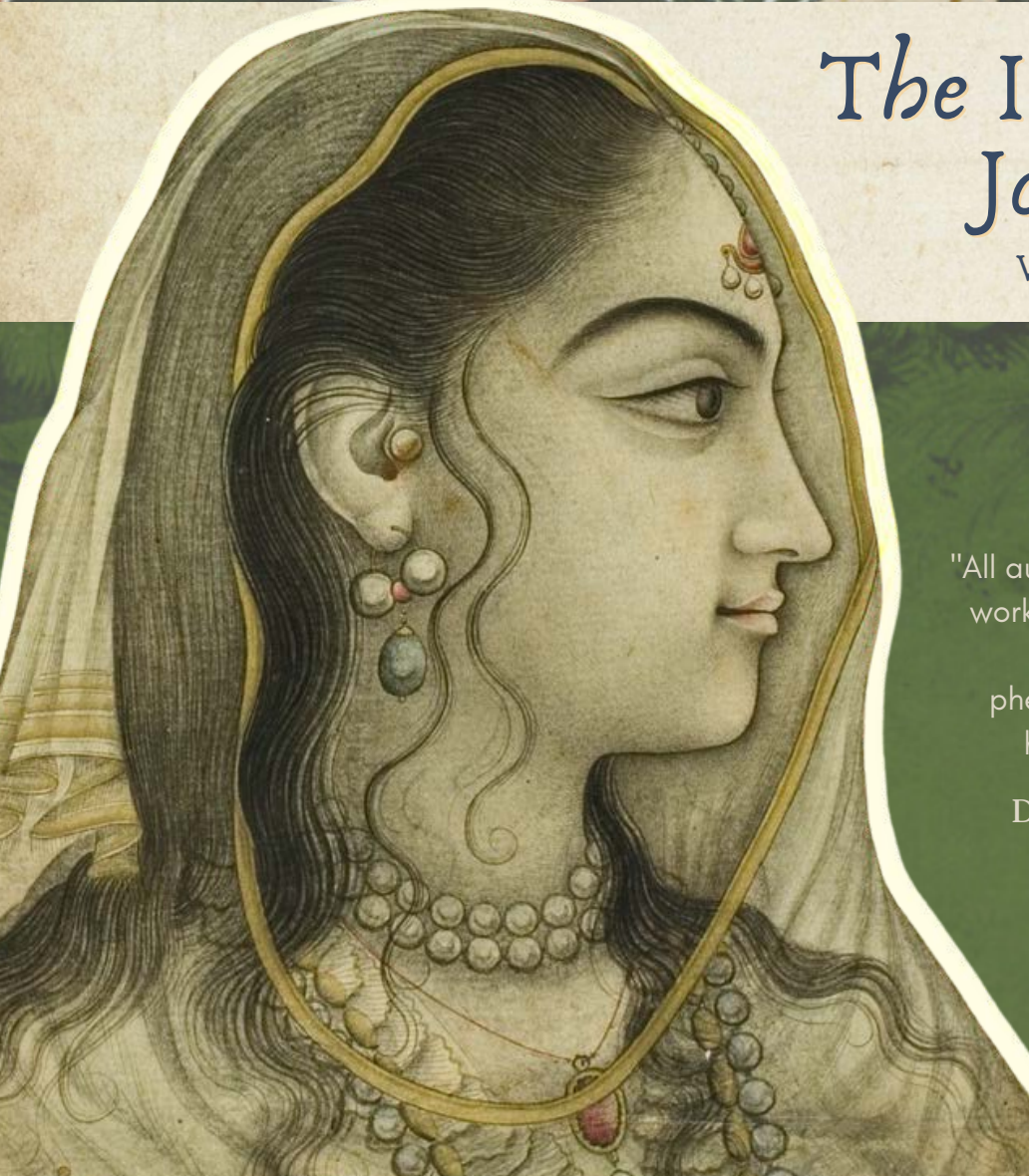




The Itihāsoḷogy Journal

Volume 2



"All authors are to be commended for their work. It is especially refreshing to see so many multi-authored essays, a phenomenon that is rather rare in the humanities and social sciences."

DR. CATHERINE B. ASHER

itihāsology

The Itihāsology Journal

Volume 2

5th June, 2023

Dedicated to

Dr. Catherine B. Asher (1946 - 2023)

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Reviews for the Journal

Dr. Catherine B. Asher

Professor Emerita, Department of Art History, University of Minnesota

Specialist in Islamic and Indian Art from 1200 to the present. Author of renowned works including *Architecture of Mughal India* and *India before Europe*.

Review

“It is a great pleasure to read so many wonderful essays by young budding scholars for Itihāsology. These cover a range of materials from art to literature and political movements concern timely issues such as patronage and politics, gender studies, contemporary understandings of older materials and more. Eric Chopra and Kudrat Singh along with their team are to be congratulated on this endeavour. I hope we see more issues of Itihāsology in the future.

Three essays concern India’s art history from the fifth century to the present. Jahanvi Jha’s essay, “Bāgh Cave paintings: An Inquiry into its Historical Context,” focuses on the patronage of these famous paintings based on critical inscriptions of the Valkha kings and a Maharaja in the service of these kings. The author through the images and their inscriptions to determine their social dimensions. Diptarka Datta takes us to 18th century Bengal and examines the motivations behind Rani Bhabani’s terracotta temples at Baranagar. Her study compliments work done on other 18th and even 19th century female patrons such as Begum Samru, Mangammal of Madurai and Ahilya Bai. Merlyn Singh’s “Oral Traditions and Folk Art: A case of Phad Paintings with Emphasis on ‘Pabuji Ki Phad’, and Commercialization of Crafts,” explores this traditional mode of Rajasthani painting that is closely linked to an oral epic. The work is enhanced by interviews with one of the artists and the commercialization of this craft. Changes include a reduction in size of the paintings to appeal to a contemporary audience as well as the addition of imagery from other oral epics not included earlier in the traditional paintings.

Saniya Rizwan and Srishti Ghulani probe Manto’s most famous short story in their, “‘Madness’ of Civilisation : Unfolding Nationhood through the mind of Toba Tek Singh.” They focus on the impact of Partition and the arbitrariness of citizenship. Shriya Dasgupta and Oyeshi Ganguly also examine the ramifications of political action in “The Schoolchildren’s Anti-Colonial Rebellion: Looking back at the Chittagong Armoury Raid of 1930.” Here they examine not a work of literature but archival documents to explore the roots of female as well as Hindu-Muslim involvement in the evolving Independence movement.

The remaining three essays all focus on literature for their arguments and conclusions. Samarth Singh Chandel and Zainab Haleem's "Lal Ded: An Analysis of Her Vākhs and Contribution to the Cultural Heritage of Kashmir," probe the utterances of this 14th century Kashmiri female poet who is part of India's rich long standing Sant tradition. While her work transcends any categorization of Hindu or Muslim the two authors have shown that in today's Kashmir Hindu and Muslim groups claim her as their own thus ignoring the Sant's message. Shrusti Sharma explores the notion of romantic love in her "Interplay of Love, Class, and Gender in Late Mughal India: Unravelling the Centrality Question of Romantic Emotions." As she attempts to give voice to sequestered elite women she addresses the issue of does honor trump emotion. "Wardrobe of the Robes: Ceremonies, Diplomacy, and Material Culture," by Vidita Gupta and Pranjali Saini provides us with an overview of the practice of gifting robes known as khilat from the Sultanate through Colonial periods. These authors address changing practices and attitudes toward this ritual today still practised at weddings and other festive occasions.

All authors are to be commended for their work. It is especially refreshing to see so many multi-authored essays, a phenomenon that is rather rare in the humanities and social sciences".

Dr. Kumkum Roy

Former Professor, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Author of influential works including *The Emergence of Monarchy in North India*, *Women in Early Indian Societies*, and *The Power of Gender & the Gender of Power*.

Review

"This edition of Itihāsology, like its predecessor, provides a glimpse of the interests of young scholars. There are several features that are attractive—the willingness to engage with both well-known as well as more unconventional themes—from cave paintings to architecture, ephemeral art forms, oral traditions, political history, to the history of emotions. Also valuable is the engagement with historiographical debates, which forms a part of several contributions. A third feature which is remarkable, is the effort to contextualize specific themes within a larger framework. So, whether the subject is temple architecture or mystic poetry, symbolic gifts marking socio-political relations, anti-colonial rebellions, romantic emotions, or the homogenizing agenda of the nation state, these are generally explored and located within a richly textured context, moving beyond the immediate, both spatially and temporally. This allows for a complex understanding,

particularly admirable and refreshing in a situation where most historical analyses are often squeezed into rigid, polarized binaries. One will look forward to future volumes.”

Dr. Daud Ali

Associate Professor of South Asia Studies, University of Pennsylvania

Historian of pre-Mughal South Asia and author of *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*.

Review

“This issue of *Itihāsology* has brought together a collection of essays by promising young scholars that range in time and period from early medieval Maharashtra to late colonial Chittagong, partition and beyond. Three key threads run through this issue. One of these is a commendable emphasis on hierarchy and resistance, from readings of Lal Ded’s *vākhs* from Kashmir and later Mughal discourses on the potentially destructive capacities of passionate love among both elites and non elites to an argument for the continuing relevance of Manto’s famous story of Toba Tek Singh and a penetrative analysis of the recruitment and dynamics of the Chittagong uprising of 1930, Another perhaps less apparent but equally important stream of argument running through a number of essay dealing with subjects like the gifting of textiles in the form of *khi’lat* to the role of painted scrolls (*phad*) in the context of oral epics in Western India, suggests that materiality must be considered central to aesthetic and courtly traditions. A final point of emphasis shows how early patronage, particularly in the context of the construction of religious monuments, from the caves at Bagh (read together judiciously with the early *Valkha* inscriptions) to the eighteenth-century terracotta temples constructed in Bengal by the famous zamindar Rani Bhabani, palpably demonstrated piety, reinforced and legitimised authority, and served, overall, as an integrative mechanism. The volume presents a rich and varied selection of essays that have interdisciplinary intersections with gender and subaltern studies, art history, and the study of literature.”

Dr. Manan Ahmed

Associate Professor, Department of History, Columbia University

Specialist in intellectual history, critical philosophy of history, colonial and anti-colonial thought. Author of *A Book of Conquest: Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* and *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India*.

Review

“I am pleased to say these articles as a collective are engaging, original and based on primary sources. I especially want to highlight the work of Diptarka Datta, Saniya Rizwan and Srishti Ghulani, and Shriya Dasgupta and Oyeshi Ganguli as being exceptional. The issue overall shows robust engagement of the authors with significant texts and questions in Indian History.”

Dr. Amrita Tulika

Associate Professor, Department of History, St. Stephen's College at University of Delhi

Specialist in the histories of folk epics, peasants, tribes, and women in India.

Review

“It is heart-warming to see such enthusiasm for the past, for all those small and hitherto neglected details that promise to illuminate our understanding of Indian history. My best wishes to the budding historians!”

From the Editor's Desk

Building upon its predecessor, the second volume of The Itihāsology Journal showcases a diverse range of voices that passionately engage with, pose thought-provoking questions, and skillfully interpret the intricate layers of history. From its very inception, Itihāsology has steadfastly pursued the exploration of the multifaceted discipline of history through a myriad of approaches and therefore, serving as a bridge between emerging scholars and acclaimed historians, this Journal has played a monumental role in cementing those efforts. This volume's essays, including several multi-authored pieces, are based on numerous themes. They delve into the connection between secular and sacred traditions found in sculptural depictions; the politics of patronage; folk art, oral traditions, and wandering storytellers; cave paintings; popular perceptions of historical monuments; material culture and royal ceremonies; and much more. Literarily and visually rich, a few of them also contain photographs and poems. The coming together of this Journal would have been impossible without the invaluable guidance and support of our esteemed reviewers: Dr. Catherine B. Asher, Dr. Kumkum Roy, Dr. Daud Ali, Dr. Manan Ahmed, Dr. Sucheta Mahajan, and Dr. Amrita Tulika. Not only did they thoroughly review each essay but also provided invaluable feedback, allowing the authors to enhance the nuance and depth of their works. This volume is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Asher, whose untimely passing has left an irreplaceable void in academia and the global community. I also extend my most heartfelt gratitude to all the writers who have contributed to this edition. It has been an incredibly enriching experience for the editors to be familiarised with the intriguing historical questions that have piqued the curiosity of these authors. On behalf of Itihāsology, we thank all of you, our family of history aficionados, it is your support that makes our work possible and propels us forward in our ongoing exploration of the past. We hope that this edition too sparks greater interest in the subject of history and inspires you to embark on your personal journey with the past!

Eric Chopra

Founder, Itihāsology

About the Editorial Team

Eric Chopra: Founder of Itihāsology. Content Executive at Teamwork Arts Pvt. Ltd. Holds a BA (Honours) in History from St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi. Interested in histories of art, ghosts, aesthetics, emotions, tangible & intangible heritage and sexuality.

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Manan Jain: MA student at School of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University Delhi. Holds a BA (Honours) in History from Satyawati College, University of Delhi. Interested in the history of architecture and gender in South Asia.

About the Authors

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Srishti Ghulani: A Psychology graduate from University of Delhi. Ghulani holds a keen interest in reviewing the mental health discourse from a critically politicised lens, and is interested in researching and writing in arenas of classroom power dynamics and democratic education.

Srushthi Sharma: An undergraduate student of History at Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi. Sharma is deeply interested in South Asian Studies from the vantage of emotions and gender; through the methodology of orality and memory.

Samarth Singh Chandel: A third year student of History at Hansraj College, University of Delhi. Chandel is deeply interested in popular culture, gender, sexuality, migration, religion and art. Apart from academia, he creates art and pens journalistic pieces.

Zainab Haleem: A third year student of History at Miranda House, University of Delhi. Haleem's interests lie in the history of religion and the politics of caste and identity. She is an avid quizzier and writer.

Vidita Gupta: Currently pursuing Masters in Museum and Gallery Studies at Kingston University. Her conference publications and research explore textiles in historical societies. Currently she is working on a The National Heritage Lottery Fund project of increasing social cohesion between groups in Kingston upon Thames through means of textile traditions.

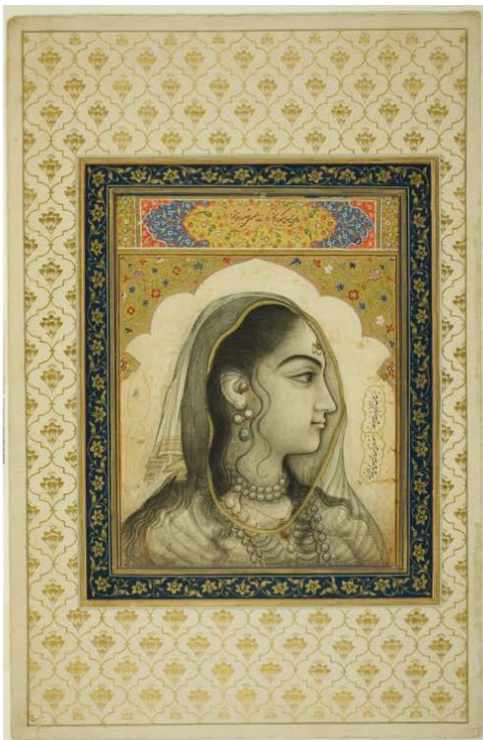
Pranjali Saini: Holds a postgraduate degree in Conservation, Preservation, and Heritage Management with a specialisation in Sustainable Tourism and Heritage Conservation. Currently, Saini works as a freelance researcher, providing organisations with research-based content. Passionate about the theory and practice of heritage conservation.

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Merlyn Singh: Pursuing Masters in Archaeology from Universita di Bologna, Italy. Singh's interests lie in digital archaeology, archaeology of the Near East, and assessing heritage issues.

About the Cover

The cover of this Journal is a result of the coming together of two public-domain Indian historical artworks that have been digitally made available by the Art Institute of Chicago. The cover has been ideated and put together by Kudrat B. Singh.



[Portrait of a Beauty](#)



[Maharana Bhim Singh in Procession](#)

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Temples of Power: Rani Bhabani of Natore and the Terracotta Temples of Baranagar

Diptarka Datta

Introduction

Rani Bhabani (1716-1795 CE) was a female *zamindar* and landowner of the vast estates of the erstwhile state of Natore in Bengal. Zamindars were local intermediaries who collected rents from the peasants and paid a portion of that to the state (Roy 2010, 180). She took charge of the state at a point in time when the geographical extent of the estates stretched from the Rajshahi District in the East (in present-day Bangladesh) to Murshidabad and parts of Birbhum District in the West (in present-day West Bengal), covering a total area of 12909 square miles (Grant 1917). Rani Bhabani was a popular subject of several novels, poems, books and other literature written by early twentieth century Bengali authors. Besides, her life and deeds are recounted in several oral legends

and traditions in Bengal. In most cases, though, these accounts and narratives pertain to her religious zeal, acts of piety, and attempts to alleviate the sufferings of the needy. She is accredited with having commissioned the construction of several Hindu temples, ordered the restoration of old temples, endowed pilgrimage routes with several amenities and provided for the sustenance of several needy subjects.

At Baranagar lies a group of terracotta temples. Built in the eighteenth century, these are attributed to Rani Bhabani and her piety. Although not more than ten temples survive at present, it is said that there were 107 Shiva temples in this region in the past. Of these, the largest and the most well-preserved is the Charbangla Temple Complex. Others include

the Bhabanishwar Temple and the Jor Bangla Temple. The aim of this paper is to study these monuments as sources to understand the socio-political, economic and religious contexts in which they were commissioned and constructed. It also tries to understand whether and how these monuments acted as symbols of power and prestige for their patron, besides being products of piety and devotion. The essay tries to investigate the reasons behind the construction of the temples in this area, their scale and proportion, and the huge amounts of money invested in them.

Geographical Context of the Baranagar Temples

The village of Baranagar is located in the Murshidabad District of West Bengal. Located at a distance of 1524 kilometres from the National Capital of Delhi, and at a distance of 215 kilometres from the state capital of

Kolkata, the village covers an area of approximately 230.46 hectares. The village lies on the western bank of the River Bhagirathi, at a meandering bend of the river (Bhattacharya 1979).

The Bhagirathi divides the district of Murshidabad into two broad geographical zones. The one lying on the west of Bhagirathi is known as the Rarh, while the one on the east is known as Bagri (Bhattacharya 1979). Geologically, the Baranagar region pertains to the Rarh topographical zone, characterised by clay and lateritic clay type of soil. The soil is comparatively heavy, greyish, or reddish (Mandal and Kayet 2016). The region also faces the threat of floods. This is mostly owing to the progressive deterioration in the carrying capacity of older existing detention basins (or *bils* in the region), and that of the river channel (Mollah 2013).

Of the temples attributed to Rani Bhabani in Baranagar, the Charbangla Temple Complex (24°15'N, 88°14'E) is the largest and the most well-maintained. The temple complex has four separate Shaiva shrines, each containing a row of three *shiva lingams* in their sanctum. The outer walls, pilasters, façades, and architraves of the temples are richly decorated with carved terracotta panels and terracotta sculptures. These contain depictions from a range of Hindu religious as well as secular themes (Chatterji 2012). While three of the temples show terracotta ornamentation, the fourth one shows decoration in lime stucco. There are depictions from the Hindu epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, scenes from the life of Krishna, different incarnations of Vishnu, and depictions of the goddesses Durga and Kali. Secular depictions pertain to scenes from contemporary times (Guha 2012). These include the depiction of such things as men and women engaging in different

entertainments, a group of hunters hunting and chasing animals, a procession of animals, fighting scenes, and others. The terracotta depictions are also profuse in their depiction of animals, birds, and other faunal species (Chatterji 2012).

A little to the north of the Charbangla Temple Complex lies an octagonal temple, topped by an inverted lotus-shaped finial and dome. Known as the Bhabanishwar Temple (24°15'N, 88°14'E), it features extensive lime-stucco ornamentation on its outer walls, and has a verandah running all around the main shrine (McCutchion 1972, 61). Close to this temple lie two dilapidated shrines, of a similar plan and design, known as the Tarakeshwar and the Siddheshwar Shiv temples (O' Malley 1914, 174). The Rajrajeshwari Temple lies on the opposite side of the road, housing three important deities of the Natore royal family. This temple

has been renovated and is being taken care of by a local temple trust. At some distance to the north lies the Gangeshwar Jor Bangla Temple (24°15'N, 88°14'E). It consists of two rectangular structures, joined together, each possessing a simple *dochala* or double-thatched roof ceiling (Sanyal 2019, 102-3). Just like the temples of the Charbangla Complex, it houses three *shivalingams* inside the *garbhagriha*. The outer walls and pilasters of the temple are richly decorated with terracotta ornamentation, covering a range of mythological as well as secular themes. Further north lies another dilapidated temple, known as the Rameshwar Shiva Temple. Not much of the original terracotta ornamentation survives now. This is perhaps the only temple in this region that can be definitively dated based on inscriptional evidence. It is mentioned that the temple was constructed in the *Shaka* era 1663, which is equivalent to 1741 CE (Ray 1961, 126).

According to David McCutcheon (1961), who produced one of the earliest and most detailed documentation of these sites, the Rameshwar Temple is probably the oldest temple in Baranagar (Ray 1961, 126). A few other temples here are also considered to be contemporaneous to these temples and are attributed to Rani Bhabani.

As noted in the discussion, the temples in Baranagar are situated in close proximity to one another. Although within a small geographical area, they exhibit unique architectural styles, and are different from one another in their appearance. Most of them are very elaborately ornamented. These raise questions relating to the contexts in which they were constructed. Upon speaking to the locals of the area, it is further learnt that in the past, there were a total of 107 Shiva temples that Rani Bhabani had created here (Pashupati Mandal, Diptarka Datta,

Baranagar, 04 April, 2022). She wanted to create a “second Varanasi” in Baranagar, although she had stopped one short of 108, due to reasons unknown. Some others narrate how the Charbangla Temple Complex itself was constructed by the divine sculptor Vishvakarma, in the course of a single night. He, however, left the fourth temple incomplete as the sun was about to rise (Pashupati Mandal, Diptarka Datta, Baranagar, 04 April, 2022). The question arises as to why these myths and legends were constructed and what they indicate about the origins of the Baranagar temples.

The Terracotta Temples of Baranagar: Interpreting the Symbols

In the previous section, the geographical context of the Baranagar terracotta temples has been analysed. Now it becomes imperative to talk about the messages and symbols conveyed by these temples. The primary

source for interpreting these symbols would be the monuments themselves. Their architectural features, scale and proportion, as well as sculptural ornamentation will serve as useful tools to comprehend these meanings.

The first temple that can be studied with this perspective in mind is the Charbangla Temple Complex. This is the first large temple complex that one encounters, while travelling on the road along the Bhagirathi River, up north. The temple complex consists of four separate temple structures, built in the *dochala* style (Karmakar and Gupta 2018). This is also probably where the temple complex derives its name from. The roofing and superstructure of the temples resemble the thatched hut roofs of rural Bengal, known as the *chala* roof. The individual temple structures have a rectangular plan. Each temple is elaborately decorated with terracotta panels. The structures are placed on

an elevated platform or *jagati*, and can be reached by a row of stairs leading to them (Michell 1983). Each shrine is fronted by a *trikhilan* structure, or a row of three pilasters, leading to the sanctum sanctorum. Three temples, namely those facing the south, east and north, are made of red lateritic brick. The fourth one, facing the west, is made of lime and mortar, and features lime-stucco ornamentation (Michell 1983). The temple complex at present is gated. It is surrounded by approximately one-metre-high fencing.



Figure 1: View of the Charbangla Temple Complex from the Bhagirathi

Although these temples house *shivalingams* in their sanctum, the decorative art on the temple walls feature mythological characters

from the Shaiva, Vaishnava as well as the Shakta pantheon. The most important external manifestation of the Shaiva affiliation of the site is perhaps the life-size terracotta image of Shiva on the western wall of the southern temple, facing the river side. This image is easily visible from a distance, right from the river.



Figure 2: The eastern side of the southern temple showing the Shiva sculpture

In his analysis of temple-building activities in late medieval Bengal, Hitesranjan Sanyal

(2016) noted that the *chala* type of superstructure in terracotta temples had become a symbol of upper-caste patronage in the eighteenth century CE (507). As opposed to this, lower-caste patrons mostly preferred using the *shikhara* or pyramidal superstructure for their temples. The Charbangla is one of the few temples that was purely based on *dochala* architecture. It was unique in terms of the *garbhagriha* having three doors, and a row of three idols placed inside it (Sanyal 2016, 99). On the central façade of the southern as well as the eastern temple can be seen an elaborately carved scene of the battle between Rama and Ravana, from the Epic *Ramayana*. Although this is a common theme to be depicted on the frontal façade of Bengali terracotta temples, the scale and proportions of this specimen are noteworthy. The high relief and fine craftsmanship exhibited in the southern temple are indicative of significant

investments in skilled labour as well as money.



Figure 3: The central panel showing battle between Rama and Ravana

Another interesting set of narrative panels can be seen on the basal friezes of the southern wall, and in niches of the western temple, pertaining to secular themes. One of these depictions pertain to a group hunting scene, where a group of armed men can be seen hiding behind a forest grove. All of them can be seen wearing hats, coats and trousers. They can be seen targeting a rhinoceros deep inside the forest. In another part of the forest, two elephants can be seen. On the extreme left of this panel is an armed man, riding on a horse, pointing his sword towards an animal.

These hunting scenes exhibit control and exploitation of the resources of the forest.



Figure 4: Hunting scene, Charbangla Temple Complex

In another panel, a royal procession of armed men-on-foot can be seen, headed by a mounted individual holding a sword. A group of men can be seen marching in front of him, carrying the royal flag. A horse, probably the royal one, decorated with embroidered draperies, is seen being led at the front by another man. The entire scene evokes a sense of power and grandeur. Another scene of a royal procession depicts a wider range of animals being used as mounts, such as camels and elephants. Additionally, a group of men can be seen carrying a lady in her *palki* (or

palanquin). Another noble can be seen riding a horse-driven carriage.



Figure 5: Royal procession, Charbangla Temple Complex

Other notable scenes from the same part of the southern temple pertain to affairs of the household. In one case, a noble can be seen along with his attendants, enjoying *hookah* and being entertained by a dancer woman. A more intimate portrayal of the household depicts a lady lying in her bed, being attended by a group of other women. The sculptors and artists have probably intended to mix the secular depictions with the religious ones, offering an interesting narrative scheme for the audiences to experience. Thus, scenes of *krishnaleela* and Hanuman's exploits in the

Panchavati (from the Epic *Ramayana*) can be seen depicted in-between the secular depictions.

While working on the secular themes, the artists and sculptors working on this temple complex would have drawn inspiration from events and characters that they had observed and heard of in contemporary society. However, it might be useful to conjecture upon the intended audience of such depictions. In her study of secular depictions from the Kantanagar Temple of Bangladesh, Sandrine Gill (2010) observed that the placement of secular themes at an eye-level for the visitors to the temple would have been a perfect device to focus their attention towards the lifeways of the nobility (135). For the devotees and visitors to the Baranagar temple, these scenes pertaining to the nobility and the military might have served as a symbol of power and prestige held by the

patron. Similarly, depictions of men dressed in a variety of costumes and riding on boats, as well as on camels and horses, most probably traders and merchants, would have only made sense if their intended audiences had some knowledge of such groups and their activities. The artistic finesse and high craftsmanship, as exhibited in the battle scene from the *Ramayana* and the image of the Shiva, would not have been necessary unless the intended audience for the temple and its iconography were socially and politically significant individuals. Nor was a significant investment required if the only people visiting this site were the common people of Baranagar.

Thus, there are two aspects to the sculptural depiction on the temple walls in the Charbangla Complex. One pertains to piety and devotion, expressed through a range of different mythological characters. The other

pertains to power and royalty, exhibited in the scenes of royal hunting, chasing the game, royal processions, lavish households and different aspects from the lives of nobles and ladies. The depiction of traders and trading communities acted as a signifier of the significant contribution of such communities towards the prosperity and affluence of the *zamindari*. It was crucial for the *zamindar* to maintain amicable relations with the bankers and financiers, who could lend resources for debt repayments (Roy 2010, 190). For a good part of the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century, the Bhagirathi served as an important channel of riverine trade and communication. (Mohsin 1966, 25). Most of the important trading centres of Murshidabad such as Qasimbazar, Bhagwangola, Jangipur and Saidabad were located on the banks of the Bhagirathi (Mohsin 1966, 26, 35). In such a context, the location of the Charbangla Temple Complex was indeed strategic,

attracting traders and merchant communities sailing up and down the river.

Up north, the Gangeshwar Jor Bangla Temple offers another interesting parallel. The temple complex is protected by the West Bengal State Department of Archaeology. On the western side of the temple complex, some structural remains of broken rubble masonry can be seen. These could indicate the presence of a protective wall around the temple in the past. According to David McCutcheon (1961), this temple would have formed a part of a *mathbari* or monastic complex, along with a nearby Kali temple and a Shiva temple (126). It lies close to the Rani's house (Ray 1961, 126).

The main temple is of a rectangular plan. The western side of the temple shows the most elaborate of the surviving terracotta ornamentation. Just like the Charbangla temples, the sanctum of the temple houses

three *shivalingams*. The central façade offers an elegant depiction of two roaring lions, charging at one another. Although not carved in high relief, the scale and proportions of the sculpture are comparable to the depictions in the Charbangla temples. This can once again be interpreted as a symbol of temporal power and royalty, inscribed on the temple entrance.



Figure 6: Central façade of Jorbangla Temple, showing roaring lions

Mythological depictions pertain to scenes from the life of Krishna, scenes from the Epic *Ramayana* and different manifestations of the goddess Durga. Images of the goddess are commonly seen in both the temple complexes, indicating a strong regional tradition of

goddess worship. The Jorbangla Temple Complex is not devoid of secular narratives altogether. Examples of this include depiction of a Bengali *babu* (a term referring to nouveau-riche elite men), wearing a European style coat, hat and trousers, and riding a horse-driven carriage. Other uniformed men can be seen in attendance.



Figure 7: Secular themes, Jorbangla Temple

It is interesting to note the range of architectural styles employed in the construction of temples in Baranagar, despite the relatively limited geographical extent of their occurrence. While the architects had used the indigenous *chala* style of roofing for the Charbangla and the Jorbangla temples,

the Bhabanishwar Temple and the two temples near it, built on an octagonal plan and featuring an inverted lotus-shaped dome, exhibit influences of Indo-Islamic architectural styles. These temples show cohesions with horizontal vaults forming a dome, built on an octagonal chamber (Michell 1981, 82). The use of a dome in the Hindu temple was clearly a borrowing from the Indo-Islamic tradition (Mangaonkar 2012, 3).

Indeed, the late Mughal landowning nobility was not only carving a regional identity for itself, but was also adopting architectural styles and tastes then prevalent in the imperium. Again, the choice of architectural styles would not have been used unless the region itself and the monuments were significant enough and intended to be visited by specific groups of audiences. Some of them at least would have been individuals from the cities and bigger towns, who had an

experience and knowledge of the different aspects of elite life. They could also appreciate the uniqueness of the architectural styles employed in the monuments here.

The Temple and Its Context

Temple building was an important tool in the hands of the landed elites of seventeenth and eighteenth century Bengal to communicate with the local subjects and consolidate their authority (Sanyal 2016, 496, 504). Temples were also spaces of congregation for the local people and devotees, who would offer their daily prayers to the deity and take part in religious celebrations, similar to present-day practices.

Etymologically speaking, the name “Baranagar” can be translated as the “big town”, where “bara” means “big” and “nagara” is a Sanskrit word for a town or city (Monier-Williams 1986, 525). Although a small

village of not more than 230 hectares at present, Baranagar had emerged as an important centre of trade and commerce in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. This was especially owing to the settlements of Jain merchant communities (in Azimganj-Jiaganj) and communities practising local crafts such as brass and bronze utensil-making (*kansari*) (Dutta 2020, 3). Several low-caste individuals had also entered into the brass and bell-metal industry since they offered significant profits (Sanyal 501). Rice, jute, silk, sugar and cotton were among the many products which were manufactured and exported in this region (Mohsin 1966, 26). Azimganj emerged as a prosperous centre of grain merchants, while Jiaganj acted as a venue for exports from inland markets (Mohsin 1966, 43). European companies were also creating a fast footprint in this area. Given the economic benefits of such production activities, Rani Bhabani would have actively encouraged such activities

in this area and put in place provisions for the safe conduct of business. Both roadways as well as river channels would have been developed and maintained for the convenient transport of goods and peoples.

The region was also fast gaining political importance. In the seventeenth century, Baranagar acted as the one of the capitals of the Natore estate, and at least till 1775 CE, the *sadar kachari* or revenue office of the Natore estate was situated here (Mahmood 1966, 134). The *kachari* used to be the center where the *diwan* or the revenue minister of the *zamindar* would conduct the business of the estate, and look into the collection as well as disbursements of revenues. A host of other officials such as *khazanchis*, *munshis*, *poddars* and *jamadars* were engaged in assisting the *naib* (Mahmood 1966, 298-99). Regular communications were maintained between the revenue office at Baranagar and the royal

headquarters at Rajshahi (McLane 2002, 13-14). One probable reason behind establishing the *kachari* in Baranagar was probably its proximity to the royal court of Murshidabad. From 1705 CE, Murshidabad became the seat of the Nawab Nazim Murshid Quli Khan's government and the royal capital of the Nizamat (O'Malley 1914, 25-26). According to Akshayakumar Maitreya (1960), Raghunandan Ray, *diwan* of the Nawab Murshid Quli Khan and one of the founders of the Natore royal family, had played an important role in securing greater revenue for the Nizamat and also in strengthening the rule of the Nawab in Bengal (23-24). Since his work required frequent attendance in the Nawab's court in Murshidabad, Raghunandan is said to have established his settlement in Baranagar and conducted his business from here (Maitreya 1960, 37). Archaeologically, very little remains of this former establishment that can be used to ascertain

the early presence of the Natore royal family in Baranagar. Upon inquiry, one of the locals pointed out the dilapidated ruins of a building, which was apparently the *kachari* house in the past (Pashupati Mandal, Diptarka Datta, Baranagar, 04 April, 2022). Interestingly enough, the ruins of this building lie just next to the Charbangla Temple Complex, often giving an impression as if the temple was a part of the official establishment here. A little distance from this lies the palace of the erstwhile Rani, also in ruins. Similarly, the Jorbangla Temple lies within the premises of the Rani's house in Baranagar.

Given the economic, political as well as social conditions prevailing in Baranagar, the creation of spacious and large temples with distinct architectural features would have served multiple purposes. For the common people, these were spaces of congregation. The

large rectangular courtyard of the Charbangla Temple Complex, with three separate doors for the *garbhagriha* indicates this further. These temples would also have been visited by revenue officers associated with the Natore state, bankers, merchant groups and other professionals based in and around Baranagar. Travelling along the Bhagirathi, individuals would have stopped by and considered visiting these large temple complexes, visible from their boats. To them, the skilled craftsmanship and intricate sculptural ornamentation would have signified financial strength as well as confidence for undertaking business here. For the Rani, Baranagar would have been an ideal location to showcase her architectural patronage, given its proximity to the Sultanate monuments of Murshidabad city.

The Patron and Her Identity

In this final section, the identity of the patron as can be reconstructed from these monuments will be discussed. Although there are no inscriptional records associated with these monuments (excepting the Rameshwar Temple which has been briefly mentioned previously), oral traditions as well as other secondary sources attribute them to Rani Bhabani. The Rani does not seem to have inscribed her identity through epigraphs and foundational plaques, at least in the case of the Baranagar temples. While numerous inscriptions mentioning the names of temple founders and architects are known from contemporary monuments in Bishnupur, Bankura and other districts, the reasons for a lack of epigraphic evidence in the case of the Baranagar temples is not very clear. In this case, oral traditions provide information about the Rani's patronage to temple-building in this area. According to legends narrated by the local people of Baranagar, the Rani had

resolved to create a "second Varanasi" here, and create 108 Shiva temples (Pashupati Mandal, Diptarka Datta, Baranagar, 04 April, 2022). The divine sculptor Vishvakarma had himself come down to Earth to undertake these constructions. However, he could only complete 107 temples before the breaking of dawn (Pashupati Mandal, Diptarka Datta, Baranagar, 04 April, 2022). These oral legends attest to power and agency on the part of the Rani, who was helped by divine agents in the construction of religious monuments at Baranagar.

The Rani's patronage would not have been unique or an outlier to the prevailing socio-economic and cultural setting of Bengal, where several other elite women were known to have patronised religious institutions in their own capacities (cf. Chatterjee 2016). Indeed, the activities of other contemporary female patrons offers a useful framework to

understand Rani Bhabani's architectural patronage. Very often, the motives were clearly commercial (Chatterjee 2016, 195). Significant sums of money would have been required by the Rani to bear the expenses of such lavish constructions as seen in the Charbangla Temple Complex and other neighbouring temples. She was able to procure this owing to the extent of her estates and the annual revenue yields from lands under Natore's governance. As already noted before, the volume of commercial activities undertaken and patronised in Baranagar would have been significant. This led to added revenues. According to one colonial account, the Natore estate submitted a total of 5253000 silver coins as tribute to the Nawab's court in Murshidabad, annually, at a time when the Rani was in the helm of affairs (Grant 56). This was possible at least till 1757 CE, after which the East India Company took over the administration of Murshidabad and brought

about a radical change in the revenue settlement of the land (Guha 1982, 57). It eventually resulted in dwindling yields from the land (Maitreya 142). The latter part of the eighteenth century witnessed the Rani losing her control over the vast tracts of land, as they were leased out to contract farmers by the Company (Guha 58-59). Land being an important symbol of social prestige, losing control over land would have meant a loss of social prestige for the Rani (Guha 1982, 58). Thus, the Rani abdicated the charge of the *zamindari* in favour of her adopted son Ramakrishna in 1789 CE, and is said to have spent the last days of her life in Baranagar (Maitreya 146-156). By then, the *sadar kachari* had already been transferred from Baranagar to Motijheel (on the opposite bank of the Bhagirathi) for closer supervision of the estate's revenues by the Company (Mahmood 134).

Thus, it is plausible that the temples of Baranagar were commissioned and completed before 1757 CE, when the socio-political situation was relatively stable. If 1741 CE is considered to be the date for the earliest construction, the other temples would have been completed within a time span of some sixteen years. This coincided with the height of power and glory of the Natore *zamindari*, and therefore, of the *zamindar*, Rani Bhabani. These were also the years when the Rani was able to secure favours from the royal court at Murshidabad and maintain amicable relations with the Nawab. For the Rani, this meant ensuring the required amount of revenues were deposited in the Nawab's treasury within the stipulated time. The construction of terracotta monuments in Baranagar, as well as in other parts of the Natore *zamindari*, could have served as a further display of financial confidence on the part of the Rani. It would have reassured the Nawab about the

extractive potential of her administration. It would have also encouraged traders and merchants to safely conduct business and undertake investments within the borders of her *zamindari*. Additionally, the Rani patronised some organised religious groups who were settled within her estate and who in turn had important commercial dealings (Chatterjee 195). Temple building and acts of piety might have helped gain the confidence of such religious groups, who offered crucial help to the Rani in times of need.

Conclusion

Religious patronage and architectural commissions have always been politically charged activities and have involved meaning-making on the part of their patrons (cf. Khan, 2000; cf. Rao, 2016). Medieval and Late Medieval Bengal was no exception (cf. Ghosh, 2005). The case of the Baranagar terracotta temples and the patronage of Rani

Bhabani has been presented here as one such example. Although many of the previous authors have highlighted the Rani's piety and framed the image of a pious Hindu widow, a "mother" for her subjects (Bayly 237), what has often been ignored are the prerogatives of a powerful *zamindar* who could successfully manage the extractive machinery of her *zamindari* during her tenure. This has been reflected in the monuments of Baranagar, all of which are attributed to the Rani. The monuments reflect careful planning, conscious choice of narrative themes and architectural styles, as well as significant investment of resources, all of which point to them being symbols of power as well as piety. While the Rani had other female contemporaries who were actively patronising religious centers, the Rani was eager to maintain her own social as well as political standing. Perhaps this is what contributed to

the legend of the Rani's desire to create a "second Varanasi" in Baranagar.

Temple-building was not a tool of upward social mobility for the Rani, since she was an upper caste *brahman* by birth. However, temples were a tool to assert her status quo and maintain important political, economic, religious as well as social ties. While seeking religious merit was certainly a motive behind the creation of a sacred geography in Baranagar, these monuments were also symbols to convey command over superior resources, both men and money. For her subjects, temples were spaces of ritual congregation and worship. The image of a pious Hindu widow commissioning public monuments and temples would have won her the confidence of the subjects, who would recognise her authority and pay their rents in due time. They would also be appeased and kept away from organised revolts against the

office of the *zamindar*. Since the revenue office was itself situated in Baranagar, the need to appease these tax-paying subject groups would have been felt even more strongly. Beyond this, however, the temples of Baranagar would have attracted the attention of merchant groups, commercial establishments, revenue officers, nobles from the court of Murshidabad, and other important groups who had their business in close proximity to Baranagar. For them, the temples and the significant investments made in them would have signified financial stability on the part of the Rani. The Rani would have used this as a tool to convince the Nawab of her ability to extract revenue from her subjects and generate significant surpluses. This could help her prevent the *zamindari* rights from passing to the hands of a rival landowning family. These temples were also symbols of carefully cultivated tastes and

aesthetic sensibilities, derived from the Mughal Empire.

With time, the written histories of these monuments as well as the oral traditions in Baranagar came to highlight the piety and devout nature of the Rani. The temples of Baranagar were interpreted as an attempt to create a “second Varanasi” in Bengal, and as symbols of a Hindu widow’s devotion. This myth played an important role in drawing hundreds of domestic as well as foreign tourists to the site. However, what was eventually obliterated from the public memory were the other meanings and

symbols indicated by these temples. Through this essay, an attempt has been made to reconstruct some of those meanings associated with the temples of Baranagar. The arguments presented in this paper will hopefully help future researchers understand the terracotta monuments of Baranagar as markers of spiritual as well as temporal power of the Rani Bhabani.s. Through this essay, an attempt has been made to interpret those symbols which lie embedded in the temples. It is hoped that future researchers will understand the Baranagar terracotta temples as symbols of spiritual as well as temporal power of the Rani Bhabani.

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Appendix I: Interview with Mr Pashupati Mandal

Name: Pashupati Mandal

Age: 70 years

Occupation: Retired school teacher; member of the Rajrajeshwari Temple Trust in Baranagar

Could you please tell me a little about the Charbangla Temple Complex?

The Charbangla Temple Complex is an unique specimen of architecture. It is an important part of the history and heritage of Baranagar. It was built by Rani Bhabani. She wanted to create a “second Varanasi” here, in Bengal. The architect Vishvakarma had come down to Earth to construct these temples. However, he could not finish the task in one night, and left the temples incomplete before dawn broke. That is why you see 107 temples here.

What do you know about the history of this region?

Baranagar was an important urban centre (*janapada*) in those days. There were around 107 temples here. Rani Bhabani herself lived here, in the royal palace. You can still see the ruins of her *kachari* building next to the Charbangla Temple Complex. Many of these temples were destroyed during the Kalapahar’s invasions. Some of them got submerged into the water.

Do you know any stories or legends related to the Rani?

The Rani was very powerful. She was a pious Hindu woman. Once the young prince of Murshidabad, Sirajuddaulah, came to marry the Rani’s daughter, However, the Rani managed to

save her daughter with the help of the *sannyasis*, whose *akhrah* (residence) was situated close to Baranagar. They hid the Rani and her daughter. Siraj had to go back. The Rani had regular dealings with the Europeans. The Nawab did not ever dare to invade her territory or fight against her. Such was her might. The Rani had an establishment in Baranagar to train *lathi*-bearers.

How is the memory of the Rani preserved in the present times?

That is primarily through these monuments. You see, earlier these areas were prosperous “Hindu” towns. Later, their names got changed and these places suffered a decline. Baranagar became a poor village. In our childhood days, we used to perform acts and plays on Rani Bhabani’s deeds. Children are told about her stories. However, we need more authors and researchers to work on the Rani’s life, and especially Baranagar. We want to draw the attention of different media agencies towards the heritage and history of this area. So many of Rani Bhabani’s temples are perishing today, due to lack of care. We want to do something about it, but we do not have sufficient funds.

Name of Interviewer: Diptarka Datta

Date: 04.04.2022

The Schoolchildren's Anti-Colonial Rebellion: Looking back at the Chittagong Armoury Raid of 1930

Shriya Dasgupta and Oyeshi Ganguly

On the 18th of April 1930, Surjya Sen (known as Master da) led the Indian Republican Army comprising 60 revolutionaries aged between 13 to 30, to lay siege on the city of Chittagong for four days and declare the setting up of a 'provisional revolutionary government' (Declaration of the Provisional Government, 18th April, 1930) implying a Chittagong free from the British rule for a period of four days. The organised armed rebellion included occupying the European Club, the Police Lines Armoury, the Telephone and Telegraph office and cutting off communications with officials all over India, gathering arms and unleashing a mass uprising all over India (Ghosh 2018, 139). This takeover was followed by the Battle of Jalalabad on 22nd April 1930 where the 55 revolutionaries faced the British army which

subsequently led to the death of 10 revolutionaries and major losses including an undocumented number of casualties on the British side (Bhattacharya 2012, 274-275). This was followed by guerrilla encounters throughout Chittagong during the years of insurgency between 1930 and 1934. Surjya Sen was hanged on 12th January 1934.

Tracing the Origins of the Movement

'The case for the Crown is that after the release from internment in or about September, 1928, Surjya Sen, Ambica Chakrabarthi, Nirmal Sen, Ganesh Ghosh, Ananta Singh and Lokenath Bal (herein referred to as the six ex-detenues) came to live in Chittagong and organised a far-reaching conspiracy for waging war against his majesty, The King Emperor.' (Opening Lines of the Judgement of the Special Tribunal in the

Chittagong Second Supplementary Armoury Raid Case No. 1 (6) of 1930/33).

The origins of the Chittagong Armoury Raid can be traced to 1918, when Surjya Sen, Ambika Chakrabarti and Charu Bikash Datta had organised a revolutionary group in Chittagong, in a socio-political context where the idea of using violence to overthrow British domination was already prevalent, especially among the Hindu bhadralok youths. Chittagong had not previously been a nerve-centre of revolutionary activities in the Indian subcontinent. So Surjya Sen and his troops were ‘independently growing with a revolutionary idea’ and had the free choice to associate themselves with the Anushilan or Jugantar groups. The Chittagong Group aligned with the Jugantar group for two primary reasons - its decentralised nature where smaller groups enjoyed relative autonomy within its loose structure, its

secular nature and its alignment with the ‘insurrection school’ The initiation of the movement can be traced to three factors: the establishment of physical training clubs with ‘purely revolutionary objective’, the passing of the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act which bestowed upon the Bengal government, the power of detention without trial for a period of five years (Chatterjee 2010, 42-43) and the lull in the Congress-led movements after the sudden suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement after the Chauri-Chaura incident in 1922. The lull in the Congress activities till 1928 had led to thousands of volunteers becoming inactive, birthing the twin phenomenon of nascent awakening and mobilisation of communist groups all across the country and revival of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal and northern India (Chatterjee 2010, 32-35). In the year 1925, when the BCLA Act was nearing expiration, there was a suggestion among local

administrative officers in Bengal that 'revolutionary terrorism was a permanent condition of unrest in Bengal, rather than a movement brought about by continued colonial occupation' (Ghosh 2018, 137). The lack of Indian representatives in the Simon Commission of 1930, Gandhi's civil disobedience movement with the Salt March, and the 1920s conspiracy cases led to the revival of revolutionary groups in the East and a week before its expiration on 24th April 1930, the Chittagong Armoury Raid took place (Ghosh 2018, 139).

It must be noted that the leaders of the Chittagong Armoury Raid were also previously involved in the Railway Dacoity of 14th December 1923 and the core ring leaders had been forming their organisation as early as 1918 (Ghosh 2001, 3). The recruitment process of the Chittagong Armoury Raiders was primarily through: friends and colleagues

in schools or colleges, family kinship networks such as between brothers and cousins, and marital or romantic relationships, which were very few.

Recruitment through Friends and Colleagues

Almost 75% of the recruitments of the members had taken place through their classmates or their playmates who were often of the same age or a few years older. Suriya Sen had explicitly instructed to recruit young students, who 'had not succumbed to the comforts and self-centeredness of the middle ages' (Singh 1959, 180).

The Indian Republican Army Chittagong Branch followed a strict hierarchy. The organisational details were never committed in writing and between the top six leaders and young teenage recruits were second rank leaders who did the actual recruiting between the age of 16 and 18, often among the 'best

and brightest' in Chittagong, from upper middle-class homes (Chatterjee 2010, 51-52). Autobiographical evidence supports this as Subodh Roy, one of the youngest participants in the raid, at 13 had stated in his autobiography that as an eighth-grade student at the Chittagong Municipal School, while visiting a classmate's home, the latter's elder brother would ask him questions such as those concerning his future life ambitions. On hearing that Roy aspired to complete his higher education in England, the recruiter had him convinced that 'it is one's duty to fight for one's country's independence by overthrowing British domination even by violent means' (Roy 2015, 14).

Subodh Chowdhury, who had sat for his 10th grade exam in 1929, was completely unaware of the revolutionary secret societies, when he was wounded during a Congress meeting in 1929, the top leaders Ananta Singh, Ganesh

Ghosh, and Lokenath Bal visited and later recruited him (Chatterjee 2010, 42-43, 48). There were some interesting exceptions where the cousin of Lokenath and Tegra Bal, Probbhash Bal, was not recruited by Tegra or Lokenath with whom he was connected by blood, but rather by Kalipada Chakravarty, his Sanskrit teacher (Ajoy Sen, son of Bidhubhushan Sen in an interview with the authors of this paper, on behalf of Agnijug Archive, 2022).

Similarly, Ram Krishna Biswas was recruited by a school senior, Tarkeshwar Dastidar who in turn, recruited Suresh De, a sixteen-year-old boy from an economically disadvantaged family (Bhattacharya 2012, 16-17). Dastidar would initially take Ramkrishna and his classmates to the seaside for day outs, and in the process ask them questions such as 'Who drains the wealth of India? It is time for us to break these bonds, if

we are to survive' (Bhattacharya 2012, 58-59).

Recruitment through family kinship network

Recruitment through kinship networks was prevalent as shown in the case of Tegra (Hari Gopal Bal), the youngest martyr of the uprising. His elder brother, Lokenath Bal, was one of the six top leaders of the IRA. Similarly, Ananda Prasad Gupta was initiated into the movement through his elder brother, the 19-year-old Debaprasad Gupta, and the two 'brothers had discussed the issue and let it be known that they were going to take part in the action' (Piyl Mukherjee, niece of Ananda Prasad Gupta in an interview with the authors of this paper on behalf of Agnijug Archive, 2022). Indumati Singh, who had built up a women's physical education group, supported the Dynamite Conspiracy and was later arrested in connection with the murder of Judge Stevens in Kumilla. She was the sister of one of the first-rank leaders of the IRA,

Ananta Lal Singh. Ananta Lal Singh's elder brother, Nand Lal Singh, too was initially a part of Surjya Sen's group in 1918. Mrinalini Sen, who was the sister of Rajat Sen, was a part of the Women's Volunteer Vahini and had assisted Kalpana Dutta and Ardhendhu Guha to organise the Dynamite Conspiracy. Dutta was the cousin sister of Subodh Roy, the youngest participant of the Chittagong Armoury Raid. Interestingly, the involvement of women, as sisters of the male revolutionaries, lies at the intersection of the twin themes of kinship or immediate familial networks and female participation in sustaining the 4 years long Chittagong Insurgency.

Women's Participation

The year 1930 was when M.K. Gandhi had called upon women to join him in the Civil Disobedience Movement. The difference was that women were encouraged to join since

Gandhiji thought they were peace-loving, non-violent and sacrificing by nature. However, not a single woman was finally chosen as a volunteer for the Dandi March (Chatterjee 2010, 205).

Revolutionary groups themselves were not very open to the idea of allowing women to participate in direct action. Kalpana Dutt, one of the two female members of the IRA in her memoir wrote that Ananta Singh, one of the key leaders of the Chittagong Youth Rebellion, was “strongly against taking girls into the revolutionary network - he did not trust us. So much so that he could not trust men who were associated with any girl.” (Dutt 1945,31) Singh’s elder sister, Indumati, herself was a sympathiser of the Indian Republican Army. However, she too was not allowed to participate in the raid. In Ananta Singh’s own words, her sister was extremely enraged on the day of the Chittagong Armoury Raid

when she realised that she had been kept in the dark about the operation. She told her brother, “I am no less than the boys - I can wrestle, shoot, drive a car. Am I inferior only because I was born a woman?” (Singh 1960, 45)

From the letters found from Pritilata Waddedar after she committed suicide following the attack on the Pahartali European Club in 1932, it seems that to die was a pre-planned decision for her and not taken to evade arrest. In her dying statement, she wrote: “Females are determined that they will no longer lag behind and stand side by side with their brothers in any activities, however dangerous or difficult. I earnestly hope that my sisters will no more think themselves weaker and will get themselves ready to face all dangers and difficulties and join the revolutionary movement in their thousands.” (Ghosh 1960, 106) However, here

one wonders whether this was the only reason behind her suicide. Some scholars suggest that she was so moved by the deaths of Ramkrishna Biswas and later Nirmal Sen whom she was allegedly in love with, and that this decision came from a very personal space (Gupta 2013). Kalpana Dutta in her memoir too mentions how Masterda felt that “she might have thought of suicide because of the death of these two very dear comrades of hers” and “forced potassium cyanide out of” him when she came to bid her last farewell (Dutt 1945, 55-56). She had written in her essay titled ‘*Dholghat Songhorshe Nirmal da o Bholar Prandaan*’ that ‘Nirmal da had within a very short period of time, made me feel like I am one of his own’ (Ghosh 2001, 63-64).

Data from the West Bengal State Archives reveal that the trend of region-wise participation of women suggest that conviction of women in the eastern part of Bengal was far greater than the western part.

The highest number of accused were from Chittagong. According to scholar and archivist Madhurima Sen, the increase in numbers might have a link with the Chittagong Armoury Raid of 1930 (Sen 2022).

Marriage and Romantic Relationships sustaining the recruitment into the rebellion

While Pritilata Waddadar was introduced to Surjya Sen through Monoranjan Rai, she was ‘allegedly’ romantically involved with Nirmal Sen. Similarly, Kalpana Dutta while fleeing from one shelter to another had been asked by Tarkeshwar Dastidar, ‘If I ever come out, will you wait for me?’ (Chatterjee 2010, 314). They had fought together and escaped the Gahira encounter. One of the most important examples of involvement in the insurgency through marital relationships is that of Premlata De, who on her marriage to Kali Kinkar De, a Chittagong Armoury Raid Revolutionary (later transported to

Andamans for life in 1933), had actively participated in the Dynamite Conspiracy and learnt how to fire a revolver (Ghosh 2001, 138-139).

There was also an alleged suppressed romantic relationship between Ganesh Ghosh and Ananta Singh, who brought the former into the movement. When attempting to tell Ganesh about joining the movement, he feared rejection: "How will I be able to bear the rejection? ...Would his refusal also not diminish my enthusiasm and resolve (to take part in the movement)?" (Singh 1960, 41). Later, Ananta Singh's revelation regarding his surrender makes it more apparent. "I had built an image of him (unknown) in my mind...With blinded judgement and petty selfishness, I had built an idol of him in my heart... However, his ignorance towards me was limitless...My love was insulted" (Singh 1960, 177) In the letter left for his comrades in

hiding at Chandernagore, Singh wrote, "My vanity is wounded...But I have a secret desire in me. I want to see and know the reaction of my fast and close friend, during my death." (Singh 1960, 179) An IB report mentions, "On the 28th June 1930, Ananta Lal Singh surrendered to the police after a quarrel with Ganesh Ghosh at Chandernagore where they were living with two others in hiding."

This might enable us to draw the inference that the two themes are not mutually exclusive but that there is a significant overlap between formal militant hierarchies in organising an armed insurgency and the quotidian relational bridges expressed through social networks such as kinship, friendship, and marital relationships.

Blurring of Communal Lines

Ganesh Ghosh had written that 'Without the support, sympathy and love of the Muslim

villagers, Masterda and his comrades would never have been able to survive in the limited area of Chittagong for so long” (Chatterjee 2010, 315). Looking to the Census of 1931, Muslims accounted for 73.80% of the population and Hindus comprised 21.84% of the total population of the district with the IRA being most active in Patiya and Boalkhali which had a Muslim population of 66.61% and 59.64% of the total population (Census of 1931). This can be empirically verified as there were multiple instances of sheltering absconders in the ‘*andarmahal*’ or inner chambers of Muslim households and refusal to provide information to the British police (Chatterjee 2010, 315). This “spontaneous relationship” was reflected in instances of Makaleshwar Rahman’s restaurant being one of the principal hideouts of the IRA, who was one of the chosen few beyond the six leaders who were aware of the 18th April action (Bhattacharya 2012, 376). Ambika

Chakravarti, was turned away by his own aunt after the Battle of Jalalabad and was sheltered by Amjad Chacha in the Potiya village (Bhattacharya 2014, 458).

In 1931, there were British attempts to engineer a communal riot following the assassination of CID officer Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla, by instigating mobs to loot Hindu shops, which did not lead to much success. Rather, the Non-Official Inquiry Committee included two Muslim citizens who supplied a unanimous official report condemning the British administration (Chatterjee 2010, 317). Kamaluddin had assisted Surjya Sen in the Kanungopara village in 1931 by providing him with shelter in his own house. The police had encircled the entire village by then, however, they didn’t entertain the possibility of Sen being hidden in a Muslim household and left without being able to trace him (Ghosh 2001, 185-186). Mir Mohammad Maulvi had

engaged his mother to shelter the revolutionaries during the period when Maulvi himself was imprisoned by the British administration (Ghosh 2001,178). Kalpana Dutta wrote in her memoir '*Chittagong Armoury Raiders : Reminiscences*' (1946) that a Muslim peasant had told her in the same village where Surjya Sen had been arrested, (betrayed by his own uncle Netra Sen, belonging to the same caste as Surjya Sen) 'It is those Dendas (local Muslim peasants would use this term of contempt referring to Hindus) that betrayed Surjya Sen.'

Gun vs Charkha Debate

The Chittagong Armoury Raid took place days after the Civil Disobedience Movement began, in fact with the British police hoping that Masterda and his followers were preparing to take part in the same. "The Bengal terrorists took an active part in the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930...When

this movement was waning, they considered it was time for them to give effect to their policy of violence", a secret British police report revealed (Singh 1960, 261). Very interestingly, the raiders attacked the AFI in the name of Gandhiji on 18th April, 1930. Ananta Singh, one of the leaders of IRA, wrote, "Despite our disagreement with Gandhi we always acknowledged the unique role of Gandhian non-violence in the nation's struggle for independence." Gandhi, however, wanted to dissociate himself from the revolutionaries as much as possible. Commenting on the Chittagong events of 1930, Gandhi wrote: "For me popular violence is as much an obstruction in our path as government violence. Indeed, I can combat the government violence more successfully than the popular..." (Chatterjee 2010, 199).

At the same time, advocate, freedom fighter, and the elder brother of Subhash Chandra

Bose, Sarat Bose, who had then been actively involved in Civil Disobedience and had declared to boycott the court for three months to support non-cooperation, decided to take up the case of the Chittagong Raiders without any fee (Singh 1960, 240). Bose also recommended Ananta to break out of jail and he himself delivered money and bombs to assist in the same. On the other hand, when Indumati Singh went to meet Jawaharlal Nehru to request him for money to fund the trials, he said, “You see ‘Katunis’ (those who weave charkha) are staying here. They will not feel very happy about your presence. It is better if you leave UP. I like that you will not try to collect the Defence Fund from UP.” (Singh 1960, 282)

The revolutionaries had a natural inclination towards Subhas Chandra Bose. While Singh in his memoir writes in no uncertain terms that the Non-Cooperation Movement was a failure, he also writes that Bose was the

culmination of all revolutionary ideals: “Subhas Chandra’s political life was not born amidst Gandhi’s non-violence and charkha. His strong politics saw light in the blood-soaked land of Khudiram, Kanailal, Jatin Mukherjee and hundreds of martyrs” (Singh 1960, 247). Similarly, Pritilata Waddadar was part of the 250 women Bose recruited as part of the volunteer corps for the 1928 Calcutta Congress session. In Chittagong too, a team of volunteer corps was formed who would patrol the city in uniform and finally aided in the attack of April 1930 (Singh 1960, 254).

In conclusion, it can be stated that the Chittagong Armoury Raid challenged the watertight distinction between nonviolent and violent methods of anti-colonial resistance in South Asia and is a perfect example of the intersection between Gandhian and revolutionary tendencies as the

Chittagong leaders were active participants in the non-cooperation movements in the 1920s. This uprising can be credited for having set into motion the trends of women's

participation in violent struggles in Bengal, unique close-knit recruitment procedures, and unprecedented Hindu-Muslim collaborative effort.

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Official Records

Judgement of the Special Tribunal in the Chittagong Second Supplementary Armoury Raid Case

No. 1 (6) of 1930/33

Judgement of the Special Tribunal in Chittagong Armoury Raid Case No 1 of 1930 (The Emperor vs

Subodh Chandra Biswas and Others)

Judgement of the Special Tribunal in Chittagong Armoury Raid Supplementary Case (The Emperor

vs Ambika Charan Chakravarty, Hemendu Bikash Dastidar and Saroj Kanti Guha) of 1933)

Judgement of the Special Tribunal in the Chittagong Second Supplementary Armoury Raid Case

(The Emperor vs Surjya Sen, Tarkeshwar Dastidar and Kalpana Dutt)

Interviews

(by authors)

Piyul Mukherjee in discussion with the authors, July 2022.

Ajoy Sen on behalf of Surjya Sen Bhavan in discussion with the authors, September 2022.

'Madness' of Civilisation: Unfolding Nationhood through the Mind of Toba Tek Singh

Saniya Rizwan and Srishti Ghulani

The dawn of August 15th, 1947 witnessed both celebration and violence. The making of two independent nations brought with them stories of severance, exodus, and the consequential infidelity of identity (Mehdi, 2021). While popular literature of the times commemorates the end of British rule, few like Saadat Hasan Manto represent the harsh truth of violent borders, political greed, and communal polarisation that is overlooked by the former. Manto's writings were influenced by his own experiences of Partition. His philosophy - art mirrors the society (Das, 2018) - upheld themes of violence, incarceration, and ethnocentrism in his short stories, plays, and memoirs. Through his short story *Toba Tek Singh* (1955), Manto portrayed the chaos preceding the Partition, the

political motivations, the denial and lopsidedness of identity distribution and belonging (Manto, 1955).

Toba Tek Singh, a tale of post-Partition scenarios, narrates the commotion caused among psychiatric asylum inmates due to their newly assumed homelands. The Hindu and Sikh inmates from Pakistan and Muslim inmates of India were prepared to be exchanged. The confusion caused by the incomprehensibility of borders, nations and statehood created resistance in the inmates, struggling to accept their delayed yet sudden displacement. One of the inmates, Bishan Singh, claimed to belong to *Toba Tek Singh*, a village located in Sialkot, in present-day Pakistan. He inquired desperately from

officials of both countries where it was situated now - India or Pakistan. He was not able to fathom that he could not 'belong' to his homeland in Pakistan anymore as a Sikh man. With one border refusing to welcome him back and the other seeming too unfamiliar to call his own, the story concludes with Toba Tek Singh dying in the land that belonged to no religion, in between the two independent nations - the no man's land. Our interdisciplinary analysis reviews the literary narrative of disability and nationhood in the backdrop of Partition, through a reading of Toba Tek Singh.

In congruence with the disability justice perspective, we use the term 'mad' for a political community of disabled people who identify as the same in an act of reclamation (Beresford, & Russo, 2021). These are people with schizophrenia, manic disorders and other mental illnesses, user-survivors of

psychiatric services and all others for whom 'mad' was earlier used as a slur (LeFrançois et al, 2013). Further, we refer to asylums as sites of governance, unequal power relations and social control (Foucault, 1995, 2006) of mad people, in opposition to the former's monolithic characterisation as systems of care and healing.

The decline of the British Empire gave way to the post-colonial construction of nation-states across the world. Such a political organisation, for whose conception violence becomes banal (Mehdi, 2021), emphasised the need to mark a fixed geographical territory, a centralised political authority, recognising citizens who are, documented and regulated by legal institutions and carceral sanctions. Often unanswered by the proponents of modern nation-states is the arbitrariness, mobility and motivation of all – law, citizenship, national

identity, and ‘normal’ behaviour (Zake, 2002).

The constant contradiction of the label of madness from the criteria of the ‘appropriate’ and useful citizen highlights the facade of nation-states as liberal and just successors of colonialism. This interdisciplinary analysis of the story attempts to integrate the mad lens, borrowed from Manto’s fictive work to build on the historical academic literature that critiques nation-states. The ‘mad lens’ lies in congruence with the mad movement (Siebers, 2008). The adoption of the term is an act of collective political reclamation of terminologies that have historically been used to oppress the community. It stands as a social assertion for the rights of people who have history with psychiatric or social violence due to their mental illnesses or deviance, in thought or behaviour.

Changing Homelands

The phenomenon of Partition rooted in communal ethnocentrism demands to be peaked into for its commentary on nationality, nation-states, citizenship and the deviants of all these institutions.

“The Muslim lunatics in India were to be sent over to Pakistan and the Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistani asylums were to be handed over to India” (Manto, 1955). Two years after the birth of India and Pakistan, their ‘lunatics’ - often forgotten, dehumanised and depoliticised - were recognised for their Sikh, Hindu and Muslim identities. After a century of being colonial subjects, the people of the subcontinent were subject to the redefinition of their homelands so as to align the demographic area assigned to them with their religious identity. What mattered was not the affiliations of birth, family, and

community with the land. What decided where one belonged was the polarised spotlight on religious and communal identities ascribed to one. Hence the Partition was not just the division of tangible lands, but also a process to separate and rearrange one's own overlapping identities (Ferrier, 2020). While the popular narratives of migration comment on the distress caused by politically determined individual disorientation (Yusin, 2009), Manto used mad characters to portray the 'insanity' of such an expectation itself, "A Sikh lunatic asked another Sikh, "Sardarji, why are we being deported to India? We don't even know their language" (Manto, 1955). Through the perspective of madness, Manto inquired into the engineering of communities by questioning the breakdown of the pre-existing familiar identities on which they mobilised. Language, kinship, occupational unions were all broken down to give way to

religion as the predominant basis of national identity.

Throughout 'Toba Tek Singh', inmates express their immense incomprehensibility with respect to the concepts of Partition and nationalism. To Manto's audience, Bishan Singh's repetitive muttering, "Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhyana the mung the dal of the Pakistan and India dur fittey moun" (Manto, 1955) reads as gibberish. The same may also be interpreted as a metaphor for the incoherence of Partition and displacement when reviewed through the lens of madness, further commenting against the apparent legitimacy of nationalism and nation-states. The chaos experienced by the inmates in response to the Partition represents their denial to accept the transience of homelands. It portrays their despair over the dictation of the boundaries of community and affiliation by distant political authorities. This perceived

lack of control over their own identity triggers confusion and resistance in the asylum inmates. The forthcoming analysis answers how this madness and suspicion become a reliable reference tool to review the politics of nation states.

Nation-States v/s The Perspective of Madness

Conceptually a nation is defined as a shared feeling of belongingness on the grounds of common identity markers of language, religion, race, history, and culture (Rejai, M., & Enloe, C. H., 1969). Central to this organisation is the documentation of all those it encompasses through the tag of citizenship. The national identity validates the community of citizens, and vice versa. The 'citizen experience' (Perron et al., 2010) endows the privilege to apparent political security, civil participation, inclusion, and expression (Sayce, 2000). For the entitlement

provided, the state in return demands compensation and essentialises a responsibility to uphold social conduct (Perron et al., 2010). The existence of this expectation sanctioned both by social norms and legal incarceration create the binary of normalcy and abnormalcy. Compromised by the flexibility and ideological social morality, citizenship is then an unnatural, socially constructed category defined by the bigoted, communal, and colonial understanding of 'appropriate' behaviour - one that is defined by conformity and standardisation (Zake, 2002). Hence, modern-nation states contradict their own conceptualisation as all encompassing, just, and accommodating political structures. The national bureaucracy needs a governable, exploitable, good employee who aids in upholding the oppressive status-quo. Those who give in to the social contract are seen as responsible for their conduct, as reasonable, with conscious

needs and demands, having claim over their own narratives; and hence, they can 'give back' to the nation. Through many legal and civil institutions, this privilege is denied to communities of mad people. Such has been done to relegate their narratives to their "irrational" brains.

Mad people, their relationship with nationality and the norms of a nation-state, thus, demands an inquiry. The needs of nationalism lie in contradiction to the political rights of mad communities (Perron et al., 2010), how the latter define community, home, and belongingness. The paradox emerges in the ways the states engage with mad communities. This is reflected in the lack of political discourse regarding mad communities in the re-envisioning of both India and Pakistan during the Partition (Manto, 1955). The questions that then arise relate to the experiences of madness and the

place held by mad communities in the civil, political and social systems of post-colonial countries. What consequences present themselves for the mad inmates of 'Hindustan' (Manto, 1995) when they are divided into the asylums of India and Pakistan?

Against the mentality of state governments (Foucault, 1991), the perspective of madness articulates social and political needs differently. For the integration of mad people, their civil liberties, dignity and freedom, societies collectively ought to be flexible to individualised and diverse needs. It requires a radical overturn of expectations of conformity to neurotypical state-oriented norms. When mentally disabled persons 'fail' to uphold such expectations, nation states repress their subjective cognitive capacities and accessibility needs.

The incongruence between the vision of the nation-states and the perspective of madness becomes discernible through the latter's segregation from the public domain - both physically through incarceration in asylums, and socially. This translates to a unique categorisation of mad communities as sub-human, uncivilised, and irrational - all detrimental to the role of the ideal productively contributing citizen (Foucault, 1972). The consequent marginalisation renders them devoid of any civil participation. From educational institutes to political frameworks, all systems overlook the needs of mental disabilities. Familial expectations and workplace structures are conceived in accordance to the expected ideal social citizen who contributes obediently to the hierarchies in place. The apparent unreasonability (Szasz, 1998) attributed to mad communities makes them purposeless and irrelevant to the

progress of such a system, thereby leaving no incentive for their inclusion or protection.

The asylum in Toba Tek Singh becomes a symbol of this segregation of communities that do not fit into the criteria and expectations of an average citizen. The Partition for the inmates was not the division of nations and communal polarisation, it was a shift in the geographical space from one asylum to another. "At long last the arrangements for the exchange were complete. The lists of lunatics who were to be sent over from either side were exchanged and the date fixed" (Manto, 1955). The laws, the governance, and the principles on which the two nations were formed did not make them differ in how they saw mad people - forgotten objects to be managed and not integrated. While they discussed the novel visions of two now independent nations, the contribution of mad people to either of these visions was one

and the same - to be isolated and repressed in their existence and expression.

The aforementioned sections analyse the paradox of nation states and perspective of madness along with the consequences that mad people face due to their powerlessness in this relationship. What still remains unanswered is the persistence with which nation-states want to uphold the dichotomy of these needs. Underlying the same is the social and political fear of madness reshaping, and redesigning communities and their structures. The very existence of the mad perspective and its rising assertion is a metaphorical resistance exposing the fallacies of the “emancipatory promise” (Perron et al., 2010) of nation-states and modern governments. Communities responsive to the needs of mad people should conceptualise

themselves as opposed to profits and hierarchies, neocolonial development and capitalist ethos (LeFrançois et al, 2013). They require centralization of care over moral policing, inter-dependence over individualist competitions, resource sharing over resource commodification, rehabilitation and justice over incarceration, social inclusion over asylums and segregation. Hence the vision of society from the mad perspective focuses on integration of different needs, disabled needs, a redefinition of the ethos of normalcy. As long as political institutions structure themselves on the basis of national and statist ideals, they fundamentally remain exclusionary. This contradiction can either be sustained with the continuity of saneism, oppression of mad people, and bureaucratic and gated citizenship systems, or it can be resolved through a radical reimagination of homelands.

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Interplay of Love, Class, and Gender in Late Mughal India: Unravelling the Centrality Question of Romantic Emotions

Srushti Sharma

“Khusrau darya prem ka, ulti wa ki dhaar,

Jo utra so doob gaya, jo dooba so paar

Oh Khusrau, the river of love

Runs in strange ways.

One who enters it drowns,

And one who drowns, gets across.”

Amir Khusrau (1253-1325)

Translated by Habibuddin Ahmed

Recent South Asian scholarship on emotions has directly or passively attempted to provide a gender-based analysis of love for certain periods and aspects of Indian history. Anna A. Suvorova’s work on Urdu romances with respect to Masnavis, Kumkum Sangari’s dissection of Mira’s devotional love along lines of class, caste and gender, and Shamsur Rahman Faruqi’s analysis of love in eighteenth century Urdu poetry are

prominent examples of such scholarship. The period starting with the reign of Shah Jahan in 1628 and ranging till the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, however, remains unexplored. This period witnessed the growth of a distinctive urban culture under Shah Jahan and political upheavals manifesting in the form of war of succession and Aurangzeb’s ambitions with regard to the Deccan. Most importantly, the period also witnessed a fine expression of romantic emotions. Architectural marvel of Taj Mahal was constructed “as an everlasting memorial of the undying emotion of Shah Jahan and the Mumtaz Mahal to each other” (Koch 179). Shah Nawaz Khan’s *Maasir-al-Umaara* reveals that Aurangzeb experienced such intense love for Hira Bai Zainabadi that he was in a deep

conflict between his love for her and his responsibilities towards his faith (Brown 83).

The essay will try to unravel the centrality and expression of romantic emotions with special emphasis on gender roles at various levels of society - elite and non-elite. It will further attempt to draw a comparison with regard to expression of romantic emotions between the elite and non-elite sections of the society relevant to our period of study. Do similarities suggest that there were several shared struggles of womxn of both elite and non-elite classes by the virtue of a common male-dominated social structure? Do the differences indicate that despite the social fabric being largely dominated by men, the manifestations of such dominance were driven by factors such as class? A note of caution here will be the argument that a clear-cut distinction between the elite and the non-elite is nearly impossible since we see

womxn and the enslaved from the lower classes engaging in romances with the elite males.

Elizabeth Chatterjee, Sneha Krishnan, and Megan Eaton Robb draw an extremely crucial inference with regard to the South Asian scholarship on emotions and advance that the premise of this scholarship is based on the intricate interconnectedness between emotions and socio-political structures (Chatterjee, Krishnan, and Robb 543-544). The utility of reconstructing histories from the vantage of emotions is best realised in an argument of Margrit Pernau wherein she argues that “the use of emotives is not only culturally learnt, it also presupposes the existence of culturally shaped emotion knowledge, which means that the study of emotions can reveal obscure information about social expectations from various groups and individuals with regard to the performativity of emotions” (Pernau 121).

Islam views the power of a woman to sexually attract men as *fitna* or chaos thus placing restrictions on the conduct of womxn² (Orsini 15). Indrani Chatterjee is of the opinion that the Islamic conception of womxn as threatening co-existed with the notion of *zaif*, meaning that womxn along with children and slaves were weak and required guidance and control of free adult males (Chatterjee 63). These ideas formed the basis of sexual-romantic interactions between men and womxn³ in the form of love. Love in Islam is recognised in the embodiment of marriage; it was encouraged only if governed by the principles of soundness and reason⁴ (*aql*) (Orsini 16). Love was considered a domain of spirituality rather than sexuality and passions which is reflected in the popular Arabic saying *al-majaz qantar al-haqiqah* ('the Phenomenal is the bridge to the Real') embodied by the Sufis (Shackle 88). Phenomenal love is represented by romantic

interactions between men and womxn (*ishq-e-majazi*) and Real love refers to the love with the divine (*ishq-e-haqiqi*) (Shackle 88).

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the thirteenth century and the development of a peculiar Indo-Persian court culture in North India resulted in the emergence of new codes of manliness or *javanmardi* which introduced novel ways of perceiving masculinity and acting out on the same. (O'Hanlon 54). These would naturally influence the romantic interactions between men and womxn by laying down ideal norms in which men will be expected to love and will passively reveal the amount of significance held by such emotions in their lives. The application of these normative ideals, however, continues to be a contested arena. For example, Amir Khusrau, the celebrated practitioner of Hindavi has used the female voice for himself to address his

male beloved (Kidwai 127). The homoerotic interactions between Alauddin Khalji and Malik Naib⁵ can also be of crucial importance here (Kidwai 132).

Katherine Brown, Indrani Chatterjee, and O'Hanlon have extensively analysed the late seventeenth century text, *Mirzanama*, which emerged in the context of a stratified urban gentry and has laid down codes that constructed elite masculinity of the time. While describing the erotic role of a reputed and high-class *mirza*, *Mirzanama* suggests that a *mirza* should never take the role of a passive beloved/ *maashuq. Ibna* or sexual passivity was a matter of shame and disgust in Indo-Persian discourses. It was womxn and men of low social class who expressed their love in the form of passive eroticism (Brown 70-71). This, according to Chatterjee, was done to maintain the hierarchies of society and polity. She makes a poignant argument that "Carnal

love itself emerged as a form of slavery, which could reduce the free moral agent of the 'public' realm" (Chatterjee 63). This implies that a form of love that was driven by passion had the capability of reversal of erotic roles⁶ thereby sowing the seeds for the dissolution of political and social structures. In other words, the trajectory of love as observed in elite circles of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was as follows: love should not be the governing factor in the life of an elite male since it can lead to a *mirza* acting in opposition to the expected erotic behaviour. The case of Izzat Khan, governor of Tattah, being denied of his rank and office by the emperor Aurangzeb on finding about his romantic interactions with a girl of his province is a case in point (Manucci Volume 2, 219). Since elite masculinity was almost always defined in opposition to the ephemeral, it is a sound possibility that in this trajectory, womxn, being driven by *nafs*

(impulses/passion), were seen as keeping romantic emotions central to their identity.

However, such normative codes rarely depicted reality of the times and a strong cross-cutting of various social classes through the emotion of love along with blurring of the conceptions of elite masculinity or *mirzahood* was prevalent. This was particularly true of the times of Shah Jahan. Despite stiff opposition from the nobility, Shah Jahan gave the title of 'concubine' to a woman he fell in love with who belonged to a lower caste called *Kanchani*, thereby integrating her into the *harem* of the royal palace (Manucci Volume 1, 196). Such practices were so prevalent that Aurangzeb had to initiate the marriage of dancing girls who were seen as a threat to the stability of the empire (Manucci Volume 2, 9). However, Manucci's credibility has been critically scrutinised by historians. Harbans Mukhia believes that Bernier, who has been

referred to by Manucci extensively, has often filled the void created by the dignified silence of the royal court on controversial matters by the bazaar gossip (Sharma 777). It is in this context that the literary corpus left behind by one of the most prominent royal womxn, Zibunnisa, becomes important.

Zibunnisa, the daughter of Aurangzeb and Dilras Banu Bigum, is celebrated as *Makhfi*⁷, meaning The Hidden One. She is believed to have written *Diwan-i-Makhfi*, whose first fifty ghazals were translated by Magan Lal and Jessie Duncan Westbrook. Zibunnisa's poetry is one of contradictions, perhaps reflecting the social dilemma faced by the young princess. On one hand, Zibunnisa's idea of romantic emotions is that of absolute devotion, in semblance with the Sufi thought. Not only does she give immense importance to love in her life but also shows the lover as inflicting pain on her.⁸

She writes:

“The love of Thee the bulbul sings,

The moth that burns its silken wings

Thy love has drawn into the fire,

And, see, the wine of Thy desire

On every goblet’s lip it clings.

No ease, no respite anywhere

Is now for me, for in Thy snare

Blindly or willingly, I fall,

No liberty have I at all,

Bound by the fetters of Thy hair.

So many tears mine eyes have shed,

Such streams of blood my heart has bled,

That now mine eyes can weep no more,

Nor can the failing fountains pour,

For dry the source from which they fed.

Thou, Makhfi, in the burning fire

Of love and unassuaged desire

Tossing in wild remorse, shalt dwell;

Love’s secrets weakly didst thou tell,

So, thou shalt pay with penance dire.”

On the other hand, particularly in her interactions with her lovers, Zibunnisa is shown as flirtatious enough to tease her lover but never crossing the “modesty” of her rank. Aqil Khan¹⁰, a native of Iran, known for his bravery, good looks and familiarity with poetry writes to her (Sharma 773):

“My love is not immature, I should be bound in chains

Modesty is not a fetter for those tried in passion.”

Zibunnisa replies to him (Sharma 773):

“True and tested lovers should always be modest

How can a shameless bird like you be fettered by modesty?”

Zibunnisa is so concerned with her honour that she asks Aqil Khan to maintain silence for her honour (if he is a true lover) when he was hiding away from Aurangzeb inside a pot that was supposed to be heated (Lal and Westbrook 16-17). This led to the demise of Aqil Khan. Love was central to Zibunnisa but never came before her honour. The primacy given to honour can be explained by the fact that in the relations of the harem, it was this honour of the young princesses that became a parameter for determining their social status and a healthy survival. Soma Mukherjee attempts to give mystic overtones to the compositions of Zibunnisa (Mukherjee 182). To me, it appears that mysticism became a channel for the young princess to express her deep and complex emotionality in a context where the emphasis on chastity and regulated sexuality of the imperial womxn was reiterated by the emperor himself. In this way, the princess became one of the many womxn

subtly carving a space for the expression of their emotions.

This dilemma is very well explained in some verses of Zibunnisa. Once while roaming in the garden, she remarked (Sharma 776):

“There are four things pleasing to the heart—which four?”

Wine, wine server, rose garden and the beloved’s waist”

As soon as she became aware of her father’s presence, she cleverly and quite funnily altered the second line of the verse (Sharma 776):

“Prayer, fasting, rosary and asking forgiveness!”

The practice of regulating sexuality of the imperial womxn was equally applicable on the favourite child of Shah Jahan, Zibunnisa’s aunt, Jahanra, also called Begum Sahiba. The

instance of her young lover Dulera being killed after court officials got a hint of their romantic affair is a case in point (Manucci Volume 1, 218). Similarly, on the orders of Shah Jahan, another of her lovers was killed ruthlessly by the lighting of a stove (Manucci Volume 1, 216). It was also mentioned that Roshan Ara Begum lost her esteem in the eyes of Aurangzeb when he, through the eunuchs of the harem, found out about the princess' two young lovers entering her apartments (Manucci Volume 2, 36). Therefore, "immodesty" of love in the lives of imperial women was certainly frowned upon.

While reading a contemporary source like that of Manucci, one can mistake certain instances or actions that primarily reflect the loyalty of an individual towards the emperor or a set of values to be as actions that are carried out of immense significance or centrality provided to love in the doer's life.

During the illness of Aurangzeb, Shah Alam's mother tolerated the humiliation inflicted on her by Roshan Ara Begum not so much because of love for her husband but perhaps owing to her loyalty towards the head of the state and for this act she was later awarded the title of *Nawab Bai Ji* by the emperor. (Manucci Volume 2, 60). Similarly, one of the two wives of Dara Shukoh, Rana Dil, refused to marry Aurangzeb after the death of Dara. According to Manucci, law of the time suggested that the wives of the dead elder brother were to be married to the living younger brother. Rana Dil was extremely hostile towards Aurangzeb and respectful towards her deceased husband. When she got to know Aurangzeb loves her long hair, she cut them off and sent them to the emperor asking him to accept her beauty and leave her in solitude. Aurangzeb still expressed his desire to make Rana Dil one of his wives and she scarred her face with a knife and sent a

cloth full of blood to him. Rana Dil's hostility towards Aurangzeb could be because of her unrequited love for the dead prince Dara Shukoh. It could also be because of her respect and loyalty towards Dara who honoured Rana Dil, once a dancing girl in the court of Shah Jahan as his wife despite stiff opposition from his father (Manucci Volume I, 362). However, emotions of love and respect have the potential of being complementary here and we cannot clearly distinguish between the two. A third possibility relates to Rana's individual agency. It can be a fair prospect that she merely didn't want to marry Aurangzeb and longed to live a life of 'solitude'. Nonetheless, emotions, respect or love or autonomy, seemed to play a central role in the life of Rana Dil who stood by these emotions and courageously acted in accordance with them.

While tracing the emotional experiences of the non-elite sections, one of the main challenges is the dearth of sources. The essay has tried to adopt a dual approach to the problem: it tries to analyse the passive references of dominant conventional sources that can be utilised for the purpose of the research along with exploring lesser-known sources like the works of the Persian poet, Muhammad Akram "Ghanimat" Kanjohi.¹¹ Chastity was associated with honour not only for womxn of the imperial household but equally for the common womxn. In one of the instances mentioned by Manucci during the reign of Shah Jahan, a woman from a non-elite social background fights a long-drawn legal battle in order to prove the judicial officer that she did not engage sexually with a man who alleges her of doing so, indicating the importance of chastity in a woman's life (Manucci Volume I, 200). Unrestrained, passion-driven love was not

only a threat to the stability of the empire but also endangered the Muslim orthodoxy present away from the imperial court. Christopher Shackle has argued that the line between the Phenomenal love and Real love was blurred and therefore, a tussle emerged between Muslim orthodoxy and love-driven Muslim mystics. The Persian poet Kanjohi, in one of his compositions¹² warns the Muslim orthodoxy to not challenge those who can live and die for love (Kidwai 159).

Stefano Pello made a pioneering attempt in using *tazkiras* as a historical source of analysis. Pello himself describes *tazkiras* “as a kind of autobiography or, even better, auto-hagiography of Persian literature by its own protagonists.” *Safina-yi-Hind*, a *tazkira* written by Bhagyan Das, contains a verse that was composed by a poet who was addicted to opium and thus went by the pen name of

Pinki, a Hindi word for opium addict. Pinki’s *masnavi* reads as follows (Pello 310):

“The one who gave opium to Pinki

left the tress of Layla in the hand of Majnun.

He is a drunkard, a libertine, a shameless man

He’s not even Pinki, he’s opium, nothing else.”

The first part of the *masnavi* equates *Layla* to that of opium and *Majnum* to that of an opium addict, again reiterating the Islamic cliché of womxn causing *fitna* or chaos through their sexual attractiveness. Pello describes a comic instance between the Mughal poet Shayda and Haqim Hazik, which was narrated by Mirza Afzal Sarkush. Haqim Haziq recites the following *ghazal* (Pello 313):

“The nightingale abandons the rose garden if he sees me in the meadow.

Nobody will be left to worship the idols, if the Brahmin looks at me.”

Hearing this, Shayda ridiculed Haqim for writing like an effeminate young boy. What is interesting is that Zibunnisa is shown as replying with the exact same couplet to her lover Aqil Khan¹³ in Shafiq's compositions¹⁴ when Khan's "anxious male gaze demanded the lover to be veiled". She was being depicted by historians such as Sunil Sharma as being confident of her physical beauty for her use of this couplet (Sharma 772). On the other hand, Haqim is derided as being effeminate when he uses the same couplet. This differential treatment may not be owing to the class differences between the princess and Haqim but as a result of the dominant norms of masculinity and femininity which governed romantic emotions and their expression, portrayal, and reception. According to these norms, an emphasis on physical beauty was a trait of a feminine lover.

Marriage seems to be a central issue in the lives of womxn which is best reflected in the case of the marriage of Abd-al-Wahab's daughter (Manucci Volume 2, 188-89). However, marriage being a social institution continued to be governed by social considerations rather than unrestrained love. This unrestrained love was not only central to the identities of womxn and persons of other sexual and gender identities but was also very rare to find. This is best depicted in Najmuddin Shah Mubarak's (Abru) *'Advice for the Adornment of a Beloved'* (Vanita and Kidwai, Same Sex, 162). Abru was said to be in love with Mir Makkhan who went by the pen name of *'Paak Baaz'*. Abru, while advising a young boy on love, writes (Vanita and Kidwai, Same Sex, 166):

"I've seen hundreds of beauties of your kind

Believe me, dear, true love is hard to find.

Still searching, lonely through the world

I wander They all want sex, but where is a true lover?"

While analysing the idea of romantic emotions, their centrality and expression at both elite and non-elite levels, there appears to be more similarities than differences with regard to the importance placed on chastity of womxn, ideas of masculine and feminine love, differential centrality based on gender norms and the perception of passion-driven love as a threat. These similarities point towards a sentiment of shared struggles of womxn despite their social classes. However, it is seemingly impossible to place all social classes of womxn at the same level. For example, the regulation of sexuality faced by an imperial princess cannot be juxtaposed with the regulation faced by a dancing girl from a

lower caste like that of *Kanchani*. Furthermore, men of lower classes were often associated with feminine traits, suggesting that the notions of masculinity and femininity governing romantic emotions were designed to favour a few elite males and support the premise of a stratified society.

The essay, thus, aims to provide a historical inspiration to the contemporary womxn's movement constantly challenging emotional chains of oppression in the form of various expectations involving a gendered performativity of emotions including that of romance along with emphasising on the role of emotions in holding and shattering socio-political structures.

Notes

1. Orsini also reiterates one of the pieces of advice given by the Prophet to Ali. The Prophet said, “o 'Ali, do not follow one glance with another glance, for the first is allowed to you but the second is not.”
2. Used here and elsewhere in the essay to denote women and persons of other gender and sexual identities.
3. This is reiterated in stories like that of Khusraw Shireen wherein King Khusraw's impatient and reckless love, in contrast to Shireen's chaste and pure love, is depicted as a reason for his failure (Orsini 20).
4. These have been written about by Barani and highlighted by Saleem Kidwai.
5. Chatterjee points out how, in love of young slave boys, reputed nobles often lost their masculine traits and easily got trapped into “slavelike” fidelity.
6. Jadunath Sarkar is of the opinion that many poets of the time went by the pen name of Makhfi and that the practice of *takhallus* being prominent amongst women is a contested claim. He, therefore, is sceptical of attributing the authorship of *Diwan-i-Makhfi* to Zibunnisa.
7. This pain can be owing to the unfulfilled desire of union or ‘unassuaged’ desire in her own words.
8. Taken from Lal and Duncan's translation, page 86.
9. First reference to Aqil Khan and his relationship with Zibunnisa comes from the accounts of Lachmi Narayan “Shafiq” who composed his works almost a century after the death of the princess (Sharma 771).

10. The essay draws heavily from Saleem Kidwai's work on the poet in Vanita, Ruth, and Saleem Kidwai (eds.) *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*. New York: Palgrave, 2020.
11. This composition becomes particularly important because it revolves around Aziz and Shahid, the latter being born into a poor family of Punjab and thus revealing some superficial information about perceptions of love in non-elite sections.
12. The reply is also attributed to her other lover Nasir Ali.
13. This isn't very surprising since the authorship of Zibunnisa's works have been highly contested (See note 7).

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Lal Ded: An Analysis of Her Vākhs and Contribution to the Cultural Heritage of Kashmir

Samarth Singh Chandel and Zainab Haleem

Introduction

In the long line of women Kashmiri poets, the wandering mystic Lal Ded has exercised a strong influence on shaping the collective identity and popular religious thought of the Kashmiris (Mattoo 2019, xiv, 4). Known through various appellations like Lalla Arifa, Lalleshwari, and Lalla Yogini, for the majority of the laypersons, irrespective of class or creed, she was and continues to be simply Lal Ded which means ‘Grandmother Lal’ or ‘Mother Lal Ded’ (Hoskote 2013, x; Kuszewska 2015, 2). Studying the life, experiences, and composition of Lal Ded, we argue, needs to progress along two key parameters that allow us to comprehensively contextualise and elucidate on her figure. First is the Bhakti movement and second is

her social location as a woman within medieval societies.

The term Bhakti is difficult to define. In a general sense, it is understood as a mode of personal “devotion” towards God. (Burchett 2019, 5) John Stratton Hawley terms it as a religion characterised by fervent “participation, community, enthusiasm, song, and often of personal challenge” with an ability to function independently of society’s institutions. (Hawley 2015, 2) Its process implies “divine encounter, experienced in the lives of individual people. These people, moved by that encounter, turn to poetry, which is the natural vehicle of bhakti, and poetry expresses itself just as naturally in song. There is a whole galaxy of bhakti poets

who have been moved to song in the course of Indian history...” (2)

Thus, the very logic of Bhakti dictates that it is constructed differently both historically and contemporarily by a range of religious communities, lay devotees, saints, their social milieus, linguistic affiliations etc.¹ Since the twentieth century, Bhakti has been popularly understood as a “movement” - the notion that between 600 and 1600 CE a vernacular, grassroots, socially inclusive, emotional Bhakti that emerged from the Tamil south and progressed northwards to reach Bengal and North India, connecting and reinvigorating the culture of the whole subcontinent. (Burchett 2019, 1-2, 5) Like a “lit fuse” - to quote A.K. Ramanujam - Bhakti “spread from region to region, from century to century, quickening the religious impulse.” (Burchett 2019, 1) This notion assumes that Bhakti, as a movement, was essentially

anti-orthodox, against Brahmanical ritualism and rejected caste oppression. Scholars divide Bhakti into two conceptual groups - *sa-gun* (with attributes) denoting forms of worship possible within the realm of sensory experience and *nir-gun* (without attributes) which visualises a formless divinity that can be accessed through the cultivation of inner experience. (Burchett 2019, 5)

Owing to the deep colonial influence on these ideas, scholars have tried to understand Bhakti in newer, more nuanced ways.² Karen Pechilis problematises the emphasis on monotheism given by colonial historiography, instead arguing that Bhakti must be understood as a history of multi-directional devotional engagements of diverse individuals and groups. Christian Novetzke argues that the category of bhakti should be understood neither as a social movement nor as a kind of personal devotion “but, rather, as an ongoing

effort to construct publics of belief, maintained through intricate systems of memory.” (Burchett 2019, 5-6)

Scholars such as Kumkum Sangari, John Cort, Krishna Sharma and John Keune have sought to move away from the historiographically overburdened and definition obsessed understandings of Bhakti towards a broad, multivocal, multidimensional cultural category that operated distinctively in the diverse regional and local contexts of medieval India. Bhakti then needs to be understood in terms of the multiplicity of its “lived forms, (and) the diversity of its historical expressions.” (Burchett 2019, 8) This approach is particularly fruitful for this essay, as it highlights the networks of interrelation and community among devotees, dimensions of memory, performance, embodiment, and emotional involvement in devotional participation, the diversity of forms and styles

Bhakti can take in different traditions and social locations, and the role of region-specific languages, sacred sites, and saints in the embodied life of devotion, all of which are crucial components of Bhakti religiosity not adequately accounted for in the earlier Orientalist, Protestant-biassed conceptions of Bhakti as devotion to a personal god.

Both popular narratives and scholarly works display a tendency to imagine Bhakti as a great equaliser of social distinctions. Thus, for the Sanskritist V. Raghavan, Bhakti provided voice to the voiceless as its socially inclusive nature uplifted all those who came within its fold. Regardless of whether this equality actualised in reality, it still provided a space for them to imagine an alternative order and to participate in it as part of a community. While this is true to an extent, the relationship of Bhakti with entrenched power dynamics of caste and gender was, and is,

more complex. (Hawley, Novetzke & Sharma 2019, 5-7)

To be sure, women played an important role in Bhakti. Every major Bhakti community has a strong female venerative figure. The influence of Bhakti woman-saints like Andal from Tamil Nadu and Mira Bai from today's Rajasthan is unmatched. Another striking feature of the literature of Bhakti is that questions about power relationships between humans and gods are often asked in a female voice. (Hawley, Novetzke & Sharma 2019, 8)

Their emergence is especially significant in the background of the strictures of the patriarchal society. From the earliest times, the Dharmashastras and the Smritis confined women to the qualities of obedience, chastity, modesty and surrender to father, husband, or son. Patriarchal notions took the form of practices like the *Purdah* (seclusion of women)

which was particularly pervasive amongst the ruling Rajput groups of Northern India; and *Sati* in which the widow mounted her husband's funeral pyre as the ultimate act of wifely devotion. Women, especially those from upper classes, were not to step out of their homes. Community pride was invested in tightly controlling the sexual chastity of women. The condition of widows was especially abhorrent. Most women were illiterate, economically dependent and subordinate to the will of men. There was not much scope in their lives beyond playing the roles of a wife, daughter and mother. (Ramaswamy 1992, 133-34)

Furthermore, the relationship between women and salvation had been a complex issue. Even during the Bhakti movement, women's claims to salvation and asceticism were contested. Uma Chakravarti observes that the female body and domesticity were

seen as obstacles in the path of salvation in the case of women. But for a man, no contradictions were perceived between the life of a householder and devotion towards God. Ruth Vanita and Madhu Kishwar see this as the opposition between “ideology of *pativrata*, whereby a woman's salvation lies in unquestioning devotion to her husband ... and the ideology of *bhakti* when the *bhakta* is a woman.” *Bhakti* involved the recognition of an entity with an authority transcending the man of the house, hence *Bhakti* and *grihastha* (domesticity) could not go together. (Kishwar and Vanita, 72)

Indeed, as we shall also see in the case of Lal Ded, marital discord and domestic abuse were often a common reason for these women to leave their homes (Ramaswamy 1992, 132). Stories relate that matters reached a tipping point when these women saints unconsciously manifested their miraculous powers, deeply

unsettling their husbands. For instance, the famous Tamil saint Karaikkal Ammaiyar's spiritual journey began when she was abandoned by her husband for spiritually materialising a mango to serve him in the meal.³ (Ramaswamy 1992, 142)

Yet the presence of *Bhakti* always kept the door slightly ajar for women to venture beyond conventions of domesticity, many of whom blossomed into thinkers and devotees, scholars, wandering mendicants and realised souls. As Vijaya Ramaswamy asserts, “the spiritual path helped women to break out of all stereotypes. As a saint, she made the unacceptable acceptable. She broke out of the chains of tradition, orthodoxy, and convention which attempted to control her sexuality, and sought God.” (Ramaswamy 1992, 134) Feminine spirituality thus was deeply shaped by experiences of discrimination and exploitation. Indeed,

saints ranging from Lal Ded and Mira Bai in northern India to Akka Mahadevi in the south expressed a rejection of patriarchal society through their compositions and actions.

Lal Ded

Despite her immense contributions and enduring popularity, Lal Ded's life has passed into oral tradition. A skeletal biography can be retrieved from an 18th century Persian chronicle called the *Tārīkh-i āzami* or *Wāqī'āt-i Kashmir* authored by Khwaja Azam Diddamari (Hoskote, xvi). As such, the precise date of her birth is unclear. She was supposedly born in the 1320s or 1330s in a family of well to do Kashmiri Pandits who resided in Pandrethan (today's Pampore in India administered Kashmir) (Hoskote 2013, xvii-xviii; Kuszewska 2015, 2). As per legend, Lal Ded was married at the age of twelve. Her husband and in-laws subjected her to

domestic abuse but she quietly steeled her resolve, focusing instead on preparing herself for rigorous spiritual discipline.⁴ (Hoskote 2013, 14; Kuszewska 2015, 2-3)

Lal Ded reached the threshold of her patience when one day, her husband deliberately broke the pitcher of water that she was carrying back home. Miraculously, while the pitcher shattered into pieces, the water continued to hold its shape on her head. Finally, Lal Ded decided to abandon the oppressions of a patriarchal marriage to freely pursue her goal of spiritual fulfilment. (Mulchandani 2019, 132) She immediately took discipleship under the aegis of the famed Śaiva saint *Sēd Bōyu* or *Siddha Śrīkāntha*, who instructed her in the spiritual path. On completing her period of discipleship and being initiated, she went out into the world, in the mould of the classical *parivrājikā*, that is, a wandering mendicant (Hoskote 2013, xvii).

In the landscape of medieval Kashmir, it was indeed unprecedented for a woman, and that too one hailing from a well to do Brahmin household, to totally cast off the yoke of marriage and tradition, step outside the bounds of the household, abandon the family and enter the patriarchal world of metaphysical/poetic experiences. (Hoskote 2013, xvii; Mattoo 2019, 15-17).⁵ A century later after Lal Ded's time, another famed woman saint, Mira Bai decided to leave the palace of her earthly husband and become a wandering singer. Thus, she blatantly rejected the controlling authority of her husband and in-laws who belonged to the powerful Sisodia clan of Mewar (Mukta 1989, 96-97). In her emotional veneration of Krishna, she imagined him as her true husband and lover, (Kishwar and Vanita 1992, 66) thereby breaking traditional codes of Rajput honour that came with violent repercussions (Mukta 1989, 95-97). And when she finally left, notes

Parita Mukta, Mira Bai forever antagonised the Rajput community of Mewar. (95).

In a sense, the path of asceticism alone could allow Lal Ded to express her spirituality by overcoming the perceived contradiction between the life of a devotee and the life of a housewife. The moment she stepped out, she also left her community behind with all its intricate restrictions. The act of wandering provided Lal Ded with space for the exploration of her experiences, for the refinement of her faculties and achieving clarity in her spiritual vision. Here, for a woman to leave her family (which was seen as the foundation of her very meaning) to become an ascetic is a very radical act. This visceral quality of abandoning is best expressed in Lal Ded's nakedness which marked the ultimate act of defiance by these women saints. It was their flagrant denial of women's sexuality and their refusal to

conform to sexual expectations. (Ramaswamy 1992, 142).

Unpacking the Vākh Corpus

Lal Ded's emergence and her consequent influence over the Kashmiri psyche is by no means accidental. The memory of her pioneering life, complete with its spiritual and material experiences, found a powerful and eloquent enunciation in her *vākhs* ("utterances"). Her life and *vākhs* are intimately embedded in the kaleidoscopic milieu of 14th century Kashmir, when the realms of state, society, and religion were rocked alive by the unprecedented dynamism of change and interaction (Hoskote 2013, xx-xi; Mattoo 2019, 4, 12; Kuszewska 2015, 3-7).

Her lifetime coincided with trends of political and social turmoil in the Kashmiri valley as the disrupted Hindu kingdom of the Damra Dynasty (1286-1320 CE) was assailed by

foreign adventurers like the Mongols. The ensuing political and economic chaos saw the influx of new political powers and the gradual spread of Islam in the region. Islamic influence received a decisive push with the coronation of Sultan Shamsuddin who founded the Sultanate of Kashmir in 1339 CE (Kuszewska 2015, 4-5). His rule marked this region's metamorphosis "from a Hindu-Buddhist past to a future that would be shaped by the gradual diffusion of Islam", (Hoskote 2013, 22) however, Hindus and Buddhists continued to dominate Kashmiri politics and culture for the coming generations. Shamsuddin and his successors consistently followed a policy guided by generosity and tolerance along with cultural patronage.⁶ In the process, they were largely successful in bringing back a degree of peace and prosperity to the region (Hoskote 2013, xxv).

Although 14th century Kashmir witnessed a vibrant culmination of numerous historical processes that were in motion, Kashmir's geographical location had always situated it as a meeting point of cross-cultural interactions. Thus, Islam was not a totally alien creed in the Valley (Kuszevska 2015, 6; Mattoo 2019, 4).⁷ Indigenous Hindu rule was in slow decline; and followers of Islam had been making both gentle and aggressive forays into Kashmir since the 12th century CE (Mattoo 2019, 4).⁸ For centuries, Buddhism and Kashmiri Shaivism (also called *Trika Sāstra*) had held sway over the religious life of the region. Buddhistic influence had led Shaivism to develop a distinctly egalitarian flavour, free from restrictions of idol worship and open to the possibility that all human beings, irrespective of their caste or creed, could achieve union with God (in this case, with Shiva) (Mattoo 2019, 5-6). Given the overlapping religious precepts of these faiths,⁹

the interaction between the Sufis and the Kashmiri populace would have been certainly fruitful, and indeed it was, leading as it did to the rise of the highly popular Rishi Order of Sufi saints in Kashmir (8-11; (Kuszevska 2015, 12-14).¹⁰

Author-translator of Kashmiri origin, Neerja Mattoo, also notes that by the time of Lal Ded, as Sufism was making incursions, Shavisim was already in slow decline. It had 'degenerated' into mere Tantric ritualism (Mattoo 2019, 6). Furthermore, the Brahmanical socio-political order of medieval Kashmir became increasingly hierarchical and caste-based. This was also a significant factor that contributed to the gradual conversions to Islam, mainly amongst the unprivileged masses (Kuszevska 2015, 6).

The advent of Sufi saints and missionaries marked the beginning of new order in

Kashmir that combined the old with the new. Cumulatively this led to the rise of a syncretic Hindu-Muslim culture with Buddhist influences that created a space within which the life and ideas of Lal Ded came to be celebrated by various communities. Hence Lal Ded was simultaneously an individual questor in her own right and also a public figure that successive generations of Kashmiris remembered as a key figure of their heritage. Scholars like Christian Novetzke bring out this “sociality” of Bhakti that involves a shared flow of ideas and emotions between the poet-performer and the audience. This becomes part of ever-widening circles of circulation that accumulate memory and material over time, ultimately giving rise to a community of devotees.

This reinterpretation of Bhakti allows us to characterise and trace the growth of Lal Ded’s *vākhs*. For Novetzke, Bhakti is not just a

personal enterprise of devotion but also a public endeavour. This public aspect - what he terms as “publics of belief” - takes shape through the reflexive circulation of Bhakti discourse among diverse individuals. Bhakti connects both the personal and public domains, with the individual (in this case, Lal Ded) serving as the node of creation and transmission. (Burchett 2019, 6) Hawley too conceives Bhakti as “a complex network of networks”—connecting people and places across regional, linguistic, and social boundaries through shared narratives, poetic genres and forms, and tropes. (Hawley 2015, 295–312)

Gradually, her *vākhs*, as ingredients of this reflexive social circulation, came to reflect the societal expression of a distinct characteristic Kashmiri self-awareness reflected through its indigenous thought, practices, and customs. As historian Agnieszka Kuszewska succinctly

observes: “Lal Ded witnessed the injustices of the Brahman – elite social order and then the advent of Islam through the activities of the Sayyids of Persia. She observed all these political and social changes exerting an impact on ordinary people's lives.’ She managed to express it in her sayings, poetry and philosophy” (Kuszevska 2015, 7).

Her utterances also bear testimony to the strong currents of ongoing social, linguistic, and cultural change at the “level of form, imagery, concept and vocabulary” (Hoskote 2013, xiii). Scholars generally accept that the Kashmiri (*Kashur*) dialect owes its growth to Lal Ded (Raina 2014, 252). The *vākhs* constituted one of the earliest manifestations of Kashmiri literature, and record the moment when modern Kashmiri began to emerge from the Apabhramsa Prakrit that had been the common language of the region through the 1st millennium CE. As a corpus,

Lal’s *vākhs* were transmitted orally for centuries before being written down. They circulated widely in popular culture between the mid-14th century and the present, variously assuming the form of songs, proverbs, and prayers. In this process, the *vākhs* acquired a composite character of Sanskritic, Arabic, and Persianate locutions that fused together the Hindu-Buddhist universe of meaning with the Islamic one that stretched from Spain across North Africa and West Asia to China (Hoskote 2013, xiii).

Lal Ded and Kashmiriyat

Lal Ded spoke directly to the people through her *vākhs*, sharing her “universal message and liberating the doctrine from sectarian or religious colour.” (“Syncretic Tradition and the Creative Life: Some Kashmiri Mystic Poets.” 2012, 94). She outrightly rejected “exclusivist organised religion with its empty, institutionalised ritualism” and criticised

practices such as idol worship as a means in itself (Mattoo 2019, 20, 29; Kuszewska 2015, 9). Instead, she recommended spiritual meditation as a path of self knowledge, liberation, and search for universal truth (Mattoo 2002, 68).¹¹

One of the reasons for the immense popularity enjoyed by Lal Ded was her openness and understanding of people's general problems (Kuszewska 2015, 8). Through the medium of her *vākhs*, she liberated the spiritual message from the abstractions of Brahmanical philosophers to deliver it straight to the masses in simple, unminced words. For this, she readily employed images and metaphors from the chores of a household to the craftsmen of the marketplace - all set in the easily recitable medium of the Kashmiri mother tongue (Mattoo 2019, 22-23; 30-34).¹² As a spiritual guide, she did not only preach but also took

lessons from her own life and transmitted those teachings. Thus her *vākhs* often assume the form of a *wopadesh* — lesson.¹³

The forms of address she uses while engaging with learned men and the divine are direct and informal, often shorn of decorum.¹⁴ Hoskote speculates that Lal Ded used colloquial forms to share the *wopadesh* with a newly forming community of interlocutors. Additionally, the idea of the subjectivity of the corpus demonstrates how a lineage, acting in her name, distributed her agency and with it the privilege of articulation — among those who had no access to political influence and no stake in political hegemony. In this context, the preferred informality could be seen as a strategy of democratisation (Hoskote 2013, xiv).

Therefore, Lal Ded had a significant role in shaping the multifaceted Kashmiri identity.

Although born in a Brahmin family, her message was highly universal as she harmonised the overlapping discourses of Islam, Sufism, Shaivism, and Buddhism. Her brand of accessibility and universality - carried on by the use of the common parlance and embellished with rich vocabulary, allusions, and suggestive power - allowed modern Kashmiri language to come on its own. It also shaped the region's indigenous collective memory, with her occupying a place of pride in it (Mattoo 2019, 31). Many of 'Lal Ded- *vākhs*' are preserved in the memory of the people and carried through centuries without written record (Kuszevska, 2015, 10).¹⁵

Even in her own time, she was perceived with great reverence among her followers. Shahabuddin Iraqi (2009) postulates a certain 'cross-breeding' of the Bhakti and Sufi movements through the example of Lal Ded and her disciple Sheikh Nuruddin. While the

Hindus in the valley formed the majority in the 15th century, it was not a new territory for the Sufis. This extensive movement of the Sufis and the gradual spread of Islam resulted in the foundations of the Rishi movement led by Sheikh Nuruddin (or Nund Rishi, the name his Hindu followers are familiar with).

Riyaz Punjabi notes that "The intermingling of Trika Shaivism with Islam resulted in the emergence of a new cult, which came to be called Rishi cult, a synonym of Bhakti. It was through the Rishis that Islam in its indigenous form became the popular faith of the people". Punjabi further states how Lal Ded served as inspiration for Sheikh Nurudddin who later came to be known as her successor and spiritual son.

Strong ties between the two are constantly reiterated in Kashmiri folk tales. Popular legend states that he refused to drink his

mother's milk at birth, and Lal Ded came to breastfeed him herself. Lal Ded finds mention in the *shrukhs* (compositions) of Nund Rishi where he calls her an avatar of his:

*“That Lalla of Padmanpore,
Who had drank the fill of divine nectar;
She was undoubtedly an avatar of ours.
Oh God! Grant me the same spiritual power.”*

Hawley further remarks that Sheikh Nuruddin and Lal Ded shared a special relationship wherein they “exchange spiritual songs; they play blind man's bluff; one time she even jumps into a baker's oven so as not to show him her nakedness.” (Hawley 2015, 303)

Lal Ded has been a symbol of heritage for Hindus and Muslims alike. She played a significant role as a symbol of ‘Kashmiri-hood’ with the idea of an indigenous and separate identity that can be linked to the

development of Kashmiri Nationalism. She enriched local traditions and also enriched the Rishi movement. Richard Temple has also emphasised her role in creating an atmosphere of harmony and tolerance. He states that, “the *vākhs* of Laleshwari have become part of day to day conversation in Kashmiri households. Her religion is not bookish. Her religion is a mix of people's hopes and miseries.” (Kuszevska 2015, 11).

Debates and Contestations

Lal Ded's poetry has undergone an unfortunate sectarian polarisation since the 1980's. While one group claims Lal Ded exclusively for Saivism, the other argues that her emancipatory ethos could not have sprung from a Hindu matrix. The first position which is characterised as the “Saiva School”, deems Islam as a Western import. This argument denies the confluence between Shaiva and Sufi traditions that were established

throughout the 14th century. The school also refuses to credit the accounts which suggest that Lal Ded was held in high self esteem by her contemporaries. Even if these accounts are exaggerations, there must have been some shared grounds of vision and discourse that led the sufis to embrace Lal Ded's poetry, and to recite her *vākhs* while initiating their assemblies.

The Sufi school on the other hand presents pre-Islamic Kashmir as an age of *jahilliya*.¹⁶ They make formulaic attacks on the Brahmins and also insist that the Kashmiri populace was keen to adopt Islam as they were suffering under Brahminical orthodoxy. This change of religion, however, did not involve a complete spiritual conversion as even in the 16th century, there were complaints about the religious laxity of Kashmiri Muslims.

The main basis for this debate is authenticity and historicity. Lal Ded's poems were an open-ended corpus until they were stabilised through print in the early 20th century. In search of the authentic poem produced by Lal Ded, some scholars have preoccupied themselves with refining away the text that they deem as interpolations. This approach hits a dead end since there is no 'original' poetry to be retrieved, as each generation revised Lal Ded's poetry toward contemporary usage (Hoskote 2013, xxxiii-xxxv).

Even as each school refers to a vague notion of Lal Ded's style, no clear explanation is provided for the enormous varieties of registers, tonalities, rhythms, and gradations of vocabulary that are accreted within her poetry. Further, in following Lal Ded's poetry, we realise that though a Perso-Arabic expression almost certainly entered the corpus several centuries after Lal Ded's death,

the Sanskrit phrases might equally have been inserted by a much later Brahmin scribe or reciter (Hoskote 2013, xxxi-xxxii).

Moreover, it is difficult to maintain a sharp distinction between Muslim and Pandit because families from Kashmir have often transitioned from Hinduism to Islam in the span of a generation. Thus, it is unlikely that they would have abandoned all their inherited theological reflexes and linguistic habits instantly.¹⁷ So, it is possible that some of the Sanskrit interpolations in Lal Ded's corpus were made by Muslims (Hoskote 2013, xxxii).

Kachru proposed the influential model of a Kashmiri bifurcated between 'Sanskritised Kashmiri' and 'Persianised Kashmiri' to account for styles within the language, which may broadly be mapped onto Pandit and Muslim sociolinguistic usage. And yet it has been noticed that the two communities do

not use these respective styles exclusively or invariably ("Modes of Address in Kashmiri" 1984, 154-72).

In light of the discussion of the probable sources and the debate on the authentic *vākhs* of Lal Ded, Hoskote argues that the poetry that has come down to us in her name is not the work of an individual but it has been produced over time as a 'contributory lineage' - a sequence of assemblies comprising people of varied religious affiliations and of both genders, representing the experience of various age groups and social locations including both literate and unlettered, reciters and scribes and redactors and commentators. He opines that these assemblies functioned as a living archive across the valley. They worked in tandem with what they saw as the core truth of Lal Ded's experienced revelation. Thus every contribution was a devotional act, offered as

an attribution to the poet (Hoskote 2013, xxxiii-xxxiv).¹⁸

Finally, Hoskote makes a case for engaging with the versionality of the Lal Ded corpus which arises from the nature of the lineage that produced it. He celebrates the interpolations and presents them as vibrant heteroglossia of the Lal Ded corpus. Citing examples of *vākhs* with Sufi inflections and Sanskrit phrases, he re-emphasises his argument of a contributory lineage and demonstrates the fatuity of attempting to establish a purely Perso-Arabic or Sanskritic Lal Ded.

Conclusion

What do we make of Lal Ded from our discussion? It is certain that she was a living person in the past, but she was also something larger than that - she emerges as a shimmering figure; a personification of the abstract, and

an allegory of the cumulative zeitgeist that characterised the linguistic, religious and cultural ferment of medieval Kashmiri society. All these elements are integral for us to understand her as a 'historical' figure - as a person born within a certain context, and whose work and identity was passed on. With the person long dead, it was the *vākhs* that came to embody her spirit. They were passed on for centuries, and moulded along the way by different social groups who disputed, claimed, discussed and revered her message and legacy. Thus, Lal Ded lived on (and continues to) through her contributions - in her radical challenge to Brahmanical elitism, in giving boost to the Kashmiri dialect, in harmonising different creeds - all in the face of the tumultuous background of Kashmir.

Notes

1. As to how the idea of Bhakti has evolved over centuries and come down to us in the 21st century has been skillfully traced by professor John Stratton Hawley in his book *A Storm of Songs: India and The Idea of The Bhakti Movement* (Harvard University Press, 2015).
2. Integral to the construction of the notion of Bhakti are the various historiographical debates that have occurred over the last century. A detailed yet lucid discussion of the historiography of Bhakti can be found in Patton C. Burchett's introduction to his book *A Genealogy of Devotion: Bhakti, Tantra, Yoga, and Sufism in North India* (Columbia University Press, 2019).
3. A good introductory essay on the Karaikal Ammaiyar is: Pechilis, "Karaikkal Ammaiyar," *World Religions and Spirituality*, April 13, 2016, www.wrldrels.org.
4. Traditional tellings of Lal Ded's life recount particularly how she was kept underfed by her in-laws. A popular Kashmiri saying describes the plight of Lal Ded: "*Whether they killed a goat, Lal Ded always had a stone for her dinner.*" Tradition goes that the mother in law used to put a flat stone on her plate and cover it with rice so it would look like a bigger heap of food.
5. A number of poems attributed to Lal Ded (known as vākhs) speak about the trials and humiliations that Lal Ded must've faced within the conservative society. However, as she matured along her spiritual path, these insults and humiliation couldn't match the vast depth of her knowledge. In one vākhs, she defies the system:

"Let them hurl a thousand curses at me,

pain finds no purchase in my heart.

I belong to Shiva. Can a scatter of ashes

ruin a mirror? it gleams.”

More famously, Lal Ded is believed to have left her house unclothed. In her nakedness, she was able to transcend the self consciousness thrust upon women by the behavioural conventions of patriarchy. Another *vākh* attributed to her reveals her self-confidence in being the instrument of the Supreme Being and her concrete faith in the path she has chosen. Lal Ded here is completely unruffled by the public’s opinion:

“They lash me with insults, serenade me with curses.

Their barking means nothing to me.

Even if they came with soul-flowers to offer,

I couldn’t care less. Untouched, I move on.”

6. With the exception of Sultan Sikandar

7. The region had been an important hub of East-West trade. Hence, it served as a lucrative destination point for missionaries, travellers, or scholars who had their impact on shaping Kashmiri culture and identity and contributing to unique religious syncretism. It is no surprise that Sufism itself had already been influenced by ascetic and meditative practices of Mahayana Buddhism.

8. There are a number of reasons that fuelled the eastwards migration of Sufis, mainly the rise of Turkish militarism in West Asia and the religious persecution of Sufis as heretics. This forced them to flee their homelands in Iran to migrate to other parts of the world; Kashmir now emerged as one of the host regions for the Sufis.

9. The foundation of this religion was the mystic philosophy of Trika Sāstra, expounded and elaborated by a series of Kashmiri scholars such as Vasugupta, Utpaladeva, Abhinavgupta and so forth. The world, as per the Trika, was a divine extension of Shiva, and hence worthy of our sensory participation without excessive emotional attachment. Abandoning total renunciation, the Trika instead emphasised on the understanding of human life as part of the celestial drama as the path to self-realisation. Sufi Islam, with its emphasis on personal experience and the pursuit of God through intense love; its egalitarian precepts; and its simultaneous acceptance of the principles of love and the need to subdue the spirit through discipline found a ready resonance in the new area they had entered.

10. A beautiful description of these three major strands of Kashmiri culture (that is, Buddhism, Sufism and Kashmiri variants of Shaivism) has been provided in the anthology *The Parchment of Kashmir: History, Society, and Polity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) edited by Nyla Ali Khan. Specifically read his introduction to section II of the book and its constituent essays by scholars Neerja Mattoo and M.H. Zaffar.

11. Lal Ded utters:

“Your idol is stone, the temple a stone too

All a stone bound together from top to toe!

What is it you worship you dense Brahmin?

True worship must bind the vital air of heart to the mind.” (Kuszevska, 9-10)

12. A beautiful example is furnished by these two *vākhs*, which conjointly describe the stages of the soul as it goes through the journey of life. The metaphor of the making of a piece of garment (also popular among later Bhakti poets like Kabir) is employed here by a worldly-wise Lal Ded:

“I, Lal Ded, set out to bloom like a cotton flower.

The cleaner tore me, the carder shredded me on his bow.

That gossamer: that was I

the spinning woman lifted from her wheel.

At the weaver’s, they hung me out on the loom.

First the washerman pounded me on his washing stone,

scrubbed me with clay and soap.

Then the tailor measured me, piece by piece,

with his scissors. Only then could I, Lal Ded,

find the road to heaven.”

13. The word ‘wopadesh’ comes from the Sanskrit ‘upadesa’ or lesson. This lesson was delivered by Lal Ded often in the form of notes of advice, rebuke, or a message to drive people out of their ignorance. The way Lal’s *vākhs* mediate the space between the *vākḥ* and *wopadesh* links the two theatres of the mystic poet’s life - the inner world of introspection and the outer world of society. Here, the *vākḥ* emerges from the former as it is an expansion of the consciousness beyond language, and the *wopadesh* manifests itself in the second theatre communicating the energy of spiritual transformation to its auditors.

14. In Ranjit Hoskote’s work, in the translated poems 58, 59, and 114, priests and scholars get short shrift as she challenges their methods and convictions: ‘hota bata’, ‘Hey priest-man!’ And yet she can speak tenderly to the guru or the Divine, calling him ‘Mali’, ‘Father’, or L Siddhd\ ‘Master’, or ‘Natha\ ‘Dear Lord’. More formally yet still lovingly, she can praise the Divine as ‘Sura-guru-natha’, ‘the Teacher who is First among the Gods’.

15. Interestingly, she appears to be very aware of the impact that she had on local culture. In one of her poems she says:

“Whatever I uttered with my tongue, became a mantra

And in another:

I burnt the foulness of my soul

I slew my heart, it passions all

I spread my garments, hem and sat;

Just there on bended knees,

In utter surrender unto him,

My fame as Lal Ded spread afar.”

16. Jahiliya is an Arabic word meaning “ignorance,” or “barbarism,”. It indicates a negative Muslim evaluation of pre-Islamic life and culture in Arabia as compared to the teachings and practices of Islam. A similar evaluation of pre Islamic Kashmir is being made here.

17. Hungarian-British archaeologist and Sanskritist Aurell Stein reported his discovery of Sanskrit inscriptions on Muslim gravestones during his journey through Kashmir in 1888 and 1896.

18. Here, the author draws upon Vinay Dharwadker’s work who has analysed Kabir’s poetry as a multi-author production.

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Wardrobe of the Robes: Ceremonies, Diplomacy, and Material Culture

Vidita Gupta & Pranjali Saini

Introduction

Sartorial practices are practices of investiture as well as of giving and visualising. This multidimensional aspect of textiles is similar to the gift-giving practices of modern society. Exchanging or giving away textiles comes with and arises from obligations, but it is also an honour and a means of strengthening social bonds. Textiles are recorded to have functioned as markers of social hierarchies. These were also used as media for delivering political or religious messages in regional and international circumstances. With the emergence of civilisations, textiles became objects of investiture and as suitable diplomatic gifts.

One of the many renowned textile-related practices from history is the *khil'at* ceremony.

The term *khila't* is derived from the word '*khil'a*' which means to wear and the term '*khala*' which denotes undressing or to bestowing a robe upon somebody. Therefore, the term *khila't* means the gift of attire. As per sources, the term also applied to various sets of other valuable items. The robe or the *khil'at* given was made out of a high-value textile embellished with brocades, velvets, and gold threads. For a more significant or high-in-stature recipient, sometimes, jewels were added to the robe. However, what made these clothes special was the fact that they were worn or at least brushed across the shoulders of the ruler or the caliph. Rather than being a simple ceremony of royal largesse, *khil'at* signified a personal bond between the giver and the receiver. Performed publicly, it was also a clarifying moment in

the socio-political relationships of people. People of the most diverse backgrounds were awarded robes for all kinds of services. Typically, these recipients were government officials, military officers, or, more rarely, the representatives of a foreign ruler, scholars, physicians, and poets. Thus, even though the specific details of the robing ceremony varied across kingdoms, the unifying factor was the honour, high value, and elite attire.

Though the term *khil'at* dates back to the 7th century, the ceremonial robing has for the longest time been performed throughout the world. The oldest description of the ceremony yet is found in the last book of the Hebrew Bible, recounting the story of Esther. In northern India, this practice was introduced by the Ghaznavids and Ghurids. Thereafter the ceremony of robes was adopted by the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire in medieval India. Under colonial

rule, the ceremony lost favour, leading to its decline.

The Delhi Sultanate

Despite the political turmoil during the Delhi Sultanate, extensive use of the *khil'at* was carried out. Each sultan is said to have had a factory where manufacturers were appointed to create textiles of all kinds to be given as robes of honour or as other presents. These robes were created out of the finest fabrics often imported and were fabricated in the royal workshops and the sultans always had some ready to be given away. This honouring ceremony was usually reserved for festivals, special occasions and courts.

In 1206, as Qutb ud-din Aibak laid the foundation for the independent Sultanate of Delhi, ties with Central Asian power were severed. Yet the socio-political ties with Central Asia could not be broken. This

dynamism is reflected in the instance where the Caliph gave political recognition to the Delhi Sultanate¹ by granting robes of honour, letters of investiture, and bestowing of titles. Similarly, in 1227, Iltutmish in return for his *khidmati* to the Caliph Mustausin of Baghdad received *khil'at* along with a ring, vest, special turban, saddle, and horses. Juzjani, the Persian historian for the Mamluk Sultanate, recorded the caliphal investiture of Iltutmish. This account, though brief in description, creates a theatrical image of the elaborate ceremonies arranged for the occasion. Interestingly, these caliphal investitures legitimised the authority of the sultans but were also shared and transmitted to subordinates or potential rivals to emphasise the designation of authority. After the reign of Iltutmish, no record of such diplomatic exchanges between the Sultans of Delhi and the Caliph of Baghdad have been found for more than a hundred years until Barani's account during

the reign of Muhammad Tughluq.²

This, however, does not mean that robes of honour were not in use during that period. The 15th century account about the fall of Siwana and Jalore to Alauddin Khalji mentions that Brahmin Madhava, after betraying his homeland to Khalji, was rewarded with a five-piece robe of honour. While *Khil'at* ceremonies as conducted under the Tughlaqs are best communicated through *Masalik-al Abasar fi-Mamalik-al-Amsar*, an encyclopaedic compendium of administrative practices written by al-Umari. As for the caliphal investiture, Firoz Shah Tughluq is recorded to be the last sultan of Delhi to have received it, and the ceremony was recorded by both Barani and Afif. Despite the lack of evidence regarding the caliphal investments, the Lodi Dynasty was not left untouched by the practice of *khil'at*, even as it was being replaced by the Mughals.

The Mughal Empire

As a direct descendant of Genghis Khan and Timur, Babur was familiar with and accustomed to the robing ceremony. He also sought to reinforce his authority by frequently gifting robes of honour and in Babur's memoirs or the *Tuzuk-i-Baburi*, there is repeated emphasis on the significance of the *khil'at* ceremony (Balkrishnan, 2020). Picking up from the memoirs, Gavin Hambly has retold three ways that Babur used the *khil'at* ceremony. The first example pertains to the practice of exchange of robes of honour between kinsmen, wherein Babur gifts the robes of honour to his maternal uncles- Mahmud Khan of Tashkent and Ahmad Khan of Aqsu- for their military support. The second is a description of the *darbar* held in Agra in 1528-29, where *khil'at* was exchanged for diplomatic purposes, and the last account follows the appointment of Muhammad

Zaman Mirza as the governor of the Bihar province.

When Humayun, Babur's successor, regained the Mughal throne in 1555, he emphasised the Persian style of robes of honour ceremonies by giving out an exorbitant number of robes. Further, the Persian equivalent term for *khil'at*, called *sar-o-pa* meaning from head to foot, was introduced. Under the rule of Akbar, the *khil'at* became a routine matter, yet transformation took place as the robes of honour were elevated as a fashion to befit the luxurious court. These robes were no longer Chinese silks and Central Asian furs but created out of brocades, velvets and gold thread silks. This was also the period when distinct categories of *khil'at*- an attire of three, five or seven pieces³- were established. During Akbar's reign, the *khil'at* were confined to the emperor's ruling class only.

The change was witnessed during Jahangir's

reign wherein *khil'at* was distributed by Mughal commanders in the field⁴. From here on, *khil'at* was an explicit symbol of submission, and the account of Mirza Nathan describes how Jahangir and Shahjahan carried several thousand *khil'ats* during their political and military campaigns. Miniatures from the *Padshahnama* are also testaments to the elements of the *khil'at* ceremony as performed by the Mughals. A painting titled '*Jahangir presents Prince Khurram with a turban ornament*' is a notable example. It depicts Prince Khurram being honoured by a turban ornament or sarpech that had previously been worn by Emperor Akbar and was perhaps considered propitious for the dynasty.

During the reign of Aurangzeb, even when the Mughal Empire was facing a military, political and economic decline, ceremonial granting of robes continued to remain significant. However, most of the accounts of

the *khil'at* ceremony during Aurangzeb's rule reflect the use of *khil'at* for kinsmen and diplomatic exchange only. With the diminishing authority of the Mughal rule, ceremonies like *khil'at* which incorporated people into the imperial court were repeated at lower levels of courtly politics. Thus, from the end of the 17th century, those Mughal governors who became de facto independent rulers, invaders outside of the subcontinent and military adventurers of all kinds maintained an act of public bonding through *khil'at*, as an attempt to emulate the legacy and by extension, the authority that the Mughal emperors held.

Colonial India

From the 17th century onwards, several Europeans were making their way into the Indian subcontinent. Most of them came as traders and merchants or missionaries. To achieve their objectives in India, they had to

recognise the local as well as the pan-Indian authorities. Thereby, the Europeans sent embassies to the Mughal court where they were bestowed with the robes of honour. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, a private French merchant, had travelled to the Mughal court in the second half of the 17th century where he was honoured with a robe of honour. Tavernier went on to have portraits of himself, dressed in the robes he had received, painted. For Europeans, understanding the multidimensional significance of the robing ceremony was difficult. However, this is not to say that Europeans were not familiar with the practice.

An incident concerning Queen Elizabeth I and the Ottoman royalty indicates that even the British were aware of the ceremony and its importance. In the late 16th century, the Ottomans and the British were enemies of Catholic Spain. Thus, in 1594, following the

defeat of the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth sought out to strengthen relations with the Ottoman Empire. For this, the Queen sent presents that included pieces of gold cloth, a jewelled miniature portrait and a letter to the Queen Mother of Mehmed III, the Safiye Sultan. In return, Elizabeth received “an upper gowne of cloth of gold very rich, and under gowne of cloth of silver, and a girdle of Turkieworke, rich and faire” (Gordon, 2019). Accounts mention that Elizabeth recurrently wore these gowns, perhaps to discomfort the Spanish spies or boast of her Turkish connection. Thus, the Europeans were well aware of the *khil'at* ceremony and its role in diplomacy.

With the 1757 Battle of Plassey, the East India Company made inroads into north India politically. By now, the ritual exchange of *nazr* and *khil'at* were established as markers of investiture and fealty. However, as the British

acquired *subas*, they ensured that under their jurisdiction, rituals like *khil'at* were not practised. In 1843, the practice of offering *nazr* and receiving *khil'at* at the Mughal court was forbidden for the British officials by the colonial government under Governor-General Lord Ellenborough.

Comparably, in the 19th century, the robing ceremony caused issues of legitimacy between the Mughal rulers and the emerging colonial empire (Gordon, 2001). As Lord Ellenborough opined, such practices were 'altogether inconsistent with the relative position of the King of Delhi and of the British government which now possesses the power from which alone the house of Timur derived its dignity' (Gordon, 2003). Eventually, the Mughal Empire held negligible political power and the Mughal emperors became pensioners to the British East India Company. Simultaneously, the

colonial officials made a transition from subordinates to rulers and highlighted this change in the relationship by becoming the gift-givers and bestowing upon others the *khil'at*. One of the noteworthy instances of display of power as gift-givers by the British took place after the Revolt of 1857. For example, the independent states of present-day Himachal Pradesh, which had either cooperated or helped the colonial powers to quell the revolt, were conferred upon with *khil'ats*, honorary titles, a salute of guns and other gifts.

Though considered as a form of bribery, the British administration continued the use of the *khil'at* system due to its ritual and political legacy in the subcontinent. However, this use was symbolic in nature and did not carry much political weight. Gail Minault suggests that repudiation of rituals like *khil'at* was perhaps the way of the British

to emphasise that they were the highest authority and not the Mughal rulers. It also became less important after the 1870s, partly due to the influence of the European fashion of dress, and because the *jama* went out of style. The inevitable consequence was that most of those craftsmen whose livelihood depended on the *khil'at*, namely, the gold brocade weavers (*zaribaf*), were negatively impacted. Therefore, with the establishment of the rule of Crown in India, new elaborate rituals like the Delhi Durbars were introduced to symbolically strengthen the British power.

Conclusion

Marshal McLuhan argues that clothing is an extension of man, representing amplification of the human skin. This idea holds true as textiles give us the liberty to create our unique identities. Further, the functional roles of clothing and textiles embody cultural

and personal values that are limitless and dynamic. Therefore, the significance of textiles and clothing in our society is imminent. Thereby, sartorial practices such as *khil'at* are manifestations of the values that clothing holds for us. *Khil'at* can be viewed as a gift exchange, wherein during these exchanges, people are exchanging obligations more than pleasantries or commodities.

The *khil'at* ceremony was employed to establish a relationship of respect and honourable service. It gained substantial meaning with the rise of Islam in the 7th century. Gradually, the practice made its way into the Indian subcontinent. Initially experienced through the caliphal investiture, *khil'at* made its way into the everyday socio-political lives of the people. *Khil'at* was now an accompaniment to the conferring of titles and bureaucratic offices. *Khil'at*'s power in medieval society is represented by the fact

that it was used in war or peace. It was especially manipulated to maintain ties between rulers that could not have face-to-face interactions due to distance. With the giving away of robes, titles, responsibilities and rewards also came with the obligation of obedience towards the emperor in both the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. Therefore, refusal of the *khil'at* indicated grave insult, paramount to treason. Simultaneously, the knowledge that a *khil'at* could not be refused was also exploited to give poison coated or epidemic infected robes.

The fealty feature of *khil'at* is what made it unfavourable for colonial rule. In the beginning, the British fit into the social fabric of the Mughals, by recognising the Mughal authority and participating in their rituals. As they began replacing the Mughals as the source of military might, patronage

and protection, the social need to represent the same also came about. Thus, arose the British East India Company's refusal to accept robes of honour, especially from the Mughal emperors. As the Mughal power deteriorated, it left a social and political lacuna. The British, already on their way to building an empire, took the opportunity to socially codify their authority and power in the subcontinent (Balkrishan, 2020).

In conclusion, society has for the longest time used clothing as a powerful means of communication. Within this context, the *khil'at* ceremony functioned in a variety of ecological systems, religions and regions. Despite the differences in the ritualistic nature of *khil'at* in different settings, the idea of fealty, honour, largesse and ostentation were central to the ceremony. Therefore, the *khil'at* ceremony had the right degree of ambiguity to it. It symbolised fashion and

luxury but was also a marker of new alliances and shifting relations in the court. This

complexity of the *khil'at* requires a more detailed study into the varied aspects of the ceremony and its impact.

Notes

1. During this period, there were a number of such independent states that were emerging. Even though practically independent, all of them needed to legitimise their authority. For this, a socio-political recognition was sought from the religious authority, from the reigning Caliph.
2. This gap in records can be explained by a period of Mongolian invasions and destruction of the Caliphate in Baghdad.
3. A typical robing ceremony included a three-piece, issued by the general wardrobe (*khila 'khan*), consisting of a turban (*dastar*), a long coat with a full skirt (*jama*) and a waist-scarf (*kamarband*). Then there was a five-piece set and a seven-piece set. The former was issued by the storehouse (*toshakhana*) and consisted of the three-piece set along with a jewelled turban-ornament (*sarpech*) and a turban decorating band (*balaband*). The seven-piece set included a headdress, long coat, close-fitting jacket, two pairs of trousers (*shalva*), two pairs of shirts (*kmais*), two girdles and a scarf (Gordon, 2003).
4. By the 18th century, women awarding the robes of honour to men became an accepted practice, since earlier the women were limited to exchanging these robes among themselves.

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Bāgh Cave Paintings: An Inquiry into its Historical Context

Jahanvi Jha

Nine in number, the Buddhist monasteries of Bāgh contain sculptures and some of the finest examples of ancient Indian art, the mural paintings. Walter Spink has dated the construction of Bāgh caves between 465-480 C.E. (Spink, "Bāgh" 53). He claims that during the early 469 to late 471 C.E., several craftsmen, sculptors, and artisans went to Bāgh in search of employment and patronage due to the aggression of *Aśmaka* on the ruler of *Ṛṣika*, inflicting a severe blow on Ajantā's patronage during the period (Ibid). Spink's assertions have not remained unscathed by scholars. Richard S. Cohen has questioned Spink's methodological framework of 'motival analysis' (the artistic and architectural elements of the site are isolated and analysed before positioning them in a historical context),

and his understanding of the pattern of patronage based on the analysis of three profound moments concerning the history of Ajantā; creation, hiatus, and devastation (Cohen, "Ajantā's history" 127-129). Based on the above arguments, this paper seeks to investigate the social dimensions of mural paintings elaborately embellished on cave number 4 and the aspect of patronage. These issues are dealt with using the donative inscriptions of Valkhā kings and Mahārāja Subandhu.

I

An analysis of the iconographic composition and arrangement in religious structures in the light of broader socio-economic transformation highlights the embedded normative values and

politico-religious ideologies (Mahalakshmi 42). Therefore, to comprehend the monastic site of Bāgh, multivalent meanings, implicit in the form of the Stūpa and the 'minor deities' must be addressed. Stūpa as a symbol of culture encapsulates aesthetic values as well as social relationships (Miller 32). The Stūpa chapel in cave number 2 is accompanied by the sculpture of Buddha with his attendants (Marshall 6), which highlights the transitional stage of Buddhism. Alongside the Stūpa, primitive cults of lower divinities such as the *Nāgas* and the *Yakṣas* (Marshall 48) are embellished on the walls. The presence of Bodddhisatva imagery above the *Nāga* panel in cave number 2 symbolises the superiority of Buddha. The cult of *Nāgas* and the *Yakṣas* were incorporated into Buddhism to harness the 'magico-religious' attributes of Stūpa and their propitiation resulted in territorial fertility, rain, and fecundity.

This reciprocal exchange between Buddhism and cults resulted in the emergence of Buddha as a 'translocal divinity with local identity' (Cohen, "Nāga, Yakṣiṇī, Buddha" 380) and helped in the domestication of the Sangha. The doorway to cave no. 4 is adorned with a female figure whose left-hand rests upon the head of a dwarf figure emerging out of the mouth of a *Makara*, while in her right hand she holds a tree branch (Marshall 14). Its iconographical analysis reveals a resemblance with the river deities evolving from the tree-spirits or *vriksha-devata*, and derived attributes from the *Śālabhañjikā* figures (Darian, "Ganges" 315, op. quoted Viennot). This female figure can be identified as the river deity *Gangā* and is accompanied by Lord *Vāruṇa* depicted as *Makara*. The most crucial element of the Bāgh cave is the paintings demonstrated in cave number 4. The Buddhist monasteries sites were often adorned with

visual narratives in the form of sculptures and painted murals. Vidya Dehejia in her work, *"On modes of Visual narration"* explores the theoretical understanding of narrative structure in Buddhist art. She highlights seven different modes of narration utilised by the artist to communicate the idea to the viewer (374). This hypothesis is utilised by Monika Zin to identify the paintings of Bāgh, which according to her depicts the story of

II

Foremost, it was G. S. Gai who identified Valkhā with the modern township of Bāgh (Gai 245). The absence of any direct genealogical relationship between these rulers translates into a very vague political history. Some scholars are of the view that Samudragupta appointed Bhulunda, a "tribal" chief, as the feudal governor of the region (Ramesh and Tiwari ix). And the

Māndhātār (Zin, " identification of Bāgh Painting" 313). She claims that under Buddhist influence, the original story of Māndhātār was modified to focus on their tendencies to condemn arrogance, greed, and lustful striving for sensual pleasures and to demonstrate their negative, disastrous consequences (Ibid).

fact that the succeeding rulers of Valkhā had Sanskritized names suggests two possibilities: either the Gupta appointed these Mahārāja from the regular "Indo-Aryan stock", or they were influenced by Brahmanization and Sanskritisation (ibid). Moreover, land grant charters ascribed to the Valkhā kings mention them meditating at the feet (*pād-ānuddhyatena*) of 'Parambhattaka', a title associated with the Guptas (Gai 244). Therefore, indicating a feudal structure

and establishing a link among the five rulers: Bhulandu, Svāmidāsa, Rudradāsa, Bhattāraka and Nāgabhata, and Valkhā as their seat of power (*'Valkhā-adhithāna'*). G.S. Gai notes a similarity in characters, royal sign manual, and phraseology between the grants of Bhulandu (year 37, 48), Svāmidāsa (107), and Subandhu (167). (Gai 244). But the inscriptions found in cave number 2 of Bāgh accredited to Mahārāja Subandu lack epithets dedicated to the rulers of the Gupta dynasty and has Māhismati as its centre. This could be indicative of a political change in the region. Therefore, an evaluation of land-grant charters assigned to the rulers associated with the region of Valkhā becomes crucial for understanding the historical process that was accompanied by a change in the nature of patronage.

These donative inscriptions play a crucial

role in understanding the process of state formation by highlighting the socio-political and economic transition in the region. The spatial characteristics and settlement structure of the Valkhā could be understood by the boundary clause mentioned in the epigraphs. The lack of terminology denoting boundary signifies a relatively open-ended unit of space (Ghose, "Boundary Representations" 128). But The mention of the term *sīmāyām* in the grant of Rudradasā (year 67) is the only exception. The presence of fluid boundary markers in the form of river Narmmadā, the forest region, a village, or a deity can not be ignored (Ghose, "Hoards of copper-plates" 8). Additionally, the donation of Village *Pippalōjjhara* on the farther bank of Narmmadā hints at the expanding nature of the Valkhā kingdom. Besides this, different territorial divisions with suffixes like *rāshtra*,

rāshtrakā, āvāsa/vāsa, bhukti, and *pathakas* are mentioned in these records (Ramesh and Tiwari, xiv-xviii). These grants provide numerous names of donated villages, which were part of Pathakas or sub-division, similar to a group of villages corresponding to a territorial division like pargana of a later period (Lal, "Spatial Characteristics" 126). The use of such suffixes and categorisation of regions in territorial division may have been done for administrative convenience. These land grants were made for perpetuity and had a hereditary character in most cases. For its successful implementation, certain directories were also issued to the royal troops and officials. Set of officials mentioned in the inscriptions of Valkhā rulers are: *amātya* (minister, officer in charge of district), *Krityakara* (executive), *chchhatr* (soldier), *bhata* (personal servant), *bhojka* (priest/ class of priest), *ārakshik*

(police-magistrate), *āsmat-paksha* (partisan), *tat-kulīnā* (kinsmen), *ādibhir* (royal herald) are mentioned. The charter of Bhattāraka (year 129) refers to scribe Krishna, the *rājyādhikrita*, who wrote down the king's oral orders (*svamukha-ājñā Likhitanmayārājy-ādhikrita-Krishnēna*). In addition to political legitimacy, these grants also familiarised the general populace with their duty. These obligations included causing no hindrance and fulfilling the objective to perform Bali, Caru, and Satra rites. Most of these charters made proclamations of property transfer in the presence of royal officers, locally landed magnates and the inhabitants of the village. Thus, giving an idea about the socio-economic groups that constituted the subjects of the kingdom. The mention of *pañcha-kāruka* (group of five artisans) and *Lohakārapallikā* (blacksmith) indicates their importance in

society. These inscriptions also speak briefly of the women associated with the process of land donation and certain religious ceremonies. The land grant penetrated into various layers of estrangement and contributed to political legitimacy by emphasising the state's rights (Sahu, "Legitimation ideology and state" 66). The recipients of these land grants mainly constituted individuals or groups of Brahmins, deities, and religious institutions. The donation of land often led to the establishment of new settlements that facilitated the movement and migration of Brahmins, as is evident from the mention of different gotras. Hypothetically, the donation of an entire village to a Brahmin of a particular gotra can be suggestive of the fact that the area was previously not under any Brahmin family which made it easy to transfer, and also the desire of the king to extend and

strengthen Brahminical influence in these areas to ensure his hold over it. Additionally, the process of Brahminisation in this region was also encouraged by the presence of *Ārya-Chāturvidyas*. They studied Vēdas and were assigned the task of performing various vows and austerities. In early India, support for religious organisations, their representatives, and a variety of other methods was utilised by the rulers through the act of patronage to bolster their influence (Sahu, "Legitimation, ideology and state" 48). A similar practice is observed among the rulers of Valkhā. The mention of *dēva-Karmāntika* (temple officer), *dēva-parichāraka* (servant of the temple), *dēva-prasādaka* (temple official), *dēva-Karmina* (temple priest), and *dēvakīya-karshaka* (cultivator associated with temple soil) in the charters of Mahārāja Bhulunda imply towards the

establishment of temples in the region (Ghose, "Hoards of copper-plates" 13). Initially, *Visnu-Nārāyana*, the deities of the Brahmanical pantheon, took centre stage in these temples, emphasising the influence of the Imperial Guptas on the rulers of Valkhā. Additionally, the rulers attempted at gaining support from the existing social categories by providing patronage to the autochthonous deity *Bappapisāchadeva* and the cult of Mother Goddess. The idea of pisācha worship stems from the devotion toward the souls of those who have died ultimately or violent deaths (Walhouse, "Bhuta-Devil and Ghosts" 480). Bappa-Pisāchadeva is recognised by Suchandra Ghose as the dead father of Bhojikā-bhatta Bandulā, who seems to have died an unnatural death either during a war or after getting infected by a certain disease (Ghose, "Hoards of copper-plates" 14). This

practice of worshipping was common practice in early India. The worship of *Bappa-Pisāchadeva* by *Pāsūpatas* and the three plots of land entrusted with *Mahesvara*, *Nandipata*, and *Nandi* in *Ambilikapadra* denotes the presence of the Shaivite sect. Although no remains of the mother goddess figurines were found at Bāgh, its mention in the inscription of Bhulunda (year 50) as *mātrinām* indicates the prevalence of the cult. The naming of goddesses based on the place where she was installed, that is, *Navatatāka*, resonates with the notion that often goddesses were placed on the boundaries of the village for its protection (Elgood, "Village Hinduism" 328). The goddess was pleased through a donation of gifts and worship for her auspicious nature. Here, the process of acculturalisation becomes evident by the propitiation of the Mother Goddess and Bappa-Pisāchadeva. It takes a form similar

in many respects to the developed in mainstream devotional Brahmanical tradition with the offering of incense, flowers, garlands, and so on.

Land grant charters attributed to the five rulers: Bhulunda, Svāmidāsa, Rudradāsa, Nāgabhata, and Bhattāraka, do not refer to patronage being provided to the Buddhist monastery of Bāgh. Furthermore, after Nāgabhata, there appears to be a thirty-year lacuna before the next ruler, Mahārāja Subandhu, acquires power. This gap could signal a regional political upheaval. The mention of the same territorial unit (Dāsīlakapallipathaka) in the inscriptions of Valkhā kings and later Subandhu, highlights their control over the region. Moreover, Mirashi locates Dāsīlakapalli as Dēswālīā, 14 miles from the Bāgh caves (Mirashi, “inscriptions of Kalchuri-Chedi era” 20). Two charters

dated the year 167 in Gupta Era (486 C.E.) were issued by Mahārāja Subandhu from Māhismati. One of these charters found in cave number 2 of Bāgh alludes to the patronage provided by him to the Buddhist monastery and the “monks coming from the four quarters” (21). He also orders for the ‘maintenance of alm-house, repairing vihāra and essential facilities to be provided to the monks residing in the monastery called Kalāyana (the abode of art)’ (ibid). The fact that the monastery was to be renovated during Subandhu’s reign suggests that these caves were built before he came to power but after the reign of Nāgabhata. Therefore, the construction of the Buddhist monastery of Bāgh could be traced between 474-486 C.E. .

Conclusion:

The patronage given to Brahmanas, temples, and monastic establishments disseminated ideas and traditions crucial to cultural transmission and reproduction (Sahu, 2003). To build authority over their subjects, the ruling class of Valkhā utilised both Brahmanic as well as local traditions. Political legitimacy, religious fervour, and social prosperity were an outcome of the act of Patronage. Patronage operated as a 'cultural catalyst' by bringing together different social categories for the formation of cultural objects and institutions (Thapar

"Tradition and Patronage" 4). A change in the nature of patronage becomes visible from the donative inscription of Mahārāja Subandhu, who provided patronage to the Buddhist monastery of Bāgh. Based on the analysis of his inscriptions one could argue that the monastery called Kalāyana (the abode of art) that consisted of the mural paintings was constructed by Dattaka on the order of Mahārāja Subandhu. However, it is not clear whether Kalāyana referred only to cave number 4 or the entire monastery of Bāgh, which leaves space for multiple conjunctures.

APPENDIX 1.

FIRST SCENE	
SECOND SCENE	
THIRD SCENE	
FOURTH SCENE	

FIFTH SCENE



SIXTH SCENE





Source : [The Bagh Caves In The Gwalior State By Sir John Marshall](#)

APPENDIX 2:

Name	Publication details	gift/order	donor	donnee	miscellaneous
Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 47 month of Pausha, 367 C.E.	Five villages on the southern bank of the river Narmmadā, Ukkārīpadraka, Dubhodikā, Bhētunkalikā, sajjarhradaka along with the water reservoir called Vibhītaka pānīyaka and Karmmānta.	Mahārāja Bhulunda, the devotee of Lord Nārāyana	Lord Vishnu	For the performance of the Bali, Caru and Satra. The deed was executed in the presence of five artisans (pañcha-kāruka)
Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 50, the month of Chaitra, 370 C.E.	Village Dubodhika entrusted with Mulasarmman and another village Dharmmānaka and a plot of land in the Arjunapanktikā entrusted with Bhuta-bhōjkā	Mahārāja Bhulunda	Mulasarmman and Bhuta-bhōjkā	For performance of the of Bali, Caru and Satra and in providing for sandal paste, incense and garlands for the mother goddesses(Navatātāka-mātrinām) at Navatātāka by agents and temple servants (devakarmminas)

Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 50, month of Phālgun, 370 C.E.	Donation of Village Pippalōjjhara on the farther bank of Narmmadā.	Mahārāja Bhulunda	Lord Nārāyanadev, installed at Valkhā	For performing Bali, Caru, and Satra rites Nature of Grant-Dēvāgrāhāra. Devaki(ki)ya-karshakā h (temple cultivators), Pāśupatās, the Ārya-chōkshas, and deva-prasādakāsare (temple servants) associated with the work of temple maintenance and providing sandal paste and incense for the performance of rites were allowed to continue on the land donated.
Grant of Bhulunda	from Valkhā, the month of Ashādha, year 51, 371 C.E.	Three plots of land were entrusted with/enjoyed by Mahēśvara, Nandapāla, and Nandi. Plots were in the village of Ambilikpādra (a village) and a plot of wasteland (khila) was to be granted.	Mahārāja Bhulunda	Lord Nārāyanadeva	For performing of Bali, Caru, and Satra rites. Nature of grant-Dēvāgrāhāra. Executor of the grant- Ādyakarnna
Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 54, the month of Vaiśākha,	Half of the village of Vibhītakagartā which was earlier enjoyed by the same deity was to be converted into Dēvāgrāhāra-bhukti and was to be administered	Mahārāja Bhulunda	Bappapisāchadeva installed at Valkhā by Bhojika-Bhatta Bandulā	Nature of the grant-Dēvāgrāhāra. For the performance of Bali, Caru, and Satra rites and in providing for sandal

	374 C.E.	by the devotees of Bhagvat (Lord Nārāyana)			paste, incense, flowers, and garlands. Gomika-executor of the grant Temple and servants Pāśupatās were allowed to cultivate.
Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 54, the month of Vaiśākha, 374 C.E.	Made a grant of two villages of Dēvagrāhāraka and Gavayapānīyaka, situated in Ūrikārāshtra. These two villages were earlier under the enjoyment of the same local deity.	Mahārāja Bhulunda	God Bappapiśāchadēva at Valkhā, who was installed there by Bhojikā-bhatta Bandulā	Gomika-executor of the grant Nature of the grant-Dēvagrāhāra. At the request of Bhojikā-bhatta Bandulā. For performing bali, caru and satra rites and for offering Incense, sandal-paste, flowers and garlands.
Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 54, in the month of māgha. (374 C.E.)	Order to grant a plot of land and a house entrusted with Indrasēna in the village Śalmalīpadraka	Mahārāja Bhulunda	To Bhatti Dāma of Harita sagotra	Nature of grant-Brahmadēya
Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 56, in the month of Jyēsthā	Grant of the Ghoshakapadraka	Mahārāja Bhulunda	To the Brāhmana Dakkāna of Bharadvāja sagotra	Executor of the grant- Ādyakarnna Pratihāra Nature of grant-Brahmadēya

	(376 C.E.)				
Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 55, in the month of śravāna (375 C.E.)	Order to grant three villages of Bhēravātaka, Bēttapahaka, and Pukaga situated in Durdukāvāsa along with charikā called Kottumānāka	Mahārāja Bhulunda	To god Mahāsēnadēva	Nature of grant- Dēvāgrāhāra. For the performance of Bali, Caru, and Satra rites and for offering incense, sandal paste, flowers, and garlands. The executor of the grant- Ādyakarnna Pratihāra Mantra-ganāchārya and others, Pāśupatās, and temple servants were allowed to enjoy the same without any hindrance.
Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 56, in the month of Āśvayuja (376 C.E.)	Order to grant village of Piñchchhikānaka, along with the marshy garden-land of Bhadrattavātākagrāma	Mahārāja Bhulunda	To the shrine of mother goddesses in the village of Piñchchhikānaka by Pāśupatāchārya Bhagvat Lokodadhi	Nature of grant- Dēvāgrāhāra. For performing Bali, Caru, and Satra rites and offering incense, sandal paste, flowers, and garlands

Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 57, in the month of Chaitra (377 C.E.)	Order to grant the village Nimbapadraka in the Bappabhatti-bhukti on the southern bank of river Narmmadā.	Mahārāja Bhulunda	To Ārya-Chāturvidyas belong to various gotras and charanas And perform different vows, austerities and are Engaged in studying their respective Vedas.	The executor of the grant- is Hataka, the police-magistrate. Nature of grant-Brahmadēya Grant was made at the request of Rāma
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Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 57, in the month of Phālgun (377C.E.)	Grant of the village of Kodravatallaka	Mahārāja Bhulunda	To the god Bappapiśāchadēva	For performing Bali, Caru and Satra rites and for offering incense, sandal-paste, garlands and flowers, and for the enjoyment of deity. Grant was made at the request of Jaya, the messenger of Bhojikā-Bhatta Bandulā, who had installed the deity at Valkhā. Nature of grant- Dēvāgrāhāra. The executor of the grant- Śramanaka, the Pratihāra Bhagvachchhishta, Pāśupatāchāryas, and temple servants was allowed to enjoy and inhabit the grant village.
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Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 59, in the month of Āśvayuja (379 C.E.)	Grant of the village of Jayasēnānaka and the brahmadēya-kshētra of the village Garjanānaka which is entrusted with Agnīśvaraka.	Mahārāja Bhulunda	To the god Bappapiśāchadēva installed in the vishaya called Narmmadāparapāra	Grant was made at the request of Innāpāda. Executor of the grant- Rudrilaka is the police magistrate For the sake of bathing the deity and for the performance of Bali and Caru rites and for offering sandal paste, incense, Satra, and garlands. Āchāryyas, Bhagvachchhishta, Pāśupatas, temple priests and temple servants enjoy and claim rights over the donated lands Nature of grant - Dēvāgrāhāra.
Grant of Svāmidāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 63, in Kārttika month (383 C.E.)	Grant of village Kukkutānaka to the east Kattangapadranon of the southern bank of Narmmadā	Mahārāja Svamidāsa	To the Brāhmana Shashthidatta of Aupamanya sagotra	Nature of grant-Brahmadēyāgāhāra

Grant of Svāmidāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 63, in Kārttika month (383 C.E.)	The village of Damanānaka entrusted with Mandara and lying in Udumbaragarttā-pathaka on the banks of Narmmadā	Mahārāja Svamidāsa	To the Āryachāturvidyapādas resident in Valkhā, who are endowed various vows, austerities with gotras, charanas, and engaged in the study of respective Vedas.	Nature of grant-Brahmādeya Grant should remain free from the encroachment of trespassers and soldiers
Grant of Svāmidāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 65, in vaiśākha month (385 C.E.)	Grant of a plot of land entrusted with Dadhipañchaka that lies to the north-west of Vanavāsinī.	Mahārāja Svamidāsa	To the Brāhmana Pamcha of Vatsa sagotra	Nature of grant-Brahmādeya
Grant of Svāmidāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 65, in Bhādrapada month (385 C.E.)	To grant one plot of land under the enjoyment of Yajñāgrāhāraka and one plot of land that was previously enjoyed by Lohakārapallikā was to be given to the donee	Mahārāja Svamidāsa	To Mātujja of Kāśyapa gotra	Nature of grant-Brahmādeya
Grant of Svāmidāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 66, in the month of Ashādhā (386 C.E.)	As per the norms of agrāhāra grants, the brahmādeya villages of Dronadantikānaka lying on the bank of Domphagarttā in Navarāshtraka on the bank of Narmmadā	Mahārāja Svamidāsa	To the Āryachāturvidyas of the capital.	Nature of grant-Brahmādeya

Grant of Rudradāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 68, in Jyēsthā month (388 C.E.)	Grant of agrāhāra village Chāravāhaka in Nagarikāpathaka on the southern banks of Narmmadā; Palāśapallī the village in Kuśapurapathaka and the village Bhētanaka lying in Gādhinagarapathaka on the northern bank of Narmmadā	Mahārāja Rudradāsa	To the Chāturvaidyapādas	Nature of grant-agrāhāra Executor of grant-Rudradāsa
Grant of Rudradāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 68, in the month of Ashādha (388 C.E.)	Grant was made as per the norms of Kulāgrāhāra grants, the village of Sallakīprishthaka entrusted with Brahmadatta	Mahārāja Rudradāsa	Brāhmana Varadēva of Vatsa sagotra	Nature of grant-Brahmādeyikā Executor of the grant is Rudradāsa
Grant of Rudradāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 69, in month of Chaitra (389 C.E.)	Grant of village Kokilavāsaka Navarāshtrakapathaka Dantika on southern bank of Narmmadā	Mahārāja Rudradāsa	Brāhmana Dantika of Aupamanyava sagotra	Nature of grant-Brahmādeya
Grant of Rudradāsa	Published from Prachakāsā, year 69, in the month of Āśvayuja (389 C.E.)	The village Śankhikavāsaka in Navarāshtraka-pathaka to donees	Mahārāja Rudradāsa	Āryyachāturvvidyas of Valkhā	Nature of the grant-Brahmadēyāgrāhāra Executor of the grant is- Bhatti Īśvaradatta

Grant of Rudradāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 70, in the month of Jyēstha (390 C.E.)	A part of land lying in the village of Dagdhapallikā, which was earlier enjoyed by Bhūtapālaka and Āryadāsa	Mahārāja Rudradāsa	Varadatta Brāhmaṇa of Kāśyapa sagotra	Nature of the grant- Brahmādeya Executor of the grant is-Bhatti Īśvaradatta
Grant of Bhattāraka	Published from Valkhā, year 102, in the month of Jyēstha (422 C.E.)	Along with udranga revenue, a plot of land entrusted with Vāyuśarmman along with paddy fields in this village	Mahārāja Bhattāraka	Rēvatī-śarmman of Vātsya-sagotra	Addresses his agents and the residents of the village of Susahanānaka in Aśvaśatī-pathaka Nature of the grant- Brahmādeya From this day of land grant field should be cultivated and no hindrance should be caused
Grant of Bhattāraka	Published from Valkhā, year 127, in the month of Śravāna (447 C.E.)	Village Śīṭalanaginī-padraka of in Botilāraśva-pathaka for the growth of his (king's) own merit.	Mahārāja Bhattāraka	Chāturvvidya-samūha of Valkhā	Nature of the grant- Brahmādeya Executor of the grant- Jayanātha

Grant of Bhattāraka	Published from Valkhā, year 129, in the month of Kārttika (449C.E.)	village Ritikāgrāhāka lying in Gādhinagara-pathaka	Mahārāja Bhattāraka	Chāturvvidya-samūha of Valgu	Addresses his agents and residents of the village gathered in Ritikāgrāhāka lying in Gādhinagara-pathaka and asked them to remain obedient to his order Nature of the grant-agrāhāra Oral orders were reduced into writing by Krishna, the rājyādhikrita
Grant of Nāgabhat	Published from Valkhā, year 134, in the month of Vaiśākha (454 C.E.)	Donation of the village of Nāgavarddhanāka in Udumbaragarttāpathaka for the performance of bali, caru and vaiśākha offerings	Mahārāja Nāgabhata	Chāturvvidyapādas of the capital	Executor of this grant is Shashtidāsa, the treasury officer. Nature of the grant-Brahmādeya At the request of Āryyikābhattachapāda for the growth of her own merit and fame.
Grant of Bhulunda	Published From Valkhā, year Year 38 and 47, in the month of Vaiśākha and Māgha respectively (358 C.E., 367C.E.)	The habitation site of a village Rohyavahaka, where cultivation was terminated, situated on the bank of Narmmadā to the east of Īśvarasēnānaka, to the north of Karjūrikā in Dāśilakapallīrāshtra	Mahārāja Bhulunda	Brāhmana headed by Aśvadēva of Kāśyapa sagotra, Agniśarmma of Vātsya sagotra, Skanda of Bhaeadvāja sagotra, Tunīka of Kautsya sagotra, Dāsila and Vāsula-śarmma of Kausika sagotra, Durakka of Kausika Sagotra, Mahaśarmma of Gargga sagotra belonging to the agrāhāra of Āryya-Dharoddhrit	The order was recounted at the request of the assembly of the brāhmana and was put down on the copper-plate Nature of grant-Brahmādeya Mention of scribes

				aka of vātsya sagotra.	
Grant of Bhulunda	Published from Valkhā, year 57, in the month of Phālguna (377 C.E.)	A piece of land entrusted with Khuddataka, situated in Ulladana-Sīmā along with the surrounding marshy land was Donated.	Mahārāja Bhulunda	Brāhmana Kusāraka of Bhāradvāja sagotra	Land grant made on the request of Āshādhānandi Nature of grant-Brahmādeya Executor of the grant is Pratihāra Skanda
Grant of Svāmidāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 67, in the month of Jyēsthā (387 C.E.)	A field entrusted with the Āryya-Vāṇijaka and situated in Dakshina-Valmīkatllla-vātakā in Nagarikā-Pathaka was ordered to be donated.	Mahārāja-Śrī-Svāmidāsa	Brāhmana Munda of śāndilya sagotra	Nature of grant-Brahmādeya Executor of the grant is Nana bhatti
Grant of Rudradāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 67, in the month of Chaitra (387C.E.)	A field entrusted with the potter (Kumbhakāra) on the south-western boundary (sīmāyām) of Dāśilakapallyām to the Brāhmana	Mahārāja Rudradāsa	Brāhmana Hūnādaya of Kāśyapa sagotra	Executor of the grant is Bhatti Īśvaradatta Nature of grant-Brahmādeya
Grant of Rudradāsa	Published from Valkhā, year 67, in the month of Chaitra (887 C.E.)	Inhabited Bhūtilakhaddaka village in Dāśilakapallīpathaka was donated to the Brāhmana as per norms governing Brahmadēyāgrāhāra grants	Mahārāja Rudradāsa	Brāhmana Hūnādaya of Kāśyapa sagotra	Perpetuity and hereditary character of the land grant is stressed. The executor of the grant is Bhatti Īśvaradatta

Barwāri cu-plate inscription of Mahārāja Subandhu	Published From Māhismati, in the Year 167, On Bhādrapad a of sam (487 C.E.)	the Grant of a piece of land grant at village (padraka) sohanā in the Udumbaragartā district (pathaka)	Mahārāja Subandhu	To Brāhmaṇa named Shashtisvāmin	for the spiritual welfare of the donor and the donor's parents. Executor (dutaka) of the grant is Guhadāsa.
Grant of Mahārāja Subandhu	Published from Māhismati in the year 167 (487 C.E.)	Village (name not mentioned) in the Dāsīlakapallīpathaka along with Udranga and Uparikara was to be used for perfume, frankincense, flowers and offerings as well as for maintaining an alm-house, for repairing broken and rent portions of the vihāra and for providing the community of venerable monks coming from the four quarters, with clothing, food, nursing of the sick, beads, seats, as well as medicine in the monastery called Kalāyana (the abode of art) caused to be constructed by Dattaka.	Mahārāja Subandhu	the Buddhist monastery	for the increase of the religious merit of my parents and myself (king and his family) Address inhabitants and officials. Nature of grant-agrāhāra

NOTE: See Ramesh and Tiwari for the arrangement and translation of land grant charters of Valkhā kings, and for Maharaja Subandhu look at Inscriptions of Kalchuri-Chedi Era by V.V. Mirashi.

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Oral Traditions and Folk Art: A Case of *Phad* Paintings with Emphasis on ‘*Pabuji Ki Phad*’, and Commercialisation of Crafts

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Abstract

The term, ‘Oral traditions’, applies to both the process of its transmission and its outcome,

derived from the oral messages being passed down to the generations (Vansina, 1985). The practice of narrating epics and stories, therefore, is an example of oral traditions. One such epic is that of Pabuji, which is painted on a scroll called ‘*Phad*’ and is transmitted through folk art and orality in the regions of Bhilwara and Shahpura in Rajasthan. Oral traditions were probably incorporated into folk art and performances to overcome language barriers and to ease the process of transmission (Mode & Chandra, 1985). Therefore, studying the relationship between oral traditions and folk art seems to be of value. Keeping this in mind, the paper will attempt to introduce the epic of Pabuji and the process of its transmission.

Oral and Intangible forms of heritage are a living inheritance of communities existing in the past, for example the *Phad* paintings. Therefore, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is important (National Mission on Intangible Cultural Heritage of India, 2015). Commercialisation seems to be an outlet for sustaining cultural traditions, but the extent to which a certain aspect of Intangible heritage can be commercialised needs to be realised. Hence, this paper will also touch on the aspect of commercialising folk art and its effect on the associated oral traditions, while focusing on Rajasthan's '*Phad*' paintings.

For this study, an interview with a member of the Joshi community was conducted to establish a better understanding of the art. Also, various articles and journals for understanding and forming a middle ground for both orality and folk art were studied in detail, to form a critical understanding of the topic and its relevance. Limitations were

encountered in the form of not having access to other *Phads* or their parallels.

Oral traditions and their transmission

As noted by Foley (1999), oral traditions are the first and foremost technologies of communication as they serve their cultural constituencies by transmitting knowledge and experience. They are also referred to as 'unwritten' historical sources preserved and passed on by their memorization (Vansina, 2006). Oral traditions, therefore, are not just sources but histology of the past and should be treated as hypotheses (Vansina, 1985). On the other hand, an oral tradition is considered reliable when it refers to recent events and substantiates similar sources of information available (Vansina, 1985).

Oral traditions are also subjected to changes influenced by different social attitudes giving way to distortions in contrast to when they were first passed down (Muraina 2015). Oral literature, if therefore collected, must include the cultural background and background of informants, along with some knowledge of folk aesthetics (Gupta, 1967). With a history of oral compositions and transmissions, particularly in the Indian region, literary history witnessed the recording of historical knowledge, information, and experience that supports the intangibility of the oral heritage which would otherwise have suffered decline and disappearance (Mirdha, 2019). Therefore, oral traditions which have been able to adapt themselves to the changes in their environment, have been able to survive with forms of literate origin, although mostly relegated to marginal social groups (Rhett, 1987).

Individuals remember and transmit oral traditions but apart from the regular practices of conversation, there are legends, myths, folktales, memories, folk songs, and proverbs. Examples of these can be found in the realm of Indian cultural and religious practices (Wilson, 2015). All Indian languages, except Sanskrit, continued to develop their works of literature drawing from both written and oral traditions (Kambar, 1994). The Vedic texts which have been called '*śruti*' for their tradition of oral transmission are believed to have instilled a sense of collective heritage-narrative amongst individuals through the transmitting of various epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat*, the Buddhist sermons, the *Jataka* tales, fables from *Panchatantra*, and *Bhakti* literature (Mirdha, 2019).

In India, oral traditions do not belong to a pre-literate age, representing a primary

condition of civilisation. On the other hand, both oral and literary traditions can co-exist as these traditions represent different sets of values but are not ethically different from each other (Kambar, 1994). As can be understood above, oral traditions of almost every kind can be recorded in literary and artistic forms. Such can be noted from the preservation of oral traditions through various socio-cultural activities. For example, the performances of *Phad* in Rajasthan, and *Pattachitra* in Odisha, to name a few, are narratives etched in the form of scroll paintings (Ramanujan, 1990).

Oral tradition in folk art: Scroll Paintings

Folk arts portray the visions and values of each culture and unfold the interaction between art and the physical, social, and intellectual conditions in each region (Mather & Karan, 1982). Adopting oral traditions into folk art and performing them

around the community must have been a way to overcome the language barriers given the multiplicity of languages in a country like India (Mode & Chandra, 1985). The paintings based on narrative traditions are evident in storytellers' scrolls (Ministry of Culture, 2017).

Scroll paintings carry different stories and episodes from epics, myths, activities with the landscape, and daily life ornamentation, seemingly prevalent in Asian traditions (Mandal, et al., 2018). Around the 1800s, wandering storytellers appear to be common throughout India, using scrolls to narrate stories about holy figures (William, 1992). These storytellers comprise *Chitrakathis* of Maharashtra, the *Bhopas* of Rajasthan, and the *Jadupatuas* of Bihar and Bengal, wandering with their folding box-altars (Mode & Chandra, 1985).

Early scroll paintings may have been used for temple decoration and are still found on pilgrimage sites. The format of scrolls varies, and the composition and arrangement of the individual scenes determine whether scenes are painted horizontally or vertically (Johnson, 1997). Today, many contemporary scrolls are painted and sold to storytellers

(Johnson, 1997). Storytellers are not permitted to sell their scrolls, as doing so is considered desecration since the scrolls seem to be rather sacred. If the pictures are used in performances, they are considered to be the home of the deity who is depicted. A scroll when ages is disposed of with respect into the sacred waters of Ganges (Johnson, 1997).

An overview of *Phad* paintings

The word *Phad* is derived from the Sanskrit word *patt*, a flat surface for painting. *Phad* in the *Rajasthani* dialect also means a fold (Bhandari, 2006). '*Phad Chitran*' is a style of scroll painting in the state of Rajasthan, traditionally etched on a lengthy piece of cloth or a canvas depicting the life events of a folk hero or a famous personality (Kumar, 1985; Sharma, 2015). The members of the Joshi clan of the Chippa caste are traditionally involved in painting and dyeing cotton and claim to be a sub-group of brahmins. The

Joshis make their paintings for the performer-priests of different social groups who display the paintings in the form of stories (Ministry of Culture, 2017).



A Bhopa and Bhopi, in front of Devnarayaji Ki Phad, Accessed from Mr. Kalyan Joshi via Email on February 15, 2022

Hearing stories based on *Phad* paintings play an important part in village life, as during evenings, the storyteller hangs the painting in an accessible and visible place, giving the gathered community a backdrop of the story (Junik-Luniewska, 2019). The oral epics of Rajasthan are kept alive by the *Bhopas* who travel from village to village, staging

performances (Dalrymple, 2010). *Bhopas* belong to different castes, most of them are *gujjars*, an agricultural-cum pastoral caste, to which the hero epic belonged. Some *Bhopas* also belong to the Rajputs- the warrior caste, and *Bailais* - the untouchables who traditionally weave (Mukhopadhyay, 1978). The performance lasts about seven days and seven nights and starts with the artist performing a *pooja* (worship), a religious ceremony, after which a young virgin draws a line to signify purity (Ministry Of External Affairs 1983). The *Bhopa* is accompanied by his wife, known as *Bhopi*, who holds a lighted lamp in front of the vertical scroll painting when narrated. *Bhopa* sings and dances, accompanying himself on his folk instrument, the *Rawanhata* (Ministry of External Affairs, 1983; Sehgal, 1976)



Map 1: Map of India locating Rajasthan



Map 2: Location of Bhilwara and Shahpura

The Epic of Pabuji

As gathered from Mr. Joshi, Pabuji supposedly was a *Rathor Rajput* chieftain, loosely placed around the fourteenth century. He was born to Dhadal Rathor and had three siblings, Sona, Buro, and Pema, but Pabuji was considered a god incarnate of Laxman, born from a celestial nymph (Smith, 2015, p. 6). Pabuji and his brother

Buroji set up their court at Kolu, with his loyal followers who included three *Rajputs* and one *Raika* from a camel herding caste [Kalyan Joshi (*Phad* Painter) in discussion with the author, February, 2022] (Smith, 2015, p. 6). The brothers seemed to have been in constant conflict with the *Kichi* rulers of Jayal. During the fight, Jindrav, *Kichi's* father, was killed. To prevent a feud Pabuji and Buroji gave their sister Pema for marriage as an alliance (Smith, 2015, p. 6) .



Title: Pabuji Ki Phad, Material: Cloth, Color, Provenance: Rajasthan , Description: Painted Temple Decorative Textile Piece, Housed at the National Museum of Crafts, Delhi

In another episode, Pabuji goes to Lanka where the demon Ravana lives, to bring with him red-brown camels of Lanka as a gift for his niece Kelam's wedding, and eventually kills Ravana with his spear [Kalyan Joshi (*Phad* Painter) in discussion with the author, February, 2022]. On the way to Lanka, Pabuji passes through Umerkot in Sindh, and here the *Sodhi* princess Phulvanti

falls in love with him. Later when he gets a wedding proposal, he accepts the offer "reluctantly" (Smith, 2015, p. 6). Pabuji then acquires a magical black mare "*Kesar Kalami*" from Deval, a cattle and horse breeder. This mare had been promised to Jindrav, who becomes infuriated and further punishes Deval by stealing her cattle (Smith, 2015, p. 7). Pabuji goes on to

save Deval's cattle but in turn, has to miss his own wedding. In a battle that follows, Pabuji spares Jindrav's life out of consideration for his sister Pema, who is Jindrav's wife. Jindrav with his allies, the *Bhatis*, returns in the second battle in which Buroji and Pabuji pass away (Smith, 2015, p. 7). To avenge their death, Rupnath, the son of Buroji goes to *Khichi*. He disguises himself as a

holy man and is helped by his aunt Pema to behead Jindrav (Smith, 2015). Pema helps her nephew to escape and later becomes a *sati*. Meanwhile, Rupnath goes off to Girnar with the head of Jindrav and uses his head as a ball and sends it back to *Khichi*. Rupnath later becomes a holy man, living on a sandhill near Bikaner, where he still is worshipped today (Smith, 2015, p. 7).

Table 1: Some of the recognizable scenes of the 'Epic of Pabuji' portrayed in the Phad housed at the National Museum of Crafts, Delhi

<i>Image 1:</i>  <i>Image2:</i> 	Pabuji in his court at Kolu
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<i>Image 3:</i> 	The Sodhos of Umarkot, to greet Pabuji
<i>Image 4:</i> 	Pabuji in battling Ravana, with depictions of Ganesha and Hanuman
<i>Image 5:</i> 	The mare, Kesar Kalami from Deval
<i>Image 6:</i> 	Pabuji bringing camels from Lanka

It seems difficult to know the place of the *Epic of Pabuji* in the spiritual culture and specifically in the literature of the community, its social, cultural, and psychological functions (Handoo *et.al*, 1988). Thus, the position of this tradition remains the same as of the *Mahabharata* of which we do not have the ethnography of its early bearers, as well as in its early oral form (Handoo *et.al*, 1988).

The Technique of Making *Phad*

The epic narration of *Phad* in Rajasthan seems to have lasted for about six-seven centuries. It is believed that the *Phad* painting began in the town of Shahpura. Currently, the paintings are done, both in Bhilwara and Shahpura (Bhandari, 2006). The *Phad* contains the epics of Pabuji, Devnarayanji, Tejaji, Ramdevji, Gogaji, and Jasnath Ji, of these the *Phad* which are spread widely and are more in number are of the epics of Pabuji and Devnarayanji. The *Phad* also depicts

stories of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* and is known as *Ramdala Phad* [Kalyan Joshi (*Phad Painter*) in discussion with the author, February, 2022].

The process to make the *Phad* starts with a long piece of hand-woven and hand-spun cloth, preferably *Khadi* or *Reja*, which is starched and burnished to retain the pigments [Kalyan Joshi (*Phad Painter*) in discussion with the author, February, 2022]. The illustrations of the story are arranged horizontally (Ministry of Culture, 2017). Natural pigments are used in the *Phad*. This is probably done to identify the religiosity of the art as obtaining colours directly from the earth's abundance is believed to deem the art pure when associated with the ritualistic function (Palem, 2019). The colours used to make the stories on the *Phad* are yellow, green, brown, red, vermillion, black, orange, and indigo, made by women artisans and mixed with *gond* (natural glue) to

form a paste [Kalyan Joshi (*Phad* Painter) in discussion with the author, February, 2022].

Table 2: Pigments used in the Phad, their purpose and source. This information has been accessed through the medium of an interview from Mr. Kalyan Joshi for the purpose of this paper.

Colour	Purpose	Source
Yellow	Used to draw an outline of the figures	Made from yellow orpiment
Green	Used to depict the plants and colour the clothing	Extracted from Verdigris
Brown	Used to paint the structures	Made from the mud found in the mines of Rajasthan.
Vermillion	Used on clothing and on the border of the traditional <i>Phads</i>	The colour is taken from the cinnabar and sometimes is mixed with the red lead oxide.
Black	Used for outlining the whole painting and its figures	Made from burning edible oil and coconut shells.
Indigo	Used to portray demons	Extracted from the indigo plants grown in Kota, Rajasthan.

Orange	Used to paint the skin	Made from red led oxide mixed with the yellow colour powder.
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Finishing touches to the painting are done on an auspicious day. The pupil of the eye is painted to denote that the *Phad* has been imbued with life. The names of the painter and the *Bhopa* along with the date are also mentioned (Bhandari, 2006). The *Phad* of Pabuji is about 17-20 feet long, and the *Phad* of Devnarayanji is almost 35 feet long [Kalyan Joshi (*Phad* Painter) in discussion with the author, February, 2022]. Initially, the paintings seem to have been in Rajput style and later were influenced by the Mughal school of art as seen in the depictions of headwear and face profiles [Kalyan Joshi (*Phad* Painter) in discussion with the author, February, 2022].

Commercialisation of crafts

The commercialisation of crafts is neither an isolated nor a uniform process, it rather is

interwoven with a broad array of economic, religious, cultural, and political factors, the configuration of which shapes its course to a significant extent (Cohen, 1989). In a traditional setup, craft items are produced in relatively small numbers, essentially meant for an audience comprising the producer and members of their community, as is visible from the production of the *Phad* paintings (Chutia & Sarma, 2016). The commercialization of crafts has been seen as a way of sustaining elements of traditional culture while providing a useful and accessible means of economic development (Friel & Santagata, 2008).

In some cases, crafts have undergone a direct transition from domestic to commercial practice, an example of which lies with the female embroiderers of Kutch, who now sell their work,

and remember a time when they only embroidered for their own families (Holroyd *et al.*, 2015). Another example of the commercialization of crafts comes from the Bengal *Patachitra* paintings, which just like the *Phad* are based on Orality. Crafts Council and *Banglanatak* are involved in the commercialisation of the *Patuas*, in different ways. Situated in Kolkata, the Craft Council's store, Artisana is a host for *Pattachitra* as well as other folk arts, to be sold (Jefferson, 2014). *Banglanatak*, on the other hand, has taken the approach of bringing the customers to the products, by introducing products like t-shirts, wallets, and umbrellas, adorning the *Patua* art. This is done by forming contracts with the village painters (Jefferson, 2014). Though such practices, to some level, retain the tradition of the art and the orality attached to it, in due course of time, it also results in changing its aesthetic and inherent cultural value.

Commercialisation of *Phad* Paintings

As known, the *Phad* painting has traditionally been done by the Joshi family, as noted in previous sections. The skill has been passed down from generation to generation, however, only the sons of the household are taught how to paint, while women are assigned with the preparations (Mittal, *et.al*, 2014). In the present scenario, the technique of *Phad* painting has not been limited only to the Joshis or to a certain gender. Mr. Kalyan Joshi (in discussion with the author, February, 2022) claims that his father, Shree Lal Joshi helped in the spread of the *Phad* and took a step towards commercialisation in the 1960s.

With the introduction of the *Phad* to the market, Mr. Shree Lal Joshi introduced and composed small-sized *Phad* paintings- where earlier the *Phad* was generally of 20 feet, it was now reduced to the size of 2'4-6 feet [Kalyan Joshi (*Phad* Painter) in discussion with the author, February, 2022]. New stories, like that of Maharana Pratap and Prithviraj Chauhan among many, were also introduced to form a certain familiarity with

consumers or society around [Kalyan Joshi (*Phad* Painter) in discussion with the author, February, 2022]. Contemporary themes have also been experimented with in *Phad* paintings- painting and depicting the cause of women's empowerment, migrant labourers, sports, etc [Kalyan Joshi (*Phad* Painter) in discussion with the author, February, 2022]. Mr Kalyan Joshi (in

discussion with the author, February, 2022) has opened '*Chitrashala*' which is a platform for one to learn about *Phadchitra* and spread it further. Moreover, he has introduced *Phad* stories of Pabuji and Devnarayanji, among many in the form of photo frames of 6 x 6-inch, and 8 x 12 inch, for more accessibility [Kalyan Joshi (*Phad* Painter) in discussion with the author, February, 2022].



An example of a contemporary Phad Painting, Accessed from Mr. Kalyan Joshi via Email on February 15, 2022

With the onset of the COVID- 19 Pandemic, it seems that the *Phad* painting lost over 150 of its practitioners. The halt on fairs, exhibitions, and

festivals, gave way to declining tourism which further resulted rather negatively for the painters of *Phad* (Tripathy, 2021). A few families supply agents for online sale, but such an option does not

seem plausible due to the small size of their business (Tripathy, 2021). Though Coronavirus is a recent addition to plausible threats causing the loss of the tradition, the over-commercialisation of the art seems to be the first and foremost threat to the *Phad* tradition. Over-commercialisation may lead to the elimination of the *Bhopas* altogether, as *Bhopas* play an important role in narrating the scroll and spreading the epics. With the transformation of the epics into stories of the present-day relevance, the orality and epic attached to them could be lost if not balanced. The *Phad* paintings find their mention in the national list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, an attempt to recognise the diversity of India's culture. Following UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the safeguarding of the Intangible cultural heritage, five domains have been classified: (i) Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage (ii) performing arts (iii) Social practices, rituals and

festive events (iv) Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe (iv) Traditional craftsmanship (Ministry of Culture, 2015). Other ways to retain the culture for the future generation, without the loss of its oral epics and artistic essence needs to be thought of, to make the paintings more accessible to society without them losing their meaning.

Conclusion

The relations between oral and written traditions in any culture are not simple oppositions. They interpenetrate each other and combine in various ways (Ramanujan, 1990). The adoption of orality into the forms of art plays a role in overcoming language barriers and easier dissemination of the epic or story. As can be noted from the *Phad* paintings of Rajasthan, oral traditions and folk artwork in conjunction. Without a *Bhopa* spreading the oral tradition just by the visual art seems infeasible. Similarly, only hearing the epics and not having a visual representation of the

same will not make much sense. The purpose of the *Phads* and *Bhopas* is to spread the tradition and the epic and perhaps not confine it to a misunderstanding or any language barriers. This paper, therefore, concerns the transmission of the *Phad* in the present times. This paper moves gradually from discussing the oral traditions to their depictions in folk art, the common traditions to have been depicted are *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, as can be noted. Further, it explains the concept of *Phad* paintings keeping in mind their conjoined factor, i.e, orality, and art. The most used *Phad*, '*Pabuji ki Phad*' is used as a reference to give the reader an idea of the epics displayed on the *Phads*. The paper then moves on

to the commercialisation of the paintings and tries to keep the *Phad* paintings in the purview of having both advantages and disadvantages from their commercialisation. The advantage is the retention of the epics, the disadvantage may come from the over-commercialisation, as noted above. Chitrashala, an initiative taken by Mr. Kalyan Joshi of the Joshi community has received commissions for projects that involve product diversification (Mittal, 2014). Regardless, on one hand, commercialisation can provide a solution for sustaining the crafts, over-commercialisation can result in the loss of the oral narrative, involvement of the *Bhopas* and *Bhopis*, and overall authenticity.

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