



IJWATCH

**International Journal for World's Ancient
Traditions and Cultural Heritage**

Volume No – 1(2)

2025



ISSN: 2998-7199

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**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF WORLD'S ANCIENT
TRADITIONS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Volume No – 1(2)

2025

*This Special issue is published in collaboration with Guru Ghasidas
Vishwavidyalaya (A Central University) Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India*



**A Journal of International Centre for Cultural Studies (ICCS)
and ICCS Global, USA**

Published By ICCS Global, USA

West Chester PA 19380, USA

&

International Centre for Cultural Studies (ICCS)

New Delhi (India)

Visit: [http:// www.iccsglobal.org](http://www.iccsglobal.org)

Email: info@iccsglobal.org

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From the Editors...

Reclaiming the Sacred: The Urgent Need for Academic Scholarship on Indigenous Traditions and Global Heritage

Dr. Yashodhan Agalgaonkar¹ and Prof. Yashwant Pathak²

In an era increasingly dominated by technological acceleration and environmental uncertainty, the traditions of indigenous communities and ancestral philosophies offer invaluable perspectives on sustainability, human consciousness, and collective well-being. From the deep meditative traditions of Buddhist philosophy to the yogic systems of South Asia, the plant-based cosmologies of South American shamans, and the vision quests of North American tribes, these systems constitute not only spiritual paths but complex bodies of knowledge deserving serious academic attention.

Yet, despite their global influence and historical depth, these traditions are frequently misunderstood, commodified, or superficially represented in mainstream discourse. It is here that rigorous academic research and publication in peer-reviewed journals become not just useful—but essential. Scholarship provides the methodological tools, ethical rigor, and historical contextualization necessary to honor, rather than exploit, these knowledge systems.

Global Indigenous Knowledge Systems: A Shared Spiritual Ecology

At the core of many indigenous traditions is a spiritual ecology—a worldview that recognizes the interconnectedness of all life forms. Among South American tribes such as the Shipibo-Conibo and the Quechua, practices involving entheogenic plants like ayahuasca are embedded within cosmological frameworks that link healing, vision, and environmental stewardship (Labate & Cavnar, 2014). These rituals are not isolated acts but part of a coherent cultural epistemology.

Similarly, the Lakota and other Plains tribes of North America engage in vision quests and sweat lodges as means of accessing spiritual guidance, undergoing personal

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transformation, and honoring ancestral wisdom (Deloria, 2006). These practices emphasize silence, solitude, and reverence—values echoed in other contemplative systems.

In Southeast Asia, indigenous groups such as the Hmong or the indigenous Tibetans have maintained animist rituals and oral cosmologies that both coexist with and influence organized religious systems like Theravāda and Tibetan Buddhism (Samuel, 1993). Tibetan Buddhism, for example, integrates pre-Buddhist Bon rituals, including chants, offerings to nature spirits, and geomantic practices.

Yoga and Buddhist Philosophy: Universal Wisdom

Yoga, a system over 2,500 years old, is rooted in ancient Indian scriptures such as the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*. It offers a detailed model of the human mind, ethics, and metaphysics. Academic inquiry into yoga not only helps separate authentic historical content from modern reinterpretations but also allows for comparative studies with other indigenous meditative and ethical systems (Feuerstein, 2001).

Likewise, Buddhist philosophy—especially its teachings on interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), impermanence (*anicca*), and non-self (*anattā*)—shares key ethical and ontological insights with indigenous spiritual systems worldwide. Studies have shown that both traditions seek liberation not only for the individual but in harmony with collective life and the natural world (Loy, 2008).

The Role of Academia: Documentation, Preservation, and Ethical Engagement

The rise of indigenous revitalization movements and decolonial scholarship has shown that academic institutions can be allies—when approached with humility and partnership. Peer-reviewed research contributes by:

- **Preserving oral traditions:** Many indigenous cosmologies remain undocumented. Rigorous ethnographic methods can help record these in collaboration with communities.
- **Contextualizing philosophical parallels:** Comparative philosophy can trace conceptual affinities across global traditions, enriching modern discourses on consciousness, ecology, and ethics.

- **Preventing cultural appropriation:** Academic clarity helps distinguish between respectful engagement and commercial exploitation, particularly in practices like yoga and ayahuasca tourism (Smith, 2012).
- **Empowering indigenous voices:** Collaborative research ensures indigenous scholars and elders shape how their traditions are interpreted and transmitted.

Conclusion: From Appropriation to Academic Stewardship

As these traditions increasingly attract global attention, the need for responsible, interdisciplinary scholarship becomes more urgent. Universities, journals, and funding bodies must prioritize the study of indigenous knowledge not as relics of the past, but as evolving, dynamic systems of meaning that can inform modern challenges—from mental health to climate crisis.

Indigenous traditions are not merely subjects of fascination or personal growth. They are epistemologies—entire systems of understanding the world. If academia is to fulfill its promise of global knowledge, it must invest deeply and ethically in their study. In doing so, we do not just preserve the past—we safeguard a pluralistic and spiritually informed future.

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Contents

Articles	Page Number
The Doctrines of Human Solidarity: The Ubuntu tradition and Philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam- <i>Prof. Alok Kumar Chakrawal</i>	9-25
Expansion and distinct forms of Agamic traditions in the North North-Eastern Region of Bharat- <i>Sandeep Kavishwar</i>	26-43
Shamanistic Traditions of Arunachal Pradesh, India History, Cultural Significance and Contemporary Issues - <i>Tarun Mene and S. Simon John</i>	44-64
Cultural and Sacred Concept of Nature in the Lithuanian Identity Expression: The Significance of the Special Relationship in the Pursuit of Preserving the Earth- <i>Gailė Vanagienė</i>	65-87
Contributions of Shree Jagannath Culture and Philosophy to the Indian Knowledge System: A Critical Analysis- <i>Dr. Chinmayee Satpathy</i>	88-101
Insight into the four aspects of Mahashakti according to the writings of Sri Aurobindo- <i>Pooja Deshmukh, Kinjal Fatnani, & Pina Bhatt</i>	102-109
Cultures in Contact: The Shang Traditions of China- <i>Prof. Ramakrushna Pradhan & Divya Jaiswal</i>	110-129
The Maori Traditions & its relevance in 21st Century- <i>Prof. Seema Rai & Akash Tawar</i>	130-144
Algorithmic Erasure and Digital Sovereignty: Rethinking Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Age of AI- <i>Vishwajeet & Monika Aswal</i>	145-159
Book Reviews	
Buddhism in Central Asia- <i>Somnath Pal & Nirmal Bag</i>	160-167
Guideline for the Contributors	168-169
List of Contributors	170-171

The Doctrines of Human Solidarity: The Ubuntu tradition and Philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Prof. Alok Kumar Chakrawal¹

Abstract

This article explores the doctrines of human solidarity through the lens of two ancient philosophical traditions: the Bharatiya concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and the African philosophy of Ubuntu. Both traditions emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings and the idea of the world as a global family, where the well-being of each individual is intrinsically linked to that of others. In a time marked by environmental crises, social inequality, and cultural tensions, these philosophies offer valuable frameworks for fostering unity, compassion, and sustainable coexistence. By examining their philosophical foundations, historical evolution, and contemporary relevance, this study highlights how Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu can serve as foundational principles for a more inclusive and cooperative global order. Their emphasis on harmony, diversity, and ethical co-living positions them as essential to redefining multilateralism and addressing global challenges in a holistic manner.

Keywords: Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Ubuntu, human solidarity, global ethics, interconnectedness

Introduction

The world is confronted with a range of pressing issues—such as environmental harm, social disparities, and cultural tensions—that demand united efforts and a fundamental reassessment of how humanity relates to both itself and the Earth. The ancient Indian philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and the African Philosophy of Ubuntu offer a unique perspective, emphasizing the concept of a global family where each individual's well-being is linked to the well-being of all. These ancient philosophical traditions promote unity, compassion, and mutual support, allowing individuals and societies to work together to create a more inclusive, harmonious, and sustainable future.

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Both Indian and African philosophies emphasize the concept of unity or oneness in the creation. The universe is harmonious and interconnected despite its diversity. The idea of interconnectedness is now commonly acknowledged. The concept of the global commons highlights the interactions between nature and humans as well as the interconnectedness of natural systems.



Source: www.googleimage.com

Because it is a concept that brings people together rather than dividing them, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu can serve as the cornerstone of the current debate about international cooperation for solving global issues. It can act as the cornerstone of the new multilateralism that is sorely needed. The imposition of uniformity leads to strife, confrontations, and violence. This chapter examines the philosophical foundations, historical roots, current applicability, and possible ramifications of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu's ethico-social philosophy.

The Ubuntu Traditions of Africa

Ubuntu, an African philosophy, is a spirituality and ethic of traditional life that emphasizes compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community with justice and mutual caring (Bhengu, 1996). The Ubuntu philosophy, originating from African traditions, emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals within a community and the idea that one's humanity is intimately tied to the well-being of others. The core principle of Ubuntu

is the phrase "I am because of who we all are," emphasizing the connection between individual identity and well-being to the collective welfare of the community (Cornell and Muvangua, 2011). This philosophy encourages empathy, compassion, and shared responsibility for the betterment of society as a whole. It has been embodied by figures such as Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa of Calcutta, Oscar Romero, Desmond Tutu, Joseph Stiglitz, and Nelson Mandela, who all embody the Ubuntu spirit in different contexts (Eze, 2010) .



Source: <https://specialplacesofindia.com/seasonalfunctions/>

The Ubuntu spirit is not just a philosophical concept; it needs to be the default consciousness of humanity for a global culture of peace. Peace is achieved through deliberate and consistent commitment to the common good in the spirit of Ubuntu (Metz, 2011). An example of Ubuntu consciousness is Joe Mogodi, a successful businessman in Pietersburg, South Africa, who demonstrated his Ubuntu by buying up 100 sewing machines at an auction and making them available to men and women in the community who were interested in starting tailoring businesses but did not have the necessary capital (Metz & Gaie, 2010). This is typical of Ubuntu consciousness and still occurs widely both in rural South Africa and among African communities in urban areas (Gyekye, 2010).

The Ubuntu philosophy comes from the realization that each and everyone's life is

deeply tied to the other and the choice to use personal power to commit to the common good rather than creating isolated individual good. The creation of the commonwealth enriches everybody, and when everybody is enriched, happiness prevails (Mkhize, 2008). However, the abuse of personal power comes from a diseased, dysfunctional, and narcissistic human mind that creates a bloated image of self and seeks to sustain it.

In reality, neither global economic and social well-being nor peace can come from the promulgation of more international instruments. The desired results of increasing and consolidating actual human and social wellbeing can only come from both a personal and collective commitment to the ethical imperatives of Ubuntu. In other words, the African Ubuntu can bring about a revolution of tenderness if the people of the world allow themselves to drink of its spirit.

The Ethno-Philosophy of Ubuntu

Ubuntu, rooted in ethno-philosophy, represents a system of thought that reflects the shared worldviews of various African cultures, presenting a cohesive body of knowledge grounded in myths, traditional wisdom, and proverbs. Despite the cultural diversity across the continent, there exists a common foundation of knowledge centered on communal identity. Originating from the Bantu language family, Ubuntu conveys the essence of being human within the context of community, as understood by many sub-Saharan societies. It is not only a concept of existence and knowledge but also embodies a moral and ethical dimension (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005).

Hunhu/Ubuntu is more than just a concept of existence (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology); it also encompasses a moral framework. According to Battle, Ubuntu emphasizes the mutual dependence of individuals for realizing, nurturing, and fulfilling their potential as both unique beings and members of a collective (Murove 2009). Desmond Tutu illustrates this idea with the Xhosa saying *ungamntu ngabanye abantu*, which in Shona is *munhu unoitwa munhu nevamwe vanhu*, meaning “a person becomes a person through others.” Similarly, Onyebuchi Eze (2008:107) stresses that personhood is rooted in community and shaped through dialogical relationships. One’s humanity relies on recognizing, affirming, and upholding the humanity of others. In essence, being a person involves understanding that one’s sense of self is partly formed through relationships with others in a shared social environment.



Source: <https://www.meer.com/en/70597-the-ubuntu-conundrum>

Ramose highlights that the proverbial nature of Ubuntu aligns with the lived experiences and traditions of African communities, particularly as reflected in the proverbs and sayings of certain Nguni languages like Zulu and Sotho. Building on the insights of Tutu and Ramose, Metz (2007: 323) equates Ubuntu with the concept of humanness, encapsulated in the expression “a person is a person through other persons.” This phrase implies that an individual’s identity as a human being is fundamentally and even metaphysically rooted in community.

Expanding on this idea, Michael Onyebuchi Eze (2010: 90) argues that Ubuntu is often presented in a dominant or idealized form that references a supposed unified past, intended to help us grasp the socio-cultural imagination of African societies before the disruptions of colonialism. However, Eze challenges the notion of a singular, pre-colonial Ubuntu tradition, suggesting instead that this portrayal is a constructed ideal with limited relevance for contemporary African life.

Although many scholars of Ubuntu tend to emphasize the supremacy of the community over the individual, Onyebuchi Eze (2008: 106) contends that the individual and the community are not fundamentally opposed in terms of importance but are instead formed simultaneously. While it is widely accepted that both the individual and the community together shape the meaning of Ubuntu, their relationship is not one of equality—rather, the individual is situated within the broader framework of the community, whose goals and values are considered more

significant. However, this does not imply that the individual plays a merely secondary or marginal role in defining Ubuntu.

1. Ubuntu as Cultivating One's Humanity

Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize winner from South Africa, emphasizes the concept of ubuntu, or human excellence, in many black African cultures. This concept distinguishes between animal and human life, urging individuals to live a genuinely human way of life and avoid living in the manner of a beast or subhuman (Tutu, 1999). Mogobe Ramose, a philosopher on ubuntu, believes that one is enjoined to become a human being. If someone fails to do so, many Africans would label them as "not a person" or "an animal." This self-realization ethic differs from other Western conceptions of the good life, as it does not focus on hedonic considerations, such as pleasure or satisfaction, that humans share with animals.



Source: <https://en.empowerment-coaching.com/post/ubuntu-eng>

2. Ubuntu and Communal Relationship

Black African societies often emphasize the importance of ubuntu, or "community," in their conception of the good life. These maxims, which include prescriptive or normative meanings, instruct individuals to become a real person or realize their true self by relating to others in certain ways. Sub-Saharan conceptions of the good life focus on self-realization in terms of communal or harmonious relationships, with Augustine Shutte, a moral philosopher, stating that our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human, which involves entering more deeply into community with

others (Shutte, 2001).

Community is analyzed as the combination of two interactions: identifying with others and exhibiting solidarity with them. Identifying with others involves treating themselves as members of the same group, taking pride or shame in others' activities, and engaging in joint projects to achieve shared or compatible ends. Solidarity involves engaging in helpful behavior, acting in ways that are reasonably expected to benefit others, and exhibiting positive attitudes, emotions, and motives towards others' good.



Source: <https://www.coachabilityfoundation.org/post/ubuntu-humanity-towards-others>

Harmony, friendliness, and community are seen as great goods in African ethics, as they are similar to English speakers' broad sense of "friendship" or "love." There are similarities between a conception of the good life grounded on ideals of ubuntu and Western notions of eudaimonia and virtue. In contrast, many sub-Saharan worldviews emphasize realizing oneself solely through others, exhausting oneself by exhibiting other-regard, which is attractive in considering moral virtues.

3. Ubuntu and Action

The sub-Saharan tradition emphasizes the importance of fostering harmonious relationships with others through virtues such as politeness, kindness, compassion, benevolence, altruism, sacrifice, forgiveness, mercy, and tolerance. While it may seem that pacifism is required for achieving friendliness, it is actually a form of valuing friendliness and community. This concept guides individuals in their choices and influences societal decision-making in African societies. Contemporary African intellectuals and policy makers often use the concept of ubuntu when organizing public and large-scale institutions, aiming to improve people's lives and foster a plausible view of how best to live (Ramose, 1999).

The attributes of the Ubuntu tradition

According to Martin H. Prozesky, the philosophy of hunhu/ubuntu encompasses more than ten defining traits, including compassion, empathy, gentleness, hospitality, deep kindness, friendliness, generosity, vulnerability, toughness, and humaneness. As a key element of ethno-philosophy, Ubuntu embodies these values. It is important to distinguish between humaneness and humanism: humaneness refers to the intrinsic quality of being human, while humanism is a worldview or ideological framework that prioritizes human interests and needs above those of other beings.

African humanism is a philosophical perspective or worldview that emphasizes peaceful coexistence and the centrality of community. It prioritizes human dignity, needs, and interests as essential values. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, the phrase *munhu munhu muvanhu*—which corresponds to *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* in isiNdebele and Zulu—effectively illustrates this concept. Onyebuchi Eze (2011:12) contributes to this understanding by describing Ubuntu or *botho* as a distinct form of African humanism, reflected in Bantu expressions like *Motho ke motho ka batho babang* and *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, meaning a person becomes truly human through their relationships with others.

Both humaneness and humanism are foundational to the hunhu/ubuntu philosophy, which upholds the collective well-being above individual interests. Some thinkers argue that what sets African identity—particularly among black Africans—apart from Western identity is the emphasis on communalism in the former, as opposed to the Western ideal of individualism. From this viewpoint, treating the individual and

community as equally central risks blurring the distinction between African communal values and Western individualistic ideals.

In the context of *hunhu/ubuntu*, gentleness involves a soft-hearted nature and a willingness to dedicate time to others. It reflects compassion and attentiveness to others' needs—an idea that aligns with both Mbiti's philosophical stance and Yamamoto's interpretation, which emphasize prioritizing others over oneself.

Hospitality is another key aspect of *hunhu/ubuntu*. It involves making guests feel welcome and comfortable, not for profit but as a genuine act of care. In contrast, the Western model often links hospitality with commercial exchange, where hosts provide for guests in return for payment. This distinction does not imply that Westerners are incapable of non-commercial hospitality, but rather that the scale and spirit of hospitality differ.

In traditional Shona and Ndebele communities, hospitality is extended freely and generously. For instance, travelers seeking relatives might be offered shelter along the way, even before reaching their destination. Among the Korekore-Nyombwe people of Northern Zimbabwe, it was customary to first offer water to strangers before asking about their needs or giving directions—an act that exemplifies the deeply rooted hospitality in these cultures.

The Philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, a Sanskrit phrase originating in ancient Indian scriptures, translates to "the world is one family." This concept is deeply rooted in Indian philosophy and has been propagated through various scriptures, teachings, and philosophies over the centuries. One of the earliest references to this concept can be found in the Mahopanishad, a lesser-known Upanishad. The Mahopanishad declares that the entire world is interconnected and should be treated as one's own family. The Hitopadesha, from which this verse is taken, emphasizes the importance of transcending limited perspectives and embracing the idea of a harmonious global family. This verse emphasizes the stark contrast between narrow-mindedness and a broad-hearted perspective, recognizing the unity and interconnectedness of all beings. The latter perspective reflects the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, where the world is seen as a single family, promoting compassion, unity, and shared

responsibility.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: The Concept

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, a Sanskrit term meaning "the world is one family," is a concept found in Hindu texts like the Maha Upanishad. It signifies that all living beings on Earth are a family, and it is a social philosophy that aims to foster an understanding that the whole of humanity is one family. This concept is rooted in the Vedic tradition, which emphasizes that the whole of humanity is made of one life energy. The concept raises questions about how individuals differ from the divine source and how the ocean is one, as well as how a drop of the ocean can dissolve in the ocean. India, with a human centric perspective, is engaged in the "Amritkaal" and aims to create a futuristic, prosperous, inclusive, and evolved society.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is a philosophy that aims to overcome the 'us-vs-them' mentality, which is the root of conflict and violence. It transcends any specific religion and emphasizes inclusion, transcending any specific religion. Indian philosophic thought underscores the concept of unity or oneness in the creation, highlighting the interconnectedness and harmony in the universe. The concept of global commons underlines the interconnected relationship of man with nature and among natural systems. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam can serve as the basis for ongoing discussions on global cooperation and underpin new multilateralism.

Vedic philosophy, which includes Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, emphasizes the divinity of every living being and believes that every human being is divine, thus there is no cause for conflict. Swami Sarvapriyananda states that Vedanta is the philosophical foundation of Hinduism, but it is universal in its application and is equally relevant to all countries, cultures, and religious backgrounds. Vedanta affirms the oneness of existence, the divinity of the soul, and the harmony of all religions.



Source: <https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/as-world-sees-wars-un-invokes-indias-vasudhaiva-kutumbakam-philosophy-617420.html>

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is relevant today because it does not impose uniformity but accepts diversity and is universal in its application. Swami Vivekananda emphasized that the spirit of acceptance and accommodation that informs Hinduism can bring peace and harmony, as it advocates the lofty view of the entire creation being one family.

Practical Aspects of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is a philosophy that emphasizes tolerance and nonviolence, which can be applied in politics and popular culture. It is not a pacifist concept, as it does not mean inaction or resort to force or war. In today's world, peace is endangered, and it must be inculcated as a way of life. The UN declared the first decade of the 21st century as the decade of the Culture of Peace and Disarmament, and the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam can strengthen the UN efforts to imbibe the culture of peace amongst people.

The Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) has been engaged in a Hindu-Buddhist dialogue, Samvad, since 2015. This dialogue has yielded many principles that can help make the world a better place, such as inculcating democracy values, conflict avoidance, environmental protection, sustainable development, universal responsibility and ethical behavior, genuine open-minded dialogue held in the spirit of tolerance, mutual respect and peaceful accommodation, and realizing that material wealth alone cannot bring peace. Compassion, karuna, courtesy, and generosity should be practiced.

The key to real and lasting peace lies in 'mental disarmament', which involves disarming the mind from poisonous defilements such as greed, hatred, jealousy, and ego. Maintaining peace should be a priority, and Hindu and Buddhist prayers invoke peace for everyone, peace everywhere. These prayers should become part of the diplomatic discourse, including at the UN. Multilateral discourse should be guided by the spirit of making the world more humane and a liveable and happier place.

In 2019, France and Germany set up an Alliance for Multilateralism, which has been joined by several countries, including India. The objectives of the alliance include promoting the rule of law and rules-based order. The post-Covid world order must be more humane, caring, and tolerant. There would be benchmarks for Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: acceptance of the higher dimension to human existence; focus on harmony; relation-based family, society, and world; intrinsic respect for women and nature; and acceptance of diversity. Imbibing ethics, morality, and spirituality in international political and economic discourse would enrich multilateralism.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam provides an antidote to self-centered and selfish thinking that has brought the world to the precipice. Humankind is facing existential threats like climate change, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and the paucity of resources. The philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is an antidote to the self-centered and selfish thinking that is proving disastrous for mankind. A new paradigm for new multilateralism, reflected in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, can help address these challenges and promote a more harmonious and compassionate world.

Philosophical Underpinnings

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu are philosophical concepts that emphasize the interconnectedness of humanity and promote values of compassion, unity, and shared responsibility. Both are rooted in Indian spirituality and have been praised by Western academics for their depth and breadth of expression. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is based on the principle of ahimsa (unity), which means non-violence, and it emphasizes the welfare of one's family to encompass the entire world. This philosophy challenges narrow identifications and promotes a broader sense of identity that transcends nationality, ethnicity, and religion. In today's interconnected world, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam fosters a shared sense of human interconnectedness, mutual development objectives, and a collective pursuit of an orderly global framework and

international harmony. It has led to India's political leaders to inscribe Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam at the entrance of the Indian Parliament, reflecting their significance.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu share similarities in their vision of One Family under God, which echoes the potential to build a global ethical framework for peace and prosperity for all people. To effectively implement this, local chapters must articulate an inclusive framework from within their own cultural traditions while building consensus around shared values.

On the other hand, Ubuntu promotes virtues that promote harmony, mutual support, and sharing within a society. It encourages individuals to consider the collective well-being and foster relationships built on empathy and understanding. Ubuntu also emphasizes the responsibility to contribute positively to one's community. Both Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu share common underpinnings, as they emphasize the interconnectedness of humanity and promote values of compassion, unity, and shared responsibility. These are enlisted as under.

- **Interconnectedness**

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu are two philosophies that emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings. Kutumbakam views the world as one family, transcending geographical, cultural, and social boundaries. Ubuntu emphasizes shared humanity and a universal bond of sharing, fostering empathy, compassion, and cooperation. The phrase "I am because we are" embodies this interconnectedness, emphasizing the intertwining of one's identity and humanity with others' well-being. Both philosophies emphasize the importance of cooperation and collaboration in addressing global challenges, transcending geographical, cultural, and social boundaries.

- **Compassion and Humanity**

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu are two philosophies that emphasize treating others with compassion, respect, and dignity. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam encourages individuals to see beyond differences and embrace a sense of shared humanity, while Ubuntu promotes "humanity towards others" and the belief in a universal bond of sharing. Both philosophies encourage a shift in perspective, leading to behaviors rooted in kindness, empathy, and genuine concern for others' well-being. They offer guidance on navigating interactions within communities and across cultures,

reflecting a universal desire for harmonious relationships and a sense of belonging.

- **Collective Wellbeing**

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu are two philosophies that prioritize the collective well-being over individual interests. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam advocates for global cooperation to resolve global problems, while Ubuntu emphasizes community and consensus for societal well-being. Both philosophies foster a sense of responsibility and shared ownership, leading to decisions and actions that promote equality, cooperation, and sustainable development. The concept of Lokasamgraha, a fundamental tenet of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, emphasizes collective welfare, compassion, and interconnectedness. Both philosophies provide ethical frameworks that guide individuals and communities towards building societies characterized by empathy, inclusivity, and mutual support. Both philosophies emphasize the importance of collective welfare and compassion in promoting a better society.

- **Shared Values and Virtues**

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu are two philosophies that promote ethical values that foster harmonious coexistence. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam emphasizes unity, diversity, and inclusion, promoting a sense of togetherness and acceptance of cultural, ethnic, and religious differences. It also encourages the inclusion of all individuals as part of the global family, challenging exclusionary attitudes and encouraging open-mindedness towards those who may be different from oneself. Ubuntu, on the other hand, emphasizes respect, dignity, and the recognition of others' humanity. It encourages helpfulness, sharing, and trust, fostering a culture of support and solidarity. Both philosophies emphasize the importance of respect, helpfulness, sharing, and trust in building a cohesive community. Both philosophies aim to create a culture of reliability and sincerity, fostering a sense of unity and mutual respect.

- **Unity in Diversity**

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu are two philosophies that celebrate diversity while advocating for unity. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam views the world's diversity as a source of strength, cultural richness, and unique perspectives that contribute to the collective human experience. It encourages individuals to see beyond cultural, religious, and ethnic distinctions and recognize the common threads that bind us all. Ubuntu emphasizes "I am because we are," recognizing that each individual's well-being is intertwined with the community's strength. Both philosophies provide

frameworks for appreciating diversity while promoting harmony and unity, offering insights into how embracing differences can lead to a more inclusive, equitable, and compassionate world.

- **Cultural Identities**

Both concepts contribute to shaping cultural identities and values. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, encouraging individuals to see themselves as part of a global community united by common humanity. Ubuntu is deeply rooted in African cultural heritage, particularly in regions such as southern Africa, reflecting the communal values and interconnectedness inherent to many African societies. Its principles of empathy, shared humanity, and community align with the communal traditions of these cultures, holding universal relevance.

- **Community and Relationship**

Both philosophies emphasize the importance of community, relationships, and social harmony. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam promotes a global sense of community, where all of humanity is seen as part of one extended family. This philosophy encourages individuals to consider the well-being of others around the world and work together for the betterment of all. Ubuntu places a strong emphasis on respectful interactions within one's own community, emphasizing the importance of treating others with dignity, understanding, and consideration, fostering an environment of mutual respect and cooperation.

In today's globalized world, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam has gained renewed relevance due to the interconnectedness of economies, ease of communication, and shared challenges of climate change and pandemics. It provides a framework for addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, and cultural misunderstandings, fostering a more inclusive and compassionate world.

Conclusion

Ubuntu, an ethical perspective and way of life, has been prevalent among sub-Saharan peoples for centuries. Its values are relevant to global readers, as they inspire ideals that are not just for those living below the Sahara desert. The quality of human life is not enhanced by feeling good, but by exhibiting virtues that promote friendliness, as opposed to a Western approach.

The socio-ethical philosophies of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Ubuntu hold significant importance in our interconnected world. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam emphasizes the importance of cooperation, empathy, and mutual understanding among nations, transcending nationality, ethnicity, and religion. It calls for international collaboration to address pressing issues like climate change, poverty, and global health crises. Ubuntu, on the other hand, emphasizes the interconnectedness of human lives and the need to uphold the dignity and well-being of others. Both philosophies recognize the ethical imperative to treat others with respect, kindness, and dignity, and call for a shift in mindset from individualism and competition to unity and cooperation.

These philosophies offer timeless guidance for navigating the complexities of our contemporary world, reminding us that our shared humanity transcends borders and differences. By embracing these philosophies, we can collectively strive for a more compassionate, just, and interconnected world, building a brighter and more harmonious future for all. By embracing these principles, we can work towards a more compassionate, just, and interconnected world.

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Expansion and distinct forms of Agamic traditions in North Eastern Region of Bharat

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Abstract

This paper examines the expansion and unique expressions of Agamic traditions in the North Eastern region of Bharat, highlighting their integral role in the religious and cultural identity of indigenous communities. Rooted in the sacred scriptures known as Agamas—central to various Sanatan Hindu traditions—these practices influence temple architecture, deity worship, rituals, and spiritual disciplines across the region. The paper explores how these traditions have been adopted and adapted by tribal communities, blending ancient scriptural principles with local customs to form distinct regional practices. In doing so, it underscores the continuity of spiritual heritage and the efforts of North Eastern tribes to preserve their cultural identity amidst contemporary social and political changes. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Agamic traditions serve not only as spiritual frameworks but also as vehicles for cultural resilience and continuity.

Keywords: Agamic traditions, North East Bharat, Indigenous faiths, Sanatan Dharma

Introduction

Agamic traditions in the North East region of Bharat are an important aspect of the cultural and religious landscape of the region. These traditions are rooted in the teachings and practices of various ancient texts known as Agamas, which are considered to be sacred scriptures in many Sanatan Hindu traditions.

These Agamic traditions are followed by various indigenous communities and tribes in the North East, and have a significant influence on their religious beliefs, rituals, and customs. The Agamas provide guidelines on temple construction, deity worship, rituals, and spiritual practices, and are considered to be a source of divine knowledge and wisdom.

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Source: <https://kaziranganationalparkassam.in/indigenous-festivals-of-north-east-india-and-their-relevance-to-traditional-agrarian-practices/>

These traditions play a vital role in shaping the religious and cultural identity of the people in the North East, and are an integral part of their daily lives. The Agamic traditions also serve as a link between the past and the present, preserving ancient knowledge and practices that have been passed down through generations. This paper deals with the faiths of the North eastern tribes and their efforts to preserve their own Culture in the current Scenario.

Vaishnavism and culture in Assam and Manipur

After the ingress of Vaishnavism in the two states of Assam and Manipur, several changes were observed in the social and cultural arena. Vaishnavism was not just a religion but became an integral part of the lives of the people of the two states.



Source: <https://www.indica.today/research/conference/visual-aesthetics-of-vaishnava-literary-culture-of-assam/>

1. One of the earliest epigraphic sources in Assam, dating back to the 5th century AD. This inscription belonged to King Surendravarman and was discovered in Nilachal hills.
2. The rock inscription belonged to King Bhutivarman and dates back to the 6th century AD near Doboka, Nagaon district, Assam.
3. Doobi and Nidhanpur copper plates originally issued by Bhutivarman and later re-issued by king Bhaskar Varman. These plates tell about the dynasty of Naraka and their descendants who ruled in ancient Assam.
4. in the 25th regnal year of king Ratnapala.
5. Issued by king Indrapala from Durjjaya in the 21st regnal year.

These are some forms of Vaishnavism in North Eastern India:

- **Gaudiya Vaishnavism-**

Also known as Chaitanya Vaishnavism or Hare Krishna, this form of Vaishnavism was founded by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the Gauḍa region, which is now Bengal and Bangladesh. The movement was inspired by Chaitanya's devotion to Krishna, and the legends of Krishna and Radha symbolize the love between God and the human soul. It is being practised in few areas of Bengal bordering areas and some other parts of Assam, Tripura; Gaudiya Vaishnavism is continuity of Bhakti movement initiated by Alwars and Nayanmars in 8th Century.

- **Neo-Vaishnavism-**

This form of Vaishnavism in Assam is monotheistic and focuses on devotion rather than salvation. Followers believe that divine grace can be achieved through devotion, and that salvation can be attained through knowledge and rituals.

Other forms of Vaishnavism include: Vishishtadvaita, Dvaita, Dvaitadvaita, and Pushtimarg.

Neo-Vaishnavism is a religious movement that originated in Assam in the 15th–16th century. It was founded by Srimanta Sankardeva, a scholar, poet, and social reformer. The movement is also known as Ek-Sharan Nam Dharma, which means "shelter-in-one-religion". It focuses on devotion to Krishna through congregational singing and listening, Chanting verses from religious scriptures like the Bhagwat Geeta & Bhagawata Purana and undivided devotion to Vishnu in the form of Krishna. This movement promotes a democratic outlook and equality among all people.

Neo-Vaishnavism insisted on four fundamental elements (i) God, (ii) Guru (the religious preceptor)(iii) the fraternity of Bhakats (devotees) and (iv) Nām.

Impact of Neo-Vaishnavism -

- * To reduce caste distinctions and uplift the backward classes
- * To create a strong social bond among the people of Assam
- * To dispel ignorance, superstition, and irrational beliefs and practices and It had a significant impact on the social, religious, literary, and cultural life of the Assamese people

Shaivism in North East India-

The Brahmaputra valley is more like Ganges valley; people who are Assamese speaking migrated initially from various parts of India, and later Tibeto- Burma. There is no clear distinction between Saivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism among Hindus unlike other religions of the world. We still find temples and devotees dedicated to one or other sects predominantly. Shaivism or Shiva worship may be the oldest sects existing before the other two in Assam.



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shivism>

Prehistoric Shaivism (2000 BCE – 600 BCE)-

The cult of fertility or the worship of Linga and Yoni personified as Siva and Devi which forms the basis of Shaktism and Tantrism is found in the Megaliths of Assam.

The cult is to be associated with the prehistoric element; the word ling has been attributed to an Austeric origin.

Kalika Puran predominantly a Shakta upa-Purana is accepted to be a product of Kamrup during 10th and 11th century AD. Contribution of the Austric and Tibeto Burmans to the basis of Tantikism comes from the Kalika Puran describing human sacrifice in the temples of Kamakhya and the Copper temple of Sadiya. The Yogin Tantra refers to the existence of a million lingas in the Kamarupa region.

The Kalika purana describes that before the introduction of Devi Worship in Kamakhya by Narakasur (Bhasmasur), Shiva was recognized as guardian deity of the land. Siva was concealed within his own city and worshiped by the Kiratas. The faith prevailed in the land even before Narakasur. Yogini tantra describes Bana as a great devotee of Shiva. Traces of the faith are found among Tibeto-Burman tribes such as Koches. The faith was perhaps popular among them and even among Khasis who were the authors of some ancient Megaliths of Assam.

The Aitareya Brahmana describes the spread of vedic culture to Kamrupa. Gopatha Brahmana records the origin of the name of Kamrupa and early contact of people of east from west.

The earliest Hindu religion that prevailed in ancient Kamrupa, in addition to tribal faith, was Shaivism. It bears certain affinities with the Bodo tribal deity Shivaray Bathau. Shiva linga is similarly represented by a cactus shoot in the Bodo traditional religious belief. Hara and Parvati are sometimes worshiped by Bodo as Burdha Gossain (Senior God) and Budhi Gosani (Senior Goddess).

Ancient Shaivism (500 BC – 1200 AD)-

A large number of pre-Ahom Shiva temples and religious places prove the popularity of Shiva worship in ancient Kamrupa. The Skand Purana relates how the king Jalpa became a Shiva worshiper and made a temple Jalpeswar at Jalpaiguri. (Skanda purana Avantya Khand). Jalpaigudi was a part of Kamrupa kingdom in the past.

The Koch kings of Western Assam claim their mythological origin to Mahadeva. Even today Shiva temple and Saiva sacred places outnumber Shakti and Vishnu temples on the North bank of Brahmaputra. Bhairava temple of Kamatapur is another old temple of Shiva of ancient Kamrupa built by Koch Kings.

Kalika Puran describes more sacred places of Shiva and Shakti or spell along the Brahmaputra valley, as 15, 4, and 5 respectively. The Kalika puran also mentions two sects of the Saivism in Assam, the Kapalikas and Pasupatas, the former being more terrible, used to perform gruesome and abominable rites. The Yogini Tantra describes two sub sects of Shaivism as Kapulas and Avadhutas, worshiping both Shiva and Shakti. These sects were only few dedicated devotees not masses.

Epigraphs refer to the worship of Shiva and erection of temples. Vanamala repaired the fallen temple of Hetuka sulin (Shiva) (Tezpur Grant V24). Ratnapala studded the earth with white washed temples enshrining Sambhu (Guwahati Grant V.10). The Grant of Vallabh Deva refers to a temple of Mahadeva (v13). Bhagdatta, who was a devotee of Krisna, worshiped shiva with penance (Tezpur grant v.5).

As has already been indicated, HE stood both for creation and destruction, explained by his various names.

1. Adideva (Khonamukhi grant v.a), 2.Isvara (Tezpur Grant) 3. Paramaheswar (Tezpur Rock Ins L2) 4. Maheswar 5. Siva (Tezpur Grant), Kamauli grant
- 6.Shambu (ibid v 10) 7. Sankara (Bargaon grant vv 1-2) 8.Pinakapani (Doobi grant v1) 9.Hetuka Sulin (Tezpur grant) 10.Gauripati (Grant of Vallabhadeva) 11.Rudra (Nowgawn grant v 1) 12.Kitava (Guwahati Grant)
- 13.Ardhanareswava (Konkamukhi grant)

Medieval Shaivism (1200 AD 1900 AD)-

With the attainment of the pre eminent status by Shakti in the Kamakhya by 12th CAD, Shaivism became less prominent but not antagonistic to the practice of Devi and retained some hold upon masses. The dynasties of Pusyavarma, Salastmbha and Brahmapala were Shaivite during the 1200 AD.

In Darrand Rajvansavali by Suryakhari there is an interesting reference of King Narnaryayan a Hindu king from the Kachari dynasty. Before proceeding for a war with Ahom Kingdom he had a message in a dream by Mahadeva to organize a dance in honor of HIM according to Kachari rites. Naranarayana organized a Kachari dance performance offering ducks, pigeons, liquor, pigs, fowls, buffaloes to Mahadeva on the bank of Sankosh River. Afterwards he was ordered to perform religious

ceremonies north of Goahin Kamal road by Kachari priests and south by Brahmin priests.

The Yogini Tantra (1600 AD) speaks of the Kaulas and the Avadhutas as two sub-sects of Shaivism, performing dual worship of Shiva and Shakti. The extreme form of left handed rituals including Panchamakara are prescribed for these sects, not practiced by masses.

The Kachari kings of Dimapur, Maibong and Khaspur were Shiva Guari devotees as testified by coins issued by Yasomaryana and Pratarrayana of the 16-17 Centuries. The monolith sandstone pillars of about 12 feet in height and 5 feet in circumference found in ruined Kachari capital Dimapur representing lings.

Pratap Singha (1603-41) erected Shiva temple at Devagram after getting rid of possession of a Devil by Hindu priest. Linga was consecrated and Hindu priests were appointed for daily worship, before this worship was conducted according to Ahom rites. (Assam Buranji (Sukumar Mahanta, p. 44).

Gardhara Singha (1681-1696) was a great devotee of Shiva Mahadeva. He constructed and maintained the Shiva temple of Umanand and Viswanath. At Vishwanath temple he performed a great sacrifice officiated by 108 Brhamins.

From Shiva Singha (1714-1744) till the last of Ahom dynasty which terminated in 1826, all the Kings with the single exception of Lakshmi Simha were Saktas followers of Parbatiya Gosain of Sanitpura, Nadia. Lakshmi Singha trained up by Pahumriya Na Gossain was ordained in Shiva Mantra, hence he was Shaivite by initiation. Although all the Ahom Kings were formally Shaktas, they were equally attached to Mahadeva.

Various temples of Assam were patronized by Ahom Kings as follows-

1. Kedareswar, Kameshwar and Kamleshwar at Hajo (1600), Umanand at Guwahati (1614), Shivasagar (1622), Negheriting (1627) originally at Darand later shifted to Negheriting (1769) when the old structure was washed out in the flood of Brahmaputra, Nandikeswar (1677), Haleswar (1707), Sukleswar, Dhaireswara (1730)

There is also a small section of the Zeliangrong Naga community in Assam's Silchar, some parts of Manipur and Nagaland, who worship Síva as Bhubán Baba at the sacred Bhubán cave, associated with the Naga spiritual leaders Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu. Even today, the Zeliangrong Nagas of Silchar celebrate a grand religious festival on the auspicious annual occasion of Maghi Purnima at the Naga Bísnu temple (also known as Naga Bísnu Rákái) situated atop the Bhubán hills.

The word Bhubán is a derivative of the Rongmei Naga word Pú búan which refers to Apou Aomei Bhuanchániu, one of the Devtás worshipped by the Zeliangrong Nagas. Pú búan/Bhubán hill is believed to be the abode of Apou Aomei Bhuanchániu, in whose honour an annual pilgrimage is observed on the occasion of Maha Sivrátri under the guardianship of elders of the Sanatan followers of the Zeliangrong Naga community spread over Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur. Apoubaomei Bhuanchániu is worshipped at the cave of Bhubán Baba located in the Bhubán hills. This cave is commonly known to the outside world as Naga cave. In the dense forests of the Bhubán hills, archaeological remnants of several Rongmei Naga villages which existed in the past have been found.

It may be noted here that Haipou Jadonang, the Hindu Naga leader and freedom fighter, had worshipped Visnu and another local deity called Tingkao Ragwang at a cave in the Bhuban hills. Hence, this cave is considered as a sacred spot by the Zeliangrong Nagas who worship Visnu as the chief deity of welfare and all-round prosperity of men and other living beings. Haipou Jadonang belonged to the Rongmei Naga community, which broadly falls under Zeliangrong that represents a combination of four cognate groups of the Nagas – Zemei, Liangmei, Rongmei, and Inpui. In the Zeliangrong Naga religious pantheon, Vishnu is known by different names such as Monchanu, Bonchanu, Bisnu, Buisnu, etc.

These groups are still adherents of the traditional belief systems that the Nagas followed before the advent of Christianity in their respective areas. They take immense pride in their ancestry and consider the norms and rituals practised by their forefathers as sacred. They have a system known as genna, which are a set of intricately evolved religious beliefs and rituals, associated with different aspects of do's and don'ts for people of different genders and age-groups. To understand such religious belief systems through Western academic vocabularies such as 'animism' or

'nature worship' can provide only a partial, one-sided understanding of the multidimensional nature of Sanatan Hindu traditions that have developed in accordance with the unique local and geographical characteristics of a particular region.

Modern Shaivism (1900 AD and later)-

Strong roots of Shaivism in the North East made this as predominant Hindu sects even today. Although the majority of common man do not differentiate between various Hindu deities, and visit all temples, celebrate festivals. There are more neo Vaishnavite than Shaivite today, Nath is the only sect follower of Gorakhnath as pure Shiva worshiper left in this region.

Shaktism -

Shaktism focuses on the worship of Goddess (feminine God) as the supreme power or ultimate reality. It is called as Shakti or Devi which means Divine mother, symbolises Strength, power, peace, love, and potency, creation etc. The Devi is worshipped in many forms such as Durga, Kali, Chandi, Parvati, Saraswati, and Lakshmi among others.

The earliest Goddess statue excavated in India near Prayagraj (Paleolithic age 20000-223000 BC) Some triangles used in worshipping the Devi are found near Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh and several statues of feminine God are found at Mehrgarh, Balochistan in Pakistan which are dated as 5500 BCE.

Shakti Worship in North-East India-

In the face of these and numerous other challenges, it has now become all the more important to work towards the preservation of the traditional systems of religious beliefs and practices of different groups and communities of people in the North-East. It is also important to understand the fact that although influenced by various local elements, these practices and beliefs are not different from Sanatan Vedic practices.

Shaktism can be divided into three denominations - Tribal/ Folk Shaktism, Tantric/Yogic Shaktism and Devotional/ Bhakti Shaktism.

1. Tribal/ Folk Shaktism -

It is perhaps the oldest form of Shaktism in Bharat. It is being practised till the date in almost all the tribal communities and villages of North East region of Bharat; even after getting converted to Christianity many people prefer these traditional ways of worship for their well being. It consists both i.e. Social or community pujas (For peace and prosperity of the village) and individual pujas (for the personal health, progress, removing the presence of ill spirits, wealth etc). In the tribal areas of Sikkim, Nagaland, Arunachal, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam, the deities are evoked with the sacrifice of Mithuns (Bison like animals), Pig, Chicken etc. In Tani Group of people in Arunachal Pradesh they use to worship Aane Donyi(Goddess Mother Son) and Atu Polo (Male God)and other deities like Kine Nane (Adi), Pinku Pinte (Galo) , Ini Mashelo Jinu, Nani Intaya(Idu Mishmi), Ringya Jawmalw (Tanwra and Kaman Mishmi) and many others.



Source: <https://htoindia.com/blog/indian-folk-and-tribal-dances/>

2. Tantric/Yogic Shaktism-

Tantric Shaktism is described in writings of 6th century CE. It focuses on the Kundalini (spiritual energy or life force) awakening Yoga. It covers tri fold tactics- Bhakti yoga, Shakti Yoga and Raja Yoga. Again it has two subtypes- Tantric and classic.

The biggest place of tantric practices is Kamakhya Shakti Peeth in Assam.

3. **Devotional/ Bhakti Shaktism -**

In this type of Shaktism Goddess is worshipped in the form of a loving mother. It is a beautiful amalgamation of Shakta Bhakti and Vedanta philosophy. The ultimate example of this type of Shaktism in modern age is Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Spiritual Guru of Swami Vivekananda.

There are other paths similar to Tantric Shaktism such as Tantric traditions and non tantric traditions which include a substantial part of Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. The tantras are formulated into two parts - Left hand path (Vamachara) and Right hand path (Dakshinachara). Vamachara is associated with pancha makara - Madya (wine), Mamsa(Meat), Matsya(Fish), Mudra (Gestures) and Maithuna (sexual intercourse), in contrast Dakshinachara insists upon purity in action and conducts.

Another distinct path is Dasamahavidya - each form of Dasha Mahavidya has its own names, story, mantras and style. These names are Kali, Bagala, Matangi, Tara, Bhairavi, Bagalamukhi, Shodashi, Bhuvaneshwari, Chinnamasta and Dhumavati. It is being practised amongst the Bengali community of North East.

Ancient Faith Systems and holy places of Shakti Worship in North East region-

In 2015, a total of 65 Durga Puja pandals were organised in different places of Dimapur and Kohima, largely by members of the Hindu community in Nagaland. But, coming to 2021, the number reduced to 43, due to vehement opposition from various Christian groups and organisations. This fact alone speaks a lot about the losses that we have been incurring as a society since the British first set their foot in Bharat.

Christianity came to Nagaland in the mid-19th century with the arrival of the British and Christian missions from Meghalaya and Assam. However, contrary to the popular belief that all Nagas are Christians, there exist till this date several groups of Nagas such as Chakesang, Angami, Rongmei, Liangmei, Zemei, Konyak etc. not only in Nagaland but in many tribal areas of other North Eastern states as well, who are still practising their traditional religious belief systems and customs. This culture of the non-Christian Nagas has been sustained through oral traditions that have passed through several generations. One such religious belief system which is still in

prevalence among the non-Christian population of Angami Nagas is Kúpenuopfú, who is worshipped as the Creator through various oblations, sacrifices, and chants. Kúpenuopfú has a female connotation among the Angamis, as the one who is responsible for the process of creation i.e. Shakti.

Kúpenuopfú, it is believed, incorporates both masculine and feminine aspects of Creation, i.e. Síva and Sákti. Men and women in Naga families who follow Kúpenuopfú have their own different set of rites and rituals, which they are expected to adhere to. Women are responsible for conducting the main religious rituals and observing fasting. The chief priest, usually the eldest member in the community, announces the rules for the day at dawn and anyone who does anything that is prohibited as per the religious rules and regulations, is meted out the appropriate punishment. Traditionally, both feasting and fasting play a significant socio-cultural role in the lives of the Nagas even today. An important aspect of Kúpenuopfú is that there is no binary concept of virtue or sin unlike Christianity. It is not considered a sin if a mistake is committed unknowingly. However, it becomes a grave sin if the mistake is committed knowingly and genna is not observed. Before the advent of Christianity, the Angami Nagas also used to worship Míawenúo, a Devi who was believed to grant her devotees' wishes. The Sumi Nagas worshipped another female deity called Litsaba, who was believed to protect crops from pest attacks and also bless her devotees with good reproductive health. Traditionally speaking, Litsaba is invoked during the annual post-harvest festival called Tuluni observed in the month of July. It is forbidden for anyone to work in the fields that day.

Among the non-Christian Zeliangrong group of Nagas, the Zeme Nagas worship a male deity called Rampáube along with his female consort Tengrángpui who is invoked as the Sákti. Non-Christian Zemes believe that Rampáube and Tengrángpui reside at Mount Páuná (Nagaland's third highest peak), which incidentally happens to be the home of a ginseng-like medicinal herb believed to bring the dead back to life.

Maa Tripura Sundari temple in Tripura -

Devi Tripura Sundari is one of the deities belonging to the Dásá Máhávidyas . She is also worshipped as the most potent incarnation of the Devi, or simply the ságuna-roopa of Adi Parasákti (the Supreme Being in Sáktitva, and also the feminine aspect

of Para Brahman). Devi Tripurasundari is hailed as a great unifier in Sáktism. Devi Tripurasundari is worshipped in many temples across India, noteworthy being the Tripura Sundari Mandir, located in the ancient city of Udaipur, about 55 km from Agartala, Tripura.

The Tripura Sundari Mandir is one among the 52 Sákti Peethas of Bharat; and, according to the popular story of Sati's death by self-immolation, her right leg had fallen here. Ma Tripura Sundari is worshipped by all people of Tripura, from the Tsipras (Debbarmas, Reangs, Jamatias, Murasings) who are the original inhabitants of Tripura, the Bengalis of Tripura, to the Tripura royal family. According to a story associated with the temple and as written in the Rajmala, king Dhanya Manikya who ruled over Tripura in the closing years of the 15th century, had a revelation one night in a dream in which Ma Tripura Sundari instructed him to shift her murti from Chittagong (in present-day Bangladesh) and initiate her worship on the hillock near Udaipur, the then capital of the kingdom.

The temple of Ma Tripura Sundari is the place of convergence of Vaisnava and Sákti followers of Tripura.



Source: <https://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/astro/religion-rituals/pilgrimage/mata-tripura-sundari-temple-tripura-know-the-special-things-matabari-shaktipeeth-temple-on-the-occasion-of-navratri/articleshow/94499294.cms>

Happy with the efforts of the king's mother, the 14 deities visited King Trilochan's palace in Udaipur. The royal family offered Puja to the fourteen deities and also

sacrificed wild buffaloes. Kharchi Puja is a century-old, important Hindu religious festival celebrated at this temple. A beautiful amalgamation of Sanatan Hindu and local Kokborok customs, Kharchi Puja is celebrated annually during the month of Ashad (June-July), 15 days after the end of the Ambubachi celebrations at the Ma Kamakhya Sáktipeeth. The festival stretches for around a week, but sometimes even more. During this Puja, goats, pigeons, and buffaloes are sacrificed to propitiate the Devi. Kharchi Puja is believed to be a way of purifying Bhúdevi or Mother Earth after Ambubachi in Guwahati.

The Kamakhya Temple located on the Nilachal Hills near in Guwahati, Assam is a significant Shakti Peeth in India and a major site of goddess worship. It is a place of worship for the mother goddess Shakti, and is especially important for Tantric Hindus and the Shakta sect. The temple is considered the birthplace of modern Shaktism because it is the place where Sati's yoni (vulva or womb) fell. It is a holy site that honors womanhood. The place is dedicated to the ten manifestations of Devi, also known as Dashamahavidya. During the Ambubachi Mela, people participate in many kinds of restrictions. The Temple celebrates the feminine reproductive energy and natural forces of fertility. Devotees from across the country travel to Kamakhya Temple to worship the Mother Goddess for fertility.

Nartiang Durga Temple is a 600-year-old temple situated in the West Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya in northeastern India. It is one of the 51 Shakti Peethas and is one of the holiest sites for devotees of the Shaktism sect of Hinduism. The Hindu Jaintia tribal community in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya believes that this temple is the permanent abode of Goddess Durga. The temple draws a large number of pilgrims from all over the country on occasion of Durga Puja. The Shakti of Nartiang Devi shrine is worshipped as Jayanti and the Bhairava as Kamadishwar. Devi's left thigh is believed to have fallen at this holy place. During Durga Puja, a banana plant is dressed up and worshipped as the Goddess. At the end of the four-day festivities, the plant is ceremoniously immersed in the Myntdu River. A gun salute is also given to the Goddess on the occasion.

Neo Devotional/Bhakti Movement in tribal areas of North East-

Nowadays a revival movement has been started in more than 100 communities in the region. They have their community based indigenous faith and culture protection & promotion organizations through which people use to organise weekly prayers in villages, discussions about the faith and culture, having a yearly program calendar, now the movement has gained a momentum and large number of followers use to devote their time in social and spiritual awareness, promotion of their own indigenous faith in a modern form. Several activities have been taken on regular basis in the society, like door to door campaign and distributing the flag, lockets and images of their own respective Gods/Goddesses; Indigenous youth festivals, social awareness programs, spiritual retreat, developing spiritual and philosophical literature, training camps for priests, youths and women; processions and spiritual discourses in masses etc.

Meghalaya-The Seng Khasi Movement is a socio-cultural movement based on Bhakti that aims to preserve the Khasi culture and religion in the state of Meghalaya, India, founded in Mawkhar, Shillong on November 23, 1899 by 16 young Khasi men under the guidance of Babu U Jeeban Roy. The founders were concerned about the loss of traditional Khasi culture and values due to British colonial rule and Christian missionaries. The Seng Khasi Movement is celebrated annually with the Seng Kut Snem festival; it includes a cultural procession called “Iaid Pyni Riti”.

Arunachal Pradesh - Late Talom Rukbo initiated Donyi Polo Yelam Kebang organisation in 1986, now a days each community is having organisation for their indigenous faith-culture protection and promotion - Nyishi Nyidung Mwngrjwng Rallung (Nyishi), Rangfraa Faith and Culture Protection Society (Tangsa, Tutsa), Danyi Piilo Society (Apatani) and others having the same.

Assam - All Bathou Mahasabha (Bodo), Hemphu Mukrang Adorbar (Karbi), Sibrai Bismoi Bosong (Dimasa)

Manipur- Tingkao Ragwang Ra-Chapriak Phom (Rongmei), Zeliangrong Heraka Association (Zeliangrong)

Mizoram - Nunna Lal Hnam (Mizo)

Tripura - Jamatia Houda (Jamatia), Molsom Dafa (Molsom)

7. **Nagaland** - Zeliangrong Heraka Association (Zeliangrong), Sibrai Bismoi Bosong

(Dimasa), Chakesang Lhekri Lenyi- Kezumi Manpouu (Chakesang), Japhu Phiki Phutsana Keseko Keho (Angami)

The impact of this movement is-

- It brings the feeling of pride on our age old faith and cultural heritage
- Assertiveness is clearly seen among the Indigenous people
- Flag on the top of the house gives the message of staunch follower's house
- Inculcate the culture of dedication for their own Dharma
- Imbibing the habits of teamwork in organizational structure
- Homecoming has been started
- Social leaders are grooming in new generation
- Self-confidence has been build up among the workers
- New prayer halls are being established
- Increase in number of regular followers in prayer centres
- Mass awareness

Conclusion

Overall, the different forms of Agamic traditions in the North East region of Bharat are a rich and vibrant aspect of the region's cultural heritage, and continue to be an important part of the lives of the people in the region. All the tribal and non tribal communities of North East are moving forward with the slogan 'Change with continuity', strengthening the roots of indigenous faith for future generations and welfare of the world, reciting the mantra of "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramyah, Sarve Bhadrani Pashyant, Ma Kaschit Dukha Bhag Bhavet

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Appendix-Photos



Inside the Naga Bísnu temple in Bhubán Pahar, Silchar



Stones dedicated to Apoubaomei Bhuanchániu, found on way to Bhubán hills



Seen at the entrance of the cave of Bhubán Baba located in the Bhubán hills of Silchar

Shamanistic Traditions of Arunachal Pradesh, India History, Cultural Significance and Contemporary Issues

Tarun Mene¹ and S. Simon John²

Abstract

Shamanism is a religious practice involving shamans who access supernatural powers through trance or ecstasy. They serve as intermediaries between the material and spiritual worlds, acting as healers, diviners, and counselors for the spirits of the dead. Shamanism is a personal and deeply social phenomenon, centered on unique practices, rituals, and symbols that allow direct communion with the spirit realm. Despite cultural differences, shamans share the role of a healer, counselor, and spiritual guardian in various indigenous cultures worldwide. Traditional shamanism includes trance states, animal guardianship, mystical combat, spirit possession, and initiation rites, all representing a shaman's role as an intermediary and their link to the spirit realm. This paper, empirically based on primary and secondary data, provides an overview of shamanism in Arunachal Pradesh, India, examining its practices, rituals, beliefs, and symbolic systems.

Keywords: Shamanism, Arunachal Pradesh, Indigenous Cultures, Trance and Rituals, Spiritual Healing

Introduction

Shamanism is a religious phenomenon with a complex and long history. It refers to a religious practice in which some people are believed to have supernatural abilities that allow them to mediate, control, and manipulate spiritual energies for human and societal benefits. It centers on individuals known as shamans who are believed to be able to access supernatural powers through ecstasy or trance. In many cultural contexts, shamans are viewed as bridges between the material and spiritual realms, acting as healers, diviners, and advisors to the spirits of the deceased. Shamanism's distinctive customs, ceremonies, and symbols that enable direct communication with the spirit world are at the heart of this intensely social and individualized phenomenon.

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Source: <https://karwaanheritage.in/the-practice-of-shamanism-and-indigenous-art-of-india/>

Originating from the Manchu-Tungus word *šaman*, as some claims, shamanism was initially used by indigenous groups in Northern Asia, such as the Tungus, Chukchi, and Khanty. Despite cultural variances in particular beliefs and practices, many societies share the function of the shaman as a spiritual and religious leader. Shamanic practices are also practiced by a wide variety of indigenous societies worldwide, including Native American tribes, Australian Aboriginal communities, Arctic peoples, and several Asian and African groups.

Nonetheless, there is evident dissatisfaction and sporadic overlap in the characteristics when defining the term “shaman.” Similarly, there exist multiple viewpoints and approaches, theories and methodical debates that emerge from anthropological, sociological, historical, psychological, symbolic, and phenomenological field of study.

The Concept and its Inherent Complexity

The English term “shaman” is defined as “a person in some religions and societies who is believed to be able to contact good and evil spirits and cure people of illness” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2000: 1176). Pratt (2007: xxii) elaborates on this definition, characterizing a shaman as “a practitioner who has developed the mastery of 1) accessing altered states of consciousness, controlling themselves while

moving in those states, and returning to an ordinary state of consciousness at will; 2) mediating between the needs of the spirit world and those of the physical world in a way that can be understood by the community, and whose mastery of the above is used; 3) to serve the needs of the community that cannot be met by practitioners of other disciplines such as physicians, psychiatrists, priests, and leaders.” Walter and Fridman (2004: xi) provide another perspective, defining shamanism as “a religious belief system in which the shaman is the specialist in knowledge. The shaman knows the spirit world and human soul through ‘ecstasy,’ the power of an altered state of consciousness, or trance, which is used to make a connection to the world of the spirits in order to bring about benefits to the community.” Anthropologists Curdy & Spradley (1975) and Harner (1973) have defined shamans as religious specialists who wield supernatural power, with Harner emphasizing their direct contact with the spirit world through trance states. Howard (1996) highlights the personalistic nature of a shaman’s status, emphasizing their ability to influence the spirit world. Hoebel (1966: 479) suggests that a shaman’s power comes directly from a supernatural source. A shaman, thus in this sense, serves as a mediator during trance periods, controlling or directing supernatural forces to achieve desired outcomes. In exchange for their services, shamans hold a specific status in their community.

As stated, there exists divided opinions and debate over the origin of the word ‘shaman’ itself. According to Alberts (2013: 41), scholars disagree over where the word ‘shaman’ came from. He noted that some scholar see shamanism as the primordial religion that shaped all other religions, and some claim it originated in Siberia. Others contend that it originated in China or India, implying that shamanism is a branch of Lamaism or Brahmanism. According to these interpretations, the phrase is related to the Manchu word *šaman*, which means ‘one who is moved or excited,’ as well as the Sanskrit words *sramana* and *Palisamana*, which mean “religious mendicant” or “worker.” Using evidence from ancient Tanjur writings and Nepalese Tantras, according to Alberts, F. Max Müller used philological analysis to support the idea that shamanism originated in India (ibid: 2013: 41).

Based on the contents, Eliade (1964: 3) pointed out that the concept of shamanism is extremely complicated and challenging to describe because it involves a wide range of roles and behaviors, including medicine man, magician, mystic, and priest.

Although he acknowledges the ambiguous and complex character of shamanism, he believes it has its roots in Siberia and Central Asia. Other academics, like Ränk (1967: 21) and Versnel (1990), contend that attempts to define shamanism too precisely or to concentrate just on its historical context might result in misunderstandings, emphasizing the necessity of thorough, historically and culturally informed study that permits ongoing reconsideration.

Walter & Fridman (2004: xxi), and Witzel (2011) believe that the term “shaman” encompasses a variety of beliefs and practices that change in reaction to shifting civilizations. Given the vast array of ecstatic behaviors, spirit possessions, and rituals that fall under the purview of shamanism, these academics highlight the difficulties in offering a definitive description. In her critique of the term’s usage, Kehoe (2000) notes that Western and New Age activities have taken and misused it, frequently misrepresenting Indigenous traditions and lessening their relevance. She also criticizes Eliade’s method, which generalizes shamanic rituals like drumming and trance, and contends that these aspects of culture are not unique to shamanism. Kehoe challenges the notion of a universal shamanic legacy by criticizing the depiction of shamanism as an antiquated, unalterable religion that dates back to the Paleolithic period. She questions the term “shamanism” because of its colonial origins and its tendency to minimize the diversity of Indigenous traditions.

Thus, from conceptual debates to spirituality, rituals, healing techniques, sacred texts, folklore, indigenous knowledge, natural relations, performing arts, language, material culture, and gender roles, this rapidly developing field of study may be called as ‘Shamanology’. This field acts as a storehouse for indigenous societies’ tangible and intangible cultural heritage from all around the world, protecting their ‘Living Heritage.’ This discipline is essential to contemporary academia providing perspectives on global concerns including protecting cultural identity and preservation, indigenous knowledge systems, sustainability, and a variety of culturally specific phenomena.

Shamanism in Arunachal Pradesh: An overview

No society or culture is without religion and religion without religious experts or specialists. This relation can be presumed as a binary projection that is difficult to erase across the cultures. The fundamental aspects and common understanding of

traditional religious belief and practices prevalent among the tribal communities is closely associated with the concept of 'Animism.' This term, as defined by Tylor (1871 [1970: 8]), refers to the belief in spiritual entities. This encompasses beliefs in ghosts, ghost-souls, nature spirits, hill gods, etc, proposing that this belief system emerged as a means to understand natural occurrences. Similarly, Joseph (2012) noted, tribal religious system consist of three essential elements. Firstly, they believe in the existence of a supernatural world. Secondly, they form a divine relationship with the supernatural world which reflects their value system. Thirdly, they practise various rites and rituals for establishing the relationship that apply to their action system and ritual language.



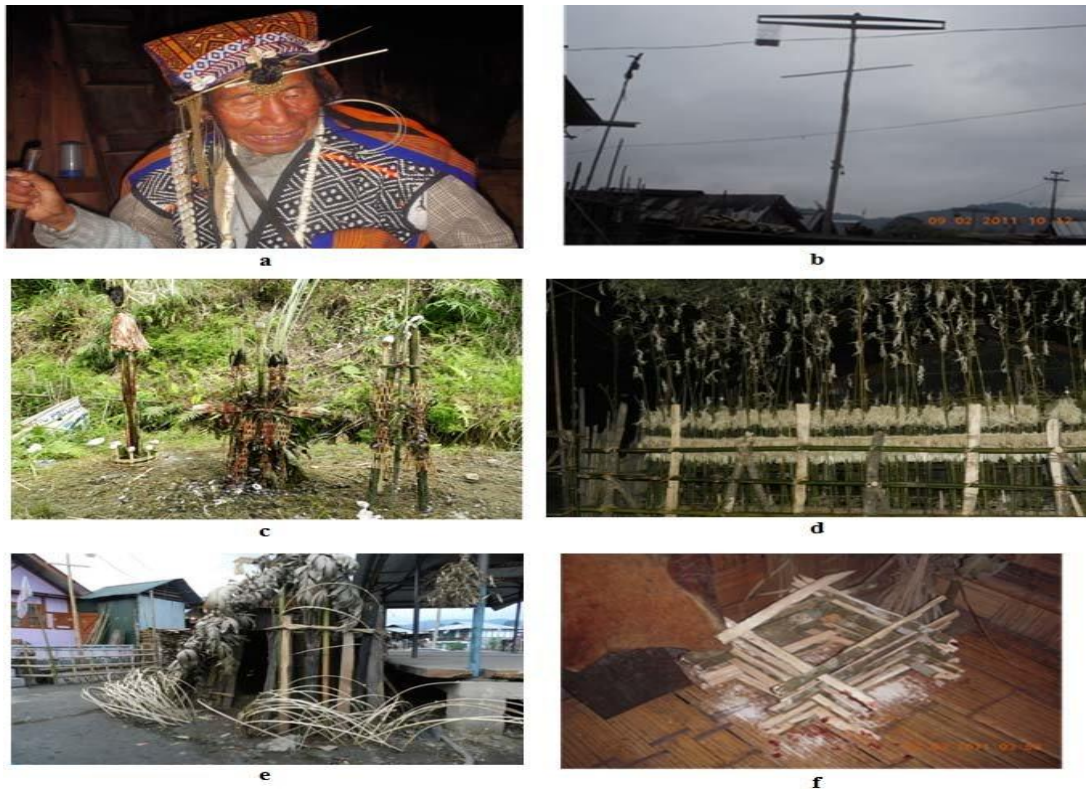
Source:https://www.google.com/imgres?q=shamanism%20in%20arunachal%20pradesh%20in%20ancient%20india&imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Flookaside.instagram.com%2Fseo%2Fgoogle_widget%2Fcrawler%2F%3Fmedia_id%3D3631745502762906032&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.instagram.com%2Fp%2FDEHx9T7vbbZ%2F&docid=5plunjjd9kRHnM&tbnid=HyB41weqvV_cAM&vet=12ahUKEwjT2vrH56SNAXVkd2wGHfjbEBUQM3oECBsQAA..i&w=1440&h=960&hcb=2&ved=2ahUKEwjT2vrH56SNAXVkd2wGHfjbEBUQM3oECBsQAA

These characteristics of a tribal religion are true to tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh, an eastern most state of India. Among them, religions do not emerge as an independent phenomenon; rather it is deeply associated with various aspects of social structure and everyday life activities of the tribal people. Their societies are comparatively smaller and they possess morality, values, customs, and unique social settings, including religion which is often based on the institution of shaman of the concerned society. Among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, a shaman is a person and also an institution as it plays a significant role and has influenced upon and conditioned every aspect of human life such as socio-religious, economic endeavours,

political and social movements, property dealings, educational tasks, ideological fervours, scientific inventions, and artistic developments, etc. It may be considered that the institutions of shamanism are the structures on which all the other superstructures survive and have been adding new dimensions to tribal life and their development.

With over 14 lakhs of indigenous population, the state of Arunachal Pradesh is home to more than 30 different ethno-linguistic tribal communities. Among these communities, shamans continue to play an important role even in the face of growing exposure to outside influences, the rise of organized religions like Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism, as well as access to modern medical facilities. Every tribe uses a different term in their native vernacular for its religious experts. For example, the Mishmi tribes use *Goak*, *Kambreng*, and *Igu*; the Nyishi, Apatani, Tagin, and Galo call their shamanic practitioners *Nyibu*, *Nyibo* or *Nyub*; the Adi call them *Miri*; the Aka (Hrusso) call theirs *Mugow*; the Sherdukpens call them *Zizih*; the Bugun call them *Phabi*; and the Sartang tribe call them *Chabji*.

Fig.1: A Nyibu of Apatani Tribe



Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/mportant-features-of-Apatani-culture-and-traditions-a-a-priest-Nyibu-wearing_fig2_282930940 [accessed 15 May 2025]

Fig.2: A Kambring of Kaman Mishmi Tribe performing Tano ritual



Source: <https://youtu.be/wADaRyYFxcg?si=91CVFB2ZnSGUNjZg>

Fig.3: An Igu of Idu Mishmi tribe performing Mipi-Ayuthri ritual



Source: <https://arunachallivingheritage.com/people?type=Idu%20Mishmi>

Fig.4: Nyibu-Apatani Shaman performing ritual on sacred altar



Source: digital.info.soas.ac.uk

Role, Types and Hierarchies of Shamans

In the context of Arunachal Pradesh, these sacred specialists, the shamans, play a significant role in the religious life of the people and their advice is sought on almost every important occasion. It is generally believed that only the shamans have knowledge of divination and, therefore, they are summoned in case of sickness, temporal distress, death of a person, marriage, for divination before building houses, before undertaking a long journey, hunting expedition, selection of sites for settlement or cultivation, sowing in the field, and so on. They are representatives of the people to communicate their sufferings and grievances to the spirits and seek redress. They are considered sacred specialists, a medicine man, a healer, a traditional philosopher, oral historians, and the methods employed are unique to them. He specializes in the trance state and goes out of his body to the sky or the land of the netherworld and it is believed that they control his tutorial spirits thereby making them their instrument to meet the desired purpose. They are in charge of benevolent tutelary spirits who help them to identify the truant spirits responsible for human distress. The tribal people have strong faith, belief, and fear of spirits. These spirits inflict illness on human beings and to appease them they sacrifice domestic animals like fowls, pigs, or Mithun (*Bosfrontalis*) on the advice of the shaman. The wrath of the spirits can only be removed with the help of the shaman who also prescribes taboo to restrain movement and food habit of an ill person for days together. As such, they play a vital

role in the socio-religious life in the society.

None can become a shaman despite one's intelligence unless one is destined to be one. For example, Mene and Miso (2024) informs us that among the Idu Mishmis, "It is believed that a mother comes to know whether her child would become an Igu (shaman) or not. If a child is born with an umbilical cord around the neck, then it is a positive sign. The birth of a child in this fashion resembles the Igu wearing an *Amrala* (Igu's costume) for dance. If a pregnant woman sees in dreams the cactus tree in which the child is hung in a basket, then her child is bound to become an Igu. So does a woman, who dreams of the bird *praerru* making its nest on the roof of the house. Dreams in most cases encourage a person to opt for shaman. Having all these signs and thus acting for a few years as an apprentice of the senior shaman, one graduates himself to a full-fledged shaman. Similarly among the Sartang tribe, one of the most evident signs of becoming a *Chabji* is the occurrence of recurrent dreams and visions that come to the chosen one. These dreams are often transcendent in nature (Lomdak, et al, 2024). Nyori (1991) states that his is an art just like any other and thus his position is like any other profession in modern society. For his work, he collects fees, the nature and amount of which depends on the type of sacrifice made. He is the mouthpiece of the people to communicate their grievances and sufferings to the spirits and to request them for redressed- a sort of intermediary between the human and spiritual world. They can identify which spirit is responsible and the rituals to be performed. They do it by a form of divination. Historically, gender has never been considered a criterion for becoming a shaman in these societies. In fact women were regarded more powerful than a male shaman and it still continues in some communities. These characteristics are found common among communities practicing shamanism.

In social affairs, they hold a privileged status in society. They are usually a full-time religious practitioner and they are unquestionably the custodian of traditions, customs, and guides as well. He utters different hymns which are not understood by the common man. He does this without the help of scriptures and under such circumstances the responsibility to keep the tradition going is vested on them.

The more capable and distinguished shaman are, known over wide areas and people summoned them quite often. When they are not summoned they engage themselves in their daily cultivation work. Generally, in the festivals, the shaman does not kill the sacrificial animal himself. It is under his direction a sacrificial altar is constructed and he alone determines the spirits who are to be represented in the altar and the mode of sacrifice that has to be performed. They wear sacred shamanic costumes while performing rituals for treatments or healing. Shamanic chanting sometimes goes along with music and shamanic dance. Their role of the shaman spans from the birth of a child to death with innumerable rituals. Their chants and narratives deal in interactions with spirits, origin myths of the universe, of the earth, nature and man, evolution of animals, man-spirit relations, souls and their abodes, survival stories, beginnings of agriculture, migration, history, etc. Their role crosses the institutional and cultural boundaries, thus, represents the central icon of socio-cultural and religious beliefs and practices in the tribal life and society.

Almost every major aspect of life revolves around the shaman and its importance is reflected even beyond the sacred boundary since they are involved in profane activities. For them, the key concept of spirit (*Ui, Khinyu*, etc) rules the world of the unknown, which may be benevolent or malevolent, while nourishing the concept of a Supreme Creator known such as *Donipolo, Maik Matai, Inni* etc.

For example, among the Nyishi tribe, a shaman is known as *Nyibu* and he holds a privileged status in the society. They not only serve as shamans but also act as custodians of belief systems and customs, operating without the aid of scriptures as the tribe lacks its own written texts. Consequently, the responsibility of preserving tradition falls upon the *Nyibu*, the shaman. Becoming a shaman is not solely contingent upon intelligence but is viewed as a predetermined destiny. Prospective shamans exhibit an inherent inclination towards the profession and typically begin their journey by serving as *Bu*, attendants to experienced shamans, and participating in all shamanic activities. After apprenticing for several years under senior shamans, they progress to full-fledged shamans (Bora, 2000). Among the Galos, there exist two types of shamans: *Mumin Nyibo* and *Nyigre Nyibo*. Nyori (1991) characterizes shamanism as an art akin to any other profession in modern society. For their services, they collect fees, the nature and amount of which depend on the type of

sacrifice performed. Shamans serve as the voice of the people to convey their grievances and suffering to the spirits, acting as intermediaries between the human and spiritual realms. This nature of shamanism is true to every tribal community of Arunachal Pradesh practicing it.

The shamans of Bugun tribe are known as *Phabi*, and they play a crucial role in the community's well-being by overseeing important festivals, rites, and healing practices. Depending on the type and intensity of the occasion, *Phabis* perform both private and public ceremonies using offerings and rituals that vary from animal sacrifices to symbolic objects like garlic and ginger. This position, which varies from village to village and is regarded as divinely chosen rather than hereditary, includes a number of specialized sorts according to their abilities and ceremonial concentration.

For example, Padu and Mene (2024) inform that in Singchung region, *Phabis* are categorized into three types:

1. *Resai Phabi* – The most prominent type, performing large rituals, especially those involving sacrifices for significant events or health issues.
2. *Mann Phabi* – Performers of less intense rituals that do not involve sacrifices, using simple offerings instead.
3. *Sai Tachua Quaiifa Phabi* – Specialized in childbirth rituals to ease labor. In

Wangho village, *Phabis* are classified as:

1. *Tsekmo* – Non-sacrificial *Phabis* who use invocations and herbal remedies for childbirth issues.
2. *Phabi* – The primary healers, conducting sacrifices and important community rituals for health and fertility.

In Namfri village, *Phabis* are further divided into:

1. *Phabi Vaik* – Responsible for a wide range of significant rituals involving sacrifices for health, harvest, and protection against spirits.
2. *Phabi Nou* – Specialists in minor ailments and simpler rituals, often in the absence of *Phabi Vaik*.

Similarly, among the Sartang tribe (see Lomdak, et al, 2024), shamans are referred to by the terms “*Chaji*,” “*Chabji*,” and “*Chopji*” interchangeably because of the regional dialectal variances. They are cultural knowledge keepers and traditional healers and

perform many ceremonies and rituals by summoning guardian and tutelary spirits. Certain rites are typically performed by specific clans and animal sacrifices and offerings are specific to each ritual. *Chabjis* are categorized into three types:

1. *Chabji Ajen*: They are apprentices or students who get instruction from seasoned *Chabjis*. They are known for their expertise in astrology and regional deities, and provide community members with horoscopes and predictions.
2. *Chabji*: They are well-known and respected shamans or religious experts who have sway in their village and the neighboring territories.
3. *Asu* or *Blu Chabji*: They are the highest-ranking *Chabji* and are referred to as the “Head Shaman.” They are essential in managing village governments and organizing important festivals and ceremonies. There is only one *Blu/Asu Chabji* at a time, and achieving this position requires a great deal of knowledge and skill rather than age.

Among the Kaman Mishmi there are the four types of shamans namely *Kambring*, *Madyu*, *Katuat*, and *Kanjel*. Each type has distinct spiritual functions, carrying out different sacrifices and ceremonies in accordance with their spiritual capacities, which they obtain in dreams through blessings from guardian deities such as *Amik-Matai*.

Fig.5: A Phabi of Bugum tribe performing ritual during Dyingkho festival



Source: <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2019/09/11/buguns-celebrate-pham-kho-sowai/>

Fig.6: A Chabji of Sartang tribe



Source: <https://arunachal24.in/arunachal-sartang-community-celebrates-tang-festival/>

Contemporary Issues

Indeed, human society, in general, is inherently dynamic, and its institutions evolve over time in response to change, presenting both challenges and opportunities. This dynamism is reflected not only in socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres but also in the overall outlook of society, including the institutions of shamanism.

For example, the *Igu*, (shaman) is revered by the Idu Mishmi tribe who is essential to the tribe's religious, social, and political life. They use divination and rituals to arbitrate between the supernatural and human worlds, resolving societal problems, disease, and death. These customs, which are ingrained in everyday life, include animal sacrifices, taboo observances, and distinctive shamanic chanting and attire.

From birth to death, an *Igu* oversees life's major events and directs both material and spiritual well-being, so their influence is all-pervasive. Along with playing important roles in community initiatives and economic endeavors like agriculture, they also assist in resolving social and legal conflicts through rites like oaths and trials. Despite their great respect, *Igus* live similar lives to other tribe members, engaging in hunting, farming, and other customary means of subsistence.

However, due to external factors like post-colonial governance, modernity, and the spread of Christianity and Hinduism, the Idu Mishmi's traditional religious practices are changing. These factors have pushed the community to either embrace new religions or embrace the revived form of traditional religion through institutionalization movements called Nani Innitayaism. With flowers, and incense,

this movement, which began in the mid-1990s, promotes the Idu Mishmi Supreme Being, *Inni*, as an image akin to Hindu rituals. This modification marks a departure from shaman-led ceremonies in which Igu, the shaman, serves as a spirit-mediator.

This change represents a move away from rituals led by shamans, in which Igu, serves as a conduit to the spirit world, and toward direct worship of a personified deity. In contrast to traditional practices, Nani Innitayaism minimizes the role of shamans, who once served as intermediaries between people and supernatural forces. Shamans use spiritual intervention and sacrifice to placate spirits in order to diagnose illnesses. In contrast, the recently formalized Nani Innitayaism encourages direct worship, eschewing the need for shamans.

In recent times, another layer of debate started where the community elders, including shamans, started asserting that this institutionalization form of Idu Mishmi religion called Nani Innitayaism is misappropriation and misrepresentation of the traditional shamanic religion. At the same time the Idu Mishmi Cultural and Literary Society (IMCLS) has recently established the Identification, Preservation, and Documentation of Igu (IPD-Igu) committee to address the plight of the shamanic tradition with the goal of conserving shamanic activities. Along with creating a training program to disseminate shamanic knowledge, the committee is compiling a database of shamans and documenting ceremonies. The current generation of Idu Mishmi receives shamanic instruction from senior shamans at this school, which also integrates shamanic practices within the community's cultural continuity and provides resources for apprentices. Through these initiatives, IMCLS hopes to uphold the Igu's crucial position in the Idu Mishmi's changing religious landscape (see Mene & Miso, 2024).

A similar shamanic plight is noticed among the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Among them, Christian proselytization has caused significant religious changes leading to internal conflicts and modifications within their ancient belief systems. Christianity upended traditional Adi cultural and religious customs, first with American Baptist missionaries and then spreading to other missions during the 20th century. While some traditional components were incorporated into the new beliefs of the first wave of Adi converts, later converts in the 1950s and 1960s were seen as producing social unrest by abandoning traditional rituals and accepting more stringent church-imposed regulations. Non-Christian leaders who favored a religious strategy to

safeguard indigenous beliefs opposed these limits since they forbade a number of customs and classified ancestral artifacts as the remains of “ancestral sins.” The result of this was the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act of 1978, despite opposition that it infringed upon the right to freedom of religion guaranteed by the constitution.

In reaction, some Adi tribal leaders attempted to modernize and institutionalize their native religion, Donyipoloism, through groups like the Donyi Polo Yeläm Kébäng (DPYK), establishing a more structured belief system in opposition to the impact of Christian missionaries. The creation of Gänggíng prayer halls, weekly worship sessions, and rituals that included items like icons, incense, and sacred water were all part of this revival, which marked a dramatic shift from custom.

In contrast to the traditional shaman (*Miri*), a new religious role known as *Ta:bé* was recruited within this institutional framework. *Ta:bé* performs rituals using pre-printed texts and lacks spiritual powers, while the DPYK trains them to adhere to standardized worship practices in *Gänggíng* (a place of worship, similar to temple or church) services, incorporating sacred elements for consistent service formats.

In reaction to outside religious influences, especially Christian missionary work and Hindu assistance, the socio-religious landscape of Donyipoloism among the Adi people has experienced significant change and internal disagreement. Within Donyipoloism, this adaptation has resulted in two main sects: *Lobük*, who use the Gänggíng prayer hall system and have incorporated structured practices influenced by Hinduism and DPYK (Donyi Polo Yeläm Kébäng) guidelines, and *Lokü*, who strictly adhere to ancestral beliefs and reject influences, deemed to be Hindu.

The main areas of disagreement between *Lokü* and *Lobük* are how they handle membership and ceremonies. While *Lokü* reject these codified customs and favor private ceremonies at home, *Lobük* members, in accordance with DPYK, observe structured prayer and deny non-participating *Lokü* official benefits. Differing from typical Adi customs, the *Lobük* incorporate customs such as thread-tying and water blessings into their wedding ceremonies and dedicate prayers during their funerals. *Lokü* desire to uphold ancestral traditions, and they frequently bargain with *Lobük* over which rites they should both do, particularly at marriage. Despite sharing burial

grounds, *Lobük's* introduction of prayer services and certain *Lobük's* proposal for separate graveyards have caused difficulties in funeral customs, making it difficult for *Lokü* to follow traditional burial customs and leaving *Lokü* unclear in terms of death rite alignment.

A rare example of flexibility can be found in healing practices, as *Lobük* consult *Miris* (traditional shamans and healers) despite their own prayer traditions, highlighting an overlap that softens sectarian boundaries, while *Lokü* seek *Miris* for diagnosis and ritualistic offerings but occasionally resort to *Gängging* prayers when other rituals fail. A larger conflict within the Donyipoloist community over religious identity, continuity, and striking a balance between upholding customs and embracing new, outside-influenced ones is reflected in this split between *Lokü* and *Lobük* (see Pertin, 2024).

Fig.7: Weekly prayer at Doni Polo Gangging Prayer hall



Source: <https://arunachalobserver.org/2017/09/04/guv-visits-donyi-polo-ganggiing/>

Fig.8: Doni Polo Gangging prayer Hall



Source: <http://easternsentinel.in/news/state/indigenous-faith-believers-observe-donyi-polo-day.html>

Conclusions

The rapid changes in tribal ways of life, driven by factors such as modern education, new forms of economic activities, interactions with other cultures, and religious conversions, have led to a decline in the number shamanic profession. This declining trend and the scarcity of new entrants ultimately endanger the ancient sacred oral narratives and community knowledge. The rich tradition of oral narratives, crucial for preserving cultural heritage, is gradually fading away with the diminishing number of shamans. There are cases of the resurgence of shamanic practices, particularly evident in neo-shamanism movements in urban Europe and the Americas, signaling a revitalization of traditions once thought to be fading from world cultures. However, in many cultures, particularly among the indigenous communities, this traditional institution of shaman faces the looming threat of extinction in the present-day context. This calls for urgent remedial measures to address this situation.

With a population of about 100,000, the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh exhibit the importance of shamans in the tribes' socio-cultural and religion life, and their continued existence is essential to its survival. However, tribes are experiencing profound socio-religious changes as a result of the impact of major religions like

Christianity and Hinduism. Some members of the community are converting, while others are still working to revive their old beliefs. Many shamans have given up their traditional duties as conversion and education have increased, particularly in urban regions where the younger generation is becoming more and more enmeshed in modernity. Rural communities nevertheless maintain their traditional customs. Despite obstacles, intellectuals and reformists working in community groups are attempting to institutionalize and maintain the traditional faith. These efforts, however, have sparked a debate over the authenticity and validation of these institutionalized forms of traditional faith, with critics arguing that such attempts represent a pseudo-proselytization process that ultimately leads to Hinduization or Sanskritization.

With a move away from shamanic activities to incorporating the institutionalized form of Donyi-Poloism among the Adi tribe, the community is now experiencing a division in the form of Lokü or Lobük, undermining the Adi community's traditional cultural cohesiveness and leading to a decline in attendance at festivals and social gatherings. Such concerns are well reflected in community members' responses to these contemporary issues. There exist multiple voices and participants with varied backgrounds; the religious landscape of Arunachal Pradesh is experiencing challenges, with some claiming maintenance of tradition, others suggesting adjustment and modification, and some abandoning and converting to outside religions.

This situation demonstrates the complex interplay between religious reform, modernization, and tradition in tribal cultures. Despite efforts to preserve indigenous practices like shamanism, the challenges brought about by socio-religious developments are evident. The fragility of these cultural elements in a world that is changing rapidly is demonstrated by the decline of traditional shamanic roles due to external causes including urbanization, education, and religious conversion.

A multifaceted approach is needed to preserve these communities' rich cultural heritage. This entails encouraging the generational transfer of traditional knowledge, advocating for cultural education, and aiding community-led initiatives that modify customs to fit modern settings without sacrificing their core values. To ensure that preservation efforts stay inclusive and represent the community's changing identity, it is crucial to address the larger socioeconomic and cultural factors that drive religious

conversions and modernization.

To ensure that these age-old customs continue to flourish in significant and pertinent ways for coming generations, maintaining the existence of shamanic traditions and other cultural practices ultimately depends on establishing a balance between reverence for historical past and receptivity to cultural change.

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Cultural and Sacred Concept of Nature in the Lithuanian Identity Expression: The Significance of the Special Relationship in the Pursuit of Preserving the Earth

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Abstract

This paper explores the cultural and sacred concept of nature within the expression of Lithuanian identity, focusing on the extent to which respect and harmony with nature—principles rooted in the old Baltic (pre-Christian) religion—are preserved and reflected in national self-consciousness. While language, customs, and history are commonly recognized elements of Lithuanian identity, this study highlights the significance of nature and natural objects as essential components, particularly as presented in the early ethnographic magazine *Gimtasai kraštas* (1934–1943). An analysis of articles from this publication reveals how natural elements such as sacred mounds, oaks, stones, lakes, and other landscape features are interwoven with cultural, historical, linguistic, and folkloric meanings. These portrayals not only shaped the Lithuanian identity construct during the interwar period but also promoted environmental awareness and a spiritual connection with the land. Through content analysis and classification of natural objects and narratives, the study demonstrates the enduring role of nature in expressing national identity and its relevance to broader ecological preservation efforts.

Keywords: Lithuanian identity, Baltic religion, *Gimtasai kraštas*, ethnography, cultural heritage, environmental preservation.

Introduction

Important cultural elements in the expression of Lithuanian identity are language, customs and history, which have received a lot of research attention. These cultural features are often used to construct national identities and are studied as factors in the process of national self-consciousness and identity construction. However, it is interesting to note that the collection of cultural traits expressing Lithuanianness, compiled by ethnographers and local historians who started the magazine “Gimtasai

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kraštas” (“Native land“), includes *nature* and natural objects.

The paper asks to what extent the fundamental principles of respect and harmonious relationship with *nature*, which are essential to the old (pre-Christian) Lithuanian religion (hereafter referred to as the old Baltic religion), have been preserved in the construct of Lithuanian identity and what role they play in the process of preserving the nature – the whole Earth. The aim is to discuss the concept of *nature* in the context of the Lithuanian identity: what it is and in what aspects it manifests itself in the set of Lithuanian traits. The object of this work is the expression of the concept of *nature* in the articles of the magazine “Gimtasai kraštas” (GK 1934–1943).



Source: <https://neukku.wordpress.com/2013/02/09/1975-lithuania/>

The analysis of the issues of the first Lithuanian ethnographic and local history magazine “Gimtasai kraštas” (1934–1940) published by the Šiauliai Regional Studies Society in 1934–1943, which is available in the “ePaveldas” electronic database, and the articles about *nature* published in them. The choice of the magazine is influenced by the fact that during the period of its publication, as well as by the efforts of its publishers, the perception of Lithuanian identity was actively fostered, and the readers of the magazine were encouraged to get to know and help preserve the source of Lithuanian strength – the Lithuanian nature and the ancient culture (Our Aspirations 1934: 1). The majority of the magazine’s articles present the historical and archaeological material, nature, customs and material culture of Lithuania and its individual areas, and deal with the methodology of local history and ethnographic

work. All issues of the journal have been consistently reviewed and articles describing nature and natural objects have been highlighted. The material is analysed by categorising the articles according to whether they are devoted to specific natural objects – castle mounds, worshipping mounds, burial mounds, lakes, oaks, stones, etc., or to a whole group of them in a selected area, and another category is devoted to the travel and excursion stories published in the magazine, with the description of natural objects and descriptions of picturesque nature. The natural features highlighted in the material are classified according to their origin: naturally occurring features and man-made natural formations; in addition, a small number of general nature descriptions are discussed. The classification of natural objects according to the additional element “attached” to them in the sources under study – historical, folklore, linguistic – is discussed. However, this proved tricky, as often one object is accompanied by more than one cultural connotation. The content analysis is carried out by examining and evaluating all the material presented in the article relating to the natural object.

The Concept of Nature in Identity Discourse: Theoretical Approaches to Research

The concept of identity (together with synonyms of identity) is defined and interpreted in different ways in different scientific discourses. The psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson began to use the concept of identity to describe a person’s perception of himself; from his point of view, *the ego’s sense of identity is a person’s accumulated confidence that the unity and continuity developed in the past is consistent with the inner content of that unity and continuity ascribed to him by others* (Erikson 2004: 308). In sociology, identity is people’s opinions about themselves and the things that are meaningful to them (Giddens 2005: 44). In ethnology and anthropology, identity is often understood as an ethnic identity, meaning a person’s conscious identification with others, sharing certain common characteristics (language, culture, etc.), and analysed as group and individual (Čepaitienė 2010: 2). Identity is linked to ethnicity, and in scientific literature these concepts often overlap. *Ethnicity shows to which society people belong, how they share culture, how they identify themselves* (Savoniakaitė 2011: 79).

It should be noted that the notions of ethnicity and nationalism are also important in the context of ethnic identity. Auksuolė Čepaitienė observes that in the Lithuanian language the term “*nation*” can refer to an ethnic group in one case and to a nation in another (Čepaitienė 2001: 168). It is not always easy to distinguish strictly between the use of these terms in the context of identity. Anthony Cohen argues that ethnicity in the concept of identity is not manifested through a sense of national rights and duties, but rather through nationhood as a claim to the integrity of a nation’s character and cultural identity (Cohen 1993: 197). It refers to the cultural expression of ethnic identity, as well as the search for or conscious construction of nation-specific traits through cultural ideas, objects or a collection of them. *The external representation of ethnic identity belongs to the cultural sphere. <...> The conscious appreciation of culture in the context of identification transforms and decomposes the natural cultural whole into individual objects and units of consumption* (Čepaitienė 2010: 4). On the other hand, the collection of such objects and cultural traits serves the ethnic group’s self- identification and representation. Culture acts as an expression or content of identity, a ‘building material’ (Castells 2006).

We could see *nature* as one such object. The ethnologist Orvar Löfgren, discussing the idea of the *nationalisation of culture* in the discourse of identity, identified the objects used to construct a nation’s identity (Löfgren 1989). Alongside a common language, a common past and destiny, as well as folk culture, national character and values, national myths and heroes, symbols of statehood, even the national cuisine, the landscape (frequently protected under the status of national parks) is mentioned in the enormous inventory of the construction of a nation’s ideology (Löfgren 1989: 9) or, to put it another way, the *nature*.

Following the views expressed and using the “tools” of the concepts discussed, we will analyse the source of this work – the articles of the magazine “Gimtasai kraštas” and their issues.

Nature: A feature of Lithuanian identity

Lithuanians at all times, resisting occupation and nationalization, felt that they had to protect and defend their Lithuanian identity, which in various ways was being

sought to be erased and levelled. Therefore, in such a struggle, it has become even more important, more precious, and the symbols chosen are all the more vivid and cherished. On the other hand, if we look at the phenomenon of identity as a process that is constantly being created and re-created, then in the course of history, the characteristic and exhibited features of the expression of Lithuanian identity have changed with the changes in the life and lifestyle of the Lithuanian people, the prevailing religious influences in Lithuania, and the modernisation of society.

Many authors have identified language, customs and history as important factors in the process of creating Lithuanian national consciousness and identity. This is extensively

discussed by Andreas Roepstorff and Aušra Simoniukštytė in their article “Modern Lithuanian Identity: A Century of Re/Creating Tradition” (Roepstorff, Simoniukštytė 2001). Paulius Subačius pays much attention to the role of cultural history in his book “Forge of Lithuanian Identity”, where he provides a detailed narrative of the phenomena shaping and representing Lithuanian cultural identity (Subačius 1999).

Language, customs and history are cultural traits that have been identified in scholarly discourses as common to the construction of national identity. However, in this paper we would like to focus more on the less frequently discussed issue of *naturalness* in the set of cultural traits that express Lithuanianness. The question posed is whether the exaggeration of *nature* can be a “litmus paper”, a special trait that distinguishes Lithuanians from others. It also addresses what is special about a Lithuanian’s relationship with *nature* and in what ways it is manifested.

A. Roepstorff and A. Simoniukštytė, analysing the modern Lithuanian identity as a tradition that has been developed for a century, consider the *narrative blocks of the relationship with nature and the understanding of history* to be the most important elements of the identity of the Lithuanian nation (Roepstorff, Simoniukštytė 2001: 145). They note that the presumed special relationship of the typical Lithuanian with the surrounding nature has already been used by scholars to study ethnic and national identity. In 1990, after the restoration of Lithuania’s independence, researchers at the Lithuanian Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law drew up questionnaires in order to describe the ethnic composition of Lithuania, especially in controversial

mixed regions such as Vilnius and other areas densely populated by Slavic-speaking people. In addition to questions such as “What songs of your own people do you know?” or “What religion do you follow?” *Two elements of the Lithuanians’ own discourse on imagined Lithuanianness were used to classify Lithuanians: stories about the special relationship of Lithuanians to nature and the pagan roots of the nation* (Roepstorff, Simoniukštytė 2001: 147).

The authors of the article, while examining the idea of the continued creation of Lithuanian identity, discuss the role of nature as a *true Lithuanian* cultural trait during the first and second periods of Lithuania’s revival. During the first Lithuanian revival, in the last decades of the 19th century, Lithuanians asserted their identity not only by expressing their historical claims and competing with the “Poles” in this respect, but also by using the criterion of the Lithuanian language as a unifying feature of an ethnic group, which had been defined already in 1822 by Simonas Daukantas (1793-1864), as well as the criterion of the Lithuanian language as a unifying feature of an ethnic group and the idea of the *mystical, fateful* connection of Lithuanians with their native natural environment (mainly the forests) and the idea of harmony with nature (Roepstorff and Simoniukštytė 2001: 152, 156). A closer look at the origins of this idea reveals that S. Daukantas saw the roots of the special Lithuanian connection with nature in the Lithuanian pagan past (i.e., the old Baltic religion). According to him, it was *when this harmony began to decay that the cultural and political decline began, which is inevitably linked to the gradual destruction and disappearance of the natural habitat of society* (Daukantas 1995, Roepstorff, Simoniukštytė 2001: 152). The relationship of Lithuanians with nature is not seen in the abstract, but as a direct, integral connection, as one of the most important factors in the change of the character of the nation, and the disruption of this natural connection is seen as a reason for the deterioration of the identity of the Lithuanian nation, and for the emergence of the negative consequences of political and cultural processes. S. Daukantas clearly identifies the destroyers of this harmony – the *Teutonic Knights, in other words, Western civilisation and Christianity: the westernisation and Christianisation of Lithuania affected all spheres of life; these processes led to social inequality, the loss of the freedom that had been enjoyed by the majority of the population, which was transformed into serfs, the decline of the ethnic culture, and the destruction of nature in general and of the natural*

environment in particular (Daukantas 1995, Roepstorff and Simoniukštytė 2001: 152). Thus, the idea of Lithuanian harmony with nature contained a strong historical and ideological charge, pointing to the strength, unity and great past of Lithuanians, and at the time of Lithuania's first revival it functioned like a well with a deeply flowing spring for the Lithuanianness.

The Second Lithuanian Revival refers to the processes that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A. Roepstorff and A. Simoniukštytė distinguish in this period also the features that unite the nation and give meaning to it, that express Lithuanianness: *a unique language, a heroic past, a rich folk culture, and most importantly, a distinctive relationship between nature and culture, between the nation and its natural surroundings* (Roepstorff, Simoniukštytė 2001: 160). They argue that *all the components of the narrative about Lithuanians that became the basis of national self-conception in the 1980s (such as a unique language, a heroic past, a rich folk culture, and most importantly, a distinctive relationship between nature and culture, between the nation and its natural surroundings) existed in the Soviet Union as well* (Roepstorff, Simoniukštytė 2001: 160), but they could be manifested in their own way. For example, traditional festivals were allowed to be celebrated, but rituals that exaggerated and gave meaning to them were forbidden.

Following the idea of the exaggeration of *nature*, A. Roepstorff and A. Simoniukštytė distinguish this period by the *grandiose and difficult-to-implement project* carried out by scientists at the Institutes of Biology and Geography at the beginning of the 1980s – *the idea of preserving the nature of Lithuania as a complex integrated whole* (Roepstorff, Simoniukštytė 2001: 159). The study concludes that *the object of defence was not nature itself, but rather the interaction between the “natural system” and social groups in a given territory, as a particular landscape was considered to be a “territorial expression of the natural-social mechanism shaping the ethnos”* (Kavaliauskas 1992, from Roepstorff, Simoniukštytė 2001: 159). It is also noticeable, using the insights of Vytautas Kavolis, that the conception of this concept is very close to the *visionary “ecological anthropology” of the founder of the Lithuanian self-image, S. Daukantas* (Kavolis 1994, from Roepstorff, Simoniukštytė 2001: 160).

The question of *naturalness* is also touched upon in Subačius' identity studies (Subačius 1999). In a detailed study, the author, albeit in a fragmentary manner, mentions the expression of Lithuanian identity and its representation by nature symbols (Subačius 1999: 119–120). The parallel between man and nature, the strong perception of man as a part of nature, has probably always been alive and active in the Lithuanian consciousness, starting with Lithuanian folk songs and ending, according to Subačius, with 20th century Lithuanian literature. Not only is the support and strength of nature sought to understand and alleviate personal fate, but also the most expressive symbols of nature are used to emphasise the power of the nation, the resilience of the nation to the blows of history, and the semantics of the nation's strength. In Subačius's study, we also find expressions of the idea of Lithuanian harmony with nature, put forward by S. Daukantas, through plant motifs. *Daukantas's "language lingonberry" is the most striking minimalist metaphor of the "perennial, evergreen plant of the nation". It has archaic connotations of 'chastity' and 'life-giving power': evergreen winterberry, bearberry and lingonberry, alongside the 'non-Lithuanian' nursery plant Ruta graveolens, were used, especially in the winter, as wedding wreath roses* (Subačius 1999: 120). Alongside these motifs is the leafless oak tree in the so-called "historical" part of Antanas Baranauskas's "Anykščiai Šilelis". Subačius classifies it as one of the more majestic images used and characteristic not only for Lithuanians, but also for other European nations in their national movements. The author generically calls the plant motifs that appear in the literature of the 20th century, which in various forms have already entered into the strata of Lithuanian identity in the poetry and prose of the last century, "wintergreenesque", and associates the images of the pine tree, the juniper tree and the spruce tree with the semantics of "evergreenness, sustainability" (Subačius 1999: 120). The choice of such motifs could suggest a Lithuanian aspiration to identify with symbols in nature that endure any conditions and are viable, thus giving meaning to the idea of drawing strength from nature.

P. Subačius's material also reveals another aspect of *nature* and *naturalness*. It is noticeable that for some time in Lithuanian literature belonging to the Romantic era, the *natural cycle of the nation's continuity* (in later literature it is replaced by the historical linear time), the *model of the "seasons" of the nation, the national culture, constructed with the ambition of a magical imagination, "I felt that the Lithuanian*

language would begin to green up anew like a herb in the springtime” (Pliateris, 1826–1831, from Subačius 1999: 119).

Thus, the cultural specificity of nature in the expression of Lithuanian identity in different periods of time is manifested and served in different ways, ideas or specific images. However, nature always remains an important feature of Lithuanian identity.

Expression of the concept of *nature* in the magazine “Gimtasai kraštas”

In 1934, the Šiauliai Regional Studies Society started publishing the magazine “Gimtasai kraštas”. This ethnographic, local history magazine was published until 1943. In the first article of the first issue, entitled “Our Aspirations”, the publishers introduce the themes of the magazine, the main ideas and the goals. In their address to the readers, the authors of the magazine invite the general public not only to take an active interest in the magazine, but also to collect material about their own region. *We know too little about our beautiful Lithuania, its nature and ancient culture, we do not have a proper understanding of the wealth of our nation, we have little knowledge of its interesting and significant past, although we repeat the old times as a source of strength* (Our Aspirations 1934: 1), the introductory article states. Readers are urged to pay attention to the *nation’s wealth, which is on the verge of disappearing*, and which, it is said, Lithuanians only appreciate for the sake of arousing the interest of foreigners. They are invited to explore their own neighbourhood and to travel around their homeland for the purpose of knowledge. Lithuania’s *nature and ancient culture*, with its historical remains, are referred to as *the nation’s wealth*, and antiquity as a source of strength.



Source: <https://www.sena.lt/zurnalai/gimtasai-krastras-zurnalas-1940m-nr1/2512978>

Descriptions by local historians and ethnographers

Looking through the issues of the magazine, we can see how local historians have responded to this invitation. The journal publishes articles on the nature, history, archaeological finds, customs and material culture of Lithuania or a particular place or region. It publishes articles on the methods of local and ethnographic work and on the problems of museology. However, let us look at the natural objects that were present in the collection of Lithuanian cultural features that the researchers who responded to the invitation saw, and how they presented them, and what meanings they gave to them.

We see printed accounts of journeys and excursions, with descriptions of the natural objects visited during the journey, as well as individual articles dedicated to specific natural objects – castle mounds, worshipping mounds, burial mounds, lakes, oaks, etc. – or to a whole group of them in a selected locality. Only in some articles can we find poetic descriptions of nature that is beautiful to the Lithuanian eye, and these are which are frequently named as such. In most cases, *nature* – the objects that define it, or the totality of these objects – are presented as ancient witnesses, often hiding some information that readers are encouraged to discover, get to know and encourage others to take an interest in.

Already in the first issue, right after his address to the readers, Ignas Končius seems to reinforce and justify the importance of voluntary and urgent ethnographic work, describing the disciplines of ethnography, ethnology and anthropology, and pointing out how the ethnographic material collected and preserved now would serve the future generations by preserving the heritage of the ancestors in this way. Perhaps, although blinded by luxury, Lithuanians living today still know and remember the phenomena that are disappearing, he says, including images of nature, while at the same time fearing whether children and future generations *will know their poetic village with its whispering woods, its sacred groves, its temples, its mighty oak trees, in whose shade the eternal fire for gods and goddesses smouldered, with the centuries-old linden, elm, junipers, rainbows and winter-green vines, with the ferns in blossom, with the birds chirping cosily, with the particoloured blossoms, with the evilly rustling slugs, the distant howls of wolves, the snoring of wild boars, and*

of the forest... (Končius 1934: 6).

It encourages not only a greater appreciation of natural objects, but also an interest in their significance and place in culture. In his short article “The Sea and Us” (Babickas 1934: 26), Babickas seeks to draw attention to Lithuania’s underdeveloped status as a maritime state. He particularly emphasises the cultural value of the sea, calling for opportunities for the younger generation to see the coastal region first-hand and experience the prevailing culture there. *We must realise that, as beautiful as our homeland is, the sea is its most beautiful decoration and its most precious jewel*, he argues (Babickas 1934: 26).

Individual natural objects. Thus, issues of the journal contain larger or smaller articles that introduce individual natural objects to the reader. For example, the archaeological description of the *Mielani Mound* (Tarasenska 1934, nos. 85–87), the discovery of the two *Katkevičius oaks in Samogitia* by J. Perkovskis (Perkovskis 1934: 181–182) and the *Liepalaukis Mound* (castle mound) by L. Kumšlytis (Kumšlytis 1934: 186–187). In the latter article, the author says that he saw huge, old oak trees growing on the mound, which were later cut down, as well as a large rock, which was later broken up by gunpowder – he presents his observations of the area for three years, assessing the changes that have occurred. He adds that he has heard his grandfather’s story that *in the times of the idolaters, a sacred fire used to burn at the top of the castle mound* (Kumšlytis 1934: 187). However, he does not draw any major conclusions from the research, noting that some of the historical signs may no longer be readable due to the ruined state of the castle mound.

P. Tarasenska’s article “*The Stone “The Table of Fairies”*” (Tarasenska 1934: 48) describes the stories of the locals, where we can see how the old cultural elements have been preserved for a long time and are still active in the meaning of the natural object alongside the new ones. At the Stone of the *Fairies’ Table* on Pentecost, people used to celebrate the end of fieldwork. Once, when someone knocked the beer mug off the stone, the ancients told people not to touch it, to let the beer flow, because *this was the Fairy’s lot* (Tarasenska 1934: 48).

In the same year, J. Perkovskis's article *Traces of the Ancient Time in Telšiai County* (Perkovskis 1934: 112–114), the object is not mentioned. It describes the historical and folklore material collected in connection with a separate natural object – the Džiugas Hill (grave) and the castle mound built next to it.

A. Mažiulis tells about the use of stones in the Pasarčiai region, but in addition to this, there are also stories related to stones, describing a method of curing warts with rainwater accumulated in the hollow of a special stone (Mažiulis 1940: 176).

Three articles in the 1936 issues deal with hills built by humans. In the articles *Kuršėnai Ancient Burial Ground* (Tarvydas 1936: 525–526) and *Uogučiai Ancient Burial Ground* (Tarvydas 1936: 527–528), B. Tarvydas presents mainly archaeological material, while K. Ščesnulevičius, writing about the *Kurgans of Donosai*, adds to his archaeological knowledge some geographical knowledge and the presentation of the local landscape the *beauty of which is hard to describe* (Ščesnulevičius 1936: 522–525). J. Mickevičius's *Panemunio castles of the 14th century* and the battles fought on them are devoted to the hillforts, the famous Lithuanian castles that stood on them and the battles fought near them. (Mickevičius 1937: 97–106), *Putvė Castle in the 14th century* (Mickevičius 1940: 286–287).

Natural sites in areas of Lithuania. Other authors, responding to the editorial invitation, describe selected areas of Lithuania and the natural objects they contain. Some articles focus on a specific group of sites, while others, with accompanying descriptions and stories from local people, present the material gathered on the various major natural sites visited in the area. One of them is E. Šneideris's voluminous, two-part article *The Antiquity of Liškiava* (Šneideris 1934: 167–174 and 1935: 199–203), which contains descriptions of mountains, castle mounds of various purposes, and burial sites – burial mounds, ancient burial grounds, and kurgans – interspersed with tales, folk tales, and stories of history. The ancient history of Liškiava is evidenced by the Liškiava Hillfort with its famous castle, which still exists in people's stories, as well as the “The stone of Viedzma”, which was lost in the fields and was said to have been intended to be used for a castle. The description of the hillfort is rich in multi-layered material, testifying to many historical periods and changes in religions. *Some elders refer to the hill not as a castle mound, but as Perkūnas Hill*, while younger Dzukijans refer to the hill as *Viedzma Hill and the*

remains of the castle as Viedzma Wall (Šneideris 1934: 170). The other named mountains and hills are mostly given meaning in historical narratives or simply recorded briefly. Students should be encouraged to take a greater interest in their own land and its ancient remains, says Šneideris. *We need as many lovers of antiquity as possible, who will also be true lovers of their homeland, because once we know our country well, we become more attached to it, more cherished and more fond of it* (Šneideris 1935: 200).



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The article by I. Končius and V. Ruokis “*Material for getting to know the Samogitian region*”, was also published in three issues (Končius Ignas, Ruokis V. 1934: 30–31; 114–115; 174–176). It is characteristic that *nature* is gently personified here. By drawing the Samogitian landscape in words, the reader sees the Minija River with its five lakes, swamps, their flora and fauna as if he were seeing the land itself (Končius Ignas, Ruokis V. 1934: 114). In addition to poetic descriptions, geographical knowledge is also provided, and place names are discussed.

The article by Stasys Ličkūnas, an active researcher of the Mažeikiai region (Ličkūnas 1934: 49–51), which was published in the very first issue of the journal,

seems to suggest research guidelines for other researchers. *It has been centuries since the castle mounds of our glorious past have been forgotten and have lost their significance...* – the author begins with a nostalgic tone, besides setting the goal of providing knowledge about the visited *castle mounds and other historical and archaeological sites* in the *Mažeikiai area* as a matter of registration (Ličkūnas 1934: 49). Having thus defined himself, he provides the reader with the geographical, historical, archaeological and folklore knowledge obtained in the research about the castle mounds, old burial grounds, worshipping mounds, as well as the castles, holy oaks, and oak forests that were located in the area. In a later issue of “Gimtasai kraštas”, S. Ličkūnas devotes a separate article to the *alka mountains of Mažeikiai County* (Ličkūnas 1934: 185–186). The author refers to the worshipping mounds and other places dedicated to the cult of the old religion as monuments of the venerable past. Tarasenska, who wrote about *Lithuanian hillforts in the Baltic States*, focuses on historical and archaeological knowledge (Tarasenska 1934: 32–35).

In 1938, the only article with a description of *nature* was published in *Juodainiai and its surroundings* (Kėdavičius 1938: 410–412). K. Kėdavičius pays homage to the small village of Juodainiai in order to *commemorate the disappearing place names he heard from old people, along with legends*. Here we find information about the Juodė hill, the burial mound, and various smaller hills, which are either folk tales or provide archaeological material. Interestingly, the researcher refutes the origin of the mountain, which is called Skruzdkalnis, as imagined by the locals. People believe that ants brought it there, but K. Kėdavičius, using excavation material, proves that it was a *temple (an ancient altar) from the 11th–12th century* (Kėdavičius 1938: 412).

J. Petrulis’s article “*Villages also have interesting pasts*” (Petrulis 1939: 555–558) presents the peculiarity of the inhabitants of the village of Rudikiai in Kupiškis Valsčius and its surroundings. Among other peculiarities, it emphasises the special Christian religiosity of the village and points out the abundance of crosses and monuments in the fields of Rudikiai village. However, it should be noted that all of these monuments are described as being related to natural objects that commemorate the cult of the old religion. A local long-time resident told the author how a *cross-chapel had been erected on a hill (the slope of Pyvesa) near the village’s blind ally*,

where a spring spills, where the eternal fire used to burn among the large oaks, when the village became Christian (Petruelis 1939: 556). A cross was later forged from one of the oaks. Other stories mention another special place in the village neighbourhood where an oak tree grew on a large stone, which is also believed to have been used for the eternal flame. Later, a cross-figure was placed in the old oak tree, and *various rosaries* were hung on its drooping branches (Petruelis 1939: 556).

The Plateliai area is described in great detail in the article *Plateliai* (Mickevičius 1940: 1–34), which Mickevičius calls the most beautiful place in the whole Samogitian land, *a true Samogitian Switzerland* (Mickevičius 1940: 1). The reader is provided with a great deal of geographical material on natural objects: the area's mountains, castle mounds, worshipping mounds, burial mounds, ancient burial graves, as well as rivers, lakes, their islands, even puddles and swamps, and the state of the forests. They are accompanied by folklore, historical stories and linguistic data.

Descriptions of local trips and nature imagery

In addition to the above, the issues of the magazine contain a number of articles describing or explaining the significance of local history trips. Two articles on the latter topic appear in the first issues of the first year of the magazine. In one of them, *The Meaning of Travel* (Dovydaitis 1934: 177–179), J. Dovydaitis, inspired by his summer travels in Lithuania, emotionally shares his experiences and invites to create the ideology of Lithuanians not out of dusty textbooks or empty speeches, but out of the experience of travel. He invites us to get to know *what makes us call ourselves Lithuanians*, in the words: *'You have found little Lithuania in the towns inhabited by strangers, dirty and uncomfortable, just as strangers themselves are uncomfortable for the resurgent Lithuania. We did not hear a pleasant voice from the ruins of crumbling mansions. Only in the flat mountains, on the hillsides, where the song accompanied the ploughman, where the voices of nightingales were carried by a pleasant breeze, could you feel that you were in your homeland. On the peaks of Panemunė, Paežerys, and sunken castles, you could talk to real Lithuanian warriors and their ghosts. The forgotten ghosts of the Old Lithuanians were so happy to find representatives of young Lithuania to teach them, to strengthen them.<...>The further you travelled, the more you felt the beauty of the homeland. Every step you*

took, you noticed how hard the ages had worked for you to live (Dovydaitis 1934: 177). This quote perfectly illustrates the importance of nature and the objects that make it meaningful in the construction of Lithuanian identity, and it really describes the strength of a Lithuanian, which comes from the nature and historical past that brought him up.

The second travel promotion article also encourages the reader to explore Lithuania's beautiful nature. Prof. S. Kolupaila, in his article *On Excursions in Lithuania* (Kolupaila 1934: 65–67), discusses the necessity of publishing various travel guides.

M. Čilvinaitė's article *In Anykštėnai* (Čilvinaitė 1937: 151–157) vividly tells about the nature of the Anykščiai region visited for the purpose of collecting ethnographic material, and includes folklore material about the Puntukas stone and the oak tree with a miraculous Christ figure that grew near it. Some descriptions of nature are also found in the diary of an impressive local history trip, which is presented in the two-part article by J. Dovydaitis published in two issues, *Six people for 6 days 160 kilometres* (Dovydaitis 1937: 229–231; 177–179).

Thus, local historians and ethnographers are actively responding to the invitation to explore Lithuanian nature and ancient culture, which was issued in the first issue, and a number of articles depicting *nature* and *natural* objects are published. In conclusion, it is important to note that all of the natural objects described in the GK magazine articles are not just nature as wild space. Descriptions of naturally occurring or man-made natural objects are always accompanied by various narratives that seem to “wrap around” them: folklore, historical narratives, linguistic material.

The specificity of describing natural objects

After reviewing the articles submitted and published by local historians and ethnographers on Lithuanian nature and its monuments, let's highlight the most prominent natural objects that have attracted the attention of researchers. They can be grouped according to their characteristic features.

The first group consists of objects of natural origin, such as: *mountain, hill, sea, lake, river, island, stone, oak, linden, oak wood, birch grove, cherry forest, grove*, and others. The second group are cultural, man-made formations in the landscape: *castle mounds, worshipping mounds, burial mounds, ancient burial grounds, kurgans, gardens*. There is also another non-numeric group of images: general descriptions of nature. They focus on *forests and fields* – the general landscape, which is said to uplift the Lithuanian spirit, evoke a sense of beauty and remind one of ancient times. Dovydaitis, in his article *Iron Devils* (Dovydaitis 1935: 229–231), rhetorically asks what forces inspired Lithuanians to fight against a far superior, better armed opponent of the time – the Teutonic Knights, who called Lithuanians “beasts of the forest”

(Dovydaitis 1935:230). Next to this, he presents a picture of the magnificent nature that was not pampering, wild, but adored by Lithuanians at the time.

The articles usually describe mountains and castle mounds of various origins and purposes. Much attention is paid to natural features that originated in ancient burial sites. Special stones and trees equally attract the attention of researchers, and are often linked and in close proximity. The most frequently mentioned tree is the oak. It is also interesting to note that almost all of the articles on lakes and rivers are about the Samogitian region. The listed natural objects appear together with others in general nature descriptions.

However, in terms of how all these objects are described and presented in the GK articles, it is very important to note that they are not only natural objects. They are culturally embedded with accompanying linguistic, historical or folkloric elements. Both wildlife objects and man-made formations in the landscape have names and are often accompanied by historical narratives and legends. Stones, for example, are described as monuments that provide knowledge of antiquity. They are intertwined with folklore stories, which are always included in the articles (*the Stone of the Fairies' Table, the Stone of the Puntukas, other stones that are marked as sacred*). Descriptions of castle mounds often contain information about the historic castles that stood on them, while articles about alcoves contain stories about the sacred fire and related stories preserved in local memories. Worshipping mounds and other

sacred places in nature are remembered and important, even if they have a Christian explanation. However, in the Christian tradition, nature is not given meaning and importance, a phenomenon that is characteristic of “Christianised” religiosity. In the GK articles we find examples of how sacred Christian paintings are hung and prayed to in sacred groves (Schneider 1935: 202), Christe figures, chapels appear in sacred oak trees (Petrulis 1939: 556, etc.), in linden trees (Schneider 1934: 171) and Pentecost is celebrated by gathering at the Stone of the Fairies (with the remnants of the old faith still actively involved in the celebration of the Pentecost) (Tarasenko 1934: 48).

The significance of the sacred Lithuanian connection with nature in the pursuit of preserving the Earth

In the GK articles on nature discussed above, we find many natural objects commemorating the old Baltic religion, some of which are named or assumed to have been shrines of the old religion, even if some of them have acquired the sense of place of the later religion of Christianity and have been adapted for further use in the syncretic fusion of the religious traditions. This shows that the sacredness and specialness of the sites in question remains even as the dominant religion in the region changes. Such places continue to be protected, respected, used and sometimes avoided out of fear.

Vykintas Vaitkevičius, a renowned Lithuanian archaeologist who studies the sacred sites of the ancient Baltic religion, notes that there has been no focused and consistent research of this kind in Lithuania, which would reveal the links between the sacred sites of the Baltic religion mentioned in historical sources and the protected areas that exist on their sites today, noting that it was not until the 1990s that attention was drawn to sacred sites, and to the spiritual values of humankind in general, in the protected areas of the whole world (Vaitkevičius 2023: 6). The Fifth World Parks Congress, held in 2003, the protection of sacred sites was for the first time placed on the agenda of the world’s protected area specialists. Vaitkevičius argues that today there is no longer any doubt that sacred forests, mountains, rivers, meadows, and grasslands on many continents are the ones that protect valuable landscapes and unique biodiversity, and he cites a few of the many examples found around the world: *The 90 km² Silent Valley National Park in India is home to 960*

species of flowering plants and a sacred forest of just 1.4 km² in the same park has 722 of these species and a wide variety of birds, butterflies and mammals. In comparison, surveys of ten sacred sites in Oelolok, Indonesia, found 189 plant species preserved there, 46 outside the sites (and only 15 of these species were found both inside and outside the sacred sites); <...> and surveys of sacred forests in Togo found 15 species not yet known to biological science in general (ibid.). The large number of such examples around the world supports the scientist's assertion that the *religious relationship of indigenous peoples, communities and even nations to their sacred sites bears a strong resemblance to the protection of protected areas in legislation at this time (ibid).*

Considering the above discussed material related to sacred places described or preserved in Lithuania in the context of examples from other continents, it can be stated that the cultural and sacred concept of *nature* in the expression of Lithuanian identity has a great significance in nature conservation processes and in the goal of preserving the whole Earth.

Conclusions

Based on the research carried out in this paper, it can be said that nature as an image expressing Lithuanian identity in the GK articles is not a one-dimensional natural object. It is interwoven with historical, folklore or linguistic material and tells about the past. Nature is also used to refer to antiquity. It can be seen that researchers are interested in the past about which natural objects provide knowledge. The antiquity they are interested in is not just historical events, but the whole epoch, with the people who lived there – the people who fought, the people who interacted with each other, the people who had characteristic traits, the people who had beliefs, the people who lived in everyday life, etc. The articles under study describe and encourage travelling and discovering Lithuanian nature and its objects – the ancient contemporaries, testifying to Lithuania's magnificent past, the old ancestral religion, the brave Lithuanian way, and stressing the importance for Lithuanians to know and appreciate it, and to preserve it for future generations. J. Dovydaitis, telling about what makes one a true Lithuanian, addresses the reader with the following words. *On the peaks of Panemunė, Paežerys, and sunken castles, you could talk to real Lithuanian warriors and their ghosts. The forgotten ghosts of the ancient Lithuanians*

were so happy to find representatives of the young Lithuania to teach them and reinforce them. <...>The further you travelled, the more you felt the beauty of your homeland. Every step you took, you noticed how hard the ages had worked for you to live (Dovydaitis 1934: 177). This quote perfectly illustrates the importance of nature and the objects that make it meaningful in the construction of Lithuanian identity, and it really describes the strength of a Lithuanian, which comes from the nature and historical past that brought him up.

It can also be assumed that the search for signs of the existence of the culture of the ancient ancestors in nature in later times is expected to find not only the material remains of the old Lithuanian culture, the so-called “*antiquities*”, and thus to achieve a more tangible continuity with the ancestors of the mythologised period, and thus to preserve not only the material, but also the spiritual legacy. Thus, a parallel could be drawn that, from the Lithuanian point of view, “nature is ancestors”, or, more precisely, a place where the Lithuanian feels a stronger connection with the ancestors who reside on this land. Summarising the cultural concept of nature in the expression of Lithuanian identity, based on the material analysed, it can be concluded that *nature* in the articles of “Gimtasai kraštas” is a sacred space for the expression of deities and historical narratives.

The conclusions dictated by the research and the presented material related to the sacred places described or preserved in Lithuania, when evaluated in the context of examples from other continents, suggest that the cultural and sacred concept of *nature* in the expression of Lithuanian identity has a great significance in the processes of nature conservation and in the pursuit for the preservation of the Earth.

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Contributions of Shree Jagannath Culture and Philosophy to the Indian Knowledge System: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This article explores the origin, growth, and evolution of Shree Jagannath Culture and Philosophy and how it contributes in enriching the Indian knowledge system in terms of arts, crafts, paintings, textiles, literatures, religions, philosophies and many more. Further, the study throw light on the influence of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy on the socio-cultural lives and livelihood of the local Indigenous communities, inspiring them in creative engagements like arts, crafts, paintings, dance, music and literature which not only reinforce their socio-cultural identity, but also facilitates community bonding and binding for generations. The paper has documented the best practices and recommends suitable strategies for preservation and dissemination of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy. While conducting the qualitative interdisciplinary research wide range of research data have been collected and compiled and interactions with the scholarly community are made on various aspects of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy such as how Jagannath has evolved as a state deity of Odisha, what are the distinct features of Jagannath Culture which make it special from other religions and cultures in India and how a grand religio-cultural heritage has been developed surrounding Lord Jagannath, connection of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy with Hindu and tribal culture, Buddhism, and Jainism etc. Above all, the study situates the Jagannath Culture and Philosophy in appropriate context while analysing diverse features of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy which contributes significantly to the Indian Knowledge System.

Keywords: Jagannath Culture and Philosophy, Indian Knowledge System, Indigenous Communities, Religio-Cultural Heritage

Background and Significance of the Study

India is a treasure house of multiple religions, cultures, languages, dialects, arts, and

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architectures etc. The religious and cultural diversity of India have not only enhanced the beauty of the country but also has enriched Indian way of life. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) broadly encompasses diverse arts, architectures, languages, philosophies and cultures etc. In order to understand the Indian Knowledge System, it is essential to explore the contributions of the regional and sub-regional cultural traditions to Indian Knowledge System. The state of Odisha occupies distinct position in the socio-cultural history of India for its valuable contribution to Indian culture, religion and philosophy. Odisha is a land of rich culture and artistic heritage which largely revolve round the Jagannath Culture and Philosophy. During ancient and medieval times, Odisha was known as Utkala i.e land of artistic excellence, '**Odra Desa** ', '**Kalinga**' or '**Orissa**' as depicted in the Indian history. Lies on the east coast of India, the state possesses rich religious and cultural heritage which are by-products of emulation, integration, and assimilation of Hindu and tribal culture, and religious faiths like Buddhism and Jainism etc.



Source: www.fullodisha.com

Lord Jagannath is a primordial deity of the Vedic Hindu Sanatana Dharma symbolizing Lord Vishnu and Krishna. Lord Jagannath is worshiped with Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra, and Sri Sudarshan as Chaturdha-Murty in the grand temple at Puri, Odisha. *Lord Jagannath* is a primordial deity of the *Vedic Hindu Sanatana* Dharma who symbolizes Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna (Tripathi 2004). *Jagannath* is not only a Lord of Hindu or, Indian but the God of entire universe (Malley 1908). As Lord of the world, Jagannath has embraced the whole humanity,

propagating the philosophy of “Vasudheiva Kutumbakam” One world one family. The religious and cultural history of Odisha largely revolves round the Jagannath Philosophy which is a treasure trove of diverse religious and cultural traditions and has contributed to the Indian Knowledge System to a great extent. The Jagannath temple at Puri is not just a historic monument, but is a great centre of learning which inspires diverse artistic and cultural engagements of the local communities in art, craft, painting, dance, music, and literature etc. and also strengthening their cultural identity and community bonding and binding for generations. Further, the Jagannath Philosophy facilitates human qualities like mutual trust, compassion, empathy, equality, inclusiveness, and respecting the otherness of others for harmonious co-existence. So, Jagannath-ism is not simply a religion or philosophy but is a way of life. However, the present knowledge and understanding of Jagannath Philosophy and its contribution to the Indian Knowledge System is inadequate and insignificant to its actual importance, since, there is no such research and documentation of the issue available at present.

In Purusottama Kshetra, Puri, Lord Jagannath is worshipped by both Aryans and non-Aryans without losing identity. Though, the origin and antiquity of Jagannath is much shrouded in mystery, He was there on Kalinga coast from Rig Vedic times (Mishra 1971). Some scholars opine the Vedic origin of Lord Jagannath and the Rig Veda narrates the floating of a sacred Daru or wooden log in the Indian ocean which traces the possible origin of Lord Jagannath. During the reign of King Kapilendra Dev, the legendary history of Jagannath was depicted for the first time in Odia Mahabharat written by Adikabi Sarala Das (Tripathy 2014). The Jagannath Culture and Philosophy has an impressive socio-religious history (Kulke 2014). From early period, common religious experience has been developed around Lord *Jagannath* (Behera 1999). He rules over his kingdom of Oriya country (Schembechler 2001). The religious and cultural heritage of Jagannath has greatly influenced the socio-cultural lives of local Indigenous communities of Odisha which has become a source of inspiration for making arts, crafts, dance, music and literature that offers livelihood and creates cultural identity and community bonding for generations.

Lord Jagannath and his grand majestic temple at Puri owe great honour and reverence as a celebrated centre of worship and also serve as a seat for learning art, religion and

culture fulfilling the religious, cultural and economic needs of local Indigenous communities. The temple of Lord Jagannath ever since its inception has become an institution of national importance that has flourished under the royal patronage of Odishan kings (Tripathy 2014). The holy land of Puri is considered as supreme among the *tirthas* because it has *Jagannath* temple (Pattanaik 2005). Puri is one of the four “*Dhamas*” propounded by Hindu religious scholar *Sankaracharya* during the 8th Century A.D. which is not only a Hindu pilgrimage but is a great religious and cultural hub for the local indigenous artists, and litterateur and has become a world heritage city of India and the world today.

Further, some inimitable features of *Jagannath* Culture and Philosophy include elaborate arrangement of rituals for religious worship of the deities continuing for thousand years in the temple, large variety of food offerings Chapan Bhoga or Mahaprasad to the deities, well organised system of servitors of Chattisha Nijoga, and celebration of Rath Yatra as a global festival etc. which is not found in any other religion and culture in India. Above all, the all-embracing human-centric approach of *Jagannath* Culture and Philosophy has enhanced its popularity and acceptance among diverse groups and communities across India and the world. The Indian scholars like Adi Sankaracharya, Ramanuja, Nimbark, Madwacharya, Vallaracharya, Nanak, Kabir and Shri Chaitanya have visited the holy land of Puri and perceived Lord Jagannath as supreme God-Head of Hindu religion.

As marker of humanism, Lord Jagannath enfolds diverse faiths and beliefs, whether oriental or occidental, rich or poor without discrimination fulfilling needs and aspirations of mighty state culture. More significantly, despite maintaining strong regional roots, *Jagannath* continues to retain its pan-Indian, Hindu character and has greatly influenced broader South Asian landscape (Behera 1999). In course of time, the *Jagannath* Culture & Philosophy has assumed cosmopolitan character and has flourished worldwide beyond the confines of Puri. Presently, Lord Jagannath is worshiped in more than 4,000 temples across the world (Pandey 2019). The Car Festival of *Jagannath* is celebrated as oldest and largest festival of the world promoting universal brotherhood and communal harmony.

Scope and Objective of Study

The present study on Jagannath Culture and Philosophy is a fascinating area of study which unfolds many unique and distinct features of Jagannath Philosophy acknowledging its valuable contributions to the Indian Knowledge System. Moving beyond stereotype and conventional research, the study examines the relevance of Jagannath Philosophy in a larger pan Indian context. The study contributes original research to the field of Indology and develops an authentic database on Jagannath Philosophy and its contribution to Indian Knowledge System highlighting the values, traditions, beliefs, and ritual practices of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy which has not been explored adequately till date. Unlike research studies undertaken by scholars on various aspects of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy which are mostly confined to local or regional context, this study evaluates the importance of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy in pan Indian context which generate new thoughts, and ideas reflecting on contribution of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy to Indian Knowledge System (IKS), which is acutely understudied by Indian academia. Moving beyond stereotype and conventional research, this study looks into the genesis of Lord Jagannath from un-iconic tribal deity in village shrines, sub-regional Hindu temples elevated to supreme godhead of Hindu religion identified with Lord Krishna or Lord Vishnu, dynamic continuum exist in the realm of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy connecting past and present, mutual interrelationship of Hinduization and tribalization within Jagannath Culture and Philosophy and its impacts on life and livelihood of local communities, fostering their cultural identity and community bonding, challenges confronted by Jagannath Culture and Philosophy while undergoing transformation from ancient to modern times, strategies adopted for preservation and dissemination of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy, best and effective practices to be documented and preserved. After all the study examines the application of the tangible and intangible aspects of Jagannath Culture in wider pan Indian context. Instead of restricting Jagannath as religious symbolism, the study offers a consolidative view on relevant contribution of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy to Indian Knowledge System reconsidering and re-evaluating some of its past tenants and future discourses. The qualitative research design is adopted collecting and assembling wide range of research data to develop holistic view and continuing healthy dialogue and scholarly conversation on the issue.

Objective(s)

- ❖ To make holistic inquiry into the origin, history, and evolution of the Jagannath Culture and Philosophy, exploring its connections with the Hindu and tribal culture and other pan Indian philosophies like Buddhism and Jainism etc;
- ❖ To study the influence of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy on socio-cultural lives and livelihood of local Indigenous community which inspire them in creative engagements like arts, literature, dance and music etc. reinforcing cultural identity and community bonding;
- ❖ To understand the distinctive features of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy and its contributions to Indian Knowledge System and to examine the core issues and challenges encountered during its religious and cultural discourses;
- ❖ To document the best and effective practices of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy and recommend suitable mechanisms for its preservation and dissemination, developing scholarly network and fostering dialogue and conversation on the issue.

From ancient times, Odisha is well known for its immense contribution towards enriching the Indian cultural heritage. The ancient spiritual tradition and distinct cultural legacy of Odisha bear enormous aesthetic sensibility to Jagannath Culture and Philosophy. The regional tradition of Odisha represents a tribe-caste continuum (Bailey, 1960). The tribal communities constitute 23 percent of the state population. Therefore, Jagannath Culture is a fine blending of Hindu and tribal culture. According to eminent Anthropologist Nirmal Bose (1941). In ancient India, the tribal people came in contact with the Hindus and Jagannath as a deity of tribal origin became Hinduized over a period of time and emerged as state deity of Odisha. Jagannath as Rastra Devata had become a binding force of Oriya Empire (Dash 1998). The wooden iconography of Jagannatha displays a “crude tribal look” which differs from the images of other Hindu deities (Eschmann 1978). Lord Jagannath has its roots in pre-medieval Odisha has evolved from its wombs of antiquity to a great religious and cultural tradition Sanskritized by Hindu Brahmin Priests and Kings of Puri, the continued ritual services offered by Daitas as descendants of tribal worshipper

Viswvasu engaged in intimate services of the deities in bathing them, dressing them, moving them when ordained (Mishra 2012), Nabakalebara or re-embodiment Ritual of Chaturdha-Murty, the worship of Patta Paintings during Anasara, the large varieties of sanctified food of Mahaprasad offered to Lord Jagannath and celebration of Rath Yatra Puri as a global festival promotes a casteless and classless society which are features of tribal society and are also found in the realm of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy.



Source: <https://www.tallengestore.com/products/deities-enshrined-in-the-jagannath-temple-pattachitra-painting-vintage-indian-art-19th-century-framed-prints>

Lord Jagannath is not simply a religious icon but is inextricably linked with the history, heritage and identity of the land influencing social, political, religious and cultural lives of people of Odisha. Jagannath Culture is distinctly revealed in traditional Patta Paintings, Palm leaf engraving, folk motifs in hand woven Khandua textile, wood carving, filigree work, horn and solapith work etc. which reflect excellent craftsmanship of Odisha State, Mahari dance performed in Jagannath Temple which transformed into Odissi dance create overwhelming responses, Geeta Govinda, Skanda Purana, Kanchi Kaveri, Daru-Brahma Geeta, Laxmi Purana are outstanding literary creations of eminent poets and writers of the state. Mahaprasad, the religious offerings of Lord Jagannath in Puri Temple are similar to the recipes in

every Odia home. All facets of Odia art and culture speak volumes about the Jagannath Culture and Philosophy and the people of the state have uphold this grand ancient heritage through continuous pursuits, passions, and perseverance.



Source: <https://www.pilgrimagetour.in/blog/jagannath-puri-rath-yatra/>

The metaphysical confluence of varied religious sects like Buddhism, Jainism, Shaivism and Shaktism in the *Jagannath* Culture and Philosophy has boosted its spiritual eminence over the centuries. The worship of holy trinity in temple where Jagannath symbolises Vishnu, Balabhadra symbolises Shiva, and Devi Subhadra symbolizes Shakti. The Vaishnavas worship Him as Lord Krishna, Saivas offer their prayers as Bhairav (Siva), Shaktas perceive Him as Dakshina Kalika, and Ganapatya worship him as Ganapati and tribal community worship him as Jagant, He is Jina Nath for the Jainas and Buddha for the Buddhists. This enduring appeal, egalitarian fellow feeling and tradition of oneness of Jagannath Culture touches every heart in a kind of transcendental oneness (Behuria 2012). The religious tolerance, and harmonious co-existence of diverse religious faiths are bedrocks of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy which provides a robust foundation for unification of Hindu and Indigenous tradition etc. Despite ups and downs, the Jagannath Culture remains steadfast with its own identity and continuity, without a parallel or a rival.

Jagannath is not simply a religious symbol but is an embodiment of Odia identity and culture of local indigenous communities who is inextricably linked with the history and heritage of Odisha. The rituals and festivals of Jagannath Temple, Puri have

encouraged the local indigenous communities in reproducing a wide range of traditional arts, crafts, paintings like Patta Paintings, Palm leaf engravings, wood carvings, folk motifs in hand-woven textiles, Mahari dance performed in the Jagannath Temple evolved as Odissi dance, literary texts of Odia poets like Geeta Govinda, Skanda Purana, Darubrahma Geeta, Laxmi Purana speak volumes of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy. Afterall Jagannath Consciousness is so deep rooted in Odia psyche that its intensely is felt in all aspects of Odia life and culture. Every artistic accomplishment of local indigenous artists whether arts, crafts, dance, music, and literature are tribute to Lord Jagannath. Such mystic panoramic confluence of folk tradition, and rituals of Jagannath in art and craft have not only empowered the local communities with traditional skills and knowledge but also have influenced the socio-cultural and economic life of the Odia community (Mohanty 2010). The rich cultural legacy and heritage of Jagannath has been carried forward by local indigenous communities of Odisha for generations through continuous pursuits, and perseverance which have made Jagannath Culture and Philosophy a living reality blooming and evolving every day. In every walk of Odia life, whether a cultural function or a marriage, birth or death ritual, the first invitation is given to Lord Jagannath to grace the occasion which shows profound honour and reverence of Odia community to Lord Jagannath. There is hardly any culture or tradition in India or the world where mystic influence of divinity is revealed in all spheres of life leading the destiny of the land and its people for centuries.

Original contribution to the field of Study

This study is an original contribution to the field of Indic Studies which reviews the contribution of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy to the Indian Knowledge System. This study offers fuller understanding of the valuable contributions of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy to Indian knowledge system through analysis of facts, evidences, critical reviews, contextualizing knowledge and experience which capture the interests of scholars and academia through mutual learning, exchanging ideas and information, enhancing quality output of research in documenting best practices of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy and its contribution to the Indian Knowledge System. The research study expands knowledge and understanding through meaningful dialogue scholarly discussion on the issue.

Lord Jagannath is the centre of the folk-art culture and tradition of Odisha. The indigenous knowledge and skills of traditional art and craft making has been passed down from generation to generation within family and community through informal and involuntary learning and training from elder members of the family. The state of Odisha is a treasure house of wonderful historical monuments, ancient shrines, holy temples and archaeological sites etc. Lord Jagannath remains the nerve centre has been deeply imprinted in the heart and soul of every Odia and has been permeated into the fabric of Odia life, art and culture. In the everyday life of Odia artists, the hand-woven crafts, arts, paintings and articles for household rituals as well as for fairs and festivals of the temples, applique work, terracotta, lacquer work, brassware, filigree ornaments and patta painting are made with great artistic excellence of artisans which not only generate income but also create their special identity at the national and international level.

The folk heritage of Odisha bears immense aesthetic sensibility to Shri Jagannath Culture and Philosophy which reflect creative craftsmanship and is neatly expressed in wide range of art and craft forms, mural and folk paintings including the conventional art and paintings which have strong religious background such as the Patta Paintings, Palm leaf engraving, Jhoti and Muruja or Rongoli in distinct colourful designs, mystical and ethnic folk motifs, hand woven textiles expressing traditional beauty, crafts like wood carving and painting, stone carving, filigree, horn work, conch shell and solapith etc. which express the excellent artistic skills, devadasi or Mahari dance performed in Shri Jagannath Temple and then the Gotipuo dance and Odissi dance exhilarated in all possible occasions, folk literatures and poetry like the Gita Govinda, Indradyumna legend of Utkala Khanda of Skanda Purana, Kanchi Kaveri, Darubrahma Geeta, Laxmi Purana are illustrious and outstanding creations of erudite Odia scholars which bear intrinsic part of cultural identity of Odisha. The voluntary involvement of local indigenous communities in upholding grand ancient heritage of Odisha in continuing folk arts, painting, literature and traditional recipes have not only enriched the cultural heritage of Odisha but has also created overwhelming pulsation among pilgrims, tourists and visitors across the world.

Wider Significance of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy

The Jagannath Culture and Philosophy is a treasure trove of diverse religions, cultures and traditions which has a great bearing on regional tradition of Odisha in implanting the finer human qualities like mutual trust, compassion, inclusiveness, respect for diversity and the otherness of others, promoting communal harmony which are bare necessities of human life and can be replicated in broader context. The temple of Lord Jagannath is not just a historic shrine or monument, but is a grand religious and cultural institution and a great centre of learning which deeply influences the life and livelihood of local Indigenous communities of Odisha in shaping creative ideas, and imaginations reflecting in diverse forms of art, craft, painting, dance, music, and literature etc which not only provides source of livelihood, but empowers them through transmitting traditional knowledge and practices of art and craft making reinforcing cultural identity and community bonding and inspiring them to carry forward this religious and cultural traditions for future generations. So, Jagannath-ism is not simply a religion or philosophy, but is a way of life which has enriched Odia life and culture to a considerable extent. In spite of navigating multiple challenges and difficulties such as foreign invasions, colonial resurgences and natural calamities, Jagannath Culture and Philosophy remains steadfast and persistently flourished for thousand years without losing its spirit and essence.

While exploring the contribution of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy to the Indian knowledge system it is evident that Jagannath Culture and Philosophy has wider significance which needs to be thoroughly understood and analysed. The distinct features of the Jagannath Culture and Philosophy include the worship of sibling deities of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra, the operation of servitor system of *Chattisha Nijoga*, the ritual services offered by monasteries of different religious sects to the Jagannath temple and celebration of Rath Yatra as a global festival promotes harmony and peaceful co-existence cutting across narrow boundaries of caste, class, religion, and territory. All these facets of Jagannath Culture Philosophy exhibit that it has fulfilled essential functions of a mighty state cult of a regional Hindu empire (Kulke 2014). Further, the study opens new dimension in recommending suitable measures that is best in given context for preservation and dissemination of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy towards enriching Indian Knowledge System which serves as a research model, that would spark research interests among new-generation scholars

for further research in this field. The more the culture and tradition of Jagannath spread, the more people across the world would learn about its usefulness for the welfare of humanity in the 21st Century.

Conclusion

Lord Jagannath is a great unifying force and symbol of national unity and integration which embraces people of different caste, class and religion across the world. The predominance of Jagannath Culture and Philosophy is revealed in almost every aspect of Odia life such as art, culture, religion and philosophy. The Odia folk arts like Jhoti, Chita Muruja drawn by rural womenfolk during household rituals like Manabasa and Sudasha Gurubara (Thursday falls on tenth day of bright fortnight of Odia month of Margasira) when Goddess Maha-Laxmi is worshiped in every Odia home. During holy occasion of Panchuka (last five days of Odia month of Kartika) Lord Jagannath is worshiped in Ria Damodara Vesha when every Odias consume vegetarian foods. Further, the Mandals or cosmic symbols or designs drawn by Brahmin priests while worshipping the deities in house and temple show the ritual importance of art in Odia tradition and culture. The traditional Patta paintings narrate the mythological stories of Lord Jagannath, Shri Krishna Radha, Mahari or Devadasi Dance is performed reciting verses of Gita Govinda by servitors in Puri Temple in front of the deities as per the Jagannath Temple tradition, Puri. The Mahari dance known as Devadasi Dance evolved as Gotipuo and then as Odissi dance got accreditation as classical dance form of India. The hand woven Khandua silks weaved by the weaver community of Nuapatana village are worn by holy trinity are of great demand in national and international market. Besides, the hand-woven crafts like wood carving, Patta Paintings, Palm Leaf Engraving and covering of chariots of holy trinity with traditional patchworks of Applique during Chariot Festival and colourful canopies are used in the Jagannath Temple. However, the broader implications of Jagannath-Dharma on the Odia life and culture are yet to be understood fully which requires further research and investigation.

After all the grand institutions surrounding Lord Jagannath and His Philosophy are invaluable gift to the humanity contributing to Indian Knowledge System and remain perennial source of inspiration for Odia and Indian community across the globe manifesting unity in diversity. The Jagannath Culture and Philosophy play a

significant role in furtherance of universal harmony and brotherhood establishing a casteless society (Dash 2009). Further, the sacred symbols of 'Nilachakra', and 'Patitapaban Flag' symbolising Lord Jagannath are of supreme values which crystalise the feelings and emotions of every Odia to an "inestimable" extent. The Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath and partaking blessed food offerings of Mahaprasad unify the spirit of integral humanism and communal harmony. Unlike other religions and faiths, the Jagannath Culture and Philosophy is considered as living and active which is so elastic and flexible that it exhibits remarkable ethos towards enriching the human life as religious and secular on the same breath. Above all, the infinite love, intensity of emotion and unshakable faith of Odia community towards Lord Jagannath has not only solidifies the Odia sentiment and identity but also regulates the Odia national life which is thoroughly inclined to the Supreme Soul - Lord Jagannath.

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Insight into the four aspects of Mahashakti according to the writings of Sri Aurobindo

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Abstract

This paper offers an insightful exploration into the four aspects of *Mahashakti* as articulated in the writings of Sri Aurobindo, a visionary thinker, revolutionary, and spiritual master of modern India. Sri Aurobindo's life and work reflect a profound synthesis of political action and spiritual realization, grounded in the transmission of India's traditional knowledge systems. Drawing from his extensive body of writings, speeches, and letters, the study delves into his metaphysical understanding of the *Supreme Shakti*—the divine feminine force responsible for cosmic creation and transformation. It also traces his biographical journey from his Western education in England to his deep reconnection with Indian spirituality and nationalist purpose upon his return. His spiritual experiences, particularly during his incarceration in Alipore Jail, mark the turning point in his realization of India's divine destiny and humanity's spiritual evolution. The paper aims to contextualize his vision of *Mahashakti* as central to both personal transformation and global awakening.

Keywords: Sri Aurobindo, Mahashakti, Spiritual Philosophy, Indian Knowledge Systems, Divine Feminine

Introduction

Bharat i.e., India has a great history of having Saints, Revolutionaries, Yogi, Rishis of transmitting our traditional knowledge systems to the upcoming generations. Sri Aurobindo is one of the most eminent, renowned personalities in the history of India. The life and works of Sri Aurobindo are a living testimony to his victorious opening of the gates of a new horizon and by means of summarizing all his views from his writings, speeches, letters, we can get a bundle of eternal knowledge about creation of this world, the Supreme Shakti from the universe playing an inseparable role and many more.

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Before we proceed to throw light on the views of Sri Aurobindo on the four aspects of The Mahashakti, The Supreme Power, it will be relevant to know a little about Sri Aurobindo. He was born on 15th August 1872 at Calcutta. He was taken along with his elder brothers to England for the primary education. But human nature says as far as we go away from our innate things, we get closer to those things only. Same was the case with little Aurobindo. He was taken there away from his motherland not to get closer to the things related to Indian Soil. But a reverse happened. He returned to India in 1893 and joined Baroda College as Professor of French and English. In 1906 he became the principal of the Calcutta College and decided to work for the political and spiritual freedom of India. The pioneering work that he did was evidently a part of his larger work for the entire humanity and for the whole world. In 1908 he was charged for sedition and kept in Alipore jail. During that period, he had Darshan of Bhagwan Shri Krishna and also had numerous experiences of Yoga and realized the assurance of the liberation of the country.

Sri Aurobindo's View: He came to Pondicherry in 1910 to concentrate on his new area of work i.e., Spiritual awakening of India and to bring down the supramental consciousness and power on the earth. He authored various books on Spirituality, Yoga, Indian philosophy, Ramayana, Mahabharat. Some of them are Essays on Gita, The Mother, The Life Divine and many more. Yogi Aurobindo was in many ways a quite essential Bhartiya Rishi, who embodied a revolutionary zeal.



Source: <https://timelinedaily.com/education/national-digital-repository-of-indian-knowledge-system-announced-in-union-budge-2025-26>

We, the living beings, all are always very much curious about how the world is created! How the world is organised! And how the world is governed and controlled!

“There is one Infinite Eternal, Changeless Existence, the All. From That All comes forth; to That all returns.” [1]

As a wave arises in the ocean, a universe rises in the All. As the wave sinks again into the ocean, a universe sinks again into the All. As the ocean is water, and the wave a form or manifestation of the water, so is there one Existence, and the universe is the form, or manifestation.

The one whom we adore as the Mother is the consciousness and force of That Supreme and far above, she creates. She is the Mahashakti who governs all the worlds. Sri Aurobindo says,

“The Supreme is manifest in her for ever as the everlasting Sachchidananda, manifested through her in the worlds as the one and dual consciousness of Ishwara-Shakti and the dual consciousness of Purush-Prakriti, embodied by her in the worlds and the Planes and the Gods and their Energies and figured because of her as all that is in the known worlds and in unknown others.” [2]

The Sankhya explains in more detail and in new ways the nature of Purush, the Spirit Soul, and of Prakriti, the Matter.



Source: <https://renaissance.aurosociety.org/the-mahashakti-and-her-powers/>

The Supreme is manifested in her for ever as the eternal Sachchidananda. Sri Aurobindo in his ‘The Mother’ puts a light on four leading powers and personalities of the Mahashakti. These four are: Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati. In the morning prayer composed by P. P. Swami Shri Manoharnath Maharaj, we can also find these 4 names and the greatness of Shaktis. He writes,

महाकाली महालक्ष्मी मंजीरि महासरस्वती । संसार तारणी अम्बे संरक्ष सती

पावती । भावस्फूर्तव आर् शर् सवव मंगल साधने । शर् युरि
भर् िीर् िो धर्त िुुःख मोचने ।[3] (प्रातुःस्मरण)

1. **Maheshwari (Wisdom)** – She is established in the comprehending wideness of thinking mind and determination power. Imperial Maheshwari is the witty, mighty and wise One who opens us to the horizon of supramental infinities, the nobility of supreme Light and the cosmic vastness. She has calm wideness, comprehending wisdom, tranquil benignity, inexhaustible compassion and sovereign and surpassing majesty with greatness. That’s why nothing can disturb her, nothing can move her and nothing can shake her because all wisdom lies in her; nothing is hidden from her that she chooses to know; she comprehends all things and all beings and their nature. She is most exalted, amazing and also calm in nature. To the wise, she gives a greater and more bright wisdom; those that have good vision she admits to her counsels; on the hostile she imposes the consequence of their hostility; the ignorant and foolish she leads according to their blindness. She handles each man according to their need and urge. Though she is bound by nothing or attached by nothing, yet she has more than any other, the heart of the universal Mother. Truth of things is her concern.

2. **Mahakali (Strength)** – She is of the nature which has an overwhelming intensity, a mighty intenseness of force to achieve, a divine violence rushing to shatter every obstacle. She is most severe to all that is stubborn ignorant and obscure. She has a power of splendid strength, irresistible passion, warrior mood, impetuous swiftness and world-shaking force. Sri Aurobindo says,

“Terrible is her face to the Asura, dangerous and ruthless her mood against the haters of the Divine; for she is the Warrior of the Worlds who never shrinks from the battles.” [4] (chapter 6, page no 42-43)

She cannot tolerate the indifference, negligence and sloth in the divine work. Her peculiar powers are force and strength and when she is allowed to intervene in her strength, then in one moment are broken like things without consistence. But She too is the Mother, She too has a deep and passionate kindness and her love is also as intense and deep as her wrath. Though her

anger and wrath are dreadful to the hostile, She is loved and worshipped by the great, the strong and the noble; for they feel that her blows beat what is rebellious in their material into strength and perfect truth. Nothing can satisfy her and calms down her that falls short of Supreme ecstasies, noblest aims and largest vistas or vision. The Divine force she carries with her.

3. **Mahalakshmi (Harmony)** – The another one is above Wisdom and Strength. She is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm. She carries with her an intricate and subtle opulence, a compelling attraction and captivating grace.

श्वेताम्बरधरे िर्व नानालङ्कारभरूति ।

जगत्सृति जगन्मातमवहालक्ष्मि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥5॥ (श्लोक ८)

In our Stotra-Mantras also the outline of Mahalakshmi is beautifully and divinely recited. Maheshwari can appear too calm and great, Mahakali too swift and formidable for its weakness to bear; but all turn with joy and longing to Mahalakshmi. For She throws the spell of the intoxicating sweetness of the Divine. Yet it is not easy to meet this enchanting power or have her presence. She demands harmony and beauty of the mind and soul, harmony and beauty of the life and surroundings, harmony and beauty in every act and movement. So, if love and beauty are reluctant to be born, she does not come. If she finds herself in men's hearts surrounded with jealousy, envy, hatred, bitterness in thoughts, selfishness, in such hearts the gracious and beautiful Goddess will not linger. For it is through love and beauty that she lays on men the yoke of the Divine.

4. **Mahasaraswati (Perfection)** – The fourth is equipped with her close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge, careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things.

सरस्वर्त महाभागे वंद्ये कमललोचने ।

वर्द्यारूपे वर्शालार्क्ष वर्द्यां िर्ह नमोऽस्तु ते॥

She is the most skilful in executive faculty and very near to the physical Nature. She holds in her nature the intimate and precise knowledge, the subtlety and patience, the discerning eye of the perfect worker. Her province are the science, craft and technique of things, organiser, administrator, artisan and classifier of worlds. She labours in

moulding and remoulding each part till it has attained its true form and is put in its exact place in the whole. When her work is finished, nothing has been forgotten, no part has been misplaced or omitted or left in a faulty condition; all remains solid, complete and admirable too. She is a mother to our wants, a friend in our difficulties. Maheshwari lays down the large lines of the world forces, Mahakali drives their energy and impetus, Mahalakshmi discovers their rhythms and measures, but Mahasaraswati presides over their detail of organisation and execution, relation of parts and unfailing exactitude of result and fulfilment.

These are the four great aspects of the Mahashakti. But the Supramental action is only possible when the Four have founded their harmony and freedom of movement in the transformed mind and life and body.

“The unreserved surrender of your inner and outer being will bring this plasticity into all the parts of your nature; consciousness will awaken everywhere in you by constant openness to the Wisdom and Light, the Force, the Harmony and Beauty, the Perfection that come flowing down from above.”

The Transformative potential of the four aspects of Mahashakti and their relevance in today's world

Aurobindo's concept of Mahashakti emphasizes the evolution of consciousness towards a harmonious union of the material and spiritual domains. This idea resonates with contemporary discussions on personal and collective growth, as well as the pursuit of a more enlightened society.



Source: <https://renaissance.aurosociety.org/the-mahashakti-and-her-powers/>

Maheshwari, in today's world, Maheshwari's wisdom can inspire individuals and leaders to adopt a broader perspective, promoting inclusive and sustainable development. Her influence encourages deep thinking, strategic planning, and a visionary approach to solving global challenges. Mahakali's energy is crucial in today's fast-paced world. Her attributes can empower individuals to take bold actions, confront injustices, and drive societal change. Her transformative power is essential for tackling urgent issues like climate change, social inequality, and political corruption. Mahalakshmi, in contemporary society, Mahalakshmi's attributes promote a balanced approach to life, emphasizing the importance of inner and outer well-being. Her influence can guide individuals and communities towards creating harmonious relationships, fostering creativity, and ensuring economic prosperity without compromising ethical values. Mahasaraswati's qualities are highly relevant in today's world, where expertise and innovation are essential. Her attributes inspire individuals to strive for excellence in their fields, encourage lifelong learning, and foster the meticulous implementation of ideas and projects. Her influence is vital for advancing science, technology, and the arts.

Conclusion

These powers of the Divine Mother can unitedly bring mankind to supramental realisation and again bring down to the matter also. They are more difficult to bring down and have not stood out in front with so much prominence in the evolution of the earth-spirit. But if we desire this transformation, we have to put ourselves in the hands of The Mother, The Mahashakti and let her do unhindered her work within us. Only things we should have, consciousness, plasticity and unreserved surrender to that Power. The integration of these four aspects—wisdom, power, harmony, and skill—provides a comprehensive framework for personal and collective growth. In a rapidly evolving world, their transformative potential offers guidance for navigating complexities and achieving a balanced, progressive society.

Together, the four aspects of Mahashakti inspire us to cultivate a deeper consciousness, act with purpose, create harmonious environments, and strive for excellence. Their relevance lies in the holistic approach they offer for addressing contemporary challenges and fostering a brighter, more integrated future.

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- श्लोक ८, श्री महालक्ष्मी अष्टकम्

Cultures in Contact: Shang Traditions in China

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Abstract

This article explores the Shang dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE) within the framework of cultural interaction, emphasizing its role as a dynamic participant in regional and long-distance networks of exchange. Located in the Yellow River Valley, the Shang civilization is traditionally known for its foundational contributions to Chinese culture through innovations in writing, bronze metallurgy, divination, and social organization. However, this study shifts the lens to examine how Shang traditions were shaped by sustained contact with neighboring cultures, nomadic groups, emerging polities, and distant trading partners. Drawing on material culture, archaeological findings, and historical records, the article demonstrates that Shang society evolved through both peaceful and contested cultural exchanges, thereby contributing to and being transformed by broader interregional dynamics.

Keywords: Shang dynasty, cultural exchange, Chinese Culture, Shang Civilization

Introduction

One of the oldest Chinese dynasties ever documented, the Shang dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE) is renowned for its extensive technological, spiritual, and cultural traditions. The Shang civilization, which was located in the Yellow River Valley, established the foundations of Chinese culture through early writing systems, bronze metallurgy, divination practices, and social hierarchy. Beyond their internal changes, the Shang were not alone, though, as they maintained constant communication with nearby cultures. The Shang economy, artistic traditions, and worldview were shaped and influenced by these interactions, which were both peaceful and conflict-driven.

This article examined the Shang dynasty in relation to the theme of cultures in contact and also looks at how other groups, including newly formed polities, nomadic tribes, and far-off trading partners, both influenced and were influenced by Shang traditions.

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This study highlighted that Shang civilization was a dynamic participant in a larger network of cultural exchange rather than a static or isolated entity by concentrating on material culture, archaeological evidence, and historical texts.

1. Historical Context and Origins of the Shang Dynasty

The Shang dynasty, the initial Chinese dynasty known to be substantiated historically, succeeded the semi-legendary Xia dynasty. Urbanization, improved agricultural efficiency, and controlled bureaucratic governance all lie near to the rise of the Shang. Anyang was the epicentre of economics, religion, and government and was the seat of power.

Archaeological evidence, such as the discovery of oracle bones and bronze vessels, tells us about Shang culture. These discoveries tell us about external influence, as well as their internal organization. For instance, the variety of burial rituals and pottery in the outer regions tells us about the blending of cultures and the adoption of local ways.



Source: www.googlemap.com

A strong aristocracy sustained a centralized government under the Shang rulers. Worship of ancestors and communication with heavenly powers—a belief often conducted through the agency of oracle bone divination—were central to their legitimacy. These religious practices, together with massive construction and innovative creativity, comprised the foundation of Shang identity.

2. Geography and Boundaries: The Land Under the Shang Dynasty

One of the most critical determinants of the cultural and political contacts of the Shang dynasty was its geographical scope. The map indicates the primary Shang-ruled territory, which is centered in the Yellow River Valley, particularly in the regions of present-day Henan, Shandong, and southern Anhui and northern Hebei provinces. Fertile loess soil, seasonal flooding, and proximity to waterways for trade and communication were all characteristics that rendered this fertile region—the cradle of Chinese civilization—suited to the founding of early states.

The Impact of Geography on Culture and Power

The Shang were able to continue control over a centralized state while shaping the border areas due to their strategically placed and comparatively small state. According to archaeological findings, cultural diffusion extended much beyond such boundaries, although the political core was dense. The presence of Shang-type tomb architecture, oracle bones, and bronze ware in peripheral areas might be an indicator of expansion through conquest or the Shang customs voluntarily embraced by border cultures.

Particularly close to the capital at **Anyang (Yin)**, a significant hub of governance, religion, and creative innovation, the Shang landscape was peppered with walled cities, agricultural communities, and ritual sites. A network of rivers, including the Yellow River, linked these cities and functioned as a major channel of commerce, war, and diplomacy.

Contemporary Chinese Boundaries vs. Shang Territory

Radical disparities across thousands of years are revealed when looking at the Shang kingdom and comparing it to contemporary political boundaries. The People's Republic of China's borders today are broader and larger, encompassing areas much further than the Shang kingdom, e.g., Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and coastal provinces. The Shang kingdom would only cover a small part of eastern China today, illustrating how the concept of one Chinese state over time changed from regional kingdoms such as the Shang to a massive, centralized empire.

The borders of the present day also reflect the expansion that followed with subsequent dynasties, most famously the Qin, Han, and Tang, which built on the administrative and cultural structure the Shang had developed. It must be noted that the Shang did have relations with external groups both peacefully and conflictual

within their own small kingdom. These earliest threads of China's richly textured cultural and ethnic fabric were woven from these points of contact.

Cultural Frontier Zones

Frontier regions at the peripheries of Shang-controlled areas were typical areas of contact with other groups, including steppe nomads, proto-Zhou societies, and other Neolithic groups. These frontier regions were sites of cross-cultural interaction, where rituals were syncretized and new technologies or practices were transferred. The Shang viewed these frontiers as fluid regions where trade, diplomacy, and occasionally war created fluid relations with non-Shang societies and not as fixed boundaries.

To that end, the land of the Shang dynasty itself can be interpreted both as a physical location and as a lively location of cultural exchange, laying the groundwork for the spread of the Sinitic world in the coming centuries.

3. Shang Cities: Defence and Urban Layout

A highly developed and well-planned society with unique architectural and defensive measures is seen in Shang dynasty cities. Archaeological excavations show the plan and operation of Shang cities, especially at places like Anyang, the final capital of the dynasty.

Construction Materials and Building Construction

The majority of Shang structures were made of wood with rammed earth foundations. Wooden frames supplemented with tiled or thatched roofs were typical of more affluent houses. Their absence in the archaeological record is not unexpected in the sense that plain ordinary dwelling houses, presumably frequented by peasants or lower-ranking officials, were less complex and more susceptible to destruction. Palaces and ancestral shrines, which were crucial to Shang religion and government, were larger and usually had more complex courtyards and ritual pits.

A rectangular, extended plan with several rooms and a sloping roof, typical of a hierarchical spatial organization, is depicted in the drawing of a reconstructed Shang building. Social stratification and the functional requirements of an agrarian culture, ancestor worship, and divination are both encompassed in this plan.

Spatial Organization and City Layout

Shang cities were well planned, with the common pattern constituting a central nucleus with ceremonial, religious, and administrative buildings and residential quarters and craft shops around it. This indicates a centralized government with a well-defined division of labour and specialization. Tombs, particularly those of aristocrats and royals, were found near cities and were usually ornamented with chariots, jade ornaments, and bronze vessels, indicative of the coming together of material and spiritual worlds.

Defensive Attributes: Fortifications and Earthworks

The construction of giant earth walls for fortifications was typical of Shang urbanism. These rammed earth (hangtu) walls were made by ramming successive layers of earth into wooden forms. It was a labour-intensive process involving many workers and cooperation. These earthworks were giant structures, as the photo illustrates, with foundations at times as wide as 20 meters and a few meters high.

The Ao city, close to present-day Zhengzhou, had walls measuring up to seven kilometres in length encircling an area of more than three hundred hectares. Such walls represented centralised political power and social structure as well as military defences against invasions and raids.

The Shang were not exempt from war, as the existence of such defences suggests. Defence was part of national planning since they would have had threats from competing tribes or neighbouring civilizations. There is a broader cultural pattern here in these defence measures as well: the Shang perceived the universe as ordered or disordered. The planned, contained, and sacred city symbolized order, and the uncontrolled lands beyond its boundary symbolized disorder and danger.

Cultural Importance of Urban Areas

Shang cities were not merely administrative capitals, but also religious and cultural capitals where government, community, and ritual converged. Public rituals served to reinforce the divine right of the king, while buildings conformed to cosmological principles. Cities therefore became stages for the enactment of tradition, spirituality, and power, articulating the Shang worldview and identity.

4. Shang Social Classes: A Stratified Society

With an authoritarian regime that duplicated and entrenched the political and economic order of the state, the Shang dynasty had a highly hierarchical society. Besides making mobility of resource, labour, and loyalty to sustain a centralized monarchy feasible, the hierarchy provided for the stability of the Shang system of government.

The King: Divine Rule and Central Authority

The king, being a divine intermediary and a political ruler, was the pinnacle of the social structure. The king did many things, including leading military campaigns, conducting state rituals, and using divination to speak with ancestral spirits. Shang kingship was inherited in elite families that claimed divine favour. The king's authority over the earth and its inhabitants was supported by this spiritual authority, which also legitimized his authority.



Source: <http://www.chinaknowledge.de/History/Myth/shang-event.html>

The king's central role in religious and governmental decision-making is attested to by archaeology, i.e., royal divinations in the form of inscriptions on oracle bones. He ordered magnificent building projects, campaigns, and state-sponsored rituals and came to be revered by the common folk eventually.

Warrior Aristocracy: Power through War

The warrior group, often born of noble blood, was then next to the king. Carrying out royal duties in remote regions, these warriors were army commanders as well as local governors. Especially in periods of internal uprising or foreign war, they were powerful and admired. Bronze weapons, like spearheads, axes, and daggers, found in

tombs illustrate the significance of war in Shang society and the reverence these people who engaged in it enjoyed.

Warriors were also rewarded with slaves, lands, and war booty for service, which confirmed their allegiance to the ruler and allowed them to prosper. This class secured control of the border lands and rural population.

Nobles: Landowners and Tribute Providers

The nobility consisted of the backbone of Shang rule. They oversaw the agricultural labour of peasants and owned huge acres of land. Nobles were compelled to pay tribute to the Shang capital in the form of labourers, animals, grain, or bronzeware in exchange for land and autonomy. The economic flow had to sustain the aristocracy and fund royal endeavours and was maintained by this system of tribute.

By constructing sophisticated tombs and sponsoring ceremonies the same as the ones performed by the king, nobles were also actively participating in ancestral worship. Because of the wealth and sponsorship of the ceremonies, the Shang kingdom was able to sustain a common elite culture.

Peasants: The Agricultural Base

The majority of the people were peasants and they occupied the lowest position in the pyramid. They tilled the land using wooden and stone tools and lived in simple houses which were usually constructed using wood and mud. Peasants, who reaped the foodstuffs and raw materials that sustained the elite, comprised a significant proportion of the Shang economy despite being lower. Peasants were largely relegated to the fields where they worked and had limited social mobility. They were also drafted into labour or military during war or construction, such as in the construction of palatial homes and city walls. The strict social stratification of the Shang dynasty is the legacy of an early feudalism where privilege and power were indelibly tied to landholding and military duty. Because each class was obligated to the next higher one by labour, tribute, or loyalty, the system bred inequality but guaranteed stability. Later Chinese dynasties' social and political structures would be influenced by this stratification over time.

5. The Mandate of Heaven and the Fall of the Shang Dynasty

Ancient Chinese civilization was profoundly impacted by the Shang dynasty, especially in the areas of social hierarchy, governance, and religious practice. The Mandate of Heaven, a revolutionary political concept that would influence Chinese rule for more than two millennia, was born out of its eventual decline. This theory was applied retroactively to explain the fall of the Shang and defend the Zhou's ascent to power, even though it is more specifically linked to the Zhou dynasty.

The Mandate of Heaven's History and Significance

A just and moral leader was given the divine right to rule by Heaven, according to the philosophical idea known as the Mandate of Heaven (天命, Tiānmìng). The Mandate of Heaven placed a strong emphasis on moral governance as a prerequisite for legitimacy, in contrast to previous ideas of divine kingship, such as those in the Shang dynasty, where the king was viewed as the preferred go-between of the ancestral spirits.

It was thought that Heaven would revoke its mandate and bring down a more moral leader in its place if a ruler acted immorally, oppressed the populace, or engaged in excess and cruelty. Famines, uprisings, natural disasters, and military setbacks were all seen as indicators that the Mandate had been lost.

The Fall of the Shang: Justification for Zhou Rebellion

The dynasty was perceived as becoming more corrupt and despotic by the late Shang period, especially during the reign of Di Xin, the final Shang king (also called King Zhou of Shang). Di Xin is portrayed in historical accounts, many of which were penned by Zhou historians later on, as a brutal and ruthless tyrant who was obsessed with luxury. Despite their exaggeration, these stories helped to legitimize his removal.

The Mandate of Heaven was cited as the moral justification for the rebellion of the Zhou people, a semi-nomadic group from the western regions, against Shang rule. According to their leader, King Wu of Zhou, the Shang had lost Heaven's favour because of their mismanagement, and the Zhou were now the legitimate rulers selected to bring justice and order back.

Aside from legitimizing the Zhou conquest of the Shang around 1046 BCE, this rhetorical structure established a precedent where future rulers would be judged based

on their moral character and ability to rule in accordance with social and cosmic order.

Impact on Chinese Dynastic Cycle

Each dynasty would emerge, flourish, weaken, and ultimately perish if it lost the moral right to govern, based on the theory of a dynastic cycle originally advanced by the Mandate of Heaven. This theory became central to Chinese political theory and historiography:

Authority is derived from virtue: Heaven favors a wise and equitable ruler.

Corruption causes decline; oppressive or immoral conduct causes unrest and disasters.

Loss of Mandate: Rebellion is justified as a sign of Heaven's displeasure.

Power transmission: A morally correct, new ruler assumes the Mandate and establishes a new dynasty.

Consequently, the fall of the Shang dynasty was considered part of a greater cosmic order and not merely a political or military occurrence. Besides assisting later dynasties in maintaining power, this provided a model for opposing leaders who were believed to be unjust.

6. Family, Ancestor Worship, and the Supreme God Shang Di

The family was the basic social organization and religious unit in Shang society. Shang religion was deeply tied to family obligations, spiritual practices, and government, unlike modern Western perspectives that often separate religion from daily life. This background laid the basis for basic principles of subsequent Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism.

The Family as a Religious Unit

In the Shang dynasty, the family was a sacred institution rather than merely a domestic arrangement. In the Shang, dead ancestors did not disappear; instead, they continued to exist spiritually, with them continuing their interest in and control over things that happened among the living. It was believed that these ancestors served as a bridge connecting the divine and human worlds.

In order to preserve family harmony, pay respect to the spirits of ancestors, and ask for protection, direction, and wealth, rituals were carried out. The male head of the household was in charge of performing rituals and presenting offerings, with a

particular emphasis on the paternal line. In order to feed the spirits in the afterlife, these offerings included food, wine, and occasionally animal sacrifices. Of course! This is an updated and enlarged version of the Shang religion section that incorporates all of your ideas while maintaining a coherent, seamless flow:

Shang Religion: Belief in Gods, Spirits, and the Supreme Power of Shang Di

Deeply spiritual and intricate, the Shang religion permeated every facet of daily life and government. Their belief in numerous gods and spiritual forces was fundamental to their religious worldview, and Shang Di (上帝) was regarded as the highest of these deities, ruling over a vast hierarchy of lesser ones. The sun, moon, wind, rain, and other natural phenomena were all ruled by these lesser gods. The Shang combined shamanism, animism, and the belief in spiritual control over earthly events to see the world as a place full of spirits and divine forces.



Shangdi. One depiction of Shangdi, the Supreme Being who ruled over humanity and nature.

Source: <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldcivilization/chapter/shang-religion/>

It was thought that Shang Di was the ultimate ruler of nature and human affairs, the Supreme Being. Despite being far away and breathtaking, Shang Di was not completely cut off from the people's daily lives. The Shang kings, who saw themselves as or half-divine kings, often consulted Shang Di through oracle bones on

weather, harvest, war, and other matters of consequence. To remain in favour with Shang Di and the pantheon of gods, such kings served as go-betweens for the divine and physical realms, performing sacrifices and rituals.

The religious lives of the general public also prospered. In exchange for rich harvests and safeguard against disasters, peasants supplicated to a multitude of deities, especially those with ties to forces of nature. Aside from the physical events, gods also represented mythological beings such as the phoenix, which is often associated with concordance and renaissance, and the dragon, which is a symbol for power and rain. These gods were often celebrated with festivals that offered an opportunity for groups of people to come together in ritual celebration, music, feasting, and sacrifice.

A society that employed spiritual means to understand and influence their environment is evident in the Shang belief system. They tried to acquire wealth, harmony, and divine blessings by calling upon the assistance of nature spirits and ancestral forces. The basis for lasting elements of Chinese spirituality that continued into later dynasties was provided by this religious system, which interrelated gods, nature, and family ancestors.

Shang beliefs in the after life

Since they thought that the spirits of their dead ancestors could influence the living world, the people of Shang performed ancestor worship and believed in the afterlife strongly. Maintaining their ancestors' good will was extremely important as they thought they could grant blessings or misfortune. The Shang employed oracle bones, typically turtle shells or the shoulder blades of an ox, in divination ceremonies to seek authorization for important decisions, such as hunting, harvesting, or war. The messages of their ancestors were inferred from the patterns created by heating these bones until they would crack. To pay homage to their ancestors and ensure continued protection and guidance in spirit and material affairs, the Shang also engaged in sacrifice, offering food, animals, or even humans. Connection between Religion and Political Power Apart from shaping family and individual life, this deeply religious system was also employed as a tool of government control. To interpret the will of the ancestors and Shang Di, the Shang emperors employed divination and oracle bones.

The king's role as the spiritual leader was established by these rituals, which also established that his decisions were in harmony with the will of God.

Religion strengthened the social order in this way by becoming an extension of kinship loyalty and obedience. From children to parents, from subjects to rulers, and from everyone to the divine, ancestor worship established a chain of respect.

Legacy

The Shang-era customs of ancestor worship and family adoration persisted throughout Chinese culture. These ideas persisted throughout the Zhou dynasty and were later assimilated and organized into Confucian ethics, which served as the moral and spiritual foundation for Chinese society for millennia after the fall of the dynasty.

7. Oracle Bones and the Origins of Chinese Writing

The invention of writing, which not only transformed communication but also established the groundwork for more than 3,000 years of Chinese civilization, is one of the Shang dynasty's most enduring legacies. Oracle bones are both a religious artifact and a fundamental component of historical knowledge because they contain the earliest known example of Chinese writing.



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oracle_bone_script

Oracle Bones: Tools for Divination and Communication

The Shang elite, particularly the king, used oracle bones, usually ox shoulder blades or turtle plastrons (the flat underside of a turtle shell), to divine the will of higher powers like Shang Di and to communicate with ancestral spirits. The Shang used these bones as a medium for divination rites in an effort to find significant answers regarding the future.

It was a very ritualized process. A question about the weather, harvests, war, childbirth, or politics would be carved into the bone or shell by a diviner. After that, a metal rod was used to heat the bone until it cracked. The king or diviners interpreted the resulting patterns as spiritual messages. The bones are the oldest examples of Chinese writing that have survived because these interpretations were occasionally written on them.

The Birth of Chinese Script

The oldest known Chinese script, known as oracle bone script, is composed of the inscriptions found on oracle bones. These ancient characters have many visual similarities to contemporary Chinese characters and are their direct ancestors. Since the script is logographic—as opposed to alphabetic—each symbol usually denotes a word or other meaningful unit.

It's amazing how many of these ancient characters still have recognizable structures and functions today. For instance, the modern forms of the early characters for "sun" (日) and "moon" (月) are almost the same. One of the most distinctive features of Chinese civilization is the persistence of writing, which enables academics to follow linguistic and cultural changes over millennia.

Scholars estimate that only roughly half of the more than 3,000 distinct characters in the oracle bone script have been fully deciphered. A preexisting oral and possibly written tradition is suggested by the writing system's sophistication, which suggests that it had probably developed over time before it was discovered on the bones.

Writing as a Tool of Power and Administration

Oracle bones were mostly religious artifacts, but the development of writing had wider ramifications for Shang record-keeping and governance. The elite were able to keep control over military planning, resource management, and ritual practices thanks to written language. Additionally, it preserved historical events and royal lineage, giving the Shang rulers a way to justify their divine authority.

Writing developed into a potent emblem of affluent society. Being confined to the ruling elite and clergy, literacy was a political and religious tool. The Shang emperors reinforced their power over affairs of state and their spiritual bond with the ancestors by regulating the written word.

Legacy of Oracle Bone Writing

One of the earliest surviving writing systems in existence came into being with the evolution and use of oracle bone script. Its impact extended far beyond the Shang dynasty. It was inherited and adapted by the Zhou, Qin, and Han dynasties, who further developed it into more standardized styles like seal script, bronze inscriptions, and finally clerical script.

Oracle bones are today a significant linguistic and archaeological treasure. They are direct evidence of the development of early Chinese language, religion, and politics in Shang. The oracle bones are more than remains; they represent a symbol of the complex interaction that existed at the centre of Chinese civilization among language, religion, and state.

8. Astronomy and Bronze Working in the Shang Dynasty

Aside from being intellectually and technologically advanced, the Shang dynasty was also deeply spiritual. Their skill in bronze metallurgy and their understanding of astronomy are two areas that reflect the extent of Shang innovation and belief. The Shang worldview, political authority, and religious tradition were all connected with these advances, which were more than mere practicality.

Astronomy: Reading the Heavens

Spiritual concepts were the pillars of Shang people's interests in the skies. As the Shang believed that heavenly phenomena were omens sent by gods or ancestors,

astronomy and astrology went hand-in-hand. The paths of sun, moon, stars, and planets were observed and recorded for the purpose of predicting the future, planning rituals, and affirming the mandate of heaven bestowed on the king.



Source: <https://www.history.com/articles/shang-dynasty>

The Shang closely monitored planetary movements, especially those of Venus, solar eclipses, and lunar phases, according to evidence found in oracle bone inscriptions. These observations were frequently used to decipher omens or assess the auspiciousness of particular days for occasions like battle, sacrifice, or royal rites.

Priests and astronomers would use celestial cycles to plan agricultural activities and religious ceremonies, and the Shang calendar seems to have been based on the moon. The notion that the Shang king ruled in harmony with Heaven (Tian) and cosmic forces was supported by the accuracy of these calendars and the notion that cosmic order reflected political order. In order to preserve ritual accuracy and dynastic legitimacy, astronomy served as both a scientific pursuit and a spiritual instrument during the Shang dynasty.

Bronze Working: Art, Warfare, and Ritual

Shang kings were guided by the heavens, but their exceptional mastery of bronze metallurgy ensured their supremacy on Earth. Since they created elaborate and potent

bronze objects that served both practical and symbolic purposes, the Shang are generally acknowledged as China's first significant bronze age civilization.

Techniques and Innovations

Piece-Mold casting, a highly advanced technique employed by Shang artisans, entailed carving a design into a clay Mold, casting it in sections, and assembling the finished product. This method was different from lost-wax casting, which was employed in Egypt and Mesopotamia, among other early civilizations. Piece-Mold casting made it possible to create incredibly intricate and replicable designs, which frequently included dragons, taotie (monster masks), mythical animals, and geometric patterns.

Shang bronze production included:

- Ritual vessels: These were used to store food, drink, or wine for sacrifices to the gods and ancestors.
- Weapons: Shang warriors had a military edge thanks to their swords, spearheads, and axes, which were fashioned of durable, sharp bronze.
- Chariot fittings and tools increased military mobility and agricultural productivity.
- Bells and musical instruments were used in court ceremonies and rituals, and they represented both spiritual symbolism and artistic achievement.

Bronze as a Power Symbol

Bronze was more than just a material; it represented spiritual connectedness and elite power. The large number of resources and labour needed to produce bronze was accessible only to the ruling class. The Shang elite managed to exercise both ritual dominance and military superiority through their control of the production of bronze.



Source: <https://factsanddetails.com/china/cat7/sub40/entry-7566.html>

Ancestor worship ceremonies were strongly associated with bronze ritual vessel production and use. These vessels acted as sacred implements and also as records of the past because they were often inscribed in early Chinese script, recording dedications, events, or ancestral heritage.

Interconnected Beliefs and Technologies

Bronzeworking and astronomy both reflect the Shang dynasty's multifaceted world view, wherein power, religion, and technology were interconnected. Bronze artifacts rendered the king's power concrete through warfare, ceremony, and social status and the heavens dictated ceremonial calendars and legitimized his right to reign. Together, these achievements show the Shang's remarkable ability to merge practical knowledge with religious meaning, impacting the early scientific and artistic foundations of Chinese civilization.

Conclusion

A watershed moment in the history of China, the Shang dynasty saw complex sociopolitical structures, technological innovations, and a highly religious worldview. Material culture, archaeological fashion, and regional relationships all attest to the fact that the Shang were not experiencing cultural isolation but instead actively engaging in dynamic relationships with neighbouring communities.

In addition to strengthening Shang identity and authority, these intercultural exchanges made it easier for concepts, technologies, and ritual practices to spread and adapt throughout frontier areas. By placing the Shang in the context of cultural contact, one can gain a more sophisticated understanding of early Chinese civilization and highlight how it evolved as a part of a larger network of regional interactions.

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The Māori Tradition: The Worldview and Its Relevance in 21st Century

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Abstract

Focusing on language preservation, legal frameworks, traditional arts, and sacred environmental activities, this paper investigates the cultural resilience and revitalization strategies of the Māori people in Aotearoa (New Zealand). The paper investigates how modern-day Māori have employed various strategies to preserve cultural sovereignty and protect their Indigenous identity. The study links Indian tribal and regional cultures to show significant similarities in cosmology, symbolic arts, and oral traditions. This comparative study shows how India, with its great cultural variety, might benefit from the Māori experience to enhance its own attempts at cultural preservation. Strategies include encouraging mother-tongue education, acknowledging holy ecologies, empowering community-led government, and integrating ancient knowledge systems into contemporary platforms. Case studies from Māori and Indian settings are discussed to underline shared challenges and possible paths for cultural continuation. Ultimately, the paper argues that Indigenous empowerment and national cultural integrity in an increasingly globalized society depend on cultural preservation, which is a proactive, evolving interaction with legacy, identity, and collective memory.

Key words: Māori culture, Cultural Preservation, Indigenous identity, Tradition

Introduction

The Māori, the indigenous people of Aotearoa (New Zealand), have a rich cultural heritage built over over 700 years of Polynesian oceanic exploration, oral history, and deep affinity with nature. Te tikanga Māori, the overall term for Māori customs, values, and social structure, is spiritual, relational, and nature-based. The Māori social structure is built on shared identity centered on kinship, ancestral genealogy (whakapapa), sacred respect (tapu), and ecological stewardship (kaitiakitanga). Māori

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society is usually structured into iwi (tribe), hapū (sub-tribe), and whānau (family group).

The Māori, like other Indigenous groups around the world, have been victims of colonization, not limited to their socio-economic marginalization, cultural loss, but the loss of their mother land. The Treaty of Waitangi was a landmark but contentious treaty between the British Crown and Māori chiefs, begun in 1840, responsible for a long-term cultural decline and institutional inequality among New Zealand society. The erosion of te reo Māori was particularly catastrophic as it was excluded from school curricula and discouraged from being transmitted intergenerationally under education policies.

The Māori culture has been extremely resilient in the face of displacement and attempts at assimilation throughout history. In recent times, there has been a revival of Māori customs in most public spaces. Official recognition of Indigenous practices concerning environmental management, the revival of Māori arts like haka and ta moko, the revival of marae-based communities, and attempts to revive the language as a whole are indicative of a healthy and dynamic cultural scene. In the 21st century, Māori principles are being increasingly integrated into New Zealand's national identity, informing policies in the areas of law, education, health, and climate change.

Origins of Māori Culture

The native inhabitants of New Zealand are the Māori. They are culturally Polynesian and most closely allied to the eastern Polynesians. The modern Māori people called themselves "usual or ordinary people," or tangata Māori, after their contact with the Europeans. The Māori originally inhabited the northern parts of New Zealand's North Island. The South Island was relatively unpopulated. Most noted history of their arrival in New Zealand is traced by around 13th century. They are known for their exceptional navigation skills; it makes their navigation smooth and precise. They had inherent skill to understand the ocean currents, positioning of stars, and interaction with birds. These things guide their long voyage.

Tikanga Māori: Traditional Customs in Modern Context

Tikanga Māori is the combination of practices, beliefs, and conventions, which drive decision-making and behavior of individual as well as collective sphere of life in

Māori culture. Tikanga, derived from the root word tika, which implies "righteous" is a dynamic, growing framework based on ancestral wisdom and spiritual principles rather than a collection of fixed set of laws that govern the social life of Māori people. It affects how Māori interact with each other, the land (whenua), and the spiritual realm. Adaptability is a significant strength of tikanga Māori. It evolves with time while retaining its spiritual and cultural character. Māori communities are altering traditional gender roles in marae rituals to align with tikanga and current gender equality ideas. Tikanga helps Māori understand identity and belonging in urban or global situations. It provides cultural continuity in the midst of fast change, enabling people to reconnect with their roots and behave with integrity.



(Maori warrior By geoftheref on Fotopedia; CC by-nd 2.0)

The Haka: Cultural Identity and Expression in Māori Tradition

The haka is a revered and iconic cultural display of the Aotearoa Māori people, or New Zealanders. It is more than a battle dance by New Zealand's national rugby team, the All Blacks; it is Māori culture, community, and resilience. Traditionally, the haka was danced by warriors prior to battle, meant to intimidate foes while invoking courage, strength, and spiritual protection from their ancestors, or tipuna. In the words of Mead (2003), the peruperu form was marked by aggressive foot-stomping, synchronized weaponry, and aggressive facial displays such as pūkana, which involves eye enlargement, and whētero, where the mouth protrudes, all meant to

convey dominance and mana.

Haka has been a central point of Māori ceremonies over the centuries, both in war and in daily life. It is used to greet people (haka pōwhiri), to mourn the deceased (haka tangi), and to celebrate with the community. It is also a passionate release for tales, maintaining oral tradition, and conveying feelings. Possibly the most famous of the hakas is Ka Mate, written by the Ngāti Toa warrior Te Rauparaha sometime in the early 1800s as a passionate chant of life and victory. With the All Blacks using Ka Mate at the start of international games, the haka is now globally famous. This has not only helped to publicize Māori culture but increase awareness of Indigenous history (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011).

In modern Māori society, the haka has been revitalized in an exceptional way, becoming a powerful symbol of cultural identity, political defiance, and the essential transmission of intergenerational knowledge. It is performed in a wide variety of contexts across marae, schools, universities, parliaments, and public demonstrations. Haka has been used to play an important part in challenging environmental destruction, mourning dead community leaders, and reasserting Māori sovereignty and rights in the face of persistent colonial legacies. This remarkable versatility serves to underscore the haka's function as a dynamic cultural form that both conserves and adapts Māori traditions to fit contemporary circumstances (Smith, 1999).

The inclusion of haka in educational and social institutions has promoted its revival and acceptance as a fundamental component of New Zealand's bicultural identity. Government programs, including the integration of Māori performing arts into the school curriculum and the official support of kapa haka competitions, have raised its profile among youth and urban Māori communities. Concurrently, concerns regarding appropriation and commercialization—specifically in non-Indigenous contexts without permission—continue to provoke significant debates around cultural sovereignty and respect (Hokowhitu, 2004).

The haka is an influential expression of Māori cultural strength, interweaving past and present, and acting as a platform for identity, cohesion, and protest. New Zealand is grappling with its colonial heritage as it imagines its national future; in this sense, the haka is a symbol of the energy and enduring spirit of Māori heritage.

Cross-Cultural Connections: Māori and Indian Traditions

Māori and Indian cultures display profound cultural and philosophical affinities premised on ancient worldviews, spiritual cosmologies, and shared living, despite their cultural and geographical differences. These affinities suggest a common regard for ancestors, ceremonial purity, oral culture, performance arts, and an ecological consciousness—all of which are central to the formation of identity and daily life in both societies.

There is a striking similarity in the genealogical awareness present in all cultures. In Māori culture, the concept of whakapapa (genealogy) is an essential aspect that identifies individuals with their ancestors, earth (whenua), and religious practices. Likewise, in Indian cultural religious practices, the notions of gotra (ancestral clan) and vamsha (clan history) establish a person's position in the social class and the cosmic order. These mechanisms serve as spiritual tools that enable current generations to connect with their forebears while at the same time discharging obligations to the descendants. For instance, in a Māori pōwhiri (welcome ritual), people introduce themselves by stating their mountains, rivers, tribes, and ancestors, just as people in India invoke their lineage (kul and gotra) during religious rituals like shradha (ancestor rites) or upanayana (holy thread ceremony).

Where ritual and spiritual purity are involved, the Māori term tapu, meaning sacred or forbidden, has a parallel in the Indian concepts of shuddhi, purity, and achara, conduct. Tapu governs not only sacred places but bodies and practices; to transgress it can have dire spiritual or social repercussions. In Hinduism, the concept of ritual impurity and the necessity of purifying oneself through practices such as ablutions, fasting, or recitation of mantras is a parallel to this same conviction in upholding cosmic order through ritual practice. These ideals shape the texture of religious life and influence social manners, food, and the management of the environment in both traditions.

Case Study 1: Sacred Geography and Ecological Ethics

Both Indian and Māori cultures treat nature like rivers, mountains, and forests as living gods or ancestors, blending material and spiritual substance. In 2017, the Whanganui River was granted legal personhood in New Zealand, a recognition of the

Māori worldview that it is a living being closely associated with the iwi (tribe). Likewise, in India, the Ganges River is revered as Ganga Mata (Mother Ganga) and has been granted legal personhood. Its sacred nature is highlighted through a series of rituals and festivals, including Ganga Aarti. These commonalities reflect an integrated ecological philosophy that sees nature as a valued relationship, and not just as a resource, and highlights the central role that Indigenous cultures have played in the development of global environmental thought.

Case Study 2: Performance as Cultural Transmission

One of the shared features seen is the use of performing arts as a medium to conserve and transmit cultural heritage. The Māori haka, a strenuous dance marked by energetic movements and postures, vocalizations, and facial expressions, plays a double role in ancient rituals and contemporary protests to express identity and group passion. Similarly, classical Indian dances like Bharatanatyam and Kathakali narrate religious myths through gesture, mudras (hand gestures), and emotional facial expressions, usually derived from epic stories like the Ramayana or Mahabharata. In both cases, performance is not entertainment; it is a religious ritual that is a living expression of cultural memory. Today, kapa haka troupes in New Zealand and traditional dance colleges in India, and its diaspora, are an important force in the cultural education and renaissance of youth.

Case Study 3: Oral Tradition and Intergenerational Knowledge

Both cultures place an enormous premium on the oral transmission of knowledge. Māori culture relies on kaumātua, elderly people who pass on stories, songs, proverbs, and histories orally. In India, gurus and pandits used strict mnemonic practices to guarantee the oral remembrance of ancient texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas over generations. This dependence on oral transmission is reflected in an epistemology that imagines knowledge as experiential, as relational, and as sacred, and not as written or academic. Mātauranga Māori, a Māori approach to Māori knowledge systems, and Vedic education programs are examples of attempts to maintain traditional wisdom in new settings.

The harmonies between Indian and Māori cultures are not coincidental; they are an expression of a common Indigenous worldview that values harmony with nature, continuity with the past, and the interweaving of the sacred into the profane. These harmonies emphasize the value of international dialogue and provide rich insights into issues of the day, including environmental degradation, cultural homogenization, and intergenerational disconnection. Through an examination of these harmonies, we gain a deeper appreciation of how traditional knowledge systems—albeit geographically specific—convey universal meaning and promote mutual understanding in the 21st century.

The Importance of Arts and Symbols in Māori Culture

Arts and symbols, which are instruments for narrative, spiritual connection, and cultural continuity, much define Māori cultural identity. Māori art—including carving (whakairo), weaving (raranga), tattooing (ta moko), and painting (kowhaiwhai)—has a deeper purpose of conserving ancestral knowledge, tribal values, and cosmological beliefs (Mead, 2003).

Among the most profound kinds of Māori artistic expression are whakairo, the intricate wood carvings embellishing various sacred artifacts, waka (canoes), and marae (tribal meeting sites). Rich in symbolism, every carving often shows legendary figures, tribe ancestors (tipuna), or tribal ancestry (whakapapa). Apart from being decorative, these carved forms are considered as living images of ancestors, therefore conserving the spiritual legacy of the dead and confirming the links of the community to its ancestry (Brown, 1995).

Likewise, culturally important and quite personal is ta moko, the traditional tattooing technique. Unlike Western tattoos, ta moko is very personal and symbolic, meaning the person's ancestry, social status, accomplishments, and tribal links (Nikora, Rua, & Te Awekotuku, 2007). The most crucial place for ta moko is the face since it reflects the person's mana (spiritual authority) and individuality. Particularly among younger generations, this ongoing tradition is a strong show of resistance, pride, and cultural reclaiming. It is still quite relevant today.

Particularly among Māori women, weaving—or raranga—is a significant art form. Often using tribal or spiritual value patterns, natural materials like flax (harakeke) are

used to create cloaks (kākahu), mats, and baskets (kete). Weaving strengthens the link between people, land, and spirituality by combining a practical skill and a sacred practice handed down through generations (Pendergrast, 1987).

Māori arts are rich in symbolic elements. Common symbols include carved faces (koruru) that represent ancestors and guardians. The Koru spiral represents development, rejuvenation, and peace. It is inspired by the unfurling fern. Manaia, a legendary creature, is generally viewed as a gatekeeper between the earthly and spiritual realms. The Tiki pendant, depicting the first person, is thought to provide protection and fertility (Barrow, 1969).

These symbols are cultural signposts encoding values, cosmology, and identity in wearable, visible, and manufactured forms, not abstraction.

Māori art has developed to encompass modern visual art, fashion, architecture, and digital media. Robyn Kahukiwa, Lisa Reihana, and Ralph Hotere among others, modern Māori artists investigate issues of colonization, identity, and survival using conventional symbols and narrative (Smith, 2012). The blend of ancient and modern highlights the vibrancy of Māori art as a cultural anchor and a tool for future shaping.

For Māori, arts and symbols are more than just crafts or trinkets. They reflect group memory, identity, and spirituality, therefore supporting the cultural vitality and resilience of Māori communities in both modern and traditional settings.

Shared Aesthetics and Symbolism: Māori and Indian Artistic Traditions

Though their different cultural and geographical situations, Māori and Indian creative traditions share similarities in their use of symbolism, ceremonial significance, and beautiful form to express cosmic ideas, ancestral identity, and social structure. Art is a profoundly ingrained cultural language with spiritual, historical, and philosophical connotations in both societies, not only decoration.

The metaphorical function of the human body as a canvas for identity and deity is one of the most clear links. The Māori rite of ta moko, or sacred tattooing preserving genealogy and status, has parallels with the Indian tradition of body adornment and symbolic tattoos. For instance, especially during ceremonies and festivals, India uses tilak, bindis, and mehendi (henna) to signify religious affiliation, social status, and

personal accomplishments (Jain 2009). Intentionally inscribed either temporarily or permanently, these marks reflect spiritual, ritual, and aesthetic elements much like ta moko does.

Architectural and sculptural expressions in all cultures incorporate myth and ancestry. Whakairo (carvings) in Māori whareniui (meeting houses) depict tribal ancestors, cosmological beings, and significant events. Every carved post conveys genealogical information, hence functioning as a structural and symbolic component. Indian temples, too, use sculptural imagery to narrate tales of deities, epics, and saints. The walls of temples like Khajuraho and Meenakshi are not only places of devotion but also narrative surfaces rich in cosmological significance and socio-religious teaching (Dehejia, 1997).

Māori and Indian art have a comparable visual vocabulary of symbols. A major symbol in Māori design, the koru expresses new life, continuity, and harmony by means of a spiral motif inspired by the unfurling fern. Conceptually, this is comparable to Indian symbols such the chakra (wheel), which are seen in Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu art and reflect the cycle of life, time, and cosmic order. Both symbols reflect a connection to nature and the supernatural as well as a cyclical perspective on existence.

Moreover, both societies' ritual textiles have social and spiritual connotations. Woven from flax and decorated with feathers or dyed fibers, Māori kākahu (cloaks) represent prestige and ancestral mana. Loaded with cultural meaning, Indian saris, dhotis, and sacred ceremonial textiles like angavastra are usually unique to locality, caste, or religious rite (Bajaj, 2011). Especially in ceremonial and holy contexts, both societies saw textiles as essential transmitters of identity and protection.

Artists today from both civilizations still utilize ancient techniques to declare cultural identity and fight colonial erasure. Māori artist Lisa Reihana and Indian artist Jitish Kallat mix traditional themes in digital and installation art to investigate topics including diaspora, memory, and rituals. This combination of classical symbols with contemporary media shows how alive and politically relevant these historic artistic languages are in twenty-first century.



<https://www.britannica.com/art/haka>

Strategies of Language Preservation

Language is a key source of cultural identity, oral history, and ancestral knowledge. For Māori and indigenous people in New Zealand and India, language preservation and revival are political and cultural priorities. Every setting has unique yet similar answers for combating linguistic decline brought on by colonization, modernity, and globalization.

1. Historical Context and Threats

Once the main language in New Zealand, the Māori language (te reo Māori) experienced a sharp decline during the 20th century as a result of British colonization, English-only education, and stigmatization of indigenous identity. Only a few seniors spoke Māori proficiently in the 1970s, which led to desperate calls for revitalization (King, 2003).

India, too, has experienced the marginalization of many tribal and minority languages as a result of dominant language policies (especially Hindi and English), urban migration, and changing socioeconomic expectations in spite of its linguistic variety with more than 22 officially recognized languages and hundreds of dialects. Unless strong action is taken, languages like Bodo, Santali, and Gondi suffer extinction (UNESCO, 2010).

2. Institutional and Policy-Based Strategies

Māori context:

Founded in the early 1980s, Kōhanga Reo (Language Nests) are Māori-language immersion preschools where elders teach children in te reo Māori, laying the foundation for language transmission (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011). Integrating linguistic and cultural education, Whare Kura and Kura Kaupapa Māori are Māori-language elementary and high schools offering a complete curriculum in te reo Māori. Te reo Māori was acknowledged by the Māori Language Act (1987) as an official language of New Zealand; it also created the Māori Language Commission (Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori). Māori radio and television shows like Te Reo TV encourage linguistic normality. Younger generations are also involved in mobile apps and social media campaigns like #ReoMāori.

Indian Context:

The Three-Language Formula was intended to promote multilingualism, this policy motivates students to study their mother tongue, Hindi, and English. Its execution, though, has varied across areas (Annamalai 2001). Institutions recording and supporting literary works in regional and endangered languages include the Sahitya Akademi and the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL). Among the many indigenous languages that have been added to the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution are Bodo and Santhali, which have been given official recognition and financial backing. Projects like Google's Project Navlekha, online dictionaries, and AI-powered translation tools are being used to conserve and promote regional languages digitally.

Safeguarding Māori Culture in the 21st Century: Lessons for India on Cultural Resilience and Revitalization

Indigenous to Aotearoa (New Zealand), the Māori offer a strong illustration of cultural persistence under colonial persecution, land loss, and language decline. Through smart legal action, language revitalization, educational reform, creative expression, and digital innovation, Māori have successfully created cultural sovereignty in contemporary New Zealand. With its varied Indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions, India struggles to maintain cultural uniqueness in the face of rising industrialization and linguistic uniformity as well. Examining Māori methods can offer helpful insights for India to protect and revive its cultural past in the twenty-first century.

Language Revitalization and Education

Cultural identification and transmission depend on language. The revival of te reo Māori underlines the need of immersive, community-driven language education. The Māori created Kōhanga Reo, or language nests, in the early 1980s, where elders taught children language and values in preschool environments. With an eye toward Māori knowledge, Kura Kaupapa Māori and Wharekura offered complete elementary and secondary education in te reo.

Though constitutionally protected, the prevalence of Hindi and English in education and public debate sometimes marginalizes India's tribal and minority languages. Although the Three-Language Formula aims to promote multilingualism, its implementation is uneven and insufficiently safeguards endangered languages (Annamalai, 2001). The Māori's focus on early immersion and community control of language acquisition can help India. Developing mother-tongue immersion preschools in Adivasi and minority populations and funding culturally relevant teacher training would significantly enhance language and cultural retention.

Legal Frameworks and Cultural Rights

The Māori have purposefully used legal tools to protect their cultural autonomy. Historically contested, the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) gives Māori claim to sovereignty and cultural preservation. Founded in 1975, the Waitangi Tribunal lets Māori tribes pursue redress for Treaty breaches including the restoration of sacred sites and land. Personhood status for the Whanganui River and Te Urewera forest reflects legislative recognition of Māori cosmology and stewardship practices. On the other hand, India's legislative system, although theoretically protective (via Scheduled Tribe status, the Forest Rights Act, and the Sixth Schedule provisions), often falls short in reality. Indigenous autonomy is undermined by a fragmented policy approach and top-down government. Establishing distinct Indigenous cultural courts to safeguard heritage rights and officially acknowledge sacred ecologies—such as granting legal status to rivers or forests valued by tribal tribes in the Northeast, Central India, and the Western Ghats—could help India.

Sacred Practices and Environmental Stewardship

Emphasizing the value of the land and environment, Māori culture centers on two fundamental ideas: tapu (sacredness) and kaitiakitanga (guardianship). Legal

recognition and co-management of natural elements act as environmental rules as well as cultural preservation tools. Cultural knowledge and conservation science combined help Māori ideals to influence national environmental planning. In India's tribal cosmologies, mountains, rivers, and woods are also regarded as sacred. Yet, conventional conservation and development conversations often overlook these perspectives. Including Indigenous ecological ethics into environmental governance, based on Māori values, can help to preserve culture and safeguard biodiversity.

Arts, Performance, and Identity Formation

Māori arts—like whakairo (carving), raranga (weaving), and haka—are vital means of expressing cultural identity and resiliency. As evidenced most clearly in Kapa Haka events like Te Matatini, both formal institutions and grassroots transmission help to preserve them. Such cultural events strengthen identity and inspire young people to get involved.

India's tribal and regional cultures are equally rich in visual symbolism, performing arts, and oral traditions. Their survival, though, is threatened by institutional negligence and insufficient records. By creating Indigenous arts festivals, including mother-tongue performing arts into school courses, and promoting intergenerational mentoring for folk arts and storytelling traditions, India might follow the Māori model.

Media and Digital Cultural Revival

Māori communities have embraced technology to raise cultural exposure. Through digital platforms, mobile apps (e.g., Kupu), and online archives, Māori language Māori Television and Te Reo TV provide culturally relevant programming. These initiatives link young people to their heritage and help them define Māori identity. Digital projects for minorities in India stay split. A national campaign for social media-driven narrative platforms, AI-assisted digital archives, and tribal-language media channels might support Māori initiatives. YouTube channels celebrating regional traditions and language study applications in Santali, Bhili, or Bodo would help to guarantee cultural continuity.

Conclusion

The tenacity and creativity of the Māori people in safeguarding and honoring their traditional past in spite of colonial disruption is motivating. Through thorough

methods including language restoration, legal action, holy ecological activities, art, performance, and digital media, the Māori have successfully incorporated old customs into contemporary life. These initiatives provide universally relevant cultural preservation tools and help to define Māori identity. Māori and Indian customs share many similarities, including appreciation of nature, symbolic arts, oral histories, and community-centered worldviews. Modernization, language decline, and marginalization endanger India's many Indigenous and regional cultures in same ways. Inspired by Māori initiatives, India could re-evaluate cultural policy to give community agency first priority, blend tradition with education and media, and formally recognize sacred cultural sites. In the end, the Māori perspective emphasizes that preserving culture in the 21st century is a dynamic act of sovereignty, sustainability, and identity rather than a question of nostalgia. For all several cultures wishing to acknowledge and preserve their cultural origins in a globalized society, this provides vital insights.

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Algorithmic Erasure and Digital Sovereignty: Rethinking Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Age of AI

Vishwajeet¹ and Monika Aswal²

Abstract

In the digital age Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) encounter both transformative prospects and significant challenges for their preservation and care. The study investigates how Indigenous knowledge intersects with digital technologies while analysing how cultural misrepresentation and linguistic marginalisation occur alongside intellectual property debates and data sovereignty politics. The shift from oral, community-rooted traditions to digital platforms risks reducing knowledge to fragmented, decontextualised commodities for global consumption. Drawing on case studies such as the appropriation of Cowichan sweater designs by the Hudson's Bay Company and the culturally respectful design of the 'Four Directions Teachings' project, the paper demonstrates how digital tools simultaneously function as means of cultural revitalisation and instruments of exploitation. The study reveals fundamental issues like algorithmic bias along with the loss of oral contextuality and ongoing debates about intellectual property rights and community consent. The paper examines digital colonialism through its investigation of how Indigenous data is gathered and used without permission, which undermines Indigenous autonomy. The paper advocates for digital governance led by Indigenous communities together with ethical AI frameworks, proposing that digital technologies cannot just serve as repositories for Indigenous heritage but must incorporate Indigenous principles, protocols and knowledge systems to achieve true preservation.

Keywords: *Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Digital Colonialism, Indigenous Data Sovereignty, Ethical AI, Digital Preservation of Oral Traditions*

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Introduction

Indigenous Knowledge Systems represent the shared wisdom and practices developed by Indigenous communities through long-term engagement with their environments. Indigenous knowledge systems function as the foundation for Indigenous governance as well as ecological stewardship while shaping spirituality and medicine and supporting food systems and linguistic diversity (Grey, 2018, 3229). Smith (1999) demonstrates that Indigenous knowledge forms a holistic network that sustains itself through deep connections to the cultural, spiritual, and social structures of Indigenous communities.

The digital era has radically transformed how knowledge is produced, shared, and stored. The shifts in digital practices generate unique possibilities for Indigenous knowledge regeneration and distribution while also introducing serious threats such as misrepresentation and loss of control over Indigenous data rights. Digital environments interact with Indigenous knowledge through complicated power dynamics that tend to repeat old colonial patterns of exploitation and marginalisation. This paper examines the interaction between Indigenous knowledge systems and modern technologies, including digital platforms and AI systems. The analysis uncovers the conflicts between the right to access information and acts of appropriation and examines how visibility can lead to distortion alongside the challenges of protecting knowledge from exploitation. The paper demonstrates through a blend of modern case studies, academic discussions, and Indigenous viewpoints that digital tools present dual possibilities for both cultural revitalisation and new forms of dispossession.

The research highlights the pressing need for community-centred digital governance frameworks through its examination of algorithmic bias and the decline of oral contextuality together with unresolved intellectual property rights and digital colonialism. The paper calls for the integration of Indigenous epistemologies into digital systems to protect Indigenous knowledge from being simplified into data points or losing cultural significance while preserving its living and evolving nature.

1. Digital Platforms for Cultural Preservation

1.1 Digital Archives and Community Websites: Indigenous communities now rely on the internet to maintain their knowledge and ensure its transmission to younger generations and broader audiences. The 'Four Directions Teachings' platform, established in 2006, presents audio recordings of teachings given by five First Nations elders from Canada. The website delivers oral storytelling while providing interactive visual experiences that allow users to learn Indigenous philosophies. The project implements a culturally sensitive approach through "digital bundles" to maintain alignment with Indigenous cultural protocols and governance systems. Wemigwans (n.d.) explains that the project sought to create a space where educators and learners can access information while maintaining the contextual significance of traditional knowledge instead of reducing it to simple facts.

The Indigenous Digital Archive (IDA) in South Africa works to protect oral traditions and cultural artefacts by using community-led digital preservation projects (Ajani et al. 2024). The Indigenous Digital Archive (IDA) demonstrates ethical collaboration by maintaining Indigenous authority over material curation and distribution processes. The model grants Indigenous communities the power to maintain control over their cultural expressions, according to Dutta (2019).



Source: <https://theprint.in/yourturn/governments-right-to-legislate-on-artificial-intelligence/2009818/>

1.2 Bridging Generational Gaps through Digital Storytelling: The Tuyang Initiative and Bundusan Books projects in Malaysia show how digital media tools help restore oral traditions and maintain language among young people. Contemporary media forms such as audio-visual productions and interactive e-books have been utilised to transform traditional stories into formats that engage digitally-orientated younger audiences (Maciej Serda et al. 2013). Digital platforms utilised with respect for cultural protocols enable these programmes to connect different generations while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Such examples show how digital platforms managed by Indigenous communities become strong tools for maintaining cultural heritage and promoting Indigenous language restoration. These examples highlight the necessity for vigilant navigation to protect Indigenous knowledge from misappropriation, misrepresentation, or commodification.

2. Community-Led Digital Preservation Models

2.1 Principles of Community-Led Models: The framework of community-led digital preservation models underscores Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and their sovereignty over cultural heritage. These frameworks position Indigenous communities as active decision-makers who effectively manage how their knowledge is digitised and shared. These models focus on cultural authenticity, which guarantees digitised knowledge aligns with Indigenous values alongside their oral traditions and spiritual protocols. This method questions digital preservation practices that come from outside Indigenous communities because they may lead to the commercialisation and loss of context for Indigenous heritage (Maciej Serda et al. 2013).

2.2 Safeguarding Cultural Protocols: Community-led models depend heavily on the protection of cultural protocols. Certain knowledge exists that is meant to stay private and not be distributed publicly. Through community-led digitisation Indigenous groups have the power to decide which knowledge remains private and which can be shared publicly or only within the community. Respecting Indigenous perspectives requires careful attention to distinctions about sacred or ceremonial knowledge.

2.3 Sustainability and Avoiding Exploitation: Community-based digitisation projects emphasise sustainability to prevent exploitation from occurring

unintentionally. The shift from analogue to digital formats should ensure Indigenous knowledge remains dynamic and protected from external consumption. Communities preserve power over their cultural materials by incorporating their traditional decision-making frameworks into digital preservation initiatives (Dutta 2019).

Community-led models represent a fundamental transformation from preservation projects led by outsiders to methods that prioritise Indigenous self-determination and cultural authority. These models serve as fundamental structures to ensure ethical interaction with Indigenous knowledge systems during the digital era.

3. Case Studies of Digital Preservation Initiatives

3.1 Sangraksha Digital Humanities Project (India): The Sangraksha initiative demonstrates how digital humanities can be driven by community-led principles in eastern India. The Sangraksha project documents cultural histories and oral traditions alongside artefacts through a co-development approach with marginalised Indigenous communities. Through true collaborative design, Indigenous community members participate as equal partners to develop both the application's design and content while also directing its dissemination process.

The research team utilised visual and sensory techniques that encompassed community-created images along with multimedia storytelling and audio-visual formats to create an inclusive and accessible environment for participants across literacy spectrums. The project focused on Indigenous epistemologies by giving priority to collective memory and oral narration while promoting participatory decision-making which contested conventional historical narratives, according to Dutta (2019).

3.2 Language and Cultural Revitalisation through Digital Tools: The Indigenous Digital Archive (IDA) and Sankofa Digital Archive stand as prominent digital preservation models in Africa. The IDA manages to turn oral histories and cultural performances into digital formats, while the Sankofa initiative preserves the Akan way of life through their proverbs and traditional practices (Ajani et al. 2024).

The mobile applications “Ntongato” from Tanzania and “Learn Yoruba” from Nigeria provide interactive learning tools along with locally recorded audio content and

specialised teaching methods to support language education and cultural revitalisation. The “Community Mapping for Environmental Management” initiative in Kenya utilises GIS technology that assists Maasai communities in mapping their grazing lands alongside water sources and wildlife corridors. The maps enable Indigenous communities to maintain their resource management systems while strengthening their self-governance.

3.3 Regional Initiatives in Southeast Asia, Canada, and Australia: The Tuyang Initiative, along with Bundusan Books in Malaysia, demonstrate how Southeast Asian communities modernise traditional storytelling through digital means to connect different generations (Maciej Serda et al. 2013).

The Canadian Shared Print Network and SIKU show how cultural preservation efforts and environmental monitoring work together in Canada. The SIKU mobile platform delivers resources on ice safety and traditional knowledge along with language preservation tools to Inuit communities (Reid et al. 2021). The “Caring for Country” program in Australia combines artificial intelligence technology with Indigenous knowledge to manage biodiversity and land resources (Indigital and Rio Tinto n.d.).

These initiatives show how Indigenous communities worldwide utilise digital tools to maintain and revive their cultural heritage through digital sovereignty and resistance to commercial data exploitation.

4. Online Cultural Misrepresentations and Appropriations

4.1 The Challenge of Digital Acculturation: Digital platforms create opportunities for cultural revitalisation yet simultaneously perpetuate traditional cultural appropriation methods. Hudson's Bay Company used Cowichan sweater designs to create products for the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics without permission from the Cowichan Tribe. The unauthorized use of sacred designs by the Hudson's Bay Company led to widespread discussions about Indigenous intellectual property rights violations and commercial exploitation of sacred symbols (CBC News 2010). The choice to use the inuksuk as the event's logo demonstrates how Indigenous symbols like this spiritually important Inuit emblem are frequently removed from their cultural origins to serve commercial interests.

4.2 Commodification and Misuse of Indigenous Symbols: The digital sphere amplifies these issues. Non-Indigenous producers commonly commercialise cultural symbols like dreamcatchers and totem poles as well as feathered headdresses. Mass-produced goods that are marketed as “Indigenous-inspired” damage genuine Indigenous artists by appropriating significant cultural symbols (Strayer and Grebliunas 2024). Despite their good intentions to honour residential school survivors, campaigns such as Orange Shirt Day have seen unauthorised commercialisation of Indigenous designs, which causes additional economic and cultural damage.

4.3 Stereotyping and Misrepresentation in Media: Digital media continues to promote damaging stereotypes like the “noble savage”, “Indian princess”, and “spiritual warrior” by simplifying complex cultures into basic tropes (MediaSmarts n.d.). Films and advertisements, along with online platforms that misrepresent Indigenous people create distortions that erase actual Indigenous lived experiences (The Canadian Encyclopedia n.d.). These representations strengthen colonial stories while silencing true Indigenous voices across worldwide media channels.

5. Intellectual Property Rights and the Limits of Western Legal Frameworks

5.1 Indigenous Knowledge and Western IP Laws: Existing intellectual property (IP) frameworks present systemic obstacles for Indigenous communities trying to protect their cultural expressions. The traditional Western system of intellectual property based on individual ownership fails to protect Indigenous knowledge which exists collectively and holds sacred significance. The Cowichan sweater incident demonstrated the legal insufficiencies Indigenous communities faced when they could not formally stop unauthorised replication of their designs (Studio H Canada Residency 2020).

5.2 Community-Centric Alternatives: Indigenous scholars and activists propose alternative intellectual property models because current systems fail to protect collective ownership and cultural specificity, and they suggest sui generis systems based on Indigenous-specific intellectual property rights. The Nagoya Protocol and multiple community-designed licensing solutions work together to establish fair

distribution of benefits and appropriate cultural handling of Indigenous knowledge (Strayer and Grebliunas 2024).

5.3 Ethical Stewardship Beyond Legal Compliance: The responsibility of ethical stewardship extends beyond formal IP laws to include respect for Indigenous rights as well as cultural protocols and sovereignty. It requires both the acquisition of consent and the assurance that knowledge utilisation respects the core values and aims of Indigenous communities. Research shows that Indigenous knowledge protection needs to extend beyond legal procedures to include culturally sensitive practices based on mutual respect and sustained relationship-building (Smith 1999).

Current legal and ethical systems require comprehensive reassessment to protect Indigenous knowledge in digital contexts while fully respecting Indigenous peoples' rights and requirements.

6. Indigenous Data Sovereignty

6.1 Digital Colonialism and Data Exploitation: Digital colonialism represents a modern colonial phenomenon aggravated by the digital age, which allows for the unauthorized use of Indigenous community data in research and commercial activities (The Future Economy 2023). Open-access policies enable the harvesting of Indigenous data related to languages and cultural knowledge, which results in cultural exploitation. Indigenous communities experience a modern form of resource loss through algorithmic data mining for AI training which parallels the historical extraction of their physical resources (Indigenous Digital Equity n.d.).

6.2 The Imperative of Data Sovereignty: Indigenous peoples possess the inherent rights to manage how data about their cultures, lands and knowledge systems is collected and used. The principle opposes data extractivism while demanding consent and culturally sensitive use that benefits all parties involved. Rana (2025) asserts that AI technologies and other data-driven systems will maintain epistemic violence and structural inequalities unless Indigenous data sovereignty is established to prevent biased and decontextualised representations of Indigenous realities.

6.3 Bridging the Digital Divide: Indigenous communities experience a substantial digital divide due to inadequate broadband access together with insufficient technical

infrastructure and digital literacy programs. The existing digital divide makes it more difficult for Indigenous peoples to maintain control over their data and preserve their digital knowledge (Rana 2025). To tackle these challenges, it is essential to make significant investments in digital infrastructure and community capacity-building while implementing policy reforms that prioritize Indigenous perspectives in technology governance.



Source: <https://dramitnagpal.com/f/future-of-independent-directorship-in-india-trends-predictions>

7. Leveraging Digital Technologies for Language and Cultural Revitalization

7.1 Digital Tools for Language Revitalisation: The use of digital media technologies serves as a crucial element for the rejuvenation of Indigenous languages and oral traditions. The FirstVoices Keyboard and Mukurtu CMS combined with mobile apps, including “Ntongato” for Tanzania and “Learn Yoruba” for Nigeria, empower communities to record and teach their endangered languages (Ajani et al. 2024). Ethically designed AI-powered platforms support language translation and documentation but need careful oversight to prevent the reinforcement of cultural biases (Welocalize n.d.).

7.2 Challenges and Ethical Considerations: Digital initiatives face multiple challenges, including infrastructure instability and funding shortages, while dealing with ownership and control issues of digital content. According to Galla (2018),

effective language revitalisation depends on incorporating Indigenous teaching methods to produce digital content that adheres to cultural protocols and operates under community-led frameworks.

7.3 Case Studies in Applied Digital Preservation: The digital humanities project “Sangraksha” in India, along with the “StoryMap” initiative in Kenya, reveals how community-led digital preservation brings positive results. These initiatives use multimedia storytelling together with participatory design and local capacity-building approaches to make sure digitised content fulfils the requirements and desires of Indigenous knowledge holders. The achievements of these projects stem not just from technological advancements but from the significant partnership between Indigenous communities and researchers who place cultural authenticity before technological dominance (Dutta 2019).

When technology deployment respects Indigenous data sovereignty and follows ethical principles while being driven by community needs, it becomes a powerful tool for Indigenous language and cultural revitalisation.

8. AI, Indigenous Knowledge, and Ethical Implications

8.1 AI as a Tool for Indigenous Knowledge Preservation: The application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) provides new methods to protect and restore Indigenous knowledge through language translation systems and ecological mapping tools along with cultural documentation processes. Projects driven by artificial intelligence, like automated language recognition systems and biodiversity monitoring platforms, improve access to endangered languages and traditional ecological knowledge (Welocalize n.d.; Perera et al. 2024). To achieve their full potential, AI systems need to learn from culturally appropriate data sets while integrating Indigenous epistemologies which depend on relational contexts and community control.



Source: <https://medium.com/ai-created-strategy-reports/data-driven-open-source-ai-the-imperative-for-inclusive-definitions-and-practices-29bd30a76758>

8.2 Ethical Risks: Although artificial intelligence holds great potential, it continues to operate under biased structures and extractive practices. AI systems without Indigenous involvement face the danger of perpetuating stereotypes and misrepresenting oral traditions while ignoring knowledge-sharing protocols. The Western emphasis on efficiency and generalisability in AI-produced representations produces outputs that lack cultural context and sensitivity (Cardona-Rivera et al. 2024). The unauthorized use of Indigenous data acts as a digital colonial force which strips Indigenous sovereignty and intensifies existing social inequalities (Indigenous Data Stewardship n.d.).

8.3 The Paradox of Participation: Indigenous communities face a paradox. While AI involvement presents opportunities for visibility and keeping languages alive, joining AI systems causes additional loss of knowledge control. The paradox which Indigenous communities face requires AI designers to create systems based on Indigenous data sovereignty principles and community-led governance while ensuring cultural integrity. Indigenous scholars, along with activists, recommend utilising frameworks like the CARE Principles (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics) as guides for ethical data management (Chigwada and Ngulube 2024).

Conclusion

Digital technologies have developed a complex setting which supports Indigenous knowledge systems. While emerging technologies such as digital platforms and artificial intelligence show promise for saving endangered languages and cultural traditions; they also pose risks by enabling their exploitation and distortion. Indigenous knowledge systems require strategies to protect their cultural heritage using digital tools while defending against threats of digital colonialism.

Throughout technological development processes of the digital era, we need to prioritise Indigenous voices, knowledge frameworks and governance systems to achieve both ethical and sustainable interactions with Indigenous knowledge. Digital technology deployment for Indigenous empowerment needs to follow Indigenous data sovereignty principles together with preservation practices led by communities and AI systems that respect cultural values.

Digital preservation of Indigenous knowledge surpasses basic documentation and access by requiring fundamental respect for Indigenous peoples' rights to determine how they preserve and protect their heritage. As Smith (1999) reminds us, “Continued research and collaboration that prioritise Indigenous perspectives and rights are essential to navigate this evolving landscape and ensure that the digital age serves to empower and protect, rather than exploit, the invaluable heritage of Indigenous knowledge systems.”

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Book Reviews

Buddhism in Central Asia

Reviewed by

Mr. Somnath Pal¹ and Mr. Nirmal Bag²

Prof. Baij Nath Puri book titled on “*Buddhism in Central Asia*”, (Buddhist Tradition (First Edition: 1987), Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, ISBN: 81-208-0372-8.

Buddhism in Central Asia, as explored by Prof. B. N. Puri an eminent historian presents a comprehensive and meticulously researched account of the spread, adaptation, and transformation of Buddhism across Central Asia. This book was first published in 1987 and reprinted in subsequent years due to sustained scholarly interest; the work remains a foundational reference for scholars of Buddhist studies, Central Asian history, and Indo-Central Asian cultural exchange.



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_Central_Asia

This historical journey is characterized by the interplay of various political forces and the adaptation of Buddhism to local cultures and traditions. The spread and development of Buddhism in Central Asia can be divided into distinct periods and

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regions, each with unique characteristics and influences. The expansive territory nestled between the Tien-Shan and Kunlun mountains became a vibrant hub for their activities. It was a region marked by a fusion of diverse peoples of varied ethnicities, languages, and occupations who together formed a richly cosmopolitan and intellectually dynamic society.

Central Asia played a pivotal role in the transmission, transformation, and localization of Buddhism from India to East Asia. As a historical crossroads of trade, culture, and religion, the region served not only as a conduit but also as a crucible where Buddhist traditions evolved in dialogue with diverse peoples, languages, and beliefs. However, archaeological and exploratory efforts from the late 19th to early 20th centuries succeeded in uncovering significant remnants along the ancient Silk Route. These discoveries have allowed for a more complete understanding of Buddhism's historical presence, enriched by literary, artistic, and epigraphic materials that reveal the cultural depth of the region. Buddhist traditions in Central Asia exemplify a dynamic process of cross-cultural transmission, adaptation, and resilience, underscoring the region's integral role in shaping the broader history of Buddhism across Eurasia.

The study explores the history of Buddhism in Central Asia and the Himalayas focusing on its introduction to small communities in the region between the Tibetan plateau and the Indus-Gangetic plains, with particular emphasis on the significance of the Kashmir Valley and the Kathmandu Valley, where Indic-style Buddhism continues to thrive today. The development of Buddhism in Central Asia is categorized into two main periods: the initial introduction and establishment of Buddhism during the Kushan Empire from the 2nd to the 4th centuries and the another is flourishing of late Buddhist culture in the 7th and 8th centuries, which was characterized by interactions with other religions and the adaptation of architectural techniques to local materials and climate. The book traces the diffusion of Buddhism from India into the vast territories of Central Asia regions encompassing modern-day Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and parts of Xinjiang in China focusing on the role of trade routes particularly the Silk Road in the movement of monks, manuscripts, and material culture.

The Structured chronologically and geographically the book opens with a concise survey of the rise of Buddhism in India before examining its transmission through key

centers such as Bactria, Gandhara, Khotan, Kucha, and Sogdiana. One of the strengths of Puri's narrative is his attention to the reciprocal influences between Indian Buddhism and the local cultures and belief systems of Central Asia. The work sheds light on the syncretic tendencies of Mahayana Buddhism especially in its interaction with Zoroastrian, Hellenistic, and indigenous Central Asian elements.

A major contribution of the book lies in its discussion of the institutional development of monastic centers, the patronage extended by local rulers, and the political conditions that either enabled or hindered Buddhist activity. Prof. Puri emphasizes the cosmopolitan character of Buddhist monasticism in the region, drawing on Chinese pilgrim accounts most notably those of Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing to illustrate the vibrancy of cross-cultural learning and translation efforts.



Source: <https://digitalorientalist.com/2022/09/27/digital-resources-for-the-study-of-buddhist-art-in-central-asia-a-general-overview/>

The book's central argument, outlined in a lucid and evocative preface is that the study of Buddhism in Central Asia must be approached holistically. Rather than isolating religion from its social, political, and cultural contexts, author emphasizes its interwoven character as a product of diplomatic engagements, transregional migrations, royal patronage, and intercultural transmissions. This framing is not only historiographically significant but also anticipates many later approaches in global and transregional Buddhist studies.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The introductory chapter presents the role of Central Asian peoples and the major transmission routes, emphasizing archaeological finds and early Buddhist monuments. Prof. Puri explores how the geographical, ethnic, and cultural characteristics of Central Asia shaped the region's role as a conduit and a crucible for Buddhist transmission. Subsections such as "*Role of Central Asian Peoples*" and "*Ancient Routes*" emphasize the strategic importance of the Silk Road and the involvement of diverse nomadic and settled populations. The section on "*Buddhist Finds—Literary Texts and Monuments*" previews the archaeological and textual evidence used throughout the book, framing Central Asia as a cultural meeting point that preserved and transmitted Buddhism eastward to China and beyond.

The second chapter develops into the political and historical context of Central Asia prior to and during the spread of Buddhism. Prof. Puri discusses major kingdoms and urban centers—*Kashgar*, *Khotan*, *Kucha*, *Karasahr (Agnidesa)*, and *Turfan (Kao-chang)* highlighting their administrative structures and their patronage of Buddhism. The chapter provides a detailed narrative of the *Northern Route States* and their significant role in sustaining Buddhist monastic and intellectual life. The section on "*The Regality and Buddhism in the Northern States*" underscores how local rulers embraced and institutionalized Buddhism, contributing to its regional entrenchment.



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_Central_Asia

Third Chapter focuses on the core scholarly chapter of the book, analyzing how Buddhism was not just transmitted but reinterpreted by various Central Asian communities. It begins with a focus on *Afghanistan*, *Bactria*, and *Parthia* regions that witnessed early Buddhist influence. The examination of both *Southern* and *Northern States* reveals the doctrinal plurality including Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna traditions. Special attention is given to the legendary scholar *Kumārajīva*, whose life and translation work in China illustrate Central Asia's role as a Buddhist knowledge hub. Subsections on other savants, like *Dharmagupta* and *Buddhabhadra*, and comparative religious discussions (e.g., with *Brahmanism*, *Manichaeism*, and *Nestorian Christianity*) reveal the rich, syncretic environment. The later sections explore *Tibetan Buddhism* and the adaptation of Buddhism in *Mongolia and Tibet*, indicating the religious diffusion and transformation across time and terrain.

The fourth chapter explores the linguistic diversity that shaped the transmission and evolution of Buddhist thought in Central Asia. Prof. Puri provides an overview of languages such as *Sanskrit*, *Prakrit*, *Tokharian*, *Sogdian*, *Kuchean*, and *Tibetan*, emphasizing their role in shaping the region's textual landscape. The section on *Scripts* discusses *Kharosthi*, *Brahmi*, and local scripts that facilitated textual preservation. The examination of *Canonical Literature* and *Local Translations* reveals how Buddhist texts were adapted linguistically and doctrinally. The inclusion of *Tibetan Buddhist Literature* highlights later developments and the persistence of textual culture in the Himalayan regions.



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_Central_Asia

In fifth chapter, Prof. Puri shifts focus from intellectual and religious life to the socio-economic and cultural foundations of Buddhism in Central Asia. He examines *cultural integration*, reflecting how Buddhist norms blended with local traditions. Another parts are detail everyday aspects of life—*family structure, food, clothing, recreation, agriculture, industry, trade, and administration* offering insights into how monastic and lay communities coexisted. The inclusion of monks as landowners and participants in trade illustrates the embeddedness of Buddhism in the region’s economic systems. This chapter underscores Buddhism's adaptability and its role in shaping as well as reflecting the broader material culture.

This rich and visual sixth chapter surveys the Buddhist artistic heritage across Central Asia. Prof. Puri examines major art centers—*Miran, Khotan, Kara-shahr, Turfan, Tun-huang*, and beyond emphasizing their stylistic diversity and cross-cultural influences. Greek, Persian, Indian, and Chinese aesthetic elements are discussed, demonstrating how Buddhist iconography evolved in this multicultural zone. The art from *Afghanistan* (e.g., *Fondukistan, Begram, Hadda*) and the *Gandhāra Region* shows the early Indo-Greek impact, while *Tibetan Art* represents later syncretic expressions. The chapter connects religious ideals (e.g., Bodhisattvas and Buddhas as saviors) to visual representation, emphasizing art’s role in devotional and doctrinal transmission.



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_Central_Asia

In the concluding chapter *the Summing-Up*, Prof. Puri synthesizes the historical, religious, cultural, and artistic dimensions of Buddhism's trajectory through Central Asia. He reflects on the symbiotic relationship between local conditions and the evolution of Buddhist thought and practice. This concluding section reiterates the central part of the book: that Buddhism's introduction, growth, transformation, and eventual decline in the region were the result of complex interactions among political, cultural, economic, and religious factors across more than a millennium. Puri emphasizes that Central Asia functioned not merely as a transit zone but as a dynamic crucible where Indian, Iranian, Hellenistic, and Chinese influences merged to shape new religious and artistic expressions.

The chapter reiterates Central Asia's role not merely as a transit corridor but as a vital contributor to Buddhist heritage. The section concludes with reflections on decline owing to political upheavals and religious competition but ends on a hopeful note, recognizing the rediscovery of Buddhist manuscripts and monuments by modern archaeologists as a revival of scholarly interest and cultural memory. A particular strength of the work lies in its attention to *syncretism* and *eclecticism*. Puri explores the interactions between Buddhism and other religions - Brahmanism, Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity, and Tibetan Lamaism demonstrating the pluralistic and adaptive spirit of Central Asian religious life. His observation that Buddhism evolved to meet both metaphysical and emotional needs, with new schools emphasizing mercy and communal salvation over individual perfection, is especially insightful.

However, some limitations of the book should be noted. Since it predates many recent archaeological and philological discoveries, readers may find its evidence base in certain areas somewhat dated. Moreover, the interpretive lens shaped by a mid-20th-century Indian historiographical tradition tends to idealize the Indian origins of Buddhism at times, occasionally underplaying the agency of local and foreign actors in shaping the religion's development in Central Asia. Nonetheless, *Buddhism in Central Asia* is a monumental work of synthetic research. It is impressive not only for its breadth covering political history, religious thought, literature, art, economy, and intercultural exchange but also for its analytical coherence.

This chapter-wise analysis illustrates the depth, interdisciplinary scope, and regional specificity of Prof. Baij Nath Puri's work. *Buddhism in Central Asia* remains a

landmark study for its integration of history, philology, archaeology, art history, and religious studies in exploring a formative cultural zone of the Buddhist world.

This book is an indispensable scholarly contribution that meticulously charts the religious, cultural, and historical evolution of Buddhism across the Central Asian landscape. This work is highly recommended for historians of religion, scholars of Indo-Central Asian studies, and those interested in the Silk Road's intercultural exchanges. Its interdisciplinary approach—drawing from archaeology, art history, political history, and philology—makes it not only a valuable academic resource but also a foundational text for future research on Buddhist transmission.

In nutshell, the book remains accessible to motivated readers outside the field. It would serve as an excellent addition to university libraries, postgraduate reading lists, and research collections focused on Asian religions, cultural transmission, and Silk Road history. For scholars and students alike, *Buddhism in Central Asia* remains a benchmark study in understanding the dynamic role of Central Asia as both a transmitter and transformer of Buddhist thought and practices.

Guideline for the Contributors

The International Journal of World Ancient Traditions and Cultural Heritage (IJWATCH) is an interdisciplinary journal dedicated to studying ancient traditions and cultural heritage. It publishes articles in Hindi and English, focusing on creative usage of ancient civilizations and traditions in various fields such as culture, social development, arts, digital communities, and philosophy. The journal welcomes contributions from around the world to explore intercultural and transcultural phenomena, providing insightful commentary on evolving traditions and developing topics for religious, cultural, and social understanding.

General Instructions

1. Manuscript Formatting

- File Format: Submit manuscripts in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) format.
- Font and Spacing: Use 12-point Times New Roman font. Double-space the entire manuscript, including references, footnotes, and endnotes. Set 1-inch (2.54 cm) margins on all sides. Page Numbers: Number all pages consecutively, starting from the title page.
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Organize your manuscript using the following components:

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- An unstructured abstract of 150–250 words summarizing the study's aim, method, findings, and conclusions.
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- Number tables and figures consecutively (e.g., Table 1, Figure 1). Each table/figure must have a clear title and, if needed, a descriptive legend.
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- Label as Appendix A, Appendix B, etc., and refer to them appropriately in the text.

3. Ethical Considerations

- Ethics Approval: State whether ethics approval was obtained for studies involving human subjects.
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**Please send manuscripts and their soft copies for publication to:
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Volume No – 1(2)

2025

IN THIS ISSUE

Prof. Alok Kumar Chakrawal

The Doctrines of Human Solidarity: The Ubuntu tradition and Philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Sandeep Kavishwar

Expansion and distinct forms of Agamic traditions in the North North-Eastern Region of Bharat

Tarun Mene and S. Simon John

Shamanistic Traditions of Arunachal Pradesh, India History, Cultural Significance and Contemporary Issues

Gailė Vanagienė

Cultural and Sacred Concept of Nature in the Lithuanian Identity Expression: The Significance of the Special Relationship in the Pursuit of Preserving the Earth

Dr. Chinmayee Satpathy

Contributions of Shree Jagannath Culture and Philosophy to the Indian Knowledge System: A Critical Analysis

Pooja Deshmukh, Kinjal Fatnani, & Pina Bhatt

Insight into the four aspects of Mahashakti according to the writings of Sri Aurobindo

Prof. Ramakrushna Pradhan & Divya Jaiswal

Cultures in Contact: The Shang Traditions of China

Prof. Seema Rai & Akash Tawar

The Maori Traditions & its relevance in 21st Century

Vishwajeet & Monika Aswal

Algorithmic Erasure and Digital Sovereignty: Rethinking Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Age of AI

Somnath Pal & Nirmal Bag

Buddhism in Central Asia

