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EMBRACING DUALITY: THE CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF COATLICUE IN MEXICA CIVILISATION

Sumit Jindal

ABSTRACT

Coatlicue is a pivotal figure in Mexica civilisation (Often Referred to as Aztecs in the modern world), embodying creation and destruction. This paper explores Coatlicue's historical roots, cultural importance, worship practices, and connections with nature and celestial bodies. Additionally, it delves into the ceremonial Serpent Walk, highlighting its ritualistic significance. The ongoing efforts in various places in Mexico describe the importance of evolving ancient traditions in today's world.

INTRODUCTION

Coatlicue, one of the most significant deities in the Mexica civilisation, epitomises the earth's fertility and destructive power. This research paper provides an in-depth understanding of Coatlicue's role in Mexica society, examining her historical context, cultural impact, religious practices, and symbolic ties to nature and celestial bodies. The relationship between Coatlicue and other gods highlights the interconnectedness of Mexica deities.

Historical Context: The Rise of Coatlicue

Coatlicue is often portrayed with a skirt of snakes and a necklace of human hearts, hands, and skulls. Revered as the mother of gods and mortals, especially **Huitzilopochtli** (the god of war and the sun) and **Coyalxauhqui** (goddess of the moon), her belief is interwoven with themes of cosmic conflict and renewal, reflecting the Mexica belief in the balance of creation and destruction.

Cultural Importance: The Earth Mother's Dual Nature

Coatlicue's duality as a creator and destroyer is central to Mexica cosmology. She symbolises the earth, representing its life-giving and death-bringing aspects. Her fearsome imagery underscores the interconnectedness of life and death, reflecting the Mexica view of existence as a balance between opposing forces.

Nature and Cosmos: Coatlicue's Celestial Connections

Coatlicue's belief is intricately linked with natural and celestial phenomena. As a mother of many celestial bodies, she influences crop growth and animal fertility. Her ties to the sun and changing seasons highlight her role in the natural world, with the Mexica viewing her as a vital force in maintaining cosmic harmony.

Sumit Jindal, *Director, ICCR, Embassy of India to Mexico*

Life and Death: The Cycle of Existence

Coatlicue's belief emphasises the cyclical nature of life and death. As a creator, she signifies birth, but her destructive aspect represents the inevitability of death. This duality reflects the Mexica belief in continuous cycles of birth, death, and rebirth, underscoring the interconnectedness of all living things.

Worship Practices: Honouring the Mother of Gods.

Worship of Coatlicue involved various rituals acknowledging her dual nature, including:

- Offerings: Gold, flowers, cacao, shells, and sometimes sacrifices as well to nourish Coatlicue and ensure fertility.
- Ceremonies: Large public events featuring music, dance, and other forms of devotion to honour Coatlicue and other gods.
- Personal Prayers: Individual and family prayers and small offerings at household altars seeking her protection and blessings.

Offerings to the Four Directions, Sky, and Earth

A lot of information is lost as a result of the Spanish Conquest, but the Mexican people have done their best to follow the same ways of worship from the information saved by former descendants and archaeologists.

During worship ceremonies, offerings were presented to the four cardinal directions, the sky, the earth, and the heart. Each offering was accompanied by specific words to honour and invoke the respective elements:

- North: "Tezcatlipoca, lord of the night sky, we offer you these gifts."
- East: "Quetzalcoatl, lord of the morning star, we offer you these gifts."
- South: "Huitzilopochtli, lord of the sun, we offer you these gifts."
- West: "Xipe Totec, lord of the seasons, we offer you these gifts."
- Sky: "Ometeotl, lord of duality, we offer you these gifts."
- Earth: "Coatlicue, mother of all, we offer you these gifts."

"Ome" – a word from the Nahuatl language for "two" – symbolises duality, and after calling this word, everyone kneels and gives the offering.

After offering to all directions, Sky and Earth, an offering is made to the heart, which is considered the centre of the divinity, a confluence of sky, earth, and all directions.

Additional dances and pre-hispanic songs are offered as well.

The Serpent Walk: Ritual Dance of Reverence

Overview

The Serpent Walk, or "**Tlamaniliztli**, " is a ritual dance performed to honour Coatlicue. This dance is symbolic of the serpents that are closely associated with her and her depiction. The dance embodies Coatlicue's connection to the earth and life-giving forces, with participants mimicking the movements of snakes to invoke her blessings. This represents the "Kundalini" or "Shakti"

Head of the Serpent

The head of the serpent in the dance symbolises the beginning of life and the creative force of Coatlicue. It represents wisdom and foresight, guiding the participants through the ritual. The head is often adorned with elaborate decorations to signify the importance of creation and the divine wisdom imparted by Coatlicue.

Belly of the Serpent

The belly of the serpent represents the nurturing and sustaining aspects of Coatlicue. It symbolises fertility, growth, and the sustenance of life.Women, highlighting the feminine aspect of nurturing and the cycles of growth and decay, often perform this part of the dance predominantly. Women carry symbolic elements such as beans, water, fire with copal, cacao, and tobacco, emphasising their role in sustaining life.

Tail of the Serpent

The tail of the serpent signifies the end of life and the destructive force of Coatlicue. It represents the inevitability of death and the cyclical nature of existence. This segment of the dance is typically performed by men, whose movements mimic the act of sweeping away the old to make way for the new. The tail's actions highlight the transformative power of death in the Mexica belief system.

Ritual Elements: Seeds, Water, Fire, Copal, Cacao, and Tobacco

During the Serpent Walk, participants carry symbolic elements in their hands:

- Seeds (e.g.Beans, Maize, Lentils): Representing life and fertility, seeds symbolise nourishment and growth. This represents the **earth** element.
- Water: In a clay jug or Jar brought from a river, sea, or any other source. Signifying purification and the sustenance of life, water is vital to the ritual and represents the **water** element.
- Fire with Copal: Fire represents transformation and the divine presence. It is offered using Sahumador("popochcomitl" in Nahuatl). To light the fire, a special resinous wood called "Ocote" is used, with a white Copal, which makes a nice fragrance and is very purifying. This offering represents the **fire** and **ether**(Akash) element as well.
- Cacao: Symbolising the richness of the earth and life, cacao is offered to honour Coatlicue's fertility aspects.
- Tobacco: Tobacco is used for its sacred, purifying properties as a medicinal herb, and tobacco is offered to the gods to seek their favour and protection.

Supporting elements: Use of Sacred Conch

On the sides of the ritual space, people use sacred conches to produce resonant sounds. The sound of the conch is believed to call the spirits and gods, creating a sacred atmosphere conducive to communication with the divine.

Symbolism and Significance

The Serpent Walk as a whole is a representation of the balance between life and death, creation and destruction. Each part of the serpent—head, belly, and tail—plays a crucial role in depicting the various aspects of Coatlicue's power. The dance serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of all things and the cyclical nature of life.

Ritual Performance

The Serpent Walk is performed during major ceremonies dedicated to Coatlicue. It involves rhythmic movements, chanting, and music, creating an immersive experience that connects the participants with the earth and the divine. The dance is often accompanied by offerings and prayers, seeking Coatlicue's blessings for fertility, protection, and cosmic balance.

The Coatlicue Statue at INAH Museum in Mexico City One of the most iconic representations of Coatlicue is the massive statue located at the National Museum of Anthropology (INAH) in Mexico City. This statue provides valuable insights into Mexica artistry and religious symbolism.

Description and Symbolism

The Coatlicue statue, discovered in 1790, is a monumental basalt sculpture standing over 2.5 meters tall and 1.60 meters wide. The statue portrays Coatlicue wearing a skirt made of interwoven serpents, which signifies her connection to both fertility and death. Her necklace of severed human hands, hearts, and a skull symbolises sacrifice and regeneration, central themes in Mexica civilisation.

Coatlicue's face is formed by two facing serpents, representing the duality of life and death. Her clawed feet and hands symbolise her earth-goddess aspect, embodying both the nurturing and devouring nature of the earth. The snakes emerging from her severed neck signify blood transformed into serpents, an image that conveys the idea of life arising from death.

Cultural Significance

The statue of Coatlicue is a profound representation of Mexica cosmology and religious beliefs. It embodies the Mexica view of the universe's cyclical nature, where life and death are intertwined. The imposing figure of Coatlicue serves as a reminder of the earth's power, both as a life-giver and a force of destruction.

The statue is a focal point in the INAH Museum, attracting scholars, historians, and visitors interested in understanding Mexica culture and religion. It provides a tangible connection to the Mexica's complex theological and philosophical systems, offering insights into their practices and worldviews.

From Museum to Temple: A Journey of Reverence

In recent history, **Elizabeth U. Harding** (Usha Ma, guardian of Ma Kali Mandir, California) visited the INAH Museum in Mexico City and was profoundly moved by the sight of the Coatlicue statue, which bears a striking resemblance to Goddess Kali of Sanatana Dharma. Believing that such a revered figure should be honoured in a temple rather than a museum, she wrote an article advocating for this change.

During a visit to Centro **Jamadi**, **Naren K. Scheiner** (a priest in the lineage of Yogananda Paramhansa and a spiritual teacher) experienced a recurring vision of a Coatlicue temple after participating in **Temazcal** ceremonies (in Nahuatl, "temazcalli" is composed of Temaz – vapour and calli - house). These visions, which he received twice a year, depicted a temple made of dark black stone, resembling "**Obsidian**, " a sacred material.

Inspired by these visions and under the guidance of Naren and **Lopamudra Bose** (a teacher of philosophy, spirituality, and Indian traditions), **Pablo Lopez Tello Mendez** and **Marisela Quirate Gallardo** led the effort to bring this vision to life. Their dedication resulted in the construction of a temple dedicated to Coatlicue at **Centro Jamadi** in **Amealco, Querétaro**. The temple's design, influenced by Naren's visions, closely resembles the **Mayan Temple of the Sun** in **Palenque, Chiapas**.

This temple now serves as a modern-day place of worship and reverence, allowing devotees to honour Coatlicue in a setting befitting her divine stature. Devotional practices and ceremonies such as Temazcal, which serve both purification and spiritual connection purposes, are regularly performed here. Additionally, the temple is a centre for the revival of ancestral teachings, with **Sarahi Martinez Anaya** and **Grandmother Luz Trinidad Fabiola Nava** serving as wisdom keepers and leading various ceremonies.

CONCLUSION

Coatlicue's complex nature is central to understanding Mexica culture and civilisation. Her role as both a creator and destroyer reflects the Mexica belief in the cyclical nature of existence.

The worship practices and rituals dedicated to Coatlicue highlight her importance in maintaining cosmic balance, fertility, and the natural order. The Serpent Walk ritual, with its rich symbolism and intricate performance, exemplifies the deep reverence the Mexica held for Coatlicue and their understanding of life and death as interconnected forces.

Through a comprehensive examination of Coatlicue's beliefs, worship practices, connections with other deities, the significance of her statue at the INAH Museum, and the establishment of her temple at Centro Jamadi, this paper provides a deeper understanding of her pivotal role in Mexica civilisation. Coatlicue's legacy as a powerful and multifaceted deity continues to be a testament to the rich cultural and religious heritage of the Mexica civilisation.

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FAMILY DYNAMICS AND MARITAL PRACTICES IN DINKA SOCIETY IN SOUTH SUDAN: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF LIFE IN THE CATTLE CAMPS

Vikram K. Porwal, Abhinav Prakash
SN Nayak, Vivek Kumar

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the integral role of cattle within Dinka society in South Sudan, examining their socio-political, economic, and cultural significance. The study focuses on the organisation of cattle-camps, known as "wut," which serve as key socio-political sections and are central to the Dinka's way of life. Seasonal migration patterns, driven by the availability of fodder, highlight the adaptive strategies employed by the Dinka to ensure the survival of their cattle during varying climatic conditions. The concept of wut exemplifies communal resource management and reinforces social cohesion among its members.

Cattle-camps, structured to avoid waterlogging, function as living spaces for herders and safe zones for cattle, with camps ranging from 100 to 5, 000 cows. Life in these camps involves vibrant cultural practices, including songs and dances that celebrate cattle. The camps also serve as educational environments where young Dinka, particularly boys, learn cattle-rearing skills essential for their future roles within the community.

The study also delves into the complexities of marriage practices, focusing on arranged marriages, bride price, and polygamy. These customs reflect the economic and social values centred around cattle. Polygamy, while symbolising wealth and status, also presents challenges such as resource distribution and familial tension.

Additionally, the paper explores the initiation rites for boys, which mark their transition to adulthood and confer social responsibilities and respect. The roles of girls, from puberty to marriage, emphasise early childbearing and domestic responsibilities, highlighting the gender-specific expectations within Dinka society.

Overall, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how cattle influence various aspects of Dinka life, from socio-political organisation to cultural practices and survival strategies, underscoring the profound connection between the Dinka people and their cattle.

Keywords: Dinka Tribe, South Sudan, Cattle Rearing Tribe, Social Work Education and Practice, Community Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Family relations, especially in matters of marriage, divorce, and child custody, are greatly influenced by the customary laws of the Dinka people. Cattle in Dinka culture possess significant worth, being profoundly ingrained within their socio-political and economic frameworks. The term "wut, " which signifies "cattle-camp, " denotes significant socio-political divisions within Dinka society, highlighting the pivotal significance of cattle in their existence.

This study explores the significance of cattle in Dinka culture, analysing the structure of cow-camps, seasonal migrations, and the daily routines and survival tactics of Dinka cattle-keepers. Cattle camps are essential in the Dinka pastoralist culture, serving as a vital component in the process of socialising young individuals. Task allocation inside the camps is determined by gender roles, which are taught to youngsters from a young age. Life in the cattle camp is dynamic and animated, marked by singing, dancing, and collective indulgence in milk. The Dinka have a profound cultural heritage of composing songs that extol the virtues of their livestock.

The Dinka prioritise investing in cattle rather than keeping money in banks, as they believe that livestock have a higher rate of multiplication compared to the growth of money in a bank. Cattle herders get such a high level of skill in negotiating grazing paths that they are able to return to their encampment even in the absence of light. A spacious cattle camp has the capacity to accommodate one to two Paramount Chiefs and can accommodate between 2, 000 to 5, 000 cows. Individuals who are part of the same family or clan own a significant number of cows within a camp. The size of the herds increases each year, unless they are impacted by disease or theft. It is common for cattle to be exchanged at marriages, and it is customary for children to be called after the bulls that are offered as a bride price to their mothers.

Historically, the Dinka adhered to animism, a religious system that incorporated veneration of ancestors and natural phenomena, in addition to a belief in a higher power. They venerate diverse natural aspects, including rainfall, the lunar body, frigid temperatures, majestic lions, and several varieties of trees. Although a significant number of Dinka people have embraced Christianity, they frequently incorporate these religious beliefs alongside their animist customs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of cattle in Dinka society is reflected in the fact that the major socio-political sections are termed wut, which is the same word as 'cattle-camp', because its members jointly herd their cattle and share grazing and other resources (UNHCR 2016). The Dinka consider cows as their sign of prosperity (Mayik 2020). They make cattle-camps on relatively raised grounds where there is no waterlogging (Ogilvy 1981). During the rainy season, which lasts from May till November, as enough fodder is available near the towns and villages, hence the cattle camps are located in the vicinity of the towns and villages, in the dry season when the grass dries up, they migrate to far-away places near the streams and rivers where they can find green fodder for the cows (Lako 1985).

They have many ways to identify the cows and bulls – through their colour, shape, markings, shape and size of the horns, legs, etc., they have a large number of names based on the colour pattern of the cows and bulls (Evans-Pritchard 1934). The Dinka consider cows as their sign of prosperity (Mayik 2020). Traditionally, Dinka have led a polygamous life (Deng 2010). The women are treated as commodities (UNDP 2018). When a man marries a woman, he pays a certain number of cows to the father of the woman as the bride price (Oxfam 2019). A man having more wives is considered better settled in his life and carries more prestige in society (UNDP 2018).

It is believed that a girl should marry early as soon as she achieves puberty (Madut 2020) so

that she can bear children as early as possible, and to continue producing children till biologically possible Oxfam. (2019). Although boys are prized more than girls as working hands, girls are also considered advantageous in the sense that they will bring a lot of cows in dowry as bride price (Oxfam 2013).

Traditionally, the Dinka have been a positive, proud, ethnocentric people who felt there could be no good reason to leave their country and lifestyle (Singleton, 2001). Dinka society is an endless process that involves a series of claims, counter-claims, obligations and transfers of cattle between the groom's and bride's families and their extended families – a wave of obligation that usually engulfs the entire lineage and communities (Deng, 2010). The cows for the marriage of the boy are contributed by the extended family and community of the boy, i.e. by his uncles, brothers, etc (Pendle, 2020).

RESEARCH QUESTION

The study aims to explore marriage and family in South Sudan in relation to livestock in the Dinka tribe. The specific research questions are:

1. 1. To examine the gender specific expectations and responsibilities within the family structure of the Dinka community.
2. 2. To understand the role of Cattle in marriages in the Dinka community.
3. 3. To understand the polygamy and property rights within the family in the Dinka Community.

METHODOLOGY

Our research unfolded in Western Lakes State, South Sudan—a region marked by its

expansive plains and a community primarily composed of the Dinka tribe. Conducted over the year from 2017 to 2018, this study involved visits to local schools and personal interactions with key members of the society and education sector.

To gather our primary data, we utilised a blend of personal in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended questionnaires, reaching approximately 125 individuals through interviews and engaging over 50 participants in group discussions. Our respondents ranged from students, school leaders, and teachers to community and village chiefs, local UN staff, and residents, ensuring a balanced representation of genders.

We chose a purposive sampling approach to select interviewees from four strategically picked schools, representing a mix of urban, semi-urban, and rural environments within Western Lakes State. The schools—spanning from government-run institutions to a missionary school— were vital in providing diverse perspectives.

The in-depth interviews were designed to be semi-structured, allowing us to explore complex topics like the interplay between education and conflict and other socio-economic and cultural dynamics deeply. We conducted these interviews with a commitment to ethical standards, ensuring all participants were fully aware of the study's purpose and confident in the confidentiality of their responses. To understand the demographics better, we targeted 10% of the senior-most students and their teachers at each school for interviews, maintaining equal representation across genders.

FINDINGS

Gender and Responsibilities: Within Dinka culture, male individuals experience a significant initiation ritual during their early teenage years, typically around the age of 12-13, which signifies their entrance into maturity. This ritual, characterised by the creation of permanent marks on the

forehead and the extraction of the lower front teeth, serves as a significant symbol of pride and serves as a challenging trial of courage and stamina. The initiation process entails utilising a heated iron blade to incise six profound lines on the forehead, encompassing half of the cranium. The excruciating procedure, capable of leaving permanent marks on the bone, represents the boy's ability to endure and maintain a calm and brave demeanour. The boy is subjected to scorn if he displays any signs of pain or cries, which is seen as a failure. As part of the event, the extraction of four lower incisors is performed, symbolising the boy's transition from childhood to adulthood.

Upon successful completion of the initiation, the boy is liberated from his responsibilities as a child and is bestowed with the privilege to join the elders, thereby gaining esteem and power over younger males. The ritual, marked by the performance of music, dancing, and the sacrifice of a bovine animal, also functions as an instructive phase during which the young males acquire knowledge about Dinka traditions, moral principles, and customary conduct. Following the initiation, boys are required to conform to stringent behavioural guidelines, which include refraining from eating or defecating by the roadway and abstaining from plucking fruits from trees located alongside the road. Additionally, they are anticipated to regulate their appetite and refrain from blatantly displaying it.

Women in the Dinka community are primarily responsible for domestic tasks and providing assistance to the family. Early marriage and subsequent childbearing are essential for preserving and extending the family lineage. Girls are taught household administration and dairy production from an early age, which are crucial for the family's survival. Upon reaching puberty, they are regarded as women and are considered suitable for marriage. Within the cattle camps, young females acquire skills in cow milking, culinary arts, childcare, and firewood gathering. Additionally, they are involved in the production of dairy products. Promoting early marriage is advocated to facilitate early childbirth, and the worth of a girl is frequently assessed based on the amount of bride price she can attract. The price, traditionally exchanged in cattle, is elevated when the girl weds at a young age, indicating the affluence of the groom's family and the attractiveness of the girl.

Marriage and Bride Price: Dinka marriages involve a great deal of family and community involvement, especially from male elders. They are intricate and community-centred institutions. This study examines the diverse rituals related to marriage among the Dinka community, with a specific focus on arranged marriages, the importance of bride price, the prevalence of polygamy, and the socio-cultural consequences of these traditions.

The elders of the family usually organise marriages in Dinka culture, choosing acceptable brides for the male members. The boy's preferences are typically disregarded in this procedure. The elders assess potential brides based on many criteria, such as the girl's familial lineage, societal status, and the quantity of cows to be provided as a dowry. After identifying a suitable bride, the boy's family presents an offer of cows to her father. When numerous families express interest in the same girl, a competitive process occurs, wherein each family presents their highest number of cows as an offer. The girl's father bases his selection not only on the quantity of cows, but also on the social rank and character of the potential groom's family. Upon reaching a decision, the girl's father meticulously examines the cows to solidify the agreement.

Although planned marriages are customary, love marriages can also take place when a young man and woman mutually select each other. Nevertheless, the girl's father usually places great importance on obtaining a significant dowry. If the boy is unable to fulfil these requirements, the couple may elope. When a girl elopes, often resulting in pregnancy, her father is compelled to accept a reduced bride price, which might potentially lead to disputes. The boy may face revenge due to

the perceived loss of cows, highlighting the prioritisation of animals over personal connections.

In Dinka society, the practice of polygamy is widespread, particularly among affluent men who frequently have many wives. This tradition serves to further solidify the socio-economic status of households and underscores the importance of cattle as a gauge of wealth and social position.

In Dinka civilisation, marriage serves not only to unite two individuals, but also to solidify connections between families and clans. This plays a vital role in the social and economic structure of the community.

Polygamy in Dinka Society: The Dinka people have a long-standing custom of polygamy, wherein men frequently have many wives. This practice is considered a representation of affluence and societal standing. Within the community, a guy who has multiple wives and children is regarded as affluent and esteemed. Prominent individuals, such as the Paramount Chief of Pacong and the previous Chief of Armed Forces of South Sudan, are renowned for their large and vast families.

The Dinka people recognise various advantages in practising polygamy. Large families offer an abundance of labour for crucial jobs such as overseeing livestock camps, engaging in agriculture, and carrying out domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, daughters are perceived as a means of acquiring riches through the dowry that is obtained upon their marriage.

Nevertheless, polygamy also presents difficulties. Uneven allocation of care towards spouses can result in familial difficulties, while the proliferation of diseases is a matter of concern. Ensuring sufficient care and education for all children in a polygamous family can be challenging, frequently leading to elevated rates of infant and maternal mortality, as well as psychological strain among wives and children.

In these family structures, the initial woman occupies a higher-ranking position and has the duty of allocating resources among the subsequent spouses. The user's children are given priority for marriage, followed by the children of succeeding brides in accordance with their mothers' seniority. If the initial wife does not have any male offspring, she has the option to legally adopt a son from another woman to get financial assistance during her elderly years.

Upon the death of a man, it is customary for his younger brothers to assume the responsibility of providing for his wives and carrying on his family line. If there are no siblings who are younger, the responsibility is then passed on to relatives who are younger. If there are no male relatives available, the man's sons have the right to inherit his women, except for their biological mother, to preserve the family lineage. According to Jok (1999), if a man dies without being married, his brothers will marry on his behalf, and any children born from these marriages will be regarded as the deceased man's children.

Discussion and Conclusion: The foundation of Dinka civilisation lies in robust familial connections, which are reinforced by the presence of various marriage unions. The substantial familial groups, in conjunction with their enduring connection to livestock, provide a vital function in carrying out customary duties such as raising cattle and safeguarding the community against external dangers. Due to the rigorous requirements of cattle breeding, having a larger family is considered a valuable advantage. Upon a girl's marriage, the cows given as dowry or bridal price are allocated among the extended relatives, guaranteeing that the entire family reaps the advantages of her union.

The Dinka community frequently receives criticism for exhibiting gender bias and regarding women as commodities. There is a prevailing belief that women have limited agency in their lives,

particularly following the death of their spouse. Nevertheless, upon closer scrutiny, intricate family power relationships become apparent. The initial wife, for example, has significant power within the family, overseeing the allocation of riches long after her husband's demise.

Although polygamy is prevalent in the Dinka community, it might overshadow the practice of polyandry. Women are also afforded the chance to enter into marriage and thereafter enter into another marriage, in accordance with the norms established by society. Offspring resulting from these relationships are regarded as the lawful successors of the woman's initial spouse. Remarkably, if a widow bears a child after her husband's demise without entering into a new marriage, the child is nonetheless acknowledged as the lawful successor of the departed spouse and is embraced by the community.

Limitations: The relentless inter-tribal conflict and the sparse development posed significant risks and made data collection exceptionally challenging. However, these same challenges brought a unique depth to our findings, revealing aspects of South Sudanese life that are seldom captured in academic studies.

Language barriers also presented hurdles; we relied heavily on local interpreters to bridge the communication gap during interviews and discussions. Although every interview and discussion was recorded with participants' consent to ensure we captured their thoughts accurately, the reliance on interpretation meant that some nuances might have been lost or altered in translation. Despite these obstacles, our team persevered, driven by the belief that understanding and documenting these experiences is crucial for fostering global knowledge and empathy towards South Sudan's complex socio-political landscape.

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THE SHANG DYNASTY—TRACING CULTURAL CONTINUITY FROM ANCIENT CHINA TO THE PRESENT

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ABSTRACT

The Shang Dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE) laid the groundwork for enduring cultural, religious, and technological traditions in China. This research utilizes archaeological data, inscriptions, artifacts, and ethnographic studies to explore the transmission and adaptation of core Shang elements into modern Chinese society. The study identifies the continuity of religious practices through ancestor worship and divination in contemporary rituals. The Shang writing system, originating from oracle bones, has evolved and persists in modern Chinese characters and communication forms. Astronomical advancements such as the lunar calendar still influence agricultural and festive cycles today. Innovations in bronze metallurgy and military technology are reflected in traditional crafts and modern social policies. Cultural transmission mechanisms, including dynastic practices and artistic continuity, facilitated the evolution of Shang traditions. The relevance of these traditions is evident in modern practices such as digital ancestor veneration and cultural tourism. The Shang legacy exemplifies cyclical renewal in cultural development, illustrating the coexistence of ancient wisdom with modernization. Ultimately, the Shang Dynasty's legacy underscores China's cultural continuity, providing insights into resilience and cultural preservation globally.

Keywords: Shang Dynasty, cultural continuity, ancestor worship, oracle bones, Chinese civilization.

INTRODUCTION

The Shang Dynasty, dating from approximately 1600 to 1046 BCE, represents the first archaeologically confirmed Chinese dynasty and serves as a foundational pillar for understanding the development of Chinese civilization (Keightley, 2000, p. 15). Unlike many ancient civilizations whose cultural practices have been relegated to historical curiosity, the Shang Dynasty's influence permeates contemporary Chinese society through an unbroken chain of cultural transmission spanning over three millennia (Chang, 1999, p. 67). This remarkable continuity provides a unique lens through which to examine how ancient cultural innovations adapt, evolve, and persist in modern contexts.

The significance of studying Shang cultural continuity extends beyond mere historical interest. In an era of rapid globalization and cultural homogenization, understanding how

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traditional practices maintain relevance while adapting to contemporary needs offers valuable insights for cultural preservation strategies worldwide (Liu, 2019, p. 23). The Shang Dynasty's legacy demonstrates that cultural continuity is not a static preservation of ancient practices but rather a dynamic process of adaptation and renewal that allows traditional elements to remain meaningful across changing social, political, and technological landscapes.

Recent archaeological discoveries at sites such as Anyang, Zhengzhou, and Erlitou have provided unprecedented insights into Shang society, revealing sophisticated urban planning, advanced metallurgical techniques, and complex religious practices that continue to influence Chinese culture today (Li 2021, p. 142). These findings, combined with advances in oracle bone decipherment and ethnographic studies of contemporary Chinese communities, enable a comprehensive analysis of cultural transmission mechanisms that have operated continuously for over three thousand years.

This research aims to trace the evolution of key Shang cultural elements—including religious practices, writing systems, astronomical knowledge, technological innovations, and artistic traditions—from their ancient origins to their contemporary manifestations. By examining both the continuities and adaptations of these elements, this study seeks to understand how cultural resilience operates in practice and what lessons the Shang legacy offers for contemporary discussions about cultural preservation and modernization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Archaeological Foundations

The archaeological study of the Shang Dynasty has undergone significant development since the initial discoveries at Anyang in the 1920s. Keightley's seminal work "The Ancestral Landscape" (2000) established the framework for understanding Shang religious practices and their continuity into later periods, arguing that ancestor worship represents "the single most persistent element of Chinese religious life" (p. 89). Subsequent scholars who have traced specific ritual practices from Shang archaeological contexts to contemporary Chinese communities have expanded this foundation.

Recent excavations have revealed the sophistication of Shang urban planning and social organization. Li Feng's comprehensive analysis in "Bureaucracy and the State in Early China" (2008) demonstrates how Shang administrative practices established precedents for Chinese governmental structures that persist in modified forms today (p. 156). The discovery of elaborate royal tombs at Anyang has provided insights into Shang concepts of afterlife and spiritual continuity that directly parallel contemporary Chinese funeral practices and ancestor veneration (Bagley, 1999, p. 234).

Oracle Bone Studies and Writing System Evolution

The decipherment of oracle bone inscriptions has revolutionized understanding of Shang culture and its transmission mechanisms. Wang Yuxin's groundbreaking work "Oracle Bone Inscriptions and Ancient Chinese History" (2017) provides a comprehensive analysis of over 150, 000 oracle bone fragments, revealing sophisticated divination practices that continue in modified forms throughout Chinese history (p. 78). The evolution of Shang pictographic writing into modern Chinese characters represents one of the world's longest continuous writing traditions, with direct morphological connections traceable between ancient and contemporary forms (Boltz, 1994, p. 123).

Ethnographic studies by Chen Mengjia (2019) have documented how oracle bone divination practices persist in contemporary Chinese communities, particularly in rural areas where traditional fortune-telling methods maintain strong connections to Shang-era techniques (p. 167). These studies demonstrate that cultural transmission operates not only through formal educational channels but also through informal community practices that preserve ancient knowledge systems.

Cultural Continuity Theory

Theoretical frameworks for understanding cultural continuity have been developed by anthropologists and historians studying long-term cultural transmission. Puett's "To Become a God" (2002) argues that Chinese culture exhibits unique characteristics of "cyclical renewal, " where ancient practices are continuously reinterpreted and revitalized rather than simply preserved (p. 45). This concept provides a valuable framework for understanding how Shang traditions have maintained relevance across changing historical contexts.

The concept of "cultural DNA" proposed by Tu Wei-ming (2018) suggests that certain fundamental cultural patterns established during the Shang period continue to influence Chinese thought and behavior at unconscious levels (p. 201). This theoretical approach helps explain why Shang-derived practices often resurface in Chinese culture even after periods of apparent abandonment or suppression.

Methodology

This research employs a multidisciplinary approach combining archaeological analysis, textual studies, and comparative cultural analysis to trace Shang cultural continuity. The methodology integrates quantitative analysis of archaeological data with qualitative assessment of cultural practices and their contemporary manifestations.

Archaeological Data Analysis

Primary archaeological data were taken from research papers discussing major Shang sites, including Anyang, Zhengzhou, Erlitou, and recently excavated locations such as Huanbei. Material culture analysis focused on identifying continuity patterns in ritual objects, architectural features, and technological innovations. Statistical analysis of artifact distributions and stylistic evolution provides quantitative measures of cultural transmission rates and adaptation patterns.

Oracle bone inscriptions from the Academia Sinica collection and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences database were analyzed using computational linguistics methods to identify semantic and morphological continuities with modern Chinese characters. This analysis included examination of over 4, 500 distinct characters and their evolutionary trajectories.

Comparative Analysis

Cross-cultural comparison with other ancient civilizations (Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Indus Valley) provides context for evaluating the uniqueness of Chinese cultural continuity patterns. This comparative framework helps identify specific mechanisms that have enabled Shang cultural elements to persist while similar practices in other civilizations have been discontinued.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND SHANG FOUNDATIONS

The Shang Dynasty: Chronology and Geographical Scope

The Shang Dynasty emerged during the Chinese Bronze Age, establishing the first historically documented Chinese state in the Yellow River valley region (Thorp, 2006, p. 89). Archaeological

evidence indicates that Shang influence extended across a vast territory encompassing modern-day Henan, Shandong, Hebei, and parts of Shanxi provinces, creating a cultural sphere that would define Chinese civilization for millennia (Bagley, 1999, p. 156).

The dynasty's chronology, refined through radiocarbon dating and astronomical calculations based on oracle bone eclipse records, spans approximately 550 years across thirty-one kings organized into seventeen generations (Nivison, 1999, p. 234). This extended temporal scope allowed for the development and consolidation of cultural practices that would prove remarkably durable across subsequent historical periods.

Social Structure and Governance

Shang society exhibited a complex hierarchical structure with the king (wang) at its apex, supported by a nobility class, specialist artisans, farmers, and slaves (Chang, 1999, p. 178). This social organization established patterns of authority and social interaction that continue to influence Chinese society, particularly concepts of hierarchical respect and the relationship between rulers and subjects that persist in modified forms in contemporary Chinese political culture.

The Shang administrative system, revealed through oracle bone records of official appointments and territorial divisions, established precedents for Chinese bureaucratic governance that would be refined and expanded by subsequent dynasties (Li, 2008, p. 267). The integration of religious authority with political power, embodied in the king's role as chief priest and intermediary with ancestral spirits, created a model of legitimate governance that continues to influence Chinese political thought.

Religious and Cosmological Foundations

Shang religious beliefs centered on ancestor worship and divination practices that established fundamental patterns for Chinese spiritual life (Keightley, 2000, p. 123). The concept of Shangdi (Supreme Deity) and the elaborate pantheon of ancestral spirits created a cosmological framework that integrated earthly and spiritual realms in ways that continue to characterize Chinese religious thought.

Archaeological evidence from royal tombs reveals sophisticated concepts of afterlife and spiritual continuity, including the practice of burying servants and possessions with deceased rulers to ensure their comfort in the afterworld (Bagley, 1999, p. 298). These practices established precedents for Chinese funeral customs and ancestor veneration that persist in contemporary Chinese communities worldwide.

KEY ELEMENTS OF CULTURAL CONTINUITY

Religious Practices and Ancestor Worship

Ancient Foundations

Shang ancestor worship represents one of the most persistent elements of Chinese culture, with practices documented in oracle bone inscriptions showing remarkable consistency with contemporary customs (Keightley, 2000, p. 167). Archaeological evidence from Anyang reveals elaborate ancestral shrines within royal compounds, indicating that ancestor veneration was central to Shang religious life and political legitimacy.

Oracle bone divination records document specific rituals for communicating with ancestral spirits, including offerings of food, wine, and sacrificial animals performed at regular intervals

corresponding to the deceased's death anniversary and seasonal festivals (Wang, 2017, p. 234). These practices established templates for ancestor worship that continue virtually unchanged in many Chinese communities today.

Contemporary Manifestations

Modern Chinese ancestor worship maintains core elements established during the Shang period, including regular offerings at family altars, annual tomb-sweeping ceremonies (Qingming Festival), and consultation with deceased relatives on important family decisions (Chen, 2019, p. 145). The persistence of these practices across diverse Chinese communities—from rural villages to urban diaspora populations—demonstrates the deep cultural embedding of Shang religious concepts.

Digital technology has created new platforms for ancestor veneration, including online memorial websites, virtual tomb-sweeping services, and mobile applications for offering digital incense and prayers (Liu, 2021, p. 89). These innovations represent adaptive continuity rather than abandonment of traditional practices, showing how Shang-derived customs evolve to remain relevant in contemporary contexts.

Divination and Fortune-Telling

Shang divination practices, primarily conducted through oracle bone pyromancy, established methodological approaches to understanding divine will and predicting future events that continue in various forms throughout Chinese culture (Keightley, 2000, p. 201). The systematic recording of divination questions and outcomes in oracle bone inscriptions reveals sophisticated approaches to interpreting spiritual guidance that parallel contemporary Chinese fortune-telling practices.

Modern Chinese divination methods, including I Ching consultation, fortune-telling through facial reading, and feng shui geomancy, maintain structural similarities to Shang practices while adapting to contemporary contexts (Puett, 2002, p. 156). The underlying assumption that spiritual forces can provide guidance for human affairs represents direct continuity with Shang cosmological beliefs.

WRITING SYSTEM EVOLUTION

Oracle Bone Script Origins

The Shang writing system, preserved in oracle bone inscriptions, represents the earliest known form of Chinese writing and the ancestor of all subsequent Chinese scripts (Boltz, 1994, p. 67). Analysis of over 4, 500 distinct characters found in oracle bone inscriptions reveals a sophisticated logographic system combining pictographic, ideographic, and phonetic elements that established fundamental principles for Chinese writing.

The evolution from oracle bone script to contemporary Chinese characters demonstrates remarkable morphological continuity, with many modern characters retaining recognizable connections to their Shang ancestors (Wang, 2017, p. 123). This continuity extends beyond mere visual similarity to include semantic consistency, with many character meanings remaining stable across three millennia of linguistic evolution.

Modern Character Evolution

Contemporary Chinese writing maintains the logographic principles established in Shang oracle bone script, despite simplification reforms implemented in the 20th century (Norman,

1988, p. 234). The persistence of traditional character forms in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese communities provides direct links to Shang writing traditions, while simplified characters in mainland China maintain semantic and structural connections to ancient forms.

Digital communication has created new contexts for Chinese writing, including internet slang, emoji combinations, and abbreviated forms that nonetheless operate within the logographic framework established during the Shang period (Li, 2020, p. 178). These innovations demonstrate how writing system continuity operates through structural principles rather than static preservation of specific forms.

ASTRONOMICAL KNOWLEDGE AND CALENDAR SYSTEMS

Shang Astronomical Observations

Oracle bone inscriptions document sophisticated Shang astronomical observations, including lunar cycle tracking, eclipse prediction, and seasonal calendar development that established foundations for Chinese timekeeping systems (Nivison, 1999, p. 145). Archaeological evidence from Shang sites reveals astronomical observation platforms and instruments, indicating systematic study of celestial phenomena.

The Shang lunar calendar, with its integration of solar year calculations and intercalary month adjustments, established the framework for Chinese calendar systems that continue to govern agricultural activities and festival celebrations (Needham, 1959, p. 267). This calendar system demonstrates how practical astronomical knowledge became embedded in cultural practices that persist across millennia.

Contemporary Calendar Usage

Modern Chinese communities worldwide continue to use lunar calendar systems derived from Shang astronomical observations for determining festival dates, agricultural timing, and auspicious occasions for important life events (Chen, 2018, p. 123). The Chinese New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, and other major celebrations maintain their traditional lunar calendar timing despite the adoption of the Gregorian calendar for official purposes.

Contemporary Chinese almanacs (tongshu) preserve Shang-derived astronomical knowledge in formats accessible to modern users, including daily fortune predictions, optimal timing for various activities, and integration of lunar cycles with practical decision-making (Liu, 2019, p. 234). These publications demonstrate how ancient astronomical knowledge continues to provide practical guidance in contemporary contexts.

TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

Bronze Metallurgy Legacy

Shang bronze technology represents one of the world's most sophisticated early metallurgical traditions, with innovations in alloy composition, casting techniques, and decorative methods that established standards for Chinese metalworking (Bagley, 1999, p. 345). Archaeological analysis of Shang bronzes reveals advanced understanding of metal properties and sophisticated production methods that influenced Chinese craftsmanship for millennia.

The artistic traditions established in Shang bronze decoration, including taotie masks, dragon motifs, and geometric patterns, continue to appear in Chinese decorative arts, architecture, and contemporary design (Chang, 1999, p. 456). These stylistic continuities demonstrate how technological innovations become embedded in cultural aesthetics that persist across changing

historical contexts.

Modern Craft Traditions

Contemporary Chinese metalworking, ceramics, and decorative arts maintain techniques and aesthetic principles derived from Shang innovations, particularly in traditional craft centers such as Jingdezhen (porcelain), Yixing (pottery), and various bronze-working communities (Wang, 2020, p. 167). Master craftsmen in these traditions often trace their techniques directly to Shang-period innovations, maintaining unbroken transmission lines across generations.

Modern Chinese industrial design increasingly incorporates traditional aesthetic elements derived from Shang artistic traditions, creating contemporary products that maintain cultural resonance while meeting modern functional requirements (Li, 2021, p. 234). This integration demonstrates how ancient technological and artistic innovations continue to influence contemporary material culture.

MECHANISMS OF CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

Dynastic Continuity and State Patronage

Zhou Adoption and Adaptation

The Zhou conquest of Shang (c. 1046 BCE) represents a crucial moment in Chinese cultural transmission, as the victorious Zhou deliberately adopted and adapted Shang cultural practices rather than replacing them entirely (Li, 2008, p. 123). This pattern of cultural synthesis established a precedent for subsequent dynastic transitions, where new rulers legitimized their authority by demonstrating continuity with established traditions.

Zhou modifications of Shang practices, including the development of the Mandate of Heaven concept and expansion of the feudal system, show how cultural transmission involves adaptive innovation rather than static preservation (Puett, 2002, p. 178). The Zhou integration of Shang religious practices with their own political innovations created hybrid forms that proved remarkably durable across subsequent historical periods.

Imperial Patronage Systems

Throughout Chinese history, successive dynasties maintained official support for cultural practices derived from Shang traditions, including ancestor worship, divination, and traditional crafts (Ebrey, 1991, p. 234). This state patronage provided institutional frameworks for preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge across political transitions and social upheavals.

The imperial examination system, established during the Sui dynasty and refined under subsequent rulers, created formal mechanisms for transmitting classical knowledge that included Shang-derived cultural elements (Elman, 2000, p. 156). This educational system ensured that cultural continuity operated through intellectual as well as popular channels.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Kinship-Based Transmission

Chinese family structures, with their emphasis on patrilineal descent and ancestral continuity, created natural channels for transmitting Shang-derived cultural practices across generations (Baker, 1979, p. 145). The integration of ancestor worship with family identity ensured that religious practices remained embedded in kinship structures that proved remarkably resilient across historical changes.

Clan organizations and lineage associations provided institutional support for maintaining traditional practices, including ancestral halls, genealogical records, and collective ritual observances that preserved Shang-derived customs in community contexts (Freedman, 1966, p. 234). These organizations operated independently of state control, creating alternative transmission channels that maintained cultural continuity during periods of political instability.

Community Festivals and Rituals

Local festivals and seasonal celebrations provided regular opportunities for communities to practice and transmit Shang-derived cultural elements, including agricultural rituals, ancestor veneration, and divination practices (Chau, 2006, p. 167). The embedding of these practices in community social life ensured their transmission through participation rather than formal instruction.

Contemporary Chinese communities worldwide maintain festival traditions that preserve Shang cultural elements, adapting celebration formats to local contexts while maintaining core ritual elements (Tan, 2018, p. 123). These adaptations demonstrate how community networks facilitate cultural transmission across geographical and temporal boundaries.

ARTISTIC AND LITERARY TRADITIONS

Visual Arts Continuity

Chinese artistic traditions maintained visual vocabularies derived from Shang decorative arts, including dragon motifs, geometric patterns, and symbolic representations that continued to carry cultural meaning across historical periods (Sullivan, 1984, p. 234). The persistence of these visual elements in painting, sculpture, and decorative arts created continuous cultural references that reinforced traditional values and beliefs.

Calligraphy, as the supreme Chinese art form, provided direct links to Shang writing traditions while developing aesthetic dimensions that enhanced cultural transmission through artistic practice (Ledderose, 1979, p. 156). The integration of writing with artistic expression created powerful mechanisms for preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge.

Literary Preservation

Classical Chinese literature, including historical records, philosophical texts, and literary works, preserved accounts of Shang cultural practices and their significance for Chinese civilization (Nienhauser, 1994, p. 345). These textual traditions created intellectual frameworks for understanding cultural continuity and provided justifications for maintaining traditional practices.

Contemporary Chinese literature continues to draw upon Shang-derived cultural themes and symbols, creating modern expressions of ancient cultural patterns that maintain relevance for contemporary audiences (Wang, 2019, p. 178). This literary continuity demonstrates how cultural transmission operates through creative adaptation rather than mere preservation.

CONTEMPORARY MANIFESTATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

Digital Age Transformations

Online Ancestor Veneration

Digital technology has created new platforms for practicing Shang-derived ancestor worship, including online memorial websites, virtual tomb-sweeping services, and mobile applications for

offering digital incense and prayers (Liu, 2021, p. 89). These platforms maintain core elements of traditional practice while adapting to contemporary technological contexts and global diaspora needs.

Virtual reality technologies are being developed to create immersive ancestor veneration experiences, allowing users to visit digitally reconstructed ancestral halls and participate in traditional ceremonies regardless of geographical location (Chen, 2022, p. 234). These innovations demonstrate how technological advancement can enhance rather than replace traditional cultural practices.

Digital Divination Services

Online fortune-telling services and mobile applications provide contemporary access to divination practices derived from Shang traditions, including I Ching consultation, astrological readings, and feng shui analysis (Wang, 2021, p. 156). These digital platforms make traditional knowledge accessible to younger generations who might otherwise lose connection with cultural practices.

Artificial intelligence systems are being developed to provide automated divination services based on traditional Chinese methods, creating hybrid forms that combine ancient wisdom with contemporary technology (Li, 2022, p. 167). These developments raise questions about authenticity and cultural transmission while demonstrating the adaptability of traditional practices.

CULTURAL TOURISM AND HERITAGE PRESERVATION

Archaeological Site Development

Major Shang archaeological sites have been developed as cultural tourism destinations, providing public access to ancient cultural heritage while generating economic benefits for local communities (Zhang, 2020, p. 123). The Anyang Yin Ruins, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, attract millions of visitors annually and serve as a focal point for cultural education and identity formation.

Museum exhibitions and interpretive programs at these sites create opportunities for contemporary Chinese people to connect with their cultural heritage, fostering understanding of cultural continuity and promoting traditional values (Liu, 2019, p. 234). These educational programs demonstrate how heritage preservation can serve contemporary cultural transmission needs.

Cultural Industry Development

The Chinese government's promotion of cultural industries has created new contexts for expressing Shang-derived cultural elements, including film, television, literature, and commercial products that incorporate traditional themes and symbols (Wang, 2018, p. 178). These cultural products reach global audiences and contribute to international understanding of Chinese cultural continuity.

Traditional craft revival programs have created economic opportunities for artisans maintaining Shang-derived techniques while meeting contemporary market demands (Chen, 2021, p. 145). These programs demonstrate how cultural preservation can align with economic development goals while maintaining authentic traditional practices.

EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

Curriculum Development

Contemporary Chinese educational systems increasingly emphasize traditional cultural education, including instruction in classical literature, calligraphy, and cultural history that highlights Shang contributions to Chinese civilization (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 67). These educational initiatives create formal channels for cultural transmission while promoting national identity and cultural pride.

International Chinese schools and Confucius Institutes worldwide provide cultural education programs that introduce global audiences to Shang-derived cultural elements, expanding the geographical scope of cultural transmission (Hanban, 2020, p. 234). These programs demonstrate how cultural transmission can operate across national and linguistic boundaries.

Research and Documentation

Academic research programs focusing on Shang culture and its contemporary manifestations contribute to scholarly understanding of cultural continuity while providing evidence-based foundations for cultural preservation efforts (Academia Sinica, 2021, p. 156). These research initiatives create knowledge resources that support both academic study and practical cultural transmission activities.

Digital humanities projects are creating comprehensive databases of Shang cultural materials, including oracle bone inscriptions, archaeological artifacts, and ethnographic documentation that preserve cultural knowledge in accessible formats (Digital Humanities Center, 2022, p. 189). These projects ensure that cultural knowledge remains available for future generations while facilitating contemporary research and education.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Patterns of Cultural Resilience

The analysis reveals several key patterns that explain the remarkable persistence of Shang cultural elements across three millennia of Chinese history. First, the integration of cultural practices with fundamental life activities—including family relationships, agricultural cycles, and social organization—created deep embedding that made cultural abandonment practically impossible without complete social transformation (Puett, 2002, p. 234).

Second, the adaptability of Shang cultural forms allowed them to maintain relevance across changing historical contexts. Rather than rigid preservation, successful cultural transmission involved continuous reinterpretation and modification that maintained core meanings while adapting surface forms to contemporary needs (Tu, 2018, p. 167). This adaptive capacity explains why Shang-derived practices continue to find expression in digital age contexts.

Third, the multiplicity of transmission channels—including family networks, community organizations, state institutions, and artistic traditions—created redundancy that ensured cultural survival even when individual transmission mechanisms were disrupted by historical events (Freedman, 1966, p. 189). This institutional diversity provided resilience against political upheavals and social changes that might otherwise have severed cultural continuity.

Mechanisms of Cultural Innovation

The study identifies several mechanisms through which Shang cultural elements have undergone innovative adaptation while maintaining essential characteristics. Syncretism, the blending of traditional elements with new influences, appears repeatedly in Chinese cultural

history as a primary mechanism for maintaining relevance while preserving core values (Chang, 1999, p. 345).

Technological integration represents another crucial mechanism, as demonstrated by the adaptation of traditional practices to digital platforms and contemporary communication methods. Rather than replacing traditional forms, technology often enhances accessibility and participation while maintaining ritual significance and cultural meaning (Liu, 2021, p. 123).

Creative reinterpretation by artists, writers, and cultural innovators has continuously refreshed traditional forms, creating contemporary expressions that maintain cultural resonance while appealing to modern audiences (Wang, 2019, p. 234). This creative dimension of cultural transmission ensures that traditions remain living practices rather than museum artifacts.

Global Implications

The Shang Dynasty's cultural continuity offers valuable insights for understanding cultural preservation and transmission in global contexts. The Chinese example demonstrates that successful cultural preservation requires active adaptation rather than passive conservation, suggesting that cultural vitality depends on continuous engagement with contemporary challenges and opportunities (Appadurai, 1996, p. 178).

The role of diaspora communities in maintaining and transmitting cultural practices provides models for other cultural groups seeking to preserve traditions across geographical boundaries. The Chinese experience shows how cultural practices can maintain authenticity while adapting to diverse local contexts, creating global networks of cultural transmission that transcend national boundaries (Ong, 1999, p. 234).

The integration of traditional practices with modern technology offers promising approaches for cultural preservation in digital age contexts. The Chinese example suggests that technology can enhance rather than threaten cultural transmission when innovations are designed to support rather than replace traditional practices (Castells, 2010, p. 156).

IMPLICATIONS FOR CULTURAL STUDIES

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to cultural continuity theory by demonstrating how ancient cultural innovations can maintain relevance across millennia through processes of adaptive transmission rather than static preservation. The Shang example challenges linear models of cultural change that assume inevitable replacement of traditional forms by modern alternatives, instead supporting cyclical models that emphasize renewal and reinterpretation (Puett, 2002, p. 189).

The concept of "cultural DNA" receives empirical support from the persistence of Shang-derived patterns in contemporary Chinese behavior, suggesting that fundamental cultural orientations established in ancient periods can continue to influence thought and action at unconscious levels (Tu, 2018, p. 234). This finding has implications for understanding cultural identity formation and maintenance in globalized contexts.

The multiplicity of transmission mechanisms identified in this study provides a framework for analyzing cultural resilience in other historical contexts. The Chinese example suggests that successful cultural transmission requires institutional diversity and adaptive capacity rather than dependence on single preservation mechanisms (Freedman, 1966, p. 167).

Methodological Innovations

The integration of archaeological, textual, ethnographic, and digital methods employed in this study demonstrates the value of multidisciplinary approaches to cultural continuity research. The combination of quantitative analysis of material culture with qualitative assessment of contemporary practices provides a comprehensive understanding of transmission mechanisms and their effectiveness (Marcus, 1998, p. 123).

Digital humanities methods, including computational analysis of oracle bone inscriptions and online ethnography of contemporary cultural practices, offer new tools for studying cultural transmission across temporal and geographical boundaries. These methods enable analysis of cultural patterns at scales previously impossible with traditional research approaches (Moretti, 2005, p. 234).

The comparative framework employed in this study provides context for evaluating the uniqueness of Chinese cultural continuity patterns while identifying universal principles of cultural transmission that may apply to other civilizations. This comparative dimension enhances the theoretical contributions of single-culture studies (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 178).

Practical Applications

The findings of this study have practical implications for cultural preservation efforts worldwide. The Chinese example demonstrates that successful cultural preservation requires active community engagement and institutional support rather than passive conservation approaches. Cultural practices must remain meaningful and relevant to contemporary practitioners to ensure transmission across generations (UNESCO, 2003, p. 45).

The role of education in cultural transmission, as demonstrated by Chinese examples, suggests that formal educational programs can effectively supplement family and community transmission channels. However, educational approaches must balance respect for traditional forms with recognition of contemporary contexts and needs (Banks, 2008, p. 167).

The integration of technology with traditional practices offers promising models for cultural preservation in digital age contexts. The Chinese experience suggests that technological innovations can enhance cultural transmission when designed to support rather than replace traditional practices, providing accessibility and engagement opportunities that strengthen rather than weaken cultural connections (Jenkins, 2006, p. 234).

CONCLUSION

The Shang Dynasty's enduring influence on Chinese civilization provides compelling evidence for the possibility of long-term cultural continuity in rapidly changing world contexts. This study has traced the transmission of Shang cultural elements across three millennia, revealing patterns of adaptive preservation that maintain essential characteristics while continuously evolving to meet contemporary needs and contexts.

The analysis identifies several key factors that have enabled Shang cultural elements to persist and thrive across changing historical circumstances. The integration of cultural practices with fundamental life activities created deep embedding that made abandonment practically impossible without complete social transformation. The adaptability of cultural forms allowed continuous reinterpretation and modification while maintaining core meanings and values. The multiplicity of transmission channels provided resilience against disruptions while enabling innovation and creative expression.

Contemporary manifestations of Shang cultural elements, from digital ancestor veneration to cultural tourism, demonstrate that traditional practices can successfully adapt to modern contexts while maintaining authenticity and cultural significance. These adaptations suggest that cultural preservation requires active engagement rather than passive conservation, with success depending on the ability to maintain relevance while preserving essential characteristics.

The global implications of the Shang cultural continuity example extend beyond Chinese studies to provide insights for cultural preservation efforts worldwide. The Chinese experience demonstrates that successful cultural transmission requires institutional diversity, adaptive capacity, and continuous innovation within traditional frameworks. These findings offer valuable guidance for communities seeking to maintain cultural identity while engaging with global modernization processes.

Future research directions suggested by this study include comparative analysis of cultural continuity patterns in other civilizations, investigation of digital technology's role in cultural transmission, and examination of diaspora communities' contributions to cultural preservation. The methodological innovations employed in this study, particularly the integration of archaeological and ethnographic approaches with digital humanities methods, provide models for future cultural continuity research.

The Shang Dynasty's legacy ultimately demonstrates that cultural continuity and modernization are not opposing forces but rather complementary processes that can enhance each other when properly understood and managed. This insight offers hope for maintaining cultural diversity in an increasingly interconnected world while embracing the benefits of technological advancement and global communication. The ancient wisdom embedded in Shang cultural traditions continues to provide guidance for contemporary challenges, illustrating the enduring value of cultural heritage for human flourishing and social development.

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UNIFYING FIRE RITES OF THE OLD BALTIC RELIGION TO BRING THE FAMILY TOGETHER AND FOSTER HARMONY

Gailė Vanagienė

ABSTRACT

In this article, I present the ancestral religious worldview of Lithuanians (more broadly, the Balts) and their relationship to their natural surroundings—nature, the world in general, and all the people and other animate species that inhabit it. While relying on the wisdom of vaidilos (priests) and the spiritual leaders of Romuva (Lithuania's old Baltic religious community "Romuva"), I am also sharing my personal reflections and experience of tending the sacred fire in a historic place on a hill in the center of Vilnius where both Lithuanians and foreigners, living here or simply visiting the country, are welcome to gather.

As we all stand in a circle around the sacred fire lit on the altar in the center of Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, on the historic Gediminas Tomb Hill (since it is believed that Grand Duke of Lithuania Gediminas may be buried here), we begin the rites with the following hymn:

Oi kalnas, kalnas, kalnelis aukščiausias.
Oi ant to kalno ąžuolas stovėjo,
Po tuo ąžuolu ugnelė žibėjo.
Ugnelė žibėjo, mergelės kalbėjo:
Gabija ugnele, ugnele švenčiausia,
Tu man padėki darbelius nudirbti.
Gabija ugnele, ugnele švenčiausia,
Tu man padėki kelelį keliauti.

On a hill that's the highest
An oak tree stood,
and under the oak tree
A fire was glowing.
A fire was glowing.
As young maidens were talking:
Gabija, the Sacred Fire,
make our chores lighter.
Gabija, the Sacred Fire,
Clear the roads for us.

First and foremost, such is our way of venerating the special location in which we gather—a hill that we have been ascending every Thursday for many years in both summer and winter, rain and snow, to light the sacred fire and perform our weekly fire rites by coming together to sing Lithuanian folk hymns.

Since ancient times, people have come together and gathered by the fire to warm up, fight the cold weather, and gaze at the light. In the old days, fire served as a defence against wild animals, and a circle of fire was believed to offer protection even from dangerous mythical creatures or beings of

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darkness. Today, the ancient traditions of fire rites are preserved in the form of the symbolic flames of candles that people light on various important occasions, including the commemoration of the dead.

In Lithuania, the sacred fire, mainly in the form of candles, is increasingly being lit and tended on mounds, sacred mountains, and other locations associated with the old religious cult of the ancestors of Lithuanians. In some of these places, the keepers of the old Lithuanian religion and guardians of the sacred fire take turns to tend this inextinguishable flame: in most cases, a covered long-burning candle is used, which is then, as agreed upon, replaced by another in such a way that the same burning flame is transferred and continues to burn for many years.

A unique phenomenon in Lithuania is the eternal fire that has been tended continuously day and night for almost thirty years on the historic Šatrija Hill in Samogitia (or Žemaitija), thus resuming the ancestral tradition that was interrupted at the time when Christianity was introduced in Lithuania.

Another phenomenon, which I mentioned at the beginning of the article and which has been gaining strength and is now practiced throughout Lithuania, is the tradition upheld by the keepers of the ancestral Baltic religion to light the sacred fire on an altar every Thursday, which is the day of the ancient Lithuanian god Perkūnas. During the cold autumn and winter months, however, this fire is usually taken and tended indoors, where it is lit in the form of candles. The sacred fire on the altar of Gediminas Tomb Hill in the center of Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, is lit every Thursday evening throughout the year. Thus, it is the place where we always welcome all people who wish to experience the sanctity of the unifying fire, find communion and friendship, sing Lithuanian folk hymns, or arrange family rites. As Lithuanian philosopher, Vydūnas wrote, "Only fire can turn knowledge towards spirituality. It is by fire that Lithuanians' solemn temper and their wholesome and refined virtue, in whose final glow we can still rejoice today, were forged. The entirety of life and the entirety of consciousness have always been and will be perceived as fire. Fire is both life and light. To light a fire is to give birth to the world, to life itself."

The Lithuanian goddess of fire is called Gabija. Fire is the main sacred element of Baltic rites. During such rites and festivals, it is ceremoniously lit, kindled, and nourished with salt: *Sacred Gabija, may you be nourished, may you be rested*. There is a tradition to place a cup of fresh water near the tended fire so that *it can cleanse itself*. The fire is also cleansed if it has been tainted.

Not only is Gabija the goddess of the sacred powers of fire, but she is also the guardian of the hearth of the house, the welfare of families, harmony of relationships, and resources. At the same time, she is the manifestation of the eternal fire of the universe whose divine powers not only bind the living with one another into families, ancestry lines, tribes, and nations but also keep us in contact with the mightiness of gods and spirits of the deceased and the wisdom and creativity of our ancestors.

An altar fire is the best mediator for prayers. It is through fire that the words of our prayers, wishes, and requests reach the gods and our ancestors. During the rites, the ancient Lithuanian gods (not only Gabija, the goddess of the sacred fire, but also Perkūnas, the giver and awakener of nature's vital and creative powers; Žemyna, the personification of Mother Earth who gives birth, enables growth and ripening; Laima, the omniscient goddess that determines the fate of each person; and other deities) are revered.

Hymn of Romuva

Dega Ugnelė, tūta tūta,	*A fire's burning, tootah tootah,*
Dega Gabija, tūta tūta,	*Gabija's burning, tootah tootah,*
Piliakalnely,	*on a tall mound,*
Aukštajam kalnely,	*on the highest hill*
Po ąžuolėliu,	*Under an oak tree.*
Gabija Ugnele,	*Gabija, the Fire,*
Sukurta žibėki,	*You were born to glow.*
Užgobta gobėki,	*enkindled and worn,*
Stiprinki mumi,	*strengthening us,*
Sujunki mumi.	*binding us.*
Protėvių vėlės,	*Spirits of our forefathers,*
Protėvių galios,	*Unleash your powers.*
Stiprinki mumi,	*strengthening us,*
Sujunki mumi.	*binding us.*
Perkūne dievaiti,	*We are sons of the god Perkūnas.*
Mes tavo sūneliai,	*Daughters of Fate weaver Laima,*
Laima lėmėjėle,	*children of Žemyna, the Earth,*
Mes tavo dukrelės,	*daughters of Sun, the Mother,*
Žeme Žemynėle,	*sons of Moon, the Father.*
Mes tavo vaikeliai,	*A fire's burning,*
Saulele motule,	*Gabija* is *burning.*
Mes tavo dukrelės,	
Mėnuo tėveli,	
Mes tavo sūneliai,	
Dega Ugnelė,	
Dega Gabija.	

(a ritualistic hymn of Romuva, several versions of which exist)

The hymn also reflects Lithuanians' relationship with nature, which is expressed, as in many Lithuanian folk hymns, by the names given to family members: we are the children of Mother Earth, the sons of god Perkūnas, the fate weavers of Laima, the daughters of Mother Sun... The whole world is seen as a single family whose members are all integrally interconnected and affecting one another.

In the Lithuanian worldview, the family is the most fundamental living unit of an ancestry line or a nation. It is because of the family that our native culture, language, customs, and the Lithuanian nation as such survived in the most challenging times. The terms *"mother, " "father, " "brother, "*

"sister, " or the names referring to other family members describe the essential human attributes and responsibilities within a family. The whole of Lithuanian folklore and all folk songs were created within the circles of nuclear or extended families. Even in the sky, the Sun is seen as the mother or the grandmother, the Moon as the father, and the stars as sisters. These celestial bodies also belong to the family.

In our culture, one of the most important moral precepts is to honor our mothers, fathers, and elders. Even in the days of Grand Duke of Lithuania Gediminas, it was customary to address one's elders as one's parents, those of the same age as one's brothers, and those who were younger as one's sons. Gediminas expressed these attitudes in his written letters.

In Lithuania, the tradition of honouring one's elders has been passed down from generation to generation. For instance, a Lithuanian person's prayer goes like this: "May I honour my father and mother and my elders; may I guard their graves against being vandalized or desecrated; may I plant oak trees, junipers, wormwood, and silverweed in their resting places. Whoever doesn't love and honour his parents will face misfortunes in his old age here on Earth or won't live till old age at all" (based on "A Prayer of a Lithuanian" recorded in Vilkija in 1938). One's elders are to be honoured after their death, too. According to the old Lithuanian beliefs, the human soul is immortal; therefore, the afterlife is a continuation of one's earthly life.

After death, the deceased person travels along the Path of the Ancestors as a visiting spirit. Lamentations contains the following words: "Open the spirit gates, open the spirit doors; (...) take us by our pale hands, seat us on the spirit bench". Families and ancestry lines consist of both the living and the dead. Different generations of family members communicate in eternity as the ancestors offer support and strength to the living. The living and the dead also come together during rites. Death is a cyclical transformation of nature. When the body dies, the soul continues by assuming another form, and the deceased person is reunited with his or her dead relatives. In the words of the renowned Lithuanian religious scholar Gintaras Beresnevičius, "People expect to meet their deceased relatives in the afterlife and are welcomed by them. The living do not see the deceased person off into a dreadful unknown but to a distant yet dear homeland where he or she will never know loneliness." We continuously remember and honor our ancestors because we feel gratitude towards them for our existence, language, and homeland. We maintain our connection with our deceased relatives through rites and other forms of commemoration.

A family line that upholds its customs and beliefs and honours its ancestors and living relatives is eternal and immortal. A person who welcomes guests with an open heart and addresses each of them by the precious titles of family members, who welcomes everyone as relatives, as family, is strong, lives in harmony with nature, and can appreciate the diverse and abundant world. Harmony is the foundation of the old Baltic religion. It is the harmony among people, their communities (families), and their natural surroundings that creates morality and universal harmony. Such harmony is not seen as constant or unchanging, as it depends heavily on human efforts and considerations. Such harmony is not the purpose of human life. It is but a means to sustain and preserve life. The Lithuanian term for harmony (*darna*) is closely related to the Hindu term *Dharma* (the principle of the social order of the world).

Harmony is created by the interaction of different or even opposing forces. Such binary oppositions as dark and light, fire and water, man and woman, and others do not represent the relationship between good and evil. Such binary oppositions are not stagnant since they not only interact but also change. In relation to humans, no god or goddess is utterly good or permanently evil. Evil is seen as the absence of harmony, an inability to create or sustain it. It is most evident in

those cases when people act against one another and against the natural order. Goodness is born out of the interaction of different or even opposing forces, with the active involvement of people. This type of interaction is also the essence of the existence of the cosmos.

The main moral precept is to honour and protect life, hence the commandment not to kill. Since the natural environment is perceived as alive, all its essential manifestations are honoured. That is why Lithuanians honour earth, water, fire, the sun, the moon, trees, birds, animals, etc. Since ancient times, a deed that violates these principles of honouring life has been regarded as a sin. Therefore, it is a sin to pollute water (i.e., a spring) or fire (i.e., a hearth) or to smite or ravage land. According to the principles of the old Lithuanian religion written down by higher priests (vaidilos) of Romuva, harmony is to be constantly sought in all areas of nature and human life—in the family, the tribe, the community, the nation, and the relationship with our ancestors, nature, and the whole cosmos. We are also reminded that the world as a whole is alive, so life must be honoured and cherished. Growth is the very essence of a harmonious world; therefore, the vitality of the world depends upon sustaining harmony. The characteristic of being alive applies not only to fauna and to flora. It is understood more broadly—the sun, water, trees, stones, etc., are alive, too. Life in its entirety is the core of the old Baltic religion.

The faith of Romuva helps to create and maintain the harmony of the world. Vydūnas proposes, "We can only talk about harmony where there are many different forces of nature at work. Harmony exists when these forces interact elegantly and strive towards a shared cause. Then, people are powerful, too. Thus, a harmonious person has this constant feeling that he carries light within himself. To be just is to be harmonious. The same sense of justice also applies to a community."

Living in harmony with nature, our ancestors perceived the significance of fire not only for their daily chores but also for their spirits. The fire that was continuously tended in places of worship unified our nation and strengthened its spirit. Fire was the mediator between gods and people, the guardian of our homes, and the keeper of moral integrity and virtue in every person. Guests attend our fire rites on Gediminas Tomb Hill from other Lithuanian towns and distant foreign countries. People, who seek to know the faith of their ancestors, as well as representatives of other religions and cultures, join us here. A virtuous, good-spirited person will welcome any well-wisher as a family member, regard individual differences as the strength of a community, and honour differing views while preserving and fostering his or her own values. A person who seeks harmony and is dedicated to creating and maintaining the idea of it will regard the whole of humanity as one unified family, standing in a circle around the sacred fire that warms and purifies us all. The members of such a family embrace one another with peace and kindness, regardless of cultural, racial, or religious differences, protect nature, our Mother Earth, honour their ancestors, and nurture all forms of life.

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TRADITIONAL PATHS TO ECOLOGICAL BALANCE

Dr Swati Amitkumar Desai

ABSTRACT

Ancient traditions across civilizations have long embodied a deep respect for nature, integrating environmental conservation into daily life and cultural practices. Traditional ecological knowledge, passed down through generations, reflects a profound understanding of natural systems and their sustainable use. Ancient agricultural systems, such as mixed cropping, water harvesting structures, and organic farming, illustrate how communities maintained soil fertility and ecological balance without harming the environment. Rituals, festivals, and spiritual beliefs further nurtured environmental wisdom and consciousness, fostering a sense of responsibility toward all living beings. This article explores the relevance of these age-old practices in addressing contemporary environmental challenges, emphasizing how the integration of traditional knowledge with modern approaches can lead to more sustainable resource management and ecological resilience. By including cross-cultural case studies from Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania, this study demonstrates the global universality of traditional ecological wisdom and argues for its integration into modern policy frameworks for sustainable development.

Keywords: Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Sustainable Agriculture, Water Conservation, Environmental Ethics, Indigenous Practices, Community Resilience, Climate Adaptation

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating pace of environmental degradation—manifested in deforestation, water scarcity, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and climate change—poses unprecedented challenges to ecological sustainability (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2022). While scientific and technological solutions have advanced rapidly, there is growing recognition of the wisdom embedded in pre-industrial societies that thrived in harmony with nature. Modern climate science, with its reliance on data models, increasingly acknowledges that resilience is not achieved through technology alone but also through cultural values and community-based practices (Pretty, 2002).

Ancient communities across the world—whether in India, Africa, South America, or Southeast Asia—developed nuanced systems of managing natural resources, guided by deep observation, oral traditions, and spiritual values (Berkes, 2012). These practices were not only sustainable but also adaptive to local ecological conditions. They provided mechanisms of resilience against

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droughts, floods, and ecological shocks—long before the emergence of formal environmental science.

This article seeks to understand these "traditional paths" to ecological balance and argue for their renewed relevance. By exploring agricultural practices, water conservation methods, cultural traditions, and governance systems, this paper highlights how these knowledge systems can supplement modern environmental strategies by offering community-based, time-tested approaches to conservation and sustainability.

TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE: A LIVING LEGACY

Definition and Nature

Traditional Ecological Knowledge refers to the cumulative body of knowledge, beliefs, and practices developed by indigenous and local communities that relate to the relationship of living beings with one another and with their environment (Gadgil, Berkes, & Folke, 1993). It is deeply rooted in culture, spirituality, and place-based observation, passed down orally through generations. Unlike modern science, which often isolates components of ecosystems, Traditional Ecological Knowledge is holistic, contextual, and adaptive.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge is transmitted intergenerationally through storytelling, rituals, and hands-on experience. Elders, spiritual leaders, and farmers act as knowledge bearers, often blending spiritual practices with ecological management. Importantly, Traditional Ecological Knowledge is embedded in the community's ethical and spiritual frameworks, making it an inseparable part of daily life rather than a specialized scientific discipline.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. Holistic Approach

Traditional Ecological Knowledge views ecosystems as interdependent networks where all species, from microorganisms to apex predators, share ecological roles. It recognizes that the health of soil, water, plants, and animals is interlinked (Pretty, 2002).

2. Cultural Integration

Knowledge is embedded in rituals, myths, taboos, and festivals, ensuring that ecological practices are reinforced by moral responsibility and community cohesion (Shiva, 2005).

3. Adaptive Management

Communities continuously monitor environmental changes, such as rainfall patterns, pest outbreaks, or soil conditions, and adjust agricultural and resource use accordingly (Altieri, 1995).

4. Intergenerational Transfer

Elders, healers, and spiritual leaders act as knowledge custodians, transmitting ecological insights orally and practically to younger generations (Berkes, 2012).

5. Ethical Stewardship

Traditional Ecological Knowledge emphasizes reciprocity, restraint, and reverence for nature, promoting conservation through shared values rather than imposed regulation.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Modern Science

Though once dismissed as anecdotal or unscientific, traditional ecological knowledge is increasingly valued in biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation, and ecosystem management.

Scientific methodologies are being enriched by traditional ecological knowledge, such as integrating Indigenous weather observations into climate models or using traditional fishing methods to prevent overharvesting. Cross-disciplinary collaborations between local knowledge systems and modern science are emerging as necessary tools for sustainable development (Berkes, 2012).

ANCIENT AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS

Mixed Cropping and Crop Rotation

Mixed cropping—such as planting legumes with cereals—reduces pest outbreaks, improves soil nutrients through nitrogen fixation, and ensures food security during unpredictable weather (Altieri, 1995). Crop rotation prevented soil nutrient depletion and broke pest cycles.

For example, in Uttarakhand, India, the *baranaja* system integrates more than 12 crops, including cereals, pulses, and vegetables, ensuring balanced nutrition and ecological resilience (Shiva, 2005). Similarly, the *Three Sisters* system of maize, beans, and squash in North America enhances ecological synergy: maize offers structural support, beans fix nitrogen, and squash shades the soil, reducing weed growth (Mt. Pleasant, 2006).

These practices prevent soil exhaustion, reduce dependence on chemical fertilisers, and enhance biodiversity. Seasonal crop rotation disrupts pest cycles and improves long-term soil health.

Water Harvesting and Irrigation Techniques

Traditional water management techniques were designed to conserve and distribute water efficiently:

- Johads in Rajasthan and stepwells in Gujarat capture monsoon rains and recharge groundwater supplies while preventing soil erosion (Kumar & Yashwant, 2010).
- Zings in Ladakh channel glacier meltwater to arid fields, demonstrating high-altitude water engineering adapted to extreme environments.
- The Phad irrigation system in Maharashtra distributes river water equitably through community-managed canals, with shared maintenance responsibilities.
- Qanats in Iran and Aflaj systems in Oman are underground water channels that reduce evaporation and efficiently transport water in arid regions (Lightfoot, 1996).

These decentralized systems reduced dependency on large-scale dams and preserved ecological flows.

Organic Soil Management

Traditional communities avoided chemical fertilizers by using organic inputs such as

- Cow dung manure and composting techniques that enhance soil microbial activity.
- Green manuring with leguminous crops that replenish nitrogen.
- Plant-based pesticides like neem extracts that protect crops without harming beneficial insects (Altieri, 1995).

This approach not only conserved soil health but also mitigated pollution, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and preserved biodiversity—benefits often overlooked in modern industrial farming (IPCC, 2022).

Rituals, Festivals, and Environmental Ethics

Religion, cosmology, and ethics were powerful tools for enforcing ecological responsibility.

Sacred Groves and Trees

Sacred groves are among the most widespread expressions of community-led conservation. These pockets of protected forest are regarded as divine spaces and are preserved for their ecological and spiritual value.

For example, in Kerala, India, *Sarpakavu* serpent groves harbor diverse species and are protected by religious taboos (Singh, 1994). Similarly, in Kenya, the *Kayas* forests of the Mijikenda community serve as ancestral sites where logging and hunting are prohibited (Githitho, 2005).

These groves act as biodiversity hotspots, gene banks, and water reservoirs, often serving as natural buffers against ecological degradation.

Nature-Based Festivals

Festivals reinforce ecological stewardship by aligning human activity with natural cycles:

- Pongal in Tamil Nadu honors the sun and rain for harvests, fostering gratitude toward agricultural ecosystems.
- Nag Panchami discourages killing snakes, preserving reptile populations essential for ecological balance.
- Hanami in Japan encourages seasonal reflection and appreciation of transient beauty, promoting ecological awareness.

Such rituals embed conservation ethics within cultural celebrations, making environmental responsibility a communal experience.

Taboos and Ethical Norms

Traditional societies often implemented taboos that mirrored modern environmental regulations:

- Prohibitions against fishing during breeding seasons preserved aquatic populations.
- Restrictions on cutting green trees ensured forest regeneration.
- Guidelines on wastewater disposal protected water bodies from contamination (Berkes, 2012).

These norms reflect a deep-seated ecological conscience, enforced through moral and spiritual persuasion rather than coercive laws.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Amazonian Terra Preta Soils (South America)

The Amazon basin has long been perceived as a "pristine wilderness, " but archaeological and soil studies challenge this myth. Indigenous communities, including the Kayapó and other groups, actively managed landscapes through controlled burning, agroforestry, and soil enrichment practices. One of the most striking outcomes is the creation of *terra preta* ("dark earth"), fertile soils formed by mixing charcoal (biochar), animal bones, food residues, and organic waste with the naturally poor Amazonian soils (Denevan, 1992).

Mechanism of Sustainability:

- Charcoal increases soil carbon retention and reduces nutrient leaching.
- Organic residues provide sustained nutrient availability.
- These soils support higher biodiversity and remain productive for centuries.

Contemporary Relevance:

Modern soil scientists study terra preta as a model for regenerative agriculture. The application of biochar is being tested worldwide to restore degraded lands and mitigate climate change by sequestering carbon (Lehmann et al., 2003).

Case Study 2: Balinese Subak Irrigation System (Southeast Asia)

The Subak system of Bali, Indonesia, illustrates the integration of culture, religion, and technology in resource management. Dating back to the 9th century, Subak is a cooperative irrigation system for rice cultivation, coordinated through water temples and guided by rituals honoring Dewi Danu, the goddess of water (Lansing, 2006).

Mechanism of Sustainability:

- Collective decision-making determines cropping patterns and pest management.
- Rotational water-sharing ensures equity across upstream and downstream farms.
- Ritual synchronization prevents pest outbreaks by ensuring simultaneous fallow periods.

Contemporary Relevance:

UNESCO recognized Subak as a World Heritage Site in 2012. Despite pressures from tourism and land-use change, Subak remains a model of community-based water governance. Modern water management projects in Southeast Asia now reference Subak for its balance of ecological, social, and spiritual dimensions.

Case Study 3: Sacred Groves of Meghalaya (India)

The Khasi and Garo communities of Meghalaya have preserved sacred groves (*law kyntang*) for centuries. These groves, some spanning several hectares, harbour endangered species such as medicinal herbs, orchids, and endemic fauna. Access is restricted, and activities like logging or hunting are prohibited under spiritual taboos (Khan, Khumbongmayum, & Tripathi, 2008).

Mechanism of Sustainability:

- Groves act as genetic reservoirs of biodiversity.
- They regulate local microclimates and water availability.
- Traditional healers use medicinal plants sustainably, ensuring regeneration.

Contemporary Relevance:

Indian environmental laws increasingly recognize community-conserved areas. The Forest Rights Act (2006) offers scope for empowering local custodians to manage such biodiversity hotspots. NGOs in Northeast India now collaborate with villagers to revive neglected groves as climate adaptation strategies.

Case Study 4: Phad Irrigation System of Maharashtra (India)

The Phad system, prevalent in northern Maharashtra, is a traditional community-managed

irrigation method. Villagers build diversion weirs (*bandharas*) to channel river water into canals. The entire system is maintained collectively, with strict rules about sharing and maintenance (Kumar & Yashwant, 2010).

Mechanism of Sustainability:

- Water distribution is equitable, preventing monopolization.
- Collective maintenance ensures resilience against droughts.
- Crop diversity sustains soil fertility and food security.

Contemporary Relevance:

The Phad model provides lessons for decentralized irrigation management in semi-arid regions. With India facing increasing disputes over river water, community-based systems like Phad offer low-cost, participatory alternatives.

Case Study 5: Aboriginal Fire Management in Australia (Oceania)

For over 50, 000 years, Aboriginal Australians have used fire as a landscape management tool. Known as "fire-stick farming, " this practice involves controlled, small-scale burns that prevent fuel buildup, regenerate grasslands, and encourage biodiversity (Gammage, 2011).

Mechanism of Sustainability:

- Creates mosaic habitats, increasing biodiversity.
- Reduces risk of catastrophic bushfires.
- Encourages regrowth of edible plants and improves hunting conditions.

Contemporary Relevance:

Australia has seen devastating bushfires in recent decades, exacerbated by climate change. Indigenous fire practices are now incorporated into fire management strategies in Northern Australia, with measurable reductions in wildfire severity and greenhouse gas emissions.

Case Study 6: Kayas of Coastal Kenya (Africa)

The Mijikenda people of Kenya protect *kaya* forests, considered ancestral homelands and sacred spaces. These forests harbor rare tree species, birds, and medicinal plants (Githitho, 2005).

Mechanism of Sustainability:

- Sacred prohibitions prevent logging and overexploitation.
- Community elders enforce conservation rules.
- Forests act as carbon sinks and protect against coastal erosion.

Contemporary Relevance:

The Kenyan government has recognized kaya forests as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. However, urbanization and charcoal demand threaten their survival. Conservation groups work with elders to integrate kaya principles into modern land-use planning.

Case Study 7: Inuit Knowledge in the Arctic (North America)

The Inuit communities of Canada and Greenland rely on traditional ecological knowledge for survival in harsh Arctic ecosystems. Knowledge of sea-ice conditions, animal migration, and weather patterns has been refined over millennia (Berkes, 2012).

Mechanism of Sustainability:

- Seasonal hunting practices prevent overharvesting.
- Navigation techniques reduce risks in fragile ice environments.
- Sharing of food strengthens community resilience.

Contemporary Relevance:

With Arctic ice melting due to climate change, Inuit knowledge is being integrated into scientific models for ice prediction and marine biodiversity conservation. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has cited Inuit contributions as vital for climate adaptation.

Case Study 8: Zuni Water Management in New Mexico (North America)

The Zuni people of the southwestern United States developed water management systems in arid landscapes through stone terraces, check dams, and waffle gardens. These structures conserved scarce rainfall, prevented erosion, and increased agricultural yields (Sandor, 1995).

Mechanism of Sustainability:

- Terracing slows water runoff and improves soil moisture.
- Waffle gardens maximize water retention for crops like maize and beans.
- Traditional religious ceremonies ensured respect for land and water.

Contemporary Relevance:

As drought intensifies in the American Southwest, researchers are studying Zuni practices for sustainable dryland farming and soil restoration.

Lessons for Contemporary Environmental Management

Ecological Restoration

Mixed cropping, organic inputs, and traditional water harvesting are proven methods to restore degraded ecosystems, reduce soil erosion, and improve climate resilience (Shiva, 2005).

Participatory Governance

Programs such as India's Joint Forest Management (JFM) succeed when community involvement and respect for local knowledge are prioritized over top-down regulation (Government of India, 2006).

Science-Tradition Integration

Blending traditional ecological knowledge with technological tools like GIS mapping and climate forecasting improves environmental planning, helping predict and mitigate risks (Berkes, 2012).

Legal Recognition

Frameworks like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and India's Forest Rights Act recognize the need to protect Indigenous and community-managed conservation areas (United Nations, 2007).

Climate Resilience

Traditional practices such as fire management, water-sharing, and seasonal cropping

schedules offer time-tested strategies for dealing with climate extremes like floods, droughts, and heatwaves (IPCC, 2022).

CHALLENGES TO INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

1. **Loss of Oral Traditions**

   As younger generations migrate to cities, traditional knowledge is at risk of being forgotten.

2. **Market Pressures**

   Industrial agriculture and global supply chains often undervalue community-based practices.

3. **Legal and Political Constraints**

   Many communities lack formal recognition, restricting their ability to conserve resources.

4. **Climate Change Uncertainty**

   Rapid environmental changes challenge the reliability of historical knowledge patterns.

5. **Cultural Appropriation**

   Commercial exploitation of traditional practices without community consent undermines ethical stewardship.

Addressing these challenges requires cross-sector collaboration, equitable policy frameworks, and long-term investments in community education and empowerment.

Toward a Hybrid Model of Sustainability

A synthesis of traditional ecological knowledge and modern scientific approaches offers pathways for ecological restoration, biodiversity protection, and climate adaptation:

- **Documentation and Archiving**

  Systematic recording of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in partnership with community elders can ensure intergenerational continuity.

- **Capacity Building**

  Training programs that integrate scientific tools with traditional methods can enhance local governance and environmental literacy.

- **Policy Integration**

  Governments should adopt participatory frameworks that recognize local institutions and cultural practices.

- **Ethical Partnerships**

  Researchers and conservationists must collaborate respectfully with Indigenous communities, ensuring benefit-sharing and cultural preservation.

- **Educational Outreach**

  Schools and universities can incorporate local ecological knowledge into curricula to nurture a sense of environmental responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Humanity faces an ecological crossroads where technological advancements alone cannot ensure sustainability. Traditional ecological knowledge, nurtured through centuries of

observation, spiritual reflection, and adaptive management, provides both ethical guidance and practical strategies for coexistence with nature.

Case studies from diverse continents reveal that ecological stewardship is deeply embedded in culture, spirituality, and community governance. These examples demonstrate that conservation is not merely a scientific problem but a moral and social imperative—one that thrives when communities are empowered to govern resources in ways aligned with their beliefs and lived experience.

The wisdom of the past is not obsolete but rather an essential component of present and future environmental planning. By fostering dialogue between modern science and traditional knowledge, societies can build resilient ecosystems, equitable governance structures, and a renewed sense of harmony with the natural world.

Embracing these traditional paths is not a retreat into nostalgia but a bold step toward a more sustainable, compassionate, and ecologically balanced future.

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SPIRITUAL HEALERS AND HERBAL WISDOM: THE ROLE OF BHAGAT TRADITION IN TRIBES OF GUJARAT

Dr. Mosam Trivedi

ABSTRACT

Among the tribal communities of Gujarat, health and illness are deeply interwoven with traditional belief systems, cultural practices, and ecological knowledge. This study explores the role of Bhagats, herbal practitioners who serve as traditional therapists in tribal societies. Known for their rich indigenous knowledge, Bhagats utilize forest-based, locally available medicinal plants and ritual practices to treat various physical and psychosocial ailments. Their methods are rooted in generations-old folklore medicine and domestic remedies passed down through oral traditions.

Through ethnographic fieldwork and case studies conducted in the districts of South Gujarat—including among the various communities of tribes—this research documents the healing practices, preparation of herbal medicines, and the socio-cultural role of Bhagats. The study also analyzes the persistence of traditional health systems amidst modern medical interventions, emphasising the community's continued faith in their indigenous healthcare practices.

Furthermore, this research highlights the importance of recognizing Bhagat knowledge as a form of intangible cultural heritage and intellectual property. It calls for the documentation, preservation, and integration of such knowledge into broader healthcare and development frameworks to promote culturally sensitive and sustainable health practices.

Keywords: Bhagat, tribal medicine, traditional healing, indigenous knowledge, herbal remedies, Gujarat tribes, folklore medicine, ethno medicine, cultural health practices, intellectual property

INTRODUCTION

India is home to a vast diversity of indigenous communities whose cultural and social systems are deeply embedded in their interaction with nature. With its rich cultural mosaic, it is home to more than 700 tribal communities that constitute nearly 8.6% of the nation's population (Census of India, 2011). These communities possess unique systems of knowledge and healing practices, deeply rooted in their ecological settings and socio-cultural structures. Often embodied by healers known variously as Bhagat, Ojha, Baiga, Muthidhar, Vaidya, or Gunia, depending on the region and tribe. These healers play a dual role—functioning not only as custodians of ethno medicinal knowledge but also as spiritual leaders who mediate between the human, natural, and supernatural worlds. An ethno-sociological approach to community healers allows for an exploration of how healing practices are not merely medical interventions but are also deeply linked to the social fabric, cosmology, kinship patterns, and ecological worldview of these communities.

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THE ROLE OF TRIBAL HEALERS

Bhagats, or traditional healers in India, occupy a highly respected position within their communities. They are often considered both medical practitioners and spiritual guides, addressing ailments that are believed to be caused by physical, social, or supernatural forces. Illnesses in tribes are frequently explained through concepts of imbalance—whether ecological, spiritual, or social. For instance, among the Baiga tribe of Madhya Pradesh, healers use forest-based herbs alongside ritualistic incantations, suggesting a holistic understanding of health that integrates both body and spirit (Elwin, 1991). Similarly, in the **Santhal and Munda tribes**, traditional healers rely on divination and herbal pharmacopoeia to diagnose and cure diseases (Mahapatra, 1992). Tribal healers serve as custodians of ethnomedicine, combining herbal knowledge with spiritual practices. Illness in many tribal communities is perceived as a disruption of the balance between the individual, community, and nature. Healers often attribute diseases to supernatural causes, such as the wrath of deities, spirits, or ancestral dissatisfaction, and thus employ ritualistic practices alongside herbal remedies (Pati & Dash, 2002). Their role extends beyond curing physical ailments; they are spiritual leaders, conflict mediators, and cultural preservers, ensuring the continuation of tribal identity.

In regions such as the Dang district of Gujarat, healers known as *Bhagats* use medicinal plants, roots, and decoctions to treat fever, skin infections, digestive problems, and snakebites. Similarly, among the Baiga tribe of Madhya Pradesh, healers integrate rituals and offerings to forest deities with the administration of herbal concoctions (Elwin, 1939). This integration of spirituality and medicine underscores the holistic worldview of communities, where health is inseparable from ecology, religion, and community.

Typology of traditional healers and practices

- **Herbalists (bhagat/bhopa/vaidya)**: use locally collected plants; prepare decoctions, pastes, and poultices.
- **Diviners/exorcists (ojha/devala)**: diagnose via oracle, dream, or ritual signs; address spirit afflictions.
- **Birth attendants (dais/sujadi)**: pregnancy, delivery, postpartum care, and ritual purification.
- **Bone setters (haddi-chikitsa)**: set fractures with massage, splints, and herbal poultices.
- **Spiritual specialists/ritual healers**: perform protective rites and collective ceremonies to restore social harmony.

Each form combines biomedical-like procedures and ritual logics; boundaries are fluid and vary across regions and tribes. In this study, we focus on herbalists who are doing plant-based healing practices.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF ETHNOMEDICINAL KNOWLEDGE

Despite their continued relevance, traditional healers face multiple challenges. The spread of biomedical healthcare systems, coupled with the erosion of forest resources and changing lifestyles, has diminished the reliance on traditional medicine in many areas. Moreover, younger generations are often less inclined to inherit this knowledge, perceiving it as outdated compared to modern science. Yet, research indicates that a significant proportion of tribal populations continue to prefer traditional healers, particularly in remote regions where state health infrastructure is inadequate (Sharma & Singh, 2015).

In recent years, there has also been a growing recognition of the intellectual property rights of these indigenous communities. Ethnobotanical studies have raised questions of biopiracy and the commercialisation of knowledge of tribes without adequate benefit-sharing. Thus, the ethnosociological study of traditional healers is not only about understanding cultural practices but also about addressing issues of justice, recognition, and sustainable integration with modern systems.

The ethnomedicinal knowledge of traditional healers is rich and diverse, shaped by centuries of experiential interaction with forests, flora, and fauna. Plants, roots, barks, and minerals form the basis of treatment, with healers often maintaining oral traditions for transmitting this knowledge across generations. Studies in Gujarat, Odisha, and Northeast India have documented the use of hundreds of medicinal plants for treating ailments ranging from common fevers to chronic illnesses such as arthritis, asthma, and skin diseases (Jain, 2010; Dash & Misra, 2012). Importantly, this knowledge is contextual, evolving with the ecology of the region and the cultural belief systems that define what constitutes "illness" and "cure."

THE BHAGAT TRADITION OF HEALING IN THE DANG DISTRICT

The Bhagat tradition represents a significant aspect of the tribal healthcare system in the Dang district of Gujarat. Bhagats are traditional healers who rely on experiential knowledge of medicinal plants, spiritual practices, and rituals to cure illnesses. Although they share the same way of life as ordinary tribes engaging in agriculture and participating in community activities, they occupy a unique social position as custodians of healing knowledge. Treating patients is not their primary occupation, as they earn their livelihood mainly through farming. Their healing practices are interwoven with community beliefs, faith in natural elements, and the socio-cultural environment of the community.

This study documents the practices of several Bhagats from the Dang district through case studies and observations, highlighting the ethno-sociological dimensions of their healing systems.

CASE STUDIES

1. Pawar Jamsubhai (82 years)

Jamsubhai, from Dhodi village, has been serving as a Bhagat, or traditional healer, for the past twenty-five years. Though illiterate, he possesses deep knowledge of medicinal plants acquired from his father. His healing rituals combine the use of both living and non-living elements of nature, always performed with specific methods and rituals. He maintains secrecy regarding medicinal knowledge, believing that disclosing it would reduce its effectiveness. He treats patients without expectation of payment, though he accepts offerings made voluntarily. Importantly, he is selective about passing on his knowledge, choosing to teach only the "right person" who demonstrates genuine commitment and responsibility.

2. Pawar Magubhai Dashrathbhai (65 years)

Magubhai, from a Bhil tribe of Hanwatchod village, is primarily a farmer with limited literacy. His medicines and medical knowledge were acquired from a close friend. He emphasizes that knowledge alone is insufficient; proper understanding of dosage and method of preparation is crucial. While he imposes no dietary restrictions on patients, he insists on fasting before collecting medicines from the forest. His practices show reverence for nature, as he avoids harming plants and sometimes uses dried herbs or animal products. He has begun passing his knowledge to his daughter-in-law, ensuring continuity of the traditional healing practice. He believes healing is a work of responsibility towards the community.

3. Pawar Mahadbhai Radkebhai (65 years)

A Konkani tribe from Malin village, Mahadbhai, has studied up to the fifth standard and has worked as an herbalist for thirty years. His treatments combine medicinal preparations with prayers or mantras, reflecting the integration of spiritual belief with healing practice. He keeps records of medicinal plants and diagnoses illnesses before collecting specific herbs. Some plants are dried and preserved for future use, taking special care to maintain their efficacy.

4. Waghmare Raijibhai Gamjibhai (62 years)

Raijibhai, a Bhil from Bhadarpada, has been practicing as a healer for thirteen years. He treats patients as a service but accepts voluntary compensation, often in money or grains. He warns that excessive use of medicinal plants can be harmful, and for curing some serious illnesses, he used animals or birds as part of the treatments. His practice illustrates the balance between compassion, ritual, and pragmatic use of resources.

5. Pawar Latebhai Labhubhai (68 years)

Latebhai, from Sarwar village, inherited his knowledge from his father. He is cautious in transmitting this wisdom, refusing to teach individuals who may misuse it. His treatments often use the bark, leaves, and roots of trees. He interprets prolonged illness as a sign of divine displeasure or the effect of magical forces. He avoids alcohol while preparing medicine.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE BHAGAT TRADITION

The case studies reveal several important social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of the Bhagat tradition of the Dang District. This observation reflects the relationship between the tribal community and forest. We also understand the ecological and community practices of the tribe.

1. **Transmission of Knowledge** – Healing knowledge is not strictly hereditary; anyone can become a Bhagat if they show dedication and moral responsibility towards a community. Knowledge is imparted gradually, often beginning with learning this knowledge with ritual initiation on a full moon day, where the apprentice assists the Bhagat.
2. **Ritual Purity and Social Taboos** – Bhagats observe certain restrictions, such as avoiding contact with households that have recently experienced birth or death. While not bound by strict religious taboos, they consider illness to be linked with divine displeasure or magical forces. They avoid alcohol while making medicine.
3. **Respect for Nature**—Traditional healers hold a sacred relationship with nature. They never pluck flowers, go barefoot when collecting plants, and avoid using tools like axes to harvest bark or roots. Instead, sharp stones are used, and specific rituals, such as avoiding shadows falling on plants, ensure respect for natural elements. In that way, they are establishing examples of sustainable forest practices.
4. **Timing and Methods of Collection** – Medicinal plants are collected only at specific times, usually in the morning after sunrise. Sunset harvesting is prohibited. Bark is always removed from bottom to top and preserved in leaves, particularly leaves of the kesuda tree.
5. Community-Centred **Healing**—Healing is seen as a service and responsibility, not a profession. While patients may voluntarily offer grains or money, Bhagats primarily rely on farming for livelihood. A strong belief persists that medicines administered by a healer of the same community are more effective.
6. **Integration of Ritual and Medicine** – Healing combines herbal preparations with mantras, prayers, and symbolic rituals, reflecting the integration of spiritual belief systems with physical

treatments. Mantras are recited in tribal dialects, and rituals like beating a thali under the full moon reinforce communal and spiritual dimensions of healing.

7. **Secrecy and Sacred Knowledge**—Medicinal knowledge is considered mysterious and sacred. Both methods of preparation and associated rituals are kept secret, shared only with trusted community members to prevent misuse of knowledge.

CHALLENGES AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Despite their cultural and therapeutic significance, traditional healers face marginalization due to the dominance of biomedical healthcare and state-led health policies. Modernization, deforestation, and youth migration have led to a decline in the transmission of healing knowledge. Moreover, the lack of formal recognition and integration into public health systems has diminished their social status (Ravi Shankar & Shukla, 2007). So it's a challenge to preserve the knowledge of the community.

However, tribal healers continue to play a vital role, particularly in remote areas where access to modern healthcare is limited. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) has emphasized the importance of traditional medicine in primary healthcare, aligning with India's policy interest in documenting and integrating indigenous practices through institutions like the Ministry of AYUSH.

CONCLUSION

The Bhagat tradition in the Dang district illustrates a complex interplay of ecological knowledge, spirituality, and social values. These healers not only provide healthcare but also reinforce the cultural identity and cohesion of their communities. Their practices highlight the deep respect towards nature, the ethical responsibility attached to healing, and the integration of faith with medicine. From an ethno-sociological perspective, the traditional healers reflect how indigenous knowledge systems are sustained through community trust, ritualised practices, and intergenerational transmission, even as modern healthcare systems expand into tribal regions. They preserve their ancestral knowledge through oral tradition and practice for the betterment and healing of their community.

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DHYANA, DHRITI & PERSISTENCE: SOCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS OF SELF-RELIANT INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The financial and political perspective of the study of self-reliant India (Atmanirbhar Bharat) has largely been explored to date. Though the social and intellectual establishments associated with it remain untouched. For this purpose, this paper points towards the three categories of values of Indian philosophy, which are Dhyana (reflective mindfulness), Dhriti (grit), and Dhairya (patience), in the form of essential intrinsic competencies in the nation-building process and viable progression. It can prominently be drawn from the propitious writings, such as the Bhagavad Gita and Yoga Sutras; the notion propounded in it does not merely exhibit the ethical path but the feasible tactics for the advancement of a single person and collective versatility. This paper embodies a subjective expository approach with dissecting values through consecrated illustrations and case studies collected from credible sources such as government officials, repositories, and obliging social exercises. It tends to focus on how these imperishable skills post-synchronising into contemporary administration, directives, and citizen enrichment can foster mental attributes, clear and rational action, and prolonged obligations, which are the prominent hallmarks for attaining actual self-reliance.

This research work also aims to propose a prospective future intrigue investigation on Dhyana and Dhriti, including youth progression, perspective regulation, and emotional welfare, based on experimental research methodology. In the process, it highlights the urge for the revival of civilizational intelligence and bridging the connection between traditional knowledge and the advanced necessities of modern society.

Keywords: Dhyana, Dhairya, Dhriti, Self-reliance.

INTRODUCTION

The vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, or self-reliant India, has gained substantial momentum in recent years, especially under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The primary objectives of this philosophy include achieving economic independence, promoting local production, and reducing reliance on imports. However, it is important to note that the socio-cultural and intellectual aspects that contribute to the establishment of a genuinely self-reliant society have not been adequately addressed, even though considerable emphasis has been placed on the political and economic structures and policies that support this vision. Self-reliance transcends mere financial metrics; it embodies a psychological, social, and philosophical framework that encourages resilience and fosters sustainable development (Bhattacharya, 2021).

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This paper asserts that fundamental Indian philosophical principles—namely Dhyana (reflective mindfulness), Dhriti (grit), and Dhairya (patience)—are essential intrinsic competencies necessary for the comprehensive achievement of Atmanirbhar Bharat. These principles, profoundly embedded in India's civilizational ethos, provide direction not only for personal transformation but also for the advancement of society as a whole (Radhakrishnan, 1953).

The objective and purpose of this study have been illustrated in some points as follows:

1. To investigate the philosophical foundations of Dhyana, Dhriti, and Dhairya as presented in classical Indian literature.
2. To assess their significance and implementation in modern nation-building and policy development.
3. To review case studies and governmental programs that reflect these principles.
4. To suggest potential research directions centred on youth development, policy formulation, and emotional health.

LITERATURE REVIEW;

The Concept of Atmanirbhar Bharat:

Atmanirbhar Bharat symbolises India's goal of achieving economic independence. However, scholars such as Bhattacharya (2021) contend that genuine self-reliance involves more than just economic power; it also encompasses social resilience and intellectual independence. While the government's policy documents emphasise infrastructural growth and technological advancements, they frequently overlook the cultural and philosophical aspects.

Indian Philosophy and Values:

Indian philosophy, with its ancient heritage spanning thousands of years, provides a deep comprehension of human behaviour and social structures. The Bhagavad Gita and the Yoga Sutras have been thoroughly examined for their moral and spiritual teachings. Academics like Radhakrishnan (1953) and Vivekananda (1896) highlight the significance of these texts in contemporary society, stressing values such as mindfulness, perseverance, and patience as universal tenets.

Dhyana: Reflective Mindfulness:

Dhyana, also known as meditation, represents a state of concentrated contemplation that results in clarity and self-awareness (Iyengar, 1993). Contemporary psychology acknowledges mindfulness as essential for emotional regulation and cognitive performance (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Within the Indian framework, Dhyana transcends mere meditative practice; it serves as a social instrument that promotes reflective governance and informed decision-making. In the Bhagavad Gita (6.10-11), Krishna instructs Arjuna on the importance of meditation, which highlights Dhyana as a path to mental equilibrium and clarity, stating:

"Let the yogi constantly keep the mind fixed on Me in Yoga, with mind and intellect controlled, free from desire and possessiveness." (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1944)

Dhriti: Grit and Determination:

Dhriti represents resilience and determination—the mental strength necessary to surmount challenges. Duckworth's (2016) research on grit corresponds with this idea, underscoring perseverance as a key indicator of achievement. Indian epics and scriptures often underscore the significance of Dhriti in facing difficulties. For example, in the Bhagavad Gita (2.14), the fleeting

nature of joy and sorrow is elucidated to promote endurance:

O son of Kunti, the non-permanent appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception, O scion of Bharata, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1944).

This verse encapsulates the core of Dhriti as the ability to endure through varying situations.

Dhairya: Patience and Courage:

Dhairya embodies the quality of patience intertwined with brave perseverance, which is essential for the sustained development of a nation. Patience is a commendable trait frequently praised in the Bhagavad Gita, particularly regarding the importance of confronting difficulties without yielding to hopelessness. The Gita (2.47) suggests to Dhairya the importance of sustaining patience and dedication without becoming discouraged by results."You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction" (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1944).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a subjective expository methodology, integrating classical philosophical texts with modern case studies and policy evaluations. The primary sources consist of translations of the Bhagavad Gita (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1944) and the Yoga Sutras (Iyengar, 1993), while secondary information is sourced from government publications, academic journals, and recorded social programs. The case studies concentrate on governmental initiatives such as Skill India, Digital India, and programs aimed at enhancing mental health awareness, demonstrating how the core principles of Dhyana, Dhriti, and Dhairya contribute to their effectiveness.

Alongside theoretical analysis, a small-scale field component was implemented to grasp the practical significance of these philosophical concepts within modern educational and administrative settings. Informal discussions and brief interviews were held with postgraduate students and administrative trainees from Gujarat, concentrating on the perceptions and practices of mindfulness (Dhyana), perseverance (Dhriti), and patience (Dhairya) in their everyday lives. Although modest in scope, this empirical data offered important insights into the ways internal virtues can affect external performance, thereby connecting classical theory with contemporary application.

DISCUSSION

Philosophical Insights into Nation-Building:

The teachings of the Bhagavad Gita highlight the importance of performing actions without attachment and sustaining equanimity in the face of both success and failure (Gita 2.47) (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1944). This principle aligns with Dhriti and Dhairya, which promote continuous effort and patience in the pursuit of nation-building initiatives. Dhyana enhances clear and rational decision-making by cultivating mindfulness and self-awareness among both leaders and citizens (Iyengar, 1993).

Contemporary Governance and Values Integration:

Incorporating these inherent values into governance can improve the effectiveness of policies. For example, mindfulness training for civil servants has demonstrated encouraging outcomes in alleviating stress and enhancing decision-making (Shapiro et al., 2005). Additionally, initiatives that promote resilience in young people through educational reforms are in line with Dhriti, equipping

the upcoming generation to tackle socio-economic challenges (Duckworth, 2016).

Fieldwork Analysis

The qualitative insights obtained from limited field interactions serve to enhance the theoretical and textual analysis detailed in the methodology. To assess the current significance of Dhyana (reflective mindfulness), Dhriti (grit), and Dhairya (patience), informal field observations and discussions were conducted with a small group of postgraduate students and administrative trainees in Gujarat. The objective was not to perform a large-scale survey but to gain an understanding of how these philosophical attributes are perceived and practised in real-world contexts related to education, governance, and personal development. The field data uncovered several significant patterns:

Dhyana (Reflective Mindfulness):

A number of participants indicated that mindful reflection—through brief meditation, journaling, or quiet contemplation—assisted them in maintaining focus and emotional equilibrium during times of academic or administrative stress. This aligns with the interpretative argument that Dhyana enhances cognitive clarity and self-regulation, which are essential qualities for rational decision-making in governance and public service.

Dhriti (Grit and Perseverance):

Many respondents, especially administrative trainees, linked perseverance with the capacity to complete long-term tasks despite limited resources or bureaucratic obstacles. Their insights reinforced the notion that Dhriti embodies mental endurance—a recurring strength in India's policy initiatives such as Skill India and Digital India, where sustained effort is crucial for success.

Dhairya (Patience and Composure):

Several participants remarked that patience serves a stabilising function in managing delayed outcomes and public expectations. They viewed Dhairya not as passive waiting but as an active form of composure that mitigates impulsive reactions, thereby promoting balanced decision-making and teamwork.Despite its limited scope, these field insights validate the theoretical assertion that the internal development of mindfulness, perseverance, and patience directly enhances external frameworks of nation-building. The experiences of the participants indicate that when individuals intentionally implement these principles in their daily work and learning settings, there is a corresponding improvement in collective efficiency and psychological resilience. Consequently, the small-scale field engagement provided empirical support to the textual analysis, demonstrating that the principles derived from classical Indian philosophy are evident in contemporary contexts of education and administration. Although broader quantitative validation presents an opportunity for future research, this preliminary field exploration affirms the significance of Dhyana, Dhriti, and Dhairya as lived values that contribute to the realisation of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

CASE STUDIES

1. **Skill India Mission:** Field data and secondary reports together illustrate how Dhriti is realised through ongoing skill enhancement. Numerous participants from the student demographic linked this mission to a mindset of resilience and adaptability in learning. Official evaluation data (Government of India, 2022) reveals that programs that included motivational and resilience-building components achieved a 20% higher completion rate, corroborating field feedback regarding perseverance leading to tangible outcomes.

2. **2. Digital India Campaign:** Administrative trainees who were interviewed emphasised that swift technological changes necessitate adaptability and reflective concentration—traits associated with Dhyana. Their practical experiences resonated with the findings from NASSCOM (2021), which indicated that mindfulness-focused digital learning settings enhanced cognitive engagement and diminished fatigue. Consequently, mindfulness emerges not only as a personal quality but also as a valuable asset in the realm of digital governance.
3. **3. Mental Health Awareness Initiatives:** Both students and officials recognised Dhairya as crucial for emotional resilience in the face of demanding workloads and societal pressures. Their narratives are consistent with data from the National Mental Health Programme (2018), which showed that ongoing mindfulness-based sessions resulted in a 30% decrease in reported stress levels. Collectively, these insights indicate that patience and emotional equilibrium are quantifiable factors influencing well-being and job performance.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite the significant potential these values hold, challenges persist, including the commercialisation of mindfulness practices, the superficial adoption of philosophical concepts, and the gap between traditional knowledge and modern application. While Dhyana, Dhriti, and Dhairya are increasingly cited in wellness programs and leadership training, their deeper ethical and transformative dimensions are frequently overlooked. The findings from the field further underscore practical deficiencies. Although most participants acknowledged the importance of mindfulness (Dhyana) and perseverance (Dhriti) in their personal and academic endeavours, few had access to structured platforms for developing these skills. Administrative trainees indicated that time limitations and institutional rigidity often restricted opportunities for practising reflective decision-making or stress management. This suggests that the conversion of philosophical virtues into actionable policies and training frameworks remains insufficient. Additionally, there is a tendency to regard mindfulness as merely an individual coping strategy rather than as a collective civic virtue vital for responsive governance. Addressing this conceptual divide requires deliberate educational and policy reforms that incorporate these principles into curricula, administrative training, and community initiatives. There are opportunities to create evidence-based models that link traditional wisdom with measurable outcomes—such as increased productivity, improved emotional resilience, and enhanced leadership quality. By pursuing this approach, India can utilise its civilizational heritage not only as cultural capital but also as a strategic asset for nation-building and sustainable governance (Bhattacharya, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The realisation of Atmanirbhar Bharat requires more than just economic and political strategies; it demands a revival of intrinsic human capabilities rooted in India's civilizational philosophy. Dhyana, Dhriti, and Dhairya embody timeless principles that transcend personal virtues—they provide a practical basis for mental resilience, rational governance, and sustained collective effort. The field-based observations conducted in this study reinforce the ongoing significance of these values in modern contexts. Postgraduate students and administrative trainees who participated in reflective or mindful practices (Dhyana) displayed enhanced emotional stability and concentration; those who prioritised perseverance (Dhriti) reported increased motivation and persistence in long-term endeavours; and participants who actively practised patience (Dhairya) exhibited composure in challenging institutional environments. These lived experiences validate the theoretical assertion that internal discipline and self-awareness are directly linked to effective governance and social

harmony. By aligning such civilizational insights with contemporary developmental needs, India can foster a genuinely self-sufficient and resilient society. The findings indicate that philosophical values, when internalised as behavioural competencies, can act as the psychological foundation for nation-building. This research thus encourages further empirical investigations—including experimental studies on mindfulness training (Dhyana) and cognitive development (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), longitudinal research on grit (Dhriti) and professional success (Duckworth, 2016), and frameworks that incorporate patience (Dhairya) for emotional well-being and administrative effectiveness.

Policy assessments must also consider the practicality of integrating such civilizational wisdom into governance frameworks and educational programs. It is only through the alignment of India's intellectual legacy with contemporary administrative advancements that the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat can be achieved—a vision that embodies self-reliance not only in production but also in intention, determination, and tranquillity.

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ANCIENT TRADITIONS AND THEIR WORLD VIEW: TWO FUNDAMENTAL STREAMS OF LIFE PHILOSOPHY—EASTERN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

Shri Manoj Kumar Dhurve
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ABSTRACT

The human journey to understand the deeper mysteries of life is as old as civilization. In this journey, philosophy has always played the role of a guide, leading us to contemplate existence, the universe and our place in it. This study examines two great world-views of ancient traditions that have shaped human consciousness for centuries: the spiritual depth of the East and the rational structures of the West. The study aims to focus on the fundamental principles of life, purposes, ideological concepts which clarify that these ideologies are not merely religious beliefs but comprehensive frameworks for understanding life, the universe, and existence. In this study eastern ideology includes the philosophical roots of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism where the purpose of life is (Purushaartha - Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha) on the other hand, western ideology is viewed from the perspective of Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), which are based on the concepts of monotheism, linear time, divine will and atonement for sins. This is descriptive study and various available literatures are opted for the study.

Keywords: Eastern philosophy, Western Philosophy, World View, Reincarnation, Moksha.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophical world views are an essential part of the human civilization, providing a fundamental basis for understanding life and the universe. It is not just intellectual exercises. Its motivated human beings to learn about existence, the universe, and themselves and having fundamental and profound effects on both individuals and societies. At the individual level, its shape our values, morality, and decision-making process while at the societal level its influence culture, law, and social structures. It is important to understand that these world views are not limited to religious beliefs. It's an important part of many other ideologies in broader frameworks to understand life, universe, and their existence. Its encompasses non-religious views such as materialism, idealism, or existentialism. Each world view helps us understand reality, knowledge acquisition and meaningful life. Its provide direction to human existence, making them extremely

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important as individual in collective lives. The philosophical view of the world can generally be divided into two basic streams: eastern philosophy and western philosophy. Eastern philosophies like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism emerged in Bharat where God described in the great texts of Sanskrit as a singular being whose names and forms can be many and innumerable and he/she is eternally living, conscious and blissful. No mourning day is observed here; rather all festivals are symbols of celebration. This ideologies share many fundamental and basic theoretical elements that makes them different from the western view point. The fundamental and theoretical aspects of this ideology include the source of creation, theory of karma, theory of reincarnation, concept of heaven, hell and salvation, merit and demerit, attainment of heavenly realms and their changes according to time, place and circumstances towards God

The basic principle of this ideology is karma and reincarnation, where the soul leaves one body and takes another body. Eastern philosophy lays its full emphasis on knowing and realizing the truth. It is not that you can believe something just because God or one of his messengers says it. It's an inner journey that developed by **"साधना"** methods like yoga and meditation. The aim of these practices is **'चित्त वृत्तिनिरोध'** (to calm or eradicate the tendencies of the mind, etc.), through which a person experiences his real and pure **"ब्रह्मा"** form. This inner realization helps to understand the purpose of life. Apart from this, the eastern ideology also believes that there can be many ways to reach the truth. In the famous statement of the **"ऋग्वेद"** is **"एकं सत्यं बहुधा वदन्ति विप्राः"** (There is only one truth, but the wise call it in many ways) is an example of this principle. In eastern philosophy, God is known by many forms including Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, because all of them represent different aspects of the same ultimate truth. This diversity reflects different dimensions of understanding life and the universe. On the other hand the basis of western ideology is monotheism (one and only God and no one else) and follow linear timeline, which comes from Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). This ideology also says that one God created this world and sent message through angels which is mandatory for everyone to follow. Its believe in one and only God, who created the universe and God is source of all rules and moral principles. For example, the story of the creation of the universe is told in the book of Genesis in the Bible, in which God created the world in six days. This reflects the central role of God in Western philosophy and shaped a large part of western civilization. Western philosophy also based on a linear timeline, with a definite beginning (creation) and a definite end (dissolution).It is believed that a person gets only one life, and after death the soul has to face the Last Judgment based on which it gets heaven or hell. This decision of heaven or hell is based on God's decision and not on deeds as before. Michelangelo's famous painting 'The Last Judgment' depicts this concept, where Jesus Christ is judging the dead people. In western ideology, the purpose of life is to follow God's will and live life according to the rules set by him. Knowledge and truth are often obtained through external sources and the purpose of moral life is to please God. This philosophy gives importance to belief and not to knowing. It is ultimate duty to believe what God has told you through angels, otherwise God can send you to hell. This is probably talked of fearing famous about God. In western philosophy, there is a strong emphasis on metaphysics and epistemology, where one attempts to understand the external world through logic and the scientific method. This approach focuses on establishing control over and improving the external world. While Eastern philosophies often emphasize the journey to the inner and the infinite, western philosophies focus more on a linear timeline and an external, creator God. These differences affect not only their religious and philosophical doctrines, but also the arts, culture, laws, and social structures of the respective societies. The influence of eastern philosophy led to the development of a holistic and harmonious society in Bharat and other parts of Asia, where the individual is seen as an integral part of the universe. In contrast the influence of

western philosophy led to the development of a more individualistic and analytical society, where the individual's independence and ability establish control over the external world.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF EASTERN THOUGHT

The Eastern school of thought presents a deep and integrated view of life and the universe. This school of thought takes the individual journey of self-realization and realization of inner peace. The main pillars of which are the following:

अद्वैत: **Oneness of Ultimate Reality:** This is the most fundamental principle of this philosophy. अद्वैत means 'not two, ' i.e. the ultimate reality is not two, but one. This principle holds that everything that exists in the universe has emerged from the same ultimate truth, called ब्रह्म. Your individual soul आत्मा is not a separate entity but a small part of the ब्रह्म. It states that there is no difference between the individual and the ultimate truth; we all are deeply connected to each other and the entire universe. This relationship is expressed in the Mahavakya of the Upanishad:

"अहम् ब्रह्मास्मि" (मैं ब्रह्म हूँ।)

Law of Karma: This law applies equally to humans, gods, demons, and incarnations of God. This shows its equality and scientific nature. It is a universal law. According to it, every action has a result, whether it is good or bad. The circumstances of your present life are the result of your past karmas, and your actions today will shape your future. This law inspires us to take responsibility for our actions, as we are the creators of our own destiny.

Emphasis on experience: The Indian view does not end with mere acceptance or strict adherence to the injunctions of the scriptures, nor does it advise to be afraid of God, but it says to experience it yourself and then accept the truth. The world is blissful: The basis of the origin of this universe is ब्रह्म, and ब्रह्म is in सच्चिदानंद, i.e., ब्रह्म nature is true consciousness and bliss, so the universe created by him is also naturally a wave of bliss and is blissful. Therefore, there is no mourning in Eastern philosophy; all celebrations are joyful.

Dharma: The word "dharma" is a Sanskrit word that literally means "to hold." It has other meanings, which include 'holding, ' 'quality, ' 'duty, ' 'rule, ' and 'spiritual path.' It is used to mean the nature of a person or thing and moral and social duties. Its universally accepted meaning is that you should fulfill the responsibility or duty you have taken well. For example, it is the Dharma, or duty, of a teacher to educate the students well. "Duty" is a synonym of "Dharma." Dharma is that which elevates you above your present condition. It takes you towards progress. It depends on the place, time, and situation as to what Dharma will be.

Offering to ancestors: The Indian system of thought believes that a person can send whatever he wants through his emotions to his ancestors who have died and who have moved to another world, material or merits from his side, which leads to their welfare. This is known as offering to ancestors.

Moksha/Nirvana: Moksha is the ultimate and supreme goal of life. It is connected with the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. It is the goal of knowing one's true spiritual identity by going beyond the ephemeral nature of the material world. In Hindu cosmology, a kalpa represents one day in the life of Brahma, which is equivalent to 4.32 billion human years. This immense period of time is calculated in two primary ways. The first method breaks down a kalpa into 14 manvantaras and 15 sandhikalas. Each manvantara lasts 306, 720, 000 years, and the 14 manvantaras sum up to 4, 294, 080, 000 years. The 15 sandhikalas, which are transitional periods of 1, 728, 000 years each, add another 25, 920, 000 years. Combining these two figures yields the total kalpa duration of 4, 320, 000, 000 years. Alternatively, a kalpa is also equal to 1, 000 mahayugas (also called a chaturyuga). A single mahayuga,

a cycle of four yugas (Satya, Treta, Dvapara, and Kali), is 4, 320, 000 years long. Multiplying this by 1, 000 gives the same total duration of 4, 320, 000, 000 years, confirming the consistent nature of the calculation. This confirms that the two methods of calculation yield the same result for the duration of a kalpa. This verse clearly states the cycle of creation and destruction, where at the end of one day of Brahma all living entities dissolve into Brahma and are reborn the next day. This vast concept of cosmic time is elaborated in Vishnu Purana also, where a kalpa is explained as one day of Brahma.

चतुर्युगसहस्राणि पूर्वं पुण्यैः कृतं युगम्।

एतदेकं ब्रह्मणो दिनं तेनैव तावती रात्रिः॥ (विष्णु पुराण 1.3.2)

Meaning: A thousand cycles of the four yugas make up one day of Brahma, and equally long is his one night.

WESTERN IDEOLOGY—JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND ISLAMIC VIEWPOINTS

The Western ideology originates from the Jewish religion and is deeply rooted in Christianity and Islam, often called Abrahamic religions. These religions have certain fundamental beliefs and principles in common that have formed the basis of Western culture, morality, and civilization. This ideology believes that there is only one supreme God, the creator and ruler of the universe. God is not a part of nature but is beyond and distinct from it. For example, the Bible says, "I am your God, and there is no other God but me." Similarly, the Quran refers to Allah as "unique" (ahad). These beliefs show that God is one and cannot be compared to anyone. The Western ideology views time as a straight line, with a clear beginning (the creation of the world) and a definite end (the Day of Judgment or the Last Judgment). It places importance on historical events and believes that human history is a purposeful journey moving towards a definite goal. Giving an example in Christianity, the birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ are considered the defining events of history. Similarly, in Islam, the Day of Judgment is considered the final stop of this linear time. This ideology does not believe in reincarnation, as every soul gets only one life. The Western ideology has sent its commandments and laws (such as the Bible, Quran, and Torah) through prophets (such as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad) to guide mankind. Following these commandments is the central basis of their religious life. It is believed that understanding God's will and living life accordingly is the path to heaven or hell. It is believed that the entire human race has a sinful nature due to the first sin of Adam and Eve. Human beings are alienated from God by their natural nature. However, God opened a way out of it by the grace. In Christianity, this was made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who took the sins of mankind upon himself. In Islam and Judaism too, salvation from sins is possible through repentance and God's mercy. The concept of divine justice states that the good and bad deeds done in this life will be accounted for in the final judgment. Those who lived a righteous life and followed God's commandments will be rewarded with heaven, while those who sinned will be punished with hell. This idea motivates people to live a righteous life and be morally responsible. In summary, the main purpose of this ideology of life is to remain devoted to God. To live life according to the divine will, follow the rules given in religious texts, maintain the principles of truth, justice, and morality in one's personal life and society, and get a place in heaven or hell on the day of final judgment. They do not believe in reincarnation. It is believed that each soul gets only one life, and the deeds towards God in this life determine its final fate. After death, the soul may have to wait till the day of final judgment or go directly to heaven or hell.

RELEVANCE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Both Western and Eastern philosophies have their own relevance and limitations. Both Western and Eastern philosophies deal with these discoveries in different ways. In Western philosophy,

especially in Abrahamic religions, creation is believed to have begun at a fixed time. The Big Bang theory, which suggests a fixed beginning of the universe, is largely consistent with this concept of linear creation. For example, the story of 'Genesis' in Christianity, which states that God created the world in six days, describes a linear and fixed beginning. It is important to note that the scientific approach is based on natural laws, while the religious approach is based on the direct intervention of God. Due to this, conflicts may arise in some areas, such as in the debate of evolution vs. creationism. Eastern philosophies, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, view the universe as cyclical, with cycles of creation and destruction. This concept has interesting parallels with theories of quantum physics and some modern cosmology. For example, in quantum mechanics, particles can be in multiple places at the same time and remain connected even when far apart. This idea is consistent with the concept of oneness present in Eastern philosophy, where everything is considered interconnected. In the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna refers to himself as Brahman and says, **"I am all, and all is in me, "** which reflects this sense of oneness. The idea that our existence is not separate but part of a vast cosmic consciousness is consistent with some aspects of modern science.

CONCLUSION

Eastern and Western philosophies offer two distinct paths for understanding life, the universe, and existence. Eastern thought, encompassing traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, is characterized by a cyclical view of time and creation. In this worldview, the universe is continuously created and destroyed in endless cycles, with Brahman as the ultimate reality present in every part of creation. The primary goal of moksha is to come on the path of self-realization. Eastern philosophy emphasizes concepts like the law of karma, where actions determine future circumstances, and reincarnation, where the soul moves from one body to another. In contrast, Western ideology, rooted in Abrahamic religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, views time as a linear progression with a definitive beginning and end. This perspective is based on the belief in a single, transcendent God who created the universe but is distinct from it. The purpose of life is to follow God's will and commandments to achieve eternal life in heaven after death. Unlike Eastern philosophy, this ideology does not believe in reincarnation, asserting that each person gets only one life, and their deeds determine their final fate at the Last Judgment. Both philosophies have unique strengths and values. The Eastern approach provides a path toward inner peace and self-discovery, while the Western approach encourages social justice and collective action. Both ideologies continue to be relevant and influence art, culture, and social structures in their respective societies.

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FAMILY SYSTEM IN SLAVIC CULTURES: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Mikołaj Jarmakowski

Slavs are in the Indo-European family of culture and language.

The study of kinship systems, social structure and systems of family organisation is one of the main areas of interest in cultural anthropology and related disciplines, in particular social history and socially oriented archaeology. The results of research on family systems are widely applicable to other areas of research on culture. This is due to the many important social functions of the family as the basic element of the social system (Gell 2020). This applies both to research into the so-called sociomorphic system of culture (understanding culture through the prism of the social phenomena that constitute it and its structure) and to research into spiritual culture. In the latter case, the numerous rituals, beliefs, and 'symbolic' practices constitute the spiritual essence of culture and the understanding of humanity found within it. Being a human, being a human specific for concrete culture can be understood through identity and relation, through being-in-the-world - towards oneself and towards all others (Wagner 1981, Descolla 2013). The basis of being understood in this way (which, after all, is always of interest to anthropologists and other researchers) is man's fundamental level of knowledge about the world: beliefs, convictions, feelings and the accompanying practices through which spirituality can be seen.

This article is an introduction to the study of Slavic family systems. It is not analytical but purely presentational in its nature. We aim to briefly review previous research and to show the perspectives in which the concepts and phenomena of the family have been studied in relation to Slavic cultures and societies. An important place in the article is given to the presentation of ethnographic materials as a direct source of the cultural perceptions and practices studied.

The Slavs are part of the Indo-European cultural and linguistic family. Their languages are most similar to the Baltic languages, with which they once formed a pre-Balto-Slavic community. According to the latest archaeological and genetic knowledge, the ethnogenesis of the Slavs most likely took place in the region now known as Polesie (the borderland between modern Belarus and Ukraine). This was a centuries-long process, during which successive layers of transformation and influence were superimposed on the crystallising Proto-Slavic community (Gołąb 1992). The influence of the Iranian people (the Scythians), who contributed to the emergence of new forms of religious life among the Proto-Slavs, is considered to be particularly important around the 5th century BC (Gołąb 1975; Трубачев 2003: 25-103; Топоров 1989; Jarmoszko 2011). Around the 6th century AD. Slavs settled in wide areas of central and eastern Europe. The formation of the first states also takes place at this time.

This period was special from a sociomorphic point of view. Reconstructed with the help of linguistic and historical-comparative studies, the Proto-Slavic social system was tribal and segmental in nature. The community was formed by large families (ps. **rodъ*[1]) of around 70

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people and living in a fairly compact area. Several such large families formed a single tribal group, usually naming themselves after a local important place (river, mountain, forest) or after the name of a great ancestor. Tribes were united around a religious cult and customs common to them. Large families were united by hereditary traditions in the lineage, including those particularly well preserved in southern Slavonia as the 'Slava' festival, rituals dedicated to the lineage's guardian deity or mythical ancestor (CMP: 187-190). Authority was patriarchal, while inter-tribal relations were linked to exogamy. The expansion of the tribe was probably mythological, sacral in nature, as were wars fought between tribes (Modzelewski 2004; Tymieniecki 1962; Tymieniecki 1996). When the cultivated land became barren, a shift of settlement took place (this happened every three to four generations or so). It was then necessary to make the newly inhabited land sacred, divine, and dedicated to the gods. Archaeologists have found traces of such activities in the form of the building of ritual forges in newly settled places, which were located on the tops of mountains (Szczepanik 2020: 314; c.f. Kajkowski 2019: 107-121). They were often accompanied by sacred hearths located on the tops of mountains, in which ritual fires were lit, probably connected with the god called **Svarožitjь*, i.e. the son of **Sъvarogъ* - the god of the sky and smithery (Łuczyński 2020: 91-100). There was also the custom of "inhabiting" the newly inhabited area with the spirits of ancestors by creating huge necropolises around dwelling sites, in which the ashes of the dead were gathered (Slavic custom ordered the corpses of the dead to be burnt).

Inferring from later ethnographic materials, we might think that the point of these activities was to 'populate' the territory with the spirits of ancestors. In ethnographic sources from the 19th century, the ancestors inhabited the areas surrounding the place of life: forests, swamps, rivers, waters, and mountains.

The early-medieval period of state formation was associated with four processes: the disappearance of the tribal social structure based on large families, the development of the central power of the prince supported by a military team, the feudalisation of social relations (i.e. the dependence of the agricultural masses on the princely power) and the Christianisation of the country's ruling strata. This last process was necessary for the recognition of Slavic statehood in the world of European politics at the time. The process of conversion to the new religion and the disappearance of traditional beliefs was itself a very protracted one in Slavdom and primarily affected the elite, who were baptised from the 8th century onwards. However, written sources indicate the vitality of "pagan" cults as late as the 15th century (c.f. Álvarez-Pedrosa 2021). Rural communities were particularly resistant, among whom syncretism between Christianity and older beliefs prevailed for a long time. In many cases, there is even talk of a following 'repoganisation', for example, in Serbian folk tradition (Јовановић 2006).

A social consequence of the changes in the early Middle Ages was the disappearance of large family structures, which were replaced by smaller families (of about 10 people) grouped around a single farm. The collection of farms formed the village, which was isolated by the feudal authorities and dependent on the magnates. Large family structures survived only in southern Slavdom in the form of the so-called *zadruga*. Their persistence was linked to the specific history of the region: from the 14th-century Turkish invasion onwards, the southern Slavs became an isolated group and their culture was largely based on fighting and resisting the Muslim invaders.

Lexical image of family

An important source of knowledge for the study of Slavic culture is language. In cultural anthropology and linguistics (especially semiotics), however, we understand it not only as a system of communication, but above all as a system of collective perceptions in which the

'world' in which people live is visible. Etymological and semantic research makes it possible to reconstruct the world of cultural and spiritual images. In the Slavic case, we are talking about the reconstruction of the Proto-Slavic language, the common language of the Slavs of the period at the threshold of their great migration. Reconstructed by linguists using the historical-comparative method, the Proto-Slavic lexicon is dated to around the 7th century AD. Let us draw attention here to two interesting depictions that bring us into the circle of the 'sociomorphic mythology' of the Proto-Slavs.

The reconstructed lexeme meaning „people" is ps. **ljudьje-* (Niewiara 2015). We can find this proto-lexeme in Polish *ludzie*, Ukrainian *ljúdy*, Russian *ljúdi*, Bulgarian *ljúde* and many other Slavic languages. In close to Proto-Slavic Baltic languages, there are common derivatives like Lithuanian *liáudis* „ludowy" or Old-Prussian *ludis* „t.s". Therefore, the Proto-Slavo-Baltic form can be reconstructed in the form **ljaudejes.* A further equivalent is Proto-Germanic *liudiz* „man, human, people". French etymologist and Indo-Europeanist Émile Benveniste has pointed out that the lexical group in question here is derived from the Proto-Indo-European word **leu̯dho-* connected with **leu̯dh-* „to grow" (Benveniste 2016: 261-273; IEW: 684-685). Thus, in this sense, people are 'those who grow'. The Polish linguist Aleksandra Niewiara has examined these representations in broader lexical contexts and has pointed to the presence in Proto-Slavic of a sequence of representations of the identity of the growth of a clump of plants and the growth of a "clump of people" (Niewiara 2015). As she wrote, the fact that human growth and plant growth are combined in lexis may have been intentional, somewhat magical and metamorphic sense, in which 'we humans' have within us the power to plump up and grow like plants. This feeling seems to have been more common in ancient European traditions. In addition to the numerous written sources mentioning the sacred significance of vegetation and its growth (for lack of space, we will not analyse them here), let us draw attention to the hypothesis put forward by the German archaeologist Georg Wilke. He pointed to a common tendency seen in Neolithic Indo-European ceramics, namely the marking with numerous, clustered incisions that could signify the owners of the vessels - the collective of the family, depicted in the likeness of a grouped 'clump of plants'; he referred to this as 'totemic tree magic' (Wilke 1923: 28). Another prominent German scholar, W. Manhardt, undertook a comparative historical study within European folklore associated with trees. As he noted, widespread and probably of Neolithic origin are depictions in which trees parallel humans and represent at the same time an infinite cluster of ancestral souls with whom the living, also 'being trees' - come into constant contact (Manhardt 1875).

Interesting in this context is the Proto-Slavic lexeme denoting a large family, i.e. ps. *rodъ* „huge family, genesis, origin" ~ **rodina* „family, homeland" ~ **roditi* „to give birth", ~ * *dorodьnъ* „prolific, fertile, rich" ~ **uroďajь* „good crop, harvest, yield" < Proto-Balto-Slavic **radás* „birth, genus" > Latgalian *rods* "relative", Latvian *rads* "birth, origin, kin, people, sex, sort" (Derksen 2008: 437). The underlying imagery present in the word sequence 'family - give birth' is presented to us by Indo-European etymology and related vocabulary, as pointed out by Julius Pokorny: pie. **u̯erdh-, u̯redh-* „to grow; high" > oind. *várdhati, várdhatē, vr̥dháti* „grows, multiplies", *vardháyati* "makes grow", *vr̥ddhá-* "grown, big, large, old", *ūrdhvá* "high" (< **u̯or-dh-u̯o-*), av. *varəd-* "make grow "; ogr. *ὀρθός* „erect, straight, right, true", ῥέθος "limb, member, body, face", ὄρθριος, ὀρθρῑνός „morning, matutinal"; alb. *Rit* „grow, make big" (IEW: 1137). The vocabulary collected and analysed by Pokorny points to a semantic relation of feelings, imagery and practices related to growing (being big, grown up, real), family, body, personal identity (bodily, spiritual) and morning. Before we make a minor comment in this regard, let us turn to one more group of related vocabulary from the Indo-Iranian lexicon.

In the „Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen" of Manfred Mayrhofer we can find deep research on Proto-Indo-Iranian root *RODH* „to grow: ved. *ródhati, ródhat, rudhyase* „to grow, to sprout", *svā-rudh* „growing from its own root", *vi-rúdh* „plant", *anū-rúdh* „regrowth", possibly also ved. rodasi „ divine parents, Heaven-Earth, *Dyavaprithvi*" (KEWA II: 468). The palatalisation changes analysed by Mayrhofer indicate that the above group of Sanskrit vocabulary is related to the Proto-European analysed above root **leu̯dh-* „to grow" w in its archaic laryngeal form **h₁lewdʰ-* „to grow; people; tribe" (KEWA II: 469).

2.3 The groups of lexemes analysed above refer to ideas related to the ontology of social life. They touch, in other words, on what kind of 'being' the family community is. Its being-in-the-world is, in the light of the lexicon, an epiphany of perpetual growth, a spiritual and physical tendency to grow as a plant, with this phenomenon referring to the phenomena of bodily integrity and the luminous epiphany of the morning. The circle of imagery evident in the lexicon would need to be subjected to closer study, especially to resolve the etymology of the lexeme rhodasi, which is extremely important for the study of the earliest elements of the Vedic tradition.

Religious and mythological images and practices

In this part of the article, we will analyse specific folk practices known from late ethnographic factography. Our aim will be to outline the spirituality associated with given aspects of family life in Slavic folk traditions. Our analysis will indicate only selected elements of the rich ritual life of the Slavs in the family context; thus, it is a contribution to a broader presentation of these complex and multi-layered issues.

A child

In all Slavic cultures, having children was crucial and very important. In folk tradition, we find traces of beliefs in reincarnation, according to which children would be the next incarnation of their ancestors' past souls. The structure of these beliefs was the circling between 'this' and 'that' worlds of migratory birds, which in folk beliefs are responsible for carrying the souls of ancestors back to the world of the living. Becoming pregnant was not only a divine blessing but also a kind of transfer of magical power that made the woman-mother extremely powerful. A woman wishing to become pregnant sought power at important places of worship, by sacred stones and trees; the practice of preparing amulets or drinks for the woman, into which were placed magical objects that gave her the power to give birth, was known. Slavic folk tales, on the other hand, refer to a woman swallowing a golden magical seed from which, like a plant, a child grows. These fairy tales point to a number of important parallelisms: the woman is the soil on which life is sown in the form of a seed. The act of sowing the grain is, in turn, in Slavic beliefs, an act of the god, Father Sky, who created the world through sowing.

A woman who became pregnant was subject to several taboos. In the most general terms, what a woman does during pregnancy is fully reflected in what her child will be like. A pregnant woman is ontologically 'open'; she can absorb the life force from other people and objects or carry it further. She is a mediator; she is open to contact with the other world. The pregnant woman avoided 'gazing' at something, because gazing at a person or object for a long time could open up the transfer of power to her inner self and, consequently, also to the child. If a woman gazed at something broken or ugly, the trait could affect the baby. The taboo of spinning and weaving is interesting. This is because a pregnant woman was forbidden to weave, bind or otherwise manipulate thread or ties. This taboo has a deep ontological and cosmological justification, as we have already written about in another text. In many Indo-European traditions, including the Slavic and Vedic traditions,

weaving, spinning and binding are particularly powerful, divine activities, paralleling the divine creative act. There is a great potential for power in this activity: in Slavic folklore, it was believed that one could 'bind' someone's soul, or 'bind' some spirit roaming the earth. By tying and untying, contact with other worlds was opened or closed. The pregnant woman guarded her emotions very strongly. She avoided "fear" because it could be of a spiritual nature, it could be an evil spell from the wind or other elements that would take away her power to live.

The birth of a child was the 'opening' of the paths to the other world. It was preceded by numerous signs coming from the other world: these signs were given by birds, especially storks. A sign of an impending birth could also come from the domestic oven, where ancestral spirits contact the living through the fire. Analogous signs concerned the announcement of the arrival of visitors to the house, which is linked to an archaic belief combining the figures of a child, a visitor, a visitor from afar, and a spirit, an ancestor. The birth usually took place in the house, on a clay floor or straw. The woman who was preparing for the birth symbolically became 'dead' - she behaved as people who are preparing to go to the other world behave. She had to be in tune with all the members of the household, and often wore the so-called 'sacred shirt', the shirt she wore at the wedding and in which, according to tradition, she would be buried in the future. During the birth, it was necessary to open windows and doors, untie all knots, so that the 'way from another world' would be easy for the child. Sacred stones of thunder were sometimes used during childbirth, which were believed to open the way into the afterlife, "tearing apart" the boundaries of worlds, just as lightning and thunder do. The birth was attended by 'grandmothers' (*baba*), or old women, who cared for the mother and child in the following days (Biegeleisen 1927; Rękas 2010; Zadrożyńska 1988; Stomma 1976).

The moment of a child's birth determined its place in reality and the world. The arrangement and brightness of the stars heralded the so-called "dola" of the child, that is, the totality of what would be close, easy and good for him in life. A few days after the birth, three goddesses called 'Rodzanice', 'Narechnice', 'Sujenice', etc., would come to the child's cradle. These are three goddesses of fate, destiny, also associated with the circulation of the sun in the sky. As the songs and incantations recorded by ethnographers indicate, they 'tied up' the destiny of a child (below is an example from Bulgaria):

Vreme bilo tokmo na polnoke, („The time struck exactly midnight")

na polnoke, vreme glua doba; („at midnight, the time of the deaf")

szczo mu došle do tri narečnici, („when the three *narečnici* came to him")

na deteto kъsmet da narečat; („the child's destiny was outlined")

Vala Bogu za čudo golemo („Praise be to God for the great miracle")

szczo se reklo ot tri narečnici, („what was said by the three *narečnici*")

szczo se reklo, i se izvъršilo. („that which was said was fulfilled")

(Серенков 1990: 177-179)

Numerous rituals for blessing the child were also known, often linked to the naming of the child. It was important to maintain a permanent link of identity between the child (the child's soul) and the family and home. This was done, for example, by 'binding' the child (in this case, a girl) to a cherry tree growing nearby. What follows here is the ritual transfer of the birthing power present in the tree to the child (using the Polish song as an example):

Wisi jabłko, wisi, Już opadnąć myśli („Hanging apple, hanging, already thinks to fall")

Wieszam cię warkoczku, W sadeczku na wiśni. („I'm hanging you braid, In an orchard on a cherry tree")

Wieszam cię warkoczku W sadeczku, na śliwie, („I'm hanging you braid in a little orchard on a plum tree")

Żeby cię doczkała Marynia szczęśliwie. („So that Marysia (girl's name) will live to see you happily")

Czerwone jabłuszko Na jabłoni wisi („A red apple hanging on an apple tree") (Biegeleisen 1927)

Bride and groom

Of all Slavic family rituals, the wedding was the most important; thus, it has a rich literature on the subject, numerous historical and comparative studies (Гура 2012; Komorvsky 2020; Велецкая 1978: 44-80; Еремина 1991: 83-193). We can summarise the meaning and structure of this rite in a few words, capturing the profound symbolism of its individual elements. The basis of the wedding rite was an exogamous structure. The bride had to leave her parents' home and move into a new house, the house of the groom's family, often very far from her original home. Let us look at this phenomenon from two perspectives, both of which are from the perspective of Slavic folk beliefs. The perspective of the bride's family was associated with loss and death, as numerous beliefs and songs emphasise. For her parents, sisters and brothers, the bride "died" as a member of their home and family. Numerous folklore studies indicate that the bride's treatment was identical to that of a deceased person: before leaving home, she had to ask for blessings, to receive a 'dole' from the spirits of her ancestors; she ritually said goodbye to the spirits of home and family represented by the cooker, the table, the corners of the cottage, sacred images. The bride often had to remain silent throughout the ritual. The perspective of the groom's family is quite different. The young girl is introduced into their home, becoming a new part of the eternal lineage of ancestral souls; introduced into her new home, the bride becomes part of the spirits and deities worshipped in the groom's home. The 'dola' received from her ancestors and God is the power by which she will be able to bear children and ensure the continuation of the groom's lineage. Thus, we see that the bride-wife is to some extent suspended between two worlds: she possesses the 'power' of her ancestors and at the same time participates in the 'power' of her husband's ancestors. The perception of these phenomena was fractal at the same time and was strongly linked to the symbolism of the house as the abode of the family, its ancestors and the gods. In the folk culture of the Slavs, the home was a microcosm, an embodiment of the cosmos and at the same time a collective body inside which live spirits, gods and people. Relocation was therefore a deeply spiritual phenomenon, both internal and external, always fully cosmological and ontological. Let us look at fragments of the mythopoetics of the Slavic wedding, in which numerous and important senses and meanings can be discerned for the understanding of Slavic family structures.

Relations between the bride and her family

The girl's parents played a very important role in the whole wedding ritual procedure. The selection of a partner was, on the one hand, at their decision; on the other hand, the opinion of the potential bride herself was very often taken into account. Annual courtship rituals (taking place mainly in spring and summer, linked to the cult of spring fertility deities), but also fortune-telling, played an important role in the selection of partners. The fortune-telling practices are extremely interesting, as they indicate that knowledge about whom to marry a daughter (whose courtship to

accept) was sought among ancestral spirits. Thus, according to what Bojan Jovanović wrote about Serbian folk beliefs, the spirits of the ancestors had, in the traditional Slavic worldview, a very great power over the living; they were the possessors of knowledge, thanks to which it was possible to act in the world in a right, good, fitting way.

Above all, the songs tell us about the growing distance, with the initiation of courtship and wedlock, between the parents and the girl who will soon have to leave her family habitat. Up to a certain point, the parents are the ones who lead their child out into the distant world, but this bond is also broken over time - after all, the bride, already a wife, will become part of another home. When the girl was ready to take on suitors and prepare for marriage, her mother (or herself with her mother's help) would sow special plants (rue, rosemary, basil) in the garden, which would later be used to prepare the wedding wreath.

The plants contained the 'power' necessary to perform the rite: the fate of the plants and the girl became identical:

Czerwiono jem sala („I sowed red")

zelono mje weszlo („And green grew for me")

nie wje żaden człowjek („No one knows")

do kogo mje teszno („To whom I long for") (Kaszuby II: 89).

The fact that the wedding plants are growing, however, points to the girl's impending removal from the family microcosm:

Oj nasijała tre hradki rutki - z jasnemy zorejkamy („Oh, I sowed three groups of rue – with bright stars")

Ny ma chto pidlywaty. („There is no one to water them")

Wstane batejko – wstane ranejko („The father will get up very early in the morning")

Pidlije rutku, krutu zełenu – dribnemy słyzejkamy. („He will water rue, beautiful, green with his tears")

(DW 35: 57)

As long as the plant is in bloom, the girl is allowed to enjoy the privileges of single status. This is because the plant gives a sign of when the girl is ready for the initiation of the wedding rite:

Зеленая да рутонька да буяє, („The green rue is blossoming")

Не сватайте да Анютки — хай гуляє; („Don't matchmake Anulka - let her be free")

Зеленая да рутонька набуялася, („The green rue has blossomed")

Уке наша да Анютка нагулялася („Our Anulka already has be free") (ВП: 141).

Analogiczne sensy wyrażają również w pieśniach słowiańskich teksty o zasadzeniu jabłoni i zerwaniu z niej jabłka; motyw ten odnosi się do ludowego mitu o zalotach między Księżycem i Gwiazdą Poranną. W mitach tych Poranna Gwiazda jest związana właśnie z jabłonią:

Zájdi Slnko za hory, za doly („Go, Sun, behind the valleys and mountains")

Za sádeček, za višňový („Behind the orchard, for the cherry")

Za sádeček, za višňový („Behind the orchard, for the cherry")

V tém sádečku má milá, má milá („In this orchard, my love")

sladkú jabloň sadela. („She planted a sweet apple tree“)

Sadela hu, sadela, sadela, („She planted her, planted, planted“)

Pána Boha prosela, („Lord Gods asked“)

aby sa jej ujala. („To take care of her”)

Rosť, jablonka, široko, vysoko, („Grow, dear apple tree, wide, high”)

spúšťaj koreň hlboko. („Grow your roots in deep”)

Kvitni kvietkom belavým, belavým, („Blossom with white, white flower”)

rod jabĺčkom červeným. („Grow with a red apple”)

Fúkaj, vetrík, od hora, od dola, („Blow the wind from the mountains, from the valley”)

odroň jabko z jabloňa… („Pick the apple from the apple tree”)

(Poloček 1952: 180).

The first stage of the wedding and the associated separation of mother and daughter and the transformation of the daughter into a wife is 'told' through the symbolism of a tree (the viburnum tree) that begins to burn at the sight of Evening Dawn, in Slavic mythology, a goddess associated with the wedding rite:

Stojąc przed Zorzą kalina ("A viburnum tree, standing before the Dawn”)

Rano się palić zaczyna („Begin to burn at the morning”)

Ej rano, raniuśko zaczyna… („Oh, begin, very early morning”)

Zosia przed mamą swą stała („*Zosia* stood before her mother”)

Łamiąc rączęta płakała („Wringing her hands she cried”)

Ej rano, raniuśko płakała… („Oh, she cried, at very early morning”)

(Czeczot 1839: 98).

The motif of drowning is also common and is linked to another set of myths, namely those associated with the wedding of the Sun. In the folk Slavic understanding, the daytime path of the Sun (Sun goddess) across Heaven reflects the path of the girl in the wedding ritual; her journey through life. Sunset is the moment of bathing in the waters of another, that world; the world from which the Sun's husband, the Moon, comes:

W niedziele raniusiejko („On Sunday, very early morning”)

kąpało się słonejko („The Sun was bathing”)

Marysia go łapała („*Marysia* treid to cath him”)

sama w morzejko wpadła („And she herself fell into the sea”)

prosiła ratunejku („She asked for help”)

ratuj mie, tatusieńku („Save me, my dear father”)

Już ja cie nie zratuje („Now I can not save you”)

bo morza nie zgrontuje („Beacuse I can not plough the sea”)

bo morze szeroczeńkie („Beacuse the sea is wide”)

do tego głęboczeńkie („And moreover very deep")

(Bartmiński red. 2011: 344-345).

Bride's transition to the other family

Passing from house to house in the rite, the bride enters into a relationship with a number of other entities that assist her in this 'transfer'. Many Slavic songs refer to a peacock; the girl, chasing it, ends up in places associated with the nuptial rite (garden, house, sacred tree):

Przede dworem zieleni się trowka („Before the manor the green is getting green")

Pasła panna bieluchnego powka („The girl grazed a white peacock")

Napasła go, do dumu go gnała („She grazed it, she led it home")

ślicnie, pięknie z nim się rozmawiała („She talked to him beautifully")

Zaciena go w ogunek niechcący („She slashed him inadvertently in the tail")

Pow poleciał do boru krzycący („The peacock flew into the forest screaming")

Ona za nim przez ogródek biegła („She followed him through the garden")

Wpadła w rzyckę – zmocała spódnicke („She fell into the river, wet her skirt"

I suko go w sieni po kumorze, („And she's looking for it in the house after the basement")

A paw siedzi w boru na jaworze („And the peacock sits in the woods on a sycamore tree")

I zaćena klucykami brząkać („And he starts ringing with the keys")

Pudzi, powku, niech ja cię nie sukam („Come on, peacock, for I'm not looking for you anymore")

(Kozłowski 1869: 108).

The whole ritual is a close reflection of what happens in the sky, among celestial beings. When a girl receives a blessing from her parents, it is indicated with a song:

Czyż ciebie, dzieweczko, Słonejka urodziła? („Were you, girl, born by the Sun?")

Słonejko urodziła, Miesiączek oświecił („Did the Sun give birth and the Moon enlighten?")

Miesiączek oświecił, Zorze kołysały („Did the Moon enlighten, the Dawns were rocking your cradle?")

Urodziła mnie mateńka w nowej świetlicy („I was born by a dear mother in a new house")

W nowej świetly, na wilgotnej Ziemi („In a new home, on a moist Earth")

Kołysali mnie moje siostrzyczki („I was rocked by my sisters")

(Fedorowski 1958: 374)

Very interesting to us is the ritual of 'rolling a wreath around the table'. Made from plants sacred to the girl, the wreath is her ritual artefact. Whoever possesses it also possesses the girl's power of life, including the particularly important power to give birth to life. During the climactic moment of the nuptial rite, the wreath was rolled around the table (exactly as the Sun is rolled around the wheel in the songs). It was rolled to the father, mother, brother, sister - none of them could accept the wreath (the girl), only the groom could do so:

A toc-ze się, toc mój wianku, („Roll on my little wreath")

Do mego tatula w ukłonku. („To my daddy with a bow")

Tatulo go nie bierze, („Daddy don't take it")

Oj bo od zalu nie może […] („Oh, because he can't from grief")

A toc-ze się, toc mój wianku, („Roll up my little garland")

Do mego Jasia w ukłonku. („To my *Jasio* with a bow")

A Jaś ci go przyjmuje („And *Jasio* accept it")

I za niego mile dziękuje („And thanks for it kindly")

(DW 20: 208).

Analogous meanings are alluded to in the ritual songs by the motif of the 'golden cup' and rue, which are further attributes in Slavic culture of the Sun goddess, the bride.

Rozsypała się ruteńka ze złocistego kubeńka, („The rue from the golden cup has spilled out")

po stoliku cieślowem, po obrusie bielanym… („Across the yew table, across the white tablecloth")

(Podlasie I: 431)

Divine wedding

Thus, we see that the wedding rite was a time of both sadness and joy. The sadness was the departure of the girl from the family home (symbolised by the setting of the sun, the withering of the plant, the scattering of the rue from the golden cup), while the joy was the loving union of husband and wife. In the songs, we come across an interesting mythological structure in which the newly formed family fulfils the archetype of heavenly divine figures. The girl is the Sun, the groom is the Moon, the stars are their children, while the place of their wedding and life, the sky, is home and also an image of God. These references relate to different aspects of the wedding. In the temporal aspect, the setting of the Sun is associated with the transition of the girl from one house to another, described above:

A już Słonejka, a już jaśniutka („Oh already the sun, oh already bright")

Już-że ona na zachodzie („She is in the west")

A już dzieweczka młodziutka („And already a young girl")

Od matki na wychodzie („Already from her mother's side")

(Санько рэд., 2004: 317)

Some of the songs contain archaic memories of divine golden carts on which the gods, bride and groom, arrive:

God's cart has arrived

Through this little house of Łukasz

Happy little house of Łukasz

And in its corner, the Moon of Łukasz

And on the pole a warm Sun

Warm Sun

From beyond the blue-white sea

From beyond the dark forest

From behind a clear field

Comes out a bright Moon

After tomorrow morning

A bright Sun will come out

Light Month

Is Iwan

Bright Sun

Is Alenushka

(Доўнар Запольскі 1909: 350)

Bride as wife in the new house

The entry of the bride into a new microcosm: a new family, a new house and a new group of ancestral souls had its own ritual character. The bride was carried out on the groom's hands over the threshold of the house, so as not to disturb the sacredness of the threshold and the ancestral spirits that dwell beneath it. The songs preserve a trace of the ancient ritual of the first baking of bread by the bride. This was a sacred act for several reasons. Bread and all actions associated with it were a form of divine act (Niewiadomski 1999) in the traditional culture of the Slavs. The rising of bread directly reflected the divine power of the duration and existence of life, a power set in motion at the beginning of the world. The young wife who baked the first bread in her new home not only entered into an ontological relationship of identity with the new microcosm, but at the same time revealed there the epiphany of the divine creative act embodied in the sacred bread:

Piekła dzieweczka kołacz („The young girl was baking a whell-cake")

Piekła nadobna kołacz („She, beautifull, baked a whell-cake")

Pod winem, pod wineńkiem, („Under the wine, under the wine")

pod rucianym wianeckiem („Under a rue wreath")

Jak na niego przenickę płukała („When she washing a wheat for it")

Wszystkie rzeczki zbiegała („She ran down all the rivers")

Pod winem, pod wineckiem, („Under the wine, under the wine")

pod rucianym wianeckiem („Under a rue wreath")

Jak na niego rozczyniała („When she making dought for it")

Rącka jej się świeciała („Her hand was shining")

Pod winem, pod wineckiem, („Under the wine, under the wine")

pod rucianym wianeckiem („Under the rue wreath")

Do samego ramienia („Up to her shoulder")

Od złotego pierścienia („From a golden ring")

Pod winem, pod wineckiem, („Under the wine, under the wine")

pod rucianym wianeckiem („Under the rue wreath")

Jak ci go w piec sadzała („As she put it in the oven")

Łopata jej się złomała („Her shovel broke")

Pod winem, pod wineckiem, („Under the wine, under the wine")

pod rucianym wianeckiem („Under the rue wreath")

Jak go z pieca wysadzała („As she took it out of the oven")

Małym dziatkom go dawała („She gave it to the little children")

Pod winem, pod wineckiem, („Under the wine, under the wine")

pod rucianym wianeckiem („Under the rue wreath")

Wy małe dziatki jedźcie („You little children eat")

I o dobrym Bogu wiedźcie („And know of the good God")

Pod winem, pod wineckiem, („Under the wine, under the wine")

pod rucianym wianeckiem („Under the rue wreath")

(DW 20: 217).

Interesting are the materials of Serbian songs in which the bride brings the Sun into her womb into her new home. The symbolism of these songs is multi-levelled: on the one hand, it refers to the old Slavic rite of 'poklade', in which the final moment of the wedding was a sexual act between the bride and the groom, whereby the transmission of ritual power was crowned and the groom's line gained potential continuity. These meanings are addressed by the image of the "Sun in the Womb" - the shining, solar birth power that the young wife brings with her:

Благо нама, девојка је с нама („Happiness for us, gir lis with us")

Доноси нам сунце у недара („She brings for us the Sun in her womb")

Да огрије свекра и свекрву… („Which will warm parents-in-law") (Питулић 2017: 138).

However, the relationship between wife and in-laws was also reflected in the phenomenon of the garden, which we wrote about above. The domestic garden was an epiphany of feminine power, including the relationships between the women living in the house; the plants growing in it were a close reflection of these relationships:

Ńe w każdim ogrodze zele se urodzi („Not in every garden the plants are growing")

ńe każdej matuli sinowa dogodzi („Not every mother can be pleased by her daughter-in-law")

ńe każdej matuli sinowa dogodzi… („Not every mother can be pleased by her daughter-in-law")

(Kamieński 1936: 222).

Divine family

The image of the heavenly family - the human family - is reflected in an extraordinarily rich way in the winter and spring "kolade" songs. These are very old songs, as is the rite of "kolade"; "kolędowanie" is one of the oldest attested by written testimonies, which point to its profoundly pre-Christian origins and its connection with ancient Slavic religiosity (Виноградова 1982). As in other songs and rituals, we also see a structure in which the human world is a parallel of the divine order. The house reflects heaven, while the hosts reflect the heavenly deities and their powers of life:

There is a newly built svjatlica
In this svjatlica, there are four windows
In the first window, the bright Sun
In the second window, the bright Month
In the third window, small stars
In the fourth window, the dark cloud
The bright Sun is his wife
The bright Month is the host himself
These small stars are his children
This dark cloud is his rye
(Санько рэд ., 2004: 318)
Generous evening, good evening (Schedry wechir, dobri wechir)
Good health to good people!
A good Moon is the host
A good sun is the hostess
They are building a church there
And in the church, there are three windows:
From the first window, a bright Moon is shining
A bright Moon – a dear Host
A bright sun shines on his wife
Bright stars are his children.
(Соценко 1928: 67-69).

The later inversion of these songs seems to be connected with their Christianisation, which transformed the earlier divine figures associated with the Sun, Moon, Stars and other celestial figures into Christian saints. Note that in the following song, the saints perform farm work in an exemplary, even archetypal, way; they establish the cosmic and sacred order of agricultural custom. Sowing and ploughing are divine attributes in Slavic culture; they are activities of great creative power. Hence, the performance of these songs not only compared the farmer's family to divine beings, but also transferred the divine order to his family; it was thus a form of blessing:

Hey, hey! Whose field is this that lies fallow, hey, hey!
Hey, hey! The master of the house, who lies in bed, hey, hey!
Hey, hey! Come out to us, master of the house, hey, hey!
Hey, hey! Whatever we tell you, we will make you happy, hey, hey!
Hey, hey! On your field, the golden sleigh is ploughing, hey, hey!
Hey, hey! Saint Scepan is coming, Saint John will chase, hey, hey!
Hey, hey! The Most Holy Virgin is bringing breakfast, hey, hey!

Hey, hey! Master of the house, and wheat everywhere, hey, hey!

Hey, hey! Take some beads, count the Kopecki, hey, hey!

Hey, hey! Harness the oxen, take them to the barn, come on!

(DW 26: 68)

Ancestor's cult

An important aspect of family rituals and customs among the Slavs was the worship of ancestral souls; some scholars even claim that it was a fundamental element of Slavic religiosity (Јовановић 2006). The souls of ancestors were worshipped in a variety of contexts, both during separate, dedicated festivals - feasts and prayers - and during all major or minor social and economic undertakings. It was common to refer to ancestors in Slavonia as *dědъ* and *baba*. The cult of ancestral souls was multifaceted in terms of its places and contexts: for the spirits of ancestors inhabited both particular parts of the house and particular places of worship, sacred places. In general, the cult of ancestors is a very important bond of traditional rituals, indicating that the category of family is perceived much more broadly than it is in non-religious societies; for the family consists, according to Slavic tradition, also of ancestors. Let us point to some ethnographic records illustrating what rituals dedicated to ancestors looked like among the Slavs. From the territory of modern Belarus comes an interesting record of a singing dialogue - a prayer said during a feast for ancestors:

Starzec: w hości my k wam pryszli („Old man: we have come to you as guests")

Chór: Dziady, dziady („Choir: Ancestors, ancestors")

Starzec: Małaczko pryniasli („Old man: we brought milk for you")

Chór: Dziady, dziady („Choir: Ancestors, ancestors")

Starzec: Kaszu, miodu niasli („Old man: we brought porridge and honey")

Chór: Dziady, dziady („Choir: Ancestors, ancestors")

Starzec: Jeszcie, pijcie duszy („Old man: eat and drink, souls")

Chór: Dziady, dziady („Choir: Ancestors, ancestors")

Starzec: Jeszcie, pijcie usie („Old man: eat and drink all of you")

Chór: Dziady, dziady („Choir: Ancestors, ancestors") (Swianiewiczowa 2018: 58-68).

The nature of the living-ancestor relationship is also indicated by funeral songs. These were performed by the so-called 'weepers', or old women specially invited to the funeral ceremonies. They must have been women foreign to the family of the deceased. Many of the songs are sung as if 'on behalf' of the deceased, as if the singers were lending their voice to the deceased. Note the interesting mediated structure in which a flower grows from the ashes of the deceased:

Napolta ze mnie, napolta ze mnie („Burn from me, burn from me")

Popiołu, popiołu

I rozsiejta mnie, i rozsiejta mnie („And sow from me, and sow from me")

Po calusieńkiem polu („On the whole field")

Wyrośnie ze mnie, wyrośnie ze mnie („Will grow from me, will grom from me")

Stokrótka, stokrótka („Daisy, daisy")

Będzie mnie płakać, będzie zalować („Will cry, will regret")

I łojciec, i matka („Both father and mother")

(Bąbel 2009: 133-173).

Podobną strukturę zachowuje analogiczny lament z tradycji ukraińskiej:

Kiedy my tebe pobaczymo? („When we will se you?")

Z kotrej storony my tebe budem wyhladaty? („From which side will we look for you?")

Na wesnu zozula, żyworonok i sołowij pryletyt, („At spring cockoo, viviparous and nightingale will come")

a ty może do nas ne pryjdesz nyhdy. („And you possibly will never come to us")

Za szczo ty na nas sia rozhnivav? („Why did you get angry with us?")

(DW 33: 184).

Similar mediating structures in which an intermediary is required to make contact with an ancestor: a bird, a tree, the wind or a flower are found in the tradition of wedding rituals. These are, namely, special songs sung by the bride if she was an orphan. Due to the necessity of obtaining the blessing of the parents before the wedding, passing on the "dola" of the ancestors - if the bride's mother was dead - the girl was obliged to call on them with a song and thus obtain the transmission of the blessing:

We wtorek rano drobny deszczyk rosi, („On Tuesday morning small rain is raining")

Marysi Tatunio Pana Boga prosi. (*Marysia's* father is asking Lord God)

Spuśćze mnie, Boże, promieniem do ziemi, (Put me down, God, to the earth")

niechze ja zobace swej córki wesele… („Let me see my daughter wedding")

(Bartmiński red. 2012: 112)

Akože ja pôjdem („Oh, how I will go")

Cez te biele hory? („Through these white mountains?")

Každá má mamičku („They tell me that my mother")

Každá má mamičku („They tell me that my mother")

Moja v čiernej zemi („My mother in the black earth")

Moja v čiernej zemi („My mother in the black earth")

Nohama do dverí („With legs to the door")

Na jej hrobe rastie („On he grave grow")

Rozmarin zelený („A green rosemary")

A ja ten rozmarin („And I will this rosemary")

Nikdy nevytrhnem („Never break out")

Moju dobru mater („And my good mother")

Nikdy nezabudnem („I will never forget")

Joj, mamička moja („Oh, my dear mother")

Budem sa vydavać („I will go")

Pridteže mi, pridte („Come, come to me")

Vinočok oddávat... („Dear wreath give") (Kadavý red. 1880: 68)

Contact with the ancestors, however, was not merely ritual, incidental, but was rather the general framework of an ontological identity in which what happens among the living 'here' part of the family is a reflection of what happens among the part that lives 'there'. Hence, it was perhaps so important to maintain the mutual bonds between the living and the ancestors, including through cyclical feasts and sacrifices. As an example of this ontological bond of identity, let us give the Belarusian variant of the spell, quite popular among the Slavs, the physical state of a given person corresponds to the physical state of the dead "on the other side"; the intermediary in the transfer of knowledge in this case is the moon:

Spell from toothacke. Dear Moon, young prince, you have a golden horn. Were you in that other world, and did you see dead souls? I was, I saw. Dead souls lie still. And their teeth don't hurt? No. May they not hurt me either (Вярreенка 2009: 25).

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ENVIRONMENTAL WISDOM AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN TRADITIONAL PRACTICES: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE "ORAON" TRIBES IN JHARKHAND OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the understanding of nature well and using it wisely, with care and respect, for the future generations that were embedded in the traditional life of the Oraon tribal of Jharkhand, highlighting how their cultural values and everyday practices contribute to ecological balance and resource conservation. The Oraon, one of the major tribal communities of central India, has long regarded nature as sacred and inseparable from community life. Forests, rivers, hills, and animals are treated as living entities to be respected, protected, and sustained for future generations. The research adopts a qualitative approach, combining field visits, interviews with community elders, and analysis of oral traditions, folk songs, and secondary literature. The findings reveal that the Oraon maintain sustainable practices such as mixed and rotational cropping, the use of natural fertilisers (cow dung), protection of sacred groves (Sarna Sthal), small-scale rainwater harvesting, and collective forest management. Rituals and festivals like Sarhul and Karma celebrate the human–nature relationship and mark seasonal cycles, reinforcing environmental awareness.

The study highlighted that the Oraons' traditional knowledge is based on the idea that taking care of the environment in a way where beliefs, traditions, and daily activities all work together to protect nature. These practices offer valuable lessons for addressing present-day environmental challenges such as deforestation, water scarcity, and climate change. By acknowledging, preserving, and adapting such indigenous knowledge, modern society can move toward a more sustainable and respectful coexistence with nature, ensuring that the balance between human needs and ecological health is maintained for future generations.

Keywords: Oraon, Tribals, Jharkhand, Environmental Wisdom, Sarna-sthal, Sarhul, Karma.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental sustainability is one of the biggest challenges we face today. Problems like climate change, cutting down forests, losing plants and animals, and shortages of water upset the natural balance and put human life at risk. Climate change causes extreme weather and changes habitats, making it harder to grow food and find clean water. When forests are cut down, it not only

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adds more carbon to the air but also destroys homes for many animals. Losing different kinds of plants and animals weakens nature's ability to support us through things like pollination and clean soil. Water shortages make it hard for people to stay healthy and grow crops. To fix these problems, we need to use nature's wisdom, follow sustainable ways of living, and create smart policies to protect and restore the environment while meeting human needs. While modern societies often try to fix problems with technology, indigenous communities have lived closely with nature for hundreds of years and have learned how to live in balance with it. Indigenous communities often embody deep ecological knowledge and environmental consciousness, developed over generations of close interaction with their natural surroundings. Among such groups in India, the 'Oraon' tribe (also known as *Kurukh*) of Jharkhand demonstrates a rich set of traditional practices, beliefs, and institutions that contribute to sustainable environmental management. Exploring the environmental wisdom of the 'Oraon' not only helps us appreciate their cultural heritage but also offers lessons for modern sustainability and conservation efforts.

The Oraon tribe in Jharkhand, a large tribal group in central India, is a good example of how their culture and knowledge help protect and keep nature healthy. The 'Oraon' tribe is among the prominent tribal communities of Jharkhand, distinguished by their unique cultural practices and traditions. They belong to the Dravidian language family and are primarily concentrated in the districts of Ranchi, Gumla, Lohardaga, Latehar, Palamu, Garhwa, Hazaribagh, Dhanbad, Santhal Pargana, and Singhbhum. Across different Indian states, they are referred to by various names, including Kurukh, Dhangars, Kisan, and Kora. Over time, the Oraon community has significantly assimilated into mainstream society, leading to notable transformations in their lifestyle and behavioural patterns (Bara, 2023).

The Oraons' worldview is rooted in animism and Sarnaism, an indigenous religious faith. *Animism* is the belief that everything in nature, such as animals, plants, rivers, and mountains, even rocks, has a spirit or soul. People who believe in animism think that these spirits live in nature and are alive, so they treat nature with respect and care. This way of thinking shows that humans are connected to all living and non-living things around them. *Sarnaism* is the traditional religion of major tribal communities like the Oraons, Mundas, and Santhal in India. It focuses on worshipping natural elements such as forests, trees, rivers, hills, and animals, which are seen as sacred and holy, especially the *Shal tree* (*Shorea robusta*). In Sarnaism, these natural places (*Aakhra, Sarna-sthal*) are believed to be home to spirits, and people honour them through prayers, rituals, and festivals to keep balance and harmony between humans and nature. Beyond ecological practical outcomes and usefulness, the Oraons' rituals and festivals like *Sarhul* and *Karma* serve as cultural institutions that reaffirm their symbiotic relationship with nature. These celebrations are not only expressions of reverence but also reinforce social norms and ethical codes that prevent overexploitation of resources. The sacred groves, or *Sarna Sthal*, stand as living sanctuaries embodying biodiversity conservation and spiritual sanctity.

In an era characterised by environmental crises and sustainability discourses, the Oraons represent more than a tribal group; they embody an ecological philosophy and practice that modern development paradigms can learn from. Understanding their traditional knowledge systems is essential not only to preserve their cultural heritage but also to integrate indigenous wisdom into participatory, sustainable environmental management. This paper aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the Oraon tribe's ecological understanding and resource management practices. It investigates how cultural beliefs, agricultural techniques, forest conservation, water management, and festive rituals function cohesively to conserve biodiversity and promote

socio-ecological resilience. The study highlights the potential contributions of indigenous knowledge to addressing today's environmental challenges, such as deforestation, climate variability, and water scarcity, advocating for policy recognition and cross-cultural dialogue for sustainable futures.

A PRELUDE

The ecological knowledge and sustainable practices of the Oraon tribe have been extensively examined across anthropological, ecological, nutritional, and cultural studies, which collectively emphasise their integrated relationship with nature. Scholars highlight the Oraons' spiritual-religious framework, centred on Sarnaism, as fundamental to their environmental stewardship; sacred groves known as *Sarna Sthal* are recognised both as cultural-religious sites and biodiversity reserves, maintained through community-enforced protection that effectively conserves forest ecosystems and biodiversity (Magni, 2024). Their festivals, such as *Sarhul* and *Karma*, function as social institutions fostering environmental awareness and sustaining traditional ecological ethics by marking seasonal cycles and invoking nature's spirits to ensure prosperity (Heritage Hub, 2025).

Agriculturally, the Oraon tribe employs diversified, sustainable methods, including mixed and rotational cropping, organic fertilisation using cow dung and compost, and traditional rainwater harvesting systems, which collectively enhance soil fertility and agricultural resilience in a monsoon-dependent climate (Seejph, 2025). Complementing ecological sustainability is the nutritional richness of indigenous Oraon foods; studies from districts like Gumla document over 130 indigenous food varieties, such as millets, green leafy vegetables, tubers, and wild fruits, that provide considerable micronutrients like calcium, iron, vitamin A, and folic acid, crucial for combating malnutrition and ensuring food security (Ghosh-Jerath et al., 2015).

The significant role of women in this ecological and nutritional knowledge transmission is well-documented; as custodians of seed conservation, medicinal plant use, and participation in fertility-related rituals, Oraon women are pivotal in sustaining biodiversity and community health (Journal of Environmental Studies, 2023). Despite growing pressures from industrialisation, land alienation, and environmental degradation, the Oraon knowledge system has demonstrated remarkable adaptability by integrating customary practices with emerging scientific insights to address contemporary ecological challenges (Seejph, 2025). Nonetheless, literature identifies gaps requiring longitudinal, participatory research to monitor impacts of socio-economic change on indigenous knowledge retention, gender-specific roles in environmental conservation, and potential pathways for integrating Oraon ecological wisdom into inclusive environmental governance frameworks. This rich body of scholarship underscores the necessity of preserving and valorising Oraon traditional ecological knowledge amidst modern developmental pressures.

In summary, the available literature underscores the Oraon tribe's traditional ecological knowledge as a comprehensive system that integrates spiritual beliefs, cultural practices, and sustainable resource management. Sacred groves serve as both ecological preserves and cultural sanctuaries, while agricultural methods emphasise diversity, organic inputs, and water conservation, contributing to food security and environmental resilience. The nutritional richness of indigenous foods further reflects the intricate connection between biodiversity and community health. Women's central role in conserving ecological and nutritional knowledge highlights important gendered dimensions often overlooked in environmental studies. Despite challenges from industrialisation

and socio-economic changes, the adaptability of Oraon knowledge systems offers valuable insights for sustainable development. However, gaps remain in longitudinal research, gender-specific studies, and participatory approaches, indicating a need for further empirical and interdisciplinary inquiry. This review situates the present study within these ongoing scholarly conversations, aiming to contribute nuanced field-based insights toward understanding and preserving Oraon ecological heritage.

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The environmental outlook of the Oraon is deeply embedded in their religious and cultural worldview. The tribe follows *Sarnaism*, an indigenous faith that venerates trees, rivers, forests, and other natural elements as sacred. Natural features are not merely utilitarian but are part of the spiritual and moral universe of the tribal community (Oraon, 2025). Festivals such as *Sarhul* are expressions of this relationship, where the Oraon pay homage to nature's cycles, offer worship in sacred groves (*Sarna*), and perform rituals that affirm interdependence between humans and the environment.

These rituals reinforce beliefs of respect towards Mother Earth (*Dharti Ayo*) and natural deities like *Dharmes*, reflecting notions of fertility and renewal (Baa, 2017). *Totemism* is another institution that supports environmental stewardship among the Oraon. Each clan may have a totem, often a plant or animal that is respected and protected. These totems come with taboos and customary restrictions that help preserve those species or ecological elements.

Sarhul Festival as a Tribal Cultural Heritage: Ecology and Spirituality

Sarhul is the principal festival of the tribal communities in Jharkhand, particularly the Oraon, Munda, and Ho tribes. The term *"Sarhul"* literally means the worship of the Sal tree. During this festival, the Sal tree is revered, as it is regarded as the dwelling place of Goddess *Sarna*, who is believed to safeguard the village from natural calamities and disasters. It marks the advent of spring and is closely associated with nature worship and agrarian traditions (Xalxo, 2012). The festival is observed during the month of *Chaitra* (March–April) when the Sal trees bloom, symbolising fertility, renewal, and the cycle of life. The Sal tree is considered sacred as it is believed to be the abode of Goddess *Sarna*, the village deity who protects the community from calamities and ensures collective well-being (Toppo, 2015). Rituals involve offering Sal flowers, local liquor, and traditional sacrifices to the deity, followed by communal singing, dancing, and feasting (Tete, 2019). Beyond its religious dimension, *Sarhul* reflects the ecological ethos of the tribal communities, emphasising harmony with nature, sustainable resource use, and collective identity. It also reinforces social solidarity by bringing together villagers in collective rituals and cultural expressions (Minz, 2014).

In the context of modernity, Sarhul is increasingly celebrated in urban areas like Ranchi with processions, cultural programs, and public gatherings, signifying the assertion of tribal identity in a rapidly changing socio-cultural landscape (Kujur, 2020). Thus, Sarhul is not only a religious festival but also a marker of tribal cultural heritage and resilience in Jharkhand.

This festival is not merely a ritualistic event but a symbolic representation of their ecological worldview, where nature and spirituality are inseparably intertwined (Xalxo, 2012). In tribal cosmology, natural elements such as trees, rivers, and hills are considered sacred and animated with spiritual essence. The Sal tree, believed to be the dwelling of Goddess *Sarna,* becomes a medium through which communities express gratitude for ecological sustenance and seek protection from calamities (Ekka, 2017). This spiritualization of nature highlights the tribal philosophy of

interconnectedness, where the well-being of humans, deities, and the environment is interdependent (Minz, 2014).

Moreover, *Sarhul* rituals embody ecological ethics. Offerings made to deities include locally available produce, flowers, and traditional beverages, reflecting a sustainable use of natural resources (Tete, 2019). Such practices reinforce the principle of reciprocity, where taking from nature is balanced with acts of reverence and protection. This worldview contrasts with modern exploitative approaches to the environment and underscores the indigenous understanding of ecological harmony (Kujur, 2020).

Therefore, Sarhul stands as an expression of the tribal worldview that integrates ecology and spirituality, positioning the festival as both a religious practice and an indigenous ecological philosophy. It demonstrates how cultural traditions serve as vehicles for environmental consciousness, deeply rooted in the spiritual and communal life of Jharkhand's tribes.

Karma as an Agrarian and Cultural Festival

The Karam festival is one of the most prominent agrarian celebrations of the tribal communities in Jharkhand, especially among the Oraon, Munda, and Ho tribes. Celebrated during the month of Bhadra (August–September), the festival is dedicated to the worship of the Karam tree (*Nauclea parvifolia*), which symbolises fertility, prosperity, and ecological balance (Ekka, 2016). The Karam deity is invoked for the protection of crops, the well-being of the family, and the overall prosperity of the community.

The rituals begin with young girls and women observing fasts, collecting soil, and planting Karam branches in a decorated area. Traditional songs and dances, accompanied by the rhythmic beats of drums, form the cultural essence of the celebration (Minz, 2014). Offerings of grains, fruits, and local liquor are made to the Karam deity, signifying a deep connection between agricultural cycles and spiritual beliefs (Toppo, 2017). Beyond its religious significance, the Karam festival plays a crucial role in reinforcing social solidarity. It brings together the youth and elders, men and women in collective participation, strengthening kinship bonds and cultural identity (Tete, 2019). Moreover, the ecological dimension of the festival highlights indigenous environmental ethics, as the worship of the Karam tree reflects reverence for biodiversity and sustainable agricultural practices (Xalxo, 2012).

In recent years, the festival has gained visibility in urban spaces like Ranchi, where cultural organisations and student groups celebrate it as a marker of tribal identity and resistance against cultural marginalisation (Kujur, 2020). Thus, the Karam festival serves not only as a religious observance but also as a socio-cultural institution that integrates ecology, agriculture, and identity assertion in tribal Jharkhand.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilised a qualitative ethnographic methodology to explore and document the traditional ecological knowledge and sustainable practices of the Oraon tribe in Jharkhand. Ethnography was chosen for its capacity to offer an immersive and holistic understanding of the community's cultural and environmental lifeways, aligning with the journal's focus on ancient traditions and heritage preservation. Data collection occurred over multiple visits to Oraon villages during critical agricultural seasons and during culturally significant festivals such as *Sarhul* and *Karma*, enabling observation of farming techniques, ritual practices, forest conservation, and water management in their natural settings.

Participant observation formed the core of the methodological approach, facilitating the researcher's active participation alongside the community in daily practices and ceremonial events. This enabled the collection of rich, contextual data reflecting both the ecological and sociocultural dimensions of Oraon life. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with diverse stakeholders, including elders, spiritual leaders (*Pahans*), women farmers, and youth engaged in traditional and modern livelihoods. This format encouraged participants to narrate their experiences and knowledge in their own words, thus preserving the oral epistemologies central to indigenous cultural knowledge.

Focus group discussions were held in gender-segregated settings to gain nuanced insights into collective governance of natural resources, social norms, and the invaluable role of tribal women in environmental conservation and ritual stewardship. Oral traditions, including songs, proverbs, and myths, were systematically recorded and analysed thematically to interpret their function in transmitting ecological values and ethics through generations. To complement primary data, an extensive review of secondary literature was undertaken, encompassing anthropological, ecological, and policy studies related to the Oraon tribe and indigenous knowledge systems. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process, emphasising informed consent, cultural sensitivity, community validation of findings, and adherence to principles of respect, reciprocity, and decolonisation within indigenous research methodologies.

This comprehensive and culturally respectful methodological framework ensured that the research honours the voice and heritage of the Oraon tribe, enabling an authentic representation of their ecological wisdom within the broader discourse of ancient traditions and cultural heritage.

TRADITIONAL AGRARIAN AND FOREST PRACTICES

Mixed Cropping, Seed Conservation, and Indigenous Foods

The Oraon have historically practised mixed cropping and preserved a variety of indigenous seeds adapted to local ecologies. This not only enhances resilience to climatic vagaries (such as erratic rain) but also sustains biodiversity in their fields (Karunamay et al., 2025).

Studies document that the Oraon utilise more than 130 varieties of indigenous food plants, fungi, and insects, many rich in micronutrients such as calcium, iron, vitamin A, and folic acid. Some of these also have recognised medicinal properties. Such food practices are intertwined with ecological diversity and traditional knowledge of wild and cultivated species.

Water Harvesting, Soil and Forest Management

Water scarcity and soil erosion present serious challenges in many parts of Jharkhand. The Oraon, through community-led initiatives, have developed systems for rainwater harvesting (such as earthen dams and ponds), and reforestation to prevent erosion (Jharkhand State News, 2017).

One notable example is Simon Oraon (also known as "Baba, " "Parha Raja") from Khaksitoli and neighbouring villages, who, since the 1960s, mobilised people to build check-dams, ponds, and plant thousands of trees (sal, jackfruit, jamun, mango) to restore forest cover and improve water availability. These actions have led to greater agricultural productivity, allowing multiple crops annually instead of just one (Jharkhand State News, 2017). Forest protection committees and norms developed via traditional institutions also help regulate the extraction of forest products, prevent overexploitation, and protect community-dependent resources.

Oral Traditions, Art and Ecological Values

Oral traditions, stories, songs, and myths transmit ecological wisdom across generations. In the case of the Oraon, these narratives often encode information about plant species, seasonal cycles, wildlife behaviour, and ethical norms about what to hunt or gather, when and how much (Karunamay et al., 2025).

Artistic practices also reflect environmental consciousness. Oraon artists use natural materials, such as soil, charcoal, plant pigments, to make paintings, craft objects, colours for walls, etc. They refrain from or limit the use of chemical dyes, instead relying on colours derived from red or brown soil, rice powder, charcoal, etc. This reflects both aesthetic values and respect for ecological sources (Choudhary, 2023).

Oraon Tribe in Indigenous Knowledge Tradition for Sustainable Development

The Oraon tribe, one of the largest tribal groups in Central and Eastern India, possesses a rich corpus of indigenous knowledge tradition (IKS) that contributes to sustainable development across ecological, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. Indigenous knowledge refers to the local, traditional, and context-specific wisdom developed over generations through close interaction with the environment (Agrawal, 1995). The Oraons' knowledge systems are holistic, combining ecological ethics, agricultural practices, health care, and social institutions to promote a balanced relationship with nature.

1. ***Ecological Sustainability***

Oraon agricultural practices are rooted in mixed cropping, crop rotation, and organic manuring, which preserve soil fertility and reduce dependence on chemical inputs (Singh & Lal, 2019). Their traditional water conservation structures, such as ahars (small reservoirs) and pynes (canals), ensure efficient irrigation and groundwater recharge (Prasad, 2021). This aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 15 (Life on Land), as it supports biodiversity conservation and prevents land degradation.

2. ***Sustainable Livelihoods***

The Oraons rely on minor forest produce (MFP) such as sal leaves, mahua flowers, and lac, which provide food security and supplementary income while encouraging forest preservation (Xaxa, 2005). The community's customary rights under the PESA Act, 1996, and Forest Rights Act, 2006, empower them to manage and use forest resources sustainably (Bharati, 2015). Such community-led management supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through self-reliant livelihoods and micro-enterprises based on non-timber forest products.

3. ***Health and Ethnomedicine***

The Oraons maintain a sophisticated system of ethnomedicine, using herbs like neem, tulsi, and ashwagandha for curing ailments (Toppo et al., 2020). The role of village healers (baigas) is crucial in preserving this knowledge. The use of herbal medicine reduces healthcare costs and supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), while simultaneously preserving medicinal plant biodiversity.

4. ***Social Institutions and Governance***

Oraon governance is organised through the Parha system, a traditional self-governing council that manages resource distribution, conflict resolution, and community festivals (Ekka, 2017). This participatory decision-making model fosters social cohesion and collective responsibility, resonating with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

5. ***Cultural Continuity and Education***

Festivals like Sarhul and Karma celebrate the cycles of nature, reinforcing environmental ethics and intergenerational knowledge transfer (Minz, 2018). Oral traditions, folk songs, and storytelling play a vital role in transmitting values of respect for forests, water, and wildlife to the younger generation, ensuring the continuity of sustainable practices.

The Oraon tribe's indigenous knowledge system represents a blueprint for sustainable development, integrating ecological stewardship, economic resilience, and cultural continuity. Policy frameworks should prioritise documentation, protection, and integration of IK into mainstream development strategies to prevent knowledge erosion and empower tribal communities as agents of sustainability (UNESCO, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research reveals that the Oraon tribe's traditional ecological knowledge constitutes a vibrant and adaptive system deeply rooted in their spiritual beliefs and cultural practices. Agricultural practices such as mixed and rotational cropping, coupled with the use of organic fertilisers like cow dung and compost, demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of soil health and pest control that sustains productivity without chemical inputs. The construction and communal management of small-scale rainwater harvesting structures address water scarcity challenges inherent to the monsoon climate. Sacred groves, or *Sarna Sthal*, emerge not only as ecological sanctuaries but also as cultural and spiritual bastions, strictly protected through community taboos and rituals led by the village priests. These groves preserve crucial biodiversity and strengthen the community's ethical commitment to conservation.

The ecological festivals, *Sarhul* and *Karma*, play a pivotal role in maintaining environmental consciousness by symbolising seasonal transitions and reaffirming the sacred relationship between humans and nature through collective ritual performances. Women hold a central place in this ecological system through their roles in seed preservation, medicinal plant knowledge, food preparation, and participation in fertility and forest worship rituals. Their leadership in forest conservation initiatives underscores the gendered dimensions of indigenous ecological stewardship.

Despite increasing pressures from deforestation, mining, and modernisation, the Oraon community exhibits resilience by integrating traditional knowledge with new scientific insights, adapting to socio-environmental changes while preserving foundational ecological values. These findings align with existing literature that positions indigenous knowledge systems as dynamic, culturally embedded frameworks essential for biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management. However, the persistence of external threats necessitates ongoing attention to support community-led conservation and inclusive policy frameworks that recognise the legitimacy of Oraon ecological wisdom. Thus, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural identity and ecological sustainability interplay, highlighting the importance of integrating indigenous perspectives within broader environmental governance.

WAY FORWARD

From the Oraon's experience, several lessons emerge:

1. *Integrating traditional institutions into environmental governance*

Village councils, forest protection committees, and totemic taboos can be formally recognised in local governance and resource management. Traditional leaders (like Simon Oraon) serve as effective agents of collective action.

2. *Promoting indigenous food systems and seed diversity*

Policy and extension services can support preservation of indigenous crop varieties, wild edibles, and indigenous knowledge around nutrition. This can help with malnutrition and resilience to climate change.

3. *Encouraging sustainable, low-cost ecological interventions*

Practices like small check dams, reforestation, and rainwater harvesting are cost-effective, scalable, and rooted in local knowledge. Supporting communities with materials and technical inputs can bolster these efforts.

4. *Cultural education and awareness*

Including traditional ecological knowledge in school curricula, community education, and awareness campaigns both within and outside of tribal communities can help preserve and spread environmental wisdom.

CONCLUSION

The Oraon tribe of Jharkhand exemplifies a holistic Indigenous Knowledge System that supports sustainability through a combination of environmental conservation, sustainable agriculture, biodiversity management, cultural rituals, education, and social governance. Their traditional practices include sacred grove conservation, mixed cropping, organic farming, rainwater harvesting, and community-based knowledge transfer through oral traditions. These help maintain ecological balance, promote food security, and support biodiversity. The Oraons also engage in social governance to ensure sustainable use of resources and climate adaptation strategies. Their indigenous knowledge contributes to protecting forests, managing water resources, and preserving cultural identity. This integrated system aligns with global sustainability goals, demonstrating the valuable role of tribal wisdom in creating resilient and sustainable communities.

Their worldview, grounded in Sarnaism, instils reverence for nature, promoting the protection of sacred groves that serve as reservoirs of biodiversity and ecological balance. Sustainable practices such as mixed cropping, organic fertilisation, rainwater harvesting, and seed preservation underscore their commitment to maintaining soil fertility, water availability, and food security without relying on harmful chemical inputs. The ecological festivals of *Sarhul* and *Karma* not only mark the changing seasons but also reinforce a collective environmental ethic, binding the community through ritualised knowledge transmission.

Women play a central and active role in this system as custodians of seeds, medicinal plants, and sacred traditions, as well as leaders in conservation efforts, highlighting the gender-sensitive dimension of sustainable development within indigenous contexts. Amid rapid socio-economic changes, industrial encroachment, and environmental degradation, the Oraon community has demonstrated remarkable resilience by integrating its traditional ecological knowledge with scientific innovations, allowing adaptation without compromising core ecological values. This adaptability is crucial as they face climate variability, land pressures, and resource challenges.

Importantly, the Oraon Indigenous Knowledge System aligns strongly with multiple United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including zero hunger, clean water and sanitation, climate action, gender equality, and life on land. Integration of their time-tested practices and cultural wisdom into contemporary policy-making and educational frameworks presents a valuable opportunity to enhance climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and social equity on wider scales.

Recognising and preserving the Oraons' ecological heritage is not only imperative for protecting their cultural identity but also for global sustainability efforts. Supportive policies that respect indigenous rights and promote participatory governance can empower the Oraon and other tribal communities as custodians of the environment. In doing so, these knowledge systems can guide humanity towards a more just, inclusive, and environmentally harmonious future—one where the balance between human needs and nature's health is thoughtfully maintained for generations to come.

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KUMBH MELA: A CONTINUUM OF SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

The Kumbh Mela is the world's largest and oldest spiritual gathering, representing a continuum of humanity's collective consciousness, reverence for nature, and the ongoing pursuit of examining and enhancing societal knowledge. It happens at four different locations associated with sacred rivers—Haridwar, Prayag, Ujjain, and Nasik—Kumbh is rooted in religious, historical, and Vedic traditions, with references dating back to the Rig Veda. Central to the Kumbh is the ritual of bathing (Shahi Snan), especially on astrologically significant days, believed to purify the soul and eliminate harmful influences. At the core of Kumbh lies the congregation of Akharas—monastic orders believed to have been systematised by Adi Shankaracharya—that embody the spiritual and ascetic traditions of the Shaiva, Vaishnava, and Udaseen sects. The gathering of Sadhus, associated with various Akharas and representing distinct philosophical tenets of spirituality, reflects a warrior-ascetic legacy that continues to inspire devotion and the quest for salvation among attendees. Despite its rich oral history and sociocultural significance, the traditions and practices of the Akharas have received limited scholarly attention. This paper examines the multifaceted aspects of the Kumbh—its origins, rituals, institutional structures, and the socio-religious roles of Akharas and Sadhus—to highlight its enduring significance in India's spiritual and cultural landscape, and its potential to guide humanity through a syncretic approach that promotes the pursuit of knowledge.

Keywords: Kumbh, traditions, continuity, consciousness and Akhara.

INTRODUCTION

The Kumbh Mela is the world's largest peaceful gathering, drawing millions of pilgrims for a ritual bath in holy rivers (Ministry of Culture, 2024). Kumbh is a congregation of people representing the belief in the spirit of Humanity, respecting nature, rivers and further extending the same to the next generation. Kumbh is and an event it is the continuity of human life which asks for coming together and discussing with each other the to collectivize the issues and together finding their solutions. There are claims that Kumbh being organized for the last twenty-five hundred years, Huen Tsang's writings prove the full-fledged Kumbh twelve hundred years ago. The date of the starting of Kumbh is not mentioned anywhere, not also when people started coming together. It only traces that after Samudra Manthan, during the fight between Demons and Gods the Kumbh of Amrit (Pitcher containing Nectar) was either placed for a day in the four locations or the Amrit (Nectar) spilled over the four areas. Kumbh is being organized at four locations a) Haridwar one the bank of Ganga b) Prayag on the Sangam of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati c) Ujjain on the bank of

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River Kshipra and d) Nasik on the bank of River Godavari. There is a strong connection of Kumbh with rivers and Bathing being one of the most important rituals of Kumbh. In April 1796 an English officer, Captain Thomas Hardwicke, accompanied by Dr. Hunter, visited the Haridvar Mela on the way to "Srinagar (Hardwicke 1801:309–347) they attended Makar Sakranti, which fell on April 8th that year. Pilgrims had come from as far as Kabul, Bhutan and Kashmir (CLARK 2006). Kumbh is where all the Akharas come together. It also becomes a matter of contention among the Akharas to showcase their strength, supremacy over others and the devotion they get from the society. All the Akharas will establish their own complex in a few hectares housing all their Sadhus and separate arrangements for the devotees. These complexes are open for the devotees and visitors, offering food, Prasad and religious literature. Devotees come to take blessings and to meet Sadhus and to discuss their problems.

There is a mention of 'Kumbh' and the bathing ritual associated with it in the Rig Veda (verse 10.89.7). It speaks of the benefits of bathing at sangam during this period, elimination of negative influences and rejuvenation of mind and soul. Prayers for the 'Kumbh' are also expressed in Atharva Veda and Yajur Veda[1].

Moreover, the historical texts also point towards evidence that Adi Shankaracharya established 10 Akharas, Ardha Kumbh and Kumbh Mela. The Kumbh Mela at Prayag is widely considered as the most significant among all the Kumbh festivals held at other locations. It is considered as the source of light and knowledge. The event of Kumbh takes place as per the following astrological positions[2]:

- When Jupiter enters the Aquarius constellation along with the Sun moving into the Aries constellation, the Kumbh festival is held at Haridwar.
- When Jupiter moves in to Leo, the Kumbh festival is held at Nasik on the banks of Godavari and in the event of Jupiter moving in to Leo and the Sun entering Aries, the Kumbh festival is held at Ujjain.
- When Jupiter enters Libra and the Sun and the Moon remain together on Kartik Amavasya (8th month of Hindu year) then also the Kumbh Festival is held at Ujjain.
- When Jupiter, the Sun, and the Moon enter Cancer on lunar conjunction (Amavasya), then also the Kumbh Festival is held on the banks of river Godavari.
- When Jupiter enters the Aries constellation and the Sun and the Moon are in Capricorn constellation, the Kumbh festival is held at Prayagraj on the new moon day.
- When the Sun is in Capricorn and Jupiter moves into Taurus, the Kumbh festival is held at Prayagraj.

DEVOTEES

The devotees who attend the Kumbh Mela come from diverse social and geographical backgrounds. Meeting the entire nation at Kumbh is no surprise. It is common to stumble to people whose appearance, language and belief system is entirely different from yours. All of them are rushing towards Sangam to take the dip as quickly as possible. The same continues from morning to night, round the clock. Many of them search for Pandas (Local Brahmins) to perform the family rituals and many flock to visit various *Sadhus* in the Kumbh Area. Speaking in broken common language or finding someone who can understand their native language.

These devotees not only search for answers to their personal problems but also act as

correspondents for their geographies, informing others about the problems of their region. Kumbh provides them a platform where they can meet strangers, start a conversation, establish a relationship and share their views. Sadhus act as counsellors, teachers, juries and mediators. Devotees look for sadhus from their area who can understand their language and problems, help them connect with others, suggest solutions, or help them identify the right person to seek advice. Everyone has different reasons to come to Kumbh, but they all have one purpose to meet and merge with others.

Many devotees stay around the sangam area. They bring raw food items, wood, utensils, and a blanket with them to support their stay of a few days at the Kumbh. Many Akharas and rich people offer free food to everyone, which also helps the devotees to stay for a few more days than expected at Kumbh. These Akharas and other rich people also provide the stay facilities. They provide makeshift arrangements near Sangam area where any devotee can stay without any cost. Making the whole experience memorable for everyone.

There are many devotees who come to donate at Kumbh. It can be goods, money, food anything, some donate only to *Sadhus* while many donate to common devotees or the people who look for donations. Historically it has also encouraged beggars. Beggars are a common sight at the Kumbh, sitting roadside looking for support/alms/donation. Many devotees donate after taking a bath, looking for purity of mind and soul. A few devotees also believe in begging during Kumbh to compensate for any mishap/accident/tragedy in the family; they feel that begging at Kumbh will save their family from any tragedy in future.

Demography at Kumbh is amazing, from newborn kids to old age, all kinds of devotees are common. Full families with small kids and older members are often seen walking with ropes or holding each other's hands to avoid losing each other. However, losing people to Kumbh is common and the most publicised phenomenon through stories and Hindi Movies. Loudspeakers announcing the whereabouts of lost people are a common occurrence.

A section of devotees also comes in search of spiritual peace. They come to renounce the world, looking for the right Guru. At every Kumbh, such people join different Akharas to be a Sadhu and learn how to live a life of asceticism for a spiritual journey.

SANGAM

Sangam holds an exceptional value in Kumbh. It is the place in water where the River Ganga meets the River Yamuna and the Mythical River Saraswati. The river Saraswati doesn't exist today, and in a few explanations is considered as knowledge being flown during the Kumbh. There is a Saraswati Well inside the fort, which is also viewed as a trace of the river. At Sangam Ganga turns rightward to meet Yamuna and from there the new merged river is called Ganga.

Sangam is considered the most pious aspect of Kumbh, where taking a dip is a symbol of a spiritual journey. Millions of devotees take a bath at the Sangam every day during the Kumbh. They walk around the rivers to find the sangam, many times taking the support of boatmen who ensure that devotees take a bath exactly at the sangam point, ensuring the spiritual dip for devotees and livelihood for boatmen.

Sangam is crowded all through the day, with various people taking bath many times a day during Kumbh. At any point in the day, millions of people rush towards the Sangam to take a dip, creating a mela-like scene around the Sangam. People bump into each other crawling in and out of sangam, changing clothes, walking in wet clothes, praying to god, offering *Arti, flowers* to rivers, few even throwing gold and silver ornaments in the river showing their gratitude to the river. This

shows the importance of water and especially the rivers to sustain and support life. Congregation around Sangam also reflects the role of Kumbh in creating awareness about water and river in human life.

Bath at Sangam is a spiritual event in the life of many devotees, especially for old people and ascetics, for young people it is a fun activity, swimming from one river to another crossing Sangam, for kids it is plenty of water around, which is scary and funny at the same time. Sadhus considered bathing as their first right. It creates ruckus around the sangam where Sadhus claim their first right to bath which leaves common devotees with no choice and wait for their turn. It is also interesting that common devotees accept the first right of sadhus over bath. Shahi Snan, a few days are considered auspicious than others for bath, and on these days, Sadhus are first allowed to dip in the Sangam, which is protected by everyone.

Sangam bath is open for all, without any restriction on rich and poor, caste background, social and economic status. All devotees are welcome in the Sangam. Everyone is busy taking a dip without worrying who is next to them, offering their prayers to Rivers. Sangam can best be described as not only the merger of the two most sacred rivers of India but also of the human populace, knowledge, wisdom, ideas and culture. Very rightly you can witness the culture of whole India in the Kumbh. Differences merge at Kumbh and create a holistic vision of India. A non-dying spirit of India and Hinduism which brings humans closer to the environment through religious means for a spiritual journey. Sangam is a symbol of resistance, survival, assimilation, integration and sharing.

SHAHI SNAN (PESHWAI)

Shahi Snan is considered as the most important aspect of Kumbh. Taking a dip in the river is at the center of Kumbh, and so there are few important days in which bathing is considered more auspicious than others. Bathing on these days is called Shahi Snan or Rajyogi Snan. There are six Shahi Snan Days a) Makar Sankranti, b) Paush Purnima, c) Mauni Amavasya, d) Basant Panchami, e) Maghi Purnima, f) Mahashivratri. All these days are according to Indian calendars and depend on the movement of the Sun, Moon and other astrological entities. Four of these Shahi Snan, from Makar Sankranti to Basant Panchami are more prominent, reason being that the Basant Panchami is the last day when the Sadhus from Akhara take bath at Sangam in Kumbh and after that they leave the Kumbh and go back to their places. Other two days are equally significant but the absence of Sadhus and Akharas make it the event of devotees only.

Shahi Snan was always the issue of contention among the Akharas and between Sadhus and common devotees. It is well accepted that common devotees take bath after Sadhus but among the Sadhus the sequence was extremely contentious and according to few stories sometimes even bloody. However, the sequence is completely concretized now accepted by every Akharas. Some books claim that the sequence was decided by Lord Curzon. Every Akhara is now allotted 40 to 45 minutes to complete their bath along with the rituals. These Sadhus are very protective of their bath rights and ensure that these rights are respected. Sri Panchayati Akhara Mahanirvani has the first right on Shahi Snan while Sri Panchayati Akhara Nirmal takes bath at the end.

First of all, Sri Panchayati Akhara Mahanirvani accompanied with Sri Panchayati Atal Akhara of Sanyasi sect will take holy dip at Sangam. They will be followed by Sri Panchayati Niranjani Akhara and Taponidhi Sri Panchayati Anand Akhara. Sri Panch Dashanam Juna Akhara accompanied with Sri Panch Dashanam Awahan Akhara and Sri Shambhu Panch Agni Akhara from Sanyasi sect will take holy dip.

Shahi Snan of Vairagi sect Akharas will start then and of them Akhil Bharatiya Sri Panch

Nirmohi Ani Akhara will take holy dip first. It will be followed by Akhil Bharatiya Sri Panch Digambar Ani Akhara. Bathing of Vairagi Akharas will be completed with the royal dip of Akhil Bharatiya Sri Panch Nirvani Ani Akhara.

Lastly Saints and Sears of Udasin Akharas will take royal bathing. Of them Sri Panchayati Akhara Naya Udasin will take royal bathing firstly. They will be followed by Sri Panchayati Akhara Bada Udasin. With the bathing of Sri Panchayati Akhara Nirmal royal bathing of Akharas will be completed.

The Akhara reaches Sangam in the form of a procession. They come in chariots, elephants, and horses armed with weapons like Trishul, Bhala, Sword. Their procession is perceived as a holy procession by devotees and many of these devotees try to enter in between the procession to either touch the feet of Sadhus or take the dust from the road of the procession as blessings. Many Sadhus after the Bath bless the devotees while some refuse to bless claiming that their penance is still incomplete. Few of them don't entertain the devotees at all.

SADHUS

Sadhus are at the center of Kumbh. Kumbh is the event where Sadhus from across India come together and meet devotees. It is also a chance where Sadhus attached to different Akhara come together and meet each other. Every Akhara is turned into a congregation of the Sadhus attached to their particular Akhara. There are two types of Sadhus in Akhara a) Saffron Clad Sadhus b) Naga Sadhus. Traditionally the Naga Sadhus were considered as Soldiers. They were trained in fighting and used to participate in battles to save and promote Hinduism. Considering the military aspect of Sadhuism they till date don't accept physically unfit people as sadhus.

Sadhus either stay in Akhara Complex or in different tents in and around Kumbh Nagari. Mostly Sadhus prefer to stay in Akhara Complex, it ensures a chance to have close interaction with other Sadhus and also the feeling of togetherness. Kharas also want Sadhu to stay inside the complex because it helps them to showcase their strength during Shahi Snan. Currently Sri Panch Dashanam Juna Akhara and Sri Panchayati Niranjani Akhara claim to have the highest number of Sadhus attached to them. There are many Sadhus who are attached to different Akharas but have attained great respect and immense number of followers, in that situation they establish their own complex in Kumbh Nagari. Sadhus have different titles representing their position within the Sadhu Samaj and also to represent their followers. Every title is attached to the number of followers from the Sadhu Samaj a Sadhu has. In ancient times it was a practice that a Sadhu used to challenge other sadhu from different sects for 'Shastrarth (debate on traditional texts)' and the defeated Sadhu would become the follower of the winner. This is how a sadhu is supposed to get the number of follower/disciple.

Sadhus get diksha from the Akhara and after completing their training and before the final ceremony of being called as Sadhu they have to perform their own *pinddaan.* Pinddaan is the last ritual of any life according to Hinduism, it is performed after death by the son or other relatives for the peace of departed souls. Sadhus are supposed to perform their own pinddaan as a symbol of snapping any relationship with their families and the new life or a next birth as Sadhu. There are many Sadhus who are extremely educated and accomplished but get frustrated with life and become Sadhu. Few get some spiritual lead in life, a general inclination towards spirituality and religion they come to Kumbh to become Sadhu. There are many who join the Akharas at a young age and spend their life among the Sadhus and later join the Akhara as Sadhu.

In Kumbh Many Sadhu runs an Ayurvedic hospital treating the patients with natural herbal

medicine. Many devotees come to Kumbh to find a solution to their lifelong diseases. The Sadhus running these Ayurvedic hospitals/clinics perform a great service by helping the patients throughout the Kumbh. It gives Kumbh a different nature other than Spiritual and religious and brings it closer to normal human life looking for solutions for their health issues.

NAGA SADHU

"Naga" came from the Sanskrit term Naga means naked.[3] Naga Sadhus are the major attraction of Kumbh. Tourists flock to get a glimpse of Naga Sadhus who are rarely seen other than Kumbh. A spiritual, religious figure wearing nothing creates curiosity among devotees. These sadhus are attached to different Akharas reflecting their strength, more so the military strength. Naga Sadhus are traditionally the Warrior ascetics fighting for the Sanatan Dharma, wearing nothing. Now, the traditional role of Naga Sadhus is no longer required, the country operates through Constitution and the Naga Sadhus are supposed to be restricted to the spiritual role only. Whether their numbers are increasing or decreasing is open for discussion because the different Akharas don't traditionally maintain those records. Many times it is reported that Akharas exaggerate the number of Sadhus attached to them, especially regarding the Naga Sadhus. Despite all the claims and counter claims, the myths around the Naga reach its peak during Kumbh. Their participation is at the center of Shahi Snan days. For many visitors and foreigners, they are the source of attraction as well as fear. The tradition of Naga Sadhu is also found in the Jain Community.

The *Naga*s of each Dasanami *akhara* revere the *bhala* (a fifteen to twenty-foot-long javelin), which is engraved with the signs of the respective deities of the *akhara*s and carried at the front of the arrival and bathing processions (*shahi snan*) at the Kumbh Melas by the chief *mahant* or by *Nagas* (Clark 2006). The Naga Sadhus were considered the soldiers of Sanatan Dharma, to protect the religion from outside attacks. Naga Sadhus wield swords, Trishul and Bhala among the weapons till date. In Shahi Snan days they march with the procession of their Akharas showing the military strength.

To become Naga Sadhu one has to join the Akhara and find a Guru. The Guru teaches the disciples Veda and Puranas along with other Hindu religious texts. On the day of their final ceremony the disciples wear the loin clothes given by Guru, perform the Pinddaan of their ancestors as well as theirs and take bath in River Ganga to become one of the Naga Sadhu. A Naga Sadhu is not supposed to marry, to collect wealth. He is supposed to eat only once in a day and is prohibited to beg from more than seven houses in a day and can only sleep on the floor. A Naga Sadhu is supposed to renounce everything in the world and to take oath to serve the Hindu Dharma.

There are many stories of the military might on Naga Sadhus. There are claims of their fight with Mughals near Jhansi where many of them lost their lives. The fight with Britishers is also claimed by a few Akharas. It is hard to verify which Akhara fought which battle as many of them try to claim the past heroics of the Naga Sadhus. As the new Akharas emerged from the old Akharas only there is a genuine case of common claim over history. These Nagas are supposed to roam around the country and not to stay at location making them completely mobile. In the past many of them have assisted a few kings in the past to save the rule of Hindu Dharma. However, there are instances of these Sadhus fighting for Muslim rulers as well.

The stories and Journey of Naga Sadhus in India is not recorded and so we don't know much about them. Considering the mystery around these Sadhus, there are many attempts to malign their image and specially highlighting their angry nature. Very few are aware that Naga Sadhus are prohibited from appreciating or praising anyone which creates confusion among common devotees.

There is a need to document their journey which can give a different perspective on Indian History.

AKHARA

Akharas as an institution are in existence for at least twelve-hundred years witnessing all ups and downs. Unfortunately, their past is not recorded and whatever little is recorded has many exaggerated and unverifiable claims. Surprisingly, their history has gone unnoticed by researchers after independence. Akharas in simple words is an institution of Sadhus. Akharas according to claims are established by Adi Shankaracharya however; there are claims of few Akharas existing even before him. There are a total thirteen Akhara and above all there is the Akhara Parishad which is a new entity to create harmony and to resolve any issue of contention among them. Akharas are a symbol of social order, unity, culture and ethics. Their main objective is establishment of spiritual values in the society. The greatest responsibility of Akhara Mathas is to establish ethical values in the society. For this reason, during the selection process of Dharma Gurus special emphasis is given on virtue, morality, self-restraint, compassion, rigorousness, farsightedness, and religiosity. Indian culture and unity derives its strength from these Akharas. Despite being divided under various organisations, Akharas are a symbol of unity among diversity. A specific type of Akahara Matha consisting of Naga sages holds special significance. Each Naga sage is always associated with some or the other Akahara. These sages on one hand specialize in scriptures and on the other are experts in the art of combat[4]. The Kinner Akhara (Akhara for transgender) and Mahila Akhara (Akhara for women) are attached to Juna Akhara and share the timing of Shahi Snan with Juna Akhara. Akahras may be categorised into the following three sections based on their favoured deity[5]:

- **Shaiva Akahras:** The favoured deity is Lord Shiva. They worship Lord Shiva in various forms based on the specific beliefs and ideologies of their organization.
- **Vaishnava Akharas:** Lord Vishnu is the favoured deity of this sect. They worship Lord Vishnu in various forms based on the specific beliefs and ideologies of their organization.
- **Udaseen Akharas:** Chandra Dev, the son of the first guru of the Sikh community is considered as the founder of the Udaseen Akhara. Followers of this of this sect principally offer their adulations to 'ॐ'.

Akharas recognize and establish the status of a Sadhu in the Sadhu Samaj and give the titles like Mandeleshwar and Mahamandeleshwer. There are many Mahamandaleshwer who are associated with Akharas but run their Math independently. To establish themselves among the eyes of devotees they seek recognition from Akharas. The head of an Akhara is called Acharya Mahamandeleshwer. A five-member committee looks after order and operations of the organization and are considered the representatives of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesha, and Shakti. In terms of numbers, 'Juna Akahara' is the largest, closely followed by 'Niranjani' and 'Mahanirvani' Akharas. Mahamandaleshwaras lead the Akharas and they are the only ones authorised to share the Guru-mantra to the inexperienced saints. During Peshvai and Shahi Snaans, 'Mahamandaleshwaras' lead the procession on ornate chariots accompanied by 'Shri Mahanta', followed by their secretaries on elephants, Naga sages on horses and rest of the saints following on foot. Akharas display great pomp and royal glory by displaying their skills using traditional weapons along with all the paraphernalia during the procession. Nowadays, these Akharas are perceived with much admiration and devotion. Holding the flags and banners of Sanatan Dharma, these akaharas spread the lustre and glory of Akahara Dharm in all directions.[6].

As Foreword of Sir Dr Jadunath Sarkar's book "A history of Dashnami Naga Sampradya" Sri K.M. Munshi, a freedom fighter and Ex Governor of Uttar Pradesh, who was himself a known writer

has written an exemplary piece of introduction of Dhashnami Sampradya. His piece is attached as Annexure I. It is a very short piece giving the most noteworthy account of their history and their contribution in our life.

These monasteries have soldiers in their group and their goal was also to fight for the protection of Sanatan Dharma. The birth of the Akhara system cannot be said with a definitive answer, according to KM Munshi[7] "Buddha and Mahavir were in fact leaders of two Orders of monks who later spread their doctrines." However, Adi Shankaracharya is credited for the organization and establishment of the Akhara System. There are claims of existence of these Akharas before him also, especially Udasin who claim their history predates the Lord Rama period. The current Akhara system owes largely to Adi Shankaracharya however, Sarkar[8] claims that considering the small life of Shankaracharya the major work of reorganization may have been taken out by his disciples. Whatever, the reality was, all the Akharas credit Shankaracharya for the establishment of Akharas. It appears that the earliest sect of this kind was founded by Shankara in the 10th century, followed by Ramanuja's sect in the 11th century, the former Shaiva and the latter Vaishnava[9]. Currently there are thirteen recognized Akharas and above them there is Akhara Parishad which is a committee of these Akharas. These three Akharas can be clubbed in three groups: a) Shaiva b) Vaishnav and c) Udasin. Shaiva are the worshipper of Lord Shiv, Vaishnav are worshipper of Lord Vishnu and majorly is seventh incarnation Lord Rama and Udasin worships Shiva, Vishnu, Surya along with Shakti (Goddess Durga) and Ganesha (Sandhu 2011). Clark (2006: 53-56) describes the Akhara system in these lines but differentiates Niramala Akhara from other Udasin Akharas. His observations on Akharas are attached as Annexure II.

God is not the only one difference among these three. The interesting difference comes from the Philosophers they follow. Shaiva Akharas follows Adi Shankaracharya while Vaishnav are followers of Ramanuj and Udasin follows Sri Chand Ji. These Philosophers are the most influential for the Indian society and it is remarkable to read them only after that we could realize their role in shaping our current society. India as a country somehow has limited understanding of the role of these three philosophers in shaping our present.

Adi Shankaracharya lived for around 32 years. There are contradictory accounts of his life[10] but the most acceptable one is that he lived in the 8th century. He is the founder of Advaitvad (Theory that Individuals and Brahm are the same). Ramanuj was in the 14th century and he was the founder of Vishisht Adwaitwad (Brahman alone exists, but is characterized by multiplicity). Sri Chand lived in the 16th century, he was son of Guru Nanak. The difference in the philosophies is mentioned in detail by Sarkar[11], the same is mentioned in ANNEXURE III for further reading. The path laid by Adi Shankaracharya for the Sadhus was the 'Path to Knowledge' while the path of Vaishnav Akharas and propagated by Ramanuj was 'Path to Devotion' (Hausner 2007). SriChandra Ji shows the philosophy of combining knowledge and devotion as a means of God-Realization[12]. The Udasis believed in renunciation (udas), bairag meant, the deprivation of kam, artha and dharma, for them attachment with God meant a complete surrender to God, a complete detachment from the world like the lotus flower in water (Sandhu 2011).

The highest position in an akhara is held by a single sabhapati (the 'president' or 'chairman'), who presides over all the activities of all regional branches of the akhara Under him, in order of hierarchical descent, are: Srimahants and mahants; their assistants (karbaris or adhikaris); thanapatis who manage the akharas properties (the temples and mathas); secretaries; pujaris; kotwals who are armed guards who also circulate information about the election of mahant-s and karbaris at Kumbh Melas, and kothariss (or bhandaris), who manage the daily supplies, such as food items, needed

by the akhara Clark (2006: 73-74). While the mahant rules over the matha by legal right (hak), the sri-mahant is elected.

The akharas are a special type of organisation of sadhus who on the one hand are well versed in sastras and on the other hand they are well equipped and trained in arms. The Panchayati form of administration is accepted by Akhara. Panchayati means that the organisation is elected through consensus and unanimity (Misra 1999). The Akharas have various branches which are called Dera/Math or Marhi. There are independent Mahamandaleshwar and Mandaleshwar who run their property independent to Akhara, Akhara don't have any right to their property. The akharas are individually responsible for matters pertaining to internal administration (such as registering sadhus, collecting dues, and issuing membership papers), for disciplining members, and for managing each akhara's still considerable funds (Hausner 2007).

Difference in the nature of distinct sadhu orders could be attributed to the fact that some sects—like the large and unruly Juna Akhara initiate members of all castes, while others—the wealthy and subdued Niranjani Akhara, for example—initiate members of so-called "twice-born, " or upper, castes only (Hausner 2007). At the most visible level, Shaiva sadhus usually wear orange (a few sects wear black) and mark their foreheads with three horizontal lines, the symbol of Shiva's trident, Vaishnava sadhus largely wear white and use vertical designs for their tilaks (Hausner 2007). Shaiva Sadhus are largely called as Sanyasis while Vaishnava Sadhus as Vairagi (Wilson 1904).

A story of formation of Akhara is claimed during the period of Akbar by J. N. Farquhar. There is no account to check the validity of his speech however, it is interesting to read, you can find attached in Annexure B. The ascetic akharas came into political and military prominence around 1200 CE, possibly in response to Muslim invasions in North India (Hausner 2007). Most if not all known groups of warrior ascetics were however founded only after the Muslim conquest and evidently were not the result of the gradual evolution of previously existing institutions[13]. During the time of Akbar and through the reign of Aurangzeb, Dasnami Naga membership restrictions were relaxed in order to allow low-caste Shudras to join the order[14]. Shudras were thought to be robust and thus well suited to take up arms in defense of Hinduism, by allowing Shudras to join with Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas, the sheer numerical strength of the order was significantly increased[15].

Unfortunately, we possess no contemporary record of the origin and history of the different Akharas before the line of Gosain Rajendra Giri who became famous in the affairs of the Delhi Empire about 1750, since that time we have detailed and correct accounts of the doings of the fighting monks (Nagas)[16]. A list of wars fought by Indian Sadhus is listed in *Annexure E*.

Farquhar was extremely critical of Naga Sadhus calling them Wild, Lawless, Shameless etc. There are views such as Sadhus are individualistic, free-floating, religious individuals who became sadhus not to pursue any social cause as such but to live a life free of responsibilities and in tune with their inner callings (Pradhan 2009).

SHAIV (SANYASI)

Shiv–Shakti, the concept is older than vedic period and the devotion towards them was common during the Harappa civilization[17]. Saivism is the sect of Hinduism who believe that god Siva is the Supreme Being. A Shaiva Sect is first mentioned by Patanjali, the members of it were known as Shivabhagvatas 'devotees of Shiva the Bhagawat'[18]. The supreme reality is called Siva, and is regarded as beginning-less, uncaused, free from defects, the all-doer and the all-knower, who frees the individual soul from the bonds which fetter them[19]. From the evidence at hand, it seems that

the earliest sectarian Shaivites were the **Kapalikas**, **Kalamukhas**, and **Pashupatas[20].** Currently, there are following type of Shaiva Sadhus[21]

- Followers of Shankaracharya:
  - Sanyasis
  - Dandis
  - Paramhansas
  - Brahmcharis
- Lingaits: Followers of Basava
- Aghoris
- Yogis

Adi Shankaracharya is considered as the greatest saint of Hinduism. He re-energized the religion and reorganized it. The greatness of Shankaar Acharya is best expressed in the following sentences by Sister Nivedita of the Ramakrishna Vivekanand Order[22]: — *Western people can hardly imagine a personality like that of Shankar Acharya. In the course of a few years to have nominated the founder of no less than ten great religious orders, of which four have fully retained their prestige to the present day, to have acquired such a mass of Sanskrit learning as to create a distinct philosophy and impress him- self on the Scholarly imagination of India, is a pre-eminence that twelve hundred years have not sufficed to shake; to have written poems whose grandeur makes them unmistakable, even to foreign and unlearned ears, and at the same time to have lived with his disciples in all the radiant love and simple pathos of the saints, this is the greatness that we must appreciate but cannot understand.*

The followers of Shankaracharya while following Shiva don't deny the other Gods and the truth of Shastra making them an inclusive sect, where people of all castes can join (OMAN 1905). All Sanyasis may eat together, and the majority accept food from any Hindu[23]. Adi Shankaracharya is credited for the formation of Akhara[24] but there are some alternative views as well[25]. What Shankar and his disciples did was to combine the scattered atoms of individual asceticism known in India from the Vedic age or even before, and place them together under regular discipline and the control of a central authority[26]. The evidence regarding the founding of the six ashramas or regiments of Dasnami nagas, so called for their habit of going about naked, is uncertain and conflicting[27].

Shaiv Sadhus are called Dashnami Sadhus and Sanyasis (Sarkar 1905). The Sanyasis, as reorganised by the eminent Vedantist scholar Sankaracharya in the ninth century, were divided into ten sections, each with its own special designation[28]. An interesting origin of the Dashnami Sadhus is written by Wilson (WILSON 1904): *The spiritual descendants of SANKARA, in the first degree, are variously named by different authorities, but usually agree in the number. He is said to have had four principal disciples, who, in the popular traditions, are called Padmapada, Hastamalaka, Suresvara or Mandana, and Trotaka. Of these, the first had two pupils, Tirtha and Asrama; the second Vana and Aranya; the third had three, Sarasvati, Puri, and Bharati; and the fourth had also three, Giri or Gir, Parvata, and Sagara. These, which being all significant terms were no doubt adopted names, constitute collectively the appellation Dasnami or the ten-named, and when a Brahman enters into either class he attaches to his own denomination that of the class of which he becomes a member; as Tirtha, Puri, Giri, etc.*

The ten branches of the Adwaita school of Shaivaism which Shankaracharya organized (or as others hold, revived) are known as the Dasanama or 'Ten Names', from the ten words which form the suffixes to the names taken by the monks of these orders after their initiation {diksha) [29]. The ten titles which an individual can accept when he became Sanyasi are Giri ('hill'), Puri ('town'), Bharati ('learning'), Vana ('forest'), Parvata ('mountain'), Aranya ('forest/wilderness'), Sagara ('ocean'), Tirtha ('pilgrimage place'), Ashrama ('hermitage'), and Sarasvati ('knowledge') (Clark 2006).

Regardless of the symbolic content of its color, an orange robe publicly designates the wearer as a renouncer of a dasnami, or Saiva order (Hausener 2007). In addition, almost all dasnami renouncers wear a tilak, or a forehead marking of ash or sandalwood paste, in the shape of three horizontal stripes, representing the trident, or trishul, of Siva (Hausener 2007).

VAIRAGI (VAISHNAV)

Vaishnavism is the name given to the Bhakti religion which recognises Vishnu, also called Bhagavat (the Blessed One), Purushottama (the Supreme Person), Narayana, Hari as the sole God[30]. In the opinion of several scholars this Bhakti Religion was of foreign origin, and was preached in India for the first time by Ramanuja[31]. The seed of Vaishnavism in South India was sown by the Alwars, who were the earliest Brahmin messengers to the South[32]. From the 9th century down to the end of the 15th century, an unbroken line of Vaishnavite reformers existed in Southern India, this cult flourished there from the early years of the Christian era under the impetus given by the Alwars, who preached bhakti and devotion to Krishna in the local Tamil, and songs composed in that language were very well understood by the mass[33].

Amongst, other divisions of less importance, the Vaishnavs are usually distinguished into four principal Sampraddyas, or sects; of these, the most ancient and respectable is the Sri Sampraddya, founded by the Vaishnava reformer Ramanuja Acharya, about the middle of the twelfth century[34]. The followers of Ramanand are much better known than those of Ramanuja in upper Hindustan: they are usually considered as a branch of the Ramanuja sect, and address their devotions peculiarly to Ramachandra, and the divine manifestations connected with Vishnu in that incarnation, as Sita, Lakshmana, and Hanuman (WILSON 1904). Vaishnavas preached the path of bhakti and accepted devotees from all section of the society "*Founders of sects since the time of Ramanuja have gone out of their way to stress this idea, and a few sects are said to have admitted Untouchables into their fold" (*SHAH 2006*).* The Ramanandi or Ramavat -sect was founded by Ramananda a follower of Ramanuj, owing to a difference on the single point, privacy in preparing and taking food, on which Ramanuja laid great stress[35].

There are claims that Vaishnava Akhara (which are Ramanandi sect Akhara) were formed as a result of fighting among the Shaiv and Vaishnav ascetics[36] for the control over pilgrimage routes and pilgrimage centers[37] (ANNEXURE C). The militant orders (akhara) and armies (Ani) of the Vaishnavite sects date from this time[38]. *There is good reason to believe that it was the violence suffered at the hands of their brother ascetics, the Yogis and Sannyasis, quite as much as Muslim persecution, that led to the arming in large numbers of the third main group of Hindu devotees, the Vishnu-worshipping sects, whose members were generally designated Bairagis (vairagi, one who has subdued his passions)****[39]****.*

The naga sub-sect was formed in 1713 in Vrindavan, in order to mount a defense against the increasing aggression of dasnāmi or Shaivaite ascetics against the Vaishnavas at prominent pilgrimage centers across North India[40]. The nagas are organized into aṇis or armies, much like

the dasnamis and practice military training and wrestling[41]. The idea of organizing Vaishnava Sadhus into Akhara was first broached at Vrindavan Conference held in 1713 called by Swami Balanand, a Ramanandi mahant of Amer (Hastings 2002). Hastings further claims in his PhD thesis that Vaishnava sources are unanimous in stating that their *Ani* (Armies) are formed for defence against the dashnami (Shaiv Akharas).

Three *Ani and* 18 Akhara were formed by Balanand to counter the attack of other sects of Hinduism (Mittal 1968). These three *Anis* Nirvani, Nirmohi and Digambari were subdivided into akharas, places where the militant ascetic members, the astradharis, of a traditional sect reside[42]. Nirvani Ani consists of the Nirvani, Khaki and Niralambhi akharas, Nirmohi Ani includes the Nirmohi, Mahanirvani and Santoshi akharas and Digambari Ani has under it the Ram Digambari and Shyam Digarnbari akharas, the Nirvani, Nirmohi and Digambari akharas are the main Ramanandi military camps, each having its principal centre in Ayodhya[43]. An interesting take on Vaishnavi Akharas is written by Jha and Jha (2012) and attached as *Annexure D*. Some of the claims made in this article are hard to verify but it is interesting to read. The Ani/Akharas not only protected the Vaishnav Sampradays from outer threats but also ensured their internal unity and religious harmony (Mittal 1968).

Four sects established by Ramanand (successor of Ramanuja's sect), Nimbarka, Madhvacharya and Vishnuswami are collectively called as *Catuh Sampradaya**[44]***. What is called madhi among the Dasnamis is the Dvara for Chatu-sampradayis, the 52 dvaras among the four sampradayas is distributed as follows Ramanandi-36; Nimharka-12; Madhva-2 and Vishnuswami-2 (Mishra 1999). Types of Vaishnava Sadhus[45]:

- Sri Vaishnavas, followers of Ramanuja,
- Madhavas, followers of Madhavacharya,
- Ramanandis, followers of Ramanand,
- Kabir Panthis, followers of Kabir,
- Ballavacharyas, followers of Ballavacharya,
- Chaitanites, followers of Chaitanya.

UDASIN

Udasin is derived from the Sanskrit word Udasin, i.e. one who is indifferent to or disregardful of worldly attachments[46] In Sikh history, the term Udasi firstly refers to the travels or missionary tours of Guru Nanak (Sandhu 2011). Udasin (also referred as Udasi) sect is an order of sadhus which was founded by the elder son of Guru Nanak, Baba Sri Chand[47], there are counter claims such as of Wilson who claims that the Udãsî sect was established by Dharam Chand, the grandson of Guru Nanak[48]. However, Udasin claims that there history predates the Bhagwan Ram period and during his days in jungle he came to know about Udasin Saints[49] because of his fame, Shri Chandraji is often mistakenly taken to be the founder of the Udasin tradition, in fact he was the 165th great exponent in this ancient lineage[50]. When Baba Sri Chand[51] was about twenty-four years old, Guru Nanak Dev advised him to study the ancient religions texts which would help him in understanding the *Gurubani* hymns[52]. Baba Sri Chand adopted Gurditta as his successor but Gurditta, being a married man, was disqualified from being a proper head of the brotherhood, he therefore made over the spiritual leadership of the order to four men who were to act as his deputies, and these four became the founders of the four principal sub- orders, called dhuans, or hearths, into which the Udasis are divided (OMAN 1905). These four disciples were Sri Guru Alimatt Muni, Sri

Guru Balhas Muni, Sri Guru Govind Dev Muni and Sri Pushpdev Muni[53].

Udasis recruit their followers from all castes and professions (Harbans Singh 1998). When a chela is admitted into the order, he is adjured to avoid those two deadly temptations: gold and women, the initiatory ceremony is brought to a conclusion by the chela drinking the water with which his guru's feet have been washed (OMAN 1905). Some wear a mass of matted hair on their heads, others go almost clean-shaven, there being apparently no general rule on this matter. The use of flesh, spirits, and tobacco is denied to the Udasis (OMAN 1905). In their outward appearance they are to be recognized by their yellow coloured robes, chippi and their indifference to the worldly goods generally, and their strict avoidance of wealth (gold) and women[54].

Udasi believe in Sikhism and Guru Granth Sahib but they analyse it through the Vedantic philosophy. Udasis march on the path of Udasin dharma whose end is to become a liberated soul or paramhansa[55]. In Udasi literature Matra has a special connotation. It stands for incantation a sacred text, or the sacred magical or a sacred formula addressed to the deities, a mystical verse or a counsel to the disciple, charm or spell etc.[56] These Matras are attributed to Baba Sri Chand, Almast, Balu Hasna and Bhagat Bhagwan[57]. The basics of the Matras towards practical conduct are:

- Nam Simran (remembering Akal Purakh or God).
- Leading a simple life.
- Working for social welfare.
- Pursuing Adhyatma Marg for higher enlightenment.

The sect became very influential during the Sikh rule and particularly during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh[58]. The Udasi Deras and Akharas which had come up before the establishment of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule enjoyed the largest dharmarth grants[59]. Udasi dehras and akharas are found in places far apart which demonstrates the intense zeal and sincerity of Udasi sadhus and scholars keen on carrying their movement to the farthest corner of the earth they could[60][61]. During what is known as the reign of terror, 1738-63, the Udasis kept the torch of Sikhism, its culture and education, burning[62]. The Khalsa were deeply involved in a life-and- death struggle against the tyranny of the oppressive Indian State and depredations of rapacious invaders, leaving the religious leadership in the hands of Udasis and Nirmala priestly classes whose religious and educational background was more akin to traditional Brahmanism than to orthodox Sikhism[63].

Udasin Akhara was established by Priyatam Dev Ji also known as Nirvan Dev Ji under the guidance of Baba Vankhandi Saheb. The idea of Udasin Akhara was conceived in Hyderabad and announced in Haridwar Kumbh in Vikram Samvat 1825 (1778 AD). Udasin Akharas are Panchayati (democratic in nature), five Mahants are responsible to take all the decisions regarding the Akharas. Bada Udasin Akhara is the oldest one while the Naya Udasin Akhara was formed after the differences within the sect.

AKHARA PROCESSION

Akhara Procession is one of the most eye catching event at Kumbh. This is considered the most sacred as well. There are many stories in different newspapers that how few devotees sneaked in between the procession to collect the dust and applied that on forehead. Akhara Procession or the March of Sadhus does seem like a march of Kings and his army. Mahmandeleshwar lead the procession of Sadhus, riding elephants where one of the disciple will hold Chatra (Umbrella) over the head of Mahamandeleshwar. Various Mandeleshwar and Mahamandeleshwar joins the procession with their disciples and shows their strength. Naga Sadhu are the biggest attraction of

the procession, they walk naked with weapons, play drums, hymns Vedic Mantra and dance. There are other sadhus as well in the procession clad completely in saffron clothes.

Procession is also the opportunity to showcase the strength of the Akharas. Various Mahamandeleshwar showed their interest to lead the procession, establishing their acceptance and leadership status among the Sadhu Samaj (Sadhu Community). Procession is the march of Akharas from their camp to Sangam. They march according to the sequence and completely protect their right to march to the Sangam. Any disturbance and interference results in wrath of these Sadhus, as per a few stories of past these infringements resulted in bloody backlash from Sadhus. Many times some devotees and journalists try to enter the procession and get severely scolded by Sadhus.

The procession includes Sadhus riding elephants, horses and chariots completely surrounded by their disciples. Sadhus ride the procession as per their status within Sadhu Samaj and also with the Akhara of their association. Many Akharas walk behind each other and share the timings of bath. It maintains a coherence in the procession and also in administration of the Kumbh area. Devotees stand at both sides of the road to get a glimpse of these akharas and also throw flowers in the path of procession. Devotees also try to take blessings from the sadhus participating in the procession; however, giving blessings during the procession is totally avoided by Sadhus.

Akhara Procession is the only chance when all the Sadhus who belong to the same Akhara participate together for an event. The procession establishes the hierarchy among the Sadhus within the Akhara and makes it evident to the public through the different symbols, role given to different Sadhus. The head of Akhara often known as Acharya Mahamandaleshwar is at the center of the procession firmly establishing his superiority over other Sadhus.

The procession is the symbol of military strength of each Akhara. In the past through the procession they made it known to everyone regarding their strength. This procession has created quite unrest in colonial administration and before that in Muslim rulers' era. Only the strong and wise Kings/Governor Generals (during British rule) have courage to interfere in the procession rules. For others it was an event closely monitored.

As the stories go, many Kings whether Hindu or Muslim used to come to take blessings and support of Akharas to strengthen their rule; however, these claims cannot be verified.

PANDA

The story at Kumbh cannot be complete without "Panda". Pandas are from the Brahmin caste coming to Kumbh to perform various rituals for the devotees. These Pandas maintain their books which contain the family history of everyone in the country. These books are long and bulky, having red covers is a family heritage for every Panda and passed on from generation to generation. Every time they will record the details of their visitors and complete the missing link of the visitor's family history asking them to provide the necessary information and complete the details. These books are intriguing and often contain surprises for the visitors because there are many facts of their family unknown to them that are often recorded in these books.

Pandas are identified by these red books. Pandas identify the devotees in Kumbh and conduct their religious rituals. The network of Panda is interesting and more so their books. Mr Skinner (1826 AD), an English traveller, has written "pandas appeared to be typical and exclusive teachers of the pilgrims and had their seats in the middle"[64]. These Pandas are custodian of family history and rituals, in Kumbh, Sadhus don't perform any ritual for the devotees however, they counsel, bless and sometimes treat them. These Pandas are identified through their Flags which contain

various symbols and detailed addresses. These Panda consciously give themselves unique names which can't be easily copied such as 'Chedi Lal BA Panda', 'Puran Panda Petari Wale', 'Dashrath Bharat Panda Jahaj wale' etc. According to the Official Kumbh website of 2013 the history of Panda is "Prayagwal is a Brahmin of high society which includes citizens of both Saryupari & Kanyakubj. Tirth teacher Prayagwal and the Panda castes are the synonyms of the same caste. According to customs all rights for offerings of religious work are given to only Prayagwal not to any other caste[65]".

Traditionally the Son is chosen as the successor of any Panda but in recent times considering the interest of the younger generation in a profession other than religious one and also the increasing flow of female devotees, the Panda are training their Daughters and Daughter-in-laws as successor. These Pandas consider their books as the most important document. Some of them claim to have records of each and every family including the famous historical personalities. They even joke about their efficiency by comparing it with Computers but their books surprise devotees in terms of the kind of information it contains about each family. Even if a devotee approaches the wrong Panda, he/she will be guided to the right Panda. These Pandas trace their origin from Tretayug and claim that their status is granted by Lord Rama. They claim patronage by King Harsha and Mughal emperors. They also boast of giving refuge to King Shivaji and further the sacrifice in the freedom struggle. Whatever the history, they are indeed interesting to meet. If anyone wants to find the individual family history can take the help of these Pandas. They are always available around the Sangam even after Kumbh.

CONCLUSION

The Kumbh Mela represents an enduring symbol of India's spiritual, cultural, and social fabric. Rooted in ancient Vedic traditions, it remains a profound gathering that transcends mere ritualistic practices. Through its unique blend of history, spirituality, and communal unity, the Kumbh Mela serves as a timeless continuity of humanity's quest for purity, knowledge, and collective consciousness. The significance of the sacred bathing rituals, particularly at the confluence of rivers at Sangam, highlights the deep reverence for water as a purifying and life-sustaining element.

The role of Akharas and their diverse philosophical beliefs further enhances the socio-religious landscape of Kumbh, offering a platform for spiritual discourse, unity, and integration across various sects. The Akharas, with their unique traditions and leadership structures, provide a vivid reflection of India's diverse religious ideologies, from Shaivism to Vaishnavism to the Udaseen tradition. The devotion exhibited by the Sadhus and their interaction with devotees serve as a reminder of the enduring relevance of asceticism, discipline, and the search for spiritual liberation.

Moreover, the vibrant presence of diverse devotees at Kumbh Mela—whether seeking spiritual peace, medical remedies, or simply participating in the communal spirit—demonstrates the event's role as an inclusive space for all of humanity. Whether in the form of the Shahi Snan, the grand procession, or the service of the Pandas, Kumbh Mela offers a holistic approach to spirituality that emphasizes the need for both internal purity and communal harmony.

In conclusion, the Kumbh Mela remains not just a religious event, but a living, breathing tradition that continues to evolve, carrying forward a legacy of profound cultural significance. It is an embodiment of spiritual consciousness that invites all who partake in its rituals to reflect on their own journey, both individually and as part of the greater whole. Through its enduring traditions and spiritual practices, Kumbh Mela holds the potential to guide humanity in its search for meaning, unity, and salvation.

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HEALING AS RESISTANCE: SOWA RIGPA AND THE PRESERVATION OF TIBETAN IDENTITY IN EXILE

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ABSTRACT

The Tibetan diaspora in India consists of people forced to flee their homeland following the Chinese invasion, seeking refuge across Indian settlements. This exodus drew both elites and working people, many of whom served as custodians of Tibet's intellectual and ritual traditions. Among these, Sowa Rigpa—the Tibetan medical system—emerges as a key vehicle of cultural resilience and identity preservation. This paper examines Sowa Rigpa as both a healing system and a mode of exhibiting cultural resistance, grounded in Tibetan language, cosmology, and collective memory. Drawing on field interviews with practitioners and community members in exile, the study explores how diagnostic techniques—pulse reading, urine analysis, and the three-humour theory—are preserved and adapted for younger generations. It also analyzes the institutional frameworks in India that shape contemporary practice, particularly the Ministry of AYUSH's formal recognition and the system's governance by the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine. While these developments provide visibility and institutional legitimacy, they also generate difficult questions around citizenship, autonomy, and access for Tibetan healers living in exile. In conditions of statelessness and displacement, Sowa Rigpa thus appears not merely as medical care, but as cultural continuity in practice—a way of being Tibetan through healing.

Keywords: Tibetan diaspora, Sowa Rigpa, traditional medicine, cultural resistance, exile, identity preservation, AYUSH, statelessness, Tibetan healers, knowledge systems.

INTRODUCTION

Sowa Rigpa, which Tibetans call *gso ba rig pa*, literally "the field of healing, " grew over centuries from indigenous Bon rites into a fulfledged medical system woven together with Indian Ayurveda, Chinese herbal wisdom, and Greco-Arabic pharmacology. Also referred to as *Amchi,* it's one of the oldest traditional medicine systems which continue to thrive. Its keystone is the Four Tantras (rGyud bzhi), compiled in the twelfth century by Yutok Yönten Gonpo the Elder. These texts lay out theory, diagnosis, treatment, and pharmacopeia in four volumes that remain the standard today. At the heart of Sowa Rigpa is the balance of three humors—wind (rlung), bile (mkhris pa), and phlegm (bad kan)—which echo both bodily functions and Buddhist notions of mind and emotion. Healers learn to read pulses in six positions on the wrist, examine urine for sediment, color, and smell, and ask endless questions about diet, sleep patterns, dreams, and mental

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states. Treatments range from complex polyherbal formulas, dozens of plants like *Saussurea lappa* and *Nardostachys jatamansi*, to dietary rules, lifestyle adjustments, and external therapies such as moxibustion [Craig & Gerke, 2016; Gyatso, 2015].

A PRELUDE

Tibet's vast high plateau, often called the "roof of the world, " was home to a civilization finely attuned to its harsh environment long before the mid-twentieth century. Averaging 4, 500 meters above sea level, encompassing approximately 4, 70, 000 square miles, it showcased a unique civilisation (Goldstein, 1990). Imagine yak caravans crossing windswept passes, yaks grazing on alpine meadows, and families tending terraced barley fields clinging to mountainsides. This was a land of extremes—where air is thin, winters can last eight months, and life unfolded around communal shiga pastures governed by local aristocrats or monasteries. These estates ensured that every household had grazing rights, even when harsh winters forced herd reductions. Yaks were the very foundation of wealth and survival: their meat, milk, hides, hair, and even dung served as food, clothing, building material, fuel, and fertilizer (Food and Agriculture Organization, 1998).

Monasteries, in turn, shaped Tibetan identity. By 1950 there were roughly 6, 000 monasteries and nunneries across regions like U-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo, sheltering more than 200, 000 monks and nuns (McConnell, 2011). These were more than religious sites: they were universities and hospitals too. Young monks memorized complex Buddhist texts, debated philosophy in courtyard debates, and learned healing arts side by side. Village healers practiced herbal lore and spirit rituals at home, but for serious cases people journeyed to monastic infirmaries, where Sowa Rigpa, the Tibetan medical tradition, thrived (Coelho, 2024).

Everything changed in October 1950, when PLA (Peoples Liberation Army) troops marched into Chamdo, eastern Tibetan region and then toward Lhasa. By May 1951, Tibetan delegates had signed the Seventeen-Point Agreement under pressure, and the first land reforms soon redistributed shiga estates to collective farms (McGranahan, 2010; Goldstein, 1978). Nomadic migrations were curtailed. Monasteries lost their land, revenue, and political autonomy. Monastic authorities were forced to register with Chinese officials and attend political study sessions in place of religious retreats. By 1959, disillusionment boiled over. A failed uprising in Lhasa drove the Dalai Lama and tens of thousands of Tibetans over the Himalayas, often on foot across harsh mountain tracks that left refugees frostbitten, blind from snow, and exhausted before they reached Nepal and India (Terheggen, Stroebe & Kleber, 2001; Servan-Schreiber et al., 1998).

The Cultural Revolution in China (1966–1976) delivered a final blow to Sowa Rigpa inside Tibet. The estimates vary, but scholars agree that over 6, 000 monasteries were destroyed or repurposed, and up to 90% of monastics were forcibly defrocked, imprisoned, or killed (Geneva Forum, 2023; National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2018). Manuscript collections, centuries of medical knowledge, were burned as "feudal relics, " and apprenticeship chains were broken when senior healers were denounced or disappeared (Samuel, 2001; Saxer, 2013).

THE REBIRTH: SOWA RIGPA IN EXILE

The exile breathed new life into Tibetan medicine in India. In 1961, the Dalai Lama reestablished the Tibetan Medical and Astro Institute, better known as Men-Tsee-Khang, in Dharamsala, reviving the 1916 Lhasa foundation. Over the next decades, Men-Tsee-Khang grew clinics across India, forged herbal gardens in Himachal and Karnataka, and trained generations of healers in a curriculum blending scripture and fieldwork (Kloos, 2013; Men-Tsee-Khang, 2022).

A turning point came in 2010, when India formally recognized Sowa Rigpa under the AYUSH ministry, amending the Indian Medicine Central Council Act to include Tibetan medicine alongside Ayurveda and Unani. The National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM) now accredits seven colleges that grant the six-year Bachelor of Sowa Rigpa Medicine and Surgery (BSRMS) in Dharamsala, Bangalore, Varanasi, Ladakh, Gangtok, Sikkim, and Dehradun (Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare, 2010). Standardization has led to GMP-approved pharmacies, research partnerships, and insurance coverage—but also to tension between the classical emphasis on individualized diagnosis and the institutional demand for uniform curricula (Gerke & Craig, 2020; Saxer, 2013).

Today, Men-Tsee-Khang boasts 58 branch medical clinics, 3 wellness centres, and a workforce of 738, spread across India (Men-Tsee-Khang, 2022). Meanwhile, Tibetan medicine has also gone global. Clinics in Nepal, Bhutan, Europe, and North America serve Tibetan and non-Tibetan patients alike. Within the PRC, limited revival occurs under state oversight in Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures, though curricula remain tightly controlled (WHO, 2013).

Economic and ecological shifts have reshaped the resource base for Sowa Rigpa. The land reforms and settlement programs inside Tibet left once-free pastures off-limits, so exile pharmacies source prized *yartsa gunbu* (Ophiocordyceps sinensis) and *paris polyphylla* from Nepal and India, creating both economic opportunity and sustainability concerns (Pordié, 2008). Seed banks and greenhouse projects in Himachal and Karnataka now cultivate native and Himalayan species, blending traditional gathering with modern horticulture [Pordié, 2008].

All the while, choosing Tibetan medicine in exile has become an act of cultural resistance. This act of everyday defiance echoes James Scott's concept of subtle resistance through routine practices (Scott, 1985). Continuing Tibetan-language instruction, recitations of sacred verses, and healing festivals on lunar new year or 29th day pujas keep ancestral and traditional memory alive.

This history, from high plateau pastoralism and monastic scholarship through invasion, purge, exile reconstruction, and modern institutionalization, shows how Sowa Rigpa has endured as both healing tradition and a form of collective identity. The following sections examine how Tibetan diaspora in India navigate their sense of belongingness, autonomy, and preservation of living traditions through the practice of Tibetan medicine in exile.

CLINICAL APPROACH AND MENTAL MEDICINE IN TIBET THROUGH CULTURAL PRACTICES

Situated at the intersection of healing, cultural preservation, and identity formation, Sowa Rigpa has been examined across philosophical, institutional, and policy terrains. The literature anchors the tradition in Buddhist cosmology and indigenous Tibetan understandings of health and illness. Central to this framework are the three humors (*nyepsa gsum*), which recent scholarship interprets with greater nuance. More than physiological categories, the humors express Buddhist ideas of consciousness and embodiment (Gyatso, 2015). Wind (*rlung*) corresponds to mental activity and movement; bile (*mkhris-pa*) to metabolism and clarity; and phlegm (*bad-kan*) to structural cohesion and stability. This interweaving of psychological and physiological dimensions distinguishes Sowa Rigpa from materialist medical paradigms (Gyatso, 2015).

Historically, Samuel (2001) traces the development of Tibetan medicine over centuries. The compilation and later redaction of the Four Tantras constituted more than a medical compendium; together they articulated a comprehensive worldview. The Four Tantras braid healing with spiritual practice and social organization. In exile, this holistic orientation gains renewed relevance as

communities work to safeguard cultural inheritance alongside material survival. Read together, these foundational texts illuminate Sowa Rigpa's philosophical depth and historical evolution, and they frame analysis of therapeutic practices and institutional trajectories in exile (Samuel, 2001).

Therapeutic practice in Sowa Rigpa spans pharmaceutical formulations, dietary guidance, behavioural modification, and spiritual practice (Craig, 2012; Gerke, 2013). Saxer (2013) chronicles a shift from locally sourced Materia Medica to standardized, industrial manufacture. Greater availability, however, brings scrutiny around authenticity, efficacy, and the commodification of traditional knowledge. As Saxer argues, standardization can dilute the contextual and individualized methods that anchor classical practice (Saxer, 2013).

Institutional rebuilding in exile has received sustained analysis. Building on the Men-Tsee-Khang's re-establishment, Kloos (2013) shows how diverse regional lineages were consolidated into a unified medical system. Systematization brought standardized curricula, formal examinations, and quality-control mechanisms; at the same time, consolidation supported cultural preservation, community identity, and political legitimacy (Kloos, 2013). A related development is the Tibetan Medical and Astro Institute (TMAI), founded under the Central Tibetan Administration. Blaikie (2014) demonstrates that TMAI functions not only as a college but also as a forum for negotiating between tradition and modernity, and between local expertise and global recognition. Its dual mandate, preserving tradition while meeting contemporary standards, captures dilemmas typical of diasporic institutions (Blaikie, 2014).

Global circulation presents a further inflection. Pordié (2008) documents how exile institutions facilitated Tibetan medicine's expansion beyond Tibetan communities. Such growth requires balancing cultural authenticity with adaptation to varied regulatory and cultural terrains. While globalization can bolster preservation, it also raises questions of ownership, appropriation, and the transformation of knowledge systems (Pordié, 2008). Heritage discourse introduces another register of legitimacy: Sowa Rigpa figures in UNESCO debates on intangible cultural heritage, recognition that may support preservation and promotion even as it risks fixing living traditions within narrow categories (Adams, 2002). In 2018, "Lum medicinal bathing of Sowa Rigpa" entered UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Educational approaches have shifted markedly in exile. Where pedagogy once centred on apprenticeship and oral transmission, contemporary programs emphasise classroom instruction, examinations, and standardised textbooks. Hofer (2018) argues that institutionalisation safeguards technical knowledge yet may erode experiential and spiritual dimensions of practice. A watershed in policy terms arrived with the Indian state's recognition of Sowa Rigpa as an official medical system. When the Indian Medicine Central Council Act was amended in 2010, Sowa Rigpa came under AYUSH oversight, and subsequent scholarship details the negotiations that made this possible. Advocates framed Sowa Rigpa as both ancient and modern, at once traditional and scientific, to secure its place within India's plural medical framework (Kloos, 2020). Yet recognition hinged on extensive documentation, standardisation, and institutional development, thereby reshaping practices it ostensibly sought to protect (Kloos, 2020).

Regulatory governance continues to evolve. The NCISM now supervises Sowa Rigpa's regulation, including entrance examinations and professional standards. These instruments can reinforce quality control, yet they risk constraining diagnostic and therapeutic approaches that depend on individualized treatment and practitioner discretion (Gerke & Craig, 2020). Consequently, tensions persist between public accountability and the flexible, context-sensitive judgment prized in classical practice (Gerke & Craig, 2020).

Scholarship on Tibetan exile communities increasingly treats traditional practices as engines of identity formation and cultural continuity. Recent studies consider how medical practices operate within broader strategies of cultural resistance and survival. Anand (2000) offers a foundational analysis of exile identity, showing how communities preserve distinctiveness while adapting to host-country conditions. Traditional practices mark authenticity and belonging, while enabling pragmatic responses to displacement. Preservation, in this view, is not nostalgia; it is political labour asserting claims to national identity and sovereignty (Anand, 2000).

Generational differences complicate this picture. Frechette (2002) reports that some younger Tibetans embrace Sowa Rigpa as inheritance, whereas others find it dated or impractical. Such dynamics mirror the broader challenge of sustaining practices across generations. Exile narratives and practices also operate as resistance to Chinese occupation and assimilation pressures (McGranahan, 2010). In this setting, traditional medicine becomes a venue for articulating alternative understandings of body, health, and healing that challenge biomedical dominance while maintaining ties to Tibet and Tibetan identity (McGranahan, 2010).

Finally, medical anthropology offers a clarifying lens. Rather than viewing medicine as purely technical intervention, the field examines it as cultural practice. Lock and Nguyen (2010) show how medical systems encode worldviews, social relations, and power. Their account of "local biologies" underscores that bodies and illness experiences are shaped by cultural contexts and lived conditions. This perspective helps explain how Sowa Rigpa addresses physical symptoms alongside social and spiritual dimensions of suffering in exile communities (Lock & Nguyen, 2010).

Kleinman's (1980) theory of explanatory models remains influential for understanding how communities make sense of illness and treatment. Applied to Sowa Rigpa, it helps explain how diagnostic categories and therapies provide culturally meaningful responses to experiences that biomedicine may not fully address (Kleinman, 1980). Petryna's (2002) notion of "therapeutic citizenship" further illuminates how health practices become sites for negotiating belonging and identity. For stateless populations such as Tibetan exiles, sustained engagement with traditional medicine can operate as cultural citizenship, asserting identity and belonging despite legal marginality (Petryna, 2002).

Despite extensive scholarship on Sowa Rigpa's philosophy, institutions, and policy recognition, its experiential dimensions in exile communities remain underexamined. Much of the existing literature focuses on clinical efficacy, historical development, or regulatory analysis, while overlooking everyday meanings and experiences of practice. How traditional medicine sustains community autonomy and distinctiveness is still not well understood. This paper addresses these gaps by examining how Sowa Rigpa functions both as healing practice and as cultural resistance within Tibetan exile communities in India. The study contributes to broader debates on how displaced populations maintain cultural practices under statelessness and how traditional knowledge adapts to new political and social environments while retaining essential characteristics and functions

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on narrative interviews. Bylakkupe, one of the largest settlements situated in Karnataka, Bengaluru, Delhi and Dharamshala were chosen as sites for their significance within the exile institutional landscape, and capacity to provide diverse perspectives. A dual methodological approach was employed for primary data collection - Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS), and Snowball Sampling. RDS is a chain-referral method best suited for hard-to-reach populations. Owing to the dispersed and isolated nature of the Tibetan community, existing social networks

were used to initiate contact and ensure representativeness. Snowball sampling supplemented this approach, enabling further recruitment through participant referrals, particularly valuable given the trust required to elicit candid personal narratives. Using this approach, 30 participants were recruited – 10 each from Karnataka, Delhi, and Dharamshala; ranging from senior physicians to recent graduates, educators teaching traditional medicine within institutional settings, students, community leaders engaged in cultural preservation activities, and lay community members. Participants represented diverse backgrounds in terms of age, gender, educational experience, migration history, and professional involvement with traditional medicine. Qualitative data thus obtained from primary and secondary sources was analyzed using six steps of Thematic Content Analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). These steps are described as familiarizing with the data, generation of initial codes, searching of the themes, reviewing the themes, defining themes, and writing up. For identification of the initial codes within the data, open coding method was adopted. This approach aligns with interpretive methodological frameworks that emphasize understanding social phenomena through the meanings and experiences of participants rather than through quantitative measurement or experimental manipulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sowa Rigpa as Cultural Memory and Continuity

For many practitioners these institutes serve as living repositories of Tibetan medical texts, rituals, and apprenticeship methods.

One doctor explains that "*Men refers to medicine, Tsee to astrology, and Khang to the institutional framework of practice. He noted that the system currently operates through approximately sixty branches across India, in addition to numerous private practitioners who continue to follow this tradition."* This institutional network demonstrates how cultural continuity operates through formal structures that preserve traditional knowledge while adapting to contemporary contexts.

Traditional apprenticeship patterns remain central to knowledge transmission. As one student describes, "*Since he was a child he learned pulse examination from his uncle, a monk at Mundgod. He taught him the Four Tantras in Tibetan script, and they recited verses together"*. Such experiences illustrate how heritage is transmitted through embodied practices and shared memory, echoing Boym's (2001) concept of restorative nostalgia that reconstructs the past in exile.

According to Dr. Ngawang, the centrality of classical texts in Tibetan medicine is anchored in the Four Tantras, regarded as the foundational text. He explained that while numerous smaller texts existed prior to its compilation, the Four Tantras consolidated this dispersed knowledge into a systematic corpus. This process of consolidation reflects a historical effort to organize medical knowledge, which continues to shape the education and training of contemporary Tibetan practitioners.

The preservation of classical language and script further reinforces continuity in Tibetan medical education. One graduate recalls, *"In their curriculum they read the Charaka Samhita in Tibetan translation. It keeps their language alive more than everyday speech."* This commitment to linguistic preservation aligns with Hofer's (2018) analysis of apprenticeship models that safeguard textual fidelity. A senior doctor likewise confirms this emphasis, noting, *"Not only in Men-Tsee-Khang, but in all seven medical colleges, the medium of instruction is Tibetan."* Such insistence on Tibetan-medium instruction ensures both linguistic competence and cultural authenticity in the training of practitioners.

Historical connections between different medical traditions also inform contemporary practice. Dr. Ngawang explains the syncretic origins of Sowa Rigpa: *"In the 8th century, a major international conference is held. Chinese medicine, Persian medicine, and Indian medicine all gather in Tibet, at a monastery. They discuss what we do and what they do. The father of our medicine then takes the best elements from each and compiles them into one comprehensive text."* This historical synthesis establishes the foundation for contemporary cultural identity, incorporating multiple influences while maintaining a distinctly Tibetan character.

Men-Tsee-Khang branches across India exemplify institutional efforts to maintain cultural memory. Branches in Chennai, Bangalore, Delhi and other places train students in traditional methods, they still do exam based on Four Tantras. This expansion supports Kloos's (2013) observation that exile institutions codify regional practices into a unified curriculum. Yet institutional growth also risks standardization pressures (Saxer, 2013). Participants acknowledged this tension: *"We want to preserve local herbs and regional rituals, but AYUSH rules push us to standardize formulations*". This dynamic reflects broader debates in heritage studies about authenticity versus adaptation (Pordié, 2008).

Sowa Rigpa functions as cultural memory through monasteries, apprenticeship, Tibetan script, and ritual performance. Institutional networks sustain these practices, navigating tensions between preservation and standardization. These processes align with scholarship on heritage transmission in diasporic contexts (Boym, 2001; Hofer, 2018).

Healing as Everyday Resistance

Practicing and seeking Tibetan medicine emerged as acts of cultural assertion and political negotiation. One practitioner noted, *"People choose us because they feel they support their own identity. It's not just medicine, it's a statement: I am Tibetan*". This dynamic reflects Scott's (1985) notion of everyday resistance, in which routine practices subtly challenge dominant power structures. A practitioner describes how community attachment to Sowa Rigpa differs from outsider experiences: *"In our community, people are attached to Sowa Rigpa medicine. They know what it is, how they visit doctors, how treatments work. They already have the basic knowledge. So whenever they face a problem, they come to us."* Such accounts suggest that Tibetan patients approach traditional medicine with a pre-existing cultural familiarity, which reinforces both trust in the practice and the reproduction of ethnic identity.

Patients often articulate their healthcare choices as a form of resistance to biomedical dominance. As one patient explains, *"Modern doctors just give pills and don't ask about your life story. Our doctors ask about your dreams, memories… they care about my Tibetan suffering too."* This emphasis on culturally informed care aligns with Craig's (2012) argument that Sowa Rigpa offers holistic alternatives to biomedical models. Dr. Ngawang further contrasts Tibetan approaches with Ayurvedic modernization: *"Ayurveda is now more aligned with allopathy. In their teaching curriculum, they include clinical lab tests, world tests, x-rays, and everything. But in our course it is not like that. We are based on the three humours and urine analysis. That is the tradition, and we continue with it."* This deliberate rejection of biomedical integration represents a form of epistemic resistance that preserves traditional diagnostic methods and sustains cultural distinctiveness.

The distinctiveness of Tibetan medicine also attracts non-Tibetan patients. In urban Delhi clinics, practitioners report increasing patient interest: *"Non-Tibetans come because they trust our herbal methods. They say there are no side effects, and they feel connected to something ancient."*

Figure 1 Display board showing a selection of Sowa-Rigpa herbal teas, oils, lotions, and other medicinal products available at Men-Tsee-Khang's Bylakuppe clinic. Such products epitomize the expansion of Tibetan medical traditions into accessible consumer goods (photo by author, April 2025)

Figure 2 Interior of Men-Tsee-Khang clinic shelf at Bylakuppe, showcasing a blend of Tibetan medicinal implements, classical texts, and pharmaceutical supplies. This arrangement highlights the coexistence of tradition and adaptation in the practice of Sowa Rigpa(photo by author, April 2025)

Another practitioner confirms this trend, explaining, *"The problem is that Indian people do not know about Sowa Rigpa medicine, and Westerners also do not know about it. So once they come to our clinic, we have to explain to them what it is and how it works."* This educational dimension of clinical practice transforms medical encounters into sites of cultural exchange, simultaneously sustaining Tibetan practice and challenging the hegemony of biomedicine.

For exiled Tibetans, seeking Sowa Rigpa also symbolizes political identity. One participant explains, *"When I take Tibetan medicine, I feel I carry my country inside me. It is like a protest; I refuse to let my culture die."* Safran's (1991) diaspora identity framework emphasizes such symbolic practices as essential to sustaining national consciousness. Moreover, this medical choice provides a safe form of political expression within the constraints of Indian policy, which limits overt demonstrations (McGranahan, 2010).

Yet resistance is negotiated rather than absolute. Practitioners also work alongside biomedicine in integrative clinics. As one practitioner explains, *"We refer patients to hospitals when needed. But then we bring them back with herbal tonics and spiritual counsel."* This pragmatic stance resonates with the WHO's (2013) call for integrative medicine strategies. It demonstrates how Sowa Rigpa practitioners assert cultural agency while simultaneously engaging with dominant medical systems.

Everyday acts of choosing and practicing Sowa Rigpa function as cultural resistance. Patients and practitioners assert Tibetan identity through healthcare, challenging biomedical hegemony and political marginalization. This dynamic exemplifies Scott's (1985) concept of everyday resistance and aligns with diaspora scholarship (Safran, 1991).

Mental and Moral Healing in Exile

In exile contexts, Tibetan medicine addresses not only physical ailments but also the psychological strains of displacement and statelessness. As one patient explains, *"Sometimes I cry because Tibetans in Tibet suffer… when I take medicine I feel calmer, my rlung balances, my mind rests."* This integration of psychological well-being with rlung theory echoes Gyatso's (2015) analysis of psychosomatic approaches in Tibetan medicine. Dr. Ngawang confirms the systematic attention to mental health within Sowa Rigpa: *"Mental health is all related to… in our medical texts we say mental health is linked to Buddhism. You have to do meditation, cultivate inner peace, and transform the way you think. In this book also, we have three chapters on mental health."* This textual foundation provides legitimacy for integrating spiritual practice with medical treatment.

Clinical approaches to mental health in Tibetan medicine combine pharmacological and behavioral interventions. A practitioner describes his work with patients experiencing psychological distress: *"We have quite a number of people who are having mental issues, like schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, and stress. It happens. So when they come to us, we advise them, we guide them how to think, the way to think, what to do, and how to do these things. And we prescribe the medicine. All these mental problems are related to sleep—sleep problems are always there."* This integrated approach addresses both physiological symptoms and cognitive patterns, demonstrating the holistic orientation that distinguishes Sowa Rigpa from biomedical psychiatry.

Practitioners describe using pulse diagnosis not only to assess bodily imbalances but also to evaluate mental states. As one practitioner explains, *"I ask about sleep, dreams, appetite… these tell me about your rlung and your spirit, how exile weighs on you."* This diagnostic approach reflects traditional concepts that view mental and physical health as interconnected through the three-humor system (Gyatso, 2015)

Buddhist ethics also inform moral healing within Sowa Rigpa. As one monk explains, *"Impermanence teaches acceptance. We counsel patients on compassion, forgiveness… this is medicine for the heart."* These moral dimensions reinforce non-violence narratives, exemplified by protests in which monks crush guns rather than fight. Such practices resonate with Kleinman's (1980) emphasis on explanatory models that integrate moral narratives into therapeutic processes

Communal support networks also enhance mental resilience among Tibetans in exile. As one participant explains, *"In my hostel we hold group prayers and discussions about exile pain. This teaches us we are not alone."* Such collective practices mirror Frechette's (2002) observations on communal coping in exile contexts. Participants frequently attribute improvements in mental health to these networks, as another recalls: *"I felt depression… but after months of community sessions and herbal treatments, I feel stronger."* This combination of therapeutic, ethical, and communal care exemplifies the holistic ethos of Sowa Rigpa.

Yet participants also noted limitations. Some worried about stigma: *"Younger Tibetans sometimes think it's old-fashioned, they prefer counseling apps"*. This generational shift highlights challenges in maintaining moral healing traditions amid modern mental health discourse (McGranahan, 2010).

Tibetan medicine offers integrated mental and moral healing that addresses exile trauma through rlung theory, Buddhist ethics, and communal practices. These approaches extend biomedical psychiatry by embedding cultural and moral frameworks into care (Gyatso, 2015; Kleinman, 1980).

Policy and Recognition: Negotiating Survival

Official recognition by AYUSH and NCISM provides resources and legitimacy for Sowa Rigpa

but also introduces bureaucratic constraints. *"AYUSH support helps us open colleges and clinics. But renewals of the registration certificate are time-consuming"*. Another practitioner detailed the institutional landscape: *"At present we have 7 colleges recognized by NCISM. National Commission for Indian System of Medicine. Under that we have 7 major medical colleges... Recognized by the Indian government. Under the Ayush, NCISM department"*. This formal recognition represents a significant achievement for Tibetan medical practitioners, yet the standardization requirements create new challenges.

The historical development of institutional recognition reflects broader political dynamics. As one official explains, *"In 2010 Tibetan medicine is recognized. After the recognition, there are still many procedures for the syllabus—running the college, revising the curriculum, all these things. But before that, as for me, I graduate from Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, Men-Tsee-Khang. At that time it is not recognized, officially not recognized. But since 1960 we are running the college."* This timeline reveals how Tibetan institutions operate for fifty years without official recognition, demonstrating resilience and adaptability in sustaining educational programs despite policy constraints.

This dynamic reflects Scott's (1985) notion of *everyday resistance*, wherein routine acts subtly challenge dominant power structures. Community attachment to *Sowa Rigpa* illustrates this principle by positioning traditional healing not merely as a medical choice but as an affirmation of cultural belonging. As Dr. Ngawang observed, "In our community they are attached with this one Sowa Rigpa medicine. They know what is Sowa Rigpa medicine. How they went to doctors. How they treat. They know they have all the basic knowledges. So whatever problem they face they come to us." His words highlight that Tibetan patients engage with *Sowa Rigpa* from a position of cultural familiarity rather than as outsiders encountering an unfamiliar system. Such pre-existing knowledge—embedded in daily practices, intergenerational learning, and communal narratives—shapes how illness and treatment are experienced. In this way, medical practice becomes inseparable from the reproduction of ethnic identity, reinforcing a sense of distinctiveness while quietly resisting homogenizing biomedical frameworks.

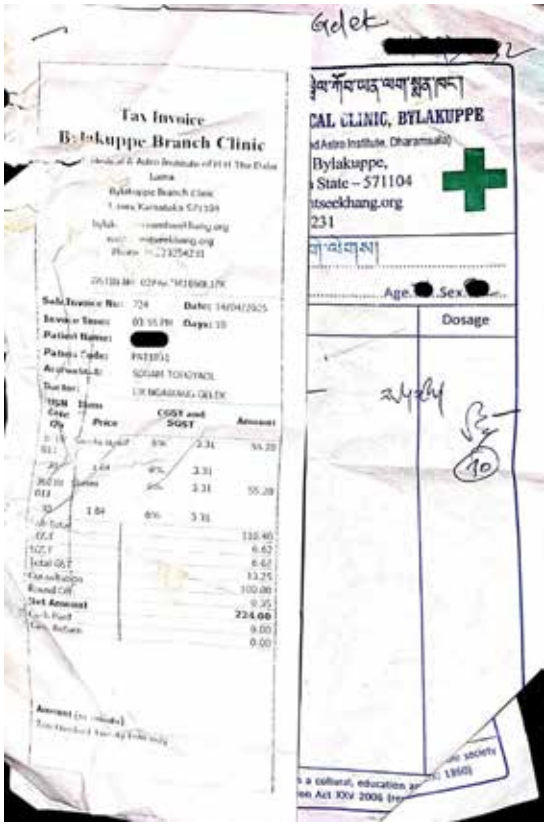

Figure 3. Tax invoice and prescription slip issued at the Men-Tsee-Khang Bylakuppe branch clinic, documenting patient care fees and prescribed medicine. This document exemplifies the intersection of traditional healing with modern healthcare administration within Tibetan exile communities (photograph by author, April 2025).

Medicine supply chains further illustrate survival strategies. As one practitioner explains, *"Herbs like yartsagunbu are expensive… we collaborate with Nepalese traders to secure supplies."* Another participant highlights the

geographic specificity of Tibetan pharmacology: *"In Ayurveda they use raw materials from tropical regions. But in our medical texts we use high-altitude Himalayan plants—4, 000, 5, 000, even 6, 000 meters above sea level. Those are the plants we are using."* This reliance on high-altitude herbs creates supply chain challenges for exile communities while simultaneously preserving therapeutic distinctiveness.

Institutional pharmacies under Men-Tsee-Khang produce standardized formulations that meet Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) requirements. Yet authenticity concerns persist, as some patients question whether factory-made capsules are equivalent to monastery-based preparations. This tension reflects Saxer's (2013) critique of pharmaceutical industrialization. A practitioner working in Karnataka acknowledges this technological dependence: *"In well-manufactured medicine, we depend upon modern technology. When we prepare pills, capsules, or syrups, we have to rely on these modern processes."*

Research and development activities demonstrate institutional adaptation to contemporary scientific standards. A practitioner describes ongoing initiatives: *"We conduct clinical trials. We have one research department in Dharamsala, and they are working on hypertension, diabetes, mental health issues, hepatitis B, and tuberculosis."* These research efforts align Sowa Rigpa with evidence-based medicine protocols while simultaneously maintaining traditional therapeutic approaches.

Global recognition further amplifies Tibetan medicine's profile. Men-Tsee-Khang's collaboration with WHO's Traditional and Complementary Medicine (TCM) initiatives situates Sowa Rigpa within global discourses on traditional medicine (WHO, 2013). Participants also view UNESCO's intangible heritage frameworks positively, with one suggesting, *"If Tibetan medicine is recognized as heritage, it protects our knowledge against appropriation."* Such recognition provides political leverage, resonating with scholarship on heritage politics (Boym, 2001).

Practitioners caution against the risks of over-institutionalization. As one warns, *"We must guard the spiritual and local aspects even as we grow under AYUSH. Too much standardization can kill our soul."* Another emphasizes the tension between tradition and modernization: *"Traditional medicine—see, modern medicine develops every day, every month, every year. But we have to go back, because so many texts are extinguished, there is no way to see them… So if you find some good text, then what it says is preserved here, something there, something else."* These concerns echo Scott's (1998) warnings about how state-driven simplifications can undermine complex local practices.

Sowa Rigpa negotiates survival through state recognition and global partnerships while navigating constraints of statelessness and regulatory pressures. Official frameworks provide legitimacy and resources but also risk undermining the fluid, localized, and spiritual dimensions critical to Tibetan medical identity.

CONCLUSION

The Tibetan exile experience is defined by statelessness, separation, and the threat of cultural erasure. Sowa Rigpa emerges in this context not merely as a system of diagnosis and treatment but as a living practice of cultural survival, identity assertion, and subtle resistance. In the absence of a recognized homeland, Tibetan medicine provides a site where language, ritual, and apprenticeship converge to sustain collective memory (Boym, 2001). Rather than passively preserving an inherited tradition, exiled practitioners and communities actively engage Sowa Rigpa to negotiate political

marginalization and assert continuity with a displaced past.

This study yields four key insights. First, Sowa Rigpa functions as cultural continuity. Monasteries, Men-Tsee-Khang colleges, and apprenticeship networks preserve Sanskrit and Tibetan texts, clinical rituals, and diagnostic chants. These practices sustain linguistic and philosophical traditions that might otherwise fade in diaspora (Hofer, 2018; Kloos, 2013). Second, Sowa Rigpa operates as everyday resistance to biomedical and political dominance. Choosing a Tibetan practitioner or insisting on herbal formulations embodies acts of cultural assertion against allopathic hegemony and statelessness (Scott, 1985; Craig, 2012). Third, the system offers integrated mental and moral healing that addresses exile trauma. Concepts of wind (*rlung*) imbalance, Buddhist ethics of impermanence and compassion, and communal support practices create a holistic approach to psychosocial resilience beyond biomedical psychiatry (Gyatso, 2015; Kleinman, 1980). Fourth, Sowa Rigpa negotiates survival within Indian and global health frameworks. AYUSH and NCISM recognition provides legitimacy and resources, while UNESCO and WHO initiatives afford heritage status and policy attention. Yet bureaucratic and citizenship constraints limit autonomy and mobility, highlighting tensions between institutionalization and epistemic sovereignty (Saxer, 2013; Kloos, 2020).

The originality of this study lies in foregrounding healing as resistance. While earlier scholarship has illuminated the history, institutionalization, and global circulation of Tibetan medicine (Samuel, 2001; Blaikie, 2014; Gerke, 2013; Pordié, 2008), few have placed Sowa Rigpa within exile politics as an act of everyday cultural and political negotiation. By integrating participant narratives, institutional analysis, and theoretical frameworks on diaspora and resistance, this paper reframes Tibetan medicine as a practice that simultaneously sustains heritage and enacts political agency. Healing in this sense becomes a form of cultural protest that preserves identity when conventional modes of political expression are constrained.

The broader implications of this reframing extend across scholarship, policy, and practice. For scholarship, this study calls for interdisciplinary research that links medicine, exile, and resistance. Future work might examine comparative diaspora healing practices or explore Sowa Rigpa's digital transmission among younger generations. For policy, host states like India should recognize and support traditional healing systems not only as complementary medicine but as vehicles of cultural rights and identity preservation. Policies that streamline registration processes, facilitate practitioner mobility, and fund heritage training programs could strengthen community resilience. International bodies might also incorporate Tibetan medicine into wider dialogues on cultural and medical pluralism.

In the end, to heal in exile is also to remember, and to remember is itself a form of resistance.

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(Endnotes)

1. *Amchi* literally translates to one who cures, or a healer. It's the Sowa Rigpa equivalent of *Vaidya* in Ayurveda. In some places Sowa Rigpa is also known as Amchi system.
2. Yutok Yönten Gonpo the Elder, one of the most popular physicists of Tibetan history, was a high lama back in 8th century. He is believed to be composer of the *Four Tantras,* and played a key role in standardizing and popularizing Sowa Rigpa.
3. A *shiga* is a traditional Tibetan communal pasture unit — a social-ecological territory where kin-based groups of nomadic herders, or monasteries or aristocrats managed grazing, water, and herds collectively, long before modern state or private land systems.
4. Seventeen Point agreement was signed between China and local Tibetan leadership on May 23, 1951. China uses this agreement to legitimize its claims over Tibet, whereas the present Tibetan leadership asserts that the agreement was signed under duress, and Tibet had no negotiating power.

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