkarastrajā// ḥiraṇyayī araṇī yaṁ nirmañdhatō aśvinā/ Taṁ tē garbhaṁ havāmahē daśamē māsi sūtavē//"*

> (**English**: May Viṣṇu construct the womb, may *Twashtri* fabricate the member, may *Prajāpati* sprinkle the seed, may *Dhatri* cherish thy embryo; Sustain the embryo *Sinivāli*, sustain the embryo *Saraswati*, may the divine *Aśvins*, garlanded with lotuses, sustain thy embryo; We invoke thy embryo which the *Aśvins* have churned with the golden pieces of *Araṇī* (firewood), that thou mayest bring it forth in the tenth month).

The couple is thus prepared to be ready to bear the responsibility of being parents and parenthood. In India, the biological-social-cultural-spiritual progression of an individual is guided by the rituals and ceremonies called the *"ṣoḍaśa saṁskārs"* or *"ṣoḍaśa"* = the count of sixteen and *"saṁskārs"* = the processes by which an individual undergoes "purification", "preparation". The individual is enabled to be a being to perform best in society, right from the stage when life is conceived in the womb to the final departure from this transitory world or death. The specific literature called the *"Dharmasūtras[8], Gṛhasūtras[9] and Smṛtis[10]"*, describes these *"ṣoḍaśa saṁskārs"* or the 16 rites from the period when the couple decides to be a parent and life is conceived up until its end. The *saṁsakārs* aim at attaining

The pre-natal saṁsakārs	The saṁsakārs of childhood	The educational saṁsakārs	The marriage saṁsakārs	The funeral ceremonies
Garbhādhān (Conception) *Puṁsavana* (Engendering a male issue) *Simāññtonayana* (Hair-parting)	*Jātakarma* (Birth rituals) *Nāmakaraṇa* (Name-giving) *Niṣkramaṇa* (First outing) *Aññaprāśana* (First feeding) *Chūḍākarma/ Chaul* (Shaving of head) *Karṇavedh* (Piercing the earlobes)	*Vidhyāraṁbha* (Learning the alphabet) *Upanayana* (Sacred thread initiation) *Vedāraṁbha* (Beginning Vedic study) *Keśāñt/ Godaan* (Shaving the beard) *Samāvartan* (End of studentship)	*Vivāha* (Marriage Ceremony)	*Añtyeṣṭhī* (Death rites).

spiritual, material, social, cultural, and religious aspects that make life holistic and the final liberation. Rajbali Pande[11] has put these 16 *saṁsakārs* under 5 groups:

There are certain essential elements included in the rites of passage, such as a deity, a performer, water, fire, wishes, offerings, gifts, community feeding, medicinal herbs, symbolism etc. These undergo contextualisation impacted by several factors, such as the availability of resources and the status of the physical environment. Thus, there are two aspects of such practices, one, being the code and the other being the actual methods of practising them.

The present paper explores the parallels between the birthing rites as stated in the code and the actual practices observed by the tribes of Madhya Pradesh, mainly the Goṅḍ[12], Baigā[13] and Bhīl[14]. The focus is on the pre-natal rites and customs, the rites during childbirth, and the post-natal stage. Naming the newborn is considered as the completion of the birthing rituals by the author of this article.
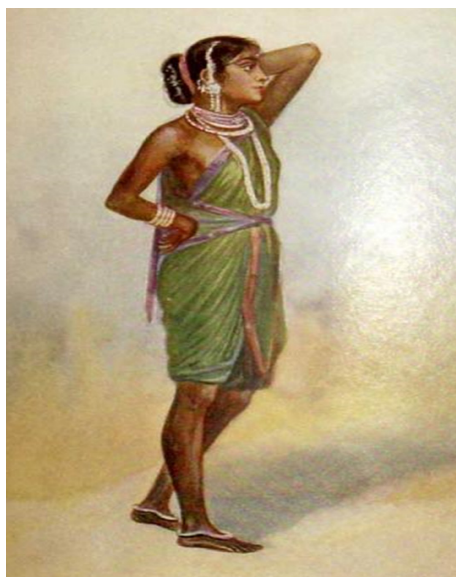
Fig. 1. Map of India showing different states
Courtesy: Maps of India

Fig. 2. A Gond woman, a watercolor by Rao Bahadur M. V. Dhurandhar, 1928

Fig. 3. Gond woman in present times
Courtesy : Wikimedia Commons

Fig. 4. A Bhil woman, a watercolor by Rao Bahadur M. V. Dhurandhar, 1928
Courtesy : Wikimedia Commons

Fig. 5. Bhil woman in Present Times
Courtesy : Wikimedia Commons

Fig.6. Baiga woman in traditional ceremonial attire
Courtesy : Wikimedia Commons

PRE-NATAL RITES & CUSTOMS

All three tribes consider the advent of a child as an auspicious event in the family and society. The Bhīls consider a boy as the "*kuldīpak*" (the light of the family)[15]. While the other two celebrate the occasion irrespective of the gender of the child, there is no celebration among the Bhīls, rather the elderly women in the family keep advising the expectant mother and provide her with the *jaḍi-buṭis* (herbs)[16]. Among the Goṅḍs, as soon as the news of pregnancy is known, the position of the pregnant mother is elevated and the family deity is worshipped[17].

For how the development of the foetus is visualized, the *Garbh Upaniṣada*[18] describes it as, "when ready, on the joining of the male and female, the embryo after a day and night is in a mixed (semi-fluid) state; after seven days it becomes a bubble; after a fortnight, a solid mass, and in a month, it hardens. In two months, it develops the head; in three months, the feet grow. In the fourth month, the belly and hip are formed; in the fifth month, the backbone is formed; in the sixth month, the nose, eyes and ears are formed. In the seventh month, (the embryo) comes to have the *jīva* (conscious self), and in the eighth month, it becomes complete in every sense. During the ninth month, all outer signs attain completeness[19]".

Interestingly, a Goṅḍi song[20], called *Sohar*, is popular and expresses the sentiments, symptoms, feelings and emotions of an expectant mother and her family and partially the development of the embryo. It also sets the tone for the future customs:

"In the first month changes begin to appear, the body becomes yellowish and the face becomes pale, it appears she is pregnant,

In the second month, the mother-in-law recognizes it, doubtless, it is pregnancy!When she walks her right leg lags behind, doubtless, it is pregnancy!

In the third month, the *nanad* laughs, let the newcomer come, I'll get a present of *munga* and moil,

In the fourth month, the mother-in-law laughs, let the newcomer come, I'll distribute pearls,

In the fifth month, the expectant mother says, the whole body aches badly, I don't like the betel,

In the sixth month, she requests her Lord, now I can't serve your bed, my body is heavy,

In the seventh month, she told her mother-in-law, now I can't cook, my whole body aches,

In the eighth month the eight limbs are developed with all her care, never can she wears her clothes properly,

In the ninth month, the mother-in-law sleeps in the neighbouring courtyard, The daughter-in-law is having pain, call the nurse soon,

In the tenth month, *Kanhaiyalal* (the son) was born, music was played and *sakhis* (friends) began singing *sohar*".

Much care is taken during the period of pregnancy and there are restrictions imposed as part of the care. The special regime stated in the *Suṣruta Saṁhitā* includes rules about consumable foods, long-distance walks, travel, fatiguing exercises, extreme emotions of anger etc, and so on[21]. The same, in practice among the tribes, could also be noted. While there are none imposed on the pregnant women among the Bhīls and Baigas and they continue doing all household chores until the visceral labour pains begin, Goṅds have set some, such as, the woman is not allowed to go fishing and has to refrain from all kinds of arduous tasks[22].

The 7th month is considered crucial in the development of the embryo. The *Garbha Upaniṣada* states that the "embryo is taken to have become *jīva* (conscious self) in the seventh month"[23]. The Gond pregnant woman, mostly during the first pregnancy, in the 7th month, rarely the 9th, is sent to her parents' house.

Targe yer siyānā among the Goṅds is a special *saṁskāra* in which the *bhumikā* (the traditional healer) prepares a drink with some āyurvedic medicines that are given to the pregnant women during the 7th month to prevent abortion[24].

RITES DURING THE CHILD'S BIRTH

Birthing is generally assisted by the elderly women of the family among the tribes discussed here. Among the Bhīls and Baigās, the woman assisting the delivery is called "*soyen*"/ "*Suvarna*" or "*sunmai*" (the midwife)

respectively[25]. A provision of "*sūtikāgṛha*" (delivery room) is mentioned by Suṣruta in his *Samhitā*, in the tenth chapter. It states that the pregnant woman, on an auspicious day, should be transferred to the "*sūtikāgṛha*"[26]. The practice is found followed, among the Goṅḍs, that as the time for delivery approaches, a "*saurgṛiha*" is assigned which is a dedicated corner of the house, separated with the help of a cloth or something similar or could be a room little away from the main residential part of the house. The word "*saurgṛiha*" seems to be derived from the word "*sohar*" which is a song sung by closely related women immediately after the child is born. An example of the *Sohar* is noted above in this article.

Ancient texts prescribe counselling of the mother under which the experienced women who are attending the labour need to advise and instruct the parturient woman, to keep her organs loose and soft (organs participating in delivery) and to remain brave, happy and patient[27]. As part of the preparation for the delivery, among the Bhīls, the attending women lit a fire and sat close to the woman who was provided with local liquor so that she didn't feel pain. They also place an arrow by the head side of the woman to safeguard the mother and the child against any evil spirits[28]. Goṅḍ women taking care or attending the pregnant women place a sickle or a knife[29] by the head side. *Suṣruta* states that if the labour is prolonged, the smoke of the skin of a black serpent or some other substance with a disagreeable smell should be applied to the vagina. Such measures produce irritation of the genital tract, which manifests in vigorous expulsive efforts[30].

Furthermore, *Suṣruta* says, in the case of protracted delivery, e.g., an obstruction of the child at the vagina, the vagina should be fumigated with the fumes of the slough (cast-off skin) of a cobra (snake) or with the fumes of *Piṇḍitaka* (Madana, *Tamilnadia uliginosa*) or the roots of *Hiraṇyapuśpi* (Kaṇṭakāri, *Solanum virginianum*) should be tied (round the neck or the waist) or *Suvarcalā* or *Atasi* (*Ruta graveolens*) or *Viśalyā* or *Pātalā* (*Tinospora cordifolia*) should be tied round the hand (wrist) and leg (ankle) of the parturient[31]. It thus seems that the use of slough, with variation, was adopted by the tribals. Among the Goṅḍs, the experienced elderly women assisting childbirth, upon realising any complications, perform a charm to ease the labour pains. They show the twig of the *garuda tree*[32] (Latin, *Radermachera Xylocarpa*) and "*kenchuli*" (discarded skin of the snake)[33]. Among the Baigās, a ring made out of the roots of the *andi* (*Ricinus*

Fig.7. Suvarcalā or Atasi (*Ruta graveolens*) Courtesy : Wikimedia Commons

Fig.8. Viśalyā or Pātalā (*Tinospora cordifolia*) Courtesy : Wikimedia Commons

communis) plant is worn by the woman to fasten and smoothen childbirth[34]. The Baiga mother is provided with the bark of *maibelā* (a plant) to chew, by the *mai* (short for *sunmai*), as it is believed that its consumption will ease the delivery and both, the mother and the newborn child, are safeguarded against any future illnesses[35]. Among the Bhīls, the woman is provided with local liquor so that she doesn't feel pain[36].

The Bhīl mother is fed with fish stew (cooked in water)[37], considered to provide strength and that of the Gonds with "*usvan*" (a decoction of medicinal herbs) or coconut mixed with jaggery or a mix of *haldi* (turmeric), *sonth* (dried ginger powder) and jaggery with a *baghār* (seasoning) of *ghee* (clarified butter)[38]. It is among the Bhīls that few foods such as fish, chillies, full liquor, and papaya are tabooed socially as these are considered to be hot and may abort the fetus. Strongly coloured foods are also prohibited as they cause nausea. It is very interesting to note that sugar dissolved in water under such conditions was also prohibited. Twinned fruits and tuber are also prohibited with a belief of having twins. Buttermilk is preferentially given to lactating women as it enhances the flow of breast- milk if the resources permit[39]. The author, during her fieldwork, learned that the pregnant woman is not allowed to eat papaya as it may cause abortion. Going back to the

foods allowed, all the classics also advise massage, oral administration of fats with medicines and use of medicines and decoctions for three to seven days after delivery. There is another drink made with boiling fish that is given to the mother.

There is a specific section of the ancient literature called the "*sūtikā paricaya*" which is dedicated to the "*āhāra* (food/diet)", "*vihara* (mode of life/ conduct)" and "*auṣadhī* (medicine)[40]". Thus, *ācārya Caraka* says that when *sutika* feels hungry she should be prescribed *yavagu* (powdered) *pippali* (*Piper longum*), *pippalimula* (*Piper longum*), *cavya* (*Piper retrofractum vahl*), *citrate* (*Plumba gozeylanic*), and *śṛṅgaberā* (*Zingiber officinale*) with anyone out of *ghṛita*, oil *vasā* (animal fat) or *majja* (marrow) considering her tolerability for these edibles and in the quantity which she can digest easily[41]. Of the above-mentioned decoction that the tribal communities use, there are some common ingredients if compared to the prescription of Charak.

POST-NATAL RITES

Among the Goṅds, following the family tradition, the cord is cut with the help of a "*ner*" (thin -sharp piece) made out of bamboo by the "*dāī*" (midwife) or the elderly woman related to the family. The cord is buried in a pit dug there itself. After cutting the umbilical cord, *mahuā* oil is applied to the child[42]. For Baigās as the baby is delivered, the *sunmāī* cuts the umbilical cord with a sickle or a knife which the woman buries there itself and covers with a piece of burning cow dung cake[43]. *Bilkhī* (the sharp front part of the arrow) is used among Bhīls to cut the cord[44].

Gor ser siyānā is the *saṁskāra* immediately after the birth of the child in which the women of the village give water mixed with honey to the newborn so that the infant can pick up suckling from the mother's breast[45].The new Baigā mother and the infant are immediately bathed with warm water and the women attending the delivery provide the new mother with the "*baḍī ūjhā*" or "*bāī davā*" (a decoction of herbs). Following this, after 7-8 hours, the mother has to brush her teeth with the "*dātun*" (teeth cleaning twig either of *neem* or *babool*) of the "*Ken*" tree and eat "*kudai* (an indigenous millet)" with black pulses[46]. There is an associated custom among the Bhīls after the baby is born. The newborn is laid on a bed made out of a heap of *payāla* or *puāla* (paddy straw). Some joyful moments also take place. The

paternal cousin picks the baby up and refuses to hand the baby back to the mother until she is presented with gifts[47]. Touching grain soon after birth is auspicious, as is the sound of laughter in the newborn's ears[48].

For the Baigās, the newborn baby is laid in a *sūpa* (winnowing basket), after the cord is cut with the help of a knife, containing some grains of *kodon*

Fig.9. Kodon (*Paspalum scorbiculatum*)
Courtesy : Wikimedia Commons

Pic 10. Kuṭkī (*Panicum sumatrense*)
Courtesy : Wikimedia Commons

(*Paspalum scorbiculatum*) or *kuṭkī* (*Panicum sumatrense*), the (indigenous millets)[49]. There is a particular practice called "*barrādānā milān*[50]" in which all kinds of local grains are laid in the *sūpa*. It is believed that having laid the newborn in there will bring in the birth of a son in case the woman has given birth to a female child only. For the Bhīls[51] on the seventh day after the birth of a child, along with whitewashing/ painting the house. The pregnant woman is bathed with turmeric. It's called *Santā*. The new mother bows her head three times to the Sun God, which is called *Sūrya Pūja* (reverence to Sun God). Relatives also participate in *Sūrya Pūja*. After the worship, a *pāṭ* (flat and low wooden stool) is made at the threshold of the house. A pile of corn is placed in the centre of the plate. One for the son and two for the daughter are worshipped by keeping a coconut-filled urn. The newly born baby is made to lie on a heap of corn with its head facing north

and feet facing south, this is called "*Pahā Dharanā*" or "*Ḍoṅgar Ḍhalwāī*". Bhils believe that the child is very brave and courageous if the heap of grain collapses. *Sayānī* (elderly women) apply *kājal ḍiṭhonā* (lampblack) on the eyes, forehead and cheeks to avoid the child being affected by any evil and also tie a black thread around the ankles. In some places, sun worship is performed on the first day of *Diwali* (the festival of lights) after the birth of a child. The child's aunt worships the Sun God by placing the child on a pile of maize. The child's mother hangs her *lehenga* (ankle-length skirt) on a nearby bamboo and hangs a pot upside down on it. In this ritual, *Aññadev* (the god of food), *Kartimātā* (a local goddess), *Jaldev* (the god of water) and *Vandev* (the god of the forest) are worshipped in symbolic form. The child's father gives clothes and ornaments to the aunts as a gift. On the birth of the first child, a collective feast is arranged by the chief. A special medicine with boiled and dried ginger, *pippali* (long pepper) and garlic is prepared and given to the woman after delivery. It is believed that this medicine generates heat and keeps mother and child in good health. The child and mother are given a ceremonial bath on the 9th or 11th day. After this purificatory bath, it is believed that the pollution period is over and she can attend to her routine domestic duties.

Fig.11. Pippli (*Piper longum*)
Courtesy : Wikimedia Commons

Among the Baigas[52], on the sixth day, when the baby's umbilical cord dries up, it is called *Sohar Uthai*. The worship of this day is called *Chhathi Puja.* On this day in the morning, the mother cleans the maternity home. As part of cleaning, the straw and ash etc. are thrown out. The place where the *āṅwal* or the umbilical cord is cut is first smeared with soil and then with cow dung. On the sixth day after delivery, the *prasuti* (the lady still considered polluted) goes to bathe in the river. She washes her hair and body several times either with black soil of *chhuī* (a white-coloured soil) or washes her clothes. After coming home, she massages herself and the newborn baby with mustard oil and turmeric or "*jagrī* (a paste of an oilseed) and this continues for months. On that day

other family members cook food that includes rice, *kodon* (an indigenous millet) and *rahar dāl* (yellow pulse). After *Chhathi*, the mother starts doing all the work outside the house, but she is not allowed to enter the kitchen. She is still considered unclean for two or three months. On the same day, *prasuti* receives blessings by touching the feet of *sunmāī* says, "*bane kare jīvo khāo* (live life)" and in return, she receives five bottles of *mahua* liquor from the family members. Some of the gifts, she partakes in the company of the host family. On the seventh day, the father of the newborn child cuts the hair of the baby's head which is called *Baiga Jhalar*. After this, the other women visit to see the child and offer blessings to the mother. The head of the household gifts five bottles of *"maṅd"* (liquor of mahua)

Fig.12. Madhuca longifolia (*Mahua*), fresh and dried fruits
Courtesy : Wikimedia Commons

which everyone drinks. The new mother enters the kitchen for the first time after three months and cooks. All women from the village are invited to the feast.

NĀMAKARAṆ (THE RITE OF NAMING THE CHILD)

Nāmkaraṇ is an important rite among all the tribes discussed here. The classical literature, such as the *gṛhasūtras* differ on the matter of deciding the *tithi* (date/ auspicious day) for the *saṁsakāra*[53]. Whereas the classical literature considers the *nāmkaraṇ* as the fifth rite among the total of sixteen, the Goṅḍs, who have three main categories, viz, birth, marriage and death, include it as the third among the first category of the rites[54]. The *nāmakaraṇ* or the naming ceremony follows the *chhaṭhī pūjā* (the ceremony of the 6th day after childbirth) among all the tribes discussed in this paper. The classical literature even ascribes the number of letters[55] in the name of a male and female child. The classical literature also mentions three or four different names, such as the name based on "own name", "after father's name" or the name by which the child will be "popularly known" and the one based on one's "*gotra* (a lineage from a particular sage if the seven)[56]"

Among the tribes, there are rather interesting ways of naming the child. Goṅḍs call the rite "*parol śobhanī kiyānā*[57]". Performed on the 12th day and even after 11/4th month, the *parole śobhani* means "*ipīśa parole* (definite name)" and signifies the concrete life. The name is based on the religion, *gotra* and planetary combinations at the time of birth. This is a very classical method of naming and all three aspects are important and have an impact on the future life of an individual. It is also believed that until the rite is performed, the newborn is not laid in the "*pālanā* (the swing where the newborn is put to sleep)". On the day of the ceremony, it is essential that the paternal aunts and uncles, apart from other villagers and relatives, gather. The mother and the baby are bathed. The newborn is laid in the swing which is rocked by the women who sing songs. The mother speaks the name in the ear of the child and all gathered welcome the moment by calling the child with the name. Once the rite is over, the mother sits on a "*paṭri* (a low wooden stool". Women from her side rub rice on her. All guests gather in a room and the baby's name is announced to them. The rite culminates with feasting[58]. *Gaurī* (goddess) and *Gaṇeśa* (god) are worshipped[59].

For the Baigās[60], the rite is performed on the next day of cleaning the

delivery room. Either the grandmother of the child or the *sayānin* brings out the child from the delivery room and sits in the "*Shri* (the entrance)". She sits in a way that the feet of the child lie dangling on a bronze plate. The village "*kotwar* (watchman)", the "*bhoī*", "*mukaddam*[61]" or the "*ājā* (grandfather)" name the child. Whoever names the child touches the child's feet and washes with "*mañd* (the local liquor brewed out of *Madhuca longifolia*). All guests offer money after washing the child's feet with liquor. The name is based on the day, month, place, bird, animal, gods-goddesses or the natural actions of the child. Interestingly, at times the name is based on an officer who happens to visit the village on the day, such as a ranger or *jamādār*[62].

Bhīls depend on the advice of the elderly members, the "*sayānā-sayānī*" of the family or the village to suggest a name for the child[63] for naming the child on the day of *Sūrya Pūjā*. The names are based, as in the case of Baigās, on the days, months etc. If the child is born on Monday - *Soma*, *Somli*. If born on Tuesday - *Mangalya*, *Mangali*. (Wednesday should be the birthday - Wednesday, Wednesday.) Thursday is called *Bhil Vistarwar*, hence *Gurjo*, *Vesta*, *Vesti* etc. If it is on Friday - *Suklya*, *Sukly*. Saturday is also called *Thatar*, hence *Sunbai*, *Thatla*, and *Thatli*. Sunday is called *Ditwar* - *Ditya*, *Ditli*, *Dita* etc. However, now all the modern names have been adopted.

INCLUSION

The *nākaraṇ* ceremony marks the end of the period of pollution and paves the path for the return to everyday life for the new mother. *Chhaṭh* (the 6th day after the delivery) marks the end of the "*sūtak*" (the period of pollution). It is considered auspicious among all these tribes. When a child is born, he or she is ceremonially inducted into the cultural fold. The *Dharmaśāstras* also lay a lot of importance on the *chhathi* or *chhath*.

Goṅḍs call *chhath* "*sohar uthai*" to which the *dāī* or the *basodan* massages the baby and mother. Both, the mother and the baby are bathed. The baby's aunt dresses him/her. A mother brings the child out into the courtyard from the *sutikāgriha* while the sister-in-law shades the child with the *sūpa*. The pole star is shown at night. On the "*barho*" or the 12th day, relatives and the villagers are invited, "*Gaurī* and *Gaṇeśa* are worshipped, a "*tika*" (mark on forehead) of "*haldi*" (turmeric) and *akṣhat* (whole rice

grains) is applied on the forehead of the child and mother, amidst singing of "*sohar*" or "*dadariya*", the child is given a name either by the "*purohit* (the one who performs the *pūjā*)" or by an elderly person of the family[64].

CONCLUSION

The discussion on the birthing rites is thought-provoking as to who adopted from whom. Whether the classical writers adopted and systematized the beliefs and practices of the communities that existed in the society or were the tribes aware of these classical works describing the various *saṁsakārs* and based their practices on them. Well, this seems to be a ceaseless question also in the light of some evidence from the literature and the *saṁsakārs* followed by the tribes under discussion. The best example comes from the Goṅḍs whose *saṁsakārs* are much more elaborate than the two. The collective terminology for the *saṁsakārs* among the Goṅḍs is *Goṅḍolāī Choksāra*[65].

How the philosophical ideas integrated within the practices of passage is known from the "*kardonā dohatnā*". It is yet another *saṁskāra* among the Goṅḍs, performed on the 5th day after the birth. On this day the village women tie a black thread with five knots, around the waist of the newborn. These five knots are believed to represent the five elements of the Universe (earth, ether, air, water, fire) that when they come together create a *jīva* (life). Death happens when there is a disbalance created among these elements. Hence the thread helps maintain the balance between these elements in the life of the newborn.

Now, there are *ślokas* from the *Garbh Upaniṣada* and the *Chhādogya Upaniṣada* at our disposal that contain the same idea while explaining the *jīva* and the Universe. The former states, "The body is fivefold (the five elements), existing in the five, depending on the six supports (tastes of food), connected with the six qualities, [consisting of] seven *dhātus* (tissues), three impurities, having two *yonis* (sexes), and (nourished by) four kinds of food[66]. It further has, as constituents of the physical body, "how is it *pancātmakam* (five-fold)? Because of the five: earth, water, fire, air and ether. In this five-fold body, what is earth, what is water, what is fire, what is air, and what is ether? It is said that what is hard is earth, what is fluid is water, what is warm is fire, what moves is air, and what is space is ether[67]".

The *saṁskārs* have undergone modification in the current socio-cultural

and socio-economic conditions, not just among the tribes, but also among the other communities. Also because of increased rates of institutional births, some of the practices have become obsolete. Yet, whether it was adoption or adoption, the evidence brought forth in this paper establishes the parallels. The texts establish standards and benchmarks and this is best reflected through the birthing rituals as presented here. There is always a quest among classical authors to establish the highest ideals. Whereas, the "culture of the people" is the portrayal of the practical approach towards beliefs and practices. It presents the higher philosophical ideas in simpler ways to make them easy to comprehend for common people. The rites discussed in this paper show how the contextualisation and adaptation to the local conditions, beliefs and available resources happen of those higher ideals founded by the classical authors.

(Endnotes)

1. Van Gennep,The Rites of Passage,1960, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 11.

2. In ancient Indian society as per various puranic instructions was divided into four stages of life. These were, *brahmacarya* (celibacy), *gṛhastha* (house holders' life), *Vānaprastha* (stage when one lives in the forests) and *Saññyāsa* (the life of total retirement from worldly life and prepare for final path). In the 9th chapter of the third *aṁśa* of Viṣṇu Purāṇa, a detailed description of each of the *ashrams* is available. According to S.C. Dube in Indian Society, 45, the *āśrama* system was closely related to the concept of *puruṣārthas* or the goals of life, viz, the *dharma* (piety/morality/ path of righteousness/ duties of the individuals), the *arth* (pursuit of wealth and well-being), *kāma* (pursuit of bodily desires, particularly sex) and *mokṣha* (salvation). Thus, the four *āṣramas* have their respective duties to be performed by the people of those respective *ashramas*. This shows the well -organized social life and its success in Indian soil. For a much exhaustive account on the ashramas etc, *Dharmasastra ka Itihasa* (Hindi version), *vol* I by P.V. Kane, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan, 1980, 195-196; History of Dharmasastra (English version), vol II, part 1, Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 194, could be referred to.

3. Please refer footnote 2.

4. Subhash Kak, The *Garbha Upanishad*: How Life Begins. *"Oṁ pañcātmak pañcasu vartmanaṁ ṣaḍāṣṛyaṁ ṣadguṇayogayuktam/ ṭatsaptdhātu trimalaṁ dviyoni*

caturvidhāhāramayaṁ//''.

5. *Garbhādhāna* is a Sanskrit compound consisting of the terms *garbha* + *ādhāna*. It means, 'impregnation-rite', a ceremony performed before conception or after menstruation to ensure conception. The definition is found in the *Yājñavalkya* i, 11; *Gṛhyāsaṁgraha*; *Mahābhārata* iii; Kapila's *Sāṁkhya-pravacana* etc.

6. Means delivery of the baby.

7. The Ṛgvéda is the earliest of the four Védas. It is a large collection of hymns in praise of the gods, which are chanted in various rituals. Sanskrit being the language of composition, the Ṛgvéda consists of 1028 hymns, organised into ten books known as *maṇḍalas*. Each *maṇḍala* has *sūktas* (hymns). Rig Veda is one of the oldest existing texts in the world. The Rigveda is the oldest compilation of human wisdom. This *Saṁhitā* (collection) is unique in its nature. In fact, it is not a book, but a compilation composed of several books which can be individually distinguished from each other. The present form of this *Saṁhitā* clearly indicates that the collection is not a single work, but consists of older and later elements. Various indications of language, style and ideas prove this point. Different hymns of this *Saṁhitā* were composed long before they were systematically arranged. The whole of the *Rigveda- Saṁhitā* is in form of verses, known as *Rik*. *'Rik'* is the name given to those *mantras* which are meant for the praise of the deities. Thus, the collection (*Samhita*) of *Riks* is known as *Rigveda- Saṁhitā*.

8. S. C. Banerji, Dharmasūtras: A study in their origin and development, Calcutta, Punthi Pustak, 1962, chapter 1. Dharmasūtras is a compound of the components, dharma and sūtra, (*dharma*, 'law' + *śāstra*, 'teaching'). The compound thus obviously means *sūtras* dealing with *'dharma'*. The Dharmasūtras are prose works, with a few verses interspersed, dealing with the code of conduct of the Hindus in its multifarious aspects. They comprehend, in their usual signification, Dharma, i.e., laws and customs governing the Hindu life, and expositions of moral duty. Sociology, the subject of these works, is a science by itself. The Dharmasūtra are designated by a variety of names. "*Smrti*" is a generic term applied.

9. The *Gṛhyasūtras* (*gṛhya* = domestic + *sutras*) are a category of Sañskṛit texts prescribing Vedic rituals, mainly relating to rites of passage such as rituals of wedding, birth celebration, name giving and coming of age of (puberty). Their language is late Vedic Sañskṛit and they date to around roughly 500 BCE.

10. The word *Smṛiti* is derived from the root "*smri*" meaning 'to remember'. There are two kinds of *Smṛitis viz*, *Dharmasūtras* and *Dharmaśāstras*. Their subject matter

is almost the same. The difference is that the *Dharmasūtras* are written in prose, in short maxims (sūtras) and the Dharmaśāstras are composed in poetry (*ślokas*). *Dharmaśāstra* is a set of ancient Indian literature which provides the codes of conduct and moral principles (*dharma*) for an individual's behavior toward oneself, one's family and one's community. *Dharmaśāstra* were mostly in metrical verses and were based of *Dharmaśāstras*, that were written during 800 to 200 BC. The topics generally dealt with in the *Dharmaśāstras* fall under three broad groups, as 1. *Ācāra*: general conduct 2. *Vyavahāra*: social conduct, law and order and *Prāyaścitta*: expiatory rites for transgressions

11. Rajbali Pande, Hindu *Saṁsakārs*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1969.

12. Goṅd is one of the major tribal communities that are spread in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, mainly depending on agriculture and forest products.

13. The Bhīls are mostly found in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh. The tribe is known for beautiful pictures with which they decorate their houses.

14. One of the oldest tribes of India, the Baigās, mainly inhibiting the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, engage in living on making terracotta pottery, agriculture and bamboo basket weaving.

15. Dr. Kapil Tiwari, Sampadā, Bhopal, *Ādivāsī Lok* Kalā evaṁ Tulsī *Sāhitya Pariṣada*, Madhya Pradesh *Sañskṛiti Pariṣada*, 2012, p.209.

16. Ibid.

17. Dr. Kapil Tiwari, Sampadā, Bhopal, *Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad*, Madhya Pradesh *Sanskriti Parishad*, 2012, p.309.

18. Subhash Kak, The *Garbha Upanishad*: How Life Begins. *"Ṛitukāle saṁprayogādekarātṛoṣitaṁ kalilaṁ bhavati saptratroṣitaṁ bududaṁ bhavati ardhamāsābhyantareṇa piṇḍo bhavati masabhyañtareṇa kaṭhino bhavti māsadvayen śraḥ sampaddhate māsaṭrayeṇ pādapraveśo bhavti/"*

19. Ibid. *"Ath mātṛāsśitapītnāḍīsūtragaten prāṇa āpyāyate/ Ath navame māsi sarvlakṣaṇasaṁpūrṇo bhavati pūrvajātīḥ smarati kṛitākritaṁ ca karma vibhāti śubhāśubhaṁ ca karma vindati//3//*

20. S.C. Dube, Field Songs of Chhattisgarh, Lucknow, The Universal Publishers Ltd, 1947, p.26.

21. Kaviraj Kunja Lal Bhishagratna, *Suṣruta Saṁhitā*, vol. II, Chapter III & X, *Garbhiṇi*

Vyākaraṇ Śarīraṁ, Calcutta, 1911, p.216.

22. Dr. Kapil Tiwari, Sampadā, Bhopal, *Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad*, Madhya Pradesh *Sanskriti Parishad*, 2012, p.309.

23. Subhash Kak, The Garbha Upanishad: How Life Begins. *"Saptame māse jīvena saṁyukto bhavati/.*

24. Anuradha Pal, trans. A.K. Gandhi, Gonda: *Utpatti*, *Itihasa tatha Sanskriti*, Delhi, National Book Trust, 2014, p.74.

25. Dr. Kapil Tiwari, Sampadā, Bhopal, *Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad*, Madhya Pradesh *Sanskriti Parishad*, 2012, p.91 & p.209; Dr. Vijay Chaurasiya, Prakrti Putra Baiga Putra Baiga, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh Hindi Granth Academy, 2009, p.209.

26. Kaviraj Kunja Lal Bhishagratna, *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, vol. II, Chapter X, *Garbhini Vyakaran Shariram*, Calcutta, Published by the Author 1911, p.216.

27. K. Bharathi & V. V. L. Prasuna , Ancient Indian Knowledge of Maternal and Child Health Care: A Medico-Historical Introspection of Āyurveda, Joumal lnd.Med. Heritage, vol. XXXIX - 2009.

28. Dr. Kapil Tiwari, Sampadā, Bhopal, *Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad*, Madhya Pradesh *Sanskriti Parishad*, 2012, p.91 & p.209.

29. Ibid, p.309.

30. Ramesh. P. Narverkar, MBBS, Bombay, Practice of Midwifery in Ancient India, 313; Kaviraj Kunja Lal Bhishagratna, *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, vol. II, Chapter X, *Garbhini Vyakaran Shariram*, Calcutta, Published by the Author 1911, p.216.

31. Kaviraj Kunja Lal Bhishagratna, *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, vol. II, Chapter X, *Garbhini Vyakaran Shariram*, Calcutta, Published by the Author 1911, p.220.

32. This is a huge tree. It is usually grown in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal, Kerala, Tamilnadu etc. in hilly areas and deep forests. The stem is woody and hard. The branches grow at the top side of the tree. Leaves are usually joined. In one twig three leaves grow like wood apple leaves. The flowers are having scattered petals and looks like bells. The pods which are actually fruits are about one metre in length. It looks like snake and a little flat. Inside the fruit white hard pulp is there. Around the seeds a transparent membrane has covered it which looks like the slough. The fruits are of chocolate colour. The speciality of this tree is if a piece of wood of it is placed before a snake, the snake becomes timid and not moves at all. Wherever this tree is found, around 100 square metres around it no snake can be

visible. If it reaches near the tree it dies. There are astronomical and religious value of the tree.

33. Dr. Kapil Tiwari, Sampadā, Bhopal, *Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad*, Madhya Pradesh *Sanskriti Parishad*, 2012, p.309.

34. Dr. Vijay Chaurasiya, *Prakrti Putra Baiga Putra Baiga*, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh Hindi Granth Academy, 2009, p.18-19.

35. Sunita Pandron, *Baigāon ke Camatkārik Nuskhe Paraṁparāgat Cikitsā Paddhati Janjāti Kṣhetra men baigā va guniya-rogiyon ka jaḍi-buṭiyon evaṁ tañtra mañtra se upchār ke saṅdarbh me*, International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, Volume 2, Issue.3, March 2014.

36. Dr.Kapil Tiwari, Sampadā, Bhopal, *Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad*, Madhya Pradesh *Sanskriti Parishad*, 2012, p.209.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid, p.309.

39. Suneel R. Qamra, J. Roy, D.K. Mishra, Food Consumption Pattern and Associated Habits of the Bhil Tribe of Dhar District of Madhya Pradesh.

40. Shital Rahul Rasane & Kirti Tushar Bhangale, Sutika Paricharya according to various Samhita, MedPulse International Medical Journal October 2015; ISSN: 2348-2516, EISSN: 2348-1897, Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2015, p.664-667. Following table provides details of the diet, conduct and medicines for the new mother.

	Ahara (diet)	*Vihar* (mode of life)	*Aushadhi* (medicine)
Carak	Liquid gruel of rice medicated with *pippalī* (*Piper longum*), *pippalimool Piper longum*'s root),*chavya* (*Piperetrofractum*), *chitraka* (*Plumbagozeylanica*), sunṭhī (*Zingiber officinale*) for 5-7 days. Use of *bṛihagana* drugs from 6th or 8th day.	*Abhyañga* (massage) of abdomen with *taila* (oil) or *ghṛita* (clarified butter) with big clean cloth. Bath with luke warm water.	*Sarpi*, *taila*, *vasā* or *majja* with *pippali* (*Piper longum*), *pippalimoola*, *chavya* (*Piper retrofracum*), *chitraka* (*Plumbago zeylanica*) and *śṛiṅgavera* (*Zingiber officinale*) *churna*. *Anupanā- ūṣṇajala* (luke warm water) to drink.

Suśruta	Snehayavagu or kṣīrayavagu saturated with drugs of *vidarīgañdhadi Desmodiumgangetium* etc.) gana form 3rd/4th to 6th/ 7th days. *Māṅsrasa* of jungle *māṅs* saturated with *yava* (*Vulgaris sativus*), kola (*Ziziphus mauritiana*), *kulatth Dolichosbiflorus*) with cooked *Śālī* rice from 7th/ 8th day to *sūtikākāla* (period of pollution).	Abhyañga with bala (*Sidacordifolia*) *taila,* then irrigation with decoction of *Bhadradaru* (*Cedrusdeodara*) etc. drugs capable of suppressing the *vāta* (air).	Pippalī (*Piper longum*), pippalimoola (*root of Piper longum*), hastipippalī, chitraka (*Plumbagozeylanica*) and ṣṛṅgavera (*Zingiberofficinale*) churna. *Anupanā-ṣṇagudodaka* (warm jaggery water) for 2 or 3 days to drink.
Aṣṭāṅgasaṁgṛiha	Liquid *yavagu* prepared with either milk or *vidāryadigaṇa* (*Puerariatuberosa* etc.) drugs for 3, 5 or 7 days. Light diet with soup of *yava* (*Vulgaris sativus*), kola (*Ziziphusmauritiana*) and *kullattha* (*Dolichosbiflorus*) from 4th, 6th/ 8th day to 12th day. Meat soup of wild animals, agreeable diet from 13th to *sūtikākāla* (period of pollution).	*Abhyanga* with *bala* (*Sidacordifolia*) *taila*, *udarveṣṭana* after massage of abdomen with *taila* or *ghrita*, Irrigation with luke warm water. Massage, unguent, irrigation and bathing with *jīvanīya*, *brimhanīya*, *madhurā* and *vātahara* drugs (drugs that help in reducing the gases).	*Sneha* with *pañcakola* (*Piper longum*, root of *Piper longum*, *Piper retrofractum*, *Plumbagozeylanica* and *Zingiberofficinale*) *churna* or *sneha* with *yavani* (*Trachyspermumammi*), *upakuñcikā* (*Nigella sativa*), *chavya* (*Piper retrofractum*), *chitraka* (*Plumbagozeylanica*), *vyośa* (*Zingiberofficinale*, *Piper nigrum*, *Piper longum*) and *saiṅdhava* (pink salt) *ānupanā-ūṣṇajala* for 7 nights.

Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya	*Pañchakola* (*Piper longum*, *Piper longum*'s root, *Piper retrofractum*, *Plumbagozeylanica*, and *Zingiber officinale*) *siddhapeya* for first 3 days, *vidaryadigana* (*Pueraria tuberose* etc.) *kwatha siddha snehayukta* (with butter) *yavagu* or *kshirayavagu* from 4th /7th day, after that gradually *bṛimhana* diet from 8th/ 12th day, after 12th day meat soup should be used.	Almost similar description as *Aṣṭāṅgasaṁgṛiha*. There is also description of massage of *yoni* (vagina) along with body.	*Taila* or *ghrita* with *pañchakola* (*Piper longum, Piper longum*'s root, *Piper retrofractum*, *Plumbagozeylanica*, and *Zingiberofficinale*) *churna*. *Anupanā-ūṣṇaguḍodaka* (warm jaggery water) for 2 or 3 days.
Kāśyap	*Pippali* (*Piper longum*), *nagar* (*Zingiber offinalis*) *yukta* and *saindhavarahita* (without salt) *alpasnehayukta* (less amount of butter) *yavagu* for first 3 or 5 days, then *sasnehalavana* (with butter and salt) *yavagu*, then *sasneha-lavana-amlayukta kulattha* (*Dolichosbiflorus*) *yush* with meat soup of wild animals and *ghṛitabhṛṛṣṭa kuṣmāṇḍa* (*Beninca sahispida*), and *moolaka* (*Raphanus sativus*).	Massage of back, pressure of abdomen and flanks, then *udarveshtana*. Sitting over a small chair covered with leather bag filled with hot *bala* (*Sidacordifolia*) *taila*, then sudation in the *yoni* with *oleo* prepared with *priyaṅgu* (*Callicarpa macrophylla*) etc. Hot water bath after proper sudation, fumigation *withkuṣṭha* (*Saussurealappa*), *guggulu* (*Commiphoramukul*) and *agaru* (*Aquilariaaagallocha*) mixed with *ghrita*.	*Snehapana* according to *satmya*. *Anupana māñda* for 3 or 5 days.

Hārīta	*Uṣṇa* (warm) *kulattha* (*Dolichosbiflorus*) *yush* on 2nd day, *pañchkola* (*Piper longum*, root of *Piper longum*, *Piper retrofractum*, *Plumbagozeylanica*, *Zingiberofficinale*) *yavagu* on 3rd day, *caturjātaka* (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*, *Elettaria cardamomum*, leaves of *Cinnamomum zeylanicum*, *Mesuaferrea*) mixed *yavagu* on 4th day, cooked rice of *śālī* or *shaṣṭikā* on 5th day.	Vaginal filling with oil and massage followed by sudation with hot water.	Decoction of available drugs out of *lodhra* (*Symplocos racemosa*), *arjuna* (*Terminaliaarjuna*), *kadamba Anthocephalusindicus*), *devadārū* (*Cedrus deodara*), *bījaka* (*Pterocarpus marsupium*) and *karkañdhu* (a variety of *Ziziphus mauritiana*). Then *nagara* (*Zingiberofficinale*) and *hāritaki* (*Terminaliachebula*) churna with jaggery on 2nd day morning.

41. Dr. Punam Kumari and Dr. Rashmi Sharma, Physiology and Management of Normal Puerperium through Ayurveda, World Journal of Pharmaceutical Research, volume 8, Issue 3, p.385-39.

42. Sampadā, Bhopal, Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad, Madhya Pradesh Sanskriti Parishad, 2012, p.309.

43. Sampadā, Bhopal, Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad, Madhya Pradesh Sanskriti Parishad, 2012, p.91; Dr.Vijay Chaurasiya, Prakrti Putra Baiga, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh Hindi Granth Academy, 2009, p.18-19.

44. Sampadā, Bhopal, Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad, Madhya Pradesh Sanskriti parishad, 2012, p.209.

45. Anuradha Pal, trans. A.K.Gandhi, Gonda: Utpatti, Itihasa tatha Sanskriti, Delhi, National Book Trust, 2014, p.74-75.

46. Sampadā, Bhopal, Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad, Madhya Pradesh Sanskriti Parishad, 2012, p.91.

47. Website of Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts.

48. Ibid

49. Sampadā, Bhopal, Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad, Madhya Pradesh Sanskriti Parishad, 2012, p.91.
Hindi Granth Academy, 2009, p.19.

50. Dr.Vijay Chaurasiya, Prakrti Putra Baiga Putra Baiga, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

51. Sampadā, Bhopal, Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad, Madhya Pradesh Sanskriti Parishad, 2012, p.209- 211.

52. Dr.Vijay Chaurasiya, Prakrti Putra Baiga, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh Hindi Granth Academy, 2009, p.18-19.

53. Dharmasastra ka Itihasa (Hindi version), vol I by P.V.Kane, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan, 1980, p.195-196; History of Dharmasastra (English version), vol II, part 1, Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941. The varied suggestions include naming on the day of the birth, 10th,12th or 10/100/365 after the birth.

54. Anuradha Pal, trans. A.K.Gandhi, Gonda: Utpatti, Itihasa tatha Sanskriti, Delhi, National Book Trust, 2014,p.78.

55. P.V.Kane, Dharmasastra ka Itihasa (Hindi version), vol I by, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan, 1980, p.199-200; History of Dharmasastra (English version), vol II, part 1, Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941.

56. Dharmasastra ka Itihasa (Hindi version), vol I by P.V.Kane, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan, 1980, p.196; History of Dharmasastra (English version), vol II, part 1, Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941. The varied suggestions include naming on the day of the birth, 10th,12th or 10/100/365 after the birth.

57. Anuradha Pal, trans. A.K.Gandhi, Gonda: Utpatti, Itihasa tatha Sanskriti, Delhi, National Book Trust, 2014, p.78.

58. Anuradha Pal, trans. A.K.Gandhi, Gonda: Utpatti, Itihasa tatha Sanskriti, Delhi, National Book Trust, 2014, p.79- 80.

59. Dr.Kapil Tiwari, Sampadā, Bhopal, Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad, Madhya Pradesh Sanskriti Parishad, 2012, p.310.

60. Dr.Vijay Chaurasiya, Prakrti Putra Baiga, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh Hindi Granth Academy, 2009, p.20.

61. As per the Persian documents of medieval India, a muqaddam was the headman of a village. He was, by profession, a peasant of the village which he headed. He could sell and buy land for the village and settle the common treasury. His position was hereditary; however, it could also be bought and sold.

62. Before 1947, jamādār was a native junior officer belonging to a locally raised regiment serving as mercenaries, especially with the British army. Later, it became

an officer in the Indian police. Basically, a person who supervises a staff of servants.

63. Dr.Kapil Tiwari, Sampadā, Bhopal, Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad, Madhya Pradesh Sanskriti Parishad, 2012, 211.

64. Dr.Kapil Tiwari Sampadā, Bhopal, Adivasi Lok Kala evam Tulsi Sahitya Parsishad, Madhya Pradesh Sanskriti Parishad, 2012, p.309 – 310.

65. Anuradha Pal, trans. A.K.Gandhi, Gonda: Utpatti, Itihasa tatha Sanskriti, Delhi, National Book Trust, 2014, p.74-75.

66. Please refer to footnote 4.

67. Ibid.

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TRADITIONAL WEDDING RITUALS IN PAKISTAN'S PROVINCE OF PUNJAB: TYING THE KNOT

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Abstract

The article examines traditional wedding rituals' cultural and social aspects in Punjab, Pakistan. The study is based on ethnographic research, including participant observation and interviews with families and community members involved in the wedding ceremonies. The article provides an overview of the cultural significance and symbolism of traditional wedding rituals in Punjab, emphasizing the role of family, community, and religion in shaping these practices. The authors discuss the various stages of the wedding process, including pre-wedding ceremonies, the main wedding ceremony, and post-wedding celebrations. The pre-wedding ceremonies, beginning with *baat pakki*, *mayon* and mehndi are crucial in establishing social ties and relationships between the families of the bride and groom. The main wedding ceremony, the *nikkah*, is the most significant part of the wedding. It involves the signing of the marriage contract and the exchange of vows between the bride and groom in the presence of witnesses. The article explores the religious and cultural significance of the *nikkah* and the various rituals that accompany it, such as the giving of the *haq-mehr* and the recitation of verses from the Quran. The post-wedding celebrations, such as the *valima* (the wedding reception), are an opportunity for the families to come together and celebrate the union of the couple. The authors examine the various cultural practices and traditions that are observed during the *valima*, including the serving of traditional food and the exchange of gifts. The article also discusses the changes that have taken place in traditional wedding rituals in Punjab over time, particularly with the influence of modernization and globalization. The authors argue that while some traditional practices have been modified or abandoned, many continue to be an important part of Punjabi culture and identity. Overall, the article provides a detailed and insightful analysis of the traditional wedding rituals in Punjab, highlighting the cultural and social significance of these practices and their continued relevance in contemporary Punjabi society.

Key Words: *Mayon*, *Barat*, *Nikkah*, *Dholki*, Mehndi, *Mehr*, *Valima*, Punjabi

INTRODUCTION

The transition from one stage of life to another is inevitable in human existence. Some of these transitions occur in the form of rituals that transition from one social standing to another. Marriage is one of the rituals that is typically seen as an iconic event in one's life. For a woman to be a wife and for a man to be a husband comes with many expectations and commitments, changing their lives drastically. Pageantry and ceremonial traditions are constant features of these marriages.

Rituals are more than just actions or festivities carried out during social occasions; they also have various symbolic implications. [1] In layman's terms, by taking part in rituals, people endorse the legitimacy of the ritual and the prevailing social structure. Furthermore, it is crucial to delve into the interpretation of these meanings from the perspective of the indigenous people who practice it. [2] Rituals can be understood as social processes in which members of a social group observe an individual going through a transition in their social status.[3] [4] Rituals are deeply rooted in ideological traditions and, as such, altering them may be deemed unsuitable.[5] [6] Due to their adherence to institutional and social norms surrounding gender roles in the family, individuals who practice these and uphold these within their social group do not let them change. According to Coltrane, the significance of gender is primarily conveyed through family rituals and other family practices due to the lack of external mechanisms in society for regulating gender. [7] The collective conscience serves as a unifying force within the community, binding its members together based on shared norms and values. [8] Family and friends play a significant role in wedding rituals as they adhere to uphold the societal norms and regulations associated with the responsibilities of the bride and groom.

Wedding customs and their symbolic connotations are examined in this study. Covering the social aspect of it, women perform these rituals to a greater extent than males, the gender ideals that are prominent in the group are passed down through them. The dominant male social structure is accepted as the norm, and by engaging in specific rituals, a social group can reinforce, reproduce, and sustain this structure. It is fascinating to notice that women do the rituals that reflect their traditional roles, preserve them, and then pass them along to the following generation. Additionally, rituals exhibit deeply ingrained views about the role of women in societies. [9]

METHODOLOGY

This is an anthropological qualitative research study. The data was collected by participating in different wedding ceremonies and viewing the ritual as well as interviewing the participants in-depth regarding the ritual. The two main elements in the interview guide were further broken down into brief, straightforward questions. One area of this element focuses on the rituals as they are carried out, while the second theme investigates the cultural context of rituals and how the people who execute them interpret them.

The study was conducted in the different cities of Punjab, mostly in the most prominent city, Lahore. The people who performed the rituals were observed and interviewed along with other individuals who especially knew about the purpose and significance of rituals in wedding ceremonies and were voluntarily willing to participate in the research study. The interviews were conducted in the national language of Pakistan i.e., Urdu although some people responded in their native language spoken in Punjab i.e., Punjabi. The locals at the wedding also translated the Punjabi songs playing in the wedding ceremony while informally chatting. Informal interaction with the people brought forward some diverse viewpoints.

DISCUSSION

Elaboration of Wedding Rituals in Punjabi Weddings

In the era of modernization, traditional cultural practices in a society do not die or fade away; rather, they change and even become revitalized. Family life and behaviour are being impacted by structural changes brought on by globalization and modernization, as well as ideational pressures that prioritize social equality, personal freedom, and individual prerogatives about family and the greater community nonetheless cultural rituals stay well and alive. [10] Of all eventual rituals performed in Punjab, the most intricate and complex event is unquestionably the wedding. Wedding customs typically last for several days, which makes them extremely intricate and lavish.

[11] South Asian weddings are known for being extravagant and pompous, therefore this high level of ritual elaboration is not a Western intervention. A typical Punjabi Muslim marriage is virilocal, hypergamous, and endogamous. Parallel and cross-cousin weddings, exchange marriages, and other marriages with affinal relatives are very popular since the endogamy

unit, the *zat*, is ordered hierarchically and the preference is for marriage within the immediate family or localized caste group, the *biraderi*. [12] [13] Overall, in South Asian Muslim communities, it is also prevalent for the majority of marriages to be placed between first or second cousins, as well as more distant relatives. [14] Wedding customs are regulated and based on gender. Even though women make up the majority of those involved, it nonetheless perpetuates gender stereotypes inside the social group. Three days are typically considered to be the most significant in Punjabi weddings. They are typically recognized by the locals, who also know what will happen on any given day, and they have unique names in the local tongue. As a result, specific occurrences happen on the specified days. Each day's activities are sequential. There are a few rituals that are performed prewedding day each day, leading up to the wedding day which contains certain rituals of its own. During each designated day, a series of events occur that encompass numerous rituals or a sequence of rituals. Hence, rituals are meticulously organized occasions that follow a specific order and culminate on the wedding day.

Rituals provide insights into the societal structure of masculinity and femininity. They also highlight how dominant ideologies are not simply followed, accepted, and reinforced, but are also challenged and examined. In addition to that, these symbols are often accompanied by elements such as the attire colour, an object, or a line from a culturally significant song. These symbols, along with their culturally recognized meanings, are passed down from one generation to another through the performance of songs and rituals. The symbolic meanings hold great significance for the couple getting married as well as for the attendees of the ceremonies.

In Muslim Punjabi weddings, wedding ceremonies typically commence within a week and conclude with the bride being at the groom's home after each ritual or series of rituals is performed each day. In the past, weddings used to span multiple days, but the current situation in the community has brought about changes. [15]There could be various reasons for this, but nowadays, due to economic and time limitations, the number of wedding days has been reduced. A particular respondent held the viewpoint:

> "We do not have the financial means to accommodate relatives who typically come to stay during rituals at the bride or groom's homes. Even though some individuals have the financial resources to cover the costs of food and other

necessities, they continue to partake in elaborate wedding ceremonies."

In Muslim Punjabi weddings, five primary ceremonies take place. The wedding or barat days consist of multiple ritualistic events, all of which occur on the same day.

1. Baat Pakki/ Engagement ceremony (pre-wedding event)

2. Mayon/Heldi

3. Mehndi ceremony

4. Wedding day/*Barat* day

  a. Preparation of barat

  b. Arrival of b*arat*

  c. *Ruksati/Vidai*

5. Valima

1. Baat Pakki/Engagement ceremony (pre-wedding event)

Once a suitable match has been identified for a young woman and a young man, the to accept the proposal takes place. In previous times, this process would typically entail the involvement of a matchmaker, particularly a female, who actively participated in the matchmaking between the two families. Traditionally, it was not uncommon for the parents of a young man to arrange his marriage without personally visiting the prospective bride's family.

[16] However, societal norms have evolved, and nowadays it is more customary for female members of the family to actively engage in the process of matchmaking by visiting various families. When the two families reach an agreement, a small ritual takes place at the girl's home where they exchange sweets. During this ceremony, the wedding date is finalized. During this occasion, the girl's family organizes a lunch and tea with eatables. The boy's family takes a symbolic action to prepare the girl for her future roles in her married home, emphasizing the importance of her readiness. In certain cultural practices, it is customary for the boy's family, particularly the father-in-law (or any maternal uncle from the boy's family in his absence), to provide a monetary gift to the girl as

a gesture of agreement and respect for the bride-to-be. The amount of money given is determined based on the economic status of the boy's family. This monetary gift symbolizes the girl's status as an important member of another family, namely, a man's wife. It also signifies the influential role of the two men, the father-in-law and the husband, in her life.

2. Mayon/Heldi

The *mayon* and forthcoming mehndi ritual ceremony hold great significance for the bride. These two rituals serve the essential purpose of purifying and secluding the bride, facilitating her transition from an unmarried status to a married one. The *mayon* ritual serves two purposes.

Firstly, it promotes the seclusion of the girl, and secondly, it symbolically purifies her entire body through the application of a paste known as *ubtan*. Through seclusion, a young woman goes unnoticed within her household, a process that facilitates the transition from girlhood to womanhood and prepares her for marriage. In a sense, she becomes unseen within the confines of her own home. During this, the bride is restricted from partaking in activities such as bathing and performing household chores. It is expected that she may limit her interactions with her male relatives (such as male cousins) and attempt to minimize contact with them.

According to Hochchild's theory, social roles like the role of the bride come with expectations for appropriate emotions. [17] This expectation stems from the respect and modesty she holds for her male relatives, as she will be entering into a close relationship with a man. The *mayon* ceremony involves the application of a paste made from turmeric powder and mustard oil (*ubtan*) onto the girl's face and body by her female friends or relatives. This ritual aims to enhance the girl's beauty for her wedding day. *Ubtan* is known to enhance the radiance of the bride's skin particularly her face, which should appear fresh, alluring, and luminous. In the past, it was customary for the girl to sit on a *choki*, a small wooden bench without arms. However, in modern times, she now sits on a beautifully decorated chair positioned at the centre of the room, accompanied by her female relatives and friends. During this time, she remains confined within her room or the designated area assigned to her in her natal home.

The groom's house invites his female relatives and neighbours for the ceremony. In contrast to the ceremony at the bride's home, this one is shorter and less cheerful. In general, the groom-to-be adorns a flower garland around his neck and drapes a beautifully decorated red dupatta over his shoulder, symbolizing a prosperous married life. The groom takes a seat on the beautifully adorned chair while female relatives delicately apply a small amount of *ubtan* to his palm. His mother and other female relatives offer him confectionery to consume. After the ceremony concludes, a meal and tea will be served.In contrast to the bride, the groom is not expected to be secluded in his household. Typically, he assists in organizing the wedding and engages in other daily activities.

3. Mehndi ceremony

Henna is applied on the bride's hands and feet to conceal altering her previous identity. The mehndi ceremony of the bride often exhibits greater splendour compared to that of the groom. The bride's journey towards marriage is a rite of passage, accompanied by a deeply emotional experience. This transformative process involves her transition from girlhood to womanhood as she prepares to leave her parental home to join her husband's household. Henna, a fragrant shrub originally from India, has now spread to various countries in Asia. In mehndi ceremonies nowadays there has been a change in trend where girls are using a different type of henna, which has a waterier consistency and a distinct chemical composition compared to the traditional henna recipe. This new henna mixture allows for the creation of intricate designs on the bride's palm. The *mehndi* ritual typically commences in the evenings and extends into the late night. Separate henna rituals are conducted for the bride and groom on the following day after the *mayon* ceremony. Henna paste is prepared in large platters, often adorned with arrangements, *gota* (golden or silver lace), and illuminated by candlelight. During the henna ceremony, the act of lighting candles also represents the illumination of the bride's life. The henna ritual commences as elderly and married women apply henna onto the bride's palm, which remains concealed beneath her veil, known as a *dupatta*.

One of the females describes the momentousness of henna: "Henna application on a girl's palm is believed to bring good wishes for her married life. If the henna leaves a dark colour after drying, it is traditionally

interpreted as a sign of a blissful marriage and deep love from her husband. This practice holds symbolic significance in that regard."

During the commencement of the ceremony, the bride is gracefully seated on an exquisitely adorned chair. Accompanied by elder women, a henna mixture is carefully applied to her palm, with a betel leaf acting as a base. Subsequently, married women turn to apply henna onto the bride's palm. These married women exemplify the importance of marriage and highlight the elevated social status that comes with being married, in contrast to unmarried girls. Following the application of henna on her palm, the bride is presented with sweets as a positive sign of a blissful married life. The bride's hands and feet are adorned with intricate henna patterns. Additionally, the women and girls attending the ceremony also embellish their hands with henna whilst singing and dancing to the music of *dhol* performing *bhangra*. This henna decoration continues until the early hours of the morning, allowing the henna to darken and develop a reddish hue. Once the henna is dry, it is rinsed off with water. To enhance the intensity and longevity of the henna colour, the bride's adorned hands are coated with oil.

The groom's henna ritual is less ornate than the bride's. The ceremony is performed as the groom sits in a chair that has been decorated. A beetle leaf is placed on his hand. His aunts, married sisters, and cousins painted his palm with henna. They give him treats to consume as a sign of a blissful marriage.

4. Wedding day/*Barat* day

On the wedding day, commonly known as "*barat* day," various events and rituals place simultaneously in the homes of both the bride and groom. This day holds great significance as it encompasses the most important rituals of the entire wedding celebration. In most cases, the wedding ceremony typically occurs in the bride's hometown. During the ceremonial day, all expenses are traditionally covered by the parents of the bride. Once the bride is fully dressed, she is escorted to the stage or centre of the room and takes a seat on a chair or sofa. Her face is elegantly covered with her *dupatta*. In the villages, usually the Punjabi bridal attire is a red *shalwar kameez*, however, in the cities and towns, the attire is usually a red coloured bridal *lehenga* that consists of a shirt and a skirt-like bottoms

with exquisite designs incorporating silver and golden threads, as well as pearls, are adorned on the bridal *shalwar kameez/lehenga* and *dupatta*.

The bride is provided with a substantial dowry, which may at times exceed the economic means of her parents. [18] The bride's parents gift her the wedding dress and all the jewellery, and she does not wear any items from her in-laws as she is still considered the daughter of her parents. This symbolizes her final day in her childhood home and her continued connection to her parents.

a. Preparation of *Barat*

At the groom's residence, the groom prepares himself by taking and donning new attire typically an off-white *kameez* and white *shalwar*. Subsequently, the ceremonial act of *sehra bandi* takes place in which the groom wears a beautifully adorned turban around his head. The *sehra* is typically composed of fresh flowers and decorative elements. The flowers are individually threaded together to form a long strand. Created using *motia* (jasmine) and *gulab* (roses). The long flower strand is then hung and to ensure that the *sehra* remains secure, the groom also wears an ornate turban. During this ceremony, the brother-in-law of the groom is requested to place the sehra on the groom's head. In the context of the in-laws, the brother-in-law (husband of the sister) holds a position of importance and is regarded with respect. His authority within the family is acknowledged, and he is given prominence. In cases where the groom does not have a brother-in-law, his brother or father assumes the role during the *sehrabandi* ceremony. The footwear may occasionally be traditional. Alternatively, the groom opts for black shoes. He spends time with his friends before preparing to depart for the *barat* ceremony.

b. Arrival of *Barat*

This day holds significant importance in the series of wedding events. The bride's family warmly welcomes *barat* at the venue with joy and excitement. The presence of the *barat* elicits a sense of apprehension among the bride's relatives. Everyone becomes vigilant and eager to welcome them with courtesy and enthusiasm. The male members of the bride's family promptly rush to greet them well at their arrival at their home. They exchange garlands, engage in handshakes, and embrace each other. Afterwards, the members of the *barat* are escorted to their

designated area. *Barat* is typically accompanied by a refreshing cold beverage in summer times, such as *sharbat*, *lussi*, (a yoghurt drink) and cold drinks. In winter they are often served tea.

The parents of the bride take care of arranging for an officially authorized person, known as a *nikkahkhawaan*, who will handle the registration of the marriage contract and other necessary formalities for the *nikkah* ceremony. The *Nikkah* serves as the official marriage contract between the bride and groom, solidifying their relationship as husband and wife once both parties have agreed and signed the document. *Haq mehr* is of a strong consideration in the whole *nikkah* ordeal, it is the money that a groom pays his bride and it is of a prominent religious importance. The amount of *haq mehr* is set according to the earnings and financial status of the groom. After the *nikkah* contract has been signed, sweets, particularly known as *nikkah ke chowaray* (dried dates), are distributed among all relatives, and individuals exchange greetings while offering prayers for the future life of the bride and groom. Following the *nikkah* ceremony, guests are served with food.

After the food has been served, the groom is requested to join the bride at her side. It is customary for the bride and groom to first see each other after the *nikkah* ceremony. The access to the area where the bride is seated is limited to a selected few individual, namely the groom's close friends or relatives who accompany him during his arrival to join his spouse. The groom's mother-in-law presents him with a wristwatch as a gift. If the mother-in-law is absent, the ritual is performed by the bride's maternal or paternal aunt. The tradition of *doodhpilai* (consuming milk) is also observed in the bride's household by her sister. The glass is adorned with exquisite golden lace and other radiant embellishments. It is presented to the bride and groom as a symbol of unity, inviting them to share a sip. The groom is traditionally expected to consume milk before it is passed on to the bride. The sisters of the bride also request financial assistance from their brother-in-law after milk. The girls initiate their request for a significant sum of money. However, through extensive negotiations and the involvement of respected elders, the groom and his sister-in-law eventually reach an agreement on a specific amount of money.

c. Vidai/Ruksati (departure of the bride from her parental home)

The father of the groom requests the bride's father for the departure of the wedding procession *(barat)* and the subsequent event of the bride's farewell (*vidai*). On this significant occasion, the bride's relatives become deeply moved. They express their emotions by embracing and conveying their heartfelt blessings. In the most poignant moments, the encounters between her and her father and brothers evoke deep emotions. Once a certain amount of time has elapsed, the *barat* cavalcade, accompanied by the bride, departs from the bride's residence.

Upon the arrival of the *barat* near the groom's residence, the friends engage in celebratory dances accompanied by *dhol* (drums) and songs. Occasionally, fireworks are also displayed, serving as a signal to the community that the *barat* has returned the bride. Upon the arrival of the bride at her in-law's house, specific rituals take place. The women relatives of the groom gather at the entrance to welcome the bride. In particular, the mother of the groom, along with other female relatives, personally receives the bride. The room is adorned with a multitude of vibrant and sparkling buntings. The bridal bed is beautifully adorned with garlands of fragrant flowers, typically using roses for decoration. Additionally, the flower garlands are enhanced with radiant embellishments. When the time arrives for the groom to enter their room, the groom's sisters' cousins intercept him at the room's entrance. This customary practice is known as *baarhrukwae*. They request a certain amount of money from him, stating that unless he pays, he will not be permitted to enter the room. After engaging in negotiations and enduring a barrage of jokes, the groom ultimately agrees to provide financial compensation to his sisters and cousins. As a result, the sisters conscientiously permit him to enter the bride's room.

Another ceremony known as *goddabithai/goddapakrai* begins as soon as the groom enters his room. *Devar*, the younger brother of the groom, is seated next to the bride. *Devar* either sits in the bride's lap if he is a youngster or on the chair next to her if he is an adult. He politely requests some financial assistance from his older brother to give up his seat next to the bride. He then graciously takes a seat next to the bride (who is his sister-in-law) until the groom kindly offers him compensation to give up the chair. When the groom fulfils the agreed-upon financial obligation,

his youngest brother relinquishes the position adjacent to his spouse.

The groom presents the bride with her *muudikhai*, which is a gift that he brings for her at the event when he sees her face out of the veil at his house. This gift often is in the form of gold jewellery, or less frequently a monetary amount (other than *haq mehr*).

5. *Valima*

Valima holds a cultural and religious significance in the Punjabi wedding ceremony. It is a brief but important event in the ordeal of wedding events. The expenses and arrangements of the *valima* are solely held by the groom's family. The bride and groom get ready for the event. The bride usually dresses in an embellished and bejewelled *shalwar kameez* or *lehnga* whereas the groom usually wears a *shalwar kameez* or a suit. The theme of *valima* day is usually airy and pastel coloured, unlike the *barat* outfits which are mostly vibrant and colourful. The bride's family, relatives, and friends gather at the house/venue of the groom. They present gifts to their daughter consisting of clothing for the groom, his father, sisters and their spouses, brothers and their partners, their children, and the groom's aunts and uncles. The bride's family is served with refreshments such as cold drinks and *sharbat*. The bride and groom are seated on decorated chairs alongside their family members. The families of the bride and groom unite and celebrate the beautiful bond of marriage among their sons and daughters. Food is served near the concluding phase of the ceremony. The main course commonly includes rice and *naan* (flat bread) with meat gravy and in sweet dishes, there are several varieties of sweets served such as *zarda or mutanjan* (sweet rice), *kheer* (rice pudding), and *gajar ka halwa* (carrot pudding). After the meal, the bride and the groom visit the bride's natal home and stay there for a night. Typically, the bride's younger brother asks for permission from her in-laws to take his sister for a day or two. During his initial visit to his in-laws, the son-in-law may with various gifts, such as a gold ring, money, a motorcycle, or a car. Once again, this illustrates the transfer of gift items from the bride's side to the groom's family.

Among Sikhs that reside in Punjab, Pakistan, weddings are typically reflective of their religion and practices with a hint of traditional and cultural values as well. The event is a significant part of the Sikh identity

and confirms that Sikhism is a unique religion from the Hindu and Muslim communities that dominated Punjab during the time of the Gurus. Guru Amar Das claims that the union of the pair, who became one soul in two bodies via the practice of Anand Karaj, symbolizes a spiritual connection between them. [19]The ceremony is characterized by its simplicity and elegance and can be efficiently completed in under an hour. However, the planning and organization of the wedding event itself can span over a year. The week leading up to the main event is marked by various pre-wed, wedding, and post-wedding ceremonies and their corresponding rituals.

1.Thaka/Roka

It is a formal meeting that is scheduled for the parents of both families to officially agree to the *rishta* (proposal) and schedule a specific date for the engagement ceremony (*kurmai*), marriage and other ritualistic events.

2.Kurmai

At the bridegroom's home or in the Gurudwara, there is a formal engagement ceremony. In addition to exchanging rings, the bride's family presents the groom with a *kara* (Sikh bangle). The *granthi* (Sikh priest) offers a brief prayer before wrapping a scarlet scarf around the groom's shoulder to begin the ritual. The groom is then given dried dates by the groom's grandfather, and everyone then partakes in food and beverages.

3.Shagun/ Chunni chadana

To formalize the upcoming marriage, the boy's and girl's parents and other family members present auspicious gifts to the *shagun/chunni chadana* ceremony. The *chunni chadana* ceremony is more significant since it entails dressing the bride-to-be in a luxurious red gown that is both meant to protect her and signify the transition from a maiden to a lady.

4.Mehndi

The mehndi ceremony takes place a day before the wedding ceremony, for the bride (and groom to a lesser extent). This ritual is parallel to the *mehndi* ritual conducted in Muslim Punjabi weddings as *mehndi*

takes place a day before *barat* (the actual wedding day) and holds a greater significance for the bride as opposed to the groom. A skilled *mehndi* artist applies mehndi to the bride's hands, which are made of water and henna powder. Later, while the bride rests under a canopy, close family and friends perform the ritualistic application (*maiyaa*) of *vatna* (a paste made of turmeric, gram flour, and mustard oil) on her to represent ritual cleansing and purification of body and mind in advance of the wedding ceremony. To ward off evil spirits, *mehndi* and turmeric are especially employed in pre-wedding ceremonies throughout Asia. [20].The mandatory *Jago* ritual, which is performed on the evening or night before the wedding and is overseen by the boy's or girl's mother's family, seems to be a completely folk custom that has recently gained a lot of popularity and served as a reason for a "warmup" pre-wedding party. [21]

5. Gharoli

A ritual bath, which the groom must take after *vatna*, is tied to this ceremony. In this auspicious tradition, the sister-in-law of the groom goes to a local Gurudwara or well with other female family members to fill an earthen pot (*gharoli*) with water that will be used to bathe the groom after the *vatna* application ceremony.

6. Baraat

a. Sehra Bandi

The *Sehra Bandi* ceremony includes significant elements of the attire worn by the groom as he leaves for the wedding, including the sisters of the groom tying a decorative fringe made of flower strings to cover the groom's face (although this is now optional) and fastening the *kalgi* (a jewelled ornament with a plume fixed on it) to the turban and the *kirpan*. The groom is traditionally expected to leave on a white *ghori* (horse), with gathered women heralding the departure with traditional folk songs (*ghoryian or sehra*). However, in modern times, a tastefully decorated car has taken the place of riding a *ghori*. The groom, dressed as a royal, experiences an enlightened consciousness as he moves slowly behind the *band-baja* and dances with members of the *junj*.

b. Milni

The bride's family and friends welcome the *barat* at the Gurdwara's gate by singing hymns and professing their belief in God's workings. The majority of participants in the *milni* are the men of the families. A member of the bride's family gives each member of the *barat* a warm hug and a garland when they are introduced.

c. Anand Karaj

The *Anand Karaj,* also known as the 'Blissful Union,' traditionally takes place during the daytime at the Gurdwara. The focal point of the wedding ceremony revolves around the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of Sikhism. The groom the lead by entering the ceremony hall first. Once the bride arrives the couple sits together on the floor with the bride positioned to the left side of the groom, facing the Guru Granth Sahib. An *Amritdhari Sikh*, who has undergone the *Amrit* initiation in Sikhism, conducts the marriage ceremony. The couple and their respective parents come together to offer *Ardaas* to '*Waheguru*', followed by the singing of *Shabads*. The priest educates the couple about the significance of their marriage, their responsibilities towards each other, and the fundamental principles of leading a spiritual life as per Sikh beliefs. After that, the couple prostrates before the Guru Granth Sahib. A saffron-coloured scarf with one end in the bride's hand and the other on the groom's shoulder is placed by the bride's father. They have now joined this symbol and are prepared to exchange wedding vows or *lavaas*.

d. Lavan Pheras

The four *lavan,* or stanzas, from the Guru Granth Sahib are spoken by the priest officiating the marriage. The couple slowly circles the Guru Granth Sahib in a clockwise direction after reading the first stanza, with the groom guiding the bride. The couple returns to their positions after the round is over, but they remain standing for the final three hymns. After each *lavan*, the circumambulation procedure is repeated three more times. While the couple performs the *phras*, the *raagis* are singing the *lavans* in the background.

RECEPTION

The reception party is organized by the groom's family to honour the newlywed couple. They extend invitations to family and friends to partake in a lavish meal and partake in a joyous celebration complete with singing and dancing. The increasing commercialization and symbolism of the wedding event, which includes celebrations spread over three or more 'parties' and culminates in the post-wedding reception to which up to 500–700 guests may be invited, dwarfs the 'spiritual' or 'religious' significance of the Sikh marriage ceremony in many ways. [22]

CONCLUSION

This article investigates the ethnographic intricacies of wedding rituals within the Punjabi community residing in Pakistan. The following rituals help the newlywed couple prepare for their responsibilities and understand the expectations they have of each other and their families. By addressing gender stereotypes, ceremonies like *mayon*, *gharoli* and *mehndi* prepare the bride for her new conventional status as a wife. She learns to submit to and follow the rules of her new kin after going through a purifying and isolation procedure. The rituals known as *doodhpilae, baarhrukwae*, and *goddabithai*/*goddapakrai* highlight the prevalent male dominance and supremacy within the household. These rituals contribute to the financial independence of men while promoting women's dependence on them. By addressing gender stereotypes, ceremonies like *mayon* and *mehndi* prepare the bride for her new conventional status as a wife. She learns to submit to and follow the rules of her new kin after going through a purifying and isolation procedure. Since the status of the bride's family is viewed as being lower than that of the groom, the flow of presents from the bride's family to the groom's family is the symbolism of this. From the moment of the *baat pakki,* until the bride is sent off to her in-laws' house, there is a prevailing sense of tension and nervousness among the bride's parents and relatives. Any mistake made could dishonour the groom's family and may potentially endanger the life of their daughter. However, the bride undergoes rituals that support the groom (male) and her position within her new family.

Hence, this study demonstrates that wedding rituals in the Punjabi community in Pakistan contribute to the reinforcement of male dominance and supremacy. There have been conflicting perspectives on the symbolic

roles of these ceremonies, nonetheless, they continue to be practised due to the social expectations within the community. Wedding ceremonies serve multiple purposes. Primarily, they hold symbolic significance as a couple transitions from being unmarried to married, undergoing rituals that redefine their roles. By doing so, they gain awareness of their newly acquired responsibilities and privileges and obtain recognition for their new marital identity. Additionally, they exert influence and solidify ideologies and societal positions within the community over successive generations. By adhering to this practice and recognizing its importance, they effectively uphold the social order within their community.

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MARITAL PRACTICES AND RITUALS OF BAIGAS IN CENTRAL INDIA

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Abstract

The Baiga is one of the comparatively isolated tribes from the Indian subcontinent. Life cycle rituals are very important in the family, which is the basic unit of Baiga social structure. These are full of rites and rituals from birth to death, pollution and sacredness, celebration, and mourning throughout the year. Baigas have a strong belief in the institution of marriage. Marriage is a sacred union in the Baiga community. Marriage is regarded as one of the most important social functions in the Baiga community which institutionalizes sex for the permanent living and procreation of children. It is also known as the sacred tie between loving partners or couples married to their parents. They follow sub-tribe endogamy and do not marry outside the *Jat* (sub-group) and in the same lineage (*Kari*) and *Garh* (native geographical territory having families from common ancestors) due to incest taboo. The custom of taking the bride price is prevalent. Girls and boys are free to choose their life partners after attaining puberty. Polygyny is permitted and a good number of such cases are found in the study area. Marriages are based on affection and love among Baigas. During various social and family functions and dances, especially the *Dashahara* dance, they also get introduced to each other and choose their life partners. Pre-marital sex is also allowed in the Baiga community and in most cases, they get married. This paper deals with the culture, lifestyle, marriage rituals, acculturation, and change among Baigas of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh in my area of study.

Keywords: lifestyle, family, marriage, ritual, custom, cultural change.

INTRODUCTION

Baiga is an aboriginal group of Central India and is a follower of one of the very ancient cultural traditions. They claim themselves as the first human on the earth or the–*Mati-Putra* (children of the soil). They live deeper into the forest and hilly areas than other indigenous groups which results in comparative geographical isolation and are categorized as a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) in India. They mainly inhabit the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh states in India. A minor Baiga population is also found in the adjoining states of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Bihar.

Earlier, Baiga was a nomadic tribe practising shifting cultivation. They were hunter, gatherers, and shifting cultivators residing in the remote hilly and forest tracts of Maikal hill ranges in the bordering areas of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Later on, they became settled agriculturists by implementing the government plans and policies during the British rule and it continued in post-independent India. Their core area is Baiga Chak in the Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh, at present which consists of more than 202 villages.

The Baiga tribe is known for its habitation, traditional healing practices, hairstyle, and tattoo marks all over the world. By nature, they are very shy and simple in living (Forsyth 1871). They are Mundari or Kolarian people located in the central highlands of India (Elwin 1939, 4). Baigas speak in *Baiga*ni and *Chhattisgarhi* dialects of Hindi. *Baigani* is recognized as a corrupt form of Chhattisgarhi. It is a dialect of Indo-Aryan stock belonging to the Indo-European Phylum (Grierson 2005). It has been also seen that Baiga officiates as priests of the local deities. They do *jhar-phunk* and also work as medicine men (Elwin 1950). The neighbouring tribal groups of Kol and Gond communities consider Baigas as priests knowing the secrets of the region's soil. Baiga is a strong believer in magic and good medicine men (Tiwari 1997). They have sound knowledge of numerous forest herbs and medicinal plants that they use to cure diseases (Chaurasiya 2009). They are shifting cultivators, hunters, and gatherers. A staple food item of Baigas is rice. *Pej* is made of maize, wheat, *kodo* (millet) and *kutaki*. Baigas are avid smokers. They are legendary drinkers of *mahua* liquor. In the name of handicrafts, they do little basketry, broom making, and wood carving. Both women and men love to decorate themselves with handmade and market-

made ornaments. The elaborate tattoo designs can be found on Baigan's body for ornamental purposes (Bloomfield 1885). The Baigas have seven endogamous subgroups known as '*Jat*' (T. D. Sharma, Baiga (Hindi) 2012). Family is the basic unit of Baiga's social structure. Life cycle rituals from birth to death are very important in the Baiga family. These are full of rites and rituals, pollution and sacredness, celebrations and mournings throughout the year. The sex ratio among Baiga in India is 993. Another characteristic of the Baiga community is polygyny. It was found during the study that several Baiga males had more than one wife. The reasons may be varied, but at Pachgaon Raiyyat Tola and in Karangara villages the spouses were found living harmoniously (A. Soni 2015).

AREA OF STUDY

The study had been conducted in Baiga villages of Dindori and Anuppur districts of Madhya Pradesh and Kawardha and Bilaspur districts of Chhattisgarh. The fieldwork was mainly done in Karangara village of Pendra Development Block of Bilaspur district, Chhattisgarh, and Kharidiha village of Karanjiya Development Block of the Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh. The villages were selected purposely depending on the availability of a good number of Baiga households and the location of the villages from the exposure and developmental point of view. The area of study has been carefully selected for covering the traditional as well as changing aspects of Baiga culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The anthropological scientific research methodology and field techniques are applied for the collection of data in the current study, such as observation, interview, schedule, focused group discussion, case study, photography, etc. Primary information was collected during fieldwork with the help of a structured household schedule (quantitative data) followed by a personal interview (structured interview guide), group discussion, and observation for collecting qualitative data. The ethnographic details about the life cycle rituals and associated traditional aspects are especially documented through interviews with Baiga elders, traditional village headmen, old records, and past studies, which are repeatedly cross-checked during the fieldwork. The data is collected from 250 households. The gathered information from

primary and secondary sources was analyzed to have a detailed ethnographic account of indigenous Baiga culture and the impact of development and cultural change.

BAIGA MARRIAGE

Every Baiga, as we have seen, belongs to an endogamous sub-group (*Jat*), a territorial *Garh*, and a particular *Goti*. The *Jats* are endogamous and during the fieldwork, six major sub-groups of Baigas were documented, i.e., *Bhumia, Binjhwar, Bharotiya, Nahar* or *Naroutia, Bhaina, a*nd *Mudia* or *Muria.* However, they were not able to tell me clearly about the *Gond-Waina*, *Kondwan*, *Bharia, Kurka, and Sawat Baiga*s. The division of the tribe into *Garhs* marks their geographical location and disallows them to marry within their *garhs* because it is considered that members of the *garh* belong to the same lineage and own native village and thus, village exogamy is preferred. Marriage within the same *garh* is considered to be incest. Therefore, in earlier days to avoid this situation, marriage within the village was avoided. But, with time, Baiga people belonging to different *garh* and lineage are found residing in the same villages. Around 34.3 per cent of people in the study area were found married within the village or in a nearby village. The average marriage distance in the study area is within a radius of 40 km. The *Bhumia-Baiga*s residing in the districts of Dindori, Mandla, Anuppur, Bilaspur, and Kawardha have marital relations with each other. In cases of inter-caste or inter-subgroup marriages and incest in the form of marriage in the same *garh* and lineage (*kari*), penalties are imposed in the form of community dinners and drinks. Sometimes it also leads to excommunication.

Marriage is regarded as one of the most important social functions in the Baiga community which institutionalizes sex for the permanent living and procreation of children. Most *Baiga* girls are married after attaining puberty. Usually, the wife is preferred of equal or smaller age. It begins when they attain the age of 14-18 years. Girls and boys are free to choose their life partners. Marriages are based on affection and love among Baigas. Baiga boys and girls get ample chances for introduction and reunion in the forest. During various social and family functions and dances, especially the *Dashahara* dance, they also get introduced to each other and choose their life partners. They can also meet each other during the weekly markets.

Thus, they get sufficient time to know each other before marriage. They get married preferably at the age of 14-20 years. Pre-marital sex is also allowed in the Baiga community and in most cases, they get married.

Cross-cousin marriage is allowed in the Baiga community. Marital ties with the maternal relatives are preferred. They can marry with their maternal cousins and children of their father's sister. Baigas have a strong belief in the institution of marriage which is considered to be a sacred union. Maximum families are married couples and not a single unmarried middle-aged or old person is found in the study area. Divorce is rare and is taken only in extreme cases. After marriage new room or house is constructed for the new couple next to the existing house of the parents and thus, Baigas mostly seems living in a nuclear family though they live near relatives like an extended or joint family. A good number of cases of polygyny are found in the study area.

Fig.1. A newly married Baiga couple

Girls are considered as an asset and helping hand in household and economic activities. In Baiga marriage, there is the custom of taking the bride price by the bride's father for giving his daughter in marriage. The

bride price is called *Suk* (also known as *Kharcha* in some places) in the local language. In earlier days, it was ranging between Rs. 18 to 25. It is paid in both cash and kind. But, now it has become symbolic and nominal. It is paid at the time of fixation of marriage. At the time of payment of bride price, in part or full, the boy's parents give a feast known as the *Barokhi*.

MARRIAGE ATTIRE

The bridegroom wears the traditional *pheta* (turban) on the head, a white *dhoti* as a lower garment, and *salukha* and *bandi* as an upper garment. They also put a printed piece of cloth or shawl as *pichhora* on their back, across the shoulders. Now, the bridegrooms have started wearing pants and shirts. Readymade *pagdi* has taken the place of *pheta*. The bride used to wear a *moongi saree* with or without a blouse and cloth or shawl (*chadar*) on the back as *pichhora*. Now, they have started wearing mill-made printed sarees, blouses, and *odani* available in the markets. Both bride and bridegroom also hold a *bijana* (fan made up of bamboo strips) in their hand and wear lots of traditional and fancy ornaments, such as silver necklet (*suta*) on the neck, *moondri* on the fingers, etc. (Fig.1). During marriage, bridegroom also wears a cowrie- garland on his neck which saves him from the effect of evil-eyes and black magic. In the case of the bride, she puts a shawl over her head for this purpose.

MARITAL PRACTICES AND RITUALS

The various types of marriages prevalent among *Baiga*s are *Mangani* (or *Charh Barat*) (traditional formal marriage with mutual understanding, consent, and willingness of both parties), *Uthhawa Vivah* (marriage by the abduction of a girl with her willingness), *Chor Vivah* (marriage by elopement), *Paithhul Vivah* (marriage by intrusion*)*, *Lamsena Vivah* (marriage by service given by groom at bride's house), *Udhariya Vivah* (marriage by extra-marital affair), and *Khadouni Vivah* (widow remarriage).

Mangani Vivah or *Charh Barat Vivah*

Formal arranged marriage among Baigas is called *Mangani Vivah* or *Charh Barat Vivah*. In this marriage, the boy's party informs the girl's party that on a certain day, they will be coming to see the girl, and the person who acts as a mediator between them is known as *Aguwa* or *Terha* who later on

at most of the time works as *doshi* in performing rituals of marriage rites. This person works as a middleman between the two parties for the fixation of marital ties. This person goes with the father of the groom-to-be for matchmaking and in most cases is a close relative or family friend. Going for matchmaking to tie the marital relationship is called "*Naat Phasay Jonathan*". The father or guardian of the groom-to-be goes for fixation of marital tie along with *terha*, close relatives, and other senior persons of the village or family. They also take the groom's sister or mother, who can go inside the girl's house to talk to her. The help of the *mukaddam* and *kotwar* is also taken in the fixation of the marriage.

The prospective groom's father goes to the house of the bride's father along with some elderly persons of the village with two bottles of liquor, *mohlain* leaves for making *chaka* (cup), coconut, areca nut, turmeric, tobacco, and *sarai* leaves for making *chongi* (smoking pipe). After reaching there, they salute each other by saying *Ram-Ram* and sit in the courtyard. By this time, some people from the village also get assembled or they are called. First, they enquire about the relations of each other. They should not be from the same *naat* (relation or lineage/ kin group). When it is settled that they are not relatives or belong to the same *garh,* the groom's father asks the bride's father to give his daughter in marriage. If the bride's father tentatively agrees, the groom's father says, 'We are thirsty' and offers two bottles of liquor brought by him to the bride's father as a token of marriage fixation. The bride's parents understand the meaning of it and become aware that the groom's party has come for *mangani* (demanding the girl's marriage) and also the fixation on marriage. The *Panchs* and the father of the girl tell them to enquire the girl, "whether she is ready for this match or not?" The father of the prospective groom goes to the prospective bride-to-be with two elderly persons and asks about her liking. If the girl says, "She doesn't know, don't drink" it means she is not ready for marriage and the boy's party returns immediately. In such a case, they don't drink *mahua* liquor. In any case, the girl's decision is final. But, if the girl replies, "Why do you ask me, to have a drink?", it reflects her approval. Now, after getting the approval of the girl, the boy's father gives coconut, areca nut, and turmeric as *neg* to the soon-to-be bride's father. The elderly persons from both sides sit facing each other. The headman of the village breaks the coconut as a symbol of the fixation of the marriage. The pieces of coconut and *supari* (areca nut) are distributed and eaten by everybody, it is called

prasad and the girl's father also accepts the offer of drinking *mahua* brought by the boy's father. Both the *samdhis* (father of the boy and the girl) start drinking and following them all the assembled men and women enjoy the drink of *mahua*. They arrange 12 coconuts and incense sticks. They offer drinks to the village deities *Thakur Deo, Gaon Gosain, Baba Maharaj*, and others. *Raksa Baba* is offered *ganja* (hemp) in the *chilam* (smoking pipe) made of *sarai* leaf. The date of *sagai* is fixed on any Tuesday after 15 days at the bride's house announced by the girl's father. All assembled people are feasted. After taking food, the boy's party returns to their village.

Sagai (Betrothal)

On the fixed date of the *sagai* ceremony, the boy's party goes to the girl's house with about 10 to 20 people, including the boy, parents of the boy, close relatives, and a few members of the village Baiga panchayat. This is known as *Sagai Barat* or *Choti Barat*. The boy's parents take along with them one or two tins of liquor (*mand* of *mahua* flower*)*, Mohalain leaves for making *chhaka* (cup), coconut, areca nut, turmeric, *prasad* (some sweet, such as parched rice and jaggery or biscuit), tobacco, *sarai* leaves for making *chongi* (smoking pipe) and *neg* (saree, make-up materials and ornaments) for the girl. The *baratis* (members of the boy's party) dance and sing *bilma geet* in front of the house of the girl. After completion of the dance, the boy's party and the villagers sit in the courtyard of the house. The *mukaddam* (traditional village headman) of the girl's village becomes the responsible official to conduct this *Sagai*. The *mukaddam* and other *Panchs* (members of the village-level traditional political organization) of the traditional village panchayat (traditional political organization) are honoured by giving them eight bottles of *mahua* liquor and all of them accept the girl as their daughter (*dharm beti*). This liquor is given by the boy's side and termed as *Barat Daru*. The *neg* (gift) includes a saree, make-up materials, and ornaments, brought by the boy's parents are given to the girl. She becomes ready and comes out to take blessings.

After this, the parents of the boy and the girl along with some elders go inside the house. The mothers of the boy and the girl sit opposite to each other facing north and south by spreading their legs. Girls from both sides and the bridegroom and the bride touch their feet and take blessings. Again, eight bottles of liquor are taken out and served to the *Panchs* and the ladies. After this, it is understood that *sagai* is done. Four bottles of liquor

are offered to the girl's father, which is called *Tarpani Mand*. This *mand* (liquor) is offered to the deity inside the house. The bride's family members drink this liquor. Now, the rest of the liquor is consumed by the assembled persons in *Sagai*. Both the parties sing *dadaria* Songs. Now, the date (*teeva*) of marriage is fixed mutually by both parties. A feast is arranged by the girl's father for the assembled persons. The villagers do the *Karma* dance with the accompaniment of the drum beats. The drums and dance programs are organized by the villagers. On the next day of *Sagai*, the girl is taken to the boy's house. She stops there for a day and comes back to her house the next day after seeing the house and meeting with the relatives there.

Teeva Dharai

If the girl's father disagrees or shows his inability to do the marriage in the same year, then the date of marriage is not fixed on the day of *sagai*. Next year, just before the marriage season, the boy's father, along with one or two relatives, goes to the girl's father to fix the date of marriage. This time nothing is needed to be brought along with them. If they like they can carry some *mahua* liquor (*mand*) with them. The day of marriage is fixed with mutual consent of both the parties. This is known as *Teeva Dharai,* here *teeva* means date and *dharai* means fixation in the local language. Sometimes, village elders or heads are also called for consultation on the fixation of the marriage date. The marriages are done among the Baigas during the idle time for agriculture, i.e. after harvesting and before rains or starting of the next agricultural season. Thus, the Baiga marriages are done in the Hindu months of *Baisakh* and *Jeth*, i.e., from April to June.

MARRIAGE CEREMONY

In the olden days, they used to perform marriages in five days, but now they do it within 24 hours and it is known as *Chaubisa Shaadi.* All the rituals are performed within 24 hours. The normal five-day-long Baiga marriage procedure usually starts on Monday. First of all, the selection of *Terha/ Doshi, Suwasa, Suwasin,* and *Bhaujai* is done. The selection of *terha, suwasa,* and *suwasin* is done by the *Dewar* (priest) of the village through the process of *Kudai Jagaun Bichari*. The selection of these officials is done within the house with the help of a *lota* (metallic pot) and two grains of paddy. The grains are put in the *lota* and shaken by taking the name of the

relative. if they come together floating on the water in the pot, that person is selected to perform a particular job. In such a manner, officials are selected to officiate in marriage. Eight bottles of liquor are arranged for the *Panchs*. This is known as *Kudai Jagouni Daru*. Before marriage, *doshi, suwasa,* and *suwasin* are selected by both the parties. Selection of the *suwasa* and *suwasin* is made from among the *bhaiya – bhabhi, didi -jija, mama and phuwa*. The work is divided among them and likewise, they officiate in the marriage rituals. Most of the time, the work of *terha* is done by the *suwasa* and *suwasa* is generally *jija* or *bahnoi*, i.e., the sister's husband. The Son of the maternal uncle can also become *terha* in marriage. He takes responsibility for the management of expenditures incurred in marriage. Food is cooked in his direction and he also selects two or three assistants (other *suwasas*) for this work. If there is any mistake in making food or the food is not cooked properly, he is held responsible for this. *Terha* is only found in the boy's house, not in the girl's house. Similarly, *bhabhi* is only found in the girl's house and the work of *bhabhi* in the Baiga marriage is accomplished by the brother's wife in the Baiga marriage. The *suwasins* are young unmarried girls, sisters, or cousins of the bridal pair. They have to remain in constant attendance to the bride and the bridegroom at their respective places. They also prepare the well-decorated terracotta *Kalash* with a lamp. The *kalash* is made up of a small terracotta pot. The pot is covered with a mix of cow dung and wet clay, which is again decorated by sticking coloured paddy and ratti (*kurulu*) of yellow and red colour separately in a vertical pattern. The yellow colour is made by using turmeric and the red colour is made with ochre. A lamp is put over the decorated pot to complete the *kalash*. Thus, they decorated the marriage *kalash* on both sides of the bride and groom.

The *suwasa* goes to invite and bring the drummers to marriage by offering them a bottle of liquor. This band party consists of the drummers who play with *nagada* (big single membrane drum) and *timaki* (small single membrane drum). They generally belong to the Dhuliya community. When the drummers come to the house, they are greeted by the housewife by applying *teeka* on their forehead and giving them a *payali* (a measuring pot*)* of *kudai*, pulse, and a rupee. After hearing the drum beats, the relatives assemble and food is arranged for them.

Kalash Koua

After the preparation of *kalash* by the *suwasin*, it is lit (installed) to start the

actual marriage rituals. Some seeds of *kodo* or *dhan* are put in the pot with a coin and a lamp filled with *jagni* oil and a wick is placed over it. Thus, the *kalash* is installed and lit on the right side of the boy's house, whereas it is done on the left side at the girl's house. Thus, half of the marriage booth (symbolically the girl's part) is constructed at the bride's house and the half (symbolically the boy's part) at the groom's house. Similarly, the first half of the marriage (including *bhawar*) is solemnized at the bride's house, and the rest of the process is completed at the groom's house.

Fig.2. Marriage *Kalash*

This installation (lighting) of the set of *kalash* (pot) and *diya* (lamp) is known as *kalash koua* (Fig.2). The bride in her house is made to sit in front of this marriage Kalash facing west direction and similarly the groom in his house is made to sit in front of this marriage *Kalash* facing east. After the process of *kalash koua* the bride and the bridegroom are not allowed to go outside the house. Even if it is needed they cannot go alone. *Terha* has to always remain with the bridegroom and the *bhoujai* has to remain with the bride.

Pani Chorana

In the early morning before sunrise on the next day, i.e., tuesday, the bridegroom and the *terha* go to the nearest source of water stealthily to bring water in a *lota* (small metallic pot of brass or bronze containing water). It is known as *Pani Chorana* (stealing water). This work is done very secretly when the village people are still sleeping in the early morning. They give it to the *bhaujai* when they go for marriage at the bride's place. The *bhaujai* keeps the *lota* filled with water safely which is further used in the marriage rituals known as *Kuwara Bhawar* and *Bada Bhawar*.

Sending *Chooliha*

Two persons from the bridegroom's side go to the bride's house in one day advance on tuesday. They are called *chooliha*. After their arrival, *mandap* is erected in the bride's house. The *choolihas* manage the arrangement of food for the bridegroom's party in the *janwas* (resting place for the Baratis on arrival to the bride's village).

Mangar Mati

Mangar-Mati is performed on the first half of tuesday. This is also known as *Mati-Khanauni* (digging-out mud). In this ritual, the bride and the bridegroom go with their respective *Suwasins*, other ladies, and guniya of the village to the nearby *bari* or forest of their villages in search of termite hill (*bamitha / dilwa / bambi*) to dig it out for getting mud to make the platform for the post (*magrohan*) in the marriage booth (*madawa)*. Rice flour or *madiya* is applied on the body of the bride and the bridegroom and they are covered with *pichhora* (big sheet of cloth or shawl) while taking them out of the respective houses for the ritual of *Mangar Mati*. The *suwasin* carries the *kalash*. While going for *mangar mati* they take two bottles of liquor, eight to ten *rotis*, *dal-bhat,* and a pestle covered with *mehlon leaves*. After reaching the forest, they search for a termite hill for the ritual of *mati khanauni*. After locating a termite hill, first of all, it is worshipped. The smaller ground portion in front of this termite hill is besmeared with cow-dung paste. Floral designs are made over this plain ground portion with rice flour which is known as *Chouk-Poorana*. The *guniya* does the worship by offering *hom-doop* on this ground (*chouk*) in the name of the deities and propitiates them by uttering some *mantras*. A few drops of mahua liquor are sprinkled over this *chouk* and the termite-hill. The remaining *daru* (liquor)

is taken by the present persons. After the worship, the termite hill is stroked and dug by using the pestle brought from the house. This is done by the *terha / suwasa* and *guniya*. During this ritual, the mother of the person to be married sits with stretched legs facing south, next to the termite hill. The bride and the groom sit on the laps of their respective mothers facing east. *guniya* gives one handful of earth to each woman present over there in their *oali* (one corner of the sari made like a pouch) starting with the mother of the bride and the bridegroom. After this, they eat the food brought by them except for the bride and the bridegroom. Thereafter, the bride and the bridegroom are lifted by their respective *suwasa* and *suwasin* and brought to the house. This is known as *Pithhghauni* (carrying on the back)*.* After coming back to their respective houses, the collected mud is kept by the ladies at two places in the courtyard of the house. At this time the drummers play their drums and the dancing starts. *Suwasa/Suwasin* dance by lifting the bridegroom/bride in their respective houses.

Madawa Gadouni

After completion of the ritual of *mati khanauni, doshi, guniya, suwasa,* and some young people go to the nearby forest to bring wood pieces for the erection of a marriage booth. The *guniya* utters a few *mantras* to please the forest and vegetation deities before cutting wood. First of all, the *doshi* cuts two boughs of *char* tree out of which *sajan*/*magrohan* and *pidha* (flat stool for sitting) are prepared. Generally, they cut down the twin branches of *Char* trees found in the nearby forest. Then the boughs of *Sal* or *Sarai* trees are cut to make the post for the erection of the *mandap*. A wooden bird (*chidiya*) is fitted over the *Sajan*. After cutting wood, they eat the taken food and then they come back home. On arriving home, the *suwasin* wash their feet. She also sprinkles turmeric water on wood pieces brought to the house and thus, it is purified and worshipped by offering *hom-dhoop*. Now, all of them dance there in the courtyard by putting the wood sticks on their shoulders with the accompaniment of the music. The drummers beat the *nagada* and *timiki* and produce good rhythmic sounds for them to dance vigorously.

Madawa is erected at both the places in bride's and bridegroom's houses. First of all, a pit is dug to set a pole of *sarai* (*sal t*ree) wood in the courtyard of the house. A coin is dropped in this pit and over it, this pole is erected. This pole makes the centre of the *madawa* (Fig.3). Along with this pole,

Fig.3. Marriage post

Sajan is also fitted. *sajan* is made from the one and a half feet long piece of wood of the *Char* tree. Sometimes *Sajan* is also coloured with the yellow colour of turmeric and geometrical designs are made with white and red colours. A small raised platform, known as *Sehri*, of around 1' X 1' feet is made around this *Sarai* pole by the mud brought during the ritual of *mangar mati*. This place is besmeared with cow-dung paste and floral designs are made there. This is done by the *bhaujai*. An arrow is also placed here along with some banana leaves and bamboo stems. Four poles of four trees are fastened on four corners and then the shed is covered with mango and *Sarai* leaves. Afterwards, the mango leaves are tied by *bagai* (Mova grass) thread and wrapped on the centre pole and around the four poles of the mandap. The *doshi* and *suwasa* demand the liquor as neg of *madawa gadouni* (erection of marriage booth). This is known as *Madawa Gadouni Mand*. The father does the worship of the mandap. The marriage *kalash*, made by *suwasins* on

both sides, is established on the right side of the *mandap* in the boy's house and on the left side of the mandap in the girl's house. They make triangles in four directions with the help of cow-dung paste and sleep there at night after doing the required work. Meanwhile, the bride/bridegroom are bathed to clean the flour paste (*chiksa*) from their bodies. They are again dressed in simple clothes and seated next to their *kalash*.

Tel-Haldi and *Kuwara Bhawar*

The haldi ceremony follows the erection of the marriage booth. In this ceremony, the bride and the bridegroom are brought by the *suwasa* and *suwasin* under the marriage booth (*madawa*) in their respective houses and get them seated on the laps of their mothers near the *sajan* or central post of the *madawa*. If the mother is dead or unable to come then this ritual is done by any *mami* in relation, preferentially starting from the paternal aunt (father's brother's wife) to the maternal aunt (mother's sister or mother's brother's wife), which are considered equivalent to mother. Turmeric paste and mustard oil is brought in a brass plate by *suwasin*. The turmeric paste and mustard oil are applied to the bride and the bridegroom by their respective *suwasins* which is followed by the close relatives and other women. The *suwasin* takes a bottle of liquor as *neg* for applying turmeric paste to the bride/bridegroom as a customary practice. The women sing *haldi geet* (song) by sitting near the *mandap*. The male folks do not apply *tel-haldi* to the bride. Then, the bride and bridegroom are seated on the *machi* (stool) to carry them inside the room in a swinging fashion after taking a round of the *madawa*. Now, turmeric paste is applied to them from face to feet by the *bhaujai* and the *suwasins* and then again taken out. The *suwasin* brings the bridegroom to the *mandap* for *kuwara bhawar* and he makes three rounds of the central pole of the *madawa*. The father and the brother of the bridegroom hold this central pole during this ritual. A similar ritual is also performed for the bride in the bride's house. Thus, in this ritual, the respective *bhaujai* makes the bridegroom and the bride move around the pole, under the *madawa*, by holding their hand in one hand and pouring water slowly from the *lota* holding in the other hand.

After this, men, women, and children dance there. *Terha* lifts the boy across the waist during the dance, which is followed by others. Turmeric paste is applied to every person, by bride/bridegroom, whosoever lifts them and dances during this ritual. This whole process of *tel-haldi* and *kuwara*

bhawar is repeated three times. It is possibly done two times on the same night and the remaining one on the next day when the last round of *tel-haldi* is applied to them. On this day, the villagers also bring turmeric paste from their houses and apply it to the bride/bridegroom. Villagers do the *bilma* dance on the beats of *nagada*. The last round of *tel-haldi* is done for the bridegroom in the morning and for the bride in the afternoon because the *doshi* reaches the bride's village along with the *barat* and goes with *jhapi* to the bride's house. At this time, the last round of *tel-haldi* is applied to the bride and *doshi* also dances by lifting the bride across the waist. This is known as *Dulhin Nachoni.* The bride is later bathed and taken inside the house. The *terha* starts making the bridegroom ready for the *barat*.

Bada Barat

In the late afternoon on Wednesday, the wedding party (*barat)* starts for the bride's village. *Kotwar* (messenger–part of the village political organization) invites the villagers to join the wedding party. After having lunch, the boy's party gets ready for *barat* (the marriage procession to the bride's house). They start for the bride's village after taking one bottle of drink which is known as *neg* (ceremonial offering). The brothers and sisters of the bridegroom stop them at the door of the house and ask for the *Neg*. The bridegroom gives some *neg* in the form of money to them. The *baratis* go on foot, while the bridegroom is seated on the horseback. This is known as *Bada Barat*.

The *suwasin* keeps the *kalash* on her head. The *baratis* take 4 – 5 tins of liquor with them. The parents of the bridegroom join the *Barat* (wedding party) and leave the house in the custody of the guests. In *barat*, the *suwasins* lift the Kalashes on their heads during the procession. The wedding party stops near the boundary of the bride's village. *Bisti/Chulliha* receives the *barat*, who was sent earlier to the bride's village to arrange food. Later on, the *mukaddam* and other traditional village *panchayat* members welcome the members of the boy's party and take them to the *janwasa* (place to stay) which is given to them in one of the houses near the bride's house where arrangements are already made in advance for drinking water and refreshment by the *chullihas*. The marriage ceremony is not solemnized on this day, but on the next day, i.e., on thursday.

Jhapi and *Dulhin Nachouni*

After taking some rest, in the evening on the same day, the bridegroom's party sends *jhapi* to the bride's house, which is taken by the *doshi* accompanied by a few people. *jhapi* is a basket containing the dress and ornaments for the bride to be worn in marriage on the next day. After the arrival of *jhapi* at the bride's house, the final third round of the *tel-haldi* process of the bride is done and she is also applied *tel-haldi* by the bridegroom's party. This is followed by the dance, which continues for 1 to 2 hours. During the dance, the *doshi* also dances by lifting the bride across his waist. This is known as *dulhin nachouni.*

On the next day, the bride is again applied *tel-haldi*. One or two *baratis* also attend this ritual. Then the bride is bathed and dressed up properly with the clothes, ornaments, and make-up materials provided by the bridegroom's party. Gifting of these materials is known as *neg*. The bride is made ready for further marriage rituals. The bride and the bridegroom go to five different houses in the village to beg alms for paddy. They are covered with *pichhora*. Both of them go with their respective *suwasa, suwasin*, a few ladies, and friends. The ladies sing *bilma* songs while moving in the village. The lady of the house washes the feet of the bride and the bridegroom and shows her affection by touching their chicks. The bride and the bridegroom salute her and take her blessings. All the accompanying ladies are given a little paddy/rice in return by the lady of the house.

Barat and *Parghouni* Dance

The bridegroom's party comes with their arrangement of a band party for the barat (wedding party) and *parghouni dance*. In the first half of the day when the bridegroom comes back from begging, the procession of *barat* starts. During the *barat*, the *doshi* carries *kawar-sika* holding a *jhapi* (a kind of basket) containing some materials for marriage. Now, instead of *jhapi*, a suitcase, trunk, or bag is used to keep the marriage material. When the *barat* reaches near, but remains a bit away from the bride's house, the bride's father with a few family members comes forward to receive his *samdhi* and *baratis*, and then the *parghouni hathi naach* (dance) starts. This traditional dance drama is a boaster of chivalry and greatness. It is enacted by the bridegroom's party on the way to the bride's house. The elephant is prepared with the help of three cots joined together to make the trunk and it

is covered by a blanket. A basket is used for the head, winnowing fans for ears, and grass sticks for the tail. The male members of the wedding party start dancing by waving sticks and *pharsa* (a kind of weapon with a flat sharp edge and wooden handle) in their hands. They move their arms and show off their fighting skills. This dance is performed with the accompaniment of *nagada* and *timki*. When the *samdhi* (father of the bridegroom) rides on the elephant some boys hold the trunk of the elephant and pull it in different directions. The elephant also moves accordingly as if it is dancing. They shout joyfully.

After this mimicry, the marriage party is given a proper reception by the bride's side. The ceremony of *parghouni* (welcoming of the wedding party) is done. The father of the bride comes forward and receives his *samadhi*. The *baratis* are greeted by marking *teeka* of turmeric and rice on their forehead. Both parties dance vigorously and show their excellence in different items like fencing, games, and skills. This is like a competition between them. Bride's father also climbs on the elephant and both the in-laws sit on the elephant and make so many gestures. The drummers beat their drums at this time to create a loud sound. The elephant is then taken inside the bride's house and the elephant dance is performed in the courtyard. In the end, the elephant is dismantled and thus the drama ends.

Ring Ceremony

After this function, a ring ceremony is performed. The bride and the bridegroom stand on the ground in front of the bride's house. The bride is accompanied by the girls and the bridegroom is accompanied by the boys. The friends of the boy sing *Dadaria* song and it is replied by the girlfriends of the bride. Meanwhile, the bridegroom runs fast towards the bride. The bride is caught by her girlfriends. The bridegroom tries to put the ring on her finger, but it takes time because the bride keeps her fingers oily and fists closed. Anyhow, by pressure, he opens the fist and slips the ring on her finger. Then they are covered by a single *pichhoura* (a piece of cloth). The grains collected from five houses are thrown over them by the females.

At the threshold of the house, the mother and an elderly woman of the house wash the feet of the bridegroom and the bride by pouring some water. The wooden pestle with *jhirra* grass is waved before them for *parchan* (welcome). Some other rituals are also performed at this stage. Nowadays,

the practice of *jaymala* (exchange of garlands) and wearing of *mangalsutra* (necklace as a symbol of marriage) is also observed by them. *Jaymala* is held here at the bride's place on the stage. The *suwasa* lifts the bridegroom on his shoulders and goes for *dwarchar* (a ritual performed at the threshold of the bride's house). The bridegroom is stopped there by the bride's sisters. They are given *neg* in the form of some money and then the bridegroom is allowed to enter the house. All the *baratis* enter the house and sit in the courtyard.

Jodi Milana or Gath Jodani

In this ritual, they throw parched paddy (*lai*) at each other. This is repeated five times. People get *laai* (puffed rice) and groundnuts. The bride and the bridegroom are stood together side by side in one place. The *doshi* ties the corner of their clothes with a knot (*gath*). This is known as *gath jodani* (joining a knot). Now, their feet are washed by the relatives starting with the mother of the bride. Afterwards, the bride is lifted by the *terha* of the bridegroom's party and the bridegroom is lifted by the bride's brother on their shoulders and taken inside the house. The bride and the bridegroom are given some food to eat. The *suwasin* and the *suwasa* feed them first at the start of taking meals.

Bada Bhawar

The bride is properly dressed by the *suwasins* and made ready for *bhawar*. In *bhawar* (which means circumambulation) they take the circle of the central pole of the *madawa*. The central pole and *chouk* (raised platform) are considered the seat of deities. The bride wears the dress provided by the bridegroom's party. The bride and the bridegroom both hold the areca nut cracker (*sarota*) in their left hand. The *doshi* and *suwasa* do the work of drawing the path of movement around the *madawa* with flour and turmeric powder. Now, they are taken out for *bhawar* by the *bhoujai*. During this ritual, they hold each other's hand. The *bhoujai or suwasin* leads them during the *bhawar* by pouring water slowly from the l*ota*. This is the same water which is brought by the bridegroom at the time of *pani chorana*. The band party plays the drums during this procedure. Altogether, seven *bhawars* are performed in a marriage. Four of them are performed at the bride's *madawa* and rest three are done at the bridegroom's *madawa* after returning to the bridegroom's house.

Badavan (Tikavan)

After *bhawar*, *badavan* (gift giving) takes place beneath the *madawa*. People offer gifts to the newly wedded couple sitting under the *madawa*. Mostly, the utensils are given in the presentation. The *doshi* starts first and then it is followed by maternal uncles, other relatives, and villagers. Each person washes the feet of the newly weeded couple and puts turmeric and rice, first on the *kalash*, then on the central pole of *madawa*, then on the *sigh* (liquor pot), and at last on the foreheads of the new couple.

At the time of *tikavan*, the traditional handloom-made clothes are given as gifts by the bridegroom's father to the bride's relatives, such as paternal grandmother (*aaji-bondri*), mother (*maye-odni* or *maye-saree*), father (*dada-dhoti*), brother (*bhai-banti*) and to other close relatives. Traditional sarees are given to all the paternal aunts of the bride. The gifts are also given to the *suwasas* and *suwasins*. After this, boys and girls form separate groups and dance. The enjoyment with drink and dance continues till late at night or sometimes the whole night on the drum beats. The bride's father, depending upon his status and capability, gives a cow or a she-calf to the daughter which is known as *bandhouni*. One dish and a *Lota* are given as dowry to them.

Barat Bida

The next day, they bid farewell to the bridegroom's party. It is held on the morning of the fifth day of marriage, i.e. Friday. The bride is offered water for mouthwash or gargling known as *kulla* (water is taken in the mouth, whirled around, and then thrown out). Then it is repeated by milk. In the third time, milk is offered and a piece of bread is also given to eat which is chewed by the bride and spitted out. A similar action is also done by the bridegroom. Then the bride is seated on the lap of her mother. The bridegroom lifts the bride from her mother's lap and takes her outside. It is known as *dulhi churana* (stealing bride)*.* During this ritual, the bridegroom pays some amount to the brothers of the bride. The bride's family members go to see off the bride, bridegroom, and *barat* up to the border of the village. The *suwasins*, female relatives, and friends of the bride sing the *bilma* song at this time. Thus, the *barat* along with the newly wedded couple leaves for the boy's village.

Returning of *Barat*

The *barat* then returns to the bridegroom's village. The newly wedded couple does not go directly to their house; they are given a *janwas* (resting place). They halt for some time at *janwas*, which is usually provided in the house of a relative or *mukaddam* (headmen) of the village. A few *baratis* also accompany them till they are shifted to their house. All of them relax and have some food. After making proper arrangements in the bridegroom's house, they move to the bridegroom's house. After the arrival of the new couple, they are taken to the *mandap,* and their feet are washed by the maternal uncles first and then by others. This ritual is known as *pav-pakharni.* Brother-in-law and other elder family members offer gifts to them. It is known as *neg*. Then they are taken inside of the house. Meanwhile, *doshi* and *suwasa* do the work of drawing the path of movement around the *madawa* with flour and turmeric powder. After some time the bride and the bridegroom are taken out of the room for completing the *badi bhawar*. Paddy is sprinkled near the *madawa* and the bride and the bridegroom take *bhawar*. Three *bhawars* are taken here; the bride leads and the *suwasin* goes on pouring water slowly in front of them from the *lota*. Now, the bridegroom and the bride are considered husband and wife. Then they are taken inside the house. The sisters and *suwasins* of the bridegroom obstruct them at the door. They are given some amount as *neg* for taking entry into the room.

Badavan

The '*badavan*' means 'gift giving'. After completion of the *bhawar*, the couple is seated under the *madawa* and the *badavan* starts. It is first done by the maternal uncle. Then, it is followed by family members and villagers. Each person washes the feet of the newly wedded couple and puts turmeric and rice, first on the *kalash*, then on the central pole of *madawa*, then on the *Sigh* (liquor pot), and at last on the forehead of the new couple. Then some object or money is presented as a gift to the newly married couple.

Ghar Bandhouni

Some trailing rituals are also performed following the marriage. In this ritual of *ghar bandhouni*, the bride and bridegroom install *dulha deo* in the house (usually in their new house or room) and worship him. The *terha* hands over the new house to the new couple. They take the blessings of the senior

members of the family and hope to be saved from all kinds of miseries.

Madawa Sadouni

Now, as the marriage is complete, the *madawa* (marriage booth) is dismantled by the boy. This process is known as *madawa sadouni*. This is done by disturbing the central pole of the *madawa*. Later on, the whole *madawa* is dismantled. The *suwasas* are given *neg* to perform this task. They hunt the chickens at this time by bow and arrow which is cooked by the bride and the bridegroom and relished by all.

The full *madawa sadouni* (dismantling of the marriage booth) is done on the next day as per convenience. While doing this, they play with turmeric and cow dung paste. *Doshi, suwasa*, the bride, and the bridegroom do the work of *madawa sadouni*. *Doshi* utters some *mantras*. They break the tied coconut into pieces and distribute it among the assembled persons. Only the *magrohi/magrohan* is fastened in the courtyard and the rest of the wood and leaves are removed from the courtyard. Later, in the month of *asarh* (June-July), the *magrohan* or *sajan* is also immersed in the nearby water body.

Khilavan

All these marriage rituals are completed in the evening and then everybody drinks and dances to the drum beats. The '*khilavan*' means the 'feast' arranged for the relatives and village members at night. It is like a reception. A goat is sacrificed, cooked, and relished with rice at night as a feast.

Beni Chhodana

The next morning, the newly wedded couple is taken to the nearest river or pond. The *suwasin* leads the procession by holding the *kalash* on her head. Standing in the water, the bride and the bridegroom open each other's *beni* or plait/bun of hair, this is known as *beni chhodana*. The newly wedded couple takes a bath together and washes each other. Their clothes are washed by the *terha* and the *suwasin*. The *kalash* including the lamp is drowned in the water. They play in the water for fun by searching for drowned pots (*lota*) in the water. While returning home the bride throws bits of *roti* all through the way.

Chaithuwa

On the same day, the relatives of the bride come in the afternoon to the

house of the bridegroom to take the bride back for a few days which is locally known as *chaithuwa* or *chouthiya*. The *chouthiya Barat* generally consists of 8 to 10 members including the girl's parents, *bhaujai*, *suwasins,* and other close relatives. The party is welcomed by giving water and some refreshments. The bridegroom's party arranges a goat for the bride's party. The goat is killed by the bride's father and mutton is cooked by them. Meanwhile, both the parties sing *bilma* and *dadaria* songs along with drinking *mahuwa* liquor. Drinking is started by the *samdhis* (fathers of bridegroom and bride) by making pegs for each other in *chhaka* (leaf cups) or ceramic cups. The cooked food is relished first by the bride's party and then by the bridegroom's party. The bridegroom's party arranges another goat at night for the villagers and feasts. All of them drink, sing, and dance.

Pivri Dhulai

After 8-10 days of marriage, the bride goes to her parent's house for *pivri dhulai*, which symbolically means the washing of the yellow *pichhora* (cloth covering the head of the couple in marriage). The parents of the boy also join them. A goat is cut there and feasted at the bridegroom's party. The parents of the bridegroom return to their house on the next day and the couple lives there for 8 to 10 days and then returns. Apart from the *mangani* or *charh barat vivah*, there are six more forms of marriage prevalent in the Baiga tribe, which are as follows:

Uthhawa Vivah

This happens in the case of abduction of a girl by a boy, with her willingness, in case of difficulty in a formal marriage known as *mangani vivah*. This is similar to a formal arranged marriage like *mangani vivah.* In this form of marriage, all the expenditures are borne by the boy's party. The girl's party goes to the house of the boy for marriage and the marriage is solemnized with similar rituals like *mangani vivah* (formal marriage). In this type of marriage, both the poles of the boy and the girl are erected side by side in the courtyard of the boy's house. No barat or marriage procession is taken out. The rest of the marriage procedures are followed similarly to the *mangani vivah*.

Lamsena Vivah

In this form of marriage, the boy serves the girl's family for 3 to 7 years. If

the girl's father is satisfied, marriage is solemnized after one year. *Lamsena vivah* i.e. marriage by service is done when the parents of the boy are unable to bear the expenses of marriage. The marriage procedure followed in the *lamsena vivah* is similar to the *uthhawa vivah*. But, this kind of formal marriage happens at the girl's house.

Paithhul Vivah

 In this form of marriage, the girl forcefully enters the boy's house from the backside of the house and sprinkles rice turmeric over the boy during night hours. This is then informed to the village officials and rituals are performed in the presence of the villagers. Then, it is informed to the girl's parents. The girl's party goes to the boy's village and demands a bride price of Rs. 300/- to Rs. 400/- and if they are not able to provide this amount, then they are asked to send the boy to their house for working as *lamsena* (*gharjamai*) for three years. On payment of the bride price, marriage is again solemnized graciously.

Chor Vivah

 In this form of marriage, the boy and the girl run away from the house with mutual consent and later on send a message to their parents telling about their address or place of stay. Afterwards, the marriage is solemnized with the help of *mukaddam*, *dewan, samrath,* and *kotwar*. The village officials or the traditional village panchayat make a compromise between both the parties of the girl and the boy. It is a marriage by elopement. Depending upon the person more responsible for elopement, it is also known as *le bhaga* (boy) or *le bhagi* (girl) *vivah*.

Ughariya Vivah

In this form of marriage, a man and a woman get married with the help of some relatives without the consent of their parents and the husband of the woman. The married woman enters the house of the man leaving her husband and later on, it is regularized with the help of village officials and paying compensation to her first husband. The amount may be Rs. 200/- along with some animals.

Khadouni Vivah

 It is a widow remarriage, which is only possible after the completion of the death rites of the deceased husband. The widow puts off her bangles

after the death of her husband on the bank of the river. She is asked by the community members about remarriage. If she likes someone then tells her his name and the marriage is solemnized by performing the ritual of *haldi-pani* or *chudi vivah* instead of a full formal marriage. If the man does not agree, then her husband's younger brother is asked to marry. In this situation of levirate marriage, the husband's younger brother makes his first claim. A widow can do remarriage according to her wish. She is not compelled to marry her husband's younger brother if she does not like to do so. If the husband's younger brother denies marrying the widow or she denies marrying either of the husband's younger brothers or anybody else, then bangles are worn to her in the name of her husband's house, and turmeric paste is sprinkled. By this act, it is assumed that she is not going to leave her deceased husband's house and property. If there is any sort of possibility of widow remarriage, it is not done with full rituals and is solemnized with the *haldi-pani* process in the presence of the *Panchs* of the traditional Baiga *Panchayat* (political organization).

HALDI-PANI MARRIAGE PROCESS

According to Baiga customs, a person can only do seven *bhawar* in a lifetime. Hence, the second marriage or the remarriage is done with the process of *haldi-pani* marriage process instead of the formal marriage process of *charh barat vivah*. This process of marriage is equally accepted as a formal marriage procedure. This is a cheaper, simpler, and quicker mode of Baiga marriage. This is a very simple process of marriage in which the bride and the bridegroom are made to sit on the ground, they are covered with a common *pichhora* (cloth piece long enough to cover the head and back) and water mixed with turmeric powder or paste is sprinkled on both of them by a friend or a relative. The man puts silver bangles on the girl's wrist. In this way, the marriage is solemnized in a very simple manner. The marriage is followed by the drinking of liquor and a feast for the relatives and villagers. This type of marriage is usually done in the case of levirate marriage, *ughariya,* and *khadouni vivah*. This type of marriage process is very economical, hence sometimes it is also followed in case of weak economic conditions of both parties, pregnancy before marriage, adultery, and sometimes also in the extremely complicated cases of *paithhul* and *chor vivah*. In such situations where the boy and the girl are unmarried, the *haldi-*

pani vivah is an easy way out, but people try to have a formal marriage later on at their convenience.

If the bridegroom has never been married, but his bride is a widow or has left her husband, the marriage is celebrated with a variation of the regular marriage procedure. The bridegroom is taken seven times around the pole, followed by the *doshi* carrying an axe to represent the bride, who herself sits looking at the process of *bhawar*. The rest is done as the *haldi-pani* rite.

MARRIAGE PROCESS IN THE CASE OF POLYGYNY

Polygyny is practised in the Baiga community. A man can keep more than one wife. Levirate and Sororate marriage are also practised among the Baigas. Both wives try to live harmoniously with the husband in the same house, as the husband takes the consent of his first wife for his second marriage before getting married. A man who does a second marriage is called *dujaha*. The first wife is called b*adaki* and the middle wife is called *manjhali* and the smaller one is called *chotki*. If a widower, divorced or married man marries the widow, divorced or separated woman then the marriage is done with the process of *haldi-pani* marriage. In the case of separated or married women the second husband gives some compensation or fine to the first husband before getting married.

If a married man does a second marriage with an unmarried girl, then the formal marriage procedure is followed with some variation. At the time of the *bhawar* ritual, the first five *bhawars* are done by the man and the new wife, possibly at the bride's place, where the man remains in the front. Rests of the two *bhawars* are completed at the man's house, where the elder wife remains in the front followed by the husband and then the new wife. The *badaki* holds in her right hand a s*arota* (arecanut-cracker) which is caught by the husband, and he in turn holds the *chotki* by the little finger of her right hand. After *bhawar* three of them sit for the *tikawan*, the husband in the middle, *badaki* on his right side, and *chotki* on his left side. The rest of the process remains almost the same.

DIVORCE

Divorce is rare and is taken only in extreme cases of disagreement. In cases of divorce and remarriage, the elderly persons known as *siyan* and the

Panchs of the traditional Baiga *Panchayat* play an important role. A small practice or ritual is followed for divorce in front of the *Panchayat*. But, it is rarely practised. The parties go to the *Panch*, break a straw in half, and throw the bits separately in different directions. An earthen pot containing a rupee is smashed on the ground. The rupee is kept by the *Panch* for refreshment. The compensation is given or fixed to be given to the losing party. At last, the *Panch* declare the divorce with no further claims of husband and wife on each other. In cases of divorce, if the woman is pregnant and she delivers a child, then the first husband has his claim over the child.

CONCLUSION

The Baigas have a strong belief in the institution of marriage. Maximum families are married couples and not a single unmarried middle-aged or old person is found in the studied area. Divorce is rare and is taken only in extreme cases. Girls are considered as an asset and helping hand in household and economic activities. Now, the bride price has become symbolic and nominal along with some objects. In the olden days, they used to perform marriages in five days, but now they also do it within 24 hours and it is known as *chaubisa shadi.* All the rituals are performed within 24 hours. The traditional form of Baiga marriage also exists with slide changes and modern trends. Along with playing the traditional *nagada* drum, a modern-day English band party and electronic music system is also hired to play modern-day songs. When the barat (wedding procession) reaches the bride's house, the *parghouni hathi naach* starts. This traditional dance drama is a boaster of chivalry and greatness. Now, this *parghouni naach* is almost vanished. Nowadays, along with the ring ceremony in the Baiga marriage, the practice of *jaymala* (exchange of garlands) and wearing of *mangalsutra* (necklace as a symbol of marriage) is also started apart from wearing metal bangles. The conceptual and procedural similarity is observed between the Baiga marriage and marriage procedure of neighbouring tribal and caste communities, which reflects transculturation between them and their co-existence as various sects of common Hindu culture.

Glossary:

Word	Meaning
Barati	People came as part of the marriage procession
Bhaujai	Brother's wife
Bijana	Handmade manual fan made up of bamboo strips
Chaubisa Shadi	Marriage solemnized in twenty-four hours
Chongi	Smoking pipe made up of a leaf
Dujaha	A man who does a second marriage
Dulha-Dulhin	Groom and Bride
Garh	Native geographical territory having families from common ancestors
Jhapi	Bamboo-basket for carrying dress and ornaments for the bride
Jhar-phunk	Magico-religious healing practice, literary *Jhar* means sweep-off and *Phunk* means blow-off
Lamsena	Son-in-law staying in the bride's house after the marriage
Madawa	Shed made up of leaves resting over a wooden structure of four posts, specially made for conducting marriage rituals under it.
Mangalsutra	necklace as a symbol of marriage
Moondri	Finger-ring
Nagada	A big single membrane drum, played with the help of two sticks
Panch	Member of traditional village administration known as Panchayat.
Parghouni	Welcoming of people (in-laws, relatives, etc.) came in marriage procession
Pichhora	Long piece of cloth used for covering the head by both male and female
Samdhi	Male in-laws (father of bride and groom)
Samdhin	Female in-laws (mother of bride and groom)
Suk	Practice of bride price while marriage
Suta	Necklet
Teeka	Application of colour in the form of a vertical line at the center of forehead in Hindu tradition
Tikawan	Gift

Timki	Small single membrane drum (musical instrument) played using sticks

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KADULU BULATH RITUAL IN SINHALESE TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE: A REVERED TRADITION IN WELIMADA, SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual, is deeply entrenched in the cultural fabric of Sri Lanka. The study embarks on a multifaceted exploration of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual, starting with its historical origins and tracing its evolutionary journey to the present day. To achieve this comprehensive understanding, the research employs a qualitative approach, engaging with local communities and conducting in-depth interviews. The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual is a traditional marriage custom performed to seek or obtain permission for the marriage from the bride's father's sister's son or the bride's mother's brother's son, who is also known as '*ewessa massina*.' This ritual stems from the ancient belief among the Sinhalese people that the bride's *ewessa massina* (bride's father's sister's son or bride's mother's brother's son) has the right, symbolically, to own the bride. Ultimately, this exploration endeavours to enrich our understanding of the enduring significance of rituals in preserving cultural identity amidst the currents of change.

Keywords: *Kadulu Bulath* ritual, Sinhalese marriage rituals, Sri Lankan traditional marriage rituals, cross-cousin, marriage taboos

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage, as a social institution, has played a central role in human societies across cultures and epochs, serving as a cornerstone of family structures and societal organization. Rooted in historical, cultural, religious, and legal contexts, marriage represents a complex web of practices, beliefs, and values that intertwine individual desires with broader communal norms. This research paper seeks to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of *Kadulu Bulath* Ritual from an academic standpoint, shedding light on its significance, functions, and evolving nature within the Sinhalese social framework in Welimada, Uva province, Sri Lanka. From the sacred rituals of ancient civilizations to the legally recognized unions of modern societies, the concept of marriage has been a dynamic force in shaping interpersonal relationships, social roles, and familial dynamics. Anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and scholars from various disciplines have explored the essence of marriage, unravelling its intricate tapestry across time and geography.

Bronisław Malinowski (1922), a Polish-British anthropologist, defined marriage as 'a more or less durable connection between male and female lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of the offspring.' Edmund Leach (1961), a British anthropologist, defined marriage as 'a relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons, which provides a child born to the woman under the socially approved institutions of marital affinity.' Marriage holds profound importance as a universal social institution that transcends time and borders. It serves as a foundational pillar of societal organization, fostering stability, cohesion, and continuity. By providing a sanctioned framework for family formation and procreation, marriage ensures the perpetuation of cultural values and traditions, offering children a nurturing environment for growth and development. Beyond its role in child-rearing, marriage facilitates economic cooperation and mutual support between spouses, encouraging the pooling of resources and division of labour. Emotionally, it offers companionship, intimacy, and a sense of security, alleviating feelings of isolation and fostering emotional well-being. Additionally, marriage confers legal recognition and inheritance rights, bolstering social status and acceptance within the community. Culturally and religiously significant, marriage embodies sacred rituals and symbolizes spiritual unions. As societies

continue to evolve, so too does the meaning and relevance of marriage, prompting critical reflections on how this institution can adapt to meet the needs and aspirations of diverse communities in the contemporary world.

Sinhalese traditional marriage in Sri Lanka is a captivating blend of rich cultural customs and religious significance, steeped in centuries-old traditions passed down through generations. In Sinhalese traditional culture, marriage is categorized into four distinct types, each carrying its significance and practices.

1. *Diga marriage*, the most prevalent form, involves a formal union between a couple with the consent and support of their families. Elaborate ceremonies and rituals mark the celebration of this monogamous and socially accepted marriage.

2. *Binna marriage*, on the other hand, revolves around the groom seeking the bride's hand in marriage from her family, emphasizing the importance of parental consent and involvement. This type of marriage reinforces the bond between families and communities.

3. *Eka Gei Kama*, transcends traditional arrangements, as it is founded on mutual affection and attraction between the couple. While increasingly common, it may still face challenges and resistance due to its departure from conventional norms.

4. *Cross-cousin marriage* involves the union of individuals who are cousins, often considered a favourable practice in certain communities due to its potential benefits of consolidating family ties and inheritance. Sinhalese traditional marriages, with their rich diversity and cultural significance, continue to exemplify the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity within the island's vibrant cultural tapestry.

In countless cultures worldwide, marriage rituals form the heart of joyous celebrations, weaving together the rich tapestry of traditions and customs that surround this momentous occasion. Among the most cherished and widespread rituals is the exchange of vows, where the couple pledges their undying love and commitment to one another before family and friends. Accompanying this heartfelt declaration, the symbolic exchange of wedding rings seals their eternal bond, a timeless emblem of unity and devotion. In some traditions, the ceremonial binding of hands or the tying of knots

serves as a vivid representation of the couple's union and their intertwined destinies. Lavish feasts, music, and dancing add jubilant splendour to the festivities, further uniting families and communities in celebration of the newlyweds' union. As these rituals are handed down from generation to generation, they not only honour the sanctity of marriage but also bear witness to the enduring power of love and human connection. Marriage rituals in the world, particularly in the Asian region, are a captivating tapestry of diversity, steeped in cultural significance and time-honoured traditions. In various Asian countries, marriage ceremonies are often elaborate and multi-day affairs, celebrated with great pomp and grandeur.

Sri Lankan marriage rituals are a fascinating fusion of age-old customs, religious practices, and cultural heritage, reflecting the island nation's diverse tapestry of ethnic groups and beliefs. The Sinhalese culture in Sri Lanka boasts a rich tapestry of marriage rituals that are deeply rooted in ancient customs and religious beliefs. Among the array of traditional marriage rituals, the *Kadulu Bulath* Ritual stands out as a unique and revered practice specific to the enchanting town of Welimada in the Uva Province. As an integral part of the Sinhalese traditional marriage ritual, the *Kadulu Bulath* Ritual holds profound significance, symbolizing blessings, unity, and the intertwining of two lives on their journey towards matrimonial bliss.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

What is the cultural significance of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual in Sinhalese traditional marriage in Welimada, Uva Province, Sri Lanka, and how has it evolved and been preserved amidst modern societal changes?

The research problem for this study centers on the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual in Sinhalese traditional marriage in Welimada, Uva Province, Sri Lanka. This research aims to shed light on the cultural significance, evolution, and preservation of this unique and revered ritual within the context of modern societal changes. By exploring the historical origins of the ritual, its specific practices, and the symbolism imbued in each step, the study seeks to unravel the deep-rooted cultural meanings embedded in the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual.

Additionally, it aims to investigate how contemporary societal shifts, such as globalization and urbanization, have impacted its practice and continued relevance within the Sinhalese community. The research will

delve into how the ritual is passed down through generations, exploring its intergenerational transmission and the efforts made to preserve this cherished tradition. Through gathering community perspectives and perceptions, the study aims to paint a comprehensive picture of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual's place in the hearts of the people of Welimada and its enduring importance in maintaining their cultural heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sri Lankan Marriage System

The historical context of the Sri Lankan marriage system is deeply intertwined with the island's rich past, encompassing various periods of colonization, cultural interactions, and religious influences. Early historical records and archaeological findings contribute to the understanding of pre-colonial marriage practices in Sri Lanka (Bandaranayake, 1990). The impact of Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial rule on marriage customs is examined by De Silva (1987) and Perera (2001), revealing the blending of indigenous traditions with European influences. These historical studies provide valuable insights into the evolution of marriage practices in Sri Lanka. The traditional marriage rituals in Sri Lanka are characterized by a diversity of practices, each reflecting the unique cultural identities of different ethnic groups. Research by Obeyesekere (1964) and Gombrich (1971) explores the rituals and symbolic elements in Sinhalese weddings, such as the *Poruwa* ceremony, the tying of the *thali*, and the exchange of betel leaves and areca nuts. Studies on Tamil, Muslim, and other ethnic communities' marriage customs add further depth to the understanding of Sri Lanka's multi-faceted marriage traditions (Kanapathipillai, 1982; Shahul Hameed, 1995). The Sri Lankan marriage system is intricately connected to social and gender dynamics within the society. Research by Jayawardena (1986) and Perera (2010) explores the roles and expectations of men and women in marital relationships and how these roles have evolved. The intersection of caste, class, and gender in marriage practices is examined by Fernando (2012) and Gunawardana (2018), highlighting the complexities of social hierarchies within marriage arrangements. The dichotomy between arranged and love marriages in Sri Lanka has been a subject of interest for researchers. Studies by De Alwis (2005) and Wijayaratne (2016) analyze the factors influencing marriage choices, the changing dynamics of partner selection,

and the negotiation of autonomy in the context of arranged marriages. The legal aspects of the Sri Lankan marriage system are discussed in research by Amarasinghe (2007) and Wickramasinghe (2014), focusing on the legal requirements for marriage registration, the impact of legal reforms on marriage practices, and the recognition of customary marriages. Contemporary Sri Lanka faces various socio-economic changes, migration, and globalization, influencing the dynamics of the marriage system. Studies by Jayaweera (2019) and Herath (2020) explore the challenges posed by urbanization, cross-cultural marriages, and the migration of traditional marriage practices.

Sinhalese Traditional Marriage System

The Sinhalese traditional marriage system in Sri Lanka encompasses a diverse array of marriage types, each reflecting unique customs, rituals, and social implications. This literature review aims to provide an extensive exploration of the four prominent marriage types within the Sinhalese community; *diga* marriage, *binna* marriage, *eka gei kama*, and cross-cousin *(ewessa gkati vivaha)* marriage. By delving into a wide range of scholarly works, ethnographic studies, and historical sources, this review seeks to unveil the cultural significance, historical evolution, and contemporary adaptations of each marriage type, offering a comprehensive understanding of the complexities that shape Sinhalese matrimonial traditions.

Diga marriage

Diga marriage represents the predominant and extensively practised form of matrimonial alliance within the Sinhalese community. In this marital arrangement, the bride becomes a part of the groom's family, commencing her residence in the groom's household after the wedding. *Diga* marriage entails a formal and solemn union between the couple, wherein the consent and endorsement of their respective families play a crucial role (Gunawardana, 1997). According to Wickramaratne (2009), the roots of *diga* marriage extend deep into antiquated customs and religious beliefs, tracing its origins to historical cultural practices that have endured over time. The essence of this marriage type lies in its elaborate traditional ceremonies, symbolizing the convergence of two families and the commencement of a new journey for the newlywed couple (de Silva, 2015). The intricate customs associated with *diga* marriage reflect the profound cultural significance and the

enduring legacy of this matrimonial institution within the Sinhalese society.

Binna **Marriage**

According to Fernando (2011), *binna* marriage is a unique form of matrimonial alliance in which the groom becomes a part of the bride's family, establishing his residence in her household following the marriage. This type of marriage is characterized by a formal and respectful approach, wherein the groom seeks the consent of the bride's family for the union. The significance of parental involvement and approval is highly emphasized in the *binna* marriage tradition (Herath, 2016). The marriage rituals and symbolic practices associated with *binna* marriages serve as demonstrations of the groom's profound respect for the bride's family and his commitment to being accepted into their familial sphere (Jayasekara, 2014).

Fraternal Polyandry (*Eka Gei Kama*)

Eka gei kama, is a form of marriage that transcends traditional arrangements, as it is founded on mutual affection and attraction between the bride and groom (De Alwis, 2008). *Eka gei kama* is a form of marriage where one woman is married to multiple men (the wife would be shared in common by several brothers within a family) at the same time. It is a unique and relatively rare marriage practice that has been historically documented in certain societies, including some regions in Sri Lanka. The primary purpose of this type of marriage in ancient Sinhalese culture was to prevent the division of the family's property. By marrying one woman collectively, the family's wealth and resources would remain undivided among the brothers, ensuring the continuity of their lineage and inheritance. In this marriage system, the eldest male child of a family would ritually bring a wife with the consent of both families involved. This wife would then be considered the wife of the eldest brother, and she would have sexual relations with all of his younger brothers as well. It's important to note that the wife's consent in such arrangements is critical, and traditional Sinhalese society often had well-established cultural norms and rules to ensure mutual respect and consent. In recent years, *Eka gei kama* has become more prevalent, challenging the longstanding norms of arranged marriages (Wijayaratne, 2019). Studies have explored the factors influencing marriage choices, the changing dynamics of partner selection, and the negotiation of autonomy within the context of *Eka gei kama* (Ranasinghe, 2021). This marriage type is no

longer legally recognized, although it may still be observed in certain rural areas of Sri Lanka.

Cross-Cousin Marriage *(Ewessa gkati vivaha)*

The preferential marriage among the Sinhalese is the marriage of cross-cousins, i.e. man married his father's sister's daughter or mother's brother's daughter. The cousins were called *ewessa* (a term probably derived from *awasya*, necessary or obligatory) (Wimalasena, 2016). During the Kandy era, the marriage system was considered the best-involved marriage between two families connected through a brother and a sister. This practice allowed for unions within close kinship circles and fostered strong familial ties. As a result, a custom emerged, stipulating that if a sister-in-law intended to marry someone else while the elder brother-in-law was still present, permission from the elder brother-in-law had to be sought. This marriage type is prevalent in certain communities and regions of Sri Lanka and is considered favourable due to its potential benefits of consolidating family ties and inheritance (Obeyesekere, 1993).

The Sinhalese marriage system encompasses various types of marriages, with some being accepted and celebrated within the community while others are considered unaccepted or discouraged. According to Gunawardana (2005), accepted marriages include the prevalent forms of marriage like *diga* marriage, which is widely practised with the consent and support of families, and *binna* marriage, where the groom formally seeks the bride's hand in marriage from her family. These marriages are regarded as socially acceptable and are often accompanied by elaborate traditional ceremonies that symbolize unity and the merging of families (de Silva, 2015). On the other hand, certain forms of marriage are viewed as unaccepted or discouraged within the Sinhalese culture. For instance, *eka gei kama*, where couples choose to marry based on mutual affection and attraction, may sometimes face challenges or resistance due to deviating from traditional arranged marriage norms (Fernando, 2010). Additionally, cross-cousin marriages, which involve unions between cousins, may be accepted in some communities but considered unaccepted in others due to varying cultural beliefs and preferences (Shahul Hameed, 1985). Understanding the distinctions between accepted and unaccepted marriages provides valuable insights into the intricacies of the Sinhalese marriage system and its evolving dynamics over time.

However, despite the extensive research conducted on the Sri Lankan marriage system, Sinhalese marriage practices, and various types of matrimonial customs in Sri Lanka, there has been a limited number of studies dedicated to the exploration of marriage rituals, customs, and other traditional practices. Consequently, this research aims to delve into a traditional marriage ritual known as the *'Kadulu Bulath* ritual' in Sri Lanka, with a particular focus on the Welimada area in the Uva province. The lack of literature, data, and information on the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual in the Sinhalese Traditional Marriage system is indicative of a research gap that calls for urgent attention. The scarcity of existing studies on this cultural practice highlights its underrepresentation in academic discourse, despite its cultural significance within the community. The researcher's attempt to fill the identified research gap regarding the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual in Sinhalese traditional marriage is commendable and holds great potential to contribute to the understanding of this cultural tradition. By investigating the cultural significance of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual, the research seeks to uncover the symbolic meanings, historical roots, and values associated with this revered practice within the Sinhalese community. Furthermore, the examination of how the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual has evolved will provide valuable insights into the changing dynamics of traditional customs amidst modern societal changes. By studying historical records, oral traditions, and accounts from community elders, the research aims to trace the ritual's development and adaptations across generations, shedding light on the factors that have influenced its evolution. Additionally, the exploration of how the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual is preserved amidst contemporary influences is crucial in understanding the community's efforts to safeguard its cultural heritage. With globalization, urbanization, and shifting social structures posing challenges to traditional customs, investigating preservation strategies will reveal how the community actively works to maintain the essence of this ritual while adapting it to suit the needs of the present. To achieve these research objectives, the researcher proposes a qualitative research design, incorporating in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. This methodological approach will allow for a comprehensive exploration of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual's cultural significance, evolution, and preservation strategies, capturing the perspectives of both ritual practitioners and community members. The findings of this research hold significant potential to contribute to anthropological studies, cultural preservation

efforts, and our understanding of the intricate cultural dynamics within the Sinhalese community in Welimada, Uva province, Sri Lanka. By filling the research gap and shedding light on the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual's cultural significance and resilience amidst modern challenges, the researcher's work is likely to be of great value to scholars, cultural enthusiasts, and policymakers alike.

OBJECTIVES

To investigate the cultural significance of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual in Sinhalese traditional marriage in Welimada, Uva province, Sri Lanka. This objective aims to understand the underlying meanings, symbolism, and historical roots associated with the ritual within the Sinhalese community.

- To document the historical background and evolution of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual by examining available historical records, oral traditions, and accounts from local archives and community members.

- To analyze the influence of modern societal changes, such as globalization, urbanization, and changing family structures, on the practice and preservation of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual.

- To identify the role of cross-cousins (father's or mother's sister's son) in the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual and explore how their involvement contributes to the ritual's cultural significance and familial bonds.

- To compare the variations in the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual's practice and significance across different communities in Sri Lanka.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive research approach to investigate the characteristics of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual. The main purpose is to observe, describe, and document this ritual, involving a critical evaluation of the facts. As a problem-oriented study, it aims to define, study, and observe the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual in a broader context within the traditional marriage system of the Sinhalese community. Data for the study were collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary non-literary sources, specifically interview records, were utilized to gather required data, while primary literary sources,

including interview manuscripts related to Sinhalese traditional marriage rituals, were used to gather relevant information. Additionally, several research-based books, case studies, and original research publications served as primary literary sources for this study. Secondary sources, such as books, research publications, journal articles, and other relevant documents, were employed for analysis, synthesis, interpretation, and evaluation of the primary sources, contributing to the exploration of the topic and providing additional data.
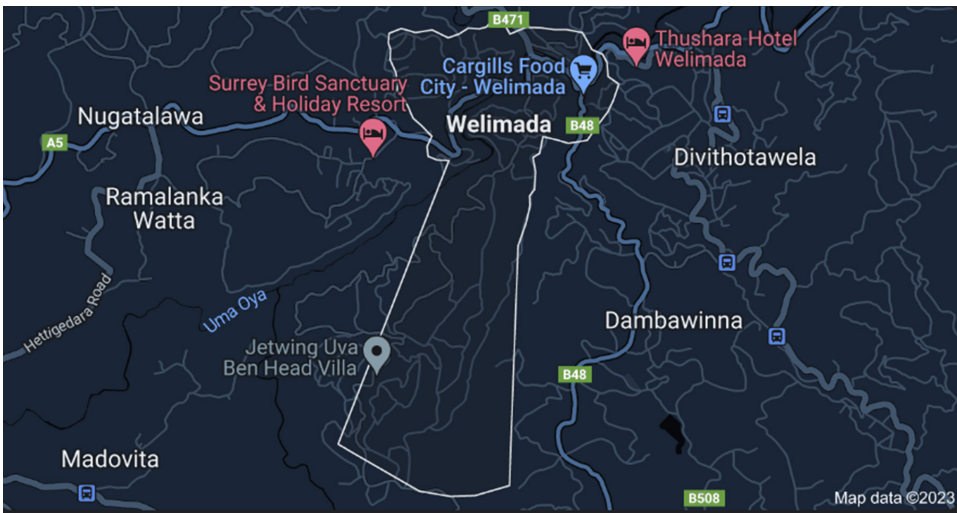
Fig. 1. Study Site - Welimada

The study site, Welimada, was chosen due to its deep-rooted cultural significance and active practice of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual among the Sinhalese community. Located in the Badulla District of the Uva Province in Sri Lanka, Welimada offers a picturesque setting surrounded by lush greenery, rolling tea estates, and captivating landscapes. The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual remains a significant part of the traditional marriage system, deeply ingrained in the lives and special occasions of the local Sinhalese population, making it an ideal location for this research.

To obtain comprehensive data and insights, the researcher employed

multiple data collection methods, including the semi-structured interview method, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews. These methods allowed for an in-depth exploration of the perspectives and experiences of the participants regarding traditional marriage rituals in Welimada. A total of 35 random interviews were conducted to gather information on the traditional knowledge and practice related to the *Kadulu Bulath* Ritual. Among the 35 respondents, 12 were able to provide insights into this traditional practice. Notably, the majority of these 12 respondents were elders aged above 60. Since this study is primarily descriptive, the information gathered relies predominantly on qualitative data. The research design and data collection methods facilitated a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual. Data analysis followed a qualitative data analysis method. This comprehensive approach allowed the researcher to transform and model the gathered data into useful information, leading to more reliable decision-making. By combining various data sources and analysis techniques, this study provides valuable insights into the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual and its significance within the Sinhalese cultural heritage in Welimada.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Marriage, as a social institution, establishes a recognized union between individuals, often through legal, religious, or cultural ceremonies, while also serving as a regulator of relationships, inheritance, and social roles within a community (Morgan, 1871). This pivotal institution holds a profound socio-cultural significance in human civilization. Universally present across diverse societies, marriage marks a crucial juncture in an individual's life, alongside other stages such as birth, puberty, and death, collectively known as rites of passage. However, unlike these stages, marriage stands as the sole aspect of human life that individuals can actively influence and control. Beyond merely ensuring the continuity of mankind, marriage fundamentally shapes the socio-cultural formation of human societies. Its customs, rituals, and norms intricately weave into family structures, kinship systems, and social hierarchies, while also influencing gender roles and defining the very notion of family. Thus, marriage emerges as a multifaceted institution, bearing both personal significance and far-reaching implications on the socio-cultural fabric of mankind. In Sinhala traditional culture, marriage is revered as a sacred and highly significant milestone in an individual's life.

Sinhalese folklore even likens marriage to a second birth for a person. This cultural perception emphasizes the immense importance and transformative nature of marriage within the Sinhala community. The comparison to a second birth underscores the belief that marriage marks a profound rebirth or new beginning, carrying immense implications for an individual's identity, responsibilities, and social roles. By describing marriage in such terms, Sinhalese culture places a deep sense of reverence and sanctity around the institution, further solidifying its central role in the lives of individuals and the broader community. In Sinhalese culture, marriage alliances can be classified into four distinct categories: *diga* marriage, *binna* marriage, *eka gei kama*, and cross-cousin marriage. Each of these marriage types is characterized by unique marital customs and rituals that hold significant cultural importance within the community. These diverse marriage practices reflect the rich and intricate tapestry of Sinhalese matrimonial traditions and contribute to the social fabric and kinship networks of the society.

Among the array of rituals associated with Sinhalese traditional marriage alliances, the *'Kadulu Bulath'* ritual holds particular significance as a traditional marriage ritual primarily observed in select areas of the Uva provinces in Sri Lanka.

- *Kadulu/Kadulla* – the gate

- *Bulath* – betel leaves

} The exchange of betel leaves near the *kadulla* (gate) of the bride's residence

In general, the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual involves the ceremonial exchange of betel leaves between the bride and groom during the wedding ceremony. This ritual is emblematic of cultural symbolism and serves as a significant gesture of bonding and unity between the newlywed couple. However, due to its restriction to specific geographical locations in Sri Lanka, the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual is currently experiencing a gradual decline, gradually fading away from the broader tradition. The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual is a traditional marriage custom performed to seek or obtain permission for the marriage from the bride's father's sister's son or the bride's mother's brother's son, who is also known as '*ewessa massina*.' This ritual stems from the ancient belief among the Sinhalese people that the bride's *ewessa massina* (bride's father's sister's son or bride's mother's brother's son) has the right, symbolically, to own the bride.

The Role of *'Ewessa massina'* **and his relationship with the** *'Kadulu Bulath'* **Ritual**

Cross cousins: *ewessa massina* – father's sister's son or mother's brother's son

By the poem provided, rainwater is claimed by the river or sea, nectar is

Ego's cross cousins   Ego's cross cousins
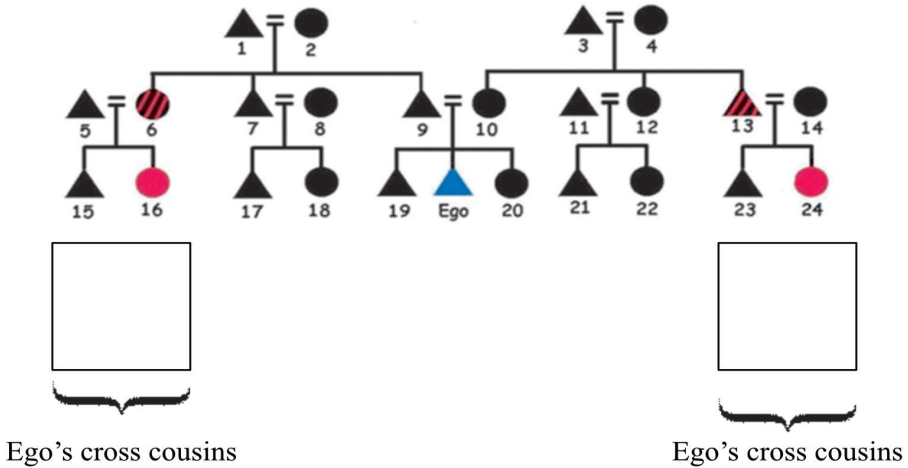
වැහිදිය අයිති ගං හෝ සමුදුරටයි
(Wehidiya aithi gan ho samuduratai)

මල් පැණි අයිති වට ගුමු දෙන බඹරාටයි
(Mal pani aithi wata gumu dena bambaratai)

මීරා අයිති කිතුලේ කළ වැද්දාටයි
(Meera aithi kithule kala veddatai)

නෙසඛා අයිති කාටද මස්සිනාටයි
(Nena aithi katada massinatai)

possessed by the bumblebee, kithul toddy is the domain of the toddyman, and likewise, the *nena* (father's sister's daughter/mother's brother's daughter) is associated with the *massina* (father's sister's son/mother's sister's son). Accordingly, the role of *ewsessa massina* plays a significant role in the Sinhalese traditional marriage system, as they are considered potential marriage partners within certain communities in Sri Lanka.

According to Gombrich (1978), cross-cousin marriages are prevalent in certain regions, and they are favoured for several reasons. First, such marriages help to consolidate family ties and alliances between kinship groups, strengthening social cohesion and support networks (Wijayaratne, 2013). Second, marrying cross-cousins can preserve family wealth and property within the extended family (de Silva, 1991). The practice of cross-cousin marriages also reinforces family lineages, as the offspring share ancestry from both the maternal and paternal sides (Obeyesekere, 1980). Although cross-cousin marriages have been historically favoured, it is essential to consider that marriage preferences may have evolved due to changing societal norms and individual choices (Jayasekara, 2016). Nonetheless, understanding the role of cross cousins in the Sinhalese traditional marriage system provides valuable insights into the cultural dynamics and practices that have shaped matrimonial customs in Sri Lanka. The involvement of cross-cousin; *ewassa massina*, specifically the father's sister's son or mother's brother's son, in performing the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual adds another layer of cultural significance to the ceremony. As cross-cousins hold a specific kinship relationship with the bride or groom, their participation in this ritual can carry special symbolic meaning and reinforce familial bonds.

In this *Kadulu Bulath* ritual, the groom seeks the consent and approval of the bride's *ewessa massina* as a significant step before proceeding with the marriage. This practice emphasizes the importance of familial relationships and respects the role of the bride's extended family in the decision-making process regarding matrimonial alliances. The historical significance of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual lies in the traditional beliefs and customs of the Sinhalese community, wherein the bride's *ewessa massina* held a particular status and authority over family matters. The act of seeking permission from him signifies the recognition of this historical role and the acknowledgement of familial ties and responsibilities within the community.

The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual has been the subject of various stories and interpretations throughout its history. From ancient times until the present day, this ritual has been an integral part of the wedding day celebration. The name *'Kadulu Bulath'* itself is derived from its meaning; *'Kadulu'* refers to a sturdy wood fence/gate or the entrance and *'Bulath'* refers to betel leaves. Therefore, the name *'Kadulu Bulath'* represents the act of exchanging betel leaves near a sturdy wood fence/gate or the entrance. As with many traditions, the way the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual is performed today may have undergone modifications compared to its early practice.

The shift in the timing and location of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual is a reflection of the changing dynamics of contemporary society. In the past, the ritual was traditionally conducted near the entrance/gate *(kadulla)* of the bride's house before the groom entered the premises, symbolizing the respect and honour paid to the bride's family and the seeking of their permission for the marriage. However, in modern times, the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual may take place after all the other marriage rituals have been performed, and it is now often conducted in the wedding hall or venue where the wedding ceremony is carried out. This change in location and timing has been influenced by factors such as convenience, logistical considerations, and the desire to accommodate larger gatherings of family and guests. While the practice of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual may have evolved and adapted over time, its enduring presence in certain cultural contexts reflects the preservation of cultural heritage and the importance of family bonds in the context of marriage among the Sinhalese people. While these modifications may alter some aspects of the ritual, the essence and symbolism of offering betel leaves as a gesture of respect and seeking approval from the bride's family remain intact.

In the past, the ritual held a primary role as a formal and solemn gesture of seeking permission for the marriage from the bride's family. It was traditionally performed before starting the wedding ceremony, symbolizing the importance of obtaining consent and approval before the union was solemnized. However, as cultural practices evolve and marriage ceremonies have evolved into more elaborate and celebratory events, the timing and purpose of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual have shifted. In contemporary times, the ritual is often performed towards the end of the wedding ceremony, not as a formal seeking of permission, but rather as a fun and enjoyable activity.

It has become a part of the post-wedding celebrations, where the couple and their guests engage in lighthearted and joyous interactions. While the core significance of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual may have transformed over time, its retention in wedding festivities showcases the cultural heritage and traditions that continue to hold value within the Sinhalese community. The ritual, now performed for amusement and entertainment, serves to strengthen family bonds and create a joyful atmosphere during the wedding celebrations.

The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual, as a significant and cherished tradition in the Sinhalese marriage alliance, is indeed accompanied by various background stories and regional variations. One aspect that might differ in these stories is the number of betel leaves used during the ritual. Some sources suggest that 100 betel leaves are used in the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual, while others mention 40 betel leaves. The significance of the number of betel leaves used in the ritual can vary based on cultural beliefs and regional practices. According to one interpretation, the use of 40 betel leaves is associated with a symbolic reference to Buddhism. It is said that there are 40 tooth relics in the Buddha's mouth, and by using 40 betel leaves, the act signifies the purity and sacredness of the promise being made during the ritual. The betel leaves are taken as a sign of reverence and respect in the presence of the bride's family. Regardless of the exact number of betel leaves used, the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual serves as a gesture of seeking approval from the bride's family and holds cultural significance in affirming the commitment of the groom to the marriage. The acceptance of the betel leaves by the bride's family symbolizes their consent and blessing for the union, allowing the groom to enter the bride's house.

One such interpretation suggests that the number of betel leaves used in the ritual may signify the number of guests who have arrived with the groom to the wedding ceremony. In this interpretation, each betel leaf offered represents one adult guest, while half of a betel leaf may indicate a child guest. By using betel leaves in this manner, the ritual becomes not only a gesture of seeking permission and showing respect to the bride's family but also a practical way to keep track of the number of guests present at the wedding ceremony. Once the bride's *ewessa massina* accepts the betel leaves, he may pass them on to the bride's mother. The betel leaves handed to the bride's mother can then be used to gauge the number of guests in attendance, helping with the preparation of food arrangements for the

wedding day. This interpretation of using betel leaves as a count of guests highlights the communal nature of Sinhalese wedding celebrations and the importance of hospitality in welcoming and accommodating guests.

The ritual of *Kadulu Bulath* not only holds symbolic and cultural significance but also serves a functional purpose in facilitating the organization and hospitality aspects of the wedding ceremony. There is an ancient practice of reciting taboo poems during wedding ceremonies, signifying restrictions or prohibitions, which has faded into obscurity. This custom involved the imposition of certain taboos by the bride's relatives, starting from the entrance and continuing through the *Poruwa* ritual on the wedding day. The researchers were able to identify the taboo poems that bear relevance to the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual in Idamegama, Welimada.

The genesis of betel leaves occurs within the *'Naga Lokaya'* (the term *'Naga*

නාග ලොවේ සිට බුලත් උපන්නේ
(Naaga lowe sita bulath upanne)

අහස බලා වෙද ඒ දළ ලන්නේ
(Ahasa bala weda e dalu lanne)

ඇවැස්ස මස්සිනා මමයි බොලන්නේ
(Ewassa massina mamai bolanne)

කඩුලු බුලත් සිය දීලයි යන්නේ
(Kadulu Bulath siya dilai yanne)

Lokaya' refers to a realm inhabited by beings known as *Nagas* or *Nāgas*. Nagas are supernatural serpent-like beings or deities that are often depicted with both human and snake-like attributes), where these leaves unfurl in response to the expanse of the sky. As the *ewessa massina* of the bride, it is solely my prerogative to depart by bestowing the betel leaves.

Previously, these poems were chanted near the threshold of the village residence before initiating the wedding proceedings. However, contemporary practice has shifted, with these verses now being predominantly recited at the location where the wedding ceremony takes place, such as a wedding hall or reception venue. Moreover, these verses are intoned after the

culmination of all other wedding rituals. In addition to this particular taboo poem, researchers have found several other taboo verses related to the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual, especially those used in the past. Typically, taboo poems consist of two components: the initial section involves the imposition of a taboo through a poem recited by the bride's relatives, while the subsequent section entails a responsive poem by the groom's relatives aimed at dispelling the taboo.

Imposition of the gate taboo *(kadulu thahanchi)*:

Responsive poem:The initial poem underscores the act of placing taboos

බුද්ධං සරණෙන් සිරසතහංචි
(Buddhan saranen sirasa thahanchi)

ධම්මං සරණෙන් දෙව්රතහංචි
(Dhamman saranen devura thahanchi)

සංසන් සරණෙන් දෙපයතහංචි
(Sanghan saranen depaya thahanchi)

මේ තුන් සරණෙන් කඩුළ තහංචි
(Me thun saranen kadulu thahanchi)

upon the groom by the bride's family. It signifies that invoking the blessings

බුද්ධං සරණෙන් සිරස දරන්නෙමු
(Buddhan saranen sirasa darannemu)

ධම්මං සරණෙන් දෙව්ර දරන්නෙමු
(Dhamman saranen devura darannemu)

සංසං සරණෙන් සිව්රු දරන්නෙමු
(Sanghan saranen sivuru darannemu)

මේ තුන් සරණෙන් කඩුළ පනිනෙමු
(Me thun saranen kadulu paninemu)

of the Triple Gem *(Buddha, Dhamma,* and *Sangha),* the groom is subject to these taboos encompassing his head, shoulders, and feet. Furthermore, with the combined blessings of the Triple Gem and the bride's family, a specific entrance taboo known as *'kadulu thahanchi'* is imposed. In response, the groom's relatives engage in a responsive poem, wherein they acknowledge and accept the bestowed blessings. Through their words, they ceremoniously dispel the imposed taboo, thereby gaining permission to enter the bride's residence.

Imposition of the gate taboo *(kadulu thahanchi)*:

Responsive poem:

අස්නය සුරපුර පඬි රට ගිණි ලැවු පත්තිනි අණ නුඹ දනිතෝතින්
(Asnaya surapura pandi rata gini lavu patthini ana numba danithothin)

ශක්‍ර භවන දෙවි සොලසට අධිපති වෙච්ච සැටිය නුඹ දනිතෝතින්
(Shakra bhavana devi solasata adhipathi wechcha satiya numba danithothin)

එක්කර රුසිවරු නවදෙන සිටගෙන කරපු තහංචිය දනිතෝතින්
(Ekwara rusiwaru nawadena sitagena karapu thahanchi danithothin)

එක් අඩියක්වත් නොපනිනු සකියනි කඩුල්ල තහනම් ඔන්න ඉතින්
(Ek adiyakwath nopaninu sakiyani kadulla thahanam onna ithin)

The poem reflects the reverence for the immense power associated with

සොල්දාදුවන් මෙන් දුවගෙන ඇවිදින් වටකරගෙන මේ මග රැකලා
(Soldaduwan men duwagena awidin watakaragena me maga rakala)

කොල්ලා නොවේදැයි වට ඔට ඉදගෙන පහරන්නේ වටපිට නොබලා
(Kolla nowedai wata iota indagena paharanne watapita nobala)

බල්ලා නොවේදැයි බුරාන එන්නේ වැටමුල ඉන්නේ හොරු කියලා
(Balla nowedai burana enne vatamula inne horu kiyala)

ගල්ලා නුඹලගෙ තහනම් හැම දෙය අපට යන්න මේ මග ඇරලා
(Galla numbage thahanam hema deya apata yanna me maga arala)

Goddess Pattini, God Shakra (often referring to Lord Indra), and the wisdom of nine ancient prophets as described in ancient Indian texts. These legendary figures are deeply respected for their significance and influence. Accordingly, the relatives of the bride assert their respect for these powerful entities by imposing taboos that prohibit the groom's side from entering the bride's residence. This underscores the perceived sanctity and strength of these traditions. The groom's side responds with a poem seeking permission to break these imposed taboos. This reflects their desire to honour and embrace the rituals of the bride's family, while also acknowledging their willingness to enter this union with respect and reverence. The poem conveys a sense of unity, respect for tradition, and hope for a harmonious marriage that transcends any customs or restrictions.

The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual holds a prominent and enduring position within the traditional Sinhalese marriage system in Sri Lanka, particularly in regions such as Central, Uva, and Sabaragamu provinces. As with many traditional rituals and customs around the world, the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual has evolved in response to changing societal dynamics and cultural influences. Nevertheless, like many traditional customs and rituals worldwide, the *Kadulu Bulath* ceremony has undergone significant evolution and adaptation over time, mirroring the transformations witnessed in today's modern society. While it remains a significant part of the traditional Sinhalese marriage system, it has adapted to contemporary circumstances in several ways.

SHIFT IN TIMING AND LOCATION

One notable change is the shift in the timing and location of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual. In the past, it was traditionally conducted near the entrance (gate) of the bride's house, symbolizing respect and seeking permission from her family. Today, it is often performed within the wedding hall or venue, sometimes as part of post-wedding celebrations. This shift may be influenced by convenience, logistical considerations, and the desire to accommodate larger gatherings.

CHANGE IN PURPOSE

Traditionally, the primary purpose of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual was to seek formal permission for the marriage. It was a solemn and symbolic act through which the groom sought the consent and blessing of the bride's family,

particularly her *ewessa massina*, before the union could be solemnized. This aspect of formal permission was a crucial step in the marriage process and was deeply rooted in cultural norms and traditions. However, in modern times, the purpose and significance of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual have evolved. While it still retains elements of respect and acknowledgement of the bride's family, it has taken on a more celebratory and lighthearted character. Today, it is often viewed as a joyful and interactive part of the wedding festivities rather than a strict requirement for the marriage to proceed.

CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS

Some interpretations link the number of betel leaves used in the ritual to Buddhism, which holds significant cultural and spiritual importance in Sri Lanka. For example, the use of 40 betel leaves may symbolize the 40 tooth relics in the Buddha. In this interpretation, the ritual becomes a way to express the purity and sacredness of the commitment being made during the wedding. The betel leaves are offered with reverence in the presence of the bride's family, aligning the marriage with spiritual values. Another interpretation is that the number of betel leaves serves a practical purpose beyond symbolism. In this view, each betel leaf offered represents one adult guest attending the wedding, while half of a betel leaf may indicate a child guest. By using betel leaves in this manner, the ritual helps keep track of the number of guests present at the wedding ceremony. The varying interpretations also reflect the depth of cultural tradition and heritage associated with the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual. It's a testament to the richness of cultural symbolism and practices within the Sinhalese community. The use of betel leaves in rituals has been a longstanding tradition, and the specific significance assigned to the number of leaves may vary based on regional customs and family traditions. It's important to note that the number of betel leaves used in the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual may vary not only by interpretation but also by personal preference and regional variations. Different families or communities may have their specific traditions and beliefs regarding the significance of the number of leaves.

FADING OF TABOOS

The practice of reciting taboo poems during wedding ceremonies, signifying restrictions or prohibitions, has faded into obscurity. This reflects

the changing cultural landscape and a shift away from certain traditional practices.

BALANCING TRADITION AND MODERNITY

The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual's evolution showcases the delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to contemporary norms. It continues to play a vital role in celebrating Sinhalese marriages while accommodating modern expectations and practices. In essence, while the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual has evolved, its essence of respect, cultural symbolism, and communal celebration remains intact. It serves as a testament to the resilience of cultural traditions in the face of changing times and continues to hold significance in Sinhalese marriage rituals. However, the researchers have identified several factors that have contributed to the changes and adaptations observed in the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual and other traditional customs within the Sinhalese traditional marriage system in Sri Lanka.

SOCIETAL MODERNIZATION

Societal modernization has brought about profound transformations in the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual, reshaping its purpose and significance. As societies have evolved, becoming more urbanized, educated, and globally connected, traditional customs like *Kadulu Bulath* have adapted to suit contemporary sensibilities. The ritual, once a formal and symbolic gesture of seeking permission for marriage from the bride's family, has shifted in meaning. In today's context, it often takes on a more celebratory and lighthearted role within modern weddings. Younger generations, influenced by individual autonomy and global perspectives, may view it as a joyful tradition rather than a strict requirement. As couples incorporate elements from diverse cultures and embrace personal choice, the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual stands as a symbol of cultural heritage, evolving alongside societal modernization while retaining its role as a cherished tradition within the Sinhalese community.

CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Cultural change has played a pivotal role in shaping the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual over time. As societies undergo cultural transformations, rituals like *Kadulu Bulath* adapt to reflect shifting values, beliefs, and priorities. One significant aspect of cultural change is the evolving role of family structures.

Traditionally, the ritual emphasized the extended family's involvement, particularly the consent of the bride's *ewessa massina*. However, as nuclear families become more prevalent in modern society, decision-making in marriages has shifted to the immediate family members. This change has altered the significance of seeking formal permission for marriage through the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual.

CHANGING GENDER ROLES

Changing gender roles has contributed to the reevaluation of the ritual. With a growing emphasis on gender equality, younger generations may question and reinterpret customs that reinforce traditional gender norms. The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual, which historically symbolized a form of ownership or consent, may be seen as out of sync with contemporary values that prioritize mutual respect and partnership in marriages. While there was once a prevalent notion that the bride was considered to belong to her *ewessa massina* in the early days, these ideas and beliefs have largely diminished in modern times. Particularly, younger generations are not as well-informed about these traditional customs and relationships.

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES/GAPS

Generational differences in the perception and practice of traditional rituals and customs, such as the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual in Sri Lanka, are indeed significant. Older generations often uphold these rituals as sacred and deeply rooted in cultural heritage, valuing them for their historical significance and adherence to established traditions. In contrast, younger couples may approach these rituals with a desire to personalize or adapt them, aligning them more closely with their own identities and contemporary values. For older generations, traditional rituals like *Kadulu Bulath* are not merely customs but also symbols of cultural continuity and family legacy. They may view these rituals as essential markers of their cultural identity, and their adherence to them can be a way of preserving a sense of belonging to a particular cultural heritage. Older family members may have a strong influence on the continuation of these customs, emphasizing their importance in maintaining cultural cohesion. Conversely, younger generations often seek to strike a balance between tradition and modernity. They may hold deep respect for their cultural heritage but also desire to express their

individuality and values within the context of these rituals. This can lead to adaptations and personalization of the rituals, incorporating elements that resonate more closely with their own beliefs and lifestyles. Younger couples may view the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual as an opportunity to infuse their wedding with uniqueness and creativity while still honouring tradition.

The generational gap in the perception and practice of traditional rituals is a reflection of the dynamic tension between preserving cultural heritage and embracing the changes brought about by modernization and globalization. It underscores the importance of intergenerational dialogue and understanding, where older generations can share the significance of these customs, and younger generations can contribute their perspectives and adaptations, ultimately contributing to the continued evolution of cultural practices like the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual in Sri Lanka.

GLOBALIZATION

As Sri Lanka becomes more integrated into the global community, there is a growing exposure to diverse cultures and ideas. This exposure has a profound impact on the evolution of traditional rituals, including the incorporation of elements from other cultures. Globalization, facilitated by advancements in technology and increased international travel, has created a cultural crossroads where traditions from different parts of the world intersect. This intercultural exchange fosters a rich tapestry of influences, where elements from various cultures find their way into Sri Lankan customs and rituals. In the context of traditional rituals like the *Kadulu Bulath*, this incorporation of foreign elements can take various forms. For instance, couples may choose to include readings or practices from other cultures that resonate with their personal beliefs and experiences. They might incorporate elements from Western wedding ceremonies, and blend these traditions to create a unique and meaningful experience.

Moreover, international media and the internet have made it easier for individuals to access and appreciate the customs and ceremonies of different cultures. Modern couples planning their weddings may draw inspiration from diverse sources, leading to innovative combinations of traditions, resulting in a fusion of cultural practices that reflect their cultural diffusion. The incorporation of elements from other cultures into traditional rituals not only adds depth and richness to these ceremonies but also highlights the

adaptability and resilience of cultural traditions in the face of global change. It signifies the capacity of cultures to evolve, absorb new influences, and create unique expressions of identity that honour both tradition and modernity. In this way, Sri Lanka's connection to the global community contributes to the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of its cultural heritage.

PERSONALIZATION

Couples today often seek to personalize their wedding rituals. They may customize the ritual to reflect their unique personalities and values, showcasing a shift towards individualism within the context of a traditional ceremony. These factors, often interrelated, have collectively contributed to the evolution of the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual and other traditional customs within the Sinhalese marriage system in Sri Lanka. The dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity continues to shape the way these rituals are practised and understood in contemporary society.

The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual holds significant importance in the Sinhalese traditional marriage system in Sri Lanka for several reasons. At its core, the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual symbolizes respect for the bride's family and seeks their consent for the marriage. The groom offers betel leaves to the bride's *ewassa massina* as a gesture of seeking approval. This reflects the value placed on familial relationships and acknowledges the bride's extended family's role in the decision-making process regarding matrimonial alliances. The ritual's enduring presence in Sinhalese wedding ceremonies reflects the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions within the community. Despite changes in the timing and context of the ritual, its retention showcases the significance of cultural customs in celebrating marriages. The number of betel leaves used in the ritual can vary, and these variations often carry cultural symbolism. Whether it's 40 or 100 betel leaves, they signify purity, sacredness, and respect for the bride's family. The act of offering betel leaves underscores the solemnity of the commitment being made during the ritual. The ritual serves as a means to strengthen family bonds and create a joyful atmosphere during the wedding celebrations. In contemporary times, it has transformed into a lighthearted and enjoyable activity that involves the couple and their guests. This aspect of the communal celebration is an integral part of Sinhalese wedding traditions. The use of betel leaves in counting the number of guests present at the wedding ceremony is not just symbolic but

also practical/functional value. It aids in the organization and hospitality aspects of the wedding by helping with food arrangements and ensuring that all guests are accommodated. The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual has historical roots in the traditional beliefs and customs of the Sinhalese community. It acknowledges the special status and authority historically held by the bride's *ewessa massina* in family matters. The ritual contributes to the identity of the Sinhalese community, emphasizing the cultural significance of marriage and the role of family in the matrimonial process. The *Kadulu Bulath* ritual is not merely a ceremonial formality but a significant component of Sinhalese traditional marriages that embodies respect, consent, cultural symbolism, and the communal nature of wedding celebrations. It continues to be an integral part of the rich tapestry of Sinhalese cultural heritage, despite evolving in its timing and context over time.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual stands as a captivating symbol of cultural heritage within the Sinhalese community in Sri Lanka. This traditional practice, which has evolved, reflects the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity. Its transformation from a formal permission-seeking ritual to a joyful celebration within contemporary weddings underscores the dynamic nature of cultural customs in the face of societal modernization and changing values. As Sri Lanka continues to engage with the global community, the incorporation of elements from other cultures enriches the *Kadulu Bulath* ritual and highlights its adaptability. This cultural crossroads fosters a unique fusion of traditions, creating ceremonies that resonate with individuals' multicultural identities. To protect these traditional cultural practices, it is vital to strike a balance between preservation and adaptation. Encouraging intergenerational dialogue and understanding can help bridge the gap between older generations, who uphold these rituals as sacred, and younger generations, who seek to personalize them. Documenting and sharing these customs through digital means can also contribute to their preservation. Furthermore, fostering an appreciation for cultural diversity and heritage in education and society at large can instil a sense of pride and responsibility in safeguarding these rituals. This may involve initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of cultural preservation and the significance of rituals like *Kadulu Bulath*. In an increasingly interconnected

world, it is crucial to recognize the value of these traditions not only as markers of cultural identity but also as living expressions of a dynamic and evolving heritage. By embracing both tradition and modernity and by engaging in the active preservation of cultural practices, we can ensure that rituals like *Kadulu Bulath* continue to thrive and contribute to the rich tapestry of our global cultural heritage.

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DEATH RITUALS OF TAMILS: SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES AND TRADITIONAL BELIEFS IN THE VILLAGES OF TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Life and death are significant social and cultural events in human societies. According to Hindu mythology, life and death form a recurring dynamic cycle. Tradition believes that death is not the end of one's life. However, it involves the transformation of one's soul from one life to the next through an arduous process, usually marked by mourning and associated rituals. On the other hand, rituals are performed to facilitate the soul's smooth travel to the next world, but ritual barriers are also marked between the soul and personal relationship. Human societies performed more rituals in various social and personal life events. They used rituals to attribute social significance to individual and family events. Among the many rituals of the Hindus, the complex funeral rites (*antyesti*) are considered inauspicious; however, they are included in the major *Samskaras* (sacraments), performed for the well-being of 'non-existing' and 'non-worldly' entities, and the living kin and the deceased. The main endeavour of this article is to discuss the funeral rites (*iruthi cataṅkukal*) of Tamil Hindus in villages of Tamil Nadu, the southern state of India. Further, the article discusses how the village people in Tamil Nadu perform death rituals and how that becomes important in the cultural practices of Tamils. The death rituals of Tamils in India usually follow a relatively uniform pattern drawn from the early periods, varying according to the sect, region, caste, and family tradition.

Keywords: *death rituals, cremation, funeral procession, oppari, thivasam.*

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the death rituals (*iruthi cataṅkukal*) and traditional beliefs and socio-cultural practices of Tamil Hindus in the villages of Tamil Nadu, the southern state of India. Tamil Hindus believe in the cyclical reincarnation of the soul. So, the funeral rites are performed not only for the disposal of dead body but also to assist the departed soul in its transmigration to the next destination. The article discusses how the village people in Tamil Nadu perform the funeral rites and how that becomes important in the cultural practices of their lives. The death rituals practiced and followed by society are closely associated with the people's beliefs about life and death. The death rituals of Tamils in India usually follow a relatively uniform pattern drawn from the early periods, varying according to the sect, region, caste, and family tradition. However, Tamil beliefs and traditional practices may vary from one region to another; this article aims to present a simple outline of death rituals that are performed and continued by the village people of Tamil Nadu. It will illustrate the language terminologies used for performing the death rituals and the implications of it for society. The village's traditional rituals are not very similar to caste-Hindus rituals; culturally, they follow local and little traditions.

BACKGROUND STATEMENT

Life and death are significant social and cultural events in human societies. According to Hindu mythology, life and death form a recurring dynamic cycle. Death has specific and symbolic meanings to human beings and is an occasion for displaying raw emotion and significant social gestures and rituals. The Tamil's response to death is shaped mainly by their traditional beliefs about the human body, soul, and afterlife. While treating the dead body displays a specific community's beliefs, many such rites and ablutions are not exclusive to Tamils. Similarities in practice are mainly due to shared beliefs in core aspects of Hindu mythologies and the proximate co-existence of different caste groups in a given locality, which allow them to observe and adopt ritual practices from each other, leading to social proximity over.[1]

In human life, rituals mark a significant presence in the social organisation of human lifespan; it has been widely claimed that traditional societies are more ritualised than modern ones.[2] Some studies attribute higher ritualization of traditional societies, characterised by undifferentiated and overlapping

roles, where specific rituals help separate roles for functional needs. An ethnographer, Arnold Van Gennep, in his work '*The Rites of Passage*' says that "rituals as key markers of luminal moments, marked by rites of passage, facilitate the passing between different social spaces and thereby bestow and manage appropriate social role".[3] In particular, rituals are also a significant tool for organising society. They are means through which the social status of an individual, group, or a large society is sustained, transmitted, and often changed simultaneously. On the other hand, as rituals reflect social structures and have specific functions, the symbols and concepts used in rituals are subordinated to practical ends.[4]

It is necessary to note that human societies performed more rituals in various social and personal life events. They used rituals to attribute social significance to individual and family events. Among the many rituals of the Hindus, the complex funeral rites (*antyesti*) are considered inauspicious; however, it is included in the significant *Samskaras* (sacraments), performed for the well-being of 'non-existing,' (*illaatatu*) 'non-worldly' entity and the living kin and the deceased.[5] It is believed that the main objects of the proper disposal of the dead body (corpse) and performance of all the funeral rites and ceremonies connected with it are to free the family members from the pollution of death and to give rest to the deceased. Hindus believe that death is not the end of one's life; it involves the transformation of one's soul (*atma*) from one life (*janmam*) to the next through an arduous process, usually marked by mourning (*tukkam*) and associated rituals. On the other hand, rituals facilitate the soul's smooth travel to the next world. However, ritual barriers are also marked between the soul and personal relationship. Until these funeral rites are duly performed, the deceased person's soul is not finally dismissed to its place in the next world.[6]

DEATH RITUALS AND TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

Among the rituals of the Hindu society, the funeral is the most important rite observed in the death of a person. Rajbali Pandey says that "the last sacrament in the life of a Hindu is the *antyesti* or the funeral with which he chooses the concluding chapter of his worldly career. While living, a Hindu consecrates his worldly life by performing various rites and ceremonies at the different stages of his progress. At his departure from this world, his surviours consecrate his death for his future felicity in the next world.

This *Samskaras*, being post-mortem, is not less important, because for a Hindu the value of the next world is higher than that of the present one".[7] It is believed that a single eternal soul is reborn multiple times in different physical forms, whether plant, animal or divine in the next world.

We find the earliest reference to funeral ceremonies from the early Vedic literature, where we find the four parts of the complete funeral rites: the burning, the *abhisinchanan,* and the *smasana-chiti* (the washing of the corpse and piling of the funeral pyre); the *udaka-karma* (water oblations); and the *santikarma* (sacraments).[8] The preoccupation with a proper funeral can even be said to inspire the most fundamental actions of adult life; the funeral is the moment supreme in which the reputation, personality, and accomplishment of the departed are forever settled.[9] Most Hindus observe many formalities when their family members or relatives die. As soon as symptoms of death become manifest in a Brahmin community, a spot is chosen on the ground and smeared over with cow dung. The *darbha* grass is strewn, and new cloth is placed upon which the dying man is laid. His loins are next girded with another ceremonially pure cloth. Then, the dying man, having given his permission, the ceremony called *sarva prayaschita*, or perfect expiation, is performed by the *purohita* and the chief mourner. A few small gold, silver, and copper coins are carried in on a metal salver, and another *akshatas*, sandalwood, and *pancha-gavia*[10] near the dying man.[11] The *purohita* pours a few drops of the *pancha-gavia* into the mouth of the dying man, by which his body becomes perfectly purified.[12]

There are practices in the Roman Catholic community in Tamil Nadu that the person before dying is placed on the house's veranda during the final days of illness. The catechist has been called to offer prayers, and relatives keep singing laments. The Catholic priest has performed the last rites. The movement of the person's death is marked by wailing and the toiling of the Church bell. A traditional drummer, especially Paraiyas (those who beat drums, *parai*) from the village, beat a *tappu* (drum) throughout the night, and in the morning, other servants are sent to announce the death to the close relatives, who bring customary (*murai saithal/ seedevi vankuthal*)) gifts of clothes and paddy and approach the deceased with usual signs of grief and respect. The body lay under a canopy with a lamp burning by her/his dead, a rosary in her/his hands, and a crucifix above her/his dead.[13]

As soon as the dying person has passed away, it is a recognised custom that

everybody presents must at once burst into tears and that in a fashion strictly laid down for the occasion. Then, the corpse is washed, and in some regions barber community shaves off all the hair of dead. It is washed a second time, and after that, sandalwood and *akshatas* are placed upon the forehead, and garlands of flowers round the neck. The body's eyes and mouths (orifices) are sealed with turmeric and betel leaf, the anklets or toes and writes are tied together with strips torn from a new sari by the barber community, and a coin is placed on the forehead (*nettikasu*, which later given to the washer man community). The mouth is filled with betel leaves, and the dead body is apparelled in rich raiment and jewels.[14] In many villages, the tradition of keeping the dead body in a sitting position in a chair is a common practice. The tiny cotton beads are put into the nasal and air orifices to block them. This kind of practice is done because a dead person with open eyes is scary and inauspicious since the body stiffens after death; it is better to tie the legs together to keep them straight. Ear and nose holes are blocked to delay putrefaction, as the air entering through them will expedite this process.[15] On the other hand, people believe that as the evil spirits might enter through visible orifices, they must be blocked immediately after death. Eyes have to be closed; otherwise, they attract such evil spirits and provide them with the ability to see.

Immediately after the death happens, the family members of the deceased person inform the death news to all the relatives and friends, those who are near and far away. After the relatives and friends have assembled in the death house, they pay a final homage to the dead body and have a last look at the departed; the dead body is then bathed, perfumed, and dressed in new clothes. The deceased person's immediate blood relatives like siblings, maternal uncles, paternal uncles, cousins, nephews, niece, maternal and paternal aunts, and their children are supposed to offer support services in terms of arranging the death bed called *paadai*/*chatta*, purchasing the flowers for the funeral procession and arranging the funeral services in the graveyard and maintain the expenses for the rituals.

Attendance at the house of the dead is a compulsory social duty. After reaching all the relatives from the same and distant villages, the funeral rites commenced with a ceremony known as '*neermalai*' (water garland), in which water to wash the dead body is collected from the river or tank or any other water bodies of the village. The procession of the *neermalai* ritual is

normally led by the village barber or Totti. Accompanied by Totti, the sons, daughters, and close blood relatives of the dead person washed themselves, fully clothed, in the village river or tank. They bring water from the river in the *sembu*, *kunda*, or pot. In some areas, the barber community of the village prepared a specially decorated mud pot to carry the water.[16]

In *the neermalai* ritual, the barber/Totti garlanded the chief mourner (the eldest son for mother and the youngest son for father) and prepared a sacred thread for him to wear (in an inverted fashion). Walking under the white dhoti provided by the village washerman and accompanied by a funeral band, the mourners returned to the house carrying decorated pots (with ash marks and thread decorated) with water. At home, female family members and relatives bathed and prepared the body with the assistance of the Totti or Vettiyan. Before this ritual, agnatic relatives poured oil and a cleansing powder onto the dead head.[17] The dead body is put on the corridor (veranda) or under a temporary canopy outside the house once all preparation has been made for the journey to the cremation ground. Generally, this custom allows grieving people to pay their final respect (*iruthi-mariyaathai*) to the deceased; scrutiny reveals that the dead body is considered more polluting and alien to family members after their final preparations.[18] The chief mourners and close blood relatives pay last respect to the dead body, which is then carried and placed in a decorative bier (*paadai*). Then, the funeral procession starts towards the cremation ground.

Fig.1. Carrying dead body in *Paadai* (Bier) to the cremation ground (Courtesy: Jagadesan, R.R.)

In Tamil, the house of the death is called '*elavu-veedu*' or '*chaavu-veedu*,' meaning the 'house of drudgery.' Both terms denote pollution and distress associated with death. All items, including artefacts, pillows, bedspreads, remains of incense sticks, candles, and oil used for burning lamps and used for the dead body, must be disposed of with the dead body. After the performance of homage to the deceased person, the final procession would start. The main mourner, especially the eldest son of the dead, processes the funeral procession from the home to the cremation ground. In many villages, the man leading the procession carries a fire pot (*kolli chatti*), which he has kindled at the domestic fire. The main mourner is followed by the funeral bier and the relatives and friends of the deceased follow the latter.[19] The order of the mourners in the procession is according to age; the elders lead first. Whenever a death occurred among the caste Hindus in the villages of Tamil Nadu, the local Vettiyans' duty was to lead the funeral procession to the cremation ground through the village's main streets. During the journey from the house of the dead to the cremation ground, the people, especially those who carry the dead bodies, repeat the sacred *slogan* '*Govinda*' '*Govinda*' while carrying the corpse. On the way to the funeral pyre, three halts are made. Each time, the mouth of the dead person is opened, and a little raw and soaked rice is placed in it so that hunger and thirst may simultaneously be satisfied. In Hindu society, women are never allowed to attend funeral ceremonies out of doors. They remain in the house and utter the most lamentable cries. The women are allowed to precede the dead body up to *idukadu*.[20]

In many funeral processions in the villages of Tamil Nadu, musical instruments are employed. However, the Brahmin community never arranged musical instruments during the funeral march. In procession, the funeral *parai* music is played monotonously throughout the funeral procession. In the music droops, the drummers dressed simply with towels wrapped around their heads and in long loincloths stuffed to fall like miniskirts; these men would dance and sing along the village's main street to the accompaniments of their drums. They beat drums during the procession. At each village crossroad (*kurukkuchantu*), the procession stopped. The drummer (the singer), usually drunk, stepped forward, and a joyful excitement seized the assembly of men and youngsters. "Bowing, smiling, shuffling his feet to the drumbeats and wiggling his hips, the singer did everything he could to entertain and make everyone laugh".[21] After a

few rounds of drumming; he would sing four lines of a high-pitched tune and say '*aamoi*.' At the junction of the village street, the carriers of the dead body move around in circles thrice. On the way to s*udukaadu* (cremation ground), they keep the dead body in *idukaadu* (a middle place on the way to the cremation ground) for some rituals, those rituals performed mainly by the female members of the family. The women can only follow the funeral procession up to the *idukaadu*. Funeral music (*parai isai*) is not played while crossing the temples, and villagers close the temple until the dead body is taken from the house.[22]

The drummers usually sing death songs (*elavu pattu*) in the death house and funeral procession. The death songs, they would say, beautify the drums, draw people to the procession, and keep them there. Further, death songs would also emphasize, praise, and exonerate the dead from the sins committed during their lifetime. The death songs are mostly said to honour the dead, which has an absolving value. In the death song tradition, relatives used to donate to the singer or drummers, and it is customary for the drummer to announce the donor's name loudly and praise their contribution. For example, if the donor of a song were a man named Malaisamy, the deceased's uterine nephew, the singer would announce, 'Malaisamy gave money so that his maternal uncle might reach heaven'. The singer always exaggerated the donor's contribution by doubling or tripling it.[23] If Malaisamy paid ten rupees for a song, the singer would announce that the man gave them twenty, fifty, or more. After the first donation, we can observe more contributions by more people. When one man's name and donations were honoured, another would offer more money for a song.[24] Along with funeral music, the dead body reaches the cremation ground. After reaching the cremation ground, the next process is to select a suitable place to arrange the funeral pyre and dig a trench. The trench for a dead body, according to *Ashvalayana Samhita*,[25] should be twelve fingers deep, five spans wide, and as long as the corpse with its hand uplifted. As the literary texts state, the corpse should be disemboweled and the cavity filled with ghee. This operation's idea was to purify the corpse and facilitate the cremation.[26]

Tamils have both burial practices and the burning of the dead body. In most of the villages, burying the dead is a common practice. On the other hand, burning the dead body is also practiced. In both cases, they

dig a grave eight feet deep/, but in burning practice, the grave is filled with wooden fuel, dry coconut shells, straw, and dry cow dung on which the dead body is placed to be burnt. The ash and bones are collected later from this grave to be dissolved or put in the sea or river water. In some communities, on the day of *thivasam*, the deceased's male children and matrilineal kin are expected to tonsure their heads, which in many cultures symbolically represents the removal of pollution associated with death and reintegration with society.[27] When the dead body was put into the grave (*savukkuli*), the village barber cut the threads from the body and removed the *arignankoir* and other jewelry. Money and betel leaves are placed on the body and collected by the funeral servants (Vettiyan). Further, the barber (Ambatten) shaved and removed the main mourner's sacred thread, which the mourner used to wear the same during the *neermalai* rituals, marking signs of the cross on the body in the grave. Incense sticks, betel leaves, aracanut, and pots with water are left at the grave site.[28] In the cremation ground before the dead body's burial or burning, the deceased's son walks around thrice in a counterclockwise direction while sprinkling water from the earthen vessel (*man kudam*). After three rounds, the vessel is then broken into the ground near the head of the dead body. This practice is known as *kudam udaittal*.[29] In Hindu tradition, before burning or burying a dead body, the chief mourner places a small piece of gold or silver coins in the mouth, and everybody deposits a few grains of soaked rice. The tradition of pouring the soaked rice into the deceased mouth is known as *vaaikkarisi poduthal*. It is usually the eldest son for the mother and the youngest son for the father who lights the crematorium pyre (the practice known as *kolli vaittal* or *kolli poduthal*). Usually, the fire is lit starting at the head site. The firing of the body symbolically means offering the dead body to God Agni (the god of fire). The fire conveys the offering to heaven. "The flames of the funeral pyre represent Lord Brahma (the god of creation), and the burning of the body signifies the release of the soul to move on to its next destination for incarnation".[30]

In the burning of a dead body, a lot of firewood and dried cow dung are heaped over the dead body, and usually, the eldest son for the mother and the youngest son for the father sets fire on the dead body. Subsequently, after burning the dead body, everyone has to take a purificatory bath followed by a ceremonial return to the dead person's house. After the funeral rites were over in the cremation ground, the chief mourner arranged payment

for the funeral servants. In many cases, in cremation grounds (*sudukaadu*), the relatives from the mother's or father's sides contribute some money to settle the funeral expenses. This practice of collecting a voluntary contribution from relatives in the *sudukaadu* is known as '*kattatalattu moi*'. After collecting money from the funeral participants, the money is distributed to the servants in the *sudukaadu* itself. The funeral payments include those to drummers, women who wail, the washer man who provides cloth for the bier, the barber from the village who serves the household and shaves the main mourner; the village barber and other funeral attendants, a Vettiyan or Totti, who carried the *kolli-chatti* (fire pot), which accompanies with *paadai* (the cortege); grave -digger, the village drummers who beat the drum throughout the day and night and the *melam* drummer funeral band.[31] Whatever excess money remains after the payment settlement in the cremation ground is handed over to the deceased family members to settle the other expenses at home.

When all the funeral ceremonies are over, the male family members and relatives from the cremation ground go to a purifying bath near *sudukaadu*, to wash and change clothes completely before entering the house as everything (*kaariyam*) to do with death is ritually impure. Only after taking the purifying bath are the funeral participants entitled by custom and usage to drink even a glass of water or to eat and enter their own house. Then, the female members of the death house clean the entire house to remove the impurities. Apart from this, they purify the house with incense and spices. In most villages, the immediate family remains in intense pollution after the funeral for seven or sixteen days. During the days of ritual impurity, family and close relatives (*udan pankaalis*) stop visiting temples, marriage functions, festivals, and other holy ceremonies. Further, the family members do not arrange marriage functions for one year or any religious festivals celebrated.[32]

The next day, after the cremation of a dead body, the eldest son, along with some of the male family members and relatives, goes to the grave to pour milk and offer flowers to the dead one. If the dead body is fired, they go to a crematory to collect the ashes and the remains. Before collecting the ashes and bones, the sons and relatives of the family walk three times counterclockwise around the ashes and bones while sprinkling milk and water on the ash. In Hindu tradition, the bones are collected individually with

the thumb (*kattai viral*) and ring finger (*mothira viral*) and are placed into an urn.[33] First, the bones of the feet are collected, and then other bones are gathered, working towards the head. After collecting, all the bones in an urn are purified and sealed along with the ashes. They are stored in a monument especially built for this purpose called *samadhi* in a secure location. After some months or even a year later, the family members carry the stored bones and ashes to be poured into one of the holy rivers like the Kaveri or any other sacred water body.[34] Suppose the death happens in the house of the marginalized people; in that case, the '*poteravannan*' washer man for downgraded people and the other lower community funeral servants carry out tasks such as grave-digging and other funeral services. Primarily, the funeral rites are performed by the village's washerman (Vannar) and barber (Ambattan) community. Furthermore, in some villages, Totti, or washerman and barber communities, played significant roles in rituals associated with funeral services. The village barbers and, in some villages, the Vettiyan/ Totti officiate as funeral priests at all Hindu funerals. He acts as 'priest of the cremation ground' on the first day of the funeral ritual is complements.[35] They play a crucial role in preparing the body, decorating the *ther/paadai* accompanying the cortege, digging the grave, removing the cloths and ornaments from the dead body, cutting the threads from the deceased, and shaving the main mourner. Similarly, there are defined roles for the washerman community who provides cloth for the bier and funeral servants who carry the pots of burning embers and provide drummers and female wailers. These service roles involve conventional presentation.[36] In many villages, washermen and barber communities usually led the procession to the place of cremation and made arrangements for the funeral pyre. Every village has a separate common crematorium for each caste group.[37]

MOURNING PERIOD

The length of the mourning period (*thukka kaalam*) depends on the closeness of kin relationships. Hindu mourning lasts one year, during which many ceremonies have to be observed. On the day after the funeral, the chief mourner, accompanied by his relatives and friends, goes to the place consecrated to the burning of the dead. There, he recommences the ceremonies of the previous evening without forgetting the food for the crows and places on the ground the strip of cloth that has been torn from the pall.[38]

Usually, the mourning period is about twelve to sixteen days among the affluent castes and lesser duration in castes those who are involved in daily labour for their earning. The traditional periods of mourning are observed only in rural areas, and more orthodox Hindu communities observe many rituals throughout the year of the death. Nevertheless, there is a race against time in towns, and the mourning period extends for a week and sometimes even less than seven days. During the mourning period, family members of the deceased are not supposed to roam around at night, and they cannot travel to other places for any personal or official work. Celebrations and entertainment of all kinds are prohibited within the family. Further, strict vegetarianism is followed during the entire mourning period.[39]

The house where the death occurred is considered polluted, and cooking is not done for a few days. The immediate relatives or neighbours bring food daily for the mourning family members to their house until the *vaikunta samaradhane*[40] happens (it is done on the 11th day or 13th day, or 16th day). The chief mourner who completed the funeral rites in the graveyard is supposed to not venture outside the house for any purpose, and he is supposed to eat the food offered by relatives and offer little of the same food to the crows and then consumed by the other family members. Generally, after removing the dead body from the house, the female members of the family wash their entire house and surrounding places with water, and a small lamp is kept burning around the clock. At the end of the mourning period, the family members prepare different food items that mostly the deceased like to eat, and the same is offered to the poor section of the people.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *KAARIYAM*

Village people in Tamil Nadu avoid saying that a person is dead; instead, they usually say the person has reached the feet of the god (*iraivanadi chernthaar*), or the world of Lord Shiva (*Sivaloka pathavi*), or that he has reached '*paramapadham*', the abode of Vishnu or '*pallipadi yethinaan*,' i.e., reached the land of dead. It is believed that a person who dies on *Margazhi thiruvaadhirai* day or on an *Ekadasi* day reaches *Sivaloka pathavi* (*iraivanadi*, the feet of the good) directly. Death during a festival occasion is considered unfortunate for the dying person because no music can be played before funeral houses and funeral processions. Another traditional

belief of the Tamils is that death on a Saturday is to lead to another death in the same household. A famous saying in Tamil, '*sanip-ponam thaniye pokathu*,' i.e., a dead body does not go singly on Saturdays. To avoid the effects of a death on a Saturday, a portion of the house where the death has occurred is dismantled, or a new exit gate is created to remove the corpse. Sometimes, a cock or hen is tied to the *paadai* (bier) and buried or cremated with the dead body.

In India, the body is immolated or buried after death, usually within one day. Then, a few days later, an elaborate ceremony called *shraddha* is performed. According to Hindu traditions, the *shraddha* ceremony is performed between the eleventh and thirty-first day after death, mainly depending on caste tradition and the region. In Tamil Nadu, the number of days after the death for the performance of *kaariyam* depends on the person's age. The idea is that the soul of the age-old person (*atma)* takes a long time to free itself from the home and family. During the time between the death and the *kaariyam* ceremony, the household where the person died is considered polluted. In part, the funeral ceremonies are seen as contributing to the merit of the deceased. However, they also pacify the soul so that it will not remain in this world as a ghost but will pass through the Yama's realm (*yamalokam*/*yama camraajyam*).

The final funeral rites or *kaariyam*/*karumakirigai* (*karumaathi satangu*) usually occur after the sixteen days (sometimes on the third day).[41] The recently departed soul, the subtle body known as the *ativahika-sarira,* is believed to go to the world of ghosts and spirits (*preta loka*). The *kaariyam* marks the transition for the soul from the world of ghosts to the abode of the ancestors *(pitru loka*). In *pitru loka* our ancestors are said to have resided until they got a physical body (reincarnate). It is also said that three generations of our ancestors reside in *pitru loka*, waiting to be born again. The *kaariyam* ceremony is the final ritual that marks the end of the mourning period; during that period, many restrictions were imposed on the chief mourner and deceased family members, i.e., cutting their fingernails, combing their hair, wearing jewellery or shoes, reading holy books, visiting temples or attending various celebratory functions, having sex, and cooking their own food. After the '*karuma kirikai*' or *kaariyam* ritual, when the transition is complete, the impurity generated is removed, and mourners are returned to their everyday social life.[42]

Fig.2. Performance of *Kaariyam* rituals by family members in river side (Courtesy: Richard Clarke)

THIVASAM, THE DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Every year, on the day of death, death anniversary celebrations or remembrance gatherings are a common practice among the villagers of Tamil Nadu. It is believed that the dead's soul visits the family once a year, especially on the day of death. On the death anniversary day, the family members, sons and daughters, and close relatives perform an annual ceremony called '*varusha thithi*' (annual ritual), in which '*padaiyal*' is offered to the dead soul. It is whispered that the dead are considered dangerous from the time of death till the '*thivasam*', a Tamil term that refers to the annual celebration. The anniversary celebrations (*varusha-thithi* or *thivasam*) are common among the village people of Tamil Nadu. In many Hindu families, a priest usually performs the *thivasam* rites on the anniversary of the deceased in the family's house. The purpose of '*thivasam*', the post-death rites, is to ensure a smooth passage of the departed soul to heaven.[43] On that day, elaborate

preparations are made by family members for a feast to receive the soul and get its blessings. They prepare different types of food that the deceased likes to eat and offer to him for getting blessings from the soul. The practice of offering food to the departed soul is known as '*padaiyal*' or '*thivasam koduttal*,' which is usually on the deceased's death day. However, the scale of celebration varies according to the celebrant's social status.

Fig.3. *Thivasam* tradition in the end of first year of death (Courtesy: Richard Clarke)

In North India, on the day of *samaradhane* (which is called as *thithi* also or in North India as *choutha*) the photo of the deceased person is opened after purifying rites, reciting sacred hymns from the *Garuda Purana*, reciting the deceased person's *ishta devatha*, conducting a purifying homa and the photo is decorated with all reverence and food is offered to the photo of the deceased by all relatives and friends; usually, people keep raw plantain *kootu* (*sabji*), Brinjal Sambhar (curry), Drumstick Sambhar (curry), a type of green called *avathi soppu* which is made into a *pallya* and Urad Dal vada.

These items are standard for funeral rites; they are cooked in the deceased person's house after the purifying ceremony. Others can bring and offer whatever the deceased person's favourite food was. After the *samaradhane*, there will be *bhajans* till dusk, and songs will be composed by women in praise of the good deeds of the deceased person and sung. Again, until that complete night, the lamp is kept lit continuously. After this *samaradhane*, it is presumed that the soul has liberation from the body, and the deceased person is thought to be permanently gone.[44]

OPPARI SONGS

The *oppari* is a traditional elegy song performed during a death or funeral ceremony in Tamil Nadu by praising the deceased, which is recognized as a cultural outcome to discharge the emotional condition of death. The song is mostly performed by non-professional females or trained male elegy performers from oppressed groups. In villages of Tamil Nadu, the *oppari* songs are traditionally performed by older women within the family or relatives of a dead person, who come to pay their last respect (*iruthi mariyaathai*) to their near and dear ones.[45] They sing songs of lamenting and eulogizing the dead person. *Oppari* songs are often unwritten in a customary manner; they pass the tradition from generation to generation. The lyrics of the *oppari* songs describe the kind of attachment, grief, and tragedy that the family member feels at the person's demise. When they sing *oppari*, the atmosphere becomes gloomy with screams, false repetitions, sobbing, and hoarse breathing of women who sing *oppari*.[46]

The evidence for the origins of *oppari* songs cannot be exactly pinpointed. V. Arasu, an eminent scholar of Tamil literature, claims that 'the *oppari* songs can be as old as the human race'. No existing text provides details and a comprehensive account of its origins, history, and development in Tamil society. Although *oppari* has been documented in ancient Tamil post-Sangam literary texts, particularly from the poetry of *Silappadhikaram* and *Kamba Ramayanam,* it has been marginalised due to the importance given to classical verses. It is even said that Avaiyar, one of the greatest female Tamil poets, sang *oppari* after the death of Athiyaman, the Velir chief of the early *Tamilakam*. Nevertheless, despite its presence in some of the greatest works, it has yet to be addressed in all discourses of literary study. It has also received less academic attention due to the challenge of its categorization.

The songs could be classified under classical music and be assimilated into folk songs. The classicists rejected *oppari* on the grounds of conventional literary and poetic rules. On the other hand, folklorists solely studied the creative abilities of marginalized castes and classes. *Oppari* transcended such boundaries and belonged to all women, irrespective of their social identity. As such, contemporary scholars have placed *oppari* under a new categorization called women's speech acts.

The *oppari* songs in the death funerals are widespread in Tamil Nadu, particularly among the marginalized and land-owning communities. In many villages, women singing *oppari* songs has been predominant among the agricultural communities.[47] Elderly women from the village primarily perform the traditional *oppari* from the demised family by describing the deceased through lamenting.[48] The lamenting are performed with distinct pitches, sounds, and silence. The characteristics of lamenting songs include repetition and selection of lyrics and music.[49] The structure of the *oppari* performance consisted of weeping, screaming, and 'breathing intakes' in between songs by expressing 'long weeping.' Besides performing the actual *oppari* song, the professional performers want more upbeat funerals; their performances will be accompanied by drums, *parai*, aero phones, whistling, and even dance, developing into a celebrated presentation.[50] Y. Srinivas pointed out that "*Oppari*, the Tamil mourning song, is an art of weeping, wailing, and lamenting, which is the folk tradition of Tamil Nadu. The practice of women singing *oppari* is prevalent in rural villages of Tamil Nadu. Mainly, women are involved in performing the *oppari* songs. When they perform, they form a circle, weep, beat their chest, wail, and jump on *parai* music's beats on a family member's death". Their traditional practice of folk-art form is predominantly performed in the southern state of Tamil Nadu and north-eastern parts of Sri Lanka,[51]

Many professional *oppari* singers earn a living by performing the folk tradition at funeral rites. Though it is performed as a conventional practice during the occasion of death, it can also be observed as both an earning process and a cultural element.[52] However, the cultural nuances embedded with *oppari* vanish from its traditional versions; it is considered a mandatory custom for every funeral occasion. Even though this folk tradition has almost reached its stage of extinction, the people in the rural areas of Tamil Nadu are fond of hearing *oppari* songs to drive away their grief.[53] In many

villages, *oppari* is considered a momentous social occasion dedicated to manifesting the outburst of one's sorrow and relieving the family members from grief and the emotional hold of death.[54] Richard Kent Wolf, when he mentions the importance of the *oppari* songs, opines that the mourners recall the distinct qualities of the dead person and the reason for his death in the lament song. The *oppari* singers also describe the personal and public life of the dead person. The singers turn the deceased's ordinary life into extraordinary, pouring the lyrics with emotions, idioms, and metaphors. The singers often create remarkable stories of the dead person. The lyrics of the songs usually describe how the death brought deep sorrow to the family. It also narrates how the deceased family member was a source of support and inspiration for them.[55] Richard further says that "mourning songs are a means of performing and communicating memory, but they are also a means for evoking that feeling of loss associated with the memory of a loved one in a generic sense".[56] F. Klopper opines that "lament is not merely a vehicle for emotional release – it is a multifaceted human emotion." Klopper considers it a medium for expressing intense emotions formed out

Fig.4. Performance of *Oppari* song in villages of Tamil Nadu (Courtesy: Raju)

of extreme pain or grief with the inability to verbalize.[57] Lamenting on the deceased person has two primary purposes. Firstly, it mitigates pain and brings solace to the dead person's family. Secondly, it helps to remember the departed soul and his works.[58]

The women in the villages express their grief over the death of their beloved with the lyrics of *oppari* songs. The mood of the songs was deeply grief-stricken, but in between songs, the women were seen talking generally with each other. They could effortlessly switch the emotional flow of spoken words and sung lyrics on and off. Between songs, they spoke about practical matters, including who had already arrived for condolence and if all the relatives were informed of the demise.[59] They even spoke about their travel there and when they planned to return. Contrary to popular belief, the oppari songs are not merely an emotional outlet but provide a platform for women to speak out against social injustices. The songs allow women to express their discontent against social norms and gender discrimination: successful *oppari* performances are not only a cathartic release but also are effective vehicles of social protests and special appeals for sympathy.

Nowadays, the villagers invite male *oppari* singers to entertain the visitors in the funeral ceremonies. The involvement of transgender in professional *oppari*, also we find across Tamil Nadu, is mainly done for their basic sustenance and livelihood. The *oppari* singers' social position is being marginalized; they have limited space and visibility in *oppari* performances throughout Tamil Nadu. Since the *oppari* song is considered a polluted, discriminated art form, it is performed mainly by the society's socially and economically poor section. Ostensibly, generation after generation, people began to accept *oppari* as an exclusive art form to be performed mainly by oppressed communities.[60] They are mostly from rural society and are merely landless agricultural labourers. They often work as daily wage labourers in the lands and construction works. The chances of getting the offer to perform professional *opparis* are seasonal, unexpected, and unpredictable as this art form is performed only during the death rituals. Death cannot happen often, as *oppari* performers cannot take this profession as their main livelihood. They are forced to look for alternative occupations like daily wage labourers in agricultural lands and other similar occupations.[61]

EXPRESSION OF WOMEN'S FEELINGS IN *OPPARI* SONGS

It is imperative to mention that widows predominantly sang oppari songs to lament and ponder their fate. A widowed woman was considered inauspicious and subjected to severe ostracization in Tamil society. She is forced to give up make-up, colourful clothes, and jewellery; most importantly, her sexual feelings and desires are curbed. The young widows could express her stifled emotions and discontent through *oppari* songs. Occasionally, she could even claim the deceased's property and possessions, which were unquestionably transferred to a male relative. Although the widowed woman could expect no legal alteration, her *oppari* performances were nevertheless permitted, as society valourised the grief of a chaste and subservient woman. The performances had to be meticulously crafted since they were the sole opportunity for an unsatisfied woman to express her longing and desires.

In most cases, *oppari* became a significant avenue for women belonging to the middle-class society. While marginalized women could express themselves through work songs, women of the intermediate castes did not get the privilege to sing in public. Through the *oppari* songs, the women express their inner feelings and emotions. Researcher Paul Greene notes that Kallar women of Tamil Nadu significantly benefitted from *oppari* songs since they could not sing in public.[62] Margaret Trawick further observes that irrespective of social standing, the central theme of all laments was the victimization of the singer by more powerful others.[63] Therefore, although the intensity of discrimination differed from one community to another, all women experienced varying forms of oppression, which they highlighted through *oppari* songs.

Funerals provided a space for women to gather and share each other's mutual pain and frustration. Women obtained greater freedom to express their raw and disheveled emotions in this exclusively female space. Although each individual sang with a distinct pitch and melody, there was unity and synchronization based on mutual understanding and trust. *Oppari* performances were among the few spaces where women could express themselves without scrutiny or surveillance. *Oppari* can be an excellent source for understanding the various challenges faced by Tamil women. The songs are historic, illustrating the various political, social, and cultural factors. An alternative view of history can be discerned from *oppari* songs, and a new narrative can be conceptualized.

CONCLUSION

In the village funeral practices, burial or burning of the dead body is the most recognized mode of corpse disposal among the Tamil Hindus from the early period up to the present. Those who choose to cremate the body are taken to a place near the lake or river, put on a funeral pyre, and burnt. Later, ashes are gathered on the second day and dissolved in the river or lake. For those who prefer to bury the dead body, the body is taken to the *sudukadu* (burial place or burning ground), mostly we find in the southern side of the village and buried at the village graveyard. If a young person dies, saplings of banana plants are attached to the bier to mark the unmarried status. If a child dies, the dead body is carried in a *thottil* (cradle) of new cloth prepared after soaking it in turmeric water. Young persons and children are buried, and only the adults are cremated. In the cremation of older people, many rituals are involved from the day of death to the end of one year.

Further, the death rituals of Tamils in the villages of Tamil Nadu associated with death exhibit their belief in the soul (*atma*), which means the soul's exit from the body. However, the soul only reaches its final destination after performing the final ritual called *kaariyam*. A belief in the existence of hell (*naragam*) and heaven (*sorkkam*) was also noticed among Tamils in the villages. Though the idea of hell and heaven exists in Hinduism, the imagination among the Tamils is more similar to the beliefs of the other regions. Another belief is that the soul's final destination is the world of souls and their ancestors. Accordingly, it is believed that the deceased's soul roams around where the deceased lived and would attempts to help or trouble relatives and neighbours. Helping or troublemaking characterizations of an *atma* are usually determined by people based on the deceased character, like good *atma* and bad *atma*. Ideas of *atma* and its abode could be more precise, and various conceptualizations about this 'final destination' exist.

As Hindus believe in reincarnation, the death rituals are discharged not only for the disposal of the dead body but also to assist the soul in transmigration to the next destination. Hindus and other religious communities perform funeral rituals that ensure comfort to the grieved family and emphasize community living and interpersonal relationships. In human life, death as a significant event becomes a social event in human

societies, as death does not simply denote the cessation of life. When human societies perceived the need for more ritualisation of various social and personal life events to confirm roles, reaffirm authority, and ritualise human inter-connectedness in various ways. They used rituals to attribute social significance to individuals and family events. This led to the integration of people into larger society and helped to instill a sense of belonging. The funeral rites also show the gender bias in the society. Sons, performing funeral rites, have preferred inheritance rights over a wife; similarly, the brother and family have more rights than the daughters.

End Notes:

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14. Dubois, *Hindu Manners Customs,* 547.

15. Om Prakash and Kennedy, *Death Rituals and Change among Hindu Nadars*, 175-76.

16. Mosse, *South Indian Christians*, 464.

17. Mosse, *South Indian Christians*, 464.

18. Om Prakash and Kennedy, *Death Rituals and Change among Hindu Nadars*, 176.

19. Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 248-49.

20. Dubois, *Hindu Manners Customs,* 547-48.

21. Isabella Clark-Deces, "How Dalits Have Changed their Mood at Hindu Funerals: A view from South India," *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Vol. 10 (3), (December 2006): 259.

22. Dubois, *Hindu Manners Customs,* 562.

23. Clark-Deces, *How Dalits Have Changed*, 259-261.

24. Clark-Deces, *How Dalits Have Changed*, 267.

25. *Ashvalayana Samhita* of *Rig-Veda* (400 BCE), a Vedic manual of sacrificial rituals, was composed for a Brahmin priest called Hotar or Hotri, whose primary duty was to invoke the Gods and Goddesses.

26. Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras,* 248-49.

27. Om Prakash and Kennedy, *Death Rituals and Change among Hindu Nadars*, 178.

28. Mosse, *South Indian Christians*, 464.

29. Dubois, *Hindu Manners Customs,* 549.

30. Sahoo, *Rituals of Death in Odisha*, 36.

31. Mosse, *South Indian Christians*, 464.

32. Sahoo, *Rituals of Death in Odisha*, 37.

33. Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*, 260.

34. Sahoo, *Rituals of Death in Odisha*, 39.

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36. Mosse, *South Indian Christians*, 466.

37. Om Prakash and Kennedy, *Death Rituals and Change among Hindu Nadars*, 180.

38. Dubois, *Hindu Manners Customs,* 552.

39. Om Prakash and Kennedy, *Death Rituals and Change among Hindu Nadars*, 178-79.

40. *Vaikunta Samaradhane*, or *Vaikunta Ekadashi*, is an important ritual performed by Hindus to commemorate the merging of the mortal soul with the divine, signifying the ultimate liberation (attain moksha or spiritual liberation) from the cycle of birth and death.

41. Mosse, *South Indian Christians*, 464-65.

42. Mosse, *South Indian Christians*, 465.

43. Sahoo, *Rituals of Death in Odisha*, 43.

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EXPLORING DEATH RITUALS IN EARLY JAMMU AND KASHMIR: UNVEILING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SATI STONE AND HERO STONE TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT

This abstract provides an overview of the death rituals practised in Jammu and Kashmir during early times, with a special focus on the Sati stone and Hero stone traditions. Jammu and Kashmir, known for its rich cultural heritage, exhibited unique customs and practices surrounding death and mourning. The study explores the religious, social, and cultural aspects of death rituals prevalent in the region, with particular emphasis on the Sati stone and Hero stone traditions. The Sati stone tradition involved the commemoration of women who self-immolated on their husbands' funeral pyres, seen as acts of supreme devotion. Sati Stones served as enduring memorials, bearing intricate carvings and inscriptions that honoured these courageous women and reflected the prevailing societal norms and values of marital loyalty. The Hero stone tradition celebrated the heroic deeds of warriors who lost their lives in battle. Adorned with detailed engravings and inscriptions, Hero stones stood as eternal testaments to their valour and served as markers of their sacrifice. These stones showcased Jammu and Kashmir's martial heritage and spirit, inspiring future generations. Drawing on historical records, archaeological findings, and cultural texts, this research aims to provide insights into the significance and symbolism of the Sati Stone and Hero stone traditions in the context of early Jammu and Kashmir's death rituals. It highlights the religious beliefs, social practices, and cultural dynamics associated with these traditions, shedding light on their impact on the region's cultural identity and historical legacy. The Sati stone and Hero stone traditions offer glimpses into the sociocultural fabric of the region, emphasizing the enduring importance of these rituals in the collective memory and cultural heritage of Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: Jammu and Kashmir, Sati stone, Hero stone, commemoration, martial heritage

Dr Amita Gupta

INTRODUCTION

The vast cultural and historical landscape of early Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is embroidered with intricate rituals and traditions that tell the story of a rich, diverse, and complex society. Among these, the death rituals, particularly the practices surrounding the Sati stones and Hero stones, command a significant place, serving as intriguing gateways to understanding the sociocultural and religious life of the region. These enigmatic stones are not just funerary artifacts; they are historical documents inscribed with the region's societal norms, religious beliefs, and cultural values. In the elaborate anthology of artifacts cataloguing human attempts to confront and commemorate mortality, the Sati and Hero stones of Jammu and Kashmir hold a peculiar yet significant place. To unveil their cultural richness and sociological implications is to walk through an open gallery of ancient human sentiments, where every inscription, every stroke of the chisel, narrates a solemn tale of death, valor, sacrifice, and societal norms.

Gupta (2020) illuminates this cultural phenomenon meticulously in his seminal work, explicating the cultural and historical roots that gave birth to these rich traditions[1]. He presents these stones as dynamic 'documents of social memory,' each carving echoing the collective consciousness of a particular era, refracted through the prism of individual stories and societal norms. The incorporation of Sati and Hero stones into the cultural fabric of J&K is not merely an accidental offspring of human emotional expression. Rather, it's an ingrained part of a longstanding tradition, systematically recorded in ancient texts such as Kalhana's Rajatarangini, translated with adept insight by (Stein 2009). This monumental work is not only a historical record but also a rich narrative tapestry, weaving together the complex strands of religion, society, politics, and individual destinies of the time.

Stein's translations unearth the depths of the practice of Sati and the celebration of heroes in a society heavily influenced by its religious and sociopolitical ethos. Moreover, his analytical narrative delineated in Kalhana's Rajatarangini, Vol II, unveils the intrinsic connection between societal norms, political climate, and the proliferation of these death rituals. Historical narratives and archaeological records harmoniously converge in the echoing silence of these stones, each carving an eloquent testament to the vibrant life, tumultuous death, and the solemn commemoration rituals of the early inhabitants of J&K. Joshi (1990) complements this convergence

with a detailed examination of archaeological findings, presenting a layered understanding of the physical and metaphorical dimensions of these traditions.

Death, in the cultural syntax of early J&K, was not a terminal event but a transformative passage. The Sati stones, inscribed with the silent screams and stoic acceptance of widows immolating themselves, do not just recount tales of tragic ends but illuminate the intricate matrix of gender, power, religion, and societal expectations. Each stone is an unuttered dialogue, a silent narrative unfolding the multidimensional aspects of womanhood, sanctity, and sacrifice. On the other side, Hero stones stand as stoic sentinels of time, echoing the valour and heroism of warriors. Each inscription is a verse of an unsung ballad, each image a frame of an unscripted epic, narrating the valor, triumph, and often, the tragic demise of heroes. These stones are not mere commemorative artifacts; they are the tangible imprints of an intangible ethos, where valor and sacrifice are not just celebrated but are ingrained elements of societal identity.

This paper aims to weave through these intricate narratives, unfolding the stories etched in stone and interpreting the silent dialogues that have transcended centuries. We are not just exploring death rituals; we are unearthing the societal psyche, religious doctrines, and cultural narratives that gave birth to, sustained and were in turn, moulded by these rituals. It is a journey through time, where each Sati and Hero stone encountered is a milestone, marking the intricate pathways of cultural evolution, religious transformations, and societal adaptations. In the echoing silence of these inscribed stones, we seek the resonating voices of a civilization, unveiling, in each inscription, the complex, rich, and enigmatic tapestry of early Jammu and Kashmir.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, *Exploring Death Rituals in Early Jammu and Kashmir: Unveiling the Significance of Sati stone and Hero stone Traditions*, a qualitative research design underpinned by a multidisciplinary approach is utilized. Field visits to specific sites in Jammu and Kashmir facilitated direct observation and documentation of Hero and Sati stones, complemented by interviews with local communities and experts to glean deeper insights. Extensive literature reviews and archival research, including resources from

the Archaeological Survey of India and historical texts like Rajatarangini, supplemented the primary data. The analytical process involved an iconographic analysis of the stones, a comparative cross-regional study, and a temporal analysis to trace the evolution of artistic styles and narratives. Furthermore, a contextual analysis integrated the socio-cultural, historical contexts, and local oral traditions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the stones' multifaceted significance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The multifaceted death rituals and the associated artefacts in the Jammu and Kashmir region have been the subject of both awe and scholarly examination. The confluence of history, culture, and societal norms, as evidenced in the traditions surrounding sati stone and hero stone, is deeply rooted in the region's rich past. In this revised literature review, we delve into the complex tapestry of scholarly works that provide nuanced perspectives on these practices.

In Gupta's seminal work, a detailed examination of memorial stones in the Jammu region underscores their role as active repositories of societal norms and transitional epochs (Gupta, 2020). These stones, etched with the sorrows and valor of their times, bring to light the intertwined narratives of death, honor, and memory.

Stein's translation of Rajatarangini emerges as another cornerstone, offering a historical journey through an era marked by complex death rituals and societal narratives (Stein, 2009). Here, the vivid portrayal of Sati and the valor commemorated in hero stones is situated within the broader societal and cultural constructs of the time.

The recent discovery of ancient stone sculptures and idols in Jammu's Doda district by villagers opens a new chapter in understanding the region's historical and cultural complexity (Khajuria, 2023). These artefacts, suggestive of a rich yet untapped historical narrative, point towards a need for exhaustive archaeological and anthropological studies. Mathawan's exploration into the mysterious horsemen of Jammu & Kashmir unveils another layer of historical artefacts and their intrinsic connections to death rituals and societal norms of the era (Mathawan, accessed 01/09/2023). In the domain of primary research, field interviews and ethnographic insights

from local historians and residents have provided a wealth of information. The oral narratives, complemented by archaeological findings and visual chronicles, forge a bridge between the tangible and intangible elements of history (Personal Interview, 2023; Ethnographic Interviews, 2023).

In a broader perspective, Kumar's analytical insights into stone inscriptions across North India provide a contextual backdrop to understand the specific narratives encapsulated in the Sati and Hero stones of Jammu & Kashmir (Kumar, 2018).

Mehta's detailed examination of the roles and statuses of women in ancient Kashmir offers a crucial lens to understand the complex social and cultural dynamics underlying the Sati stone traditions (Mehta, 2020).

Pandit's narrative *"Warriors of the Valley"* and Shah's comprehensive examination of archaeological findings in the Himalayan region serve as crucial anchors, connecting the multifarious death rituals and associated artefacts to the broader cultural and historical narratives of the region (Pandit, 2019; Shah, 2021). In this enriched narrative, the complex interplay of societal norms, historical epochs, cultural transitions, and individual destinies comes to light. The Hero and Sati stones, silent yet potent narrators, offer glimpses into an era where death was a passage intricately woven with the threads of society, religion, and culture. As this exploration ventures deeper, it stands fortified by the foundational works of scholars like Gupta, Stein, Joshi, and others. Each perspective, each narrative, contributes to a more profound, nuanced understanding of the death rituals in early Jammu & Kashmir-a narrative etched in stone, echoing through the annals of time.

Incorporating contemporary findings and scholarly works, including Khajuria's revelations of the ancient stone sculptures in Jammu's Doda (2023) and Mathawan's insights into the mysterious horsemen of Jammu & Kashmir, enriches the context and depth of the ongoing discourse (Mathawan, accessed 01/09/2023). Lastly, Shah's comprehensive work on *"Archaeological Finds in the Himalayan Region"* (2021) serves as a bridge between primary and secondary data. Shah not only sheds light on the tangible artifacts related to the discussed traditions but places them within a wider Himalayan context.

1. Hero Stone in Kashmir

In the serene and mystical landscapes of Kashmir, amidst the whispering valleys and majestic mountains, lies an untold narrative carved in the silent but eloquent hero stone*s*. These ancient artifacts, marked with intricate inscriptions, are silent sentinels of history, preserving the valor and glory of bygone warriors. Every etching on the stone unfolds a tale of bravery, a dance of shadows and light where ancient heroes, though long gone, continue to live, their spirit echoing in the timeless valleys of Kashmir. Unearthed in the realms of Arin and Mattan, these stones invite us on a journey back in time, offering a glimpse into an era where heroism and artistry converged, etching epic tales of gallantry in the immortal embrace of stone. Each hero stone is a chapter of an untold epic, where the essence of Kashmir's glorious past awaits to be discovered and revered.

2. Hero Stone in Arin

The revelation of a Hero stone in Arin (Fig. 1) Bandipore is not just a significant archaeological find but also a rich tapestry weaving together the complex sociocultural and historical narratives of the region. Yaseen Tuman's generous sharing of the images brings to light an artifact that stands as a silent yet eloquent testament to the gallantry and valor of warriors of a bygone era.

The Hero stone is more than a mere stone; it's a narrative chiseled in stone, echoing the tales of bravery and sacrifice that are otherwise lost in the annals of history. The intricate carvings, the silent inscriptions, each a verse of an unsung ballad, take us on a journey back in time when valor was etched not just in stone but in the very ethos of the society. In the serene and silent locales of Arin, this stone stands juxtaposed against the tranquil environs as if a stark reminder of the tumultuous and brave battles once fought here. It brings to life the echoes of the clashing swords, the gallant warriors, and the ultimate sacrifice that marks the spirit of a true hero.

Comparative studies, such as the detailed exploration of the Sati stones of Kashmir, pave the way for a nuanced understanding of these artifacts. They are not isolated pieces of rock adorned with carvings but are interconnected relics that, when studied in unison, unveil a grand narrative. A narrative that is deeply interwoven with the social fabric, the

Fig. 1. The intricately Carved "*Hero stone*" in Arin, Bandipore - This exquisite artefact, adorned with detailed inscriptions and designs, stands as a testament to the valiant warriors of ancient times.

cultural ethos, and the historical evolution of Kashmir.

This newly discovered Hero stone adds another piece to the complex jigsaw puzzle of history. Every carving and every inscription is a clue, leading the discerning eye deeper into the intricate labyrinth of history, unveiling layer after layer of the enigmatic past. The stone is not just a commemorative edifice but a doorway, an entrance into the enigmatic world of heroes long gone yet immortalized forever in stone. As we delve deeper into the study of such stones, we are not just archaeologists or historians; we are detectives of time, unraveling mysteries encrypted in stone, each discovery leading not just to answers but unveiling a plethora of questions, each question a pathway to another discovery, and thus the journey of unearthing history continues.

In conclusion, the Hero stone of Arin is not a solitary find but a significant marker in the continuous journey of exploring, understanding, and interpreting the rich, diverse, and intricate history of the Kashmir Valley. (Fig. 1) Every etching is a silent verse of an epic ballad, every inscription a silent echo of gallant roars, every stone a chapter of history unveiling the valor, the sacrifice, and the indomitable spirit of warriors of yore, immortalized forever, not just in stone, but in the very soul of the valley.

3. Hero Stone in Mattan

One such Hero stone resides quietly yet profoundly at Mattan. This stone is a hidden gem amidst the revered Shiva *Ling* and the enigmatic royal fish with a golden earring. While the tale of the fish, as narrated by the author's Nani, imbibes the location with an aura of mythological essence and grandeur, the hero stone awaits its due recognition and exploration. The transition from the observer's childhood, marked by curiosity and the inability to swim, to adulthood punctuates the revelation of the stone's presence. It underscores the stone's overlooked existence amidst myths

Fig. 2. Hero stone at Mattan - This image captures the enigmatic Hero stone nestled beside the revered Shiva *Ling* at the sacred spring in Mattan, Kashmir. (After, Vinayak Razdan 2016)

and prominent religious symbols. This personal journey mirrors the broader academic and cultural negligence of such historical artifacts. The silence surrounding these stones is as profound as the tales they potentially narrate, echoing the gallantry and valor of warriors long passed.

There is a palpable absence of academic research on the Hero stones scattered across Kashmir. These stones, silent yet eloquent, hold within them unuttered stories of ancient warriors, narrated not in words but intricate carvings, each marking the death of a warrior in battle. The stones are symbolic commemorative artifacts epitomizing honor, valor, and the ultimate sacrifice.

The observer's revelation about the existence of a hero stone at Mattan accentuates an academic void. The stone, anonymous yet bearing testament to a warrior's valiance, coexists with the iconic Shiva *Ling* yet remains untouched by academic inquiry or cultural spotlight. This absence of scholarly attention points to a broader neglect of specific historical artifacts that are integral to understanding the complex and rich tapestry of Kashmir's past. Comparative studies could provide significant insights into the cultural, historical, and social narratives embedded within these stones. The interplay of mythology, religion, and history, as epitomized by the juxtaposition of the Shiva *Ling*, the mythical fish, and the hero stone at Mattan, can offer multidimensional perspectives on Kashmir's cultural heritage. Incorporating studies like those of Gupta (2020), which delve into the memorial stones of Jammu, could serve as a foundational base for further exploration in Kashmir. Gupta's work on the social memory encapsulated within the stones of Jammu highlights the intrinsic connection between these artifacts and the collective consciousness of the region's populace. Similarly, the nuanced translations and interpretations of ancient texts by Stein (2009) could be instrumental in deciphering the inscriptions and iconography of the hero stones.

To pave the way for a comprehensive understanding of these stones, multidisciplinary approaches incorporating archaeology, history, art, and cultural studies could be instrumental. Unraveling the mysteries embedded within these stones could not only illuminate the life and times of ancient warriors but also enrich the global understanding of Kashmir's multifaceted heritage, where myths, legends, history, and artistry converge in silent yet eloquent testimony of times long passed.

4. Sati Stones in Kashmir:

In the enchanted realms of Kashmir, the Sati stones stand as silent yet powerful narrators of a poignant chapter in history. Nestled amidst the lush landscapes, these carved stones speak of the ultimate sacrifice, echoing the resilience and grace of women from ancient times. The sati stones are more than inanimate carvings; they are testimonies to the lives and legacies of women who transcended the ephemeral to etch their existence into eternity. Every inscription tells a tale of unwavering devotion, a dance of the soul that defies the boundaries of life and death. In the silent whispers of the wind and the serene embrace of the mountains, the stories woven into these sati stone*s* continue to resonate, a testament to the indomitable spirit and grace of the women of Kashmir. Each stone is a chronicle, an eternal echo of love, loss, and lore amidst the transcendent beauty of the valley.

Fig. 3. This stone slab at Buniyar, adorned with the etching of a horseman and a woman in the upper panel, unveils the enigmatic world of India's 'Sati-stones,' narrating silent tales of love, sacrifice, and immortalization. *(After, Vinayak Razdan, 2015)*

5. Buniyar Temple

The presence of another set of Sati stones in Kashmir unveils a deep, intriguing layer of the region's history, casting a spotlight on the enigmatic and often grim traditions of the past. These stones, discovered in the Buniyar Temple, present themselves as silent testaments to the ancient ritual of Sati. Nestled within the temple's colonnades, these sculpted slabs resonate with the echoes of a time when women, shrouded in tragic grandeur, immolated themselves upon their husbands' demise.

One distinct stone at Buniyar bears the intricate carvings of a horseman and a woman, a familiar representation reminiscent of sati stones across India. (Fig. 3) Despite the haunting beauty engraved into each stone, they encapsulate a history of anguish, where the ritual of Sati was a solemn ode to the departed. Kashmir, known as *Satidesh* for its mythical origins rooted in the narrative of Sati, the first wife of Shiva, holds no collective

Fig. 4. Two additional stone slabs housed at Buniyar are silent witnesses to an ancient era, their intricate carvings revealing untold stories of valour, tradition, and cultural legacy that still resonate through the annals of time. *(After, Vinayak Razdan 2015)*

memory of this practice among the Pandit community. Yet, these stones, eloquent in their silence, tell tales of women who were immortalized through self-sacrifice.

Daya Ram, during his monumental survey in 1915, accentuated the presence of these enigmatic stones, marking them as probable sati-stones. Characterized by intricate designs that divided the slabs into compartments, each stone unveiled a narrative of Bhairava and a female figure encased in eternal stillness between a bird and a dog, symbolic of the divine. (Fig. 4)

In the shadow of Kashmir's enchanting landscapes, these stones are reminiscent of the rituals in the neighboring Himachal's Mandi, where memorials for fallen warriors and their self-immolated wives stand tall. Each slab is a cryptic narrative, unraveling tales of an era where native belief systems and burgeoning Islamic traditions wove a complex tapestry of death, honor, and memory. Yet, amidst the mystical allure and the silent stories whispered by the wind, the Sati-stones of Kashmir are melancholic monuments to a bygone era. An era marked by the juxtaposition of heroic gallantry and haunting sacrifice, immortalized in stone, bearing witness to a history where tales of valor and tragedy were eternally entwined.

Thus, each stone at Buniyar, and others scattered across the mesmerizing vistas of Kashmir, stand not just as artistic masterpieces but as eerie silhouettes against the backdrop of time, echoing the resonant cries and solemn songs of Satis - women who became legends, engraved in the eternal embrace of stone. The enigmatic narrative of the Sati stones, woven with tales of anguish and immortalization, extends its ghostly fingers to the exhibits within the SPS Museum in Srinagar. (Fig. 5) Here, some memorial slabs stand as quiet witnesses to the poignant and unsettling dance of life and death. Adorned with intricate carvings, they weave stories of dead men and their dead wives; tales steeped in the dark romance of war, bloodshed, and self-immolation. They are not just etchings on stone but echoes of heart-rending episodes narrated in the ancient text of Rajatarangini. During the administration of Dewan Kirpa Ram between 1826 and 1830, a chilling resurgence of the ancient practice of Sati haunted the valleys of Kashmir. Influenced, perhaps, by the Sikhs and Punjabi Hindus, the Kashmiri Pandits, too, embraced this morbid tradition once more. Each memorial slab at the SPS Museum narrates

these silent stories of love, sacrifice, and tragedy - they are epitaphs of a time when love transcended the barriers of life and plunged into the fiery embrace of death.

These ancient memorials, frozen in the silent corridors of the museum, are spectral echoes of a turbulent past. Each engraving, each inscription, is a sonnet of love and death, a vivid depiction of heroic men and the wives who joined them in the afterlife, painting a grim yet poignant narrative of honor and sacrifice. As one delves deeper into the mystical allure of these stones, a sojourn to Verinag unveils yet another chapter of this silent saga. Amidst the serene beauty that defines Verinag, the stones, with their haunting engravings, cast a contrasting shadow of mystery and melancholy. They are silent sentinels of history, echoing the unsung ballads of heroism and the tragic elegance of Sati.

Each slab, whether within the silent embrace of the SPS Museum or the mesmerizing landscapes of Verinag, is a testament to a past where the fires of Sati illuminated the dark nights. Amidst the celestial beauty of Kashmir, these stones stand as reminders of a time when love, honor, and tragedy were eternally entwined, painting a narrative as hauntingly beautiful as it is tragic.

6. Memorial stones of Jammu

Fig. 5. The memorial slabs at SPS Museum in Srinagar, intricately carved, tell tales of lives lived with courage and devotion, offering a poignant glimpse into the rich tapestry of history, culture, and traditions that define a bygone era. *(After, Vinayak Razdan 2015)*

Fig. 6. The Sati stone at Verinag, each etching narrating an untold story, stands as timeless testimonies to the enduring legacy of ancient customs *(After, Vinayak Razdan 2015)*

In the historic landscapes of Jammu, a hero stone stands stoic, embodying the timeless tales of bravery and honor. It is a stone yet a saga, narrating the valor of warriors who once roamed these lands, their spirits as indomitable as the majestic terrain that cradles their memories. Each inscription is a verse of courage, each carving a silent echo of triumphant roars and clashing swords. Amidst the natural splendor and ancient architecture of Jammu, this hero stone is a sentinel of history, a confluence of art and narrative, where each etching unveils a chapter of bravery, echoing the undying legacy of heroes who are immortalized not just in stone, but in the

collective memory of the region. The literature on memorial stones and the cultural practices surrounding them in the Jammu region, as elucidated by Dr. Lalit Gupta, presents a comprehensive examination of the social, cultural, and spiritual dynamics intrinsic to the Dogra community (Gupta, 2017). Gupta's work navigates through the intricacies of memorial stones, which stand as testimonies to the region's distinct identity, language, and traditional ways of living despite political unrest. According to Gupta, there are eloquent markers of the valiant acts of self-sacrifice and heroism that are deeply embedded in the collective memory of the Dogras, being perpetuated through generations via folklore and ballads (Dutta 1987, 342). Folk singers, known as Gardi, Yogi, and Daraes, play a pivotal role in the preservation and transmission of these valiant stories, encapsulating a profound sense of honor and chivalry that is revered within the community (Sharma 1965, 29).

Gupta's exploration unveils a multifaceted view of these memorial stones, encompassing a rich tapestry of Karakaan and *Baran–long* narrative poems and ballads that immortalize the esteemed virtues and heroic deeds of notable figures (Nirmohi 1982, 22). The intricate interplay between the historical, legendary, and imaginative themes within these ballads underscores the intricate complexity and depth of Dogra's oral tradition (Dutta 1987, 342-343).

A closer examination of the types of Karakaan reveals an intricate classification, ranging from Puranic Ballads that revolve around Brahmanical gods and goddesses to those of Folk and Family Deities (Sharma 1965, 36). Each narrative intricately weaves the divine and the human, underscoring the integral connection between the spiritual and earthly realms (Atrey 2008, 31).

Baraan, the ballads of heroism, further exemplifies the valor and courage that defines the Dogra warriors. Each narrative is a harmonious blend of historical, yogic, and love ballads, each contributing to the intricate mosaic of the community's cultural and historical legacy (Sharma 1965, 30). The memorial stones, termed Mohras, unveil a nuanced perspective of the Dogra's spiritual landscape (Atrey 2008, 32). These are not merely physical structures but are imbued with profound spiritual significance, serving as a bridge between the living and the departed, the earthly and the divine. Gupta's narrative then transcends into the visual and artistic

realm, unearthing the aesthetic dimensions of the Jammu memorial stones (Gupta, 2017). The artistic evolution, from the classical 'Margi' traditions to a predominant folk idiom, encapsulates the dynamic and evolving artistic expressions that have been intricately intertwined with the region's historical and cultural trajectories. The diverse iconography of hero and sati stones and their strategic placement in specific locales – near water sources, under trees, and in temples – accentuates their spiritual and cultural significance (Atrey 2008, 32). The evolution of *dehris,* small memorial shrines, marks a distinct shift in the material and design of these spiritual edifices, reflecting the sociocultural transformations over the years.

Gupta's exploration is not merely an academic inquiry but a profound journey into the soul of the Dogra community (Gupta, 2017). The memorial stones, with their intricate carvings, diverse forms, and deep-rooted spiritual and cultural significance, stand as silent yet eloquent testimonies to a community's unwavering adherence to its values, traditions, and beliefs amidst the tumultuous waves of time. Gupta's work, enriched by its profound insights and intricate examinations, beckons for a deeper exploration and understanding. The memorial stones of the Jammu region are not isolated artifacts but are interwoven into the cultural, social, and spiritual fabric of the Dogra community. Each stone, each carving, each narrative, is a living testimony, echoing the valiant echoes of the past, and inviting future generations into a profound dialogue with their heritage. Each stone stands as an unyielding bridge between the past and the future, the earthly and the divine, the individual and the community – a silent guardian of a legacy that transcends the ephemeral dance of time. As an exception to the above statement, the oral art forms of tribal and nomad communities of Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir contain a number of ballads of folk heroes (Dutta 1987, 343).

7. Ramban Memorial Stone

The exploration of death rituals and artistic representations in early Jammu and Kashmir is further enriched by the enigmatic presence of the Ramban Memorial Stone, located two kilometers from the village of Gool in the area known as Ghoragali, or Horses pass. (Fig. 7) The statues, often found in streams and utilized for mundane purposes such as washing clothes, are enshrouded in mystery, their origins largely unknown to the local

residents. To some, these artistic renderings serve as cryptic traffic signs, guiding the caravans of a bygone era that traversed the region during the times of Mahabharata (Mathawan).

Nestled within the diverse cultural landscape of Gool Gulabgarh, an area marking the transitional point between the Jammu and Kashmir regions, these stone edifices depict intricate scenes of horsemen, appearing as warriors embarking upon a campaign. The artistry, rich in detail and symbolic narratives, emanates a Bactrian influence, offering a unique contrast to the prevalent Indic styles of the era (Science First Hand, 2018).

Each horseman, armed and poised, is a silent testament to the rich tapestry of historical narratives, cultural exchanges, and complex power dynamics that have shaped the region. The variety in the figures, some portraying local deities, others adorned with geometric shapes, infuses

Fig. 7. Panoramic view of Ghora Gali site along the Gool-Sangaldan road *(After Live History)*

Fig. 8: Stone horses of mounted warrior *(After, Science First Hand, 2018)*

the site with an aura of enigmatic allure, beckoning the onlooker into a world where art, history, and myth converge (Mathawan). Yet, amidst the artistic grandeur and historical significance, a narrative of neglect and deterioration unfolds. The Ghora Gali site, home to over 200 of these meticulously crafted horsemen, bears the scars of time, neglect, and environmental adversities. The absence of preservation efforts and the palpable neglect by the Archaeological Survey of India cast a shadow over these historical treasures, accentuating the urgency for comprehensive research, preservation, and exploration (Matawan). In the intricate interplay of stone, artistry, and silent narratives, the Ramban Memorial stone and the enigmatic horsemen of Ghora Gali emerge as vital components in the exploration of death rituals, artistic expressions, and cultural amalgamations in early Jammu and Kashmir. Their silent yet eloquent narratives, etched in stone, beckon for recognition, exploration, and preservation, promising insights into the uncharted terrains of historical, cultural, and social landscapes of the region.

8. Doda Memorial Stone

In the exploration of historical death rituals and stone artistry in early Jammu and Kashmir, another significant discovery has been made in the village of Siwli in Bhallesa, situated in the Doda district. This remarkable

finding comprises ancient stone sculptures, idols, and structures, unveiling a hidden chapter of the region's historical narrative. (Fig. 10). The unearthing occurred unexpectedly as villagers were engaged in digging a basement for a memorial. Situated 70 kilometers from the district headquarters of Doda, the village of Siwli became the epicenter of this discovery. (Fig. 9**)** Delving approximately 10 feet into the earth, the villagers uncovered 11 stone water pipes, two small ponds intricately constructed from curved stone plates, an idol, and several ancient stone sculptures. As the site awaits an official survey by the Archaeology Survey of India (ASI), the discovered artifacts beckon with the promise of unveiling nuanced insights into the region's past. Each sculpture, idol, and stone structure serves as a testament to the profound historical, cultural, and artistic legacy ingrained in the soils of Jammu and Kashmir. The Doda Memorial Stone and associated artifacts offer yet another perspective in the multifaceted exploration of death rituals, artistic heritage, and cultural amalgamations in this enigmatic region.

The juxtaposition of historical artifacts, the anticipation of comprehensive research, and the unveiling of silent narratives promise to enrich our understanding of early Jammu and Kashmir. These ancient artifacts, resurfacing from the depths of time, are poised to weave new threads into the intricate tapestry of history, culture, and artistry that defines this region. The silent stones, adorned with the echoes of bygone eras, await their narration in the annals of historical scholarship, promising revelations that transcend temporal and spatial confines.

9. Sati stones of Jammu:

Amidst the verdant valleys and majestic terrains of Jammu, there lies a silent testament to the lives and sacrifices of women immortalized in the form of sati stones. These inscribed memorials, engraved with intricate designs and inscriptions, weave a narrative of devotion and sacrifice that is as haunting as it is beautiful. Each stone, a canvas of enigmatic artistry, narrates tales of women who have become one with the elements, their spirits echoing in the winds that sweep across the enchanting landscapes of Jammu. These stones stand as silent sentinels, guarding the poignant tales of Sati, a practice where devotion and tragedy intermingle, casting a shadow of enigmatic allure over the historical and cultural tapestry of the region. Every inscription, every carving, unveils a tale where love,

sacrifice, and tragedy are inseparably entwined, echoing the unsung ballads of women whose lives are eternally inscribed in the annals of history.

Sati Memorial at Udhampur

Fig. 9. Stone sculpture *(After, Hindustan Times, March 2, 2023)*

Fig. 10. Warrior stone sculpture *(After, Hindustan Times, March 2, 2023)*

The Tragic Legacy of Sati: Unraveling the Fate of Raja Suchet Singh's Queens:

The demise of Raja Suchet Singh, a pivotal character ingrained in the historical tapestry of Jammu and Kashmir, unveils a complex, multifaceted exploration of death rituals that have been intimately interwoven into the region's cultural fabric. The tragic narrative of Raja Suchet Singh's (Fig. 11) wives, caught in the web of devotion, societal norms, and overwhelming grief, is a testament to the enduring legacy of Sati practices. As detailed in the historical accounts by Manu Khajuria, the prevalence of Sati was deeply entrenched among the Rajput families of Jammu. (Khajuria, 2020) The ritualistic self-immolation of the widows, steeped in convoluted emotions and societal expectations, highlights a complex interplay of power dynamics, gender roles, and cultural imperatives.

The Samadhis, erected in memory of the women who perished in the flames of Sati, stand as silent witnesses to the poignant narratives of love, loss, and sacrifice. (Fig. 12) Each structure, adorned with intricate inscriptions and artistic renditions, narrates a tale of devotion and tragedy that transcends temporal confines. (Choudhary, 2020) In contrast to the somber echoes of Sati, the hero stone traditions of Jammu and Kashmir unveil another layer of the region's mortuary customs. The stones, often engraved with heroic acts of valiance and bravery, serve as eternal commemorations of warriors who met their end in the battlefield. (Bingley, 2008)

Through an intricate analysis of literary works, historical accounts, and archaeological findings, this paper aims to deconstruct the underlying narratives, sociocultural contexts, and historical trajectories that have shaped the sati and hero stone traditions of early Jammu and Kashmir. In doing so, it seeks to unveil the nuanced complexities, unspoken narratives, and enduring legacies that these practices have imprinted upon the region's cultural, historical, and social landscapes. In the intricate dance of death, devotion, and duty, the lives and deaths of Raja Suchet Singh's wives are emblematic of the complex intersections of power, gender, and societal norms. Their narratives, etched into the annals of history and immortalized in stone, continue to echo the untold stories, unvoiced sentiments, and unbridled passions that have shaped the enduring legacy of Jammu and Kashmir's death rituals. (Choudhary, 2020)

10.   Sati Stone at Manwal

In the compelling narrative of death rituals in early Jammu and Kashmir, the prominence of Sati stones captures the intricate dynamics of mourning, heroism, and artistry. One such prominent artifact is the Sati Stone located
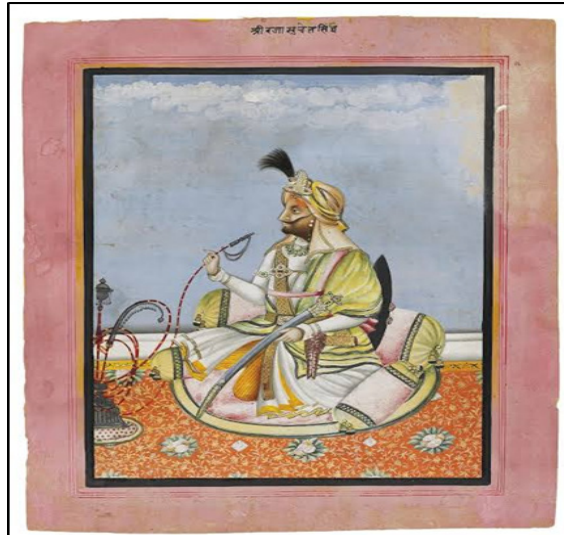

Fig. 11. Raja Suchet Singh Dogra (After, Nakul Rana 2021)

Fig. 12. Samadhi of Maharani at the site where the sati was performed. Mausoleum outside the Ramnagar Fort, district Udhampur *(After Director General Archaeological Survey of India 2019)*

at Manwal, a testament to the exquisite craftsmanship and the profound narratives woven into the fabric of the region's cultural and historical landscapes.

The Manwal Sati stone, with its dimensions of 37cm in length, 48cm in width, and 15cm in height, unveils a narrative marked by profound artistry and poignant emotional resonance (Archaeological Survey of India, Srinagar Circle). (Fig. 13)The intricate relief scene, brought to life through deep carving, encapsulates a world where artistry and emotion converge. The stone reveals a horse, adorned in a beautifully designed gown-like dress, ridden by a warrior who brandishes a spear in his left hand and controls the reins with his right.Yet, amidst the visual narration of valor, there lies a silent testimony to the tragedy of Sati. The elegantly depicted scene includes palki carriers, who bear upon their shoulders a palki containing a highly ornamented lady in a seated posture, adorned with an earring. It is a poignant reminder of the woman's journey to the flames, her silent sacrifice echoing the complex interplay of cultural norms, individual agency, and societal expectations that characterize the practice of Sati in this region.

Despite the damage to the horseman's face, the narrative encapsulated within this sati stone remains as eloquent as ever, echoing the silent yet potent voices of those who embraced death with an enigmatic amalgamation of resignation, defiance, and devotion. Each stroke of the chisel, every intricately carved detail, unveils a society deeply entrenched in complex rituals of death, where narratives of heroism and sacrifice are eternally etched in stone, and thereby, in collective memory. This artifact, catalogued under the reference number GM-SCJ-JK-1373190 by the Archaeological Survey of India, Srinagar Circle, emerges as a pivotal point of exploration in this paper, offering nuanced insights into the complex, multifaceted world of death rituals in early Jammu and Kashmir (Archaeological Survey of India, Srinagar Circle).

DISCUSSION

The integration of the beautifully inscribed and intricately designed hero and sati stones of both Kashmir and Jammu regions presents a rich tapestry of insights that contribute significantly to our understanding of the complex death rituals and the historical context in early Jammu and Kashmir. This section provides an in-depth discussion on the synthesis of findings elucidated from the detailed examination of these ancient artifacts, and the intertwined narratives of heroism, sacrifice, and cultural norms they convey.

HERO STONES: NARRATIVES OF VALOR

Fig. 13. Archaeological Survey of India, Srinagar Circle *(After National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities)*

The intricate details captured in the hero stones of Arin and Mattan in Kashmir present a vibrant visual narrative. The artistry and inscriptions embedded in these stones, as vividly described, are not merely artistic expressions but serve as a nuanced narrative medium. They immortalize the gallantry and valor of ancient warriors, effectively turning each stone into a silent yet eloquent chronicle of individual and collective heroism.

This resonates strongly with the enigmatic allure of the hero stone found in the historical landscapes of Jammu, embodying similar tales of bravery and honour.

The discovery and exploration of these hero stones signify a notable advancement in our comprehension of the sociocultural dynamics of the era. They underscore the societal valorization of martial prowess and bravery, where narratives of individual heroism are intricately woven into the collective cultural memory. This aspect is further highlighted in the examination of the Ramban Memorial Stone and the Doda Memorial Stone, providing a diverse and multifaceted perspective of the artistry and symbolic representations associated with heroism in the region.

SATI STONES: ECHOES OF SACRIFICE

The juxtaposition of sati stone*s* within the mesmerizing yet complex cultural landscape of Kashmir and Jammu unveils a dark yet poignant narrative of sacrifice and devotion. Each stone, with its intricate inscriptions and depictions, serves as a gateway into an era where the convergence of grief, societal norms, and spiritual beliefs manifested in the tragic yet revered practice of Sati. In Kashmir, the Buniyar Temple's sati stones and those discovered at the SPS Museum and Verinag offer hauntingly beautiful narrations of women immortalized through self-sacrifice. These stones, though silent, narrate a vibrant tale of anguish and immortalization, echoing narratives of individual women and the societal constructs that shaped their fates.

Jammu's narrative, highlighted by the tragic tale of Raja Suchet Singh's queens and the enigmatic sati stone at Manwal, presents a complex interplay of societal expectations, individual choices, and the multifaceted manifestations of love and devotion. The elaborate depictions and inscriptions on these stones underscore the cultural complexity and the deep-seated norms that guided the lives and deaths of women during this era.

SYNTHESIS OF CULTURAL NARRATIVES

The detailed examination of the hero and sati stones in both regions uncovers an intricate dance between societal norms, individual narratives, and the

overarching cultural paradigms of the era. These artifacts are reflections of a society characterized by its profound adherence to codes of honour, valor and sacrifice.

The hero stones of Kashmir, with their intricate carvings, serve as silent yet potent testaments to an era of warriors, echoing a society that prized and memorialized martial valiance. Juxtaposed against this, the sati stones of Kashmir and Jammu unveil a complex narrative of female sacrifice, interwoven with themes of devotion, societal duty, and tragic beauty.

BRIDGING HISTORIES, UNVEILING NARRATIVES

In the intricate interplay between these varied yet interconnected narratives, a comprehensive understanding of early Jammu and Kashmir's cultural, societal, and historical landscapes emerges. These silent yet expressive stones, etched with the echoes of the past, weave together a rich narrative that transcends temporal confines. In both regions, the Hero and Sati Stones are not isolated artifacts but integral components of a complex societal tapestry. They narrate stories of valor and sacrifice, reflecting a society deeply rooted in traditions that continue to echo through history. The exploration and analysis of these artifacts, thus, do not merely unveil the past but offer insights that resonate with the enduring cultural, societal, and historical identities of Jammu and Kashmir.

FINDINGS

Hero Stones

The examination of hero stones in the valleys of Kashmir and landscapes of Jammu has revealed a profound cultural emphasis on heroism and valiance. These stones are engraved chronicles, capturing the martial bravery of warriors from bygone eras. Their discovery in places like Arin and Mattan offers detailed accounts of the intricate societal fabric that revered and immortalized acts of bravery. They also underscore the imperative of cultural preservation and the exploration of ancient scripts and inscriptions to decipher these stones' stories. In Jammu, similar narratives of heroism emerge, embedded in the intricate carvings of hero stones that stand as sentinels of a historical era where martial valiance was a pivotal aspect of societal identity. These discoveries are enriched by the insights garnered from studies on the social memory encapsulated within these artifacts,

highlighting their role in the collective consciousness of the region's populace.

Sati Stones

Sati Stones in both regions weave a haunting narrative of female sacrifice intertwined with cultural and societal norms. The intricate carvings and silent whispers of these stones, discovered at sites like the Buniyar Temple, unveil a complex dance of devotion, societal expectations, and tragic elegance. They narrate tales of women immortalized through the harrowing practice of Sati, each stone echoing the confluence of grief, honour, and spiritual beliefs that defined this era. In Jammu, the narrative is accentuated by the exploration of sites like the Sati memorial at Udhampur, where the tragic yet reverent practice of Sati is captured in elaborate depictions and inscriptions. The stones serve as eerie reminders of a time when complex societal norms and cultural paradigms defined the lives and deaths of women.

CONCLUSION

The detailed exploration of the hero and sati stones in Jammu and Kashmir has yielded a rich array of insights that illuminate the complexities of death rituals and cultural practices in these regions. Each stone, engraving, and inscription is a silent narrator, weaving together intricate narratives of heroism, sacrifice, and the societal norms that shaped these practices. For academia, these findings underscore the necessity for a multidimensional approach to explore the cultural, historical, and societal nuances embedded within these artifacts. The intricate carvings and inscriptions beckon for comprehensive research that spans archaeology, history, art, and cultural studies. There's a significant need to delve into the untapped reservoir of narratives encapsulated in these stones to illuminate both the individual and collective stories they hold.

Culturally, the hero and sati stones are not just remnants of the past but are living testaments to the intricate dance of societal norms, individual lives, and cultural paradigms. They underscore a profound connection between the past and present, offering insights that can bridge historical gaps and provide a nuanced understanding of the evolution of cultural practices and societal norms. From a policy and preservation perspective, the findings illuminate the urgent need for concerted efforts to preserve these artifacts.

The rich historical, cultural, and artistic narratives embedded within them are at risk of erosion, both physically and metaphorically, necessitating policies for the preservation and promotion of these stones as integral aspects of the regional heritage.

*Exploring Death Rituals in Early Jammu and Kashmi*r has unveiled a world where silent stones narrate vibrant tales of valor and sacrifice. The hero stones stand as testimonials of a society that immortalized bravery; the sati stones echo the poignant dance of devotion and tragedy. Together, they weave a complex tapestry of a region steeped in cultural richness, historical depth, and societal complexity. As we move forward, each stone, engraving, and inscription invites us into a dialogue-a profound engagement with the past to glean insights, understanding, and reverence for a history that continues to shape the identity of Jammu and Kashmir.

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DEATH, MEMORIES AND BELIEFS: FORMATION OF IDENTITY AMONG THE CHAKHESANG NAGA TRIBE

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ABSTRACT

Death is generally observed as a respectful event among the Nagas which is reflected through the elaborate rituals. Burial practices were adopted long back in different ancient societies since prehistoric times, and the act of carrying out these practices serves different purposes, meeting the cultural needs of different societies. The objective of the paper is to explore the shared embedded relationship between man and his environment and, the social and cultural significance attached to burial customs and rituals followed in the aftermath of death among the Chakhesang Naga tribe of the Northeast region in India. Some of the research questions explored include how life and death were imagined through time and space. Why do certain memories stick on while others fade away? How the social life of a person was sustained through material culture in both tangible and intangible forms? To understand these, it will draw inferences on several factors which include the study of the different types of burial systems, classification of death, mode of disposal, death-related memorial monuments, memory and oral tradition, fear and superstitious beliefs and post-death life concepts. The paper will describe the features of prehistoric megalithic culture of the past in terms of interring the objects in the grave and the concept of life after death, closely tied up with material culture and traditional belief systems of both tangible and intangible forms. Similarly, it will highlight the measure of honour and respect given to a person during a lifetime which continues even after death in the form of material culture through symbolic representation of tangible objects.

Keywords: Chakhesang, death, memories, beliefs, monuments.

INTRODUCTION

Death is a life crisis, a conjuncture of changes and transformations of the physical body, social relations and cultural configurations (Hallam and Hockey 2001,1-2). Death, which is the end-of-life cycle is generally observed as a respectful event among the Nagas in general, the sign of which is reflected through elaborate rituals carried out after death. The acts of carrying out burial-associated rituals, which were adopted long back in different ancient societies since the prehistoric period have served and attached to various distinct reasons and purposes, meeting different cultural needs of the people.

The objective of the paper is to explore the shared embedded relationship between man and his environment and, the social and cultural significance attached to burial customs and rituals followed in the aftermath of death among the Chakhesang Naga tribe of the Northeast region in India. The paper also looks at how people remember the past in death-related cultures through traditional oral narratives and the representation of tangible things in the form of material objects in remembering the past. It also seeks to understand human social behaviour to generate the social identity of the past. Some of the prompt research questions include- how life and death were imagined through time and space. Why do certain memories stick on while others fade away? How the social life of a person was sustained through material culture in both tangible and intangible forms? The study is done through the investigation of oral narratives in various forms by cross-referring the whole process and stages of burial practices along with the study of death-related monuments.

The cycle of life and death has produced many memorable social cultures in their contact with the surrounding environment, shaping the life of the people to where one belongs. However, the culture of the people produced during their lifetime does not simply meet its end with the occurrence of death but continues for generations through different modes of customs and traditions. The social life of a person among the Nagas likewise, does not end with physical death but is believed to continue even after death. The very reason available to infer is the nature of Naga social life, which in the past was full of competition and challenges in the ladder of social status and this was proved by the availability of different monuments in the region. The same trend of competition is believed to continue even in the post-death

life world. The only form of burial followed among the Chakhesang tribe is a primary and complete single burial system. The burial customs of the Chakhesang Nagas are further distinguished between natural and unnatural death. Accordingly, the nature of death is differentiated by its burial sites between these two. The concepts of life, death and post-death life were closely tied up with taboos and superstitious beliefs, cultures and traditions of both tangible and intangible among the Chakhesang Nagas.

Type of Burial System

The only type of burial found among the Chakhesang Naga tribe is a complete primary burial system called *mhakrie* - burying the dead in a dugout pit, wherein the dead body is interred along with an offering of objects and other material goods, which is then covered with stone slabs and dug out pit earth. The interring of funerary assemblage serves a purpose among the Chakhesang Nagas linking to death life concept, which is reflected in the burial customs.

Classification of Death

The burial practice among the Chakhesang Naga tribe is distinguished by two kinds of death which are:

(a) Natural death: Natural death refers to such cases which occur due to old age and sickness alike. Among the Chakhesang tribe, all such cases of natural death are usually disposed of and buried with all proper necessary rituals and complete funeral customs with honour and respect.

(b) Unnatural death: Unnatural death refers to those caused by village riots, war, accidents, drowning, falling off a cliff, rocks, or trees, those died in childbirth and suicidal death. In short, any untimely and accidental deaths are considered unnatural. All kinds of unnatural deaths are generally buried outside the village gate without any ceremonies for fear of similar mishaps in future.

THE POST-DEATH-LIFE CONCEPT

The Nagas like any other megalithic societies and communities of the past believed in the post-death life concept and the abode of the dead, although views on the afterlife differ from one tribe to another. The Chakhesang Naga tribe believe that the soul of the deceased goes to the land of the dead

and so on the funeral day, the dead person is buried along with household material objects like dresses, agricultural tools and food grains which a person would require in post-death life world. Similarly, Hutton in his work with the Semas cites a similar concept of belief found among the Sema Naga tribe that, when the dead man reaches the land of the dead, he goes to his village, of which there is presumably ghostly reproduction and live just as in this life (Hutton 1921a, 212).

It is commonly belief among the Chakhesang tribe that the soul is said to go to the abode of the dead only after the burial ceremony and until then, it remains at home. Therefore, the dead bodies are usually disposed of in a burial pit before sunset to let the soul of the dead reach its abode on time. The journey to the abode is said to undergo a lot of hardships and challenges and one has to face and confront enemies who had died earlier on the way. On account of all these post-death life concepts and belief systems, the departed souls are sent gallantly by firing guns, yelling and uttering words of encouragement, mostly acted out by the male members of the deceased family and close relatives. The whole process of these acts is done to encourage the departed soul as a gesture of extended relationship and support from the living people.

In a similar concept of post-death life, Epao in his work further acknowledges this belief system of the Nagas stating that, as the first life of mankind is full of pride and prejudice, so is life after death, full of competition and feeling for enemies seems to be very strong (Epao1993,85). All the animals which were killed for the dead as the funeral meat for distribution among the people who helped in the arrangement are also believed to go along with the departed soul to the abode of the dead which would later become the deceased cattle and of which he or she would be proud. Likewise, different material tools and objects were also buried to use in the next life based on gender, profession, status, age, and nature of death. However, after examining all these traditional belief systems of post-death life associated with burial practices, one thing which remains obscure is the lack of clear understanding among the living about the physical description of the post-death world and its various activities to validate the beliefs of the people. Therefore, it is no less important to acknowledge that life beyond this living world continues to remain unexplored in an intangible form.

FEAR AND SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS

Fear of certain things for different reasons is a nature of mankind which gives way for superstitious beliefs. Likewise, death which is a sign of sadness is an unwanted invitation and is considered one kind of fear factor among the Chakhesang Nagas. Therefore, it is treated with proper respect to avoid unwanted premature departure of members of the family. It is also believed that the spirits of the ancestors even after death continue to visit the living people and this is how the superstitious feelings were conceived about the dead people from the past.

Fear of the consequences of bad dreams is one deciding fear factor determining the daily life and activities of the Nagas to date. Bad dreams are taken as a message for warnings and precaution before taking up any activities of the day. For instance, mention some of the common popular traditional beliefs on certain symbolic dreams which people still give due attention and respect, related to signs of death occurrences are; to dream of a person extracting his or her tooth is a sign of the approaching of death among close relatives. Similarly, if a person is found taking pictures putting on white dresses and attending any mass services are also signs of approaching death. Hutton in his book remarks (Hutton 1921b, 247), that to dream of being bitten by a tick, which cannot be pulled out, is an omen of approaching death, while to dream of a man dressed entirely in new clothes is a sure premonition of the death of the man thus seen.

Omen is another fear factor which is given due place in the life of the Nagas. For instance, observation of the collapse of graves is a significant omen among the Ao Naga tribe. It is believed that after death, the collapse of the grave proves the lifestyle and character of a person. In the past, as Longchar in her research, the Ao Naga tribe followed the practice of smoke-drying the dead body which was kept in a bamboo mat on a raised platform at the height of four to eight feet above the ground. When the bamboo post decayed and withheld its support from holding the grave in due course of time, grave falling was taken as a judgment of whether the person lived an honest or crooked life. If the head falls first on the ground, the man is declared to have lived a dishonest life (Longchar 2011, 207). Another popular common belief is that of a night bird locally known as *thuvupu,* if chirps at night and crosses the village, it is taken as a sign of approaching death or natural calamities in the same village. Likewise, the

folks also believed that a rainbow which falls directly on a particular house will see the occurrence of death in the house. It is also believed that on a sunny day when a sudden storm of lightning and rain occurs, it is taken as a sign of the death of an important person. Similarly, an important person is usually believed to die on important events or occasions like festivals in the calendar of the Chakhesang Nagas. It is clear from the above descriptions that fear of various factors related to supernatural forces governed the life of the Chakhesang Nagas in the past and subsequently, it led to superstitious beliefs.

MODE OF DISPOSAL

Wailing and mourning for the departed soul by close family members are peculiar scenes when it comes to death among the Chakhesang Nagas. Generally, it is believed that when good and kind-hearted people die, wailing and mourning are expected to be more. On the contrary, if a person did not live a life of good character, there would be none to wail and mourn. Given this perception, a person while growing up is cautiously taught by parents and elders to live a life of virtue to earn and retain respect in post-death life which comes in the form of material goods to be interred into the grave, memorial objects to be represented and also through the presence of the number of mourners and acts of wailing.

Paying homage to death is a public event and therefore the burial ceremony among the Chakhesang Nagas is usually attended by most of the members of the community. The first thing performed after death is the washing of the corpse. Then the corpse is laid out on the bed, the whole body is covered with the deceased clothes. The burial pit is dug out by close friends and relatives at day time either in front of the house or alongside one of the village paths which can be seen by whoever passes by. The graves are usually dug out about five to ten feet deep and the bottom of the grave is lined up with planks, wood or bamboo mats. Speeches are generally delivered by close friends describing the good works of the deceased during their lifetime. The dead body already laid down is now covered up with stone slabs before the grave is filled up with the surface dug-out earth. To comfort the family members of the deceased, the village youth would stay and watch for nights by singing folk songs until the burial ceremony was over.

For important and well-known personalities of public figures, the youth of the village would go and fetch stone boulders to pile up the deceased grave and to raise a platform in their names for serving both as memorials and resting places in common junctions. On the other hand, for mere public citizens or members of a village, the body is mostly disposed of and buried without piling up of stones upon their graves. This was one reason why many grave sites got lost and forgotten today. It is clear to know that by observing the nature of burial sites, one can also sense the presence of marginality giving different treatment to different individuals based on layers of personality status.

In the event of difficulties in bringing the corpse from far places, particularly during the head-hunting days and inter-village riots which was once the order of the day, some parts of the deceased body or belongings like a bunch of hair or clothes are brought home for the burial rituals representing the dead body. In some cases, the relatives made an effigy of the deceased and performed the rites. That was how the corporeal remains of the deceased are partially retained. The death rituals of infants and children are less elaborate compared to adults in the community under study. Hutton who lived and worked with the Angami Nagas also observed that children who died within five days of birth were buried in an old pot wrapped in old clothes, inside the house under the floor of the living room without any ceremonies, because they have not been named. If two persons die on a particular day, the younger deceased will be buried first as a sign of giving due respect to the elder one (Hutton 1921c, 340). Although there is a strong belief in the concept of post-death life, death is nevertheless feared and considered an awful loss, for which the departed souls were usually sent off gallantly by firing guns encouraging the departed ones not to fear anything on the journey to be undertaken to the dead man's world. Upon the death of rich or influential people, more of such significant acts are performed and witnessed.

ASSOCIATED BURIAL OBJECTS AND RITUALS

The associated objects interred in the burial sites and their elaborate rituals reflect a similar culture to the megalithic period. Rao in his work has described that during the megalithic period, it was a normal practice to put offerings along with the mortal remains which include objects like

pottery, iron objects, ornaments of both metal and semi-precious stones, stone and terracotta objects etc (Rao 1998,119). Likewise, it was also a common practice among the study region to offerings of objects and other material goods in the burial pit along with the dead. The interring of objects as mentioned earlier serves a purpose among the Chakhesang Nagas who believe in the concept of life after death, which is reflected in the burial customs. However, the list of materials and belongings to be interred in the grave differs from one tribe to another. The Chakhesang believes that the soul of Para chance the deceased goes to the land of the dead. Therefore, on the funeral day, in the case of male folks the deceased is buried along with the best dresses, spear, machetes, traditional fire sticks, rice beer and agricultural seeds like paddy on the belief that he would use them in the next life. Another common practice and belief was the burying of a live chicken along with the deceased body to clear the journey's footpath to be undertaken by the departed soul to the abode of the dead. Similarly, upon the death of a person who in his lifetime was a prominent hunter and had killed wild animals like tigers, bears or bagged war trophies, a dog is killed and the meat is distributed on the belief that the dog shall be his loyal companion when he encounters his enemies on his journey to the dead man's world. After the dead body is buried, around the grave, fire is lighted and put up for a few nights to ignite the way of the departed soul while undertaking a journey to the dead man's world.

In the case of a female, spinning and weaving items along with agricultural seeds were interred. Also, a few beads were buried along with her clothes and items of her daily needs. The different objects interred are also determined by a person's profession, gender, occupation and status which could vary from one individual to another. Likewise, according to the status of the family, domestic animals like cows and pigs were killed for the funeral feast and also for the distribution of meat thereafter. These acts of feast and meat distribution were done on the belief that unless animals were killed and offered, the dead person would suffer in the next life in the form of domestic wealth. Meat which is distributed can be taken home for cooking, but the relatives of the deceased are forbidden to cook inside the house except outside for three days after which, it is thrown away and forbidden to eat anymore. When the meat is distributed, it is also highly objected to saying thank you while receiving the meat on the belief that such politeness would count as a welcome of death in the family.

For about one week while having food, a little share of cooked rice with a little salt is tied up either at the corner of the house or placed on the burial site in a plantain leave as a sign of continuing relationship and respect for the departed soul by his or her family members. It is believed that the deceased would come to eat it. While describing the rituals and customs of the burial among the Chakhesangs, Epao further finds out that at the close of the funeral rites, which usually take place on the third day of the burial, the bitter leaves of a particular plant locally available known as '*sakruni'* is soaked in water and squeezed. The bitter drops of water produced are soaked in one end of a cloth piece and the whole family will bite the same portion one after the other to avoid any such occurrence in future (Epao1993,27). Bitter for Epao is referred to as a sign of departure and separation which is not easily welcomed in any manner.

DEATH AND MEMORIAL MONUMENTS

The absences and loss introduced into human experience by death render the task of materializing memory all the more urgent (Hallam and Hockey 2001,1). Memories of the past are explored through the presence of material objects associated with the deceased embodied in burial-related practices performed during a person's death. Further exploring of memories related to death comes mostly in the form of symbols of action through the representation of monuments and structures in the name of a deceased to be remembered for generations. Active formation of memories among the living depends upon a personal relationship with the deceased and more so among the public domain through represented objects in various forms. Memories of the deceased for a while may not be required to be preserved through represented objects among the loved and dear ones. However, in due course of time, there is the possibility of forgetting and not being able to vividly remember past events without the presence of objects or symbols attached to the deceased. Therefore, to sustain memories among the living, the needs arise to be validated with symbols of objects in the name of the deceased.

The finite capability of human beings to mentally record past events and incidents puts forth the need for metaphorical representation of different objects in an extended form as the main tool for retrieving memories of the past. In prehistoric times, when the knowledge of writings was not known

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to mankind, human beings identified themselves with material objects they used, which came as an aid to seek when one began to learn the movements. They left no record of their history in writings, about their social life and culture, which further makes it a difficult task to study them. However, despite the absence of written records, they left enough evidence of their social life through different artefacts and other material objects with which they are associated. Likewise, the relations of memory associated with dead people are not likely to continue if objects are disturbed or destroyed.

Of all the objects, stone was considered to come as the first object of human aid which further played as an agent in marking the representation of the past behaviour of mankind. Erections of memorial stone platforms and gravestones are common among the Chakhesang tribe. Among the gravestones, a common practice is the erection of a monolith above the grave (Fig.1). The underlying idea behind the erection of memorial monuments is to remember the deceased through symbolized long and lasting stone objects. The anthropomorphic figures in association with the megalithic monuments were also spotted. The present-day tribal practices suggest that the anthropomorphic figures were erected to represent their ancestors. These kinds of figures were usually found near the sites of megalithic monuments like menhir and sometimes even formed part of the megalithic monument in association with gravestones as a memorial. In a similar setting of culture, Rao also described that though these figures are very few and association of these figures are not a common feature of all the megalithic monuments, the study of these figures is nevertheless, not without significance as they reveal the funerary customs and the religious practices (Rao 1987, 16).

As described earlier, it is a tradition to kill a dog upon the death of a hunter or warrior who during his lifetime had killed wild animals like tigers on the belief that the dog would guard the deceased from the attack of the wild animals on his way to the dead man's world. Based on this philosophy, the symbolic anthropomorphic figures are likewise represented upon the grave of a hunter and warrior for the same. In doing so, it also depicts the social status and kind of person the deceased was, through the symbolic representation of objects upon the burial site (Fig.2).

Therefore, the representation of material objects placed and erected upon the burial site also projects the identity of a person's social life during a lifetime. One significant mark of symbolic object representation is the series

of small stone slabs in the form of alignments representing metaphorically the number of female folks a person won love favour during his lifetime, which are usually exhibited and erected on the memorial stone platform (Fig.3). The significance of these represented monuments embedded in the culture of the Chakhesang Nagas is not far to seek. In the past, when headhunting and constant inter-village riots were the order of the day, to obtain love and favour from female folks was a matter of pride and honour which did not come easy with ordinary people, but to those who possessed certain qualities and whose credit is due for their contributions and services rendered to the community both in times of war and peace. However, the practice of this culture was discontinued with the end of village riots and head-hunting days with the intervention of the British and the coming of Christianity in the late 19th century A.D.

DEATH, MEMORY AND ORAL TRADITIONS

Human beings are expected to carry out acts of love in their social relations with others and when love becomes the bridge of a relationship, it develops memories. When such a relationship is parted, it is not easily forgotten by the living people who shared those memories. Therefore, death which causes this physical eternal separation from the living is unwanted and is taken as a sign of bitterness. The need to remember the past cultures related to death has foregrounded the importance of the role of memory and oral traditions, as a substitution in marking the identity of a person and events of the past. Along with material objects, traditions of oral narratives through folk songs play an important role in the process of memory-making among the Chakhesang Nagas. In the past, mankind exhibited their identities in different forms both tangible and intangible ways. Similarly, the identity of a dead person was made known both through the traditions of oral narratives in the form of tales, folk songs, myths, legends and symbolic representations of objects. For instance, one of the popular legends associated with the erection of memorial monuments in an interview with the folks in the Tsepfume village of the Chakhesang tribe goes:

Once upon a time, the two legends namely *'Khamiluo' and 'Mutiluo'* settled down at Tsepfume village, one was said to be a man and the other a spirit. Another version says, one was a man and the other a woman, who were so rich, hospitable and sociable that people of that village requested

them to give 'feast of merit'. But they refused saying that there would be bloodshed in the village if they gave feast. However, despite their warning, people insisted and the pressure was so great that they could not refuse anymore but promised to give a feast to fellow villagers, while at the same time, cautioning them that there would be bloodshed in the village. Likewise, as has been told, amidst the preparation process of pounding rice to make local rice beer for the feast, while accompanied by folksongs, a man accidentally slammed his partner with his cup and thereby a discord started among them. Some simply started beating others, and many of them started attacking each other for defence and retaliation without knowing who the real offender was, and consequently, there was bloodshed as warned by *Khamiluo* and *Mutiluo*. After that incident, one evening without giving any information to fellow villagers, the couple slipped out of the village. On that very midnight, some unusual roaring sound rocked the entire village repeatedly waking people from their sleep and leaving them without any clue. The next morning, the warriors and village elders decided to venture out to search for the missing couple. Putting up the best war-like dresses and weapons available, they set out with uncertainty of their coming back home alive in the face of the roars and rocking that they experienced the night before. On spotting the site from where the sound of roaring emanated, was found freshly built giant dolmen in the form of a cave. As they watched through the bushes, they could glimpse *Khamiluo* and *Mutiluo* sitting comfortably inside the newly built Dolmen cave. The couple on seeing their fellow villagers warmly welcomed them and explained their success of building the Dolmen cave, after which they all left that place and went back to the village.

The couples who had erected these monuments (Fig.4) during their lifetime were remembered even today in that locality by this legendary story from one generation to another exhibiting their past social identity through the symbolic representation of monuments.

Similarly, folk songs are also used as a popular form of oral tradition in remembering past events and incidents before the knowledge of writings developed. For example, the two poetic folk song lyrics in the *Chokri* dialect of the Chakhesang Naga tribe go:

(I)

Ruli Kuve Apele Thi, Apele Su Thumamutu Khru, Mhashe Phuvo Kohima Lu   vo, Vemotate Daruchelu Vo, Kuve Mino Bamu Chomole, Midolu Lhu Nezo Tsotame Runa Luzhe Nemo Su Puvo, Rukra Zode Neza Chiyole.

(II)

Khresa Kuve Puza Thupuveyi Thi, Thupuveyi Thupahi Thide Dimapur Ruka Pukhozude, Dzulikalu Ngumvumizu Kusu, Kusu Deno Puva Khrivashe, Urami Nelusuzole, Khonimori Khomo Lalhole.

The above folk song lyrics retrieved through personal communication with the cultural troops in the *Kutsapo* village of the Chakhesang tribe described the journey undertaken in the cycle of life and death by two different individuals. The first one narrates the life story of a young teenage girl named *Apele* who is loved by everyone during her lifetime. Unfortunately, while studying in high school she got ill and was taken to a place in Kohima and died in the hospital. The lyric further grieved the departed soul by conveying messages through folk song that a good person does not live long on this earth and time has come for her to leave this world while unaware

Fig. 1. Grave monolith

Fig. 2. Burial anthropomorphic Plates.

Fig.3. Series of memorial stone slabs.

Fig. 4. Legend associated memorial monuments

and has brought sorrow to the whole village with her death. Likewise, the second lyric describes a male youth by the name *Thupuveyi*, a public servant on duty, who was killed by unknown enemies in an ambush while coming from Dimapur town.

In both cases, the lyrics in their content have personal information like the name of the departed one, type of personality, profession and occupation, cause and nature of death, describing the deceased in his or her absence through folk songs. In short, it describes the life journey of two people who were remembered and honoured through traditional folk songs. This is how the personality of a person even after death is retained occasionally through oral traditions among the Nagas (Fig.5).

Fig.5. Chakhesang Nagas performing traditional folk songs in commemoration of the dead people

BURIAL SITES: NATURE OF INTIMACY AND PRIVACY

The place and location of burial sites are also an important mark for memory-making among the Chakhesang Naga tribe. The sites of the burial and representation of memorial objects are commonly found both in private and public domains. Accordingly, the spatial locations of burial sites determine the intimacy of the dead with the living. It also indicates the nature of death. For instance, in cases of unnatural deaths as described earlier, which were considered rare occurrences were forbidden to be buried inside the village habitation. In such cases of death disposal, children were strictly restricted

from attending. It was stated in one of such cases that, if a woman died while giving birth to a child which is an event of unusual occurrence, the child was never allowed to live, which they believed to be an evil spirit, a disembodied ghost, incarnated in the mother whose death it had caused (Hodson 1919, 301). Similarly, for women who died in the attempt to deliver a child, it was taboo for even her husband to touch his dead wife's body. Whereas in the case of natural death, the Chakhesangs buried the dead either close to their house or on the side of the village footpaths on the belief that, physical death would never separate their memories and the departed ones were never forgotten among the living. This conveys a message of not privileging the living over the dead in their social world but allowing the departed ones to remain alive in the memory of the living people despite of physical separation caused by death. This is how the nature and status of the deceased were made known and conveyed through the location of the burial sites.

There is no proper orientation for burying the dead bodies among the Chakhesang Nagas. However, in most cases, it followed the East-West direction with the deceased head facing towards the east and feet towards the west. The concept and belief is that the East-West direction signifies the life journey of a person from birth to death, birth referring to sunrise in the east and death to sunset in the west. Describing the orientation of burial sites among the Angami Nagas, Hutton further finds out that there was no particular orientation of the dead, but if two persons are buried at the same time and place, they are given the same orientation (Hutton 1921d, 228).

TRANSFORMATION AND CHANGES

The incapability of human nature to remember past events and incidents, resort to the practice of elaborate burial rituals and customs in the form of material objects through which the death and loss of a person were represented and communicated. Today with the coming of many modern technologies, there are different ways in which the feeling of loss and absence can be addressed involving various material forms like written text, photography, video and audio tape apart from other material objects like clothes and death-related monuments, all of which plays as means and agents to retrieve memories of the past. There is no doubt that even at this stage of life, it is difficult to remember memories of past events without the

help of markers in the form of symbolic objects. The advancement of modern technology has produced different modes of storage devices like computers for recording memories replacing the traditions of oral narratives and metaphorical representations of monumental objects. Similarly, advanced modern technology has brought multiple convenient accesses at our instant disposal and commands replacing traditional production of knowledge like oral narratives and in doing so, it also has brought complex situations in contesting and retrieving one's own traditional culture and identity amidst modernization and its popular cultures.

Another transformation drawn from the study of material culture concerning burial practices is the change of belief system taken over superstitions after the intervention of Christianity in the region of the Chakhesang Naga tribe in the late 19th century. In an animist world, as Epao has described, people put faith in certain superstitious beliefs which enslave them from moving freely in their thoughts and actions, in the course of which, the act of appeasement is developed in the minds of the people due to the feelings of insecurity caused by fear (Epao1993,1). The superstitious belief system in ancient Naga animism played a deciding factor before the coming of Christianity and therefore when Christianity came as liberation to drive away the fear from these bondages, people willingly welcomed this new religion which taught the moral values of life free from all factors of evil and fear.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The study reveals parallel sharing features of the megalithic culture of the past in terms of interring the objects in the grave, coupled with the concept of life after death. The burial customs do not end with the burial ceremony but are closely associated with other beliefs and rituals that follow after the death. Further, it highlighted that the concepts of a person's life, death and life after death were closely tied up with day-to-day culture and traditions of both tangible and intangible factors. The rich tradition of burial customs followed after a person's death among the Chakhesang Nagas indicates the continuity of life after death. Similarly, the symbolic monumental objects represented upon the burial sites and other public places exhibit their respect and honour for the dead people.

Stone monuments were commonly used for marking memories among

the Chakhesangs because of their durability, stability and a symbol of permanency for the persistence of generating memory over a limited temporal physical life of human beings. Objects of memorial monuments also carry cultural meanings and emotions of the people as an extended sign of relationship. The measure of respect given to a person in his or her lifetime continues to follow even after death in the form of material culture through the symbolic representation of memorial objects. Likewise, it was the hope of earning social and cultural respect in the aftermath of death that inspired the living to live a virtuous life. Dead people were also remembered and honoured through the living tradition of oral narratives in the forms of folk songs, tales and legends where memory is traditionally generated among the living people. As a result, the burial customs among the Chakhesangs show a strong tie between memorial objects and oral traditions, complementing each other in remembering past events.

Glossary	
Angami Nagas	Name of a tribe in the state of Nagaland, India.
Ao Naga	Name of a tribe in the state of Nagaland, India.
Apele	Name of a young girl on whose name a folk song is composed.
Chakhesang	Name of a tribe in the state of Nagaland, India.
Chokri	The dialect of the Chakhesang tribe.
Khamiluo' and 'Muti-luo	Name of two legends from Tsepfume village.
Kutsapo	A village named in the Chakhesang tribe where the fieldwork was carried out.
Mhakrie	A local language term for the grave.

Nagas	Inhabitants of Nagaland.
Sakruni	The local dialect term for bitter leaves of a particular plant locally available in the study region.
Thupuveyi	Name of a male youth on whose name a folk song is composed.
Thuvupu	A local dialect term for a night bird among the Chakhesang tribe.
Tsepfume	A village named in the Chakhesang tribe where the fieldwork was carried out.

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UNREVEALING THE MYSTERIOUS: A STUDY ON THE DEATH RITUALS OF HIJRAS IN SOUTH ASSAM, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Hijras are a closely-knit community of Third Genders found in the Indian subcontinent. They are called by different names like *Kinnars, Jogappas etc.* in different places. Although considered similar to transgenders, they are different. To be specific, a *hijr*a can be considered a transgender but not all transgenders consider themselves as *hijras*. Being a *hijra* means to follow a specific set of rules, customs, rituals, traditions and language. The *hijra* community is a closed group of trans persons, who can be either a transgender-one whose gender identity is different from biological sex, a transexual-one who has transformed their body through surgical procedures or an intersex (earlier called hermaphrodites)-one who has taken birth with both male and female genitalia, or genitalia that are not male or female. The point to be noted is that although several groups identify themselves as *hijras* in the Indian subcontinent, the intersex people are called by many as the "genuine *hijras*". As has already been mentioned, *hijras* has certain secret rituals and customs, many of which are undisclosed. Although researchers have worked on various aspects of *hijra* lives, especially their health and social arena, there still exist certain aspects which are unknown to the academia as well as society as a whole. And, in these aspects, there exists limited or no research present on the *hijra* community of Northeast India, especially the Southern part of Assam, also called Barak Valley. Against the backdrop, this particular study will focus on the *hijras* of Barak Valley which consists of three districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. Attempts will be made to reveal the death rituals of the *hijras*, which are considered one of the mysterious rituals of the *hijra* community. This paper is part of a larger project and is the outcome of an intensive field survey conducted in South Assam, India.

Keywords: Assam, hijra, community, death

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, rituals are used by folks, ethnic groups and communities to settle their position in society. Rituals, customs and traditions are important to understand the culture of a particular community. These also help to understand the power dynamics of a society. For instance, one can understand the power relationship between men and women in our society through marriage rituals. Similarly, pregnancy and childbirth rituals reflect the position of women in society due to their capacity to give birth to a new life. It also reflects how women are perceived in society due to their fertility factor. That is, rituals manifest power relationships as well as constitute the identity of an individual in society. In this context, it is extremely important to understand the customs and rituals of a marginalized community like *hijras* because it not only reflects their position in society but also defines social order. This is because, for a community living beyond the margins, like the third gender, their rituals are a consequential part of accomplishing their cultural traditions.

The existence of a third category of sex is natural among humans, animals[1] and plants. But the natural is considered unnatural in our society which recognizes only the first two sexes, that is, males and females. The third category of sex/gender has remained isolated from mainstream society. This has resulted in the social isolation and marginalization of the gender non-binary population who are comparatively lesser in number. Although there is no exact number of trans people, research conducted by various non-governmental organizations and governmental organizations, however, provided an estimate of the population spread across the countries on all the continents. In the European continent, around 0.5% to 0.8% of the UK population is estimated as trans people[2] of whom 0.1% are transgenders[3]. In the American continent, around 0.3% of the total population of the United States of America count as transgenders and 0.5% of the adults went for the transition of sex[4]. In the Asian continent, in a report published by the United Nations Development Programme & United States Agency for International Development, Being LGBT in Asia: Nepal Country Report, (2014), Bhumika Shrestha who is a transgender politician of Asia speaks about the general perception of society, mostly in Asian countries, towards the gender and sexual minorities- "Some think that all LGBT people are cross-dressers or transgender, and others say they have not come across any

gays or lesbians". This is because people often do not discuss such issues and therefore do not understand who these gender and sexual minorities are, which leads to an ambiguous understanding of these social groups.

In India, *hijras* are one such social group who remain in an ambiguous state in our society. They are the most visible third gender category present in the Indian subcontinent. Academic literature talks about the third gender in India. There are certain autobiographies of *hijras* like A. Revathi's (2010) *The Truth About Me* and Laxminarayan Tripathi's *Me Hijra Me Laxmi* (2015). Manobi Bandyopadhyay (2018), in her novel *'Antahin Antarin Proshitavotrika'*, meaning *Endless Bondage,* has made an elaborate discussion on the real lives of the *hijras* in West Bengal. Autobiographies are the original testimony of an individual's life experiences- the joys, sorrows and tortures that speak a lot more than those because these also reveal a huge lot of things about the society in which the person lives. Again, academic novels are beautiful descriptions of happenings based on true incidents. Of the notable novels that speak about gender non-binary people, one can look into Swapnomoy Chakraborty's *Holde Golap,* meaning The Yellow Rose. Although both autobiographies and novels form important reading materials to understand the *hijra* community, Ajay Majumdar and Niloy Basu have also worked on the male transgenders, *kotis* and *hijra* live in the society of West Bengal. Their work also discloses some aspects of the language used by *hijras* within their community. But all these texts help to understand the lives of *hijras* in different parts of India and are silent on the issue at hand, that is death rituals of *hijras*. Rather they talk about the initiation ceremony, rituals regarding the entry of *hijras* within the community, their lives within the community and to some extent their language. This creates a big gap for the current research which needs to be addressed.

Hence, through this study, attempts have been made to address this gap and throw light on the death rituals of the *hijras* in the Northeastern region of India, which is again an under-researched area. Researching the virgin area is not only significant from the perspective of a researcher but it will also add significantly to the already present literature highlighting the rituals encircling *hijra's* lives. Hence, the main aim of this study is to highlight the unhighlighted death rituals of *hijras* in South Assam.

EXISTENCE OF THIRD GENDERS IN ANCIENT INDIA

Historically, third genders have been present in India since ancient times. This is prevalent in ancient Indian literature like the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Arthashastra, and Kamasutra which mentions persons recognized as *Napumsaka*, *Kliba*, *Shandhu* and *Tritiya Prakriti*. The Mahabharata (400 BCE and c. 400 CE)[5] mentions certain characters who have changed from female to male or male to female. The first story to be mentioned is about *Shikhandin* (Pattanaik 2014) who was born the daughter of King *Drupada* (king of *Panchala*) but was brought up as a boy because the queen declared that a son was born to her. *Shikandin's* story talks of sex change from female to male. In yet another story as described in Ganguly 1883-1896; Goldman 1993; Peer 2013, Arjuna became "*napumsaka*"[6] or *shandhu*- '*an effeminate man who dresses and behaves like a woman*'[7] by the curse of *Urvashi* in the *Virataparvan*. This is the story of *Brihannala* who is described as beautifully dressed in a 'red silk', wearing 'numerous ivory bangles, gold earrings and necklaces made of coral and pearls' with 'long and braided' hairs[8], *Brihannala* looked beautiful and glorious enough to reflect the glory of a warrior prince even in hiding. *Brihannala* was hired as a teacher of "*dancing, singing, and hairdressing*" (Wilhelm 2004) *by the king. After a year of feminine attire,* Arjuna got back his male body, free from *Urvashi's* curse. What is important here is not only the curse which made Arjuna an 'eunuch transvestite'[9] and effeminate but also the feminine attire as has been described which resembles the present-day male-to-female *hijras* in India.

The Ramayana, composed between 5th/4th century BCE and 3rd century CE[10] also contains stories that witness the presence of *hijras* at that time. One such story as described by Sharma 2009, 28; Michelraj 2013, 17; Tiwari 2014, 20; Pattanaik 2014, 171 is that of *Rama*, who was on his journey to exile for fourteen years and was followed by his followers in the kingdom. On his return from exile, he found that some people were still standing on the riverside. *Rama* could not understand the reason behind it and asked them why they were standing there. The people replied that *Rama* asked only the two sexes to return but did not say anything to that particular group who were 'neither men nor women' (Pattanaik 2014, 173). So they were standing there waiting for the instructions. Pleased by the love and loyalty of the people, *Rama* conferred them with a boon that 'whatever they will say will come true[11]'.

Kautilya's Arthashastra also mentions *Kliba* and *Napumsaka* as security guards[12] (Verse 1.21.1), spies and queen's attendants. Chapter V of Book III of the Arthashastra mentions, 'Persons fallen from caste, persons born of outcaste men, and eunuchs shall have no share; likewise, idiots, lunatics, the blind and lepers[13]'.

The Arthashastra also mentions that on the insult of the *Kliba* or *Napumsaka*, a punishment of 12 *pans* was declared[14], where pan refers to a type of coin. That is during the Maurya age, which started at around 324 BCE, society was little sympathetic towards the *Klibas*. On the other side, it also echoes people's repudiation towards the *Napumsaka*s or *Klibas* which was prevalent at that time, or else, why would the king need to talk about punishment to protect any of the individuals? The need to safeguard comes only when there exists susceptibility which was in the vicinity at that time. Besides this, the eunuchs were also denied a share of property (Verse 3.5.28, 29).

METHODOLOGY

The present study has been undertaken under the case study research design, with *hijras* as the single case study. Traditionally, case studies are qualitative, and hence qualitative research methods have been used for this study. Respondents were located through the snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling, also called "chain referral sampling" is a non-probability sampling which is used when it is difficult to identify respondents and find access among them. In the process, once the respondents are accessed, the interview method has been followed with the help of Interview Schedules to record their experiences and responses. The Interview Schedules were formulated by a combination of open (to explore participant's interpretation) and closed-ended questions. The responses were recorded and finally documented. So far as the location is concerned, this study has been conducted in two districts of South Assam[15]-Cachar and Karimganj. The third district of South Assam, Hailakandi has not been visited because the *hijras* of Karimganj and Hailakandi stay together at Karimganj district.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF SOUTH ASSAM AND ITS HISTORY

South Assam (Fig.1) comprises the three districts of Cachar, Karimganj and

Hailakandi. Cachar is one of the oldest places in India. With a geographical area of 3786 sq. km., Cachar is located between 92 Degrees 24' E and 93 Degrees 15' E longitude and 24 Degrees 22'N and 25 degrees 8'N latitude. As per 2011 census, Cachar has a total population of 17,36,617. Karimganj has a geographical area of 1809 sq. km—the total population of which, as per the 2011 census is 1228686. Of the three districts, Hailakandi is smaller with a geographical area of 1327 sq. km. It has a total population of 659296. The main river of the region is river Barak due to which South Assam is also called Barak Valley.
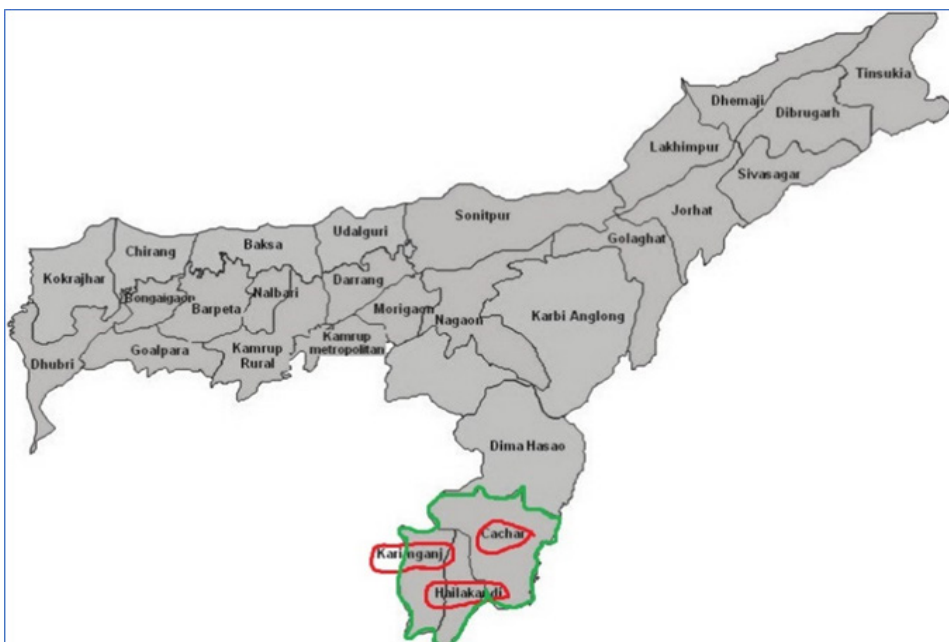

Fig.1. Three districts of South Assam in the Map of Assam

Cachar, which was called '*Hidimbeswar*'[16] in earlier times, was a part of the greater Surma Valley region of pre-partition days that included Cachar plains and Sylhet. Cachar had two subdivisions- Silchar and Hailakandi, headquartered in Silchar; and Sylhet had five subdivisions- North Sylhet, Karimganj, South Sylhet, Habiganj and Sunamganj, headquartered at Sylhet. Sylhet, the greater part of which is presently located in Bangladesh, included Karimganj till 1947. The Surma valley region, which was named

after river Surma (including the rivers *Barak* and *Kushiara*)*,* itself was ruled by different kings at different times, which included the *Devas* of Bhatera plates in the 5th century A.D.; the Varmanas of Kamrupa in the 6th century A.D.; the *Harikela* (ancient name of *Srihatta desh*) State from 7th -10th century A.D., which was followed by the Tripuri Rajas. However, the Tripuri state that initially comprised of Cachar, Sylhet and Tripura plains was short-lived because, with the emergence of the Muslim rulers of Bengal from the 14th century, Sylhet began to be ruled by the Muslims, while Cachar remained a part of the Tripuri state. The entire valley, thus began to be ruled by two sets of rulers forming diverse socio-political formations during the time. In the 16th century, the administration of Cachar plains came at the hands of the Raja of Cooch Behar who appointed Kamalnarayana as the governor of Cachar. It was followed by the foundation of the Dehan kingdom (independent Khaspur state) under the rule of the last Koch king Bhim Singha. After his death, Cachar went under Dimasa rule with Lakshmichandra in the 18th century as the king followed by Krishnachandra Narayan and finally Govindchandra Narayan last king of Cachar. The reign of Govindchandra (1813-1830) could not continue for long. As a result of the Badarpur treaty signed between himself and David Scott-the political agent of the Governor General of North East Frontier on March 6, 1826, Govindchandra became the tributary king of the British who was required to pay a sum of Rs. 10,000 to the Company every year. In 1830, the king was killed which finally led to the annexation of the Kachari kingdom by the British. It was then the district of Cachar was created and acclaimed formally on August 14, 1832, by the Governor General's formal proclamation. Under the superintendence of Captain T. Fisher, Cachar Plains was made a district of Bengal. The hills of North Cachar were annexed in 1854 to be made a part of the Cachar district. In 1874 the district of Cachar was brought within the state of Assam. A few years later, Karimganj and Hailakandi sub-divisions were made into separate districts on July 1, 1983, and 1989, and the three districts together constitute the present map of Barak Valley.

DISCUSSION

Third genders were called by different names as depicted in different ancient Indian literatures. For instance, Vatsayana alluded to people belonging to *Tritiya Prakriti* because of the nonappearance of or unclear genitals who

lived on sex work. The *Tritiya Prakriti* people were of two types- a woman-like and a man-like[17]. In Verse 2.9.1-10, Vatsayana goes on to describe the features of the *Tritiya Prakriti* woman in these words: 'The one in the form of a woman imitates a woman's dress, chatter, grace, emotions, delicacy, timidity, innocence, frailty, and bashfulness[18]' The *Tritiya Prakriti* people were described so because they were third and were 'neither male nor female'[19]. *Kliba* referred to one "who was sterile, impotent, castrated, a transvestite, a man who had oral sex with other men, who had anal sex, a man with mutilated or defective sexual organs, a hermaphrodite[20] [intersex person], or finally, a man who produced only female children[21]. In contemporary times, a commonly used terminology for the third gender is the term transgender which has been described by authors including Jack Halberstam and Annamarie Jagose.

> [T]ransgender is for the most part a vernacular term developed within gender communities to account for the cross-identification experiences of people who may not accept the protocols and strictures of transsexuality. Such people understand cross-identification as a crucial part of their gendered self, but they may pick and choose among the options of body modification, social presentation and legal recognition available to them. So, you may find that a transgender male is a female-born subject who has had no sex reassignment surgery, takes testosterone (with or without medical supervision), and lives as a man mostly, but is recognized by his community as a transgendered man in particular[22].

Transgender is an umbrella term and transexual is the more specific term. In the context of the Indian subcontinent, we can say that transgenders or transexuals[23] may or may not identify themselves as *hijras*. Regarding the usage of the Urdu term *hijra* in the Indian subcontinent instead of ancient *Kliba* or *Napumsaka*, it is to be simplified that it was only after the advent of the Mughals that the word *hijra* came into wide use[24]. Thus terminologically, the *hijra* word has its origins in Urdu[25]. The term *hijra* is used to call the eunuch's[26] intersex community or hermaphrodites of South Asia. Eunuch refers to the emasculated or "castrated adult males who signify with female identity[27]" whereas, intersex, earlier called hermaphrodites is a person who has taken birth "with both male and female genitalia, or genitalia that are not male or female"[28]. Catherine Harper describes the sex development of intersex people.

Intersex occurs when sexual development and differentiation in utero is atypical, and a baby is born, for example, with a blend of both male and female internal and/or external genitalia. This may be signified in ambiguous genitalia or it may manifest in a range of internal and external configurations. For example, the infant may have female external genitalia, but have one ovary and one testis, with that singular testis being hidden inside. Alternatively, there may be internalized gonads that contain both ovarian and testicular tissue mixed. Similarly, or in addition, genetic configurations and hormonal balances may be atypical for a regular male or female[29].

When intersex people, grow as either male or female (in case of sex ambiguity) and attain puberty (in case of female-like) or in a later period develop as the opposite sex, the ambiguity about their sex is discovered. Then they undergo an emasculation operation if required, and accept the culture of the *hijra* community to be called a *hijra* through ritual entry into the community. A *hijra* is a eunuch that has certain specific religious customs, rules, traditions and language.

In South Assam, *hijras* call themselves *kinnars*. There are three categories of *kinnars* in South Assam.

1. Chibri - One who is born as a male and is castrated.

2. Gents Kinnar - They have small '*purush linga*'. That is born as male, but the external sex organ is very small and is not active. They have body hair and little beards also grow on their faces. 90% of *hijras* fall under this category.

3. A born *Ladies Kinnar* - The born ladies *kinnar* are like the females only but they do not have menstruation. They cannot give birth to a child and hence cannot get married, unlike the females.

DEATH RITUALS OF *HIJRAS* IN SOUTH ASSAM: UNREVEALING THE MYSTERIOUS

Death rituals, like any other rituals, are important to understand the culture of a community. Death rituals vary from religion to religion, culture to culture, time to time. Broadly, the deceased is either cremated or buried with variations in the process and specificity of customs and traditions. South

Assam consists of different categories of people which include Bengali Hindus, Bengali Muslims, and a small proportion of tribal communities like Dimasas, Manipuris, Rongmei Nagas and Nepalis. All these people perform death rituals as per their tradition. For instance, after death, most of the Bengali Hindus cremate their bodies. However, there is an exception with a few communities of Bengali Hindus who follow a mixed process of cremation and burial. In the case of Bengali Muslims, the body of the deceased is generally buried. Now, since gender non-binary populations are born across all communities irrespective of their religion, caste and community, they follow their own rules. *hijra* communities are organized communities of gender non-binary populations which is framed with a single pattern of relationship. There is a *guru* and a disciple. The disciple is considered the daughter of the Guru. In South Assam, this relationship is called as *gurumaa-chela* relationship, where the *chela*, who is the disciple calls *gurumaa* as *Maa* (mother). The *gurumaa* is considered the mother of the daughter. Encircling this relationship, all the subsidiary relationships like sister, and grandmother are formed. The *gurumaa* recognizes a transperson as a *chela* through the ritual process of entry of the disciple into the community.

In South Assam, when a *hijra gurumaa* dies, the *chelas* have to do all the rituals of the deceased. At first, they inform about the death of the *gurumaa* to the elders of the community. Beginning with the *Gurumaa* of the *gurumaa*, that is the grandmother of the *chela*, they inform other elders of the community like *dadiguru, naniguru,* sisters of *gurumaa* within the community, other *chelas* of the deceased and other senior members of the community. After all are informed, the *chelas* mourn the death of their *gurumaa*. They remove their bangles, wipe *bindi* and remove all the makeup from their faces. They do not wear red clothes either. Then the deceased is bathed and wears new clothes, after which the rituals are carried out as per the religion of the deceased. Although the *hijras* of South Assam are secular which means they do not follow any specific religion in their daily lives. They equally visit Hindu temples as well as Muslim mosques called *dargahs*. The gender non-binary persons can born in any religion but when the ritual initiation ceremony of the person is done, the person becomes a *hijra* with all the rules and regulations of the community. All of them stay together as a community irrespective of the region they were born. But after death, they follow the death rituals of the deceased as per her

birth religion or converted religion, since some of them willingly convert their birth religion to another religion.

Thus, if a *hijra* is from a Muslim community, the burial process is followed as per the customs of Islam which is called *kabar*. But in the case of other religions like Hindu or Christian or any other religion, *hijras* are given *samadhi* in South Assam. But unlike the first two sexes of the same religion, the third gender called as *hijras'* final customs of death are not carried out in broad daylight. Rather all the procedures are carried out during the night when all the people are asleep. Also, the last rites are not done in season, the local word for the cemetery, or *kabarstan, the* local word for the burial ground. This is because they do not want the grave to be disrespected in any way. As one of the *hijra* from Cachar district replied, they have experienced such things earlier. People disrespected a *hijra* grave and spit on them. So, they avoid the local burial ground for the last rites to be carried out. Also, they carry out the activities at nighttime to maintain privacy and refrain the other two sexes from viewing the *hijra* body because it is the body which they respect at the utmost. It is the body for which they face all kinds of social isolation, it is the body for which they leave their birth homes and enter the community, it is the body for which they desire to become members of the opposite sex. Their bodies are the ultimate places of worship for them. They do not want to disclose the body of the deceased in public which was preserved by the deceased throughout her life. Another reason for night nighttime performance of the last rites is that this will not let the public know about the place where the body of the deceased was eternally resting in peace. Hence, if the *hijra* have a home owned by themselves, the burial is done behind their homes. But if there is no owned place, the *chelas* buy a small piece of land for the body of the deceased to rest in peace.

Once the burial is done, the *chelas* take note of all kinds of debts, if any, held by their *gurumaa*. The debts are to be paid by all the *chelas* together. The community is rigorous in this regard. They may at times skip giving debt to parents who give birth to them, but as per the community rules, the *chelas* must pay the debts of their *gurumaa*s. If the amount is less and payable at that moment, they go for the next customs, but if the debt amount is more, they take time from the senior members of the community to do the ceremonial event following the death of a *hijra* called *sammelan*. In

this case, the *gurumaa* had no debt, but the *chelas* were not in a position to arrange the ceremonial event, they took time from elders of the community to arrange money so that they could carry out the expenditures of the event. Till then, the *chelas*, as per the rules of the community, follow a restricted lifestyle. That is, they cannot wear any jewellery including earrings, bangles, or nose pins; they cannot wear any makeup like lip colour; they also cannot wear any red cloth. Just as the widow follows, the *chelas* follow similar rules after the death of their *Gurumaa.*

A *hijra sammelan* is a ceremonial event of two to three days, followed by the death of a *hijra*. It is a meeting where the *chelas* of the deceased have to invite other *hijras* including all the *chelas*, and *dadiguru* to perform the *shuddhikaran* rituals, after which the *chelas* will be purified and return to normal daily activities. The invitations are done across boundaries. In South Assam, on the death of a *hijra gurumaa*, the *chelas* had to invite senior *hijras* from Bangladesh as well. Expenses of the event apart, all the travel expenses of the invitees are to be paid by the *chelas* to organize the event. Although in some places the *sammelan* is performed for three days, in South Assam it ranges from two to three days. In the *sammelan*, the most important ritual is the *shuddhikaran* during which the *chelas* are to wear all the jewellery, do make-up, and wear a red saree. And all these are done by other *hijras* who are invited to the event. After the *chelas* are purified, the next important task is to pay off the debts. Then a meeting is conducted on all the future decisions regarding the *chelas*. After the *sammelan* is complete, all the invitees are to be sent back to their places by the organizer *hijra* with due respect. With this, all the death rituals of a *hijra* are complete and the *chelas* return to their normal lives.

The death rituals of *hijras* in South Assam include all the related *hijras* of the deceased who are invited into the *sammelan* to pay their due respects and perform the shuddhikaran rituals. This is however different from other parts of India. In Narayanpur[30], a city in North India, for instance, *hijras* from all over the country assemble for three days to pay their condolences. Another difference lies in the time duration. While in south Assam, the assemblage ranges from two to three days, but in Narayanpura, it is for three days. One reason for this may be because the death of the *hijra* guru as mentioned in the research paper includes the presence of *hijra* in the *dargah*, a Muslim religious shrine that owns space in the shrine using property ownership.

Such kind of property ownership of *Hijras* from their gurus also exists in South Assam.

FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

Hijras are a closely knit community of third genders present in the Indian subcontinent. They have their customs and rituals. Amidst the several rituals, the death rituals of *hijras* are important. This study is the outcome of field surveys conducted in the districts of South Assam. The major findings include the unique nature of commemorating the death of a *hijra*, especially in the case of *hijra* gurus. Firstly, the death rituals of *hijras* in South Assam are carried out at night. This is because they do not want the body of the deceased to be disrespected in any way. Their bodies are the ultimate places of worship for them. They do not want to disclose the body of the deceased in public which was preserved by the deceased throughout her life. They want to refrain from the society which has isolated them entire their lives only for their bodies, the general perception of *hijras* is a group of men clad in sarees and bright lip colours. Secondly, the body of the deceased is cremated or buried which depends on the religion of the deceased. Although the *hijras* of South Assam are secular regarding their faith and religious practices, and they stay together in the community irrespective of the religion of the individual members and visit religious places of all religions, the last respects are paid as per the religion of the deceased. Thirdly, the *hijras* of South Assam do not use public crematoriums or burial grounds. This is again because they do not want the grave to be disrespected by spitting as they experienced earlier. Finally, there is a variation of South Assam from other parts of India. Ghosh's (2021) study of a North Indian town revealed that the ceremonial event related to the *hijra* guru's death at a religious shrine is for three days where *hijras* from the entire country assemble. In South Assam, the assemblage varies from two to three days where only those *hijras* who are related to the deceased assemble, irrespective of the fact that they come from India or outside India. Although there are few numbers of *hijras* in the Southern part of Assam, all of whom are Bengali speakers, this study has attempted to reveal the mysterious death rituals of *hijras*.

(Endnotes)

1. The existence of "hermaphroditic earthworms, possessing two perfect sets of external and internal reproductive organs, capable of reproducing as either female or male" is one example to this. Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), Introduction x.

2. N. Antjoule, "The Hate Crime Report 2016: Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia in the U.K. United Kingdom" (Galop: 2016), 4, https://www.galop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-Hate-Crime-Report-2016.pdf

3. G.J. Gates, *How many people are lesbian , gay , bisexual, and transgender ?* (The Williams Institute, 2011), https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/How-Many-People-LGBT-Apr-2011.pdf.

4. Gates, "*How many people are lesbian , gay , bisexual, and transgender ?*"

5. Upindar Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India,* (New Delhi: Pearson Education in South Asia, 2009), 18.

6. R. P. Goldman, "Transsexualism- Gender and Anxiety in Traditional India," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, 3 (1993): 374-401. 383.

7. C. Peer, "Homosexuality and Gender Expression in India," *Aletheia—The Alpha Chi Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship* 1, 1 (2016), 1-8, 6.

8. Amara Das Wilhelm, *Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex: Understanding Homosexuality, Transgender Identity, and Intersex Conditions Through Hinduism,* (Philadelphia: Xlibris Corporation, 2004), 21.

9. Devdutt Pattanaik, *Shikhandi*, (Haryana: Penguin Books India, 2014), 111.

10. Upinder Singh, *A History of,* 18.

11. M. Michelraj, "Historical evolution of Transgender Community in India, *Asian Review of Social Sciences*, 4 1 (2015): 17-19. 17.

12. The Arthashastra in its first book mentions that the King would be received by the eunuchs in the second chamber who were 'personal attendents and dressers'. *Kautilya: The Arthashastra* (L. N. Rangarajan, Ed. and Trans.). (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1992),152. http://library.lolmain/87FF16CB3ABE2B88BEFD704AB1830E04 (Original work published 1987)

13. *Kautilya: The Arthashastra* (L. N. Rangarajan). 415; R. Shamashastry, Trans. *Kautilya* A*rthashastra,* (Bangalore: Government Press, 1915). 233.

14. Manobi Bandyopadhyay, *Bangla Samaj O Sahitye Tritiyasatta Chinha [Third*

Gender Symbols in Bengali Society and Literature], (Kolkata: Pratibas. 2012), 84.

15. South Assam is also called as Barak Valley due to the fact that river Barak flows through the districts of this region.

16. Hidimba rajya was named after the demon Hiramba who married Bhim, one of the Pandavas of Mahabharata giving birth to a son Ghotochkacha. As an honour it was given the name 'Hidimbeswar by the kingdoms of Khaspur and Maibong. The descendents of Hindimba family later came to be known as 'Kacharis'.U. C. Guha, *Cacharer Itibritta,* (Kolkata: Swapan Publishers, 2012), 46.

17. Manobi Bandyopadhyay, *Bangla Samaj O Sahitye Tritiyasatta Chinha*, 88.

18. M. Vatsayana, *Kamasutra,* (W. Doniger, & S. Kakar, Trans. and Eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 65.

19. M. Vatsayana, *Kamasutra*, 25.

20. It is possible that the term hermaphrodite has emerged from "Hermaphroditus, the figure from Greek mythology whose male body was merged by the gods with the female body of the nymph Salmacis".Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), Introduction x.

21. Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India,* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 21.

22. Stefan Horlacher, "Transgender and Intersex: Theoretical, Practical, and Artistic Perspectives", in *Transgender and Intersex: Theoretical, Practical,and Artistic Perspectives,* ed. Stefan Horlacher, (New York: Springer Nature, 1998), 1-26.

23. "The word *transsexualism* did not become part of the English language until the early 1950's. It was invented as a medical term by Dr. D. O. Cauldwell, who used it to classify a girl whom he described as obsessively wanting to be a boy. He called her condition *psychopathia transsexualis".* Janice Raymond, *Transexual: The Making of the She male Empire,* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), 20.

24. Gayatri Reddy, With respect to Sex.

25. Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (2nd ed.) (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999), 13.

26. The term 'eunuch' has been derived from the Greek word "*Euneukhos*" meaning 'bed chamber attendant' (Shingala, 1987, as cited in Chettiar, 2015). This was the reason why the *Hijras* were put in charge of harems during the later Mughal period. The process of emasculation (either voluntarily or under force) made the eunuchs

sexually incapable due to which, they were considered as the most appropriate guards for harems (Varkey, as cited in Chettiar, 2015). According to Waters (2017), "The eunuch was born male but, after the separation or nullification of the testicles, took on the attributes of a female; any distinction between physical and social attributes is unimportant here. The eunuch was not a woman but was certainly no longer considered a man. The eunuch was imperfect, even incomplete—a view also projected onto women in many cultures." (p. 24) Serena Nanda, Neither man, 14. P. Saxena, *Life of a Eunuch,* (Mumbai: Shanta Publishing House, 2011), 7.

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FUNERARY RITUALS IN TAMIL SOCIETY IN SRI LANKA: PERFORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The funerary rituals are the last rites that are performed for people who are pronounced dead. From the religious viewpoint of all religions, funeral rites help the peaceful transmigration of the departed soul to reach the heavenly world of the almighty god. From an anthropological perspective, a funeral is considered a rite of passage. Funerary traditions vary according to a society's worldview, socioeconomic lifestyles, ideological understandings, and religious faiths. Every ethnic group has its distinctive way of departing the late souls belonging to their community. Over the years, Tamil society has had a unique history of traditional funerary rituals that underwent gradual changes due to changes in socioeconomic conditions, religious affiliations, Sanskritization, colonisation, urbanisation, and globalization. However, certain elements continue in the funerary culture of Tamil society as their intangible heritage. As rituals are fundamentally performative, funerary rituals are not exceptional. This paper discusses the performative perspectives of funerary rituals in Sri Lankan Tamil society, as no systematic academic research on them has been carried out. This study is limited to the northern part of Sri Lanka, where Tamils are densely populated and share almost homogeneous cultural practices. Five structured interviews with funeral professionals, ritual specialists, and clergy who conduct funeral services were used as a prominent data collection technique in this research to understand the cultural construction and social organisation of the process of the funerary practices performed for the collective healing of those who were close to the departed soul. A direct personal observation of mine was used to identify the performing arts elements in the funerary rituals. This study identified funerary rituals that can be characterised as performing arts, such as *oppari*, which is an ancient form of lamenting; *maradithal*, which is sung while beating the chest; singing holy verses as part of prayers performed with the hope of showing eternal bliss to the departed soul; etc. Performative rituals associated with funerals are dying as they are either modified or avoided to suit the prevailing circumstances in this age of rapid change.

Key Words: Funerary Rituals, Performative, Funerary Culture, Intangible Heritage

INTRODUCTION

A society's worldview, socio-economic life, philosophical perceptions, beliefs, etc. are revealed through the funerary rituals of that community. Therefore, the social life of that particular society can be understood by studying funerary rituals from various angles. Numerous studies have focused on the cultural and social significance of funerary rituals in different parts of the world.

When studying the funerary rituals of Tamils, much attention is paid to the funerary rituals of Tamil Nadu, India, where the majority of Tamils live. However, funerary rituals differ depending on the caste, regional, and class differences of the Tamils living in Tamil Nadu. Funerary rituals in Tamil Nadu are not uniformly formalised as one standard funerary culture. However, the ancient traditions of the Tamils are still preserved in funerary rituals in Tamil Nadu. For Sri Lankan Tamils, funerary rituals are largely similar to those in Tamil Nadu. However, due to the influence of Saivism, the funerary rites of the Sri Lankan Tamils have been formalised, thus Tamils in Sri Lanka follow a relatively uniform pattern in their funerary culture.

Attempts have been made to explore the cultural and religious perspectives on death within the context of Sri Lankan Tamils. K. Sivathamby provides a sociological analysis of the funerary rituals followed within the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. In this study, he studied the various aspects of Tamil funeral customs within the sociocultural context of Sri Lanka. Tamil funeral rituals from an anthropological perspective were also analyzed. However, though the cultural, social, and religious aspects surrounding Tamil funeral practices were briefly analysed from an anthropological perspective, no research has been done so far on performative elements in the funerary culture of Tamils. This study aims to get the funerary rituals in Tamil society analysed from performative perspectives to identify the performative elements of the funerary rituals that reflect the broader social and cultural heritage of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Are there different types of funerary rituals practised in Tamil society in Sri Lanka?

2. Do geographical, cultural, and religious factors decide the funerary culture of Tamils in Sri Lanka?

3. How do the funeral rituals of Tamils in Sri Lanka shape how rituals are performed?

4. Does the funerary culture of Tamils in Sri Lanka evolve?

5. What part do funeral rites play in facilitating mourning, remembering the deceased, and the social and emotional health of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka?

6. What are the different performative elements in the funeral rituals of Tamils in Sri Lanka that reflect broader social and cultural aspects of the Tamil community?

7. To what extent has the funerary culture of Tamils in Sri Lanka become standard funerary practice?

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Even though Tamils who have converted to Christianity perform their last rites in a Christian way, their death rites also show some traditional aspects of Tamils. As the majority of Sri Lankan Tamils follow the Saivite culture, Saivite cultural beliefs have come to dominate the Tamils' view of death. However, the traditions of the Tamils before the introduction of Saivite culture to the Tamils are also seen in the Tamil death rituals. Tamils who follow Christianity bury the dead body, whereas Tamils of Saivite culture cremate the dead body. In other respects, there are many similarities. Those who follow Saivite culture sing *devara* hymns, whereas Christians read Bible verses in front of the deceased. These comparisons led to another study. As the majority of Sri Lankan Tamils follow the Saivite culture, this study is limited to the funerary culture of Tamils who follow the Saivite culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A ceremony or gathering that is held after someone has passed away is called a funeral. It is a way for loved ones to gather to pay respect to and remember the deceased, as well as to support and comfort one another

during this trying time. Funerals can take on a variety of forms based on cultural and religious customs, but they frequently feature rituals, speeches, and the burial or cremation of the deceased. The purpose of a funeral is to provide closure, commemorate the life of the deceased, and offer support and comfort to those bereaved (Emma Thompson, 2022).

The final rites for those who have been declared dead are known as funeral rituals. Funeral rites, according to the religious perspective of all religions, aid in the peaceful transmigration of the dead soul to the celestial realm of the all-powerful deity. An anthropological viewpoint holds that attending a funeral is a rite of passage. Funerary customs differ depending on the worldview, socioeconomic status, ideologies, and religious beliefs of a culture.

Inhumation was the earliest form of funerary culture practised in ancient Tamil society, like many other primitive ethnicities. The rich literature of Tamils from the *Sangam* period clearly shows that Tamils had burial practices as their funerary culture. Urn burials of Tamils were identified as the archaeological findings. Thus, archaeological evidence even further validated the data given by the literature of ancient Tamils, which states about the burial practices of Tamils. Additionally, Tamil *Sangam* literature paints a complete picture of the development, constant growth, and later modifications in the creation of funeral monuments across time. The subsequent changes were undoubtedly gradual and were brought on by the inevitable cultural, social, and economic changes that Tamil society had experienced over the years (Iniyan, 2005).

Sanskritization is a process by which a group of people who are at the lower level of the caste hierarchy change their customs, rituals, ideology, and lifestyle in a manner that imitates those of the upper caste people, particularly the *Brahmins*, to elevate their social status in the caste hierarchy (M.N. Srinivas, 2003). Due to Sanskritization, cremation took over from burial as the dominant funerary culture. Sanskritization was first adopted by the dominant castes in Tamil society. Therefore, burial was far more widespread among those at the lower levels of the caste hierarchy, even though the dominant castes started practising the sanskritized funerary culture of cremation. However, unlike the so-called higher castes, the so-called lower castes gave their members greater liberty in deciding how to dispose of the deceased. As sanskritization was adopted by those in the

lower level of caste hierarchy with time, funerary culture became relatively a standard practice.

Though burial was then replaced by cremation, which became the standard funeral practice in Saivite society, it has never completely disappeared in the funerary culture of Tamils. Anyhow, cremation became a standard funeral practice, though burial is still occasionally practiced in Tamil society. According to Jeffery et al., contrary to popular belief, burial is a very widespread practice in Tamil Nadu. However, as far as the funerary culture of Sri Lankan Tamils is concerned, cremation has become a standard funerary practice.

An eminent anthropologist named Victor Turner defined rituals as "prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers." Turner defines rituals as structured and symbolic actions that take place within a social or cultural context, involving shared beliefs and meanings. According to Turner, rituals can reshape communities by fostering a sense of belonging and identity. He saw rituals as a means of resolving psychological and social conflicts by enabling people to temporarily leave their regular roles and reach a liminal condition. Turner asserts that this essential period of liminality is one in which people feel a sense of ambiguity, openness, and promise. Communitas refers to a state of collective solidarity and equality that arises during certain ritual experiences. Overall, Turner's perspective on rituals emphasizes their transformative nature, their role in constructing social bonds and identities, and their ability to create a temporary alternative reality that goes beyond everyday routines (Victor Turner, 1969). It can be said that rituals appeared when men appeared. Rituals are an integral part of human life. Rituals are an expression of the human mind. They manifest emotionally based on beliefs. Rituals are performed to protect sacred nature, to connect with the essence and gain its power to make it useful and untainted, and to isolate and purify it from evil. These rituals are of many types.

Rituals are divided into two types: life rituals and death rituals. The final ritual of humanity is the death rite. The aim of performing these funeral rituals is to express unbearable grief, to make the deceased God and lead their family, to break the relationship with the family, and to reach the lotus feet of God. "Performative" refers to the act of performing or carrying

out an action deliberately and intentionally. It does not merely mean that the action is not just functional or practical but also carries symbolic or expressive meaning. As far as rituals or ceremonies are concerned, the performative aspect refers to how the actions, gestures, or behaviours involved are performed with a particular significance or purpose. In rituals, actions are performed in a way that is intentional, deliberate, and often by established traditions or beliefs. Owing to the performative nature of the rituals, individuals or groups are actively expressing and embodying certain values, emotions, or cultural norms. Performative elements can be found in various areas of life, not just in rituals. For example, public speaking, theatrical performances, or even day-to-day interactions can involve performative elements, where individuals consciously project or convey certain messages or emotions through their actions or words. Overall, the concept of performative highlights the intentional and symbolic nature of actions, emphasising how they are not just practical but also carry deeper meanings and intentions (Austin, J. L., 1962).

Indeed, rituals can be performative. They frequently entail a series of deliberate and symbolic actions, gestures, or rituals carried out by individuals or groups. By established customs or beliefs, these actions are frequently repeated or performed in a particular order. Rituals' performative component provides their force and meaning by enabling participants to connect with their respective cultures, spiritual practices, and worldviews. The performative aspect gives the event an additional level of meaning and participation, regardless of whether it is a religious rite, a cultural custom, or even a personal ritual.

Funerals provide a space for mourning, reflection, and the celebration of the life and legacy of the departed. These rituals offer support and closure to the family and friends left behind, while also recognising the significance of the life that has passed. Funerals play a critical role in completely different social orders and can be profoundly important for those included. They offer an opportunity for the community to come together to support one another, share stories and recollections, and discover comfort within the lamenting process.

Funerals are considered to be rituals. They regularly include an arrangement of ceremonial activities and traditions that are performed to honour and keep in mind a departed individual. Funerals can vary greatly

depending on cultural, religious, and personal beliefs. They frequently incorporate customs such as viewing or wake, eulogies, prayers, processions, and burials or cremations. Funerals play a role in a collective healing process. When the loss of a loved one happens, those left behind become deeply emotional, and that is a challenging time for them. Funerals provide an opportunity for collective grieving and support, allowing family, friends, and community members to come together to remember, honour, and celebrate the life of the deceased. During a funeral, individuals share stories, memories, and emotions related to the person who has passed away. As this collective sharing of grief provides comfort to the loved ones of the departed soul, they realise that they are not left isolated in their feelings of loss. Funerals also offer a space for expressing emotions, both individually and as a group. Crying, sharing condolences, and consoling one another are all part of the collective healing process that occurs during a funeral. Accepting the pain and grief, and then finding strength and support in the community gathered at the funeral, According to Mahesan N. (1998), funerals, which include rituals, prayers, or other symbolic acts, provide a sense of structure, meaning, and spiritual comfort. These rituals can contribute to collective healing by helping individuals connect with their beliefs, find hope, and process their emotions in a shared and supportive environment. Thus, funerals serve as a powerful collective healing process.

As ancient Tamil society had a rich musical culture, music held a significant place in every aspect of the social life of Tamils. Thus, music had a strong presence in ancient Tamil society. Music and dances were an integral part of celebrations, rituals, and daily life. Music was used in every aspect of expression, such as love, nature, and social issues, reflecting the beliefs and values of the community. Hymns and songs were important aspects of Tamil funerary culture. Music in ancient Tamil society acts as a means of storytelling, cultural expression, and spiritual connection (Raghavan, 1993).

MUSICAL ELEMENTS IN THE FUNERARY RITUALS OF TAMILS

Oppari is a traditional form of lamenting in Tamil society. *Oppari* is a type of folk song that frequently combines lament and eulogy. Usually, a group of female relatives who attended the funeral to offer their respects

to the departed sings the *oppari.* It is a way to share and comfort one's sadness as well as the grief of the bereaved. The *oppari* is a common way for communities to express their sorrow at a funeral. Professional oppari singers are occasionally hired, but this is a declining practice.

The songs do not have a predetermined structure; instead, the lyrics are sung spontaneously, largely improvised, and they pay tribute to the departed. The *oppari* is frequently focused on the deceased's family members and emphasizes the degree of their blood relationship (mother, father, brother, sister, etc.) with the person. The singer of *oppari* wails sings and beats her chest while accompanying the mourners in bringing their repressed pain to the surface. *Opparis* are full of wordplay involving names and occasions connected to the deceased. The lyrics are additionally decorated with colourful local idioms. *Oppari* singing is still common in rural areas, but it is on the verge of extinction in urban areas. The significance of *oppari* is as a form of mourning, performance, and Tamil folk music. The ritualistic and artistic aspects of *oppari* ensure that *oppari* is performative (Rajaram and Gopala, 2017).

According to Pathmanesan (2017), the music of the *parai* drum (*Parai melam*) is very important in Tamil culture. The music of the *parai* drum has a lengthy history in the world's drum heritage. But regrettably, several causes are contributing to the decline of this performing art. As far as the status and placement of *parai* drum music in Sri Lankan Tamil culture are concerned, *parai* drum music is regarded as inauspicious because it is used in funeral rituals.

The Tamil community in the diaspora practices the performance of memory through various funeral and memorial rituals. Funerary rituals in the diaspora serve as a means of keeping connections with ancestral homelands and preserving cultural identity. Hymns, songs, chants, and other forms of musical expression are integrated to stir up emotions and pay homage to the departed soul. Thus, having considered the funerary culture of Tamils, it can be said that the ability of music to create a sense of community, provide solace, and facilitate the grieving process is well understood (Urmila Mohan, 2013).

The cultural and religious perspectives on death within the context of Sri Lankan Buddhism were explored. Extensive research was done on various beliefs, rituals, and practices surrounding death and the process of dying in

Sri Lankan Buddhist traditions (John Clifford Holt, 1995). Tamil funerary rituals from an anthropological perspective were analysed a bit. The cultural, social, and religious aspects surrounding Tamil funeral practices were analysed briefly from an anthropological perspective by scholars. In such studies, the funerary processes have been explained from historical perspectives, and the changes that the funerary culture underwent have been highlighted. There has been remarkably little research that focuses on performative elements in the funerary culture of Tamils.

Michael Moffatt (1977) states that various dimensions of the Tamil funeral rites, such as the preparation of the body, the role of mourners, and the overall funeral process, should be analysed to understand the funerary culture of Tamils. Historical context, cultural beliefs, and rituals should be analysed to have a clear understanding of the funerary tradition of Tamils. There are traditional folk theatre forms that centre on the theme of death. Unique elements of the performance, including its storytelling techniques, music, dance, and costumes, are integral parts of the funerary culture of Tamils. Folk theatre forms, especially *therukoothu,* portray death as a central theme and reflect the broader cultural and social attitudes towards mortality in Tamil society. Extensive research on the funerary process provides a deeper understanding of the intersection between performing art and the concept of death in the funerary culture of Tamils (Shulman and Velcheru Narayana Rao, 1996). In his study titled *"Funerary Rituals of the Tamil Community in Sri Lanka: A Sociological Analysis"*, K. Sivathamby provides a sociological analysis of the funerary rituals observed within the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. In this study, he studied the various aspects of Tamil funeral customs within the sociocultural context of Sri Lanka. In this study, he focuses more on the beliefs, social interaction, and social style involved in death rituals. Sivathamby K. (2013) states that death rituals have undergone various changes over time, and according to him, it cannot be said that the death rites found in Tamil culture were as per the standard funerary practice.

As far as Saivite culture is concerned, not being reborn is considered the ultimate goal for a departed soul. To reach God without rebirth is the expectation of Tamils who follow *Saivism.* Saivites want death to be a matter of joining the Lord Shiva (Mahesan, N., 1998). However, the belief of the ancient Tamils is different from this perception, as the ancient Tamil

community believed in reincarnation. According to Iniyavan (2015), the worship of burial monuments by ancient Tamils demonstrates their belief in rebirth. The culture of worshipping the dead as deities has stuck with the Tamils. In his research titled *Death and Funerary Rites in Sri Lanka: A Case Study from the Eastern Province*, Dennis B. McGilvray focuses on the eastern province to provide a detailed analysis of the cultural and social aspects of the funerary rituals of Tamils (Dennis B. McGilvray, 1989). Funerary rituals have evolved and transformed, considering the impact of historical events on religious practices and mourning traditions (Kalinga Tudor Silva, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was adopted as the data collection technique for this study. A literature review was done to study the existing knowledge that has focused on the cultural and social significance of the funerary rituals of Tamils and to study the rituals and the performative aspects associated with them. Data collection was done from the fieldwork conducted as much as possible among the Tamil community in the places that are predominantly Tamil. Ethnographic research methods such as participants' direct observation and structured and semi-structured interviews with both elderly people and those who have expertise in the funerary culture of Tamils were used for this study. Religious texts, especially Saivite and Hindu religions, historical records, and newspapers were also read to get a deeper understanding of the cultural context of funerary rituals in Tamil society in Sri Lanka.

The researcher attended the funerals of the Tamil community across various regions where Tamils are densely populated to look deeply into the funeral process to identify performative aspects of the funerary customs of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Thus, one could observe the funerary rituals of Tamils in different parts of Sri Lanka by paying attention to the various performative perspectives.

Less formal discussions were conducted with members of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka who have participated in or witnessed funerary rituals, as well as experts on Tamil culture, religion, and history. Diaspora Tamils were also less formally interviewed to gather data about the funerary culture practised by them. Those who conduct the funeral service as their profession and the laypersons who conduct the funeral service as a voluntary

community service were also interviewed in a semi-structured manner. Those who take part in the funeral process in various ways, including the drum players, were also interviewed for this study.

Data collected from the three persons who have expertise in the funerary culture of Tamils, common people of the Tamil areas, and those who take part in the funeral process in their respective fields were summarised and organised for further analysis by comparing the data that I collected using my direct observation. Knowledge gained through the literature review of this study was used to get a deeper understanding to analyze the data collected through the above-mentioned methods for this study. A comprehensive interpretation of the data was done by highlighting significant findings and unique insights in the data analysis process of this study. Qualitative analysis techniques like thematic analysis or content analysis were used in this study.

DISCUSSION

The funeral culture of the Tamils is rich in rituals and symbolism, reflecting the spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions of the Tamil community. The funeral procession is just before the last ritual of the funerary culture of Tamils. According to the belief in Tamil society of Saivite culture, the ultimate goal of a soul is to get liberated from the cycle of birth and death. There is a set of ritualistic customs that are practised with the hope that those customs will contribute to the peaceful transmigration of the departed soul. Once all the rituals are performed at the home where the funeral takes place, the funeral procession starts. Funeral procession, which is the important process of final rites, plays an important role in facilitating the soul's journey towards the feet of the Lord, according to the beliefs of the Tamils of Saivite culture.

It should be noted that specific practices may vary based on regional customs, beliefs, and personal preferences. *Brahmin* priests do not conduct funeral services. *Saiva Kurukkal* (priests of Saivite culture) conduct the funeral services. In places where *Saiva Kurukkal* is unavailable, those who have expertise in the traditional funerary culture conduct the funerals. Some of the elements of traditional rituals that are difficult to perform in present-day circumstances are modified in a way to get them performed on a symbolic basis.

FUNERAL PROCESS

Preparation

While the soul leaves the body, family members or relatives who do not cry and remain unspoken recite the holy hymns of Saivism such as *Thevaram* and *thiruvasakam*. The relatives squeeze milk into the mouth of one who is about to be departed to prevent the throat from drying up and engage in things like applying holy ash, namely *thiruniru*. As the soul leaves the body, the soul is slightly disturbed. This causes confusion and unbearable grief to the soul that is about to be departed. In this circumstance, if the people nearby shout and cry, the soul will be more disturbed and distressed. Because of this, there has been a custom of keeping quiet and doing things that are worthy of divine thought. In this state, while reciting the *thevaram* and *Thiruvasakam* hymns, peace and divine contemplation are created for the departed soul and those present.

When a person dies, the dead body is laid with the head facing south. The dead body is laid with its head facing south, as Saivites believe that if the head of the dead body is placed in the north direction, the dead body will suffer damage and deteriorate quickly. After that, things to be done before the dead body stiffens up are done. It is then ensured that the dead body's mouth and eyes are closed, and the big toes are tied together. There is a tradition that these things should be done immediately because they cannot be done if the body becomes stiff by losing its heat. Nowadays, there are hospitals and funeral undertakers that help in conducting funerals. They will take care of these. However, the tradition of family members doing this in the event of a death at home continues today. After that, it is customary to cover the dead body with a white cloth from head to toe to prevent flies, ants, etc.

Getting a white dhoti or cloth tied over the place where the deceased is placed

After that, the washerman in the surrounding area is invited to get a white dhoti, or cloth, tied over the place where the deceased is going to be placed. This is the important process of the funeral that makes the deceased godlike. It is performed with the belief that the deceased should be treated as God *Shiva* throughout the funeral process. Thus, a dead person is considered godlike until the last rites. That is why whatever is done during *abhishekam*

to Shiva (bathing, chanting of *devaram*) is done to the deceased as equal to Shiva. After that, a traditional lamp is lit near the head of the body. In the olden days, when there were no electric lights, traditional lamps provided light. To see the face of the dead body, it was customary to light a traditional lamp near the head of the deceased. Since the Lord is in the form of light, this tradition of lighting traditional lamps continues even today in the belief that the Lord is also present when the traditional lamp is lit.

Announcing the death

When a person is pronounced dead, the process of announcing the death *(ilavu sollal)* is done. Announcing death by wandering the streets where the kiths and kins live is the customary practice of the funerary culture of Tamils. On the day before the funeral, those who announce the death go to the relative's residences on bicycles and recite the family name of the deceased in a song-like manner. Thus, even an announcement of a death is performative in the funerary culture of Tamils. Even though obituary news is conveyed through newspapers and digital platforms nowadays, this particular custom is still practised in the *vaddukottai* and Point Pedro areas of Jaffna.

Recitation of *Thevaram* and *Thiruvasakam*

At the time of death, until the funeral rites are completed, and throughout mourning, relatives and friends recite *thevaram* and *thiruvasakam*s, which are the holy hymns of *saivism*. Now, in urban areas, they use audio. There is also a custom of singing Siddha songs associated with death. Not all holy hymns are sung with the right music. But they are sung with devotion. It is believed that once the soul leaves the body, it remains invisible to the naked eye and wanders in its vicinity until the funerary rituals are completed. As Saivites believe that not being reborn is a great gift for the soul, these holy hymns are sung to wish the deceased to reach the lotus feet of Lord Shiva without rebirth.

Worshipping

As has already been mentioned, due to the large-scale Sanskritization of the Saivite culture of Tamils, Hindu culture influences a lot of spiritual beliefs. According to Hindu culture, which dominates the Saivite culture of Tamils in some aspects, Lord Ganesha should be respected and worshipped before initiating anything. In that manner, turmeric paste and *arugam* grass

are used to install a symbolic Lord Ganesha before initiating the funeral process. Then, in a silver pot full of water, coconuts are placed on the mouth of the pot, and mango leaves are placed around the coconuts. This silver pot with coconut and mango leaves is the symbolic display of the installation of Lord Shiva and goddess Shakthi.

After that*, kolli kudam* is prepared. An earthen pot full of water with coconut and mango leaves is called *kolli kudam*. Once the installation of Lord Ganesha, Lord Shiva, goddess Shakthi, and *kolli kudam* is completed, Pooja worship begins. Lord Ganesha is worshipped to clear all impediments and to grant his grace for the proper completion of all the ritualistic customs associated with the final rites. Shiva and Shakthi worship is done to invite them to be present at the ceremony to grant their grace to the departed soul on the right path to attaining eternal bliss. Through *kolli kudam pooja*, the departed soul is invoked to be present at the final rites to get prepared to be guided towards eternal bliss by the Lord Shiva. Then, *parai* drummers will start beating the traditional *parai* drum of Tamils. Then, prayer is recited by singing the hymns of Saivite belief, called *Panchapuranam*.

Performing *Parai* Drum

Parai is a Tamil musical instrument. It is a drum made of leather. The word '*parai*' refers to speech. '*Parai*' is derived from the word '*paraithal*' which means 'to speak'. (Nannool: 458). *Parai* drum music has a long history in the world drum tradition, and it is the symbol of the ancient performing art of Tamils. Due to Sanskritization and various factors, this performing art lost its prominence as auspicious music. Parai drumming takes a prominent position in the funerary culture of Tamils. Though the *parai* drum was an integral part of the music culture in ancient Tamil society and was recognised as auspicious as well, this drum is now seen as a funeral drum in the Tamil culture of Sri Lanka. Contrary to what the ancient Tamils had a perception of funeral, the funeral is viewed as an inauspicious ritual because of the influence of Saivite culture. As the *parai* drum became a funeral drum, the music of it announced to the people surrounding the place that a funeral would take place. Therefore, the news of death is communicated to people by beating the *Parai* drum.

Bathing ceremony

The first and foremost step related to the deceased in the funeral is called

the bathing ceremony, which is a cleansing ritual. This tradition intended to prepare the deceased for the funeral rites. The body of the deceased is traditionally bathed and dressed in clean clothes by close relatives. As embalming of the dead body is done nowadays, this bathing tradition has become symbolic. Then, the body is garlanded with flowers. After that, holy ash on the forehead is applied. In this bathing ceremony, oil and fruits are applied to the body of the deceased, followed by fresh water. At the last step of the bathing, *kumba* water on the deceased is sprinkled. Scientifically speaking, bathing the body is done to purify the body and avoid spreading infections. The materials that were used to bathe the dead body were the only available materials in the earlier days. Cleaning detergents are available extensively in the markets, and the embalming of the dead body is done nowadays. Therefore, bathing with oil and fruits is not scientifically needed. However, this bathing ceremony became symbolic, and the Tamils of Saivite culture believed that the dead body should be treated as the god Shiva, whose worship is devoted to the Supreme Being. Therefore, they still bathe the dead body using oil and fruits, like how the god Shiva is bathed in the temples. Thus, the bathing ceremony is an intentional and symbolic action by established traditions or beliefs. Therefore, the bathing ceremony is the perfect example of a performative ritual.

Pounds of incense

After the bathing ceremony, the pounding of incense is done. Holy verses dedicated to Lord Shiva by saint Manikkavasakar in his holy script, namely "*thiruvasagam,*" are sung in the prayer in the belief that the sins of the departed soul will be eliminated by these holy verses called "*thiru Potchunnam*," and the departed soul will be guided to eternal bliss by listening to these twenty holy verses of *thiruvasakam.*

A clean small mortar (*ural)*, having a bowl-shaped cavity in which grains and other substances can be crushed, and a pestle (*ulakkai*), which is used to pound the substances in the mortar, are used for this. The mango leaf is tied with both a mortar and pestle. Holy ash, sandal, and *kunkumam* are applied to both the mortar and pestle. The mortar is placed under the feet, and turmeric, *arugam* grass, and some rice are put inside it. The pestle is given to the right hand of the person who performs the last rites and is asked to keep it. After singing each holy hymn of *thiruvasakam*, which is *potchunnam*, the substances in the mortar are pounded using a pestle. Thus,

all twenty verses of *potchunnam* are sung.

Holding ghee sticks

At the time of singing the holy verses of *thiruvasakam* to forgive the sins of the departed soul, grandchildren of the deceased hold the ghee sticks by standing around the deceased. It is performed by the grandchildren of the deceased to ensure the genealogy of the deceased. Those who carry the name of the deceased to the next generation should hold the ghee sticks. Grandchildren of the deceased perform this funerary custom. The spiritual belief behind holding the ghee sticks is that the departed soul may receive enlightenment to attain eternal bliss. In foreign countries, candle lights are used symbolically instead of ghee sticks to abide by the fire regulations. The belief behind this funeral process is that the departed soul will receive enlightenment to follow the path of eternal bliss.

Floral tribute

Then, those who attend the funeral are allowed to view and garland the deceased. It is an opportunity provided to everyone attending the funeral to pay their last respects to the deceased.

Placing rice in the mouth of the deceased

Close relatives of the deceased put a handful of rice, free of husk, in the mouth of the deceased. According to the belief in Saivite culture, the departed soul is blessed if it is not to be born. Therefore, those who are close to the deceased pray for the departed soul not to be born and to reach the lotus feet of the god. Rice free of husks will not germinate. To convey the wish that the soul should not be reborn symbolically, a handful of rice free of husks is put into the mouth of the deceased.

Oppari

Though it is a declining practice, it is still sung by women who are close to the deceased. Mostly, women sing *oppari* in their own homes. Professional *oppari* singers are hired at funerals nowadays. However, it will be meaningful and informative if the *oppari* is sung by those who are close to the deceased. If the deceased has not been seen for a long time, they sing oppari about it. *oppari* functions as a commentary as it narrates every process of the funeral. *Oppari* is also sung as one asks and the others answer.

The greatness, history, and social contribution of the deceased are sung in *oppari. Oppari* is sung, and traditional drums are played in the belief that the soul will stay in that home environment for 31 days. Therefore, it is not good to let the departed soul listen to negative things, according to the beliefs in the funerary culture of Tamils. Those who sing *oppari* start intensifying the oppari when placing a handful of rice, which is free of husk, in the mouth of the deceased. Once the funeral process involves placing a handful of rice in the deceased's mouth, oppari singers start telling the most important things about the deceased and what they leave behind for the bereaved. It should be noted that oppari is not sung when holy hymns are recited or poojas are performed. There is a possibility of mental illness for those who do not talk about their grief. Because of this, the custom of crying with oppari was developed. Without understanding its need and meaning, many people are avoiding it today, mistaking it as an uncivilised act. Though there is no standard text or music established for singing *oppari,* it is sung like how professional singers sing. Parables, phonics, and other musical parameters are well used in *oppari.*

Maradithal (way of lamenting)

The process of beating the breast, as when women bewail the dead, is called *maradithal*. *Maradithal* is done for *oppari* songs. Therefore, it is called *maradithal pattu* as it is sung while beating the chest. This is why there are 'for-hire' artists. *Maradithal* is not performed at a specific place or time; it is sung only at funerals. When the body of the deceased is inside the house, *maradithal* performers perform it while standing in the courtyard of the house at the entrance. This singing is part of the funerary ritual in life circle rituals. *Maradithal* songs are usually performed only after the deaths of old people. If close relatives perform *maradithal*, they do it until the 8th day of the funeral. *Maradithal* is intensified at the time of putting a handful of rice in the mouth of the deceased.

Closing of the coffin

According to the Saivite belief, the departed soul should discard all earthly desires. To reflect this belief in the funerary ritual, jewellery and other decorative ornaments are removed from the deceased during the last passage of the rite towards eternal bliss. The removal of ornaments is done when the coffin is closed. When the coffin is closed, the women will scream

and cry. Because if the coffin is closed, then women cannot see the body of the deceased. This is because there is no practice of women going to crematoriums.

JOURNEY TO THE CREMATORIUM

Paadai

Paadai is a palanquin-like structure built to carry a deceased person to the crematorium. It is built like a vehicle on which a deceased person can be placed in a lying position. It is attached to poles and is carried on the shoulders of at least four men who are close relatives of the deceased. The *paadai* is made of coconut leaf, bamboo, white cloth, etc. There is also a tradition of decorating the *paadai*. The elders of the village, together with the *parai* drummers, build this *paadai*. Once the death rites begin, this *paadai* is quickly constructed at the entrance of the home where the funeral takes place. Tamils used this *paadai* to carry the deceased to the crematorium. A white cloth known as *nilapavadai* is placed along the path where the deceased is carried. On the way to the crematorium using *paadai*, they would stop the journey there and play the drum, and then continue the journey towards the crematorium. The dexterity and artistry of carrying the dead body very quickly by building a structure to carry the deceased are revealed through the death ritual of the Tamils. Like God is carried on a palanquin during the temple procession, the deceased is carried in the path. This shows that Tamils have a culture of giving so much respect to the deceased. This is a declining practice now. Nowadays, hearses are mostly used to carry the deceased to the crematorium. However, it is still in use in the rural villages of Tamils.

Starting with an announcement, *parai* drumming continued in the funeral procession, and the beating of it was stopped at the entrance of the crematorium. Persons belonging to a particular oppressed community beat this drum for generations. Though *parai* drumming has a rich history in the way it is beaten with various rhythms and musical patterns, a particular rhythm is beaten at funerals. The *parai* drum is beaten in a way that stops the flow of music to keep it in tune with a measure and to move with a uniform rhythm. According to the people attending the funeral, the beat of the *parai* drum creates a mournful environment, and people become emotional as a result of its music. The drum played during the funeral procession is also

considered a final expression of respect for the deceased. Thus, drum music is a symbol of the death ritual, from the announcement to the final respect. To the extent that music plays a primary role in mourning, there is no Tamil life without music.The one who is going to perform the last rites called the next of kin, carries the *kolli kudam* and firebrand to the crematorium to do the cremation.

CREMATION

Though the funerary culture of Tamils was burial for several thousand years, as a consequence of the Sanskritization, cremation became the standard funerary practice of Tamils. However, burial culture did not completely disappear from the funerary culture of the Tamils. The bodies of those who died a bad death are still buried. Unnatural deaths, such as those caused by accident, murder, or arson attacks, are called bad deaths. However, cremation later became the standard funeral practice. As the Sanskritized Saivitie culture adapted the Hindu culture after it further went into the process of extreme Sanskritization, Harichandra Purana of the north Indian Hindu tradition influenced the cremation process of Tamil funeral culture.

According to the funerary culture of Hindus and Saivites, cremation is a very significant ceremony. They think it frees a person's spiritual essence from their temporary physical form so they can be born again. It is believed that if it is not done or done improperly, the spirit will be agitated, fail to make its way to the afterlife, and return to haunt a living family. Because of its association with purity and its ability to drive away evil ghosts, demons, and spirits, fire is often used to dispose of the deceased. To prepare for transmigration, the fire god Agni is commanded to consume the physical body and create its essence in heaven.

According to Hindu belief, Harichandra is the authorised earthly representative of Lord Yama. Upon the arrival of the dead body of the deceased at the crematorium, it will be placed in front of the stone or statue, remembering Harichandra, whom *pooja*s will conduct before cremation, with the belief that Harichandra should be worshipped to get the final rites completed. After that, the body of the deceased will be placed in the furnace area of the crematorium, where immediate family members will come for the final rituals. A clay pot of milk will be held on the left shoulder of the one who is going to do the final rites by his brother-in-law. As he walks

around the dead body, a hold will be made, the milk pouring from it will be sprinkled on all four corners, and the pot will finally be broken in front of the deceased body. Then, symbolically, the one who is going to do the last rites will set fire to the body of the deceased. After that, all will return home after sprinkling water over their heads three times.

ASH COLLECTION

After the cremation, the deceased's ashes are usually ready for collection about 2 hours later. Then the cloth containing ashes will be put into the clay pot containing milk and holy water, and then the pot will be thrown as far into the running water as possible. This is called *kaadattuthal.*

MOURNING PERIOD

Following the cremation, the family enters a period of mourning, which usually lasts for eight to thirty days, depending on their circumstances. During this period of mourning, relatives and friends visit the family of the departed soul to express their condolences and offer their support. The ones who did the final rites and those associated with him are to remain unshaven and maintain a strict vegetarian food habit until the eighth day of the funeral.

RITUALS AND OFFERINGS

Throughout the mourning period, commemorative rituals and prayers are conducted for the departed soul. Offerings such as food and beverages, flowers, and incense are made to the departed soul.

MEMORIAL SERVICES

On the thirty-first day, a memorial service called the *thithi* is conducted. Family, relatives, and friends get together to remember the departed, offer prayers, and share a meal. Many of the funerary customs followed during the death ritual are not followed nowadays, as some funerary customs are difficult to follow in the age of rapid change. Some other elements of the funerary culture of Sri Lankan Tamils are followed with modifications or symbolically. Even those that are considered irrelevant in today's times are still followed in the villages without change. Even people who had a culture of burying dead bodies had to change to a culture of cremation when

they lived in urban areas. Social and economic factors also exert such an influence on funerary rituals. The Tamils living in the diaspora do not want to give up their heritage. However, we are unable to follow it completely and follow many things only as symbols. This generation knows the purpose of symbolically following something. But the next generation is less likely to have that understanding.

Thus, although the death rituals have undergone many changes due to social and economic conditions, their performance has somehow continued. Thus, changes in funeral rites over time may not have had a major impact on their performance. As far as funeral rituals are concerned, each ritual is performed with deep faith and with the intention of receiving God's grace. Since rituals are performative in nature, all rituals of death are performative. Looking at the death ritual as a ritual of the Tamils, we can see its performative perspectives. Furthermore, while examining the performativity of death rituals, it can be seen that every step of the funerary ritual is performative.

CONCLUSION

In Tamil funeral traditions, the funeral procession is of utmost importance. In most cases, it entails a solemn, planned procession from the place of grieving to the crematorium. To honour the deceased and say farewell to the departed soul, family and friends assemble to perform a set of rituals performed at funerals. The ultimate goal of a soul is said to be to escape the cycle of birth and death in Tamil society, especially in the Saivite culture. Several ritualistic traditions are observed during funerals in pursuit of this release, with the hope that they may aid in the peaceful departure of the departed soul.

In Tamil culture, those who attend the funeral get themselves connected with funerary rituals, with the hope that their performative components give them power and purpose. Apart from considering it a religious ritual and a cultural tradition, the performative elements inherited in the funerary culture of Tamils in Sri Lanka add a new degree of participation and meaning to the funeral. Everything performed about funerary cultures, such as preparation of the funeral, announcing the death, bathing ceremony, recitation of the holy hymns, worshipping, performing *parai* Drum, pounding of incense, holding ghee sticks, floral tribute, placing of rice in the mouth of the

deceased, singing *oppari,* performing *maradithal,* construction of *paadai,* the closing of the coffin, journey to the crematorium, ash collection, observing mourning period, offerings, and memorial services are ritualistic and performative in the way they are performed.

These rituals are performed with great care and attention to detail, and they are performed from a variety of performative perspectives that emphasize the value of preserving cultural heritage and encouraging community healing. The rituals and symbolism that are ingrained in Tamil funeral culture represent the community's spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions. The symbols that are used in the funerary rituals serve as a constant reminder of the spiritual beliefs embedded in Tamil funeral customs.

Funerals are seen as ritualistic events. They frequently consist of a series of rituals and traditions that are followed in remembrance and honour of the departed soul. The funerary culture of Tamils can have a set of performative elements. They usually involve a series of intentional and symbolic gestures, rituals, or activities that are performed by either individuals or the community as a whole. These actions are commonly repeated or carried out in a specific order by accepted norms or beliefs.Tamils' rich traditions and a strong sense of community are reflected in their funeral customs. The funeral procession, with its rituals, symbolism, and communal support, serves as a way to honour the deceased, cherish their memory, and provide comfort to those bereaved. It is a custom that is firmly founded in the spiritual practices and cultural traditions of the Tamil community, giving their loved ones a heartfelt and profound farewell through performing a set of ritualistic processes that are rich in performativity. Performative rituals associated with funerals are declining as they are either modified or avoided to suit the prevailing circumstances in this age of rapid change. Although funerary culture has undergone many changes, its performativity continues in different forms.

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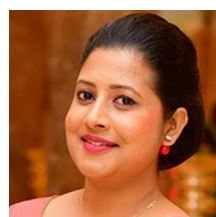
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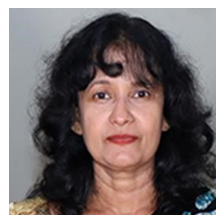
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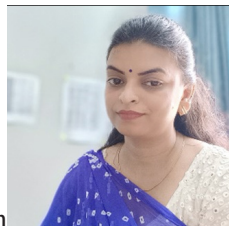
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