

ISSN : 0975 - 7805

**JOURNAL  
OF  
INDIAN HISTORY  
AND  
CULTURE**

**(under UGC - CARE)**

**December 2024  
Thirty-Fourth Issue**



**C.P. RAMASWAMI AIYAR  
INSTITUTE OF INDOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

(affiliated to the University of Madras)

The C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation

1 Eldams Road, Chennai 600 018, INDIA

**Editor** : Dr. G. J. Sudhakar

**Assitant Editor** : Dr. Kamala Gopalan

**Editorial Board**

Dr. Nanditha Krishna

Dr. V. Mohan

Dr. G. Balaji

Dr. V. Sandhiyalakshmi

Dr. J. Sumathi

Dr. Aarti Iyer

Dr. A. Chandrasekaran

**Published by**

**Prof. Nanditha Krishna**

C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Institute of Indological Research

The C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation

1 Eldams Road Chennai 600 018

Tel : 044-48529990 / 044-42081758

E-Mail: [cpriir@gmail.com](mailto:cpriir@gmail.com) / [cprafoundation@gmail.com](mailto:cprafoundation@gmail.com)

Website: [www.cprfoundation.org](http://www.cprfoundation.org)

**Layout Design** : T. Pichulakshmi

**Subscription**

Rs. 500/- (for 1 issue)

Rs. 990/- (for 2 issues)

## OBITUARY



**Dr. K.V. Raman (1934 - 2024)**

Former Professor and Head,  
Department of Ancient History and Archaeology,  
University of Madras  
&  
Former Superintending Archaeologist  
Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi

The passing of Prof. K.V. Raman is a great loss to the world of Indian History and Archaeology. He was very humble and unassuming, yet a font of great knowledge. He was the first historian I met when I came to Chennai in 1974 and gave me good advice when I was establishing C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Institute of Indological Research, including serving on several of our committees and on the advisory board of our Journal of Indian History and Culture. We reprinted his Early History of the Madras Region which is a seminal work. His demise is a matter of great sorrow. May his soul attain sadgati.



## CONTENTS

1. **Gendering Renunciation: Reflections on Early Buddhist Society** 11  
*Ujjwal Yadav*
2. **The Evolution of Zen Buddhism: Tracing its Journey from India to China and Japan** 28  
*Debmitra Sanyal*
3. **“The Sacred Abode of The Goddess”: A Study of the *Trisrotā Mahāpīṭha* in Koch-Kāmta Region** 42  
*Antarleena Bhattacharjee*
4. **Tracing the Bon Religion in the History of Ladakh: Continuity and Change** 54  
*Tsewang Dolkar*
5. **Are Donations Measurable? A Computational Analysis of Weights and Measures in CēRa Donative Inscriptions** 67  
*Ajith M*
6. **The Telugu Chodas of Kosala: A Curious Case of Immigration and Rule of A South Indian Family in Western Odisha** 81  
*Binod Bihari Satpathy*
7. **Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal through Inscriptions - A Historical Perspective** 101  
*Binay Barman & Mala Laha*

8.     **Formation of States and Process of  
Brahminisation on the Western Coast of India**     116  
          *Meghana Kapdi*
9.     **Deconstruction of The Intellectual Tradition of  
Medieval India: A Case Study of The Chishti Sufi  
Scholars of The Thirteenth and  
Fourteenth Centuries**     134  
          *Aneesa Iqbal Sabir*
10.    **War Weapons of The Ahoms of Medieval Assam:  
A Study in Military and Cultural Contexts**     150  
          *Anupal Saikia & Ankita Kalita*
11.    **Foreign Service System under the Ahoms**     166  
          *Suren Das*
12.    **Death and other Themes:  
Revisiting a Pre-Colonial Naga Society  
through The Myth of Meyuba**     176  
          *Taliyanger Changkiri*
13.    **A study of Select Wooden Sculptures preserved  
in The Assam State Museum, Guwahati,  
from the Perspective of Art**     192  
          *Rashmita Phukan*
14.    **Religious Beliefs in Mid-Seventeenth Century  
Mughal Bengal: A Study in the Alteration of  
Mass Faiths and the Emergence of  
Dynamic Religious Identity**     198  
          *Imon-Ul-Hossain*
15.    **Crises and Migration: Multan in the  
Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries**     215  
          *Umar Nazir*

16.	<b>Evolving Perspectives: Native Response towards the Colonial Bureaucracy in Malabar</b> <i>Souda MT</i>	234
17.	<b>Learning of <i>Terooverkadoo Mootiah</i> (<i>Firûvérkâdû Mutiah</i>) in Madras: An Exemplar for Education in the later Decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century</b> <i>Anantanarayanan Raman</i>	250
18.	<b>Role of Breklum Mission in Upliftment of Women and Children of Koraput District</b> <i>Raghumani Naik</i>	267
19.	<b>Intertwined Legacies: A Museum and An Art School in Mid-Nineteenth Century Madras</b> <i>Vaishnavi Ramanathan</i>	279
20.	<b>Awakening Peasantry and The Role of the Early Nationalist Associations in Tamil Nadu</b> <i>R. Kuppan</i>	299
21.	<b>Beyond Divergence: Vithalbhai Patel's Role in shaping Vallabhbhai Patel's idea of Municipal <i>Swaraj</i></b> <i>Aditya Sundwa &amp; Shomik Dasgupta</i>	316
22.	<b>Unearthing The Colonial Roots: Agricultural Research In Postcolonial India</b> <i>Vinod Kumar Singh</i>	337
23.	<b>Redistributing Land Equally: Land Reform Measures In Post-Independence Assam</b> <i>Anamika Saikia &amp; Bipul Chaudhury</i>	351

<b>24.</b>	<b>Aghoramūrti - A Rare Manifestation of Śiva</b> <i>S. Nithya</i>	<b>367</b>
<b>25.</b>	<b>Book Review - 1</b>	<b>375</b>
<b>26.</b>	<b>Book Review - 2</b>	<b>380</b>



## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

The latest issue of the Journal of Indian History and Culture has a rich variety of papers, which range from early Buddhist society to the intellectual traditions of Chishti Sufi scholars. From the middle ages, the articles come down to contemporary history, including the early nationalist association in Tamil Nadu. There are some interesting papers on art history over the ages. The result is a very pan-Indian and rich variety of papers.

We thank all the contributors and referees for their support. We request all our future contributors to strictly follow the guidelines in our website <https://journalcpriir.com> (for contributors) and restrict their paper to a maximum of three thousand words and to a maximum of ten illustrations per article.

I wish to thank all the members of the CPR Institute of Indological Research and the C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation for helping in bringing out this issue of the Journal.

**Professor G.J. Sudhakar**





## **GENDERING RENUNCIATION: REFLECTIONS ON EARLY BUDDHIST SOCIETY**

**Ms. Ujjwal Yadav**

Ph.D. Scholar

History Department, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad

### **Abstract**

*This paper attempts to explore the differential nature of the renunciatory experiences of men and women belonging to early Buddhist society. The research draws on the popular folklore tradition of the Jātakas supported by other textual traditions, specifically the Therīgāthā. It seeks to deploy gender as a category of analysis to explore the rituals, practices and renunciation of the ordinary lay men (upāsakas) and women (upāsikās) who did not join the Order but were important support groups that influenced and shaped the 'social' and 'non-social' worlds considerably. This paper essentially probes into diverse contexts, reasons, and trajectories through which gender-based power relations shaped the renunciatory quest of men belonging to the different socio-economic categories. Therefore, it aims to highlight the relationships of power, conflicts as also companionship in elaborating these possibilities. Additionally, it seeks to engage closely with how any decision and journey of renunciation was fraught*

*with tensions and contestations, more often posed by the immediate family members and what may be its possible implications.*

**Keywords:** *Renunciation, Gender, Jātakas, Therīgāthā, Theragāthā.*

## **Introduction**

The quest for renunciation in early Buddhist society can be contextualised against the backdrop of the intellectual churning and ‘social’ movements that culminated in the rise and consolidation of the varied heterodox sects in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. The disillusionment of the masses with the elaborate Brahmanical sacrifices and the urban milieu, based on preserving wealth facilitated an active search for alternative paths to liberation. In this context, the materialisation of the *Sangha* as a sedentary institution offered refuge to those in search of salvation. However, not everyone became a member or recruit of the Order, especially the lay disciples who continued to support the *Sangha* materially and religiously from outside. The institution of renunciation in the early historic period has been studied from various perspectives in both Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions.

Among other things, the dialectical relationship characterised by mutual dichotomy and considerable interdependence between renouncers and householders forms a significant facet of the wider discourse on renunciation. According to Romila Thapar, the varied renouncer groups from the post-Vedic period did not try to negate or alter the social order radically ‘rather they were seeking to establish a parallel society’.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of the Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions, Thapar, argues that while the latter emphasised the essentially dichotomous relationship between the householder (*gahapati*) and renouncers (*bhikkhus*), the former strived to weaken it by formulating the *āśrama* theory in a single cycle.<sup>2</sup>

So, the latter, in fact, represents a period of tension within the Brahmanical tradition, given the challenges from the organised heterodox sects, particularly Buddhism. Uma Chakravarti qualifies the category of the householder by making a distinction between the *gahapati* of Buddhist texts, involved both in productive and reproductive functions, and the *brāhmaṇa* householder, simply concerned with the latter.<sup>3</sup> Chakravarti opines that the fundamental contradiction between the *brāhmaṇa* and *śramaṇa* tradition (and particularly in early Buddhism) could be attributed to the continued “householder status” along with the constant association of the former with the “social world” despite renunciation.

This paper takes the issues and practices of renunciation beyond the narrow walls of the monastic Order to examine how renunciation for laymen (*upāsakas*) and laywomen (*upāsikās*) was influenced, designed, and regulated along the lines of gender. This exercise is an attempt to point out and open up the possibilities for analysing renunciation, particularly in reference to the lay followers by adopting gender as a category of historical analysis.

The paper begins with exploring the possible reasons for laymen and women to choose the path of renunciation, leaving settled householder lives. In this context, can it be presumed that everyone could possibly exercise their individual choices to renounce, irrespective of gender? Further, in what ways, the experience and journey of renunciation was different for men and women belonging to different socio-economic categories? And, what were the different physical and symbolic changes and its implications that marked the lives of renunciates?

Additionally, what were the different trajectories for reaching the same goal, and how did gender play an important role in it? The second part of the paper deals exclusively with the problems in the path to renunciation by reflecting closely on the conflicts, contestations, and negotiations attributed to close family members. Further, in what ways

do these contestations shape and characterise an individual's decision, journey, and fruits of renunciation, essentially stemming from differential gender and socio-economic locations in a hierarchised social milieu.

This paper is based on a critical examination of primarily the *Jātakas* supported by other Buddhist Pāli textual sources such as the *Therīgāthā* and *Theragāthā* that reflect diverse concerns and strands of renunciatory thoughts and practices. The *Jātakas* being the stories of the Buddha's former births is a vast genre and extremely varied in content and themes. The stories are diverse and internally divided on various levels, particularly in terms of their distinct but related structural parts. Therefore, this paper focuses on narratives that explicitly foreground the complexities of renunciation. This includes narratives anthologised in the *nipātas* (books) such as - *Timsanipāta* (XVI), *Cattālīsanipāta* (XVII), *Pañṇasanipāta* (XVIII), *Saṭṭhinipāta* (XIX), *Sattanipāta* (XX), *Asīnipāta* (XXI), and *Mahānipāta*. In these *nipātas*, often, the Great Renunciation (*mahābhinnikkamanam*) of the Buddha is the topic of discussion among the *bhikkhus* in stories of the present (*paccupannavattthu*). In the stories of the past (*atītavattthu*), either the *Bodhisatta* himself or a character close to the *Bodhisatta* renounces with his aid and intervention. In addition, the *Therīgāthā* and *Theragāthā* provide fascinating glimpses of the renunciatory lives of the first and former *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* who adopted an ascetic life by becoming members of the *Sangha*.

### **Renunciation: A gendered perspective**

In the Buddhist view of life, the ultimate aim of existence was to attain *nibbāna* (salvation/ liberation). According to the Buddha, this could be done by controlling and eliminating desire, which is seen as the root cause of all suffering. This is exemplified in the Buddhist doctrine of the four noble truths (*dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭṭapadā*). In the Buddhist world view of things, specifically its thrust on the notion of impermanence, renunciation, irrespective of age was viewed as the sole path to liberation. The *Jātakas* depict the journey of renunciation for men and women in diverse ways and contexts. Not surprisingly, the *Jātakas* project the quest

of *nibbāna* as the supreme cause of renunciation for men, particularly the kings. At the level of the narratives, the renunciation of men, and more specifically the rulers, occupies prime space and is explored in greater detail both in the verses (*gāthās*) and the commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*). Interestingly, in the concluding section (*samodhāna*), as in the case of the *Sāma-jātaka* (JA 540), the kings, in particular and men in general invariably attain salvation and become destined for heaven. Compared to this, the experience and overall renunciatory journey of women occupies minimal space in the narratives, even as some concession is offered to women belonging to the royal families who occasionally make it to the concluding section as in the *Mahājanaka-jātaka* (JA 539). But even as the queen is granted her next life in the Brahma world roughly on par with the king and other men, she had to first discharge her responsibilities towards her husband and son before formally beginning her own renunciation.

As we shall see later, even as some space is conceded to women, the identification of royal women in the conclusion is not free from tensions. Importantly, instead of their own renunciation, women figure more prominently in their capacity as counsellors and companions to men who decide to renounce.

For example, elite women, the queens, especially in their role as daughters and mothers, become instrumental in guiding or establishing important men of the family, mostly fathers and husbands on the ‘right’ path to renunciation. Nevertheless, these women are hardly acknowledged or identified for the same in the concluding remarks. This is particularly true for the stories that suggest a clear Buddhist outline where the king becomes a transformed person, given to alms-giving and charity.

An instance of this comes from the *Khaṇḍahāla-jātaka* (JA 542) which revolves around a cunning *brāhmaṇa* family priest, the king’s chief counsellor in temporal and spiritual matters who intended to take revenge on the king’s innocent son. For this, he advises the king to sacrifice all his sons as a sort of guarantee to heaven. But the king’s mother tries

to convince him of the futility of such sacrifices and suggests what she thinks is the 'right' path by preaching the following *gāthā* -

*'Take thou the well-proved royal road: let all the wealth in  
alms be given,  
And hurt no living thing on earth - this is the certain path  
to heaven.'*<sup>4</sup>

In the *Mahānārada-kassapa-jātaka* (JA 544), Rūjā, the King's daughter, counsels him at length, resorting to fascinating parables to suggest the 'evil of practising sin.' Rūjā discourses with the King (her father) on righteousness, drawing from her actions through a series of the previous births and finally declares the supreme Law through the following *gāthā* -

*'He who wishes  
the heavenly enjoyments, a heavenly life,  
glory, and happiness, let him avoid sins  
and follow the threefold law. Watchful and  
wise in body, word and thought, he follows  
his own highest good, be he born as a  
woman or a man'.*<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, in the conclusion, Rūjā is related to the Buddha not as a woman but as one of his closest disciples - Ānanda. What may be the possible reasons for this change in gender in the final identification of the characters in the story?<sup>6</sup>

According to Naomi Appleton, the change in sex in the final identification represents that rebirth as a woman was a result of bad karma and therefore, one must aspire to be born as a man. Interestingly, this change figures mostly in the commentary section and continues to remain rare and limited. Appleton contends that in the earlier tradition, when the *Bodhisatta* path was still not codified as exclusively a male domain, the sex of an individual was not an obstacle to the spiritual progress of both men and women who could become *arhats*.<sup>7</sup>



Appleton's recent examination of why the *Bodhisatta* is never born as a female in the *Jātakas* suggests how the later formal codification of the *Bodhisatta* path in effect excluded the *bhikkhunis* placing them in an unequal position vis a vis their male counterparts. A *Bodhisatta* could not be born as a female in the *Jātakas* primarily because of a specific focus on the maleness of the Buddha in commentaries, apart from his consistent birth as a male in his former lives. And, therefore, the *Bodhisatta* path, became an exclusively male path right from its beginning till its completion.<sup>8</sup>

The *Jātakas* highlight various categories of renunciation for men such as voluntary (for *nibbāna*), imposed (based on *kamma* either past or present), circumstantial, and those based on active meditations by the *Bodhisatta*. In effect, the narratives present multiple possibilities within which the quest for *nibbāna* appears as one, albeit significant reason for renunciation. Within the former category and mostly in the case of the rulers, reasons of age gain primacy. The *Jātakas* are replete with instances that suggest that the King decided to renounce as soon as he saw his first grey hair. In the *Nimi-jātaka* (JA 541) as the King's barber informs him of the former's grey hair, the King says -

*'Lo these grey hairs that on my head appear*

*Take of my life in passing year by year:*

*They are God's messengers, which bring to mind*

*The time I must renounce the world is near.'*<sup>9</sup>

The renunciation of young princes (*kumara*) was often a result of their banishment from the kingdom for a variety of reasons, ranging from their over generosity, suspicion of inheriting the throne by force, plotting internal disputes, etc.

For example, in the *Vessantara-jātaka* (JA 547), prince Vessantara is banished from the kingdom for his over generosity in gift giving. So, his renunciation, from the beginning, seems to be rooted in the punishment and his subsequent expulsion from the kingdom. Interestingly, even as

the banishment was ordered specifically for him, Maddī, his wife and two children accompany him throughout his journey. For Maddī, it is her duty to be with her husband in everything and she accepts that death would be better than being separated from him.

In contrast to men, the choice or decision and even the journey of renunciation for women, particularly those belonging to the elite groups appear to be dependent on their husbands (choice) instead of being entirely a personal one. The *Jātakas* restrict entry of women as wives turned ‘companions’ in the renunciatory journey of men, their former husbands. Even when some *Jātakas* offer possibility of wives renouncing with husband, the narratives continue to maintain that despite all the pleadings, emotional outbursts of grief, the queens are invariably turned back to the palace or the entire royal entourage along with the subject populace renounce together, despite the exceptions.

The narratives explicitly reject the idea of the woman accompanying or renouncing her husband and women are mostly portrayed as a bane (and not a companion) for an ascetic life.<sup>10</sup> The tension in the narratives is attributed to the bodies of women and particularly their beauty which is viewed as a site of sin, distraction, and impurity. In such cases, the utility of *individual* salvation is emphasised instead. Consider these lines from the *Mahājanaka-jātaka* (JA 539), where the King thinks - ‘Sivali [the King’s wife] keeps following me; a wife is the ascetic’s bane, and men blame me and say that even when I have left the world I cannot leave my wife.’<sup>11</sup>

As the queen keeps following her former husband, hoping that the king would return to former householder life, the King, by cutting a muñja grass says-‘See, Sivali, this stalk cannot be joined again,’ ‘Like to a muñja reed full grown, live on, O Sivali, alone’. Thereby, virtually closing any possibilities of their reunion again. Hence, ideally, the question of a queen wife renouncing with the king is rarely seen as a valid and acceptable possibility, nevertheless, exceptions such as

the *Vessantara-jātaka* and others remain significant. It appears that renunciation of married couples across different social categories does not seem to be a norm but a permissible exception in the *Jātakas* perhaps as a response to Brahminical traditional practices. Interestingly, even when a royal woman accompanies her husband, the husband's renunciation gains primacy over her own and she emerges mostly as a support instead of being an ascetic in her own right. Further, as she strives for that renunciatory status at par with men, the *Jātakas* hesitate, reluctant to acknowledge the ascetic compatriot status of these women as they continue to be addressed as wives and mothers in the narratives.

Additionally, even as ascetics were expected to be independent in their daily affairs, for women, a more or less direct continuity from their former householder lives is alluded to as they continue to delegate their domestic responsibilities, even within the *āsamma* or the hermitage. This is certainly true for queen Maddī, as also others, who accompany their husband in the wild. The narrative informs, 'daily at dawn, Maddī arises, provides water for their drinking and food to eat, brings water and tooth-brush for cleaning the mouth, sweeps out the hermitage, leaves the two children with their father, basket, spade, and hook in hand to the forest for wild roots and fruits, with which she fills her basket....'<sup>12</sup>

Thus, it seems that for women belonging to high class families and those coming from a lower social background, responsibilities towards their former husbands and children (when applicable) continued despite renunciation. This gives sense of an 'unbroken' continuity and connection with former life domestic lives as wives. On the contrary, men appear to be virtually free from their former personal and familial obligations and are depicted indulged in meditation within the hermitage while the wives toil throughout the day.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting that a visible change in the attire and physical appearance of men symbolises the initiation of their formal renunciation. For example, Dukūlaka, belonging to a hunter's family (*kula*), entering

the hermitage, puts ‘a robe of red bark and thrown a black antelope-hide over his shoulder and twisted his hair in a knot, and assumed the garb of an anchorite,’ indicating the beginning of his formal renunciation.

However, the *Theragāthā* ideally describes the hermitage as small hut, roofed and pleasant without any explicit mention of attire of the *bhikkhus*, unlike constant references to shaven head, robes, and bowl of the *bhikkhunīs* in the *Therīgāthā*.<sup>14</sup>

However, it seems for rulers specifically and men belonging to elite families generally, elaborate preparations are done to suggest the shift in the status from being a householder to turning an ascetic. For example, the *Culla Sutasoma-jātaka* (JA 525), mentions the King -

‘sent an attendant and had all the requisites for an ascetic brought to him, and had a barber to remove his hair and beard, and throwing his magnificent robe on a couch he cut off strips of dyed cloth, and putting on those yellow patches, he fastened an earthen bowl on the top of his left shoulder and with a mendicant staff....’<sup>15</sup>

In the case of at least royal women (and heirs), a possible though not explicit change in the attire is alluded. This is evident from the *Vessantara-jātaka* (JA 544), as Maddī accompanies her husband on the journey. Her mother-in-law asks, ‘*Maddī, who once Benares cloth and linen used to wear, and find kodumbara, how bark and grasses will she wear?*’<sup>16</sup>

Complementary to the idea and path of renunciation is the notion of ‘abandonment’ which seem to be closely entwined with the formal beginning of the renunciation of both men and women. For kings and young princes, the quest for renunciation was deeply rooted in the ideal of renouncing specifically any claims to throne, kingdom, and kingship. Generally, parent’s consent was sought but perhaps, it was not always obligatory.

For example, in the *Yuvanajaya-jataka* (JA 460), the son of the King Sabbadatta renounces the kingdom as he learns about the impermanence of things, while watching the morning dew drops disappear by the day in sunlight. He begs consent from his parents which is granted by the father even as his mother continues to weep and stop him.

On the contrary, for women belonging to different social categories, the notion of abandonment was deeply rooted in familial ties which meant abandoning primarily - the household, family, particularly sons and husbands. This is supported by evidence from another early Buddhist text, *Therīgāthā* ascribed to the first *bhikkhūnīs* who joined the *Sangha*. In these verses, the *bhikkhūnīs* constantly associate their salvation with liberation from the drudgery of “mortar and pestle.” Consider this oft-cited verse ascribed to *theri Muttā*-

*‘The name I am called by means freed  
and I am quite free, well-free from three crooked things,  
mortar, pestle, and husband with his own crooked thing.  
I am freed from birth and death,  
what leads to rebirth has been rooted out.’<sup>17</sup>*

Therefore, the *Jātakas* hint at the possibilities in the way renunciation was visualised and experienced by ordinary and not so ordinary men and women located outside the *Sangha* but related to it in different ways. It appears that while lay men and women sought inspiration from the Order and were generally aware of the general ‘codes’ of a renunciatory lifestyle, they obviously did not lead a community life at par with ordained *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhūnīs*. There was no restriction on the entry of laymen and women if they wished to join the Order, but perhaps efforts were made to help the former attain their renunciatory goals while still in the social world or its fringes in a way that was mutually beneficial to the *Sangha* as well. This also meant a greater degree of flexibility and constant adjustments in rituals, practices, and behaviour of the lay disciples, vis-a-vis their counterparts in the monastery.

### Problems in the Path: Of Kings, Queens, and People

It appears that the renunciation of both men and women belonging to the various social categories was fraught with several tensions since the very beginning. It is likely that the rulers were also expected to seek permission from parents to embark on their journey of renunciation. However, they were relatively free to take their own decision but were perhaps supposed to make a public declaration to the immediate family members, in particular, the wives and parents, extended royal clan, and to the city/subject-populace at large.

For instance, in the *Culla Sutasoma-jātaka* (JA 525), as the King decides to renounce, he summons eighty thousand councillors (*asūtiamaṇṇasahassāni*) headed by his general (*senāpatipamukhāni*), sixty thousand *brāhmaṇas* (*saṭṭibrāhmaṇasahassāni*) headed by chaplain (*purohitapamukhāni*) and many of his subjects and citizens and proclaims that ‘A grey hair has appeared on my head; I am an old man, and you are to know that I am become an ascetic.’<sup>18</sup>

Further, it is likely that rulers also enjoyed the liberty and authority to exercise their decision to renounce almost immediately. So, it was possible for a monarch to follow a renunciatory lifestyle within the confines of royal palace (mostly at the top-storey of the palace) instead of formally moving to a hermitage/ forest, even as that inevitably happens at a later stage. The *Mahājanaka-jātaka* (JA 539), clearly discusses how the King continued to follow an ascetic lifestyle in the palace for a period of about four months before departing for forests. The King instructs-

‘O general. From this day forth let none see my face except one servant to bring my food and another to give me water for my mouth and a toothbrush, and do you take my old chief judges and with their help govern my kingdom: I will henceforth live the life of a Buddhist priest on the top of the palace alone’.<sup>19</sup>

But since the personal decision had implications both at a personal and political level, the decision is shown to be bitterly contested, specifically by the royal clan itself. The *Jātakas*, vividly portray the reactions of the close family members and occasionally the subject populace as well, imploring the King to return.

In this particular case, the King's decision to renounce is initially contested by the counsellors, followed by his mother, father, queen consort, elder son, younger son, commander-in-chief, and finally by a merchant named Kulavaddhana. However, the King remains firm on his resolve and eventually the people of the realm along with the royal entourage join the King on his journey.

In contrast, ordinary men and women were required or expected to get consent from their close family members based on their specific gender and socio-economic locations. For example, men were to seek permission from the parents, women from their husbands, slaves from masters, and so on. I. B Horner writes that 'wives are hardly represented as announcing to their husbands, as husbands sometimes did to them, that they were about to renounce the world, and they seldom slipped surreptitiously away.'<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, the case of the lower class, caste groups is contoured with lesser conflicts and anxieties both in the case of women accompanying their husbands as well in granting permission to become ascetics as in the *Sāma-jātaka* (JA 540), which pertains to the renunciation of two individuals from the hunters' family (*nesādakule*). In contrast, the *Sāma-jātaka* (540) acquaints us with a young man belonging to a wealthy merchant family, dear to his parents.

One day from the terrace of his house, he observes a great crowd going to *Jetavana* with perfumes and garlands to hear the law. He himself goes there and after distributing the required items, hears the law and subsequently decides to join the Order. But he is told that the

‘*Tathāgatas* do not ordain anyone who has not obtained the permission of his parents: so he goes away, and lives a week without food, and having at last obtained his parents’ consent, he returns and begs for ordination.’<sup>21</sup> It appears that such contestations and active opposition of the family members over the decision of men to renounce seem to be more common specifically to the powerful ruling elites and rich merchant families due to concerns over wealth and continuity of the lineage. One of the reasons for such contestations could be the emphasis of the *Jātakas* on the notion of *patrilineal* descent. Hence, sons were considered important in maintaining the continuity of kinship relations and as inheritors of ancestral property.

The response to these contestations probably resulted in some compromises and flexibility by the monastic order, specifically in view of ordinary men considering their personal and familial circumstances. This is internalised in the possibility, wherein a son who has become an ascetic could still support his parents in old age and it is considered *permissible* in the texts. In the story mentioned above, as Sāma returns from the forests without developing any spiritual insights, he thinks, ‘If I become a householder I can support my parents.’ But the statement is qualified by the Buddha who says, ‘A son who has become an ascetic can be helpful.’ So Sāma says, ‘I will now support my parents while still remaining an ascetic without becoming a householder.’

Therefore, it was possible, at least, for men belonging to wealthy families to continue to support their parents even as they became ascetics. However, this choice does not seem to be available to women who were to choose either the settled householder life or the renunciatory path. In fact, the renunciation of women rarely appears to be contested by others, and probably women were granted permission relatively easily. Any tension around their decision to renounce seems to be inextricably related to their marital and domestic responsibilities, particularly towards husbands and sons that women were entrusted within the domestic fold.



## Conclusion

It can be concluded that a wide range of personal, social, and political factors glossed over by the concern of attaining *nibbāna* shaped and led to the quest of renunciation, more so in the case of men. The path of renunciation was ideally open to all but culminated into a very different experience for men and women governed by their socio-economic locations. It appears that it was relatively ‘easier’ for men to renounce and to ‘enjoy’ the journey and fruits of their renunciation, particularly the kings’ who invariably appear to be destined for a higher spiritual pedestal. But renunciation of kings continues to be invariably interspersed by political and personal concerns, particularly kingship and sovereignty. The decision and journey were not smooth for men belonging to different social categories and the path was fraught with contestations at so many different levels, more so for men, as sons emerge as heirs of wealth and kinship relations.

In contrast, the renunciation of women occupies very limited space in the *Jātakas*, even when they figure important as individual ascetics. Very often, they appear as guides to men in their path to renunciation. In many cases, laywomen belonging to the lower order accompanied their husbands in the renunciatory path, an option perhaps not readily available and accessible to elite royal women, despite some exceptions.

Further, very rarely, we find women enjoying the fruits of their renunciatory lives as the texts continue to remain mostly silent about women across categories in the concluding section. Importantly, for women, there is a reassertion of the previous familial relations and domestic responsibilities within the hermitage that closely imitates their earlier lives, giving a sense of continuity instead of a ‘breakaway’ from their former household status.

## References

1. Thapar, Romila, (2010). *Ancient Indian Social History; Some Interpretations*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad. p. 56.

2. Thapar, Romila, (1981). 'The householder and the renouncer' in the Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions,' *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. 15, No. 1-2. New Delhi, p.296.
3. Chakravarti, Uma, (2006). *Everyday Lives Everyday Histories; Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of 'Ancient' India*, Tulika, New Delhi. p. 194.
4. Cowell, E.B & R.A. Neil, (eds.), (1895-1907). *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, Vols. I-VI, Cambridge University Press, Oxford, p. 73.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 258
6. A similar evidence comes from the *Mahānārada-kassapa-jātaka* (JA 544).
7. Appleton, Naomi, (2011). 'In the Footsteps of the Buddha; Women and the Bodhisatta Path in Theravāda Buddhism', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol.27 No.2, USA. pp. 33-51. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudrel.27.1.33> Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2023.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.
9. Cowell, E.B & R.A. Neil, (eds.), (1895-1907), *Op. cit.* p. 53.
10. Similar emotions about women are echoed in the *Theragāthā*. Consider the verse attributed to Aatuma, 'Just as a young bamboo is hard to trample down when its tip has grown, and it has developed hard wood, so I find it hard to go forth because of the wife who has been brought home. Give me permission. Now I have gone forth.' Norman, K. R, (1995). *The Elders' Verses Theragāthā*, Pali Text Society, Oxford. p. 10.
11. Cowell, E.B & R.A. Neil, (eds.), (1895-1907), *Op., Cit.*, p. 32.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 271.
13. It shall also be noted that apart from continuity in gender relations, the power hierarchies within a family also continued and in some cases extended in the hermitage. For example, in the story of the past of the Sona-nanda-jataka (JA 532), an entire brāhmaṇa family consisting of mother, father, and two sons become ascetics. However, in the hermitage the factors of age and seniority decide

- the delegation of daily activities. See, Cowell, E.B & R.A. Neil, (eds.), (1895-1907), *Op. cit.*, p. 166.
14. Norman, K. R, (1995). *Op. cit.*, p. 98.
  15. Cowell, E.B & R.A. Neil, (eds.), (1895-1907). *Op. cit.*, p. 98.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
  17. The Pāli version reads -  
'*sumuttā sādhumuttamhi tīhi khujjehi muttiyā*  
*Udukkhalena musalena patinaa khujjakena ca*  
*Muttamhi jaatimarannā bhavenetti samuuhatā ti.*' See, Hallisey, Charles, (2015). *Therigatha: Poems of the First Buddhist Women*, Murthy Classical Library of India, Harvard University Press, London. pp. 10-11.
  18. Fausboll, Viggo, (1877-1897). *The Jātaka: together with its commentary, being tales of the anterior births of Gotama Buddha*, Vols. I-V, Trubner and Co., London. p. 178.
  19. Cowell, E.B & R.A. Neil, (eds.), (1895-1907). *Op. cit.*, p. 30.
  20. Horner, I. B, (2005). *Women Under Primitive Buddhism: laywomen and almswomen*, Cosmos Publications, New Delhi. p. 150.
  21. Cowell, E.B & R.A. Neil, (eds.), (1895-1907). *Op. cit.*, p. 38.



## THE EVOLUTION OF ZEN BUDDHISM: TRACING ITS JOURNEY FROM INDIA TO CHINA AND JAPAN

**Ms. Debmitra Sanyal**

Assistant Professor

PIIT College, Greater Noida affiliated with CCS University

### Abstract

*Zen Buddhism, a distinct branch of Mahayana Buddhism, emphasizes the practice of meditation and the direct experience of enlightenment. Originating in India, Zen's philosophical underpinnings were significantly shaped by the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. However, it was not until its transmission to China, where it became known as Chan Buddhism, that the practice began to crystallize into the form recognized today.*

*This paper explores the evolution of Zen Buddhism, tracing its journey from its nascent stages in India, through its development in China, and its eventual establishment in Japan, where it acquired its Zen nomenclature. The paper delves into Zen's integration with Chinese Daoist principles, which facilitated the emergence of a unique spiritual practice emphasizing meditation, intuition, and*

*the pursuit of sudden enlightenment. This Sinification of Buddhism led to the development of distinctive schools and practices, significantly influencing Chinese culture, arts, and society. The subsequent transmission of Chan to Japan resulted in the formation of Japanese Zen, which further diversified into various schools, most notably the Soto and Rinzai. Japanese Zen significantly impacted local customs, arts, and the samurai ethos, embedding itself deeply within the fabric of Japanese society. This comparative analysis highlights the philosophical continuities and cultural adaptations Zen Buddhism underwent across its journey, illustrating the religion's remarkable capacity for transformation and assimilation into diverse cultural contexts. By examining the evolution of Zen Buddhism across Asia, this paper sheds light on the complex interplay between religious philosophy, cultural identity, and historical context, offering insights into Zen's enduring appeal and relevance in contemporary society.*

**Keywords:** Zen, Zendo, Zafu, Kokyo, Koan.

## **Introduction**

Buddhism, one of the world's major religious traditions, originated in India around the 5th century BCE with the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha. Emphasizing the cessation of suffering and the path to enlightenment, Buddhism rapidly spread across Asia, evolving and diversifying into various schools and traditions. Among these, Zen Buddhism emerged as a distinctive branch that prioritizes meditation (*zazen*), intuition, and direct experiences of enlightenment over the study of scriptures and doctrinal learning.

Zen Buddhism's genesis can be traced back to the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism, which emphasizes the bodhisattva path - a vow to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Zen, however,

places a unique emphasis on the practice of meditation as the primary path to enlightenment, distinguishing itself through its minimalist approach and focus on the present moment. This approach to Buddhism was further developed and refined as it spread from India to China, where it became known as Chan Buddhism, and subsequently to Japan, adopting the name Zen Buddhism.

The evolution of Zen Buddhism from its Indian roots through its development in China and flourishing in Japan represents a remarkable journey of cultural and religious synthesis. Each transition not only adapted Zen to its new cultural context but also enriched it, leading to the emergence of distinct practices, teachings, and schools of thought. This paper seeks to explore this evolution, examining how Zen Buddhism has maintained its core emphasis on meditation and direct experience while simultaneously integrating with and being shaped by the diverse cultures it encountered. The research question guiding this inquiry is: How has Zen Buddhism evolved from its origins in India to its current practices in China (Chan Buddhism) and Japan (Zen Buddhism)?

## Historical Background

Buddhism's genesis in India around the 5th century BCE marks a pivotal moment in religious history, initiated by Siddhartha Gautama, later known as the Buddha, or "the awakened one." His teachings, centred around the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, provided a framework for overcoming suffering through moral conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom. The essence of Buddha's doctrine emphasized the impermanence of all things, the concept of no-self (*anatta*), and the possibility of *nirvana* - a state of liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth (*samsara*). As Buddhism spread across India, it diversified into various schools. A significant development was the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism a few centuries after the Buddha's passing. Mahayana, or the "Great Vehicle," introduced the ideal of the bodhisattva, a being who seeks enlightenment both for themselves and for the benefit of all sentient beings.

This form of Buddhism posited that enlightenment was accessible not only to monks and nuns but to all individuals, regardless of their station in life. Mahayana scriptures, such as the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Heart Sutra*, expanded the philosophical depth of Buddhist teachings, emphasizing emptiness (*sunyata*) and compassion (*karuna*). Within the rich tapestry of Mahayana Buddhism, Zen Buddhism emerged as a distinctive path focused on meditation and direct experience. The roots of Zen are often attributed to the legendary figure Bodhidharma, an Indian monk who travelled to China in the 5th or 6th century CE.

Bodhidharma is traditionally credited with emphasizing meditation over the ritualistic worship and scholastic study of scriptures, laying the foundational principles of Zen (Chan in Chinese). He purportedly taught that enlightenment was a sudden, direct insight into one's true nature, attainable through meditation and mindfulness in everyday activities. Bodhidharma's teachings found fertile ground in China, resonating with Daoist philosophies of naturalness and simplicity.

Over time, Chan Buddhism developed distinctive characteristics, notably the practice of *zazen* (sitting meditation), *koan* study (contemplative riddles designed to provoke enlightenment), and an emphasis on direct transmission of insight beyond words and scriptures. Chan spread throughout China, giving rise to various schools, each with its own interpretation of Bodhidharma's teachings<sup>1</sup>. The most influential of these were the Linji (Rinzai in Japanese) and Caodong (Soto in Japanese) schools, which emphasized *koan* practice and *shikantaza* (just sitting) meditation, respectively.

The establishment of Chan Buddhism marked a significant evolution in Buddhist thought and practice, characterized by an experiential approach to enlightenment that contrasted with the doctrinal emphasis of earlier forms of Buddhism. This transition reflected a broader trend within Mahayana Buddhism toward more accessible and practical methods of spiritual cultivation, paving the way for Zen's eventual

spread to Japan and beyond. Bodhidharma's legacy, though wrapped in myth and legend, underscores a pivotal moment in the development of Zen Buddhism - a moment when the introspective practice of meditation became paramount, setting the stage for Zen's unique contribution to the global religious landscape<sup>2</sup>.

### **Development in China**

The development of Zen Buddhism in China, where it became known as Chan Buddhism, represents a pivotal phase in its evolution, marked by significant integration with indigenous Chinese Daoist principles. This synthesis resulted in the creation of a unique spiritual discipline that emphasized meditation, spontaneity, and the importance of naturalness in the pursuit of enlightenment, distinguishing Chan from its Indian Zen predecessors.

### **Integration with Daoist Principles**

Chan Buddhism's arrival in China saw it encountering an established cultural and philosophical landscape deeply influenced by Daoism and Confucianism. Daoism, with its emphasis on harmony with the Tao (the fundamental nature of the universe), spontaneity, and simplicity, resonated with the meditative practices and philosophical outlook of Chan. Chan masters adeptly incorporated Daoist concepts of naturalness and non-action (*wu-wei*) into their teachings, emphasizing meditation as a means of returning to the natural state of mind, free from conceptual attachments. This blending with Daoist principles facilitated Chan's acceptance in Chinese society, as it echoed familiar themes and complemented existing spiritual practices<sup>3</sup>.

### **The Five Houses of Chan**

As Chan Buddhism matured in China, it diversified into several major schools or "houses," each with its distinct approach to teaching and practice. The Five Houses of Chan-Linji (Rinzai in Japanese), Caodong (Soto in Japanese), Yunmen, Fayan, and Guiyang - developed during the Tang and Song dynasties, reflecting the richness



and diversity of Chan thought and practice. Among these, the Linji and Caodong schools became particularly influential, with Linji emphasizing the use of *koans* (puzzling questions or statements) and sudden enlightenment, while Caodong favoured silent illumination or just sitting in meditation.

### **Influential Figures: Huineng**

A seminal figure in the development of Chan Buddhism is Huineng (638-713), the Sixth Patriarch of Chan, whose teachings emphasized the sudden realization of one's inherent Buddha-nature. Huineng's Platform Sutra articulates core Chan principles, advocating for a direct, experiential approach to enlightenment that transcends the ritualistic study of texts. His doctrine of "no-thought" (*wunian*) and the notion that enlightenment is immediately accessible to all became central to Chan's philosophical underpinnings, influencing subsequent generations of Chan practitioners<sup>4</sup>.

### **Chan's Role in Chinese Society, Arts, and Culture**

Chan Buddhism profoundly impacted Chinese society, arts, and culture. Its emphasis on simplicity, spontaneity, and naturalness found expression in poetry, painting, calligraphy, and landscape gardening - arts that became mediums for Chan monks and lay practitioners to convey their spiritual insights and aesthetic sensibilities. The literati painters, often Chan monks themselves, developed a style of painting that used swift, spontaneous brush strokes intended to capture the essence or spirit of their subject, embodying Chan's minimalist aesthetic and philosophical principles.

Chan's influence extended beyond the arts to imbue everyday life and culture with its values and practices. The tea ceremony, for instance, became a meditative practice reflecting Chan's emphasis on mindfulness and the beauty of simplicity. In these and other ways, Chan Buddhism contributed to shaping a distinctly Chinese approach to spirituality, aesthetics, and the cultivation of the self.

The development of Chan Buddhism in China represents a dynamic period of cultural synthesis and innovation. By integrating with Daoist principles and adapting to Chinese cultural norms, Chan Buddhism carved a unique path that deeply influenced Chinese spirituality, arts, and society. The establishment of the Five Houses of Chan and the teachings of figures like Huineng facilitated the diversification and enrichment of Chan, establishing it as a major force in the spiritual and cultural landscape of China.

### **Transmission to Japan & Evolution of Zen**

The transmission of Chan Buddhism from China to Japan, where it became known as Zen Buddhism, marks a significant chapter in the religious and cultural history of Japan. This transition not only introduced new spiritual practices to Japan but also profoundly influenced Japanese aesthetics, ethics, and cultural practices. The establishment of the Soto and Rinzai schools represented the formalization of Zen in Japan, each bringing distinct practices and philosophies that would deeply embed Zen into the fabric of Japanese society.

### **Introduction of Chan to Japan and Transformation into Zen**

Chan Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the 12th century, primarily through the efforts of two monks: Eisai and Dogen, who would later found the Rinzai and Soto schools, respectively. Eisai, after studying in China, returned to Japan and established the Rinzai school, emphasizing the use of koans and the importance of *kensho* (seeing one's true nature) as a path to enlightenment. Dogen, on the other hand, introduced a practice focused on *zazen* (sitting meditation) as the sole means to attain enlightenment, forming the basis of the Soto school. These schools adapted the teachings of Chan to the Japanese context, laying the groundwork for the unique evolution of Zen in Japan<sup>5</sup>.

### **Adaptation within Japanese Culture**

Zen Buddhism was not merely a set of religious practices; it became a way of life that influenced various aspects of Japanese culture. In the arts, Zen inspired a minimalist aesthetic that valued simplicity,

asymmetry, and a profound appreciation for the beauty of imperfection, known as *wabi-sabi*. This aesthetic can be seen in traditional Japanese arts such as ink painting (*sumi-e*), calligraphy (*shodo*), and garden design, where the Zen principle of expressing the essence of the subject with minimal strokes or elements was emphasized. The tea ceremony, or *chanoyu*, is another cultural practice deeply influenced by Zen. More than a social event, the tea ceremony became a form of meditation in motion, reflecting Zen values of mindfulness, purity, and harmony. The ritual of preparing and serving tea in a highly stylized manner encouraged participants to focus on the present moment, fostering a sense of tranquillity and communion with others<sup>6</sup>. Zen also left its mark on the samurai class, influencing the development of *bushido*, the way of the warrior. The samurai adopted Zen practices to cultivate discipline, focus, and a state of mind unaffected by fear or distraction. This mental training was considered essential for mastering martial arts and fulfilling one's duty with integrity and courage.

### **Influence on Japanese Aesthetics and Ethics**

Zen philosophy profoundly influenced Japanese aesthetics and ethics, promoting an appreciation for the transient beauty of nature and the impermanence of life. This perspective is encapsulated in the concept of 'mono no aware', the poignant awareness of the fleeting nature of things, which became a central theme in Japanese literature and art.

Furthermore, Zen's emphasis on direct experience and the cultivation of insight led to an ethic that valued authenticity, self-discipline, and a compassionate engagement with the world. These values permeated Japanese culture, shaping social norms and individual behaviour.

The transmission of Chan Buddhism to Japan and its evolution into Zen Buddhism significantly impacted Japanese society. The founding of the Soto and Rinzai schools introduced practices and philosophies that deeply resonated with Japanese sensibilities, leading to the widespread

adoption of Zen principles across various cultural domains. The integration of Zen into Japanese arts, the tea ceremony, samurai training, and ethical norms not only enriched Japanese culture but also offered a distinctive lens through which to view the world, highlighting the enduring influence of Zen on Japanese aesthetics and way of life<sup>7</sup>.

### Comparative Analysis

Zen Buddhism's journey from India, through China, and into Japan is a narrative of both continuity and divergence, illustrating how cultural, historical, and geographical contexts shape religious practices and philosophies. This comparative analysis highlights the evolution of Zen Buddhism across these regions, focusing on meditation techniques, koan practice, and the concept of sudden enlightenment.

### Meditation Techniques

In India, the practice of *dhyana* (meditation) was central to Buddhism, emphasizing mindfulness and concentration to achieve insight into the nature of existence. As Zen Buddhism emerged, it maintained this focus on meditation but adapted its techniques to emphasize *zazen*, or seated meditation, as the primary path to enlightenment.

In China, where Zen became known as Chan, meditation practices were influenced by Daoist traditions, emphasizing naturalness and spontaneity. The Chinese approach to meditation often highlighted the importance of “no-mind,” a state of awareness without attachment to thoughts or sensations. The integration of Daoist principles led to a distinctive Chan practice that valued simplicity and direct experience.

The transmission of Chan to Japan saw further evolution in Zen meditation practices. The Japanese Zen schools, particularly the Soto school founded by Dogen, emphasized *shikantaza*, or “just sitting,” a form of meditation without any specific focus other than the act of sitting itself. This contrasted with the Rinzai school's use of *koans* during meditation as a tool to transcend rational thought and achieve sudden insight<sup>8</sup>.

### **Koan Practice**

*Koan* practice, involving the contemplation of paradoxical statements or questions, is a unique feature of Zen Buddhism, particularly in the Rinzai school. While not prevalent in Indian Buddhism, *koan* practice in China and Japan became a central method for teaching and achieving breakthroughs in understanding. In China, *koans* were used to challenge students' conventional thinking and provoke enlightenment. This practice was further developed in Japan, where the systematic use of *koans* and the emphasis on *kensho* (seeing one's true nature) became hallmarks of Rinzai Zen training.

### **Sudden Enlightenment**

The concept of sudden enlightenment, the idea that awakening can occur instantaneously, is another area of both continuity and divergence. Originating from Indian Mahayana Buddhism's emphasis on the potential for immediate awakening, this concept was embraced and expanded in Chan Buddhism, particularly by the teachings of Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch. In Japan, the Rinzai school continued to stress sudden enlightenment through *koan* practice, while the Soto school, despite its different approach to meditation, also acknowledged the inherent Buddha-nature accessible at any moment.

Zen Buddhism's evolution from India to China and Japan showcases a rich tapestry of philosophical continuities and cultural adaptations. While the core emphasis on meditation and enlightenment remains constant, the methods and expressions of these principles have been shaped by the unique cultural landscapes of each region, illustrating the dynamic and adaptable nature of Zen Buddhism<sup>9</sup>.

### **Contemporary Zen & Global Influences**

The contemporary practice of Zen Buddhism, with its roots in ancient traditions, has found a vibrant and evolving presence on the global stage, especially in the West. Its spread beyond Asian borders is a testament to its universal appeal and adaptability, addressing the spiritual

and existential needs of people across diverse cultural landscapes. This section explores the modern practice of Zen globally, its relevance in contemporary society, its contribution to mindfulness practices, and its role in interfaith dialogue.

### **Global Spread and Practice**

The introduction of Zen to the Western world in the 20th century, notably through figures like D.T. Suzuki, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Shunryu Suzuki, marked a significant shift in its global presence. These pioneers of Zen in the West adapted its teachings to suit the Western context, emphasizing direct experience, meditation practice, and the application of Zen principles to everyday life. Today, Zen centres, meditation groups, and monastic communities can be found across North America, Europe, and beyond, offering teachings and practice opportunities to an ever-growing audience seeking spiritual depth and mindfulness in a fast-paced, secular world.

### **Addressing Modern Existential Challenges**

Zen Buddhism, with its focus on the present moment, mindfulness, and the intrinsic emptiness of phenomena, offers profound insights into modern existential challenges. In a time marked by rapid technological change, environmental crises, and societal upheaval, Zen teachings provide a pathway to inner peace, resilience, and a deeper connection to the world. The Zen approach to life's suffering and impermanence encourages a stance of acceptance, compassion, and engagement, offering solace and clarity to those grappling with the complexities of contemporary existence.

### **Influence on Mindfulness Practices**

Zen Buddhism has significantly influenced the development of mindfulness practices in the West. The concept of mindfulness, central to Zen meditation, has been embraced by psychology, healthcare, and personal development fields as an effective tool for reducing stress, enhancing emotional well-being, and improving overall quality of life.

This secular adoption and adaptation of Zen mindfulness techniques underscore the practical relevance of Zen teachings in promoting mental and emotional health in today's world.

### **Interfaith Dialogue**

Zen Buddhism's openness and emphasis on direct experience make it a fertile ground for interfaith dialogue and exploration. Zen practitioners and leaders have engaged in conversations with representatives of other religious traditions, exploring common grounds such as the quest for spiritual understanding, ethical living, and the pursuit of peace. Through these dialogues, Zen contributes to a broader interreligious movement aimed at fostering mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among the world's faith traditions<sup>10</sup>. The contemporary practice of Zen Buddhism globally not only sustains its traditional roots but also innovatively addresses the challenges and opportunities of the modern world. Its teachings and practices, embodying simplicity, mindfulness, and compassion, resonate with people across cultural and religious boundaries, illustrating Zen's enduring relevance and transformative potential in addressing the existential questions of our time.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has traced the remarkable journey of Zen Buddhism from its origins in India, through its formative years in China, to its full flourishing in Japan, and its contemporary global spread. Zen's evolution is characterized by its adaptability and the universal appeal of its core practices, especially meditation, and its emphasis on direct experience and insight. The transition from India's focus on mindfulness and concentration to China's integration with Daoist principles, and finally to Japan's development of unique schools like Soto and Rinzai, illustrates Zen's remarkable capacity to resonate across diverse cultural landscapes.

The analysis highlighted how Zen Buddhism, while maintaining its essential teachings, adapted to the cultural contexts of China and Japan, influencing and being influenced by local traditions, arts, and

philosophies. This mutual enrichment has not only sustained Zen's vitality through centuries but also enhanced its appeal beyond its original geographic and cultural boundaries. In contemporary times, Zen's emphasis on mindfulness and presence has found resonance in a global audience grappling with the challenges of modernity and existential concerns. Its practices offer solace and clarity in an age marked by distraction and disconnection, illustrating Zen's enduring relevance.

Zen Buddhism's journey into the global arena, especially its influence on mindfulness practices and interfaith dialogue, underscores its role as a bridge between traditions and a source of universal wisdom. The adaptability and enduring appeal of Zen across different cultures and epochs highlight its potential to contribute meaningfully to contemporary social movements and the dialogue between science and spirituality. Future research could further explore Zen's contributions to addressing societal challenges, its role in promoting mental health and well-being in the context of modern psychology, and its intersection with scientific understanding of consciousness and the human mind. Such inquiries could illuminate the ways in which this ancient tradition continues to enrich our modern world, demonstrating the timeless relevance of its insights and practices.

## References

1. Dumoulin, H., (2005). *Zen Buddhism: A History, India and China*, World Wisdom, Vol. 1, Bloomington. pp. 27-40, 63-90.
2. Bielefeldt, C., (1988). *Dogen's Manuals of Zen Meditation*, University of California Press, London. pp. 15-55.
3. Ferguson, A., (2011). *Zen's Chinese Heritage: The Masters and Their Teachings*, Wisdom Publications, Boston. pp. 11-20, 43-45, 73-79.
4. Hu Shih (1953). *Ch'an [Zen] Buddhism in China: Its History and Method. Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 3-24.
5. Heine, S., & Wright, D. S., (eds.), (2000). *The Koan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, New York. pp. 3-14.



6. McRae, J. R., (2003). *Seeing Through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*, University of California Press, London. pp. 119-154.
7. Sharf, R.H., & Sharf, E.H., (eds.), (1995). *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, Stanford University Press, California. pp. 49-113.
8. Suzuki, D. T., (1994). *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, Grove Press, New York. pp. 99-117.
9. Watts, A. W., (1957). *The Way of Zen*, Vintage Books, New York. pp. 47-78.
10. Yampolsky, P. B., (1967). *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, Columbia University Press, New York. pp. 41-45, 72-73.



## **“THE SACRED ABODE OF THE GODDESS”: A STUDY OF THE *TRISROTĀ* *MAHĀPĪṬHA* IN KOCH-KĀMTA REGION**

**Ms. Antarleena Bhattacharjee**

Research Scholar

Department of History, University of North Bengal  
Darjeeling, West Bengal.

### **Abstract**

*The concept of ‘pīṭha’ is exclusively associated with the Śakti cult and Śākta theology. In Hindu religious tradition ‘fifty-one’ Śakti pīṭhas is an axiomatic notion. The number of the pīṭhas ranged from 4 to 51 and further developed to 108 in number, including several ‘upa pīṭhas’ through a well-constructed Śākta theology which is quite interesting to study.*

*If we take into consideration, different canonical texts, regarding the list of Śakti pīṭhas, we can see that the divine mother, with her cosmological qualities expands herself even beyond the country. We can find four Śakti Pithas in different countries other than India. The Trisrotā Mahāpīṭha is presently located at the Sātkura village of Sālbari mouja which comes under the Jalpaiguri district of present West Bengal. As per the legend, the ‘Vāma-Pada’ of the Sati had fallen here. Through this article, a modest attempt has been made to analyze the Trisrotā Mahāpīṭha,*

*one of the celebrated Śakti Pithas of the Koch-Kāmta region, along with a detailed discussion of the legend of Pīṭha-Sihana.*

**Keywords:** *Śakti, Trisrotā, Mahāpīṭha, Upapīṭha, Koch-Kāmta.*

### Introduction

The conception of the *Śakti* cult and the *Sākta* theology is a fascinating subject of India's religious tradition. Veneration to the cult of the mother goddess was deeply rooted in Indian civilization. Since time immemorial, when early men started settling in an agricultural society, the cult of the mother goddess has been associated with the cult of fertility. *Śakti* cult is considered one of the best celebrated *smārtapanchāposana* cults.<sup>1</sup> Those Hindus who worshipped the female principle as their supreme deity are called *Śāktas*. The word *Śakti* primarily denotes 'energy' or 'power'.<sup>2</sup> The great Goddess is known in India as '*Devī*', and has many guises. She is '*Mā*', the gentle and approachable mother; the mother of the Universe. She assumes cosmic proportions, destroying evil and addresses the creation and dissolution of the world. The early Buddhist text '*Niddesa*' (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E.), surprisingly remained silent regarding the worship of the *Śakti* or the female principle but here, we find a clear mention of the other four sects of the *smārtapanchāposana* cult.<sup>3</sup>

Although with this information, the antiquity of the *Śakti* worship is inadmissible, many scholars put forward the argument, based on archaeological remains that a concept of the female cult prevailed amongst the Indus Valley people. An oblong terracotta seal from Harappa with impressions on both sides shows on the right side of its obverse face, a nude female figurine, shown upside down with legs wide apart and a plant issuing from her womb. Marshall compares this scene with one from a terracotta relief of the early Gupta period from Bhita, where the Goddess is shown with her leg in the same position, with a lotus issuing from her neck instead of her womb.<sup>4</sup>

J.N Banerjea is of opinion that this particular aspect of the Goddess may represent the concept of Devi *Śākambharī* described in the *Devīmāhātmya* chapter of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*.<sup>5</sup> The Early Vedic literature approaches a way, subservient locus to the female deities than the male one. Thereafter, they were more glorified as consorts of their respective Gods and embodiments of the ‘strength or potency’ of the inactive and transcendent gods. Even the most significant female deities of the Vedic literature like *Usas*, *Aditi*, *Prithvi*, *Ratri*, *Ila*, *Vac*, and *Saraswati* hold an inferior position. It is for the first time in the *Vāg Āmbhrni Sūkta* or *Devi- Sūkta* of the *Ṛg Veda*, that the conception of the *Śakti* is exposed in her pristine form; that the Divine Energy is inexorable in everything.<sup>6</sup>

In course of time, the ancient cult of the Universal Mother metamorphosed into the full-fledged *Śakti* cult and incorporated myriad Devi concepts. But it is really in the Puranic literature, particularly, in the *Devīmāhātmya* chapter of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* that the cult of the Sakti truly emerges, revealing different iconographic representations often satisfactorily confirmed by extant archaeological specimens.<sup>7</sup>

### **Myth and History behind the *Sati Pīṭhas*:**

The term ‘*pīṭha*’ generally denotes the sacred altar of the goddess.<sup>8</sup> In the Hindu religious tradition, the concept of 51 *Sati pīṭhas* is very well known. The mythological legend behind the creation of the *Sati pīṭhas* can be traced back to the *Ṛg Veda*, though the legend assumed its full-fledged version probably in the late-medieval period.<sup>9</sup> The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Tāṇḍyamahā Brāhmaṇa* narrate a story of Prajāpati who is himself recognized as the *Yajña* or sacrifice.

According to the story, the Gods were repelled by Prajāpati, as he was committed to inciting his daughter *Usas* and requested *Rudra* to punish him by piercing him with his arrow. This part of the story was gradually modified in the later period. During the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, the destruction of the sacrifice of *Dakṣa Prajāpati* by god *Śiva* was

developed.<sup>10</sup> The earliest form of the modified version occurred in the *Mahābhārata* and *Matsya Purāṇa*, *Padma Purāṇa*, *Kurma Purāṇa* and *Brahmanda Purāṇa* also containing a slightly modified versions of the same legend. According to the narration, once upon a time, Daksha Prajāpati performed a great *Yajña* or sacrificial ceremony where he called upon all the supreme deities but deliberately ignored his daughter *Sati* and son-in-law *Śiva*. But hearing the news of the event, *Sati* made up her mind to attend uninvited, despite her husband's constant refusal. *Sati* had to meet profuse reproach regarding her husband when she came to her father's house. Out of immense grief, *Sati* terminates her life by entering the sacrificial fire.

On hearing the news of *Sati*'s death, *Shiva* became furious and appeared at the scene of the sacrifice with his attendants. The *Yajña* of the Daksha was destroyed.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Lord Vishnu dismantled *Sati*'s body by throwing his discus. At the places all over the world, where the fragments of *Sati*'s corpse fell, emerged a *Śakti Pīṭha*. *Devi* is believed to live there in her very active form, with *Bhairava*, a form of her husband, *Śiva*.<sup>12</sup> The insemination of the notion of '*Pīṭha-Sthana*' can be considered a paradigm shift regarding the Śakta theology, though the number of the *Śakti pīṭhas* varied in different canonical texts.

### **A number of the *Pīṭhas***

The number of the sacred centers of the Goddess varied in different canonical texts. Though the popularly accepted number of the *Pīṭha* is 51, some of the texts enlisted 108 *Pīṭhas*. As for the *Maha Sakti pīṭhas*, there is a detailed list of the *Upapīṭhas* i.e. the *Sakti pīṭhas* which are relatively less important.

In the *Vanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, which is a composition prior to 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, one sees the earliest reference to the three holy *pīṭhas* namely, *Yoni Kuṇḍa* and *Stana Kuṇḍa* (the text *Mahābhārata* mentioned two *Yoni Kundas* and one *Stanakunda*). The former two *Kundas* were located at *Bhimāsthāna* near the *Pañchananda*, Punjab region and on the mountain peak known as *Udyatparvata*.

And the *Stanakunda* is located on the mountain peak known as *Gaurīśikhara*) associated with the limbs of the great mother Goddess.<sup>13</sup> Chinese pilgrim Hieun-Tsang who visited the country during the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE has mentioned seven *Śakti pīṭhas* in the country<sup>14</sup> though for a long period, the notion of the four sacred *Śakti pīṭhas* was prevalent. The *Hevajra Tantra*, a Buddhist canonical text composed by Padmavajra before 693 CE mentions four sacred *pīṭhas* namely, Jālandhara, Odiyāna, Pūrṇagiri and Kāmarupā. *Kalikā Purāṇa*, an important *Śakta* text also comprised exactly the same sacred centers as mentioned in the *Hevajra Tantra*.

However, it is interesting to note that the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Kalikā Purāṇa* contained a list of seven sacred *pīṭhas* of the country. *Sādhanāmālā*, another Buddhist work also speaks of four *pīṭhas* along with Uddiyāna, Pūrṇagiri, and Kāmarupā, the text added Śrihatta as another *Śakti Pīṭha*.<sup>15</sup> Some of the other Tantra texts hold a slightly different view regarding the number of the *Śakti pīṭhas*. The *Jñanarnavatantra* lists eight important *pīṭhas*, whereas *Rudrayamalatantra* mentions ten sacred *pīṭhas*. In the text, *Kularnavatantra*, we can find a list of 18 *Śakti Pīṭhas*. The *Kubjikatantra*, an important text which was discovered by Haraprasad Sastri, lists 42 sacred *Śakti Pīṭhas*.<sup>16</sup> It is in the text *Pīṭhanirṇaya*, which was composed probably, in the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century, that a list of 51 *Śakti Pīṭhas* is mentioned and this list is counted as the most recognized list regarding the number of *Pīṭhas*.<sup>17</sup>

### **An Introduction to the region of Koch-Kāmta**

The area that was taken into consideration for the present study is the Koch-Kāmta region. The province was identified with different nomenclatures in different historical periods. The territory was named Prāgjyotiṣa in the most ancient times and Kāmarupā in medieval times.<sup>18</sup> In the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*, the territory is referred to as Prāgjyotiṣa. In epigraphic records, the term 'Kāmarupā' was first mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>19</sup> Medieval texts like *Āin-I-Ākbari* and *Bāhārīstan-I-Ghāibi*

mentioned that two different kingdoms, namely, Kāmta and Kāmarupā together formed the Koch country.<sup>20</sup> The term ‘Kāmarupā’ is first made use of in some of the *Purāṇas* and *Tantras*, which are admittedly of a later date than the great epics. Geographically, the Koch-Kāmta region is situated in the western part of the Kāmarupā.

According to the *Kalikā Purāṇa* and the *Yogini Tantra*, Kāmarupā is divided into four sacred divisions namely, Kāma-pīṭha, Ratna-pīṭha, Subarna-pīṭha and the Soumara-pīṭha. The Koch-Kāmta region fell under the Kāma-pīṭha.<sup>21</sup> The Trisrotā Mahāpīṭha is located at the Sātkura *village* of Berubāri Grām Panchayat, which comes under the present Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. The territory of modern Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri originally formed part of the ancient kingdom of Kāmarupā.

### **The Trisrotā Mahāpīṭha:**

As mentioned above the Trisrotā Mahāpīṭha is presently located at the Sātkura *village* of Berubāri Grām Panchayat which comes under the present Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. The text *Pīṭhanirṇaya* listed Trisrotā in the sixteen numbers. Here the ‘vāmā-pada’ of Sati had fallen. Here, ‘Devi’ is identified as Bhrāmri or āmari and Bhairava is Īśhvara. *Śivacarita* also contains the name of Trisrota in forty-two numbers amongst the fifty-one *mahapithas*. According to the text, the ‘*dakshina-jānu*’ of Sati fell here. Here, Devi resides in the form of Candika and her Bhairava is Sadananda. However, we find a discrepancy in the text *Sivacarita* which also mentions Trisrota as an *upapitha* where the *padamsa* of Sati had fallen.<sup>22</sup>

In the village of Sātkura, Devi Bhrāmri is popularized with autochthonous nomenclature as Devi Garteswari. Besides the temple of Devi Garteswari, another temple is situated which is dedicated to the Devi Garveswari. Devi Garveswari is popularly known as the ‘Bodeswari Mao’ (in vernacular language, *Mao* means Mother).<sup>23</sup> The historicity of the Trisrotā *pīṭha* is an age-old notion if we go by the legends and hearsay, but the present temple is a new construction. This particular temple was

built in 2005. In the temple complex, we notice that two identical temples are dedicated to the goddess Garveswari and Garteswari respectively. The Bhairava temple is situated in one corner of the temple complex.

Both the icons of the Garteswari (Figure 6) and Garveswari (Figures 4 and 5) are very unique in nature. The icon of Devi Garteswari (Figure 6) is made of black basalt stone and measures approximately four inches in height. The female icon is two-handed and resides in a sitting position. She is holding a stick-like object in her right hand and her left hand is placed near her left knee. She is decked with various ornaments like a necklace, waist garland, bangles, and *mani-bandha*. The icon is wearing a *yajñapovita* across her left shoulder and the breast portion of the icon is quite voluptuous. The researcher hypothetically assumes that the icon is wrongly identified by the locals with Goddess Bhrāmri. No canonical text confirms the *dhyana* of the Goddess Bhrāmri with these iconographic features. The *Devi Bhāgavata Purāna* prescribed the legend of goddess Bhrāmri. According to the legend, the goddess assumed the form of a black beetle to kill the demon, Aruna.<sup>24</sup>

Another icon of the goddess Garveswari also has very unique iconographic features. The icon is made of black basalt and measures approximately 3 ft. in height. The icon is four-handed. In the upper right hand, the goddess is holding a discus and in the lower right hand, holds a mace. In the upper and lower left hands, she is holding a flower and probably a conch shell respectively. Her lower left hand is placed near her chest. Her *āyudhas* are identical to Lord Vishnu. With her left leg, she is trampling Ganesha. The icon of Ganesha is in a dancing posture. He is dancing on a full-blown lotus pedestal. He is four-handed. One hand of the icon is completely mutilated. The upper left hand is placed near his chest and he is holding a club with his lower left hand. The upper right hand of the icon is shown in *Varadā mudra*. The icon of the Ganesha is pot-bellied and wearing a *yajñapovita*. Two male figures playing a musical instrument can be seen on either side of the stele. This particular feature makes this icon very unique in nature.



The trampling of Ganesha by some of the Buddhist goddesses like Aparajitā, Tāra, Manjusri, and Parnasavarī could be seen.<sup>25</sup> But no Hindu canonical text confirms this feature; thus it is quite difficult to identify the icon properly.

## Conclusion

The temple of Bhairava (Figure 8) is situated on exactly the opposite side of the goddess' temple. A *Śiva liṅga* is placed inside the temple. Beside the Bhairava temple, there is a unique twin tree with different types of leaves which reflects the *Chaityavṛkṣa* concept (the tree is conceived as a sacred place) (Figure 9). The Trisrotā Mahāpīṭha can be considered one of the best-celebrated *pīṭhas* in the region of North Bengal. This particular village also has become a pilgrimage centre for pious devotees. Though the place is qualitatively rich in heritage and culture, it remains obscure from the point of view of the researcher. An in depth study is required to bring to light the historicity of this particular *Śakti Pīṭha*.

## References

1. Those persons who belong to the orders of the *Brāhmanas* and are guided by the injunctions laid down in the *Smritis*, are called *Smartas*. They worship five cult deities namely- *Śakta*, *Śaiva*, *Saurya*, *Vaishnava*, and *Ganapatya*. Banerjea, J.N., (1941). *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi. p. 6.
2. Pitchman, Tracy, (1994). *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition*, State University of New York Press, Albany. p.105.
3. Banerjea, J.N., (1960). *Panchopasanā*, Navana Printing Works Pvt. Ltd., Kolkata. p. 217.
4. Banerjea, J.N., *Op. cit.*, p. 489.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 490.
6. Chakrabarti, Kunal., (2001). *Religious Process*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, 182.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

8. Togawa, Masahiko., (2006). *An Abode of the Goddess: Kingship, Caste and Sacrificial Organization in a Bengal Village*, Manohar, New Delhi. p. 27.
9. Sarkar, D.C., (1973). *The Śākta Pīṭhas*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. p. 5.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Togawa, Masahiko, (2006) *Op. cit.*, p.28.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Sarkar, D.C., (1973). *Op. cit.*, p. 12.
14. Nigudananda, (1959). *Mahatirtha Ekanna Pithar Sandhane*, Sarat Publishing House, Kolkata. p. 65.
15. Sarkar, D.C., (1973). *Op. cit.*, p. 13.
16. Togawa, Masahiko., (2006) *Op. cit.*, p.28.
17. Sarkar, D.C., (1973). *Op. cit.*, p. 4.
18. Ghosal, S.C., (1949). *History of Cooch Behar*, the State Press, Coochbehar. p. 2.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Ghosal, S.C., (1973). *Op. cit.*, p.3.
21. Choudhury, H.N., (1903). *The Coochbehar States and Its Land Revenue Settlements*, the Coochbehar State Press, Coochbehar. p. 211.
22. Sarkar, D.C., (1973). *Op. cit.*, p.97.
23. Roy, Harishchandra., (2010). *Trisrotā Mahapith*, Trisrotā Mahapith Committee, Jalpaiguri. pp. 13-14.
24. Swami Vijñananda., (1921). *Devi Bhāgawatam (The Tenth Book, Chapter 13)*, The Panini Office, Allahabad. p. 1643.
25. Chattopadhyay, Debiprasad., (1959). *Lokāyata Darshan*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi. pp. 132-134.



Figure 1 - The sign board in front of the Temple  
(Photography by Author)



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Figure 2 and 3 - The Temple of Devi Garveswari and Devi Garteswari  
(Photographs by Author)



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Figure 4 & 5 - The Unique Icon of the Devi Garveswari and a close image of the Ganesha trampling by the Devi Garveswari (Photographs by Author)



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Figure 6 & 7 - The Icon of Devi Garteswari and the Aniconic Stone represents the 'Vāmā-Pada' of the Sati (Photographs by Author)



Figure 8 - The Bhairava Temple at the Trisrotā Temple Complex  
(Photographs by Author)



Figure 9 - The Unique Twin Tree with different kinds of leaves beside the Bhairava Temple. (Photograph by Author)



## TRACING THE BON RELIGION IN THE HISTORY OF LADAKH: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

**Ms. Tsewang Dolkar**

Research Scholar

Department of History, University of Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir

### Abstract

*This paper is an attempt to comprehend the prehistoric religion known as Bon, which once dominated the Buddhist Western Himalayas. The paper discusses works that explore Bon religion and demonstrate how it is still practised in the trans-Himalayan region. The present paper outlines important information about the traces of Bon chos<sup>1</sup> and its assimilated form, specifically in the Ladakh region.*

**Keywords:** *Assimilation, Bon chos, Ladakh, Pre-Buddhist religion, rites and rituals.*

### Introduction

Presently, Ladakh and Tibet are recognised as the centres of Buddhism. Prior to this, the regions were under the umbrella of the Bon religion. The *Bon-chos* or Bon religion is believed to be the oldest faith in the Tibetan plateau region and possibly the entire Central Asia<sup>2</sup>. It was a primitive and native religious tradition with a mixture of nature worship, animism and shamanism.

Different views and interpretations are encompassed around the term, “*Bon*.” D. Snellgrove and G. Uray identified *Bon* as “entreat” or “invoke”. Furthermore, Snellgrove even presumes that the word *Bon* is similar to the term “*chos*”<sup>3</sup>. S. Kaloyanov was of the opinion that the term *Bon* has two sides: one, it is of Tibetan origin or it came from a foreign land. Understanding the issues associated with the origin and development of pre-Buddhist layers of Bon religion becomes critical. Etymologically, V. I. Abaev cites that the term “*bon*” is similar to the Iranian and Indian term “*banu*,” which means “ray” or “light”. The word “*bon*” is also similar to the “*bun*” in Persian, meaning “foundation” or “roots.”<sup>4</sup>

Ladakh’s history was unknown until the ninth century CE, but archaeological discoveries in the region are undoubtedly shedding light on the matter. The region’s harsh environment prevented any settlement in this region for extended periods; therefore, the majority of the early inhabitants were nomadic. Dards and Mons, the earliest settlers in Ladakh arrived gradually in areas of the region drained by the Indus with minimal vegetation. Prior to the arrival of Buddhism in Ladakh, it appears that the religious needs of the earlier settlers were met by Bonchos and its practices.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Studies of the ancient religious history of Ladakh have always centred on Buddhism, but Buddhism was a foreign religion to the people of *Maryul*<sup>5</sup>. Prior to Buddhism, the entire Trans-Himalayan region practised the primitive Bon religion. But very few people have studied this period of religious history in ancient Ladakh. Therefore, this paper is an effort to provide some insight on the history of Bon religion in Ladakh.

### **Objective and Methodology**

The objective of this paper is to understand the Bon religion, including its definition, types, origin and its traces in Ladakh region. The paper also discusses how the Bon religion has evolved and has

been integrated into Buddhism. Field research, first-hand experience, review of original sources and research papers were taken into account. Additionally, as a Ladakhi, I have first-hand knowledge of all the customs that are observed in day-to-day life.

### Types of Bon

Most historians and scholars divide the Bon into two types: the Primitive Bon and the *Yungdrung* Bon. The Primitive Bon is basically a folk religion, a form of primitive shamanism. It is said that the origin of primitive Bon was to deal with the bad spirits and demons, worship the heavenly deities and work for the betterment of the people on earth<sup>6</sup>. It was a belief system focusing on the worship of magical beings and occult elements. The Bonpos<sup>7</sup> perform daily rituals to appease deities and spirits, such as burning incense, juniper or sprinkling water.

An important part of the Bon pantheon was animal and even human sacrifices<sup>8</sup>. Manuscripts dating from the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. were mentioned by R. A. Stein in *Tibetan Civilization*, in which the nature of Bon rituals were clearly mentioned. Dmitry Ermakov divided the prehistoric Bon into two categories: the Prehistoric Bon of Zhang-Zhung and the Tibet and Prehistoric Bon of Eurasia. He said that in order to cover a greater phenomenon, he came up with these terms.

According to Dmitry, all the folk practices of prehistoric Eurasia come under the larger umbrella of Bon, which is why he coined the term “Prehistoric Bon of Eurasia”<sup>9</sup>. Li An- Che believed that the Primitive Bon prevailed through the reign of gNah-kri-stdan-po to Khri-sde-btsan-po for approximately twenty - six reigns. Tsewang Gyampo Arya made a very major point, that one has to be clear and not get confused between the generic term “Bon,” i.e., the primitive Bon or the folk practices and the *Yungdrung* Bon that later became known as “Bon only”<sup>10</sup>. *Thonpa gShen-rab*’s<sup>11</sup> doctrine was the *Yungdrung* Bon. “*Yung*” meaning no diversion from the eternal truth, “*Drung*” means everlasting, undying, so “*Yungdrung* Bon” means “religion of everlasting or eternal truth”. With



the Eternal Bon, *Thonpa gShen-rab* refined and reformed the Primitive Bon dogmas and rituals. All forms of blood offerings and animal sacrifices were replaced with effigies, dough, etc. It became more of a figurative and symbolic tradition<sup>12</sup>.

Casual Bon and Fruitional Bon are the two practises or parts of *Yungdrung* Bon. Casual Bon aims to improve current standards of living and hardship through various types of prayers and rituals, which would guide the follower towards Fruitional Bon, higher teachings that eventually point the way to Buddhahood. The counter clockwise Swastika (*yungdrung*) is the symbol of *Yungdrung* Bon<sup>13</sup>. It also represents deities, monasteries, adherents and many doctrines of *Yungdrung* Bon. Other symbols that depict pre- Buddhist *Yungdrung* Bon are the flaming jewels motif, stepped shrine, horned eagles, priests, wild yak riders and a mystic letter A<sup>14</sup>.

### Geographical Identification

The Bon religion is closely associated with the *Zhang zhung* kingdom. A Persian geographical text, *Hudûd al-‘Âlam*, locates the Zhang zhung kingdom between the then Tibet, India and China; here, the country is described as r’ngrng - read Rângr(u)ng<sup>15</sup>. It is said that the ancient kingdom of Zhang zhung consisted of three different regions: the external (*Gopa*), inner (*Phug-pa*) and the middle (*Bar-pa*). The external borders correspond to today’s central and eastern Tibet, while some stretch their boundaries to Gilgit in the west to *Dangs-ra khyung-rdzong* in the east. The inner *Zhang zhung* includes sTag-gzin, which is frequently associated with Bactria. Western Tibet, also known as the Ngari region, consisted of three districts: Maryul, Guge and Phurang<sup>16</sup>, a part of middle *Zhang zhung*.

People living in *Zhang zhung* are described as nomads in *Hudûd al-‘Âlam*<sup>17</sup>, while others believed that *Zhang zhung* was most likely a kingdom of union and alliance of several local chieftains. The ancient culture and kingdom of *Zhang zhung* predates the culture of Tibetan

Buddhism in Tibet. Archaeologist and anthropologist Mark Aldenderfer roughly keep the time period of the kingdom as between 500 BCE and 625 CE<sup>18</sup>, as confusion prevails regarding the conquest of *Zhang zhung*, as to whether it happened during the reign of Songtsen Gampo (605 or 6017- 649) or Trisong Detsen (755- 797 or 804)<sup>19</sup>.

### **Rationale of the Study**

In order to understand and extract sources regarding the existence of Bon religion in Ladakh, one has to keep in mind that scholars and historians have referred to then Maryul/ ancient Ladakh as Western Tibet. Ladakh as a separate body or kingdom before 950 A.D never existed. The land was part and parcel of the shifting fortunes of the wider Tibetan plateau<sup>20</sup>. The present people of Western Tibet are a blend of at least three different stocks or races: two of Aryan (Dards and Mon) and Mongolian origin. Francke says that an archaeological database shows that an ancient tribe of Tibetan nomads existed in this part of the hills and plains much before the land was settled by the Dards and the Mons<sup>21</sup>. Much about their faith can be understood from scanty archaeological sources, folk lore and songs.

Prehistoric rock carvings, commonly known as petroglyphs are found all over Ladakh, especially near the bank of river Indus and its tributaries. These delineations include simple engraved animals and male figures, inscriptions and *mchod-rten*<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, some important engravings were found that consist of unusual figurative forms such as distorted human forms, amalgamated animal-human forms, symbols, and signs related to some very old scenes. Carvings that are somewhat like masks are found in abundance, especially in Nubra valley<sup>23</sup>.

Some geometric signs and figures like thunderbolt and swastika were also found in certain areas<sup>24</sup>. In Zaskar, narrow plates were found on which a counter clockwise swastika was made, and on another, two yaks are fighting with an archaic stupa behind<sup>25</sup>. Such symbols are representations of the region's Primitive Bon *chos* (religion), though

petroglyphs related to Bon *chos* are very minimal. Apart from rock art, we have *Yungdrung* monastery (also known as Lamayuru or Yuru at that time), which, according to A.H. Francke is the oldest and only Bonpo monastery of Ladakh, named after the *swastika*, a bonpo symbol<sup>26</sup>.

A large number of unsystematized Bon *chos* have been preserved in Western Tibetan Plateau's folklore. Francke assimilated the whole folklore of Western Tibet as *gLing chos*. The *Keser saga* is one of the most famous epics of Western Tibet, and it has numerous versions in each part of Western Tibet.

Keser is a personification of a heaven-sent king, and the whole Keser saga is a pre-Buddhist episode. According to the *Chronicles of Ladakh*, before 950 A.D., the descendants of Keser ruled Upper Ladakh, while Lower Ladakh was governed by different independent principalities. The epic is full of demons, magic, power, deities, gods, rituals and has all the traits from which one can easily identify its bent towards primitive Bon *chos*<sup>27</sup>.

## Findings

The Bon-*chos* was also known as the *Lha-chos* i.e., the religion of spirits or deities. For a very long time, the Bon *chos* was practiced alongside the newly introduced Buddhism in the region of Western Tibet. If we talk about Tibet in particular, there is still a section of population who are followers of *Yungdrung* Bon, but in the context of Ladakh, the primitive religion of the region got assimilated into Buddhist pantheon.

However, remnants of pre - Buddhist *chos* can be seen in different religious practices of Buddhists in Ladakh. The present form of Bon *chos* gets reflected in the worship of *Lha* (local deities) (to protect oneself or family from the wrath of the deity or nature), the burning of juniper to cleanse the atmosphere or aura of a house or village, and the changing of juniper on the shrine on Losar (new year); earlier along with these, there was blood sacrifice, which was later banned and kept only as purification ritual.

Apart from these wedding songs also have mythical references of pre- Buddhist element, other songs have also cited local gods (of mountain, water, earth, sky and household). Here the main feature of Bon religion is reflected, which believes in a matrix of multiple realms. Preparing “*skyin*” (figure of *ibex* made of dough) on the occasion of Losar and paying homage to it shows the nature worship and animist faith of the region (Ladakh). The *Lhato* (where deity dwell) is cleansed during the *losar*, new juniper is placed, the structure gets new paint; butter lamps are lit in front and prayers are made in order to please the family or village deity. These are a few Bonpo elements that got united with Buddhism and today, they are reflected clearly.

In a conversation with Api Chuskit (she is 80 years old), she told me that she learned the *Epic of rGyalam Kesar* from her grandfather. She told me that during winter time they used to gather around the fire and their grandpa used to narrate the story in the form of poetry and prose. She very patiently narrated the whole story to me. Some important takeaways from the story, I will share, which is important for this paper. This epic narrates the story of King Kesar, his son Kaga Gyalu and the legendary warriors of Ling-Yul, their extraordinary travels and wars. The epic starts with a man named Ling Pa Sonam who lived in Ling-Yul.

Upon helping the god of rain and snow i.e., Lha Wangbor Gyabjin, in killing of the king of the subterranean realm who was in the form of a black yak, was granted a boon. Ling Pa Sonam asked for one of the sons of the God of heaven to come down to earth and rule over Ling-Yul and protect the land and its people from invasions as the land was without any king or ruler. His wish was granted but the God said that strange things would happen before the birth of his son; “...eighteen warriors will be born who will assist my son and after them my son will descend on earth to rule the Ling-Yul”.

After a few episodes Kesar descended on earth in the form of a hailstone and fell into the cup of Grog Zang Lhamo (daughter-in-law of Ling Pa Sonam), she drank the hailstone and conceived him. After

many hindrances, Kesar became the king of Ling-Yul and the eighteen grand-sons of Ling Pa Sonam became the knights of Kesar. They went on multiple wars and expeditions; his expedition on Hor-Yul, Jang-Yul and Sog-Yul were well explained in the form of poetry.

On their journey, they crossed the path of magical creatures and demons. Kesar, on his way also pacified demons and went on winning country after country. Now, historians and researchers presume that Ling-Yul, the birth place of Kesar was probably located somewhere between today's Ladakh and Tibet. Further, Sog-Yul mentions in the epic, Mongolia, Janh-Yul and Sog-Yul might be in Tibet. Numerous songs in the epic praise the beauty of different landscapes. They also mention people live in tents and rearing livestock. The epic talks about multiple realms and according to Bon-chos, the universe comprises three realms. It also deals with the names of multiple Gods like the God of rain, God of mountain, God of river etc.

This shows that this epic is based on the faith of nature and deity worship, which is a Bon practice. Kesar is also regarded as one of the principal deities in the Bon-chos. People of Ladakh have great faith in supernatural forces, Lhas and Lhus. The three realms that are talked about in Bon-chos are also described in some folk songs of Ladakh. Apart from the Kesar saga, there are also numerous folk songs and stories which refer to the pre-Buddhist religion. Kesar epic is the one which is most famous and well known.

There is a saying "*yul la snan-na Gya-Meru, mKhar la snan-na Khalatse*" which means that the first village was Gya-Meru and the first palace was in Khalatse (of Dard's). *Ladags rGyalrabs* mentions that a ruling dynasty in the village of Gya-Meru claims to be direct-descendants of Kesar. While talking to a monk he said that the type of worship Brokpa people used to do, cannot be considered as Bon-chos. I believe their faith is an animistic form of worship or nature worship as they worship the sun, moon, trees, mountains and rivers,

which is what Primitive Bon-chos was. Also, today there are around 25 households in Ladakh that practice Yungdrung Bon but mostly are Tibetan. There is a Bonpo Monastery named, “Yungdung Lhatse Bon Monastery Ladakh” and also a “Bon Cultural Preservation Society Ladakh” in Choglamsar.

### **Result of the Study**

All things considered, the existence of Bon *chos* in Ancient Ladakh or *Maryul* or Kie cha (called by Fa Hian) is evident, but we must be cautious of the fact that there are different forms of Bon. One must not get confused between the Primitive Bon and the revised Bon, which was started by *Shenrab* (*Yungdrung* Bon). Although all the shamanist or animistic practices are considered to fall under the greater umbrella of Bon, there are differences between the one practiced in Ladakh and Tibet. According to the findings, we can say that more of primitive Bon *chos* were practiced in Ladakh. In order to tie up the loose ends, we must see this phase of Ladakh’s history in connection with Western Tibet and as a greater part of the *Zhang zhung* kingdom.

### **Conclusion**

The arrival of Buddhism in Ladakh did not completely wipe out the primitive religion. Buddhism, with the passage of time, started assimilating Bon religion in itself, while some forms of primitive religion kept themselves intact and survived alongside. The present form of Bon *chos* can be traced from the folklores and folk songs of Ladakh and the essence of the primitive ways can still be seen in the lives of Ladakhi people. The history of Bon religion in Ladakh is obscured by lack of sources and general knowledge, which further adds to its mystique. Furthermore, Buddhism and trans-Himalayan traditions, both contain significant elements of the ancient Bon religion. Further research can be done in this area to learn more about the old Ladakhi belief system, and it is also possible to explore why this period of history was left out of the overall narrative of the religious history of Ladakh.

## References

1. *Chos: chos* (dharma) is a Tibetan word that translates as “religion”.
2. Handa, O. C., (2001). *Buddhist Western Himalaya*, Indus Publication Company, New Delhi. p.254.
3. Snellgrove, D., (1967). *The Nine Ways of Bon*, Oxford University Press, London. pp.20,303.
4. Bartholomae, C., (1904). *Altiranisches Worterbuch*, Verlag Von Karl J. Trubner, Strasburg, pp.968-969.
5. *Maryul*: The ancient name of Ladakh.
6. Che, L. A., (1948). ‘Bon: The Magico-Religious belief of the Tibetan speaking peoples’, *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 4, Number 1, Chicago. p.33.
7. Bonpo: Followers of the Bon religion.
8. Steele, F., (1982). ‘A Journey to Tibet and the Northern Side of Everest’, *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 13 Number 2, Philly. p.138.
9. Ermakov, D., (2008). *Bo and Bon*, Vajra Publications, Nepal. p.XLVII.
10. Arya, T. G., (2016). ‘Yungdrung- bon; the Religion of Eternal Truth in the Land of Snow’, *The Tibet Journal*, Vol. 41 Number 2. Dharamshala. pp.65-66.
11. *Thonpa gShen-rab*: founder of *Yungdrung Bon*, born in sTag-gzing i.e. area circling Kailash (this area was once the central part of Zhang-Zhung).
12. Bellezza, J. V., (2017). ‘The Swastika, Steeped Shrine, Priest, Horned Eagle and Wild Yak Rider- Prominent antecedents of Yungdrung Bon’, *Revue d’Etudes Tibetaines*, Vol. 42, Paris. p.5.
13. Ermakov, D., (2008). *Op. cit.*, p. 8 & p. XLVII.
14. Bellezza, J. V., (2017). *Op. cit.*, 11. p.33.
15. Beckwith, C., (2011). ‘On Zhang zhung and Bon’, *International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies*, Germany. p.166.
16. Stein, R. A., (1972). *Tibetan Civilization*, Stanford University Press, Stanford. p. 20.
17. Beckwith, C., (2011). *Op. cit.*, 14. p.166.
18. Aldenderfer, M., (2003). ‘Defining Zhang zhung ethnicity: An

- archaeological perspective from far Western Tibet', *Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the IATS*, Vol. 8, Oxford. p.1.
19. Karmey, S. G., (2009). 'A General Introduction to the history and doctrines of Bon'. *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myth, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, Kathmandu. p.180.
  20. Rizvi, J., (1983). *Ladakh: Crossroads of high Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. p.55.
  21. Francke, A. H., (1978). *Ladakh the mysterious land: History of western Himalayas*, Cosmos Publications, New Delhi. p.17.
  22. *Mchod-rten*: Buddhist stupa.
  23. Thasngspa, T. L., (2011). *Petroglyphs of Ladakh*, Ladakh Art and Media Organisation, <https://www.sahapedia.org/petroglyphs-ladakh>, Accessed January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023.
  24. Ahmed, M., (2011). *Rock Art and Petroglyphs of Ladakh*, Ladakh Art and Media Organisation, <https://www.sahapedia.org/rock-art-and-petroglyphs-ladakh>, Accessed January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023.
  25. Polosmk, N. V., Shah, M. A., & Kundo, L. P., (2018). 'Petroglyphs of Zaskar, India: Findings of the 2016 Season', *Archaeology, Ethnology & Anthropology of Eurasia*, Vol. 46 Number 2, Krasnoyarsk Russia. p.64.
  26. Francke, A. H., (1978). *Ladakh the mysterious land: History of western Himalayas*, Cosmos Publications, New Delhi. p.52.
  27. Khan, K. A., (2017). *The story of rGyalam Kesar: from the legend of Ladakh*, Stawa Publication, Leh Ladakh. pp. 5-10.





Fig. 1. Picture of anticlockwise swastika seen near Dha village of Leh.  
*Source: photograph by author*



Fig. 2. A man with hands up and probably the sun and moon are shown here.  
Found near Dha. *Source: by author*



Fig. 3. Petroglyphs of Murig village, Nubra valley.  
*Source: photograph by author*



Fig. 4. Image of a family *Lhato* and an image of a village *Lhato*.  
*Source: photograph by author*



Fig. 5. A family *Lhato* and figures of ibex made of dough.  
*Source: photograph by author.*



Fig. 6. Yungdung Lhatse Bon Monastery in Choglamsar Ladakh.  
*Source: photograph by author.*



## ARE DONATIONS MEASURABLE? A COMPUTATIONAL ANALYSIS OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES IN CĒRA DONATIVE INSCRIPTIONS

**Mr. Ajith M**

Research Scholar

Centre for Historical Studies, School of Social Sciences  
JNU, New Delhi

### Abstract

*The present study tries to trace and apply computational techniques to analyze important terms related to weights and measurements used in the Cēra inscriptions. Terms like Nāḷi, Iṭaṇṇaḷi, Para, Āṭṭitaṇaḷi, Kāṇam, Kalam, Kalaṇṇu., etc. appear most frequently in the Cēra inscriptions. The present paper emphasizes how these weights and measures were used to assess the donations to religious institutions in early medieval Kerala. Moreover, the paper tries to reveal the frequency of appearance of specific terminologies, the important donations and the kind of measurements used for different objects. The distinction between royal gifts (king / royal family) and gifts by ordinary people reflects the socio-economic scenario of the period under study. This paper also aims to look at inscriptional data from the lens of quantifiable analysis, where the focus is on understanding socio- economic differences in society through the measurability of the gifts.*

**Keywords:** *Cēras, computer analysis, donation, inscription, weights and measures.*

## Introduction

The state formations in early medieval South India are generally associated with the emergence of regional powers<sup>1</sup> and the *Cēra*, *Cōla*, and *Pāndya* were seen as reviving their power, marked by a number of waves between the ninth to twelfth centuries C.E., amongst these three regional powers. The present paper emphasizes the Weights and Measurements used in the *Cēra* inscriptions. The *Cēras*, also known as the *Perumāḷs* of *Makōtai*, ruled from c. 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century CE. with *Makōtai* or *Mahodayapuram* as their capital. The *Cēra* administrative boundary has been demarcated as the modern *Gokarnakam* in Karnataka state on the north, Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu in the south, the Western Ghats in the east and the Arabian Sea on the west.

The structure of early medieval polity was developed from the territorially limited state of the early historic period to a gradual but drastic change into an agrarian based state society.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the social structure of early medieval Kerala underwent significant changes in the first millennium CE., especially towards the end of this period. The transitions ranged from chieftains to monarchy, from the clan and kin based occupation to hereditary occupational groups and castes, from millet production to paddy, and significantly, the beliefs of the society changed from heterodox religious ideologies to temple oriented *Brāhminism*.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the kin based agrarian system gave way to temple centered paddy cultivation, accelerated surplus production, and the emergence of different occupational groups and caste proliferation in this region. In these circumstances, the significance of weights and measurements lies in the tax collection, forms of donations to the religious institutions, internal as well as external trade and exchange, etc. However, this study emphasizes unearthing of the social formation of early medieval Kerala through the computational analysis of weights and the measures that occurred in *Cēra* inscriptions.

Moreover, this period endorsed a large chunk of donations into religious institutions, and remarkably, they were well written either on temple walls, pillars or on copper plates.<sup>4</sup> The social, political, economic, and cultural elites of the society made lavish gifts to the religious institutions and engraved them as a memory of their beneficence. Moreover, the reason behind donations was to impose their superiority, the concept of divinity, and prosperity for the donor, and thus, the transactions engraved on South Indian temple inscriptions represent the gifts of power.<sup>5</sup>

Rajan Gurukkal emphasizes that the evolution of inscriptional records of land grants in the form of *brahmadēya* deeds and the convention based oral traditions, replaced by the document based bureaucracy produced a large number of epigraphical records in early medieval South India.<sup>6</sup> These inscriptions are important sources for the (re)construction of early medieval South Indian history. In this regard, the current research emphasizes how weights and measures were employed in Cēra inscriptions to evaluate offerings made to temples. A novel strategy of using computational analysis for the weights and measures will also be discussed. The purpose of the study is to show the frequency of usage of particular terminologies, significant contributions and the type of measurements used for various objects.

### Weights and Measurements

The major weights and measures used in Cēra period have been restricted as compared to the other contemporary dynasties. If we examine the Cēra and Cōla inscriptions, we can find similar terminologies like *uṛi*, *kalam*, *nālī*, *ulakku*, and *tūṇi*.<sup>7</sup> In both *tūṇi* and *kalam*, the ratio ( $3\ Tūṇi = 1\ Kalam$ ) is similar, but the measurement is different.<sup>8</sup> As per their nature, the weights and measurements are generally divided into four categories. These would be *Commodity Weight System*, *Grain Measurement*, *Length Measurement*, and *Liquid Measurement*. These important Weight and Measurement terminologies were statistically arranged on their appropriated types.<sup>9</sup>

## Commodity Weight System

The references to commodity weight systems in *Cēra* inscriptions have been limited. Most of the Weights and Measurements come under the grain measurement. The *Thiruvalla* copper plate is largely discussed via the commodity weight measurement.<sup>10</sup> The *paḷam* and *tulām* are important units amongst them. Furthermore, four *Kai* is equal to one *paḷam*, and one *tulām* is equal to hundred *paḷam*.<sup>11</sup> The *Trikkākkarai* inscription has mentioned one *kai* of tamarind.<sup>12</sup> There is no further reference to *kai*, either equal to, or separate, from the two other units of weight system. But Narayanan has been assuming that four *kai* is equal to one *paḷam*.<sup>13</sup>

Table of Early Measurements in Travancore		തിരുവിതാംകൂറിലെ മുൻകാല തൂക്കപ്പെടികൾ	
4 Nēmaṇi	-	1 Kunnikkuru	4 നെമ്മണി-1 കുന്തിക്കുരു
2 Kunnikkuru	-	1 Maṇṇāṭi	2 കുന്തിക്കുരു-1 മഞ്ചാടി
2 Maṇṇāṭi	-	1 Paṇamīṭa	2 മഞ്ചാടി-1 പണമിട
10 Paṇamīṭa	-	1 Kalañu	10 പണമിട-1 കഴഞ്ചി
21 Paṇamīṭa	-	1 Pavaṇ Tūkkam	21 പണമിട-1 പവാൻ തൂക്കം
31 Paṇamīṭa	-	1 Rūpa Tūkkam	31 പണമിട-1 രൂപാ തൂക്കം
8 Grām	-	1 Pavaṇ	8 ഗ്രാം-1 പവാൻ
11.66 Grām	-	1 Tōla	11.66 ഗ്രാം-1 തോല
16 Grām	-	1 Oṇṣ	16 ഗ്രാം-1 ഓൺസ്
16 Oṇṣ	-	1 Pount	16 ഓൺസ്-1 പൗണ്ട്
14 Pount	-	1 Kall	14 പൗണ്ട്-1 കല്ല
2 Kall	-	1 Kālamśam	2 കല്ല-1 കാലംശം
4 Kālamśam	-	1 Śatatūkkam	4 കാലംശം-1 ശതതൂക്കം
20 Śatatūkkam	-	1 Ton	20 ശതതൂക്കം- 1 ടൺ

Table 1- Early Measurements Table in Travancore  
The image of this table has been taken by the author from *Koyikkal Palace*,  
Nedumangadu, Trivandrum, Kerala.

## Grain Measurements

The *Cēra* inscriptions are generally associated with *Nell* (paddy) and *Ari* / *Arici* (rice) measurements. Apart from paddy and rice, the inscriptions also deal with offerings like *Neyy* (ghee), *Pon* and *Sempon* (gold), *Puli* (tamarind), and other offerings. These offerings and donations are measured with the following like *Nāli*, *Idaṇāli*, *Kalam*, *Kūrū*, *Kalañu*, and *Paṛa*. The ratio of these Weights and Measurements were: two *alakku* equals one *uṛi*, two *uṛi* equals one *nāli*, one *nāli* is around two hundred grams, four *nāli* equals one *idaṇāli*, ten *idaṇāli* equals one *paṛa*, one *kalam* equals *pattu patinnālippaṛa* or *nūru nāli*, and

one *kalam* equals twenty *para*.<sup>14</sup> The smallest measure is *alakku*, but *uṛi* is the available smallest measure value.<sup>15</sup> The larger measurement units are *iṭaṇḷi* and *para*, that are still used in Kerala, and the *kalam* is the highest unit of measurement which existed in *Cēra* period.<sup>16</sup> There is a statistical chart of major Weight and Measurement terminologies related to grain measurement.

SL.	Reference	State, District, Taluk	Ruler	Date	Terminology
1	TAS 02 09 (I&II)	KL KLM Kollam	SR	849	<i>Kuṭanāḷi</i>
2	TAS 02 09 (III)	KL PTA Thiruvalla	SR	17	<i>Ayinnūru nāḷi</i>
3	TAS 02 09 (III)	KL PTA Thiruvalla	SR	17	<i>Eṇṇūḷi</i>
4	TAS 02 09 (III)	KL PTA Thiruvalla	SR	17	<i>Eṇṇūḷi</i>
5	TAS 02 09 (III)	KL PTA Thiruvalla	SR	17	<i>Aipattunālu Kāṇam</i>
6	TAS 02 09 (III)	KL PTA Thiruvalla	SR	17	<i>Nāli Ariyi pūta bali</i>
7	TAS 02 09 (III)	KL PTA Thiruvalla	SR	17	<i>Patinkalam</i>
8	TAS 02 09 (III)	KL PTA Thiruvalla	SR	861	<i>Eṇṇāli aricikont - niṅṭyam</i>
9	TAS 02 09 (III)	KL PTA Thiruvalla	SR	861	<i>Patinkalam</i>
10	TAS 02 02	KL KTM Changanasserry	RR	12	<i>Ainūṛu Nāḷi</i>
11	TAS 02 02	KL KTM Changanasserry	RR	12	<i>Irupattu kalam Nell</i>
12	TAS 02 02	KL KTM Changanasserry	RR	12	<i>Nāḷi</i>
13	TAS 02 02	KL KTM Changanasserry	RR	12	<i>Onpattu Kūrū</i>
14	TAS 02 02	KL KTM Changanasserry	RR	12	<i>Patinkalam</i>
15	TAS 03 42	KL EKM Kanayannur	BR	6	<i>Nūṭṭirupatu - kaḷaṇu pon</i>
16	TAS 03 42	KL EKM Kanayannur	BR	6	<i>Patinkalam Nell</i>
17	TAS 03 42	KL EKM Kanayannur	BR	6	<i>Nell Nāḷi</i>
18	TAS 02 07 (A)	KL KTM Changanasserry	BR	14	<i>Iṭaṇḷi</i>

19	TAS 02 07 (A)	KL KTM <i>Changanasserry</i>	BR	14	<i>Paṇṭirukkalam</i>
20	TAS 02 07 (C)	KL KTM <i>Changanasserry</i>	BR	15	<i>Ancu Kāṇam – pontanṭam</i>
21	TAS 02 07 (C)	KL KTM <i>Changanasserry</i>	BR	15	<i>Kalaṇṇu</i>
22	TAS 02 07 (C)	KL KTM <i>Changanasserry</i>	BR	15	<i>Paṇṇirukalaṇṇu</i>
23	TAS 02 07 (C)	KL KTM <i>Changanasserry</i>	BR	15	<i>Pattu kāṇam – pontanṭam</i>
24	TAS 02 07 (D)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	23	<i>Nāḷiyāl – Nūrunāḷi Ceytari</i>
25	TAS 02 07 (D)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	23	<i>Nūṭrunāḷi</i>
26	TAS 02 07 (D)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	23	<i>Paṇṇirukalaṇṇu</i>
27	TAS 02 07 (G)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	31	<i>Arupatin - Kalaṇṇu Sempon</i>
28	TAS 02 07 (H)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	31	<i>Itaṇṇāḷiyāl - Patinaccunāḷi Neyy</i>
29	TAS 02 07 (i)	KL KTM <i>Changanasserry</i>	BR	33	<i>Enpatu Kalamnell</i>
30	TAS 02 07 (L)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	42	<i>Iraṇṭu Uri</i>
31	TAS 02 07 (L)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	42	<i>Irupatu Nannāḷiyum</i>
32	TAS 02 07 (L)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	42	<i>Muṇṇāṇṇāḷiyil</i>
33	TAS 02 07 (L)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	42	<i>Muṇṇāṇṇāḷiyil Irunāḷḷ Ceytha Neyyum</i>
34	TAS 02 07 (L)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	42	<i>Muṇṇāṇṇāḷiyil - Nūṭrunāḷi Ceytariyum</i>
35	TAS 02 07 (L)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	42	<i>Nāḷpatin Kalaṇṇu pon</i>
36	TAS 02 07 (L)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	42	<i>Nālnāḷi Uri Puḷi</i>
37	TAS 02 07 (L)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	42	<i>Nūrunāḷi</i>
38	TAS 02 07 (L)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	42	<i>Uppu Itaṇṇāḷi</i>
39	TAS 02 07 (J) (05 62)*	KL KTM <i>Changanasserry</i>	BR	47	<i>Nāḷāyiratti Eṇṇūru – Parai Nellin</i>
40	TAS 02 07 (J) (05 62)*	KL KTM <i>Changanasserry</i>	BR	47	<i>Pantirunāḷi - Tiruvāmiruth</i>
41	TAS 02 07 (M)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	58	<i>Akatteḷunāḷi</i>
42	TAS 02 07 (M)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	58	<i>Onpatilul onpatu</i>



43	TAS 02 07 (M)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	58	<i>Örottun̄i Nellum</i>
44	TAS 02 04 (A)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Anccu Kāṇam</i>
45	TAS 02 04 (A)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Irunāḷi Ari</i>
46	TAS 02 04 (A)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Irupattaint Kalam</i>
47	TAS 02 04 (A)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Irupattainkalaṇu pon</i>
48	TAS 02 04 (A)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Mukkāl</i>
49	TAS 02 04 (A)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Munnāḷi Arici</i>
50	TAS 02 04 (A)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Nāḷi</i>
51	TAS 02 04 (A)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Nūṭru Kalam</i>
52	TAS 02 04 (A)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Onpatunāḷi Parayāl - Anpatupparai</i>
53	TAS 02 04 (A)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Onpatunāḷi Parayāl - Arupatupparai nell</i>
54	TAS 02 04 (A)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Parai</i>
55	TAS 02 04 (B)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Ayinkalam</i>
56	TAS 02 04 (B)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Nāḷiyāl</i>
57	TAS 02 04 (B)	KL ALP <i>Chenganoor</i>	VK	--	<i>Irupattanccu Kalaṇu</i>

The statistical list of the grain measurements emphasizes that the *nāḷi* is the basic measurement for the religious rituals like *tiruvāmiṟut* (food offering to the deity) and *pūta bali* (sacrifice).<sup>17</sup> Most of the measurements are multiples of *nāḷi*.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, *nāḷi* is used for measuring ghee as well. There are certain measurements used to measure the liquid donations. But they are mostly measured with *nāḷi* and *iṭannāḷi*.<sup>19</sup> The *Vālapaḷḷi* copper plate emphasizes the amount of tax from different lands that the *paṇimakkal*



Figure 1 - Image of Para  
Koyikkal Palace, Nedumangadu,  
Trivandrum, Kerala.

(temples servants) should pay to the temple. Those taxes amounted to twenty and twenty-five *kalams* of paddy.<sup>20</sup> Thus, donations are measured in *nāli* or its multiples and the tax or *āṭṭikōl* (annual payment) is measured with *paṛa* and *kalam*. Moreover, the donations of gold have also been measured in either *kāṇam* or *kaḷaṇu* and there was no specific reference for value of gold.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, the statistical analysis of different donations and their measurements emphasize that there was a systematized standard of weights and measurement that was used in the *Cēra* period. *Tarisapaḷli* copper plate emphasizes that the *Vēṇāṭu* governor *Ayyanaṭikal*'s gift of land with 72 rights with collection of tax was at *Kurakkēṇi Kollam* to *Maravān Sapir Iṣo*, a Syrian Christian merchant.<sup>22</sup> The significant gifts like *vārakkōl* and *kappān* and the grants of *tulākkūli* and *niṛaikūli* to the leaders of merchants in trade centers were designated as the guardians of weights and measures and given a price as compensation for upholding standards.<sup>23</sup> Narayanan emphasizes that these practices helped to standardize weights and measurements.

### **Length measurement**

The important terminologies related to length are *viral* or *aṅkulam* (figure length), *aṭi* (foot length), *kai* (arm's length), and *kōl*.<sup>24</sup> Other units of length are *tūṇṇi* and *vēli* that occur in *Vāḷappaḷli* copper plate. There were no descriptions regarding *tūṇṇi*, but in the *Cōla* period, the *vēli* used as intermediate measurement to measure the length.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, another reference to *nānūrukkalam nilavum karayum* emphasizes that the land is also measured with *kalam*. It might be the hundred *kalam* of paddy producing land. Time is also calculated with the length of the shadow, *akattirupattayyaṭi* (25 feet before noon), *akattayyaṭi* (5 feet before noon), *ucci tiriṇṇu oraṭi* (1 foot after noon), *ucciyakattu pantīraṭi* (12 feet after noon).<sup>26</sup> *Trikkākkarai* inscription of *Bāskara Ravivarman* refers to '*Uccayakattu Pantīraṭiyin muṇṇē*', meaning twelve feet before noon. Therefore, the *aṭi* has been used as an important measure to calculate time.

SL.	Reference	State, District, Taluk	Ruler	Date	Terminology
1	TAS 02 02	KL KTM <i>Changanasserry</i>	RR	12	<i>Nūṭṭṛaiampatu Tūṇṇi</i>
2	TAS 02 02	KL KTM <i>Changanasserry</i>	RR	12	<i>Ṭṛaṇṭu Vēli</i>
3	TAS 02 07 (D)	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	BR	23	<i>Uccayakattu - Pantṭṛaṭṭiṭṭin muṇṇē</i>
4	TAS 02 07 (J) (05 62) *	KL KTM <i>Changanasserry</i>	BR	47	<i>Nānūrukkalam - Nilavum Karayum</i>

Liquid volume measures

The *Cēra* inscription refers to liquids like ghee and curd being donated to the temple. Ghee has been mostly measured in *nāḷi* or *iṭannāḷi*. But in some instances, there were some other units of measurements like *ulakku* and *tuṭavu* which were also used to measure the liquid type gift. MGS emphasis that the *tuṭavu* is equal to *ulakku*.



Figure 2 - Image of *Uḷakku* and *Uriya*  
Koyikkal Palace, Nedumangadu, Trivandrum,  
Kerala.

SL.	Reference	State, District, Taluk	Ruler	Date	Terminology
1	TAS 02 09 (III)	KL PTA <i>Thiruvalla</i>	SR	17	<i>Uḷakku Neyy</i>
2	TAS 03 40	KL EKM <i>Kanayannur</i>	--	--	<i>Tēvar Tuṭavu</i>

There are a number of references to a few measurements along with the term *tēvar*. Some of them are statistically arranged below:

SL.	Reference	State, District, Taluk	Ruler	Date	Terminology
1	TAS 03 40	KL EKM Kanayannur	--	--	<i>Tēvar Paṛayāl nāli</i>
2	TAS 03 40	KL EKM Kanayannur	--	--	<i>Tēvar Tuṭavu</i>
3	TAS 03 42	KL EKM Kanayannur	BR	6	<i>Tēvaṛiṭaṇṇāli</i>

The above discussed terms emphasize that the early medieval Kerala temples have maintained standard measurements, to avoid ambiguity and corruption in transactions.<sup>27</sup> Thus, we can assume that the temple at the time acted as an institution to standardize the weights and measurements.

### Computational Analysis

Several digital technologies are now available and easily accessible to aid in improving historical research. These technologies are commonly divided into four main categories such as Annotation, Data Visualization, Text Mining, and Word Tracking. Among these four categories, the present study applies a text mining method to analyze the weights and measures of the Cēra period and uses a tool called “Voyant” to extract the most frequent terms. Voyant is open-source software for evaluating data in the form of digital texts such as books, inscriptions, manuscripts, etc. It counts the words in one or more digital texts, classifies the words, and displays their frequency.

The Voyant analysis emphasizes that the most frequent term is *nāli* nine times. Along with *nāli*, terms like *ennuḷi* (2), *irunāli* (2), *akattelunāli* (1), *kuṭanāli* (1), *munnāli* (1), *munnāliyiḷ* (1), *nannāliṭiyum* (1), *nūrunāli* (1), *nūṭunāli* (1), and *onpatunāli* (1) occur in the inscription. These terms attest that *nāli* was used as the basic and most appropriate measurement used to measure the offerings.



Figure 3 – Voyant analysis of Cēra Inscriptions

## Conclusion

The statistical analysis of the inscriptions gives us insights into the donative grants and their measurability. Materialistically, the value or the measurements of the donation are measurable through different weighing measures. Unlike *Cōlas*, the *Cēras* did not have large-scale land grants to religious institutions and most of the *Cēra* donations were related to donations in the form of kind instead of land grants. Except for a few land grants like *Māmpaḷli* plates, and *Trikkaṭittānam*, others were donations of rice, paddy, ghee and other necessary commodities. As has been revealed through the inscriptions, one can see the existence of a standardized measuring system, at least with regard to the day to day activities of the temple, and we assume that the society as a larger unit might have had these standards of measurement. However, one should also be cautious of the nature of these measuring standards, whether they were limited to the temples as they served as centres of many economic activities and whether they were exclusive to temple donations.

Apart from the materialistic view, what are the other aspects of the donations? As James Heitzman mentions, gifts are made for using divinity to establish power and superiority in society. The *Cēra* inscriptions clearly show that ordinary people were forced to pay taxes or

ritual offerings to the temples. If they failed to pay or perform the ritual, they had to pay double ‘*mutṭukil mutṭiratti*’ to the temple and the royal treasury as well. Thus, the ordinary people’s donations mentioned in the inscriptions were not really donations; they were compulsory payments, except for royal or socio-economic-cultural elites.

## References

1. Chattopadhyaya, B.D., (1985). ‘Political Processes and Structure of Polity in Early Medieval India: Problems of Perspective’, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 13, No. 6, New Delhi. pp. 3-34.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
3. Gurukkal, Rajan., (2012). *Social Formations of Early South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. p. 242.
4. Heitzman, James., (1977). *Gifts of power: Lordship in an early Indian State*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. p.1.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Gurukkal, Rajan, (2007). ‘Shift of Trust from Words to Deeds: Implications of the Proliferation of Epigraphs in the Tamil South’, *The Indian Historical Review*, Volume XXXIV, No 2, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi. pp. 16-35.
7. Sastri, K. A. N., (1955). *The Cōḷas*, University of Madras, Madras. p. 624.
8. Narayanan, M. G. S., (2013). *Perumāḷs of Kerala: Brahmin Oligarchy and Ritual Monarchy: Political and Social Conditions of Kerala Under the Cēra Perumāḷs of Makōtai* (c. AD 800-AD 1124), Cosmo Books, Trissur. p. 307.
9. The statistical arrangement of the terminologies is following method. The arrangement consists of six parts, the first part is the serial number, the second part contains the source or the reference of the term. For example, TAS 02 02 means, TAS is the abbreviation of the Travancore Archaeological Series, first 02 is the volume number (second volume) and the second 02 is the inscription number in the concern volume. At one place the reference coded like TAS 02 07 (J) (05 62) with (\*) mark, which refers that inscription is published in Travancore Archaeological

Series, volume two, inscription number is seven and ‘J’ is the serial number within seven, and volume five and inscription number is 62. The third section deals with the location of the inscription. For example, KL KTM *Changanasserry*, KL is the abbreviation of the State Kerala, KTM signifies Kottayam district and Changanasserry Taluk. The other state abbreviation is Tamil Nadu (TN), district abbreviations are Kollam (KLM), Pathanamthitta (PTA), Alappuzha (ALP), and Ernakulam (EKM). The fourth section is the abbreviations of the names of the rules. The names are Rāma Rājaśēkara (RR), Stānu Ravi Kulaśēkara (SR), Bāskara Ravi Manukulātitya (BR), and Vīra Kēraḷa Varman (VR). The fifth part deals with the regnal year of the ruler (which is in two digit) or the date of the inscription in Common Era (which is in three digit). And the last part of the table is the terminologies associated with Weights and Measures.

10. Gopinatha Rao, T. A., (1916). *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. II, Law Printing Press, Madras. p. 131.
11. Narayanan, M. G. S., (2013), *Op. cit.*, p. 307.
12. Subrahmanya Aiyar, K. V., (1922). *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. III, Government Press, Trivandrum. pp. 170-171.
13. Narayanan, M. G. S., (2013), *Op. cit.*, p. 307.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 308., Vijayalekshmy, (2003). ‘Localisation of Weights and Measures in Pre-Modern Kerala’, *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Vol. 64, Aligarh. pp. 609, <https://www.keralatourism.org/responsible-tourism/networking/ProductDetail/193> , accessed on 10 October, 2022.
15. Gopinatha Rao, T. A., (1916), *Op. cit.*, p. 47.
16. Narayanan, M. G. S., (2013), *Op. cit.*, p. 308.
17. TAS 02 07 (J) (05 62), ‘Pantirunāḷi Tiruvāmiruth’, TAS 02 09 (III), ‘Nāḷi Ariyi pūta bali’
18. Nāḷiyāl Nūrunāḷi, Irupatu Nannāḷiyum, Muṇṇāṇṇāḷiyil Irunāḷi Ceythariyum, Muṇṇāṇṇāḷiyil Nūtrunāḷi Ceytariyum, TAS 02 04 (A) ‘Onpatunāḷi Paṛayāl Anpatupparai’,
19. TAS 02 07 (H) ‘Itāṇṇāḷiyāl Patinaccunāḷi Neyy’, TAS 02 07 (L) ‘Muṇṇāṇṇāḷiyil Irunāḷi Ceytha Neyyum’

20. Gopinatha Rao, T. A., (1916), *Op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.
21. TAS 02 07 (C) 'Ancu Kāṇam pontanṭam', 'Pattu kāṇam pontanṭam', TAS 02 07 (G) 'Arupatin Kalaṇu Sempon', TAS 02 07 (L) 'Nālpatin Kalaṇu pon', TAS 02 04 (A) 'Irupattainkalaṇu pon'.
22. Gopinatha Rao, T. A., (1916), *Op. cit.*, pp. 67-68 & 80-82.
23. Narayanan, M. G. S., (2013), *Op. cit.*, p. 309.
24. *Ibid.*, Vijayalekshmy, (2003), *Op. cit.*, p. 609,
25. Sastri, K. A. N., (1955), *Op. cit.*, p. 621.
26. Narayanan, M. G. S., (2013), *Op. scit.*, p. 309.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 308.





## THE TELUGU CHODAS OF KOSALA: A CURIOUS CASE OF IMMIGRATION AND RULE OF A SOUTH INDIAN FAMILY IN WESTERN ODISHA

**Dr. Binod Bihari Satpathy**

Assistant professor

Department of History

Bharathidasan Government College for Women Puducherry.

### Abstract

*Immigration within and outside the subcontinent was always there since remote antiquity. Trade, invasion and search for employment are primary reasons for immigration of common people. However, for the royal and noble class, search for new territory for carving kingdoms was a prominent cause. The Indian subcontinent witnessed several examples of migration of the royal class and establishment of kingdoms far from their homeland. The Telugu Chodas of Kosala (Western Odisha) were an example of such royal migration.*

*In the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 11<sup>th</sup> century CE, the Telugu Chodas emerged in the political horizon of Kosala (Western Odisha). They carved a small kingdom and ruled from their headquarters at Suvarnapura for a brief period of around 45 years (c. 1069-1114 C.E) as feudatory of the Naga kingdom of Chakrakota Mandala. Based on their epigraphic records, this essay will discuss the short*

*but significant history of the Telugu Chodas with special reference to their origin, advent, reign and contribution to the cultural domain of western Odisha.*

**Keywords:** *Migration, conquest, copper plate, Charter, feudatory, grants, etc.*

## **Introduction**

At the beginning of 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian subcontinent witnessed several events. Northern India endured recurring incursions of the Ghaznavid army under Mahmud. Several kingdoms got eliminated and new ones emerged. In the south, the Cholas emerged as a mighty force. They commissioned military campaigns within the subcontinent and beyond its territorial limits. However, all the spectacular military expeditions of the Cholas, were in fact plundering raids<sup>1</sup>.

The Gangetic expedition of Emperor Rajendra Chola was one such plundering raid. Politically, Rajendra Chola's northern campaign did not bring the annexed territories under the control of the Chola hegemony. However, these campaigns left a long-lasting influence and mark on the territories over which the imperial army of the Cholas marched. On their way to the Ganges, the Chola army marched through Odisha. With the withdrawal of the victorious Chola army, new political formations took place in the political horizon of Odisha. The Somavamsi of Utkala got a new king, Yayati-II, who built the famous Lingaraj Temple at Bhubaneswar.

At this time, the western frontiers of the Somavamsi kingdom witnessed repeated incursions at the hands of the Kalachuris and the Nagas of Chakrakota Mandala. In course of time, the Somavamsi lost their sway over the western region called the Kosala, giving space for the Nagas to control this region. Under the Naga suzerainty, the Telugu Chodas entered this region in the third quarter of 11<sup>th</sup> century CE, precisely around 1069 CE and began their rule in and around Suvarnapur as a feudatory.

Subsequently, the Telugu Chodas established their authority for a short period of time before they were overthrown by the powerful Kalachuris. Three of their records, viz, the Mahada<sup>2</sup> (EI, XII, No. 9), the Kumarsimha<sup>3</sup> and the Patna Museum<sup>4</sup>, which are available to us till date, inform us about this dynasty. Based on the discovery places of their copper plate records, it can be assumed that the Telugu Choda ruled over an area comprising present Sonepur and Balangir districts, as well as some portion of Kalahandi district, with their capital at Suvarnapura<sup>5</sup>.

Epigraphic records inform us that the Telugu Chodas were Saivite and built temples in their dominion. They patronized Sanskrit and revived the cultural atmosphere of the upper Mahanadi valley. The Telugu Chodas adapted and assimilated in the new environment in a very short time. The extant Baidyanatha temples and imageries at Baidyanatha, Charda and Patnagarh bear the stamp of the Telugu Chodas and portray the legacy of the creative genius of the dynasty. Based on the available copper plates, this essay will discuss the short but significant history of the Telugu Chodas with special reference to their origin, advent, reign and contribution to the cultural domain of western Odisha.

### **Emergence and ascendancy of the Telugu-Chodas**

The Somavamsi rule started to fade after the demise of mighty Mahasivagupta Yayati II Mahasivagupta. The Amoda plate of Prthvideva I<sup>6</sup> makes us believe that the repeated attacks by the Kalachuris in the western frontiers further weakened the hold of the Somavamsi rule in the western tract of their kingdom.

At this juncture, in the southwest of Somavamsi dominion, the Naga dynasty rose to power in the Chakrakota Mandala, roughly comprising present Bastar region of Chhattisgarh and the undivided Koraput district of Odisha. The earliest known epigraphic record of the Nagas is from Errakot<sup>7</sup> near Jagadapur and it is dated 25 April 1023

C.E<sup>8</sup>. The date of this Errakot record is synchronous with the time of invasion of Rajendra Cola (1022 C.E) and the Nagas might have entered Bastar as part of the Chola army.

The Tirumalai inscription<sup>9</sup> of Rajendra Chola mentions the conquest of Sakkrakotam (Cakrakota) along with Madurai Mandalam, Namanayikodam, Pancapalli and Masunidesam. The last-mentioned territory means the 'land of snakes'. So, it may be suggested that the Nagas (snakes) established their rule over that country which was a small principality. The small principalities around that of the Nagas were united to form Cakrakota Mandala in subsequent times. Thus, the Nagas established them and vied with other ruling dynasties of the neighbouring kingdoms for supremacy. In the quest of expansion of their dominion, the Nagas came in contact with the Somavamsis of Utkala. There is a reference to the struggle of the Somavamsi king Janamejaya II Mahasivagupta (1065-80 CE) with Nagaraja in the Ratnagiri copper plate charter of Karnnadeva.

In that war, the Somavamsis were defeated by the Naga king. Possibly it was during the wars that Naga king Somesvaradeva sent one of his generals, Yasorajadeva of a Telugu Choda ruling family under his dominion to capture Suvarnapura region which the latter occupied sometime in 1069 CE before the Kuruspal inscription was recorded<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the war between the Nagas and the Somavamsi provided a platform for the Telugu Choda to enter western Odisha as feudatory of the Nagas.

## Origin

In their epigraphic records, the Telugu Chodas have taken the titles of *Cholakula Kamala Kalita Vikasa Bhaskarah* (the Sun who makes the lotus bud of Cholakula bloom), *Ṭaverinatha* (Lord of Kaveri), *Dinakarakulanandanah* (Scion of Solar dynasty), and *Varaurapura adhisvara* (Lord of Urair) the traditional capital of the Colas<sup>11</sup>. It has been suggested that they were related to the Colas of the South. A number

of Telugu-Choda chiefs bearing the same titles are known to have flourished in Kuddapah, Anantapura and Karnool districts of Telugu country<sup>12</sup>.

The title of Ayanagandhavarana, popular with the generals and subordinates of the western Calukyas has also been adopted by the Telugu Chodas. Later on, they came to serve under the Nagas of Cakrakota. As pointed out above, one of them named Yasoraja was given a chance to attack Suvarnapura region of Kosala in 1069 CE. Yasoraja occupied the territory and was made the ruler by his paramount lord, the Naga ruler Somesvaradeva I of Cakrakota.

### **Political history and chronology**

In course of time, the Telugu Chodas ruled over the Sonepur-Balangir region of western Odisha and adopted the title, *Sakala Kosaladhisvara* (Lord of entire Kosala)<sup>13</sup>. They possessed *Rakta dhvaja* (red standard or banner) and *Simha lanchhana* (the lion crest). They were Baidyanatha Pada Pankaja Bhramara (bee on the lotus feet of the Lord Baidyanatha). They belonged to Kasyapa *gotra* and enjoyed the feudatory titles like Ranaka, Mahamandalesvara and Mahavyuhapati<sup>14</sup>.

So far three Copper plate grants<sup>15</sup> of the Telugu-Choda period have come to light. These three copper plate grants throw light on the political history of the Telugu Chodas. The Kuruspal inscription<sup>16</sup> of Naga King Somesvaradeva I dated 1069 CE informs us about the Nagas' conquest of Kosala and subsequent appointment of Telugu- Choda Yasoraja-I, as the Governor of the conquered territory. Further, the Ratanpur stone inscription of Jajjaladeva of the Kalachuri dynasty dated 1114 CE<sup>17</sup> refers to the conquest of Kosala from the Telugu Chodas by the Kalachurris.

This event is corroborated by the Kharod inscription of Ratnadeva III, in which the victory of Jajjaladeva against Somesvara III alias Bhujabala of Suvarnapura is written<sup>18</sup>. This suggests that the Telugu-Choda dynasty ruled from Suvarnapura from 1069 C.E to 1115

CE as feudatories of the Naga kings of Bastar<sup>19</sup> (Sadananda Agrawal, Epigraphical and Numismatic Treasures from Sonepur District, Smaranika, Sonepur, 1998, p. 5). The second one is the Kumarisimha grants issued by Somesvaradeva III, in the 11<sup>th</sup> year of his reign. The third and last known record of the Telugu Choda is the Patna Museum plates issued by Somesvaradeva III in his 17<sup>th</sup> regnal year. Based on the above-mentioned copper plates charters, historians prepared the genealogy<sup>20</sup>. The earliest known figure of this dynasty was one Callamaraja, who was probably a feudatory of the Naga of Baster. He was succeeded by Yasorajadeva-I, who arrived in south Kosala and was given charge of ruling over this area by his overlord the Naga King. Yosorajadeva had scions namely, Somesvaradeva I and Chandradityadev (Chieftain of Ammagrama).

In Kosala, Yosorajadeva was succeeded by his eldest son Somesvaradeva I, who, in turn was succeeded by Dharalladeva alias Yasorajadeva II. Somesvaradeva II, the donor of Mahada copper plate charter succeeded his father in Kosala. Somesvaradeva II was succeeded by one of his relatives, Yasorajadeva II, the son of Chandraditya and grandson of Yosorajadeva I. Finally, the son and successor of Yasorajadeva II ruled the Telugu Choda dominion from Suvarnapura in the name of Somesvaradeva III. He donated the Kumarisimha and Patna Museum plates.

### **Data derived from the Telugu-Choda's Epigraphs**

The three inscriptions of the Telugu Chodas constitute a unique class by themselves. These copper plates charters provide interesting information about the rulers of the dynasty and the early part of their career in Kosala. Besides, the place name of the region in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century C.E, the South Indian origin of the Telugu Chodas and their story of immigration and *gotra*, etc. are of significance. Titles such as the *Cholakula Kamala Kalita Vikasa Bhaskarah* (the Sun who makes the lotus bud of Cholakula bloom), *Ṭaverinatha* (Lord of Kaveri), *Dinakarakulanandanah* (Scion of Solar dynasty), *Varaurapura*

*adhisvara* (Lord of Urair) the traditional capital of the Colas<sup>21</sup> portray the emotional connection of Telugu Chodas to their homeland i.e. the Tamil country. Subsequently, however, they adapted to their new place of residence, by adopting the title, *Sakala Kosaladhisvara* (Lord of entire Kosala)<sup>22</sup>.

### **Mahada Plates**

The Mahada Grant was issued by King Somesvaradeva varman in the 23rd year of this region, that is on Sunday, Megha Sudi-7, when the Sun was in Makara and the moon at Revati during the 23rd regnal year of his overlord Somesvara, the Naga king of Bastar. The above details exactly correspond to 18th of January, 1092 C.E<sup>23</sup>. Somesvaradevavarman has described himself as “*Mahamahimadalesvara, Mahabhupati and Chakravartin*” which indicate his sovereign status. He has been taken as the donor’s overlord Somesvaradeva of Chindakanaga dynasty.

The donee of this grant is Madhusudan. The charter records the grant of the village Champamalla along with five other villages - Mahada, Attandrela, Medhaka, Khadan and Kokatideb - all of which are identified in modern Birmaharajpur subdivision under Sonapur district<sup>24</sup>. The blessings of Lord Baidyanatha Bhattaraka was sought for longevity and wealth of the country through the donation of the villages. The villages referred to below have been identified with present day Champamal, Mahada, Achanda and Mendhamal, while Khadan and Kokatideb elude identification<sup>25</sup>. The term Maha-Mahi-Mandalesvara<sup>26</sup> of the Mahada Charter literally means the ruler of a *mandala* or district. *Pancamahasabda* refers to the privilege of enjoying the sounds of five musical instruments, the use of which are allowed to persons of high rank and authority - such as a horn, a tabor, a conch-shell, a kettledrum and a gong.

It may be said that Somesvaradeva II was appointed as the ruler by the Naga king Somesvara, whose period of reign is assigned from C.E 1069 to 1110 because his son Kanharadeva was on the throne of

Cakrakota by 1111 C.E as known from his Narayanpal inscription<sup>27</sup>. Somesvaradeva is also known to have been defeated and imprisoned by Jajjaladeva I (A D 1090-1120) as revealed by the Ratnapur inscription by the latter<sup>28</sup>.

Since the Mahada inscription dated R.Y.23 refers to Somesvaradeva (Naga) as meditating on his feet by the Telugu Choda king of the same name, it is evident that the Telugu Chodas spent their early career as feudatories of the Nagas. Of course, the successors of the Naga king Somesvara were weak and they failed to maintain their hegemony over Suvarnapura.

The donor-king describes himself as a bee at the lotus-feet of Sri Baidyanatha (*Sri Baidyanatha-pada-pankaja-bhramara*). Evidently, the god Baidyanatha has been identified with the Lord of that name in a village on the bank of the Tel, about 10 kms. To the west of Suvarnapura. The ruins of an old porch with some miniature and big images, assignable to 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> century CE still stand at the village. The same God is invoked in the Kumansimha copper plate charter of Somesvaradeva III. It appears that the Lord was the titular deity of the family and his temple was erected by either Somesvaradeva II or one of his predecessors.

### **Kumarisimha Charter**

The Kumarisimha grants were issued by Somesvaradeva III, in the 11th year of his reign, from the capital of Suvarnapura. The introduction portion of the charter describes its donor as a great devotee of Lord Mahesvara (*Parama-Mahesvara*), decorated with all sorts of eulogies (*samasta prasasti alamkrta*), veritable figure of the terrible Candi (the goddess with a ferocious form) for all the enemies (*dorddanda-candihta-sakala-vipaksa*), a great lord of the illustrious Kshatria family (*ksatriyakula mahima Mahadeva*), the sun which helps in the blossoming of the lotus bud that is Chola-kula (*Chola kula-kamalakalika-vikasa-bhaskara*), lord of entire Kosala (*Sakala Kosaladhisvara*), *Auyanagandhavarana* (a traditional title of the Chodas in South India) and adept at eradication



of the vanity of the circle of enemies (*Satrumandalika-mada-nivarana-durddhara*) victor of battles against many enemies (*samarajit-tneka ripu-pathi*), the lord of Kaveri (river), the scion of the brilliant rayed sun (*pradyota dinakara-kulanandana*) who has the standard of blood-red banner (*raktadhvaja*) and the seal of lion (*simha lanchana*). The donated village Kumarisimha is identified with modern Kumarisimha (northern bank of Mahanadi, constituting modern Birmaharajpur subdivision)<sup>29</sup>. The donee was a *rajakula* Brahmana, named Kadrapani Sarma of *Kasyapa gotra*, *Nedhru-Vargya*, Saya Pravara and a pupil of *Yajurveda*. The occasion of the donation was a lunar eclipse on the full moon day of Magha. It was issued on the 11th day of the bright fortnight of Magha in RY 11. King Somesvara III came to the throne in 1095-96 CE; thus, the Kumarisknha plates seem to have been issued either in 1106 or 1107 C.E. The composer of the grant was Pandita Baladeva, while it was incised by Vijnani Lokanatha.

### Patna Museum Plates

The Patna plates were issued in (1112/13 C.E.) on the sixth day of the bright half of the month of Jyestha by Somesvaradeva III in the 17th regnal year from Suvarnapura. The object of this charter is to record the donation of the village Phullamuthi and Dohali situated in the Visaya of Charada. The grant is addressed to the people of Vaniyabandha. The donors were Utsavakara and Divakara belonging to *Garggya gotra*. The grant was made for pleasing Lord Narayan Bhattaraka (*Bhagavato Nardyana Bhattarakaya Pritaye*), and for the increase of the merit of the parents of the donor. The inscription was written by Pandit Narayan and engraved by Lokanath. The village Vaniyabandha in Charada Visaya, identified with modern Charada, is situated at a distance of 35 kms., north of Sonapur town on the road to Binik. The Patna Museum charter provides a complete chart of genealogy from the earliest known chieftain, Callamaraja, to its donor king Somesvaradeva III. Secondly, it describes the donor, very interestingly, both as Paramamahesvara and Paramavaisnava, although it refers to Sri Baidyanatha Siva as his family deity.

### **The end of the Telugu Choda Rule**

Except the above discussed three copper plate charters, no other record of any other ruler of the dynasty has come to light. The Kharod Stone inscription<sup>30</sup> informs us that the Kalacuhri King Jajjalladeva (cir. 1090-1120) of Ratnapura invaded Suvarnapura and defeated Bhujavala alias Somesvara III. As no records of the Telugu Chodas are found after this date nor any of the contemporary dynasties of the neighbouring territory referred to the Telugu Chodas in their inscription, it appears that the glorious rule of this dynasty ended with the rule of three rulers and lasted only for roughly forty-five years.

### **Cultural Contributions**

The Telugu Chodas ruled in the Sonepur-Balangir region for a brief period of forty-five years. However, in this short time all the three rulers of the dynasty contributed greatly to the cultural efflorescence of this tribal dominated region of Odisha. The Telugu-Chodas patronized Saivism as well as Vaisnavism and built temples. They invited learned Brahmins and donated land and thereby, spread the Brahminical religion in the region. The monumental legacy of the Telugu Chodas is still visible in the form of the extant Saiva monuments of Baidyanath, Charda, and Patanagarh. The Baidyanatha temple is situated on the bank of the Tel about 16 kms. west of Sonepur. Originally, the temple consisted of a sanctuary and the porch. At present only the porch portion of original temple is surviving and is restored by authorities (Fig.1). The square *mandapa* has a stone doorframe at the entrance, projecting balconies on the north and south, an ornately carved doorframe on the west leading to the sanctum, twelve engaged stone pillars forming the square interior and a raised platform in the center of the floor, measuring 14 feet square, with a pillar on each corner. The exterior walls, however, are of brick. The engaged pillars forming the square interior are rather plain in treatment in contrast to the ornate decoration of the four pillars of the raised dais. Inserted between the pillar capitals and the architrave are iron beams which help to support the stone ceiling, the architraves forming a checkerboard pattern of square and rectangular frames spanned by overlapping courses of masonry scaled by stone slabs<sup>31</sup>.

The doorframe on the east, which projects out sharply from the brick walls, consists of three bands of scrollwork which begin above the *dvarapala* niche at the base. The *Dvara-Lalata-Bimba* panel on the lintel contains a Gaja-Laksmi image with Laksmi seated in *lalitasana* with her right leg bent, rather than the earlier pose, with legs crossed and firmly locked which was standard on most doorframes (Fig.2). The inner surrounds of the frame are decorated with lotus rosettes and scrollwork. The architrave over the portico, at the level of the brick walls, was decorated with miniature shrines alternating with two figures (Fig.3). These two figures, one male and one female, are represented, displaying their sex organs.

The doorframe at the west, leading to the sanctum, is flanked at the base by *dvarapalas* and attendant river goddesses. The jamb above the river goddess is decorated with a *naga* figure, with intertwining tails, while at the base of the jamb, above the *dvarapala* is the bust of a diminutive *naga*, the jamb above this motif being divided into facets. The lintel of this inner frame has on its top band, a *graha* slab in which Ketu is added to make nine *graha*. The architrave above this inner frame is decorated with a large image of Vishnu in *Anantasayana* (see Fig.2). Similar image of Vishnu in *Anantasayana* is also carved at the lintel of the doorjambs of Kapilesvara temple at Charda (Fig.4). The four pillars on the raised dais in the center of the floor have a square, undecorated base resting on a *purna-ghata* pedestal. The shaft of the pillar above the base is octagonal and decorated, with standing lions, alternating with *kirtimukha* masks with pearls dripping from the mouths of all eight figures. Above these lion motifs are two bands of scrollwork, lightly carved, and, at the top of the shaft, an *alamba* motif of *kirtimukha* masks with one mask on each of the eight facets (Fig.5). The north and south balconied porches are provided with a raised seat which is fenced by a balustrade. Set at intervals between the short balusters are small slabs containing various scenes of Krsna and female figures or *mithunas*. The corner pillars supporting the flat roof of the porch are decorated with *kirtimukha* motifs and ornamental designs, while the inside pillars display *alasa-kanya* carved in high-relief (see Fig.10).

On the exterior, the *pabahga*, consists of four mouldings. The top moulding is aligned with the porch railing. The *jangha* is divided into two unequal stories by a simple moulding on the *kanika* and *anuratha*. With the renovation of the temple, the walls being reconstructed with modern bricks, the decorative program is no longer visible (see Fig. 1). The method is of carving figures in high-relief on a stone slab, the figures being finished with a veneer of stucco, allowing the sculptor to render delicate lines and refined details.

Of the images within the *mandapa*, there is a Kartikeya and Ganesa placed on the north and south walls of the projecting cast entrance. The image of Kartikeya is unique in that, the lower body is rendered in profile, astride the peacock mount, moving from right to left, rather than frontally depicted in the standard manner.

Kartikeya is two-armed and holds the *Jakli* in his right hand. His damaged left hand appears to rest on the head of his mount (Fig.7). His hair is arranged in corkscrew-locks, fanning out on both sides of his head, rather than in the standard *sikhandaka* mode with three tiered locks. Ganesa, though his left leg is missing, assumes a dance pose. Many of his arms are broken off (Fig.6). Other large images carved in high-relief on slabs include a Hari-Hara depicted in *samabhanga* flanked by smaller images of the bull Nandi and a female attendant (Fig.9). He is four-armed and holds the trident and *Chakra* in the upper right and left hands respectively. His lower right hand is extended in *varada*, while his corresponding left hand is broken off. There is an image of Nataraja, broken into two pieces, which now lies on the ground in front of the *mandapa*. Many of his ten arms are badly damaged or missing. The upper two hands hold a serpent horizontally above his head while other visible attributes include a rosary, *Kapala* and *Damaru*.

Some of the most enchanting images are the numerous female figures carved on slabs within the *mandapa* and on the porch pillars. In many cases, they represent *alasa-kanyas* engaged in everyday activities

such as looking into a mirror or removing their garments. In some cases, the female assumes the *salabhanjika* pose beneath a tree. Several examples represent the female holding a child, a motif that becomes increasingly popular from here on.

In another example, possibly representing a goddess, the woman places her left hand on her thigh and raises her right hand in *Abhaya-mudra* (Fig.10). In general, the figures appear very tranquil in pose and exhibit a slight smile suggesting inner contentment. There are also spoked-haloes behind some of the female figures as well as behind the male figure in a *mithuna* scene (see Fig. 9). The female partner in this latter motif clings to the neck of the male and lifts her left leg as she pins him against the wall. Though the female appears near ecstasy in her embrace the male seems static and unmoved. On stylistic and iconographic grounds, the temple is dated to last half of the 9th century<sup>32</sup>. However, there is absolutely no reference to the God Baidyanath in the Somavamsi record although, the Telugu-Chodas declare Lord Baidyanath as their tutelary deity. Hence, the original temple must have been constructed or renovated from an existing one by the Telugu-Choda ruler during their brief rule<sup>33</sup>. The Kapilesvara temple at Charda in Sonepur district and the Koslaesvara temple at Patanagarh in Balangir district share similarities with the Baidyanath temple. At least the *mandapa* portion bears striking resemblance. Definitely, these two temples also received patronization from the Telugu-Choda ruler. The village name Charada is found mention in the Telugu-Choda copper plate grants, hence, the ruler was definitely aware about the temple. The Koslaesvara temple at Patanagarh was possibly commissioned by the Telugu-Chodas<sup>34</sup>.

## Conclusion

The Telugu-Chodas originally hail from the Tamil country, as reflected in their *virudas* and placed themselves among the ruling elite of the then western Odisha. The Telugu-Chodas began their rule as a feudatory of the Naga dynasty of Chakrakota. They carved a kingdom over the Sonepur-Balangir region of western Odisha, claimed

the title of Mahamandalesvara and Chakaravartin and were called Sakala Kosaladhisvara. They remained emotionally connected with their homeland with titles such as *Cholakula Kamala Kalita Vikasa Bhaskarah*, *Ṣaverinatha* and *Varaurapura adhisvara* or lord of Uraipur. They patronized both Saivism and Vaisnavism and donated land to the Brahmanas. However, their rule was short-lived and by the beginning of 12<sup>th</sup> century C.E the Telugu Chodas were deposed by the Kalachuris and lost in oblivion.

### Photo courtesy

- Image Nos. 2, 4, 5, and 8: Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Odisha.
- Image No.1, 3, 6, 7, 9 & 10: Author

### References

1. Spencer, George, W., (1976). 'The politics of Plunder: The Cholas in Eleventh Century Ceylon', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.35, No.3, Cambridge University Press, pp.405-420.
2. Sircar, D.C., & M. Venkataramayya, (1950). 'Mahada Plates of Somesvaradevavarman: Year 23' *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 28, Part. 6, Calcutta, pp.238-288.
3. Banerji, R.D., (1927-28). 'Patna Museum Plates of Somesvara II', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 19, New Delhi (Rpt. 1983), pp.97-100.
4. Ramdas, G., (1946). 'Kumarisimha Plate Grant of Chola-Kula Somesvaradeva', in *Journal of Kalinga Historical Research Society*, Vol.1 No.1, Balangir, pp.229-236.
5. Mishra, P.K., & J.K.Samal., (eds.) (1997). *Comprehensive History and Cultures of Orissa*, Vol.1, Kaveri Books, New Delhi, p.242.
6. Hiralal, Rai Bahadur., (1927-28). 'Amoda Plates of the Haihaya King Prithivideva I: Chedi Samvat 831', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.19, New Delhi (Reprinted 1983), pp. 75-80.; Mirashi, V.V., (eds.) (1955). 'Amoda Plates of Prithivideva I; (Kalachuri Year I)', *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.4, Part.2, Inscriptions of the Kalachuri Chedi Era, pp.401-408.

7. Hiralal, Rai Bahadur., (1926). *Descriptive Lists of Inscriptions in the Central Provinces and Berar*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Government Press, Nagpur, No.285, p. 166.
8. Majumdar, R.C., (2011). *The History & Culture of Indian People: The Struggle for Empire*, Vol. 5, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, p. 215.
9. Hultzsch, R., (1891). *South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. 2, Part 1, Archaeological Survey of India, Madras, pp. 117-120.
10. Hiralal, Rai Bahadur., (1916). 'Khuruspal Stone Inscription of Somesvaradeva', in *Descriptive Lists of Inscriptions in the Central Provinces and Berar*, 2nd ed. Government Press, Nagpur, No. 203, p. 147.
11. Sahu, N.K., P.K. Mishra, and J.K. Sahu., (1989). (eds.) *History of Orissa*, Nalanda, Cuttack, 1989, p.194.
12. Sastri, H.K., (1981). 'Malepadu Plates of Punyakumara-The Fifth Year of His Reign'. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 11, pp. 343-344.
13. Sahu, N.K., and others, (1989). *Op.cit*, p.194.
14. Mishra, P.K., and J. K. Samal, (ed.), (1997). *Op. cit.*, p. 238.
15. Sahu, N.K., (1971). *New Aspects of History of Orissa*, Sambalpur University, Sambalpur, p.21.
16. Hiralal, Rai Bahadur., (1909-10). 'Khuruspal Stone Inscription of Somesvaradeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.10, Part.1, Calcutta, pp.25-30.
17. Mirashi, V.V., (1955). 'Ratnapur Stone Inscription of Jajalladeva I', in *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.4, Part.2, Inscriptions of Kalachuri Chedi Era, pp. 409-418.
18. Mirashi, V.V., (eds.), (1955). 'Kharod Stone Inscription of Ratnadeva III', *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.4, Part.2, Inscriptions of the Kalachuri Chedi Era, Government Epigraphist for India, Ootacamund, pp.533-42.
19. Agrawal, S.N., (1998). 'Epigraphical and Numismatic Treasures from Sonapur District' *Smaranika*, Sonapur, (1998). p. 5.
20. Sahu, N.K., and others. (1989). *Op. cit.*, p. 192.
21. *Ibid*, p.194.

22. *Ibid.*
23. Agrawal, S.N., (1989). *History of Sonapur* (Odia), Vol. II, Atmaprakasani, Balangir, Odisha, p.43.
24. Sahu, J.K., (1997). *Historical Geography of Orissa*, D.K. Print world Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p. 86.
25. Mishra, D.B., (1997). 'Epigraphic References of Suvarnapura and its Surrounding Tract.' *The Souvenir of AONGCTA*, Sonapur, p.26.
26. Sircar, D.C., (1966). *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*, Motilal Banarasidass, New Delhi, pp. 179-80.
27. Hiralal, Rai Bahadur., (1907-08). 'Narayanpal Inscription of Gonda Mahadevi.' *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.9, Calcutta, pp. 311-46.
28. Mirashi, V.V., (1955). (ed.) *Op. cit.*, pp. 409-418.
29. Mishra, D.B., (1997). *Op. cit.*, p. 27.
30. Mirashi, V.V., (1955). (ed.) *Op. cit.*, pp. 533-42.
31. Das, D.R., (1976). 'Kosalesvara Temple at Baidyanath, (Balangir District, Orissa).' *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 38, No. 4, Museum Rietberg (Switzerland), p. 298.
32. Donaldson, T.E., (1985). *Hindu Temple Art of Orissa*, Vol. 2. E.J. Brill, Leiden, p. 207.
33. Agrawal, S.N., (1989). *Op. cit.*, p. 43.
34. Sahu, N.K., and others. (1989). *Op. cit.*, p. 194.





Fig. 1. The Baidyanatha temple General View.



Fig. 2. Doorframes of Baidyanath Temple



Fig. 3. Decorated portico of Baidyanath temple



Fig. 4. Lord Vishnu at nearby Charda temple doorframe, similar to Baidyanath



Fig. 5. Pillar Base and Column inside the Mandapa at Baidyanath.



Fig. 6. Image of Lord Ganesa, Baidyanath



Fig. 7. Image of Kartikeya, Badyanath



Fig. 8. Image of Hari-Hara,  
Baidyanath.



Fig. 9. Amorous Couple,  
Baidyanath



Fig. 10. Female figures, Baidyanath



## VAIṢṆAVISM IN BENGAL THROUGH INSCRIPTIONS - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Dr. Binay Barman**

Assistant Professor, Department of History  
Saldiha College, Bankura, W. B.

&

**Dr. Mala Laha**

Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit  
Saldiha College, Bankura, W. B.

### Abstract

*Within the realm of theistic beliefs, Vaishnavism stands out, venerating Lord Vishnu as the ultimate deity deserving worship, devotion, and commitment. The concept of divine grace is intricately linked with the Vaishnavite deity Vishnu, who is recognized as liberal and benevolent. Numerous archaeological, literary, and inscription-based sources offer abundant materials for studying Indian society, encompassing its religion, traditions, customs, and rituals, with a particular emphasis on Vaishnavism. It is not known when, where and how Vaishnava philosophy or religion originated but it is believed that Nathmuni attributed traditional Vaishnavism by the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE in South India. From South India this philosophy spread all over India. This philosophy is popular in Bengal as well as other parts of India. The main focus of this paper is to discuss Vaishnavism in Bengal as seen in inscriptions during the Pre-Gupta, Gupta, Pala and Sena periods.*

**Keywords:** *Background, progress of Vaishnavism in Bengal, pre-Gupta era, Gupta era, Pala and Sena period.*

### **Background of Vaishnavism**

During the sixth century BCE, *Vaiṣṇavism* flourished alongside Buddhism and Jainism, establishing itself as a prominent religious movement. Rooted in devotion to Lord Viṣṇu, *Vaiṣṇavism* gained traction as a distinct creed. This term finds its roots in the ancient *Ṛgveda*, where ‘Viṣṇu’ emerges as one of the foremost deities in the eyes of a segment of the populace during the later Vedic era.<sup>1</sup>

The emergence of ‘*Vaiṣṇavism*’ is often associated with the Upaniṣadic period. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, for instance, depicts Lord Kṛṣṇa as a disciple of Ṛṣi Ghoṣa from the Aṅgīrasa family, also identifying him as the son of Devakī.<sup>2</sup> In the epic *Mahābhārata*, Lord Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa occupies a significant role, serving as the leader of the Vṛṣṇi clan and earning divine reverence from both the Vṛṣṇi clan and the Pāṇḍavas.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars assert that Lord Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa’s heroic attributes contributed to his deification. Worship of him as the Supreme God gained prominence, with the belief that devotion could lead to salvation. Both Lord Vāsudeva and Lord Nārāyaṇa from the later Vedic period assumed the role of Supreme Beings. In the annals of religious history, the *Nārāyaṇanīya* section is known as ‘Nārāyaṇa’, focusing on the eternal soul of the universe and presenting four forms: Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Hari, and Kṛṣṇa. Interestingly, in the Vedic age, Lord Viṣṇu did not hold a significant place among the deities.

*Vaiṣṇavism*, a prevalent theistic religion, centers on the worship, devotion and dedication to Lord Viṣṇu. The concept of divine grace is intertwined with Lord Viṣṇu, embodying principles of liberalism and benevolence. Abundant archaeological and literary sources offer valuable insights into Indian society, its religions, traditions, customs, and rituals, especially those of *Vaiṣṇavism*. Within Hinduism’s religious

tapestry, *Vaiṣṇavism* or *Vaiṣṇava* philosophy holds a significant place. The term “the Pervader” is closely associated with *Vaiṣṇava* philosophy, encapsulating the worship and acceptance of Lord Viṣṇu. Devotees engage with Lord Viṣṇu through various forms of prayer, guided by the philosophy that devotion (*Bhakti*) to Lord Viṣṇu that leads to liberation (*Mokṣa*) from the cycle of birth and death.

*Vaiṣṇavism*’s doctrine is intricately linked with *Shaivism*, *Shaktism*, and *Smarthism*, forming a vital component of religious thought. The philosophy’s popularity grew during the early medieval and medieval periods in India. Origin theories of *Vaiṣṇavism* are diverse, with the Ghosundi inscription in Rajasthan suggesting the worship of *Samkarṣaṇa* and *Vāsudeva* around the second century BCE.<sup>4</sup> Heliodorus inscriptions support this view. This inscription is considered to be contemporary with the Ghosundi inscription. His devotees or followers are known as *Bhāgavata*.<sup>5</sup>

According to *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Lord Viṣṇu is identified with sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> *Purāṇas* mention three devotional religions, where Lord Viṣṇu is seen as a Vedic deity. Another aspect is Lord Nārāyaṇa, initially a cosmic and philosophical entity. In contrast, Lord Vāsudeva represents a historical God, later worshipped by common people as a *Vaiṣṇava* deity. Some identify him as *Vaiṣṇava*, *Kṛṣṇa*, and *Gopala Kṛṣṇa*. Notably, *Vaiṣṇava* philosophy encompasses various schools, including the *Bhāgavata* community, whose philosophy is expounded in the *Bhāgavad Gītā*.

This philosophy emphasizes three paths to salvation: *Jñāna* (knowledge), *Karma* (action), and *Bhakti* (devotion).<sup>7</sup> The first path is a difficult one. The second path prescribed a golden mean between *Pravṛtti*, or desire and *Nivṛtti* or withdrawal. The Karma Yogin surrenders to God the fruit of whatever work he does. He serves God by his work. The third path is the path of *Bhakti-Yoga*, the path of devotion or the “emotional attachment to God” which is the royal road to *Mokṣa* or salvation.

*Vaiṣṇavism* resonated well with the agrarian society of the post Vedic Age. Unlike the Vedic religion, which involved sacrificing oxen and heroes, *Vaiṣṇavism* introduced devotion (*Bhakti*) to Lord Kṛṣṇa, reducing the burden on peasants. Lord Kṛṣṇa's protective role of cattle and pastoral legends influenced the culture, while his elder brother Balarāma symbolized farming with his plough, impacting common households.

During the relevant period, *Vaiṣṇavism* made significant strides, gaining royal patronage from rulers such as the Guptas, Chālukyas, and Hoysalas. The multitude of temples adorned with Viṣṇuite images highlighted its extensive influence across India and beyond, even reaching Indian colonies in the Far East.<sup>8</sup> The doctrine of *Vaiṣṇavism* underwent notable changes. The concept of *Avatāra*, divine incarnation in human form, gained prominence, especially during the period under review. The number and nature of *Avatāras*<sup>9</sup> varied across treatises, initially numbering four or six, later expanding to ten or more.

The next great change in the *Vaiṣṇava* religion was the addition of two new chapters in the life of Lord Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. The first is the story of the life of child Kṛṣṇa brought up among the cowherds, and the second is his amorous dalliance with the *gopis* or cowherd girls. These phases of Lord Kṛṣṇa's life occupy such an important position in modern *Vaiṣṇavism*<sup>10</sup> that it looks like heresy to assert that they did not form part of the original creed. Still, that seems almost undoubtedly to have been the case. Some ideas of a pastoral Lord Kṛṣṇa might be of fairly early age, and there is no inherent improbability in a religious teacher beginning his life as a shepherd.

### **Progress of *Bhagavatism* or *Vaiṣṇavism* in Bengal**

The progression of *Bhagavatism* or *Vaiṣṇavism* in Bengal traces an intriguing journey through history. Initially, this religious belief seemed localized within the Mathurā District.<sup>11</sup> The observations of the Greek ambassador Megasthenes shed light on this early phase. Megasthenes,



the Greek envoy to the Mauryan court (c.300 BCE), documented various facets of ancient Indian society. His account mentions the Sourasenoī or Surasena tribe worshippers of Herakles (commonly identified with Krishna), inhabiting Methora (present Mathura) region. This corresponds to ancient Indian texts referencing the Vrishni and Yadavas at Mathura, devoted to Krishna, a deity revered for his heroic exploits and analogous to the Greek Herakles.<sup>11</sup> Megasthenes' accounts also bring forth a somewhat perplexing tale that intertwines Herakles and the Pandavas with the distant Pandya region in the southern part of India. The resemblance of the capital city Madura to Mathura has led scholars to speculate that *Bhagavatism* could have penetrated the southern extremities of India as far back as the fourth century BCE.

However, as time marched on, by the second century BCE., the influence of this emerging religious ideology had spread well beyond the borders of Mathura. Epigraphic records attest to the worship of Lord Vāsudeva cropping up in regions such as Maharashtra, Rajputana, and Central India. For instance, Heliodorus, a Greek ambassador from Takṣasila, referred to himself as a *Bhagavata*. He went on to erect a *Garudadhvaja*, a pillar adorned with an image of Garuda at its summit, in honour of Lord Vāsudeva, the Supreme Deity, at Besnagar. This location was once the ancient city of Vidisā, situated within the Gwalior state.<sup>12</sup>

This historical evidence underscores that *Vaiṣṇavism*, akin to Buddhism, managed to attract converts among foreign individuals and had gained sufficient prominence by the second century BCE to capture the attention of the most sophisticated civilizations. Interestingly, an inscription emerges from the eastern extremity of Bengal, offering insight into the astute dissemination of the Lord Viṣṇu cult to even remote corners of the region. Inscriptions from the Gupta and post-Gupta periods provide further evidence that the worship of Lord Viṣṇu in his form as Ananta Nārāyaṇa had gained substantial popularity across various parts of India, including Bengal.

### Condition of Vāsudeva cult during the Pre-Gupta Period

During the pre-Gupta period, the landscape of religious practices in Bengal underwent notable changes due to the introduction of Purāṇic mythology and religion. This shift led to the emergence of various cults that took root in the region. Among these developments, the worship of Lord Viṣṇu also gained prominence in Bengal. One of the earliest references to the worship of Lord Viṣṇu in Bengal can be found in the Śūsūniyā rock inscription<sup>13</sup> dating back to the fourth or fifth century C.E.<sup>14</sup> This inscription is carved alongside a depiction of a wheel (*cakra*) on the back wall of a cave situated in the Bankura district of West Bengal. The inscription sheds light on the religious inclinations of King Chandravarman, who is associated with the region of Puṣkaraṇa.

King Chandravarman is mentioned as a devoted follower of Chakrasvamin, a name that pertains to Lord Viṣṇu. This inscription not only indicates the presence of Vāsudeva worship in Bengal during this period but also offers insights into the personal devotion of King Chandra Varman to Chakrasvamin, who is none other than Lord Viṣṇu.

The Śūsūniyā rock inscription, situated within the confines of a cave, provides a tangible link to the religious sentiments and practices of the pre-Gupta period. It attests to the early adoption and reverence of Lord Viṣṇu's cult in Bengal, as well as the influence of Purāṇic mythology on the religious landscape of the region. This inscription serves as a valuable historical artifact that connects the people of that era to their religious beliefs and practices.

### Condition of Lord Vāsudeva cult during Gupta Period

The cult of *Vaiṣṇavism* appears to have been well established in Bengal during the Gupta and post-Gupta period. *Vaiṣṇavism* was a predominant aspect of Brahmanical religion during the Gupta age. With the rise of the power of the Guptas, *Vaiṣṇavism* came to the foreground and had appeared in the remotest corners of India, including Bengal. Some of the Gupta monarchs were great champions of the *Vaiṣṇava* cult.

The royal Guptas, from the time of King Chandragupta had assumed the title, '*Param Bhagavada*' indicating that they were *Vaiṣṇavas* in their personal religious pursuit. Two epigraphic records bearing the name of the Gupta king, Samudragupta refer to the close connection that *Bhagavatism* had with *Yoga* philosophy. One of these is dated in the year five of the reign of King Samudragupta and was found at Nālanda.<sup>15</sup> The other is dated in the year nine of the same king and was found at Gaya.<sup>16</sup> In both these inscriptions, the name of the emperor is found prefixed with the epithet '*Param Bhagavada*'. But these inscriptions are held as having been forged at some later date. In the Allahabad *Praśasti*, however, King Samudragupta is found eulogised as '*Achintya Puruṣa*'.<sup>17</sup> The term *Achintya Puruṣa*, however, has been an epithet attributed to Lord Vasudeva Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Information about erection of temples and installation of images are found mentioned in quite a number of inscriptions coming down from the Gupta age. A copper plate inscription found from Baigram in the Bogra district of Bangladesh, dated in the Gupta era 128 that is 448 CE, apparently of the time of King Kumaragupta I, reveals that two brothers, Bhoyila and Bhāṣkara, inhabitants of villages Trivṛta and Srigohali (situated in Baigram) had purchased some fallow and homestead lands in order to meet the expenses of repair works to the temple and for the worship of a deity named Lord Govindasvamin. Govindasvami<sup>18</sup> has been the name of the Lord Viṣṇu held as one and the same with Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Though some of the Gupta monarchs professed the *Bhagavata* form of *Vaiṣṇavism*, nothing can be said about the religious practices professed by the early rulers of the Gupta family from Sri Gupta, founder of the dynasty up to King Samudragupta. It has been generally accepted that King Samudragupta was *Vaiṣṇava*. In the opinion of Dr. D.C. Sircar, King Samudragupta, though a *Vaiṣṇava*, was apparently not a *Bhagavata*. There might have been some doctrinal differences between the faith of this king and *Bhagavatism*, professed by his successors. This is indicated

by the fact that in the inscriptions issued by his successors, the name of King Samudragupta is not found prefixed by the epithet, '*Parama Bhagavata*' as it occurs in the case of the two copper plate inscriptions referred to above and held as forged.

Mention may next be made of an inscription of the time of King Buddhagupta found from a place called Damodarpur in Dinajpur district, now in Bangladesh. In this inscription, which does not bear any date, there is mention of a gift of four *Kulyavāpa* and seven *Kulyavāpa* of land for the erection of two *devakulas* or shrines for two deities named Kokamukhasvāmi and śvetavarāhasvāmi<sup>19</sup> respectively. These two deities have been held as representing two different forms of the boar incarnation of the Lord Viṣṇu. The 5<sup>th</sup> Dāmodarpur copper plate of the Gupta year 224 (543 C.E.) gives an account of the restoration and repair of the temple of śvetavarāhasvāmi.<sup>20</sup> It apparently refers to the temple that was found mentioned to the above as set up in the time of Buddhagupta, referred to in the 4<sup>th</sup> Dāmodarpur copper plate. śvetavarāhasvāmi was, in all possibility a form of the *Varāha avatara* of Lord Viṣṇu. However, Dr. Kamal Ray in the *Indian Historical Quarterly* asserted that this Kokamukhasvāmi was a form of the Nṛsiṃha incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu.

According to Dr. D.C. Sircar, the original (*adya*) temples of these two gods might have been situated in some hilly region of Nepal, known as Varāha *chhatra* (varāha *kṣetra*) or Kokamukha. The two deities were undoubtedly two different forms of the Lord Viṣṇu, probably two varieties of his Varāha form which had once been quite popular in northern parts of Bengal. Thus, it appears that the *Vaiṣṇava* creed had come to gain wide popularity in Bengal during the time of the Gupta rule.

Bengal had continued to remain a stronghold of *Vaiṣṇavism* during the post-Gupta times. Many people of this period, as in the case of the people known from the inscriptions of the Gupta age, are found to have been known by names bearing *Vaiṣṇava* affiliation. Many names found in the copper plate inscriptions of the time of Gopachandra and

Dharmaditya - two rulers of post-Gupta age may be mentioned in this connection which bore *Vaiṣṇava* bearing. The Tipperah copper plate inscription of Lokanātha belonging to the seventh century CE, bears reference to the worship of the deity named, '*Ananta Nārāyaṇa*'. This deity was none other than a form of Lord Viṣṇu, conceived in the post of recumbence. The seal attached to this Tipperah grant bears a eulogy of the God Viṣṇu-Vāsudeva. It appears that during medieval times, there had grown a close relationship of mutual understanding between the Brahmanical Hindus and persons following the Mahayana Buddhist creed, both revering deities of both the pantheons.

Lokanātha, who was a person of Mahāyāna pursuit, appears to have had great reverence for the Brāhmanical God Viṣṇu-Vāsudeva. So, it may be presumed that the deity represented on the seal of this inscription of Lokanatha had come to be held as a form of the Mahāyāna God Lokanātha represented in the form, of Viṣṇu. This seal attached to the Tipperah grant bears a relief of a figure of the goddess Lakshmi or Sri standing on a lotus pedestal, and being sprinkled by two elephants from two sides upon her head with water. This representation is known as the Gaja-Lakṣmi or Abhiṣeka Lakṣmi motif. Such representations had become characteristic of a large number of indigenous Indian coins and probably reveal *Vaiṣṇava* affiliation of the persons who had issued those coins.

### **Condition of Vāsudeva cult during Pāla period**

We may presume that Kṛṣṇa cult was highly popular in Bengal from the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. though the influence of Buddhism steadily grew in the Pāla period, yet the large number of epigraphic records proves the prevalence of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal. The Khālimpur inscription of Dharmapāla reveals that the emperor had made a liberal grant towards the benefit of a temple dedicated to a deity mentioned as Lord Nārāyaṇa.<sup>21</sup> This deity was in every possibility a form of the God Viṣṇu. The Badal pillar inscription of the time of King Nārāyaṇapāla<sup>22</sup> was issued by a person named Bhatta Gurava Mishra, who had been a counsellor of the

King Nārāyaṇapāla. The inscription records the setting up of the pillar which was originally surmounted by a figure of Garuda. It contains a panegyric account of Gurava Misra and his ancestors. The inscription reveals that Gurava Misra was a devoted worshipper of God Viṣṇu. It is interesting to note that while Gurava Misra has been compared with Lord Gopala Kṛṣṇa, his father Parasurama and his mother had been compared to Vāsudeva and Devaki, father and the mother of Kṛṣṇa respectively.

In the Khālīmpur copper-plate inscription of Dharmapāla and another inscription, it is stated that the moon, God Chandra is born out of the ocean. These inscriptions further inform us that Rohini is the wife of Chandra. Sometimes, Chandra is also called a descendent of Atri. The Monghyr Copper Plate inscription of Devapāla records that Pṛthu, Sagara and other Purāṇic heroes were adored by the people. In this inscription, Bali, the King of Daityas of the golden age, Bhārgava of Tretā and Karṇa, the king of Aṅga of Devapāla are invoked as model donors. The Kamauli Copper - Plate of Vaidyadeva records that Vṛhaspati, the preceptor of the Gods is the model of Wisdom. From the Badal Pillar inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla, we know about the myths of Agastya's swallowing the ocean and Paraśurāma's campaign against the Kṣatriyas. It may be pointed out that in all the Farīdpur Copper Plate inscriptions and other inscriptions, it is evident that the kings of Bengal were inspired by the examples of Pṛthu, Dhananjaya, Nala, Yayati, Ambariṣa, Sagara etc. to perform noble deeds.<sup>23</sup> In the Badal Pillar inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla we find, that many myths are connected with Lord śiva and his consort.<sup>24</sup>

### **Condition of Vāsudeva cult during Sena Period:**

In the Barāckpur Copper-Plate of Vijaysena and in the Naihati Copper-Plate of Vallālasena, we find that Lord śiva is known by different names,<sup>25</sup> i.e. Sadāśiva, Ardhanarisvara, Dhurjati and Maheśvara and he had two sons, Kārtikeya and Ganeśa. Though the Sena rulers were devotees of Lord śiva, yet Lakṣmaṇasena and his successor were devout worshippers of Viṣṇu. Thus, we find that many inscriptions begin with the invocation of Nārāyaṇa.<sup>26</sup>

Vaishnavism is also popular in the northern part of Bengal i.e. Kamarupa-Kamata-Kuchbehara region. According to Sailen Debnath, ‘in the seventh and eighth century C.E., several Vaishnava preceptors and preachers named Ramananda, Nimananda, Gadadhar and Nityendra settled in Kamarupa-Kamata-Kuchbehara region or present North Bengal for reinitiating of the Koches (Rajbanshis) to Vaishnavism from the grip of Buddhism, and the reinitiated people were called Poruas.’<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that Vaishnavism was established in Kamarupa-Kamata region at a time when Sun-worship as well as Brahminical culture made considerable progress.<sup>28</sup> Ancient Pragjyotisha or present Assam had long been associated with Vishnu worship. In this region, the inscriptional reference to Viṣṇu is made in the Badaganga inscription, where the Kamarupa king Bhuti Barman is mentioned as ‘*Parama-daivata-Paramabhagavata*’.<sup>29</sup>

### Conclusion

The influence of *Vaiṣṇavism* in different inscriptions of Bengal proves that the worship of Lord Viṣṇu, apart from any sectarian spirit, seems to have been a general practice in early days. Many great kings of Bengal have been ardent worshippers of Lord Viṣṇu. It has already been stated that the spread, as well as popularity of *Vaiṣṇavism* in Bengal in the medieval times were mainly due to the good offices of the *Vaiṣṇavite* rulers such as the Guptas, the Pālas, the Senas and their successors. There are evidences to show that the royal personages of some other minor dynasties and chieftains also worked for the furtherance of *Vaiṣṇavism* in Bengal and its neighborhood.

Apart from receiving allegiance and patronage from patrons of royal families, many ministers and high officials of non- *Vaiṣṇavism* rulers as the Pālas and also from wealthy and affluent merchant community of the region contributed to the spread of *Vaiṣṇavism* in Bengal. Most of the images of the deity found from all over the region bear evidence to the patronage that was received from wealthy persons who could spare substantial amounts of money for the execution of such images and also of suitable temples, which at one time had enshrined these images.

## References

1. “ato devā avantu no yato viṣṇu vircakrame.  
prthivyāḥ sapta dhāmabhiḥ” (Rgveda saṃhitā 1/22/16)  
“idaṃ viṣṇurvicakrame tredhā nidadhe padam.  
samulahamasya pāṃsure..” (Rgveda saṃhitā 1/22/17)  
“trīṇi padā vi cakrame viṣṇurgopā adābhyah.  
ato dharmāṇi dhārayan..” (Rgveda saṃhitā 1/22/18)  
“viṣṇoḥ karmāṇi paśyata yato vratāni paspaśe.  
indrasya yajyuh sakhā” (Rgveda saṃhitā 1/22/19)  
“tad viṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padaṃ yadā paśyanti sūrayah.  
divīva cakṣurātātām..” (Rgveda saṃhitā 1/22/20)  
“tadvi prāso vipanyavo jāgrvāṃsaḥ samaddhite.  
viṣṇoryat paramaṃ padam.” (Rgveda saṃhitā 1/22/21)  
Datta, Rameshchandra, (1987). (ed.), Rgveda saṃhitā, Vol. I,  
Harapha Prakasani, Calcutta. p.102.
2. “taddhaitad                      ghora                      āṅgirasah                      kṛṣṇāya  
devakīputrāyoktvovācāpīpāsa                      eva                      sa                      vabhūva                      so’nta  
velāyāmetatrayaṃ                      pratipādyetākṣi                      tamasyacyutamasi  
prāṇsaṃśītamasi                      tatraite dve ṛcau bhavataḥ” (Chāndyogya  
upaniṣad 3/17/6). Swami Gambhirananda, Sri Shankaracharya,  
(1986). Upaniṣad granthāvalī, Vol.II, Udvodhankarjalaya,  
Culcutta. p.122.
3. “anye                      hi                      sumahābhāgā                      valavanto                      durāsadāḥ.  
nityotthānena                      saṃpannā                      nāradāndhakavrṣṇayah.”  
Mahābhārataṃ; śāntiparvaḥ; adhyāyaḥ-082; ślokaṣaṃkhyā-008.  
Dutta, Manmathanath, (ed.), (1903). The Mahabharata, Santi  
Parva, Elysium Press, Calcutta, p.102.
4. “devadevasya vāsudevasya garuḍadhvajah ayaṃ kārītaḥ iha  
heliyodoreṇa bhāgavatena diyasya putreṇa tākṣaśilākena  
yavanadūtena āgatena mahārājasya antalikitasya  
upāntāt sakāśaṃ rājñah kāśīputrasya bhāgabhadrasya  
trātuḥ varṣeṇa caturdaśena rājyena vardhamānasya.”  
Sircar. D.C, (1942). Select Inscriptions-Bearing on Indian History  
and Civilization, Vol.I, University of Calcutta, Calcutta. p.89.



5. “tena gājāyanena .... bhagavabhyāṃ ...sudevābhyāṃ pūjāśilā-prākāro nārāyaṇa...” Chakravarti, N. P, (1938). *Epigraphia Indica, Vol.XXII*, Archaeological Survey of India-Description and Travel India, 1933-1934, Manager of Publication, Delhi. p.14.
6. Verma, Nargis, (1990). *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (The Etymologies in the Satapatha Brahmana)*, Nag Publishers, Delhi. p.27.
7. Majumdar, R. C, (2013). *Ancient India*, Motilal Banarsidass, (8th reprint), Delhi. p.431.
8. Majumdar, R, C., (2013). *Op. cit.*, p.434.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Majumdar, R, C., (2013). *Op. cit.*, p.435.
11. Majumdar, R, C., (2013). *Op. cit.*, p.173.
- 11a. McCrindle, J, W., (1877). *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, Thacker, Spink and Co., Calcutta, p.108.
12. *Ibid.*
13. “puskaraṇādhīpatermmahārārājaśrīsiṃhavarmanṇaḥ putrasya mahārājaśrīcandravarmanṇaḥ kṛtiḥ cakrasvāmināḥ dāsāgreṇātisṛṣṭaḥ”. Mukherjee, Ramaranjan & Maity, S, K., (1967). *Corpus of Bengal Inscriptions*, Jadavpur University, Calcutta. p. 40. Also see in (Susunia Rock Inscription of Chandravarman, *Epigraphia India*, Vol. XIII.)
14. Majumdar, R, C., (2013). *Op. cit.*, p.279.
15. “...licchavidauhitrasya mahādevān kumāradevyā mutpannaḥ paramabhāgavato mahārājādhīrāja śrīsamudraguptaḥ....” Majumdar, N, G., (1926). Monographs of the Varendra Society Rajshahi - No. I, *Nalanda Copper Plate Inscription*, Varendra Society, Rajshahi (Samudra Gupta: Year: 5), pp. 71-79.
16. “mahārājādhīrājaśrīcandrāguptaputrasya licchavidauhitrasya mahādevān kumāradevyā mutpannaḥ paramabhāgavato mahārājādhīrāja śrīsamudraguptaḥ....” Mukherjee, Ramaranjan and Maity, S, K., (1967). *Op. cit.*, p.141.(*Gaya Copper - Plate Inscription of Samudragupta: year 9*).

17. “...*puruṣasyācintyasyabhaktyavanatimātragrāhyamṛdu hr̥dayasyānukampāvataunekagaśatasahasra.... pradāyinaḥ....*” Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription of *Samudragupta*. Also see in Singh, Upender., (2014). *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century CE*, Pearson Education India, New Delhi. pp. 477-478.
18. “*Bhagavad govindasvamināḥ devakulam*”. Chakravarti, N. P, (ed.), (1938). *Epigraphica Indica* (Record of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1933-1934), Vol. XXII, Manager of Publication, Delhi. pp. 14-15. Also available in *Baigram Copper Plate, Epigraphica Indica.*, Vol. XXII, pp. 81f.
19. “*kokamukhasvāmi-śvetavarāhasvāminornāmaliṅgamekaṃ devakuladvayametat.*” Mukherjee, Ramaranjan and Maity, S, K., (1967). *Op.cit.*, p.62.
20. “*Bhagavataḥ śvetavarāhasvāmino devakule khaṇḍa phuṭṭapratisaṃskāra*” *Ibid.*, p.71.
21. “....*Śubhastalyaudevamkulam...bhagavannanna nārāyaṇabhaṭṭarakāya*”. *Ibid.*, p.100.
22. “*yaśai tasyottasthau hr̥tāhigarvḍacchalāmalam*”. Jas, Burgess., (ed.), (1894). *Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. II, The Superintendent of Government Printing India, Calcutta. p.164. (Kielhorn, F, *The Badal pillar inscription of Narayanapala*, V28, *Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. II, p.164.)
23. “*yayātyambariṣasamadhṛtau...*” Pargeter, F, E., (1910). ‘Three Copper Plate Grants from East Bengal’, *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. 39, British India Press, Bombay Education Society, Bombay. pp. 193-216. (Faridpur Copper-Plate Inscription of Dharmaditya-Regnal Year 3and other *Corpus Inscriptionum of Bengal*, p.75.)
24. Burgess, Jas., (1894). (ed.), *Epigraphica Indica: A Collections of Inscriptions (Supplementary to the Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum)*, Printed and Published by the Superintendent of Government Printing India, Calcutta. pp.160-165. It is to be noted

that in Kielhorn, F, ‘*Badal Pillar Inscriptions*’ this information is available.

25. “*namaḥ śivāya krauñcāridviradāsyasoḥ śiśutatayā vihasnu avyāj jagadhūrjjaṭaḥ*”. Majumdar, N, G., (1929). *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Varendra Research Society, Rajshahi. p. 57.
26. “*oṃ oṃ namo nārāyaṇāya*”. Majumdar, N. G, (1926). *Op.cit.*, p.92. (*Gobindapur Copper Plate*), *Tarpanadighi Copper-Plate of Lakṣmanasena*, p. 99.
27. Debnath, Sailen., (2008). *Essays on Cultural History of North Bengal*, N. L. Publishers, Siliguri. p. 62.
28. Baruah, S, L., (2012). *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi. p.159.
29. *Ibid.*



## FORMATION OF STATES AND PROCESS OF BRAHMINISATION ON THE WESTERN COAST OF INDIA

**Ms. Meghana Kapdi**

Assistant Professor in History

V.M. Salgaocar College of Law, Miramar-Goa.

### Abstract

*The following paper traces the evolution of Indian society based on the Varna or the Caste system to the emergence of feudal states due to Sanskritisation. It outlines the role of Brahminical ideology, the caste system, and the emergence of the states that flourished during the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. The influence was seen in the process of transition from oral tradition to written records in the form of rewriting of the Puranas and also the emergence of Sthala Puranas. The period also saw the reclamation of new lands and the expansion of agriculture, leading Brahmins to leave their traditional vocation and gain control over the newly acquired lands with the alliance of the local rulers. By examining the role of Sahyadri Khand of Skanda Purana as an example, it sheds light on the contrasting geographical explanation with mythological narratives by giving examples of how the process of Brahminisation and Sanskritisation evolved in the coastal regions. The paper presents insights into the*

*interplay between Brahminical ideology, the caste system, and state formation. It talks about how mythology and historical narratives were utilized to uphold the hierarchy in society and legitimize the position of Kshatriyas in ancient India.*

**Keywords:** *Puranas, Sthala Mahatmyas, Sahyadri Khanda, Parshurama, Sanskritisation, Brahmanical ideology, Gupta period, feudalism, feudal states.*

From ancient times, the main feature of Indian society is the varna or the caste system. Brahminical ideology and Sanskritisation, the concept of Hinduism, caste system and based on all these, the emergence of the states within the folds of the above concepts have been the constant forces in the Indian socio-political and religious fields. The Indian historical tradition was in the form of what is called the oral tradition. Only when writing was introduced, historians decided to pen down the events that they found important, this is when the *Itihaas-Purana* tradition emerged.

Again, the writing of the events was not in the form, in which the Western scholars were accustomed to. The *Itihaas-Purana* tradition can find its roots in Vedic literature which was oral in nature and later on was written down in the form of *Puranas*. F.E. Pargiter has shown how some of the *Puranas* were translated from oral Prakrit to literate Sanskrit.<sup>1</sup> The Brahmins realised the importance of turning oral Vedic literature into a written one and that it would enhance their position in society. The *Puranic* texts were written by these Brahminical writers, who also brought about changes to the text. As and when the situation arose, they added to the *Puranas*. With the expansion of agriculture in the newly acquired lands, the Brahmins now desired to hold the lands under them. They turned to the local rulers who wanted to extend the territories and influence the people in the newly occupied areas. So, what is evident in the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods is a huge change in the historical

traditions in the form of local *Puranas*, *Sthala Mahatmyas*, and the Caste *Puranas*. They included the *Vamshavalis* of these local rulers and helped them trace their origin to the Vedic period.

In the *Sthala Mahatmyas* and the Caste *Puranas*, there was a common pattern that was followed. To give an example, a reference to Parshuram is found in the *Skanda Purana* and he is also mentioned by all the local *Puranas* on the west coast, especially by *Sahyadri Khanda* which claims to be a part of *Skanda Purana*. To know how the *Sthala Purana* or the Caste *Purana* work, their structure can be considered. The *Puranas* are the source in which *jatis* and *varnas* were originally mentioned. It evolved from being based on occupational groupings to a four-tiered caste structure, with Brahmins occupying the highest position. Various *Puranas*, *Upa-Puranas*, and *Sthala Mahatmya* were written down to support their stance. It did validate the Brahmins' position at the top of the social ladder. In this, they had the backing of the Kshatriyas, who, on the other hand required the approval of the Brahmins to validate their recently established kingdoms.

## **Puranas**

The *Puranas* are classified as a class of Sanskrit literature by Indologists, and they cover the following five themes: creation, recreation, genealogies, Manu-cycles of time, and dynastic histories. The total *Puranic* literature is divided into two categories- (i) *The Maha-Puranas* which are eighteen in number and deal exclusively with the five themes mentioned above, and (ii) *The Upa-Puranas*, which are eighteen in number, are composed in the same style as the *Maha-Puranas* but address specific regional cults and sects. There are more works written in the relatively recent past in addition to these thirty-six texts, between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. C.E. which also claim to be *Puranas*. However, this claim is not recognized by most Indologists since these works do not deal with the traditional five or ten themes. In this category may be included the *Puranas* of particular castes and the *Puranas* of particular places (*Kshetra Purana* or *Sthala Purana*).<sup>2</sup> The *Puranic*

geographical account (*Kshetra Purana* or *Sthala Purana*) is mixed up with mythology. It is partly based on actuality and partly on imagination. The scholars have made attempts to match the names of the real locations with the mythological names that appear in the geographical narrative in the *Puranas*.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that the *Puranas* adhere to two distinct geographic schemes: the first one depicts the global geography, while the other one incorporates the geography of India or its area. The consensus among scholars is that mythology is the appropriate category for the global geographic scheme. In terms of India's geography or its regional area, on the other hand, scholars believe that the Puranic geographical framework is based on fact. The *Sthala Purana* has adhered to both of these plans.<sup>4</sup>

The main problem in this context is to find out how the composition of the *Puranas* was linked to a caste's claim for a higher status. In other words, to say merely that the composition of a caste *Purana* bestowed higher status on a caste which had it composed, is to resort to the people's explanation of events. A sociological explanation, on the other hand, would have to indicate why and how the composition of caste *Puranas* was associated with a caste's claim for higher status and to what extent were the *Puranas* successful in their attempt to validate the status of a caste.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the fact that the authors of the *Puranas* felt the need to give Brahmins from distant locations legendary beginnings further suggests that their origins are dubious. Thus, according to *Skanda Purana*, the Chitpavana Brahmins of Konkan were created from the funeral pyre of sixty men by Parasurama due to want of Brahmins to perform for him a *srarddha* rite. According to the same *Purana*, Parasurama in a similar manner created the Karhada brahmins from camel's bones and also conferred Brahminhood upon some Kaivarta families who later came to serve as priests to that caste.<sup>6</sup>

Several texts, such as *Brahmanda Purana*, *Shiva Purana*, and *Skanda Purana* are named as the main *Puranas* with several regional recensions. Texts like the *Sahyadri Khanda* are often linked to the designation of *Sthala-Mahatmya*, indicating the site's unique religious and cultural significance.

The spread of Brahminical ideology and Sanskritisation is described in several *Puranas*, one of them being *Sahyadri Khanda*, which is a part of *Skanda Purana*. It is a regional text in Sanskrit credited for expanding the narratives on the religious geography of Konkan affiliated with Hinduism. This text is named after the Sahyadri hills on the eastern side of the Konkan coast. Konkan sits between the Arabian Sea to the west and the Sahyadri Hills to the east.<sup>7</sup>

It captures regional religious significance while proclaiming itself to be a part of *Skanda Purana*. This self-proclamation addresses the claim for authority as being a part of *Skanda Purana*, which is well-known and valued to this day.<sup>8</sup>

*Sahyadri Khanda* goes into great detail explaining the mythological figure, Parasurama's creation story of the Konkan, the formation of the seven Konkan islands (*Sapta-Konkan*), the ideas of heaven and hell, and, finally, detailed accounts of the world's disintegration and Shiva's potential atonement. The mythological account for the creation of the coastal land follows the story of Parasurama, who was banished from Earth after killing a sizable number of warriors<sup>9</sup>.

According to *Sahyadri Khanda*, this exiled hero then stood atop the Sahyadri hills and shot an arrow into the sea, demanding new land. The shoreline between the sea and the Sahyadri hills was then visible as the waters receded.<sup>10</sup> The persistence and acceptance of this folklore seem to have followed a rather consistent pattern of written and oral retrieval that is still in use today. To spend the rest of his days atoning for the sin of murdering the warriors, a new continent had to be built for the hero Parsurama.



However, Konkan was then devoid of Brahmins to perform the rituals for purification. Brahmins from other regions of India were then invited to make Konkan their home. The sections *Patitagramanirnaya* and *Hittapavanvyutpatti* from the text of *Sahyadri Khanda* supplement the main narrative with details on migration and the communities in diaspora concerning the settlement of the population of the Konkan coast. The Brahmins from the banks of River Sarasvati and some others, resurrected from fourteen corpses washed ashore feature as the first inhabitants of Konkan.<sup>11</sup> This was the beginning of the spread of Brahminism and Sanskritisation of the local population of Konkan. This was just one case which is popularised by the *Puranas*. Many such incidences suggest that Brahminical ideology and Sanskritisation in conjunction with the development of regional states was a pre-requisite of the time.

#### **Brahminism and its influence on society:**

The change from 'Brahminism' to 'Hinduism' was not rapid or abrupt, nor did it mean a total rupture from earlier customs. It was more the result of a long and slow process of development and evolution, reflecting both a remarkable continuity and a dramatic shift in the ideological thrust and approach brought about by a rapidly shifting socio-economic order, which required the Brahminical ideologies to take serious note of the changes affecting modern society and make existentialist adjustments.

Sanskritisation of the lower castes and the outlying tribes has been caused by the castes that hold higher positions in the hierarchy, generally being more Sanskritised than the castes in the lower and middle parts of the hierarchy. It appears that the lower castes have always attempted to usurp the higher castes' traditions and way of life. The theoretical existence of a ban on their adoption of Brahminical customs and rites was not very effective, and this is clear when we consider the fact that many non-Brahminical castes practice several Brahminical customs and rites.<sup>12</sup> Initially what began as the *varna* and the *jati* system in Vedic times, slowly converted itself into a fourfold caste system based on hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> *Varna* and *Jati* were mainly based on the occupational divide. Each caste

group had its specific and ascribed occupation. Some of the occupations were considered pure, while others were impure. Based on the notion of purity and pollution of occupations, it regulated the degree of contact and relationship between caste groups.<sup>14</sup> Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras were the four divisions.

Here Brahmins were the teachers, Kshatriyas were the protectors of the land, Vaishyas were the traders and Shudras did the menial work.<sup>15</sup> M. Srinivas delinks the caste system from the Varna model. Varna is a vertical arrangement of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras excluding the untouchables. It further gets divided into twice-born (*Dwija*) groups based on the right to perform *upanayana* (thread ceremony for the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas).

While this division becomes the basis for the social hierarchy, other factors like occupation, diet, and customs also form a part of it.<sup>16</sup> This particular system was greatly governed by Brahminical thinking, which later got deeply rooted in the re-writing of the *Puranas* and *shastras* during the pre-Gupta and the Gupta periods.<sup>17</sup> Sanskritisation is no doubt an awkward term, but it was preferred to Brahminisation. The agents of Sanskritisation were not always Brahmins. It was in fact, the attempt of the lower Hindu caste, tribals or other groups who changed the customs, rituals, ideology and way of life to mirror the twice-born castes. It was also followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy which needed to be reorganized and conceded by the local community. The process took about a generation or two before the claim was conceded.

Earlier, the non-twice-born castes were prohibited from following the customs and rites of the Brahmins and it is not unreasonable to suppose that Brahmins were responsible for this prohibition, as they were a privileged group entrusted with the authority to declare the laws. However, the existence of such a prohibition did prevent the Sanskritisation of the customs and rites of the lower castes.<sup>18</sup> Today, the

situation might be slightly different due to the backing of political power, legal and constitutional guarantees and economic betterment. The lower castes now no longer need to imitate the higher castes to gain social recognition or higher status.<sup>19</sup>

Brahmanical customs and manner of life did manage to spread among all Hindus as well as among some outer tribes, despite some hurdles. This is partially caused by the layered nature of Hindu society, where countless minor organisations attempt to pass for larger ones. The concept of hierarchy permeates the entire caste system. Not only do the various castes create distinct hierarchies, but this is reflected in the activities they engage in, the food they eat, and the practices they follow. Therefore, engaging in professions such as butchering, tanning, herding pigs, or dealing with toddy lowers a caste's status. Castes that presented blood sacrifices to gods were viewed as inferior to those that merely brought flowers and fruit. Down the caste system, the entire lifestyle of the upper caste was absorbed. Furthermore, as previously shown, the Brahmin way of life, language, cuisine, attire, and jewels finally permeated the entire society.<sup>20</sup>

Using the term Brahminical instead of Hindu or Hinduism has the advantage of demonstrating continuity from the later Vedic period onwards. It appears that the Brahmins never truly relinquished their supremacy, in spite of all the challenges, compromises, and adjustments they encountered along the way. Hinduism is seen as a movement from below that changed Brahminism in the post-Gupta and early medieval periods. It consists of social and religious customs with local and regional origins. This is why it is important to emphasize that the normative texts continued to promote the core values while accommodating such changes. Lastly, the word 'Hindu' is a modern social construct.<sup>21</sup> As it initially spread eastward and then outside the Gangetic core, Brahminical culture and tradition underwent changes as it was adopted and adapted in various locations. These changes were caused by the inheritance of the indigenous people it encountered.

The boundaries of *Aryavarta* as a cultural region were not very sharply defined. They were both porous and flexible - in so far as they extended geographically and incorporated new regions within their sphere and porous because, contrary to general perception, it was inclusive.<sup>22</sup> However, accommodation did not necessarily take place on a footing of equality. Since its inception, the Brahminical tradition has simultaneously integrated and ranked persons, places, customs, and rituals by allocating them distinct roles inside its fold in accordance with the prevailing structures. The Brahminical tradition's influence grew as well because those who thought its rites were superior imitated them. In an attempt to elevate their own standing, they began adhering to and taking part in Brahminical ceremonies and rites.<sup>23</sup> The widening geographical focus of Brahminical ideology was thus a two-way process since its inception.

Among other socio-political activities, the writing of the *Puranas*, the development of regional mythologies, the dissemination of *Vedic-Sastric-puranic* concepts, the creation of origin stories for aristocratic families and the use of Sanskrit, all contributed to the sub continental identity of Brahminical ideology. Thus, from the ninth to the tenth century, the regional polities of the Palas and Senas of Bengal, the Somavamsis and later, the Gangas of Orissa, the Kakatiyas of Andhra, the Hoysalas of Karnataka, and the Cholas of Tamil Nadu emerged within a broader context of societal changes.<sup>24</sup> The story of Parshuram shooting an arrow from the hills of Sahyadri and creating the Sapta Konkan region, helps readers understand the aforementioned qualities in literature like *Sahyadri Khanda* and *Keralolpathi*.

During the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, the demands and strains of an expanding agrarian order had achieved great momentum, resulting in the production of the *Puranas*, which is a phenomenon that is roughly parallel to it. The latter seems to have been written with a very particular intention in mind: to act as vehicles for the spread of mainstream religious doctrine among illiterate and acculturating tribal populations.

Furthermore, a close examination of the *Puranic* content reveals that the composers of the *Puranas* completely transformed the Brahminism found in the *Dharmasastras* and the *Smritis*, giving rise to a completely new ideology that is best defined as *Puranic* Hinduism. At some point, groups of people and areas that were formerly hostile or viewed as remote were combined. A sense of the shifting contours of the conception of concepts like ‘*Aryan*’ and *Aryavarta*, with their substance and spatial dimensions constantly modified, can be felt as one moves from the idea of *Brahmavarta* of the *Rig Vedic* period to *Aryavarta* of later Vedic times and further through *Baudhayana Dharma sutra* up to Manu *smriti*. Kalinga, Vanga, Magadha, and Saurashtra, once placed outside the core were made part of it over time.

The way that people’s locations, traditions, and beliefs were arranged over time illustrates the intricate procedures that went into both the absorption of various racial groups and the dissemination of Brahminical philosophy. When faced with practices, the compilers of the *Smriti* literature did not endorse or accept them as characteristic of the other or distant places; they even rejected them as belonging to a different era. However, the very act of the inclusion of local customs and practices ensured their integration with the mainstream. Over the course of its global expansion and evolution, the tradition developed a composite character made up of elements from several geographical areas. Throughout the process of syncretism, the uniqueness and originality of local circumstances, characteristics, and symbols were frequently lost.<sup>25</sup>

### **Society and its complexity**

As a consequence of State formation, the emerging ruling classes, on grounds of expediency, were forced to find mechanisms to ‘bridge the gulf between the folk and the elite’, which mostly found expression in the form of the absorption or tribal deities into the Hindu pantheon and their subsequent ascendancy to high ritual elaboration.<sup>26</sup> The Brahmin beneficiaries migrated to these areas with their ideas of seasons, agriculture, technology, and value systems. They were responsible for the transformation of the tribal societies.

Admittedly, they were not on a civilizing mission. They had to create a minimum of a Brahminical social milieu to thrive in these new areas. Besides, to sustain themselves, the commencement of the process of turning the tribes into agriculturists must have been a huge task. Whatever the motives or compulsions, the net result was the inner colonization of the peripheral belt.

The Brahmins offered modern agricultural technologies to the tribal populations in the recently reclaimed territories, but they also introduced them to a new set of cultural influences known as the Brahminical way of life. The emergence of peasant castes, such as *sankirna* (mixed) *jatis*, and their numerical expansion due to recruitment from tribal groups are other features of this period of transition.

The Sudras, out of whose ranks rose royalties have been rightly described as the most dynamic social category. The Kshatriya and Sudra *varnas* have thus been constantly enlarging.<sup>27</sup> Another factor was the decline of trade with the Western world following the collapse of the great Roman empire which adversely affected commodity production, internal trade, and eventually even monetary economy and urbanization. As a result, the commercial economy collapsed, placing the greatest amount of pressure on arable land as the primary source of output.

On the other hand, large-scale agricultural growth was only made feasible by advancements in irrigation techniques and agricultural technology, as well as the reclamation of unused land and virgin areas. Thus, it is not surprising that a great deal of writing on plant knowledge and agricultural methods started to appear during this period in writings like *Krsi-Parasara*.

From this time on, advancements in closely linked fields like metallurgy, astronomy, and even veterinary medicine become highly noticeable, and even sacred books like the *Puranas* dedicate a significant amount of space to them.<sup>28</sup>

### **Feudalism as an aid for State formation**

Because of the rapidly shifting socioeconomic landscape, the advocates of Brahminical ideology needed to acknowledge the ways in which modern society was evolving and implement existentialist changes. However, the reclamation of virgin or wasteland could not be achieved by individual initiative alone; a certain degree of state enterprise and sponsorship was required for such reclamation activities to gain momentum.<sup>29</sup> One indication that the primary purpose of land gifts during the Gupta and post-Gupta periods was the reclamation of virgin tracts is the fact that these gifts were usually made in areas that were away from the Indo-Gangetic plain since the latter had already been subjected to significant agricultural pressure.

It was inevitable for the Brahminical ideologues to take advantage of this new development. They began to recommend the gift of land to Brahmins. The Brahmins thought that the gift of the lands had far greater spiritual merit than that acquired through the performance of Vedic yajnas. Donations of land began to be considered a *mahadana* or the greatest of gifts. It not only brought about a significant change in the very tenor of the Brahminical belief system with gift-ritualism gaining importance over sacrificial ritualism, but also provided an additional incentive to the donors in the form of spiritual merit to be earned through it.

It led to the emergence of Brahmins not only as the primary beneficiaries of land grants but also as a prominent class of land owners who were no longer dependent upon their traditional profession, namely, the performance of intellectual and priestly duties alone for earning their livelihood. In that capacity, it was reasonable that they would pursue other commercial pursuits, such as agriculture.

The alteration in the situation led to a century's-long geographical and cultural divide between the Brahmins of the midland and their other counterparts, who, as recipients of land grants, were forced to travel to distant areas and establish new roots in their new communities. A natural

corollary of such a development was the rise of numerous sub-castes on the basis of their regional affiliations. In a Rashtrakuta charter of the time of Indra third [dated 926 CE], we get a reference to five classes of north Indian Brahmins namely, Sarasvata, Kanyakubja, Utkala, Maithila, and Gauda. Brahmins of south India are similarly classified into five sections collectively known as *Panca-Dravida*.<sup>30</sup> The fact that the authors of the *Puranas* deemed it necessary to attribute to Brahmins of outlying regions mythical origins further points to their doubtful antecedents.

When the states emerged, it was the Brahmins who provided legitimacy to the new ruling houses by absorbing their tribal deities, through the performance of sacrifices and also in some instances by inventing fictitious, respectable genealogies for the rulers. Culturally, the Brahmins propagated the northern Sanskrit norms. They provided ideological support to the ruling dynasties and helped the rulers to win over the confidence of their subjects. They injected values of habitual obedience and ideas of *Varnasramadharm* into the minds of the common people, which were necessary for the establishment and perpetuation of state/class societies. Not only that, it also became the backbone for the people who migrated and settled in other parts of India.<sup>31</sup>

With the change in the socio-political scenario came the phase where there seemed to be a certain lack of confidence; the fear of the loss of status and privileges and related anxieties of the Brahmins in the face of unprecedented all-round growth and prosperity. Besides, it alludes to the formation of local states within the framework of Brahminical ideology and traders, Brahminic settlements, *mathas*, and temples as centres of cultural dissemination and integrative agencies provided the necessary supra-local and transregional linkages.

The all-India Brahminic ideology evolved through these networks of linkages, engaging and coming to terms with different regions at different points in time. This is perhaps when the caste system's rigidity first emerged.<sup>32</sup> The caste system is not a solid structure where the



relative positions of the various castes are established forever. There has always been room for mobility, particularly at the intermediate levels of the hierarchy. A low caste group was able to move up the caste ladder in just one or two generations by becoming vegetarians and teetotalers, as well as by Sanskritising their pantheon and rituals. In summary, it supplanted the Brahmins' traditions, ceremonies, and beliefs to the greatest extent possible, and it appears that low caste members frequently adopted the Brahminic way of life-despite it being technically illegal. Instead of being called 'Brahminisation,' this process has been dubbed 'Sanskritization' because some Vedic rites are exclusive to Brahmins and the other two 'twice-born' castes.<sup>33</sup>

In large parts of the nation, the caste, land, and power pyramid, which systematically deprived the untouchables of their proprietary rights in land and oddly reduced them to a permanent stock of aggressive labour, demonstrates the depth and reach of an overarching, unifying Brahminical ideology. Within this framework came the concept of feudalism, wherein, the Brahmins who initially were the people imparting religious education now became the masters of the land and they had the support of the newly established royal houses. In the post-independence period, the idea of Indian feudalism for long remained the dominant framework for understanding early medieval India.<sup>34</sup> Questions have been raised in recent times as to what exactly was the role of Brahmins and Brahminical ideology in the state formation. In his article, K. S. Singh has contested the validity of the Brahminical model of the diffusion of agricultural technology and cultural change in areas peripheral to the Gangetic plains.<sup>35</sup> He suggests that the relationship between the Brahmins and the local indigenous population, where the former was granted land, was characterized not by harmony or cooperation, but by some form of antagonism, generally latent but occasionally manifest.<sup>36</sup> The validity of Singh's argument for the early medieval period may be questionable. However, it implicitly raises a fundamental question - can the role of the Brahmins as the forerunners of socio-cultural change be perceived in a static, unchanging manner?

## Conclusion

To conclude, from the earliest times, the concept of Brahminism and for that matter, brahmins themselves depended on the four-fold caste system which evolved in Hinduism. To protect their hierarchy and status in the society, they controlled it through newly formed feudal states and Brahminical Sanskritisation. With the state formation, the Kshatriyas found their refuge in the Brahmins who legitimized their rule through the incorporation of various myths in the *Sthala Purana* and one such perfect example is that of *Sahyadri Khanda* of *Skanda Purana* which talks about the creation of the Konkan region by the mythical hero, Parsurama. Though the evidence points out that the creation of Konkan is more of a geographical phenomenon when the land and the sea separated due to the tectonic changes, the *Sthala Purana* in the form of *Sahyadri Khanda* gives the attribute to Parasurama for the creation. The reclamation of the land then followed the settlement of the Brahmins who migrated from various parts of India. The process of Brahminisation and Sanskritisation thus started in the coastal belt of India. To make the process smooth and in an orderly pattern, the necessity arose to legitimize the kshatriyas who came forward as the protectors of lands. The newly settled Brahmins gave them their identity by legitimizing them as the rulers of the land. The backing was that of *Sthala Puranas* or the *Kshetra Puranas* which were written during this time. In turn, the Brahmins were given protection by these Kshatriya families from the local resistance in the form of recognition of their higher status in society. Not only that they were also given the lands to carry out the religious duties attached to their caste. Thus, began the nexus between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas to further strengthen the social hierarchy in the form of the caste system.

## References

1. Rao, Nagendra, (1999). 'The Nature of Brahmanical Traditions of India,' *Samaja Shodhana: Journal of Mangalore Sociological Association*, Vol. 8, No.1, pp. 27-32. [http://irgu.unigoa.ac.in/drs/bitstream/handle/unigoa/2150/J\\_Mangalore\\_Sociology\\_Assoc\\_8%281%29\\_1999\\_27-32.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://irgu.unigoa.ac.in/drs/bitstream/handle/unigoa/2150/J_Mangalore_Sociology_Assoc_8%281%29_1999_27-32.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) (Accessed on 15 October 2021).

2. Das, V., (1968). 'A Sociological Approach to the Caste Puranas: A Case Study', *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol.17, No. 2, pp. 141-164. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23619308> (Accessed on 15 October 2021).
3. Ray, B., (1985). 'A Critical Study on the Puranic Geographical Account with Special Reference to the Nīlādri Mahodayam'. *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 66, No. 1/4, pp. 239-247. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41693610> (Accessed on 15 October 2021).
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. Kale, Durga, (2019). 'Vocalizing the "Local": Exploring the Cultural Milieu Along Coastal Maharashtra', *Journal of Cultural and Religious Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 7, pp. 380-390. DOI:10.17265/2328-2177/2019.07.004 (Accessed on 16 November 2020).
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. For further information on Parsuram mythology, please refer to "Pañca Gauḍa and Pañca Drāviḍa: Contested Borders of a Traditional Classification" by Madhav Deshpande.
10. Kale, (2019). *Op. cit.*, pp. 381.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Srinivas, M., (1956). 'A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol.15, No.4, pp. 481-496, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2941919> (Accessed on 01 May 2020).
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. Upadhyay, S., (2013). 'Sanskritization at large: Cultural changes in contemporary India', *Indian Anthropologist*, Vol 43, No.2, pp.1-24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43858414> (Accessed on 15 October 2021).

16. *Ibid.*
17. Upadhyay, S. (2013). *Op. cit.* pp. 4.
18. Srinivas, M. (1956). *Op. cit.* pp. 481.
19. Upadhyay, S. (2013). *Op. cit.* pp.11.
20. Srinivas, M. (1956). *op. cit.* pp. 483.
21. Sahu, B., (2001). 'Brahmanical Ideology, Regional Identities and the Construction of Early India', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 29, No. 7/8, pp.3-18, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3518122> (Accessed on 15 October 2021).
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. Sahu, B., (1985). 'The Brahmanical Model Viewed as an Instrument of Socio-Cultural Change-An Autopsy', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol.46, pp.180-189, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44141348> (Accessed on 15 October 2021).
27. Singh, K., (1983). 'Varna, Jati and Jana: an anthropo-historical perspective', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol.44, pp.731-744, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44139928> (Accessed on 11 June 2021).
28. *Ibid.*
29. Nath, V., (2001). "From 'Brahmanism' to 'Hinduism': Negotiating the Myth of the Great Tradition", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 29, No. 3/4, pp.19-50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3518337> (Accessed on 11 June 2021).
30. *Ibid.*
31. Sahu, B. (1985). *Op. cit.* pp. 183.
32. Sahu, B. (2001). *Op. cit.* pp. 13-14.
33. Upadhyay, S. *Op. cit.* pp. 13.
34. Sahu, B., (2015). "From Regional Histories to Histories of the Regions and Beyond", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 43, No. 3/4, pp. 33-47, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24372934> (Accessed on 11 June 2021).

35. Singh, K., (1983). 'Varna, Jati, and Jana: an anthropo-historical perspective', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol.44, pp. 731-744, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44139928>. (Accessed on 11 June 2021).
36. Sahu, B. (1985). *Op. cit*, pp. 180.



## DECONSTRUCTION OF THE INTELLECTUAL TRADITION OF MEDIEVAL INDIA: A CASE STUDY OF THE CHISHTI SUFI SCHOLARS OF THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURIES

**Dr. Aneesa Iqbal Sabir**

Assistant Professor

CAS Department of History, AMU, Aligarh

### Abstract

*The hagiological literature comprising the Malfuzat and Tazkira of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is very informative with respect to the life of society and culture of the period in review. In this article, the Malfuzat such as Fawaid-al-Fuad and Khair-al-Majalis and the Tazkiras such as Siyar-al-Auliya and Akhbar-al-Akhyar and other contemporary Persian sources have been utilized for a lucid portrayal of Sufi scholars of the Chishti silsilah and their efforts to spread knowledge. The detailed study of these sources has enabled to understand the efforts and enthusiasm of the Chishti Sufis in enhancing the intellectual climate of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Their obsession and keenness for the attainment of knowledge and a comprehensive discussion of the subjects of study, authority of the teachers, relationship between the teacher and the taught, the teaching process, the teaching method, the selection of books, the channels for the dissemination of learning have been possible. The*

*goal of acquiring education by the Sufis was mainly moral and religious training and not to acquire material comforts of life.*

**Keywords:** *Education, Chishti, Quran, Hadith, Tafsis, Fiqh, Tasawwuf.*

Annemarie Schimmel, states “The classical handbooks of Sufism consist to a large extent of Apophthegmata and random sentences of the masters of the old. The Indian Sufis, however, carefully collected the dicta of their masters day-to-day, and as Khaliq Ahmad Nizami has rightly pointed out, “these ‘diaries’ constitute a valuable source of our knowledge of life outside the court circles”. They are a necessary corrective of the official historiography, they allow us interesting glimpses into social and cultural problems that the official authors wittingly or unwittingly overlooked’<sup>1</sup>. In this article, the *Malfuzat* such as *Fawaid-ul-Fuad* and *Khair-ul- Majalis* and the *Tazkiras* such as *Siyar-ul-Auliya* and *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar* and other contemporary Persian sources have been utilized extensively to give a proper picture of the Sufi scholars of the *Chishti silsilah* and their contributions towards education and learning. Through the thorough study of the above mentioned *malfuzat* and *tazkiras*, it has been possible to discuss some crucial aspects of Muslim education and learning. The detailed study of these sources has enabled to understand the endeavours and passion of the *Chishti* Sufis in enhancing the intellectual climate of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Their fascination and predilections for the acquisition of knowledge and a detailed discussion of the curriculum, subjects of study, position of the teachers, relationship between the teacher and the students, the method of teaching and the agencies for the provision of education have been made possible.

### **Goal of Education**

Education imparted during the period under review, was not exactly the same as today. At the time, the chief aim of education was the purification of the soul, and it was regarded as ‘preparation for life

and life after death<sup>22</sup>. Great attention was paid to every student in the educational institutions and no attempt was made at standardized mass production. The aim of receiving education was mainly religious and moral training. Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddith, in his famous work entitled *Akhbar-al-Akhyar*, has recorded an interesting conversation among the students which throws ample light on the aims and objects of their studies.

‘Once the students were having a conversation among themselves and were asking each other about the aim and objects of their studies. Some of them pretended and insincerely asserted that they were pursuing their studies to get an insight into divine mysteries, while others were truthful and straight forward and said that the object of their pursuing knowledge was to have some worldly gain in future. When they asked me about my opinion, I said that my purpose in pursuing knowledge was to acquaint myself with the views of men of erudition and wisdom of the past, know their intuitive method of resolving intellectual difficulties and realizing the reality’<sup>23</sup>.

### Significance of ‘Ilm’ (knowledge)

The significance of ‘Ilm’ is evident from the views of different scholars and Sufis of the *Chishti silsilah* of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Nasir-ud-din Chiragh’s views about knowledge (*Ilm*), as found in *Khair-al-Majalis*, reveals his emphasis on combining knowledge with action and precept with example, as he said:

‘*Maqṣūd az ʿIlm aml ast, ʿIlm-e-husna lafsā nesth*’

‘Purpose of knowledge is action, it is not beauty in itself.’<sup>24</sup>

Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya’s concept of ‘ilm (knowledge) was of a high order and it transcended all material considerations. He considered it a noble endeavour, an end in itself, which could not be made a means of earning one’s living.. One day, a student came to see him and in the course of the conversation said that he often went around the court so that he could get affluent in life. The Shaikh did not like his purpose of acquiring knowledge.



Similarly, the Shaikh did not like poetic talent to be wasted in writing panegyrics<sup>5</sup>. He cited in his *Majlis* (assembly) a remark of Shaikh Jalal-u'd-din Tabrizi that the ambition of *ulama* is confined to either getting the job of a teacher, or a *Qazi* or a *Sadr-i-Jahan*, 'They aspire for nothing higher, but the *darwesh* have many stages of development'<sup>6</sup>. The Shaikh once quoted Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz that 'when a man acquires knowledge, he becomes respectable in the eyes of the people, but when he acts upon it, he becomes a dear one of God'<sup>7</sup>. He spoke in his assembly about persons whose salvation was due to their devotion of learning<sup>8</sup>.

With the instinct and temperament of a real and dedicated scholar, he used to say that a scholar's pleasure in solving an academic problem was greater than that of a king in ruling over a territory<sup>9</sup>. He repeatedly emphasized that one should be an '*alim*' with the qualities of a *darwesh* ingrained in him. He referred to three scholar saints of this order, whom he had the privilege to meet - Maulana Shihabuddin, Maulana Ahmad Hafiz and Maulana Ahmad Kaitheli<sup>10</sup>. Repeatedly he told his audience that *Ilm* (learning) without a heart full of cosmic emotion was vain and fruitless<sup>11</sup>.

## **Methods of acquisition of knowledge**

### **A. Directly approaching a teacher**

For specialization in any particular subject, an individual had to directly approach the teacher, who had acquired expertise in that subject or to attend his private classes. Here, sometimes the scholar joined the group which was already taking lessons from a particular teacher in a particular subject. This was a more popular and well-known method followed not only in India but also other Muslim countries of the world during the period under review. For example, Maulana Alauddin Inderpati was a *Hafiz-i-Quran* and such an excellent teacher of Quranic teaching that many associates of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya memorized the Quran from him. Mir Khurd and his two uncles were also his students<sup>12</sup>. The historians and *Tazkira* writers have narrated that sometimes, in order to

attain scholarship and knowledge in a particular subject, students had to go to specific places and sometimes had to travel to foreign countries. Specifying this trend of acquiring education, Bilgrami writes in his *Ma'asir-u'l-Kiram*,

‘*Tulbâ İlmi khail khail az shehre ba shehre mi rawand  
wa har jâ mawâfiqat dast dahad ba tahşil mashghûl mi  
shawand*’

‘Seekers of knowledge went in large numbers, from city to city and everywhere, they engaged themselves in receiving learning according to their choice’<sup>13</sup>.

The famous Sufi Shaikh, Nasir-ud-din Chiragh of Delhi studied *Hidaya* from Maulana Abdul Karim Sherwani and Maulana Fakhruddin Hanswi. He took lessons on *Usul-i-Fiqh* from Maulana Muin-ud-din Kashani and for other books he studied under the guidance of Shaikh Shamsuddin Muhammad bin Yahya Awadhi<sup>14</sup>. Thus, he studied different subjects from different teachers who possessed expertise in that particular subject. There are more evidences of this pattern of acquiring education, for instance in the case of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya (his mentor Shaikh) who acquired knowledge of *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence) and *Usul-i-Fiqh* (Principles of Jurisprudence) from Maulana Alauddin Usuli. He studied *Maqamat-i-Hariri* (Arabic Adab) from Maulana Shams-ul-Mulk and *Mashariq-ul-Anwar* (*Hadith*) from Maulana Kamal-u'd-din Zahid and turned towards Shaikh Fariduddin Awadhi Shafi for the study of *Tafsir Kashaf* and for the study of *Awarif-ul-Ma'arif* (*Tasawwuf*), presented himself to Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj Shakar<sup>15</sup>.

From the above examples we can infer that during the period under review, the trend was that for the study of specific subject one had to approach particular teachers to acquire higher learning. People belonging to different occupations, categories and strata would participate in the lectures. These teachers or experts of subjects were not so famous as being attached to any *Madrasa* or educational institution. Rather they were known and recognized for their distinction and expertise in teaching

a particular subject. From the above discussion, it is evident that directly approaching a teacher or expert of a particular subject for the acquisition of knowledge was considered the most stable and reliable method for imparting higher learning.

### **B. The *Khanqahs* and the Sufi *Majlis* as a centre of learning**

The *majlis* of the Sufis played an important role as an instrument through which education was imparted to people. It can be deduced from the activities in the *Khanqahs* of the famous Sufis and the proceedings of their *majlis* that people could benefit in the field of education. Firstly, in these *Khanqahs*, education was imparted by teaching specific books and most of the books were generally related to *Tasawwuf* (mysticism) and *Tafsir* (Exegesis)<sup>16</sup>. Secondly, some Sufis who were amongst the *Ulama* class and were interested in teaching would spare some time to teach in the *Khanqah* or small rooms (*hujras*) attached to it. Books of such subjects which they were fond of, were taught to the members of the *Khanqah* and the general public took advantage of this. Thirdly, sometimes the *Quranic* verses and the *hadith* were explained regarding the problem under discussion, sometimes the questions of the participants were answered with reference to the *Quran* and the *hadith* in the assemblies of great Sufis and *Mashaikh*. Sometimes minute problems related to some *Quranic* verse or *Hadith* were also solved in these *majalis*<sup>17</sup>.

Moreover, some Sufis would be interested in narrating important *Fiqh* issues in front of their *muridin* (disciples), there were interrogative sessions and answers were given to the questions put forward by the audience. For instance, Shaikh Nizam-u'd-din Auliya's *murid*, Fakhruddin Zarradi, a contemporary of Muhammad bin Tughlaq was deeply interested in the teaching of *Fiqh*. After joining the Sufi fraternity, he spent most of his time in the *Khanqah* of Nizam-ud-din Auliya. He was continuously involved in the process of teaching. Daily he would, after the *Chasht* (prayer performed between sunrise and meridian) prayers, teach the '*Hidaya*' (a famous book of *Hanafi Fiqh*) in a building adjacent to the *Khanqah*. According to the author of *Siyar-al-Auliya*, multitudes of people attended his lectures<sup>18</sup>.

In the *majalis* of the Sufis incidentally the problems or queries of the books that were taught were solved and a very good example of this is found in the case of another *murid* of the same Shaikh. Once Shaikh Nizam-u'd-din asked one of his *murids*, Shaikh Shamsuddin Yahya Awadhi about the books he had studied and in reply, he mentioned the '*Usul-i-Bazdawi*.' The Shaikh asked him several questions and at the end, Maulana Shamsuddin put forward the difficulties or problems related to this book which he could not comprehend. The Shaikh explained and elucidated in an impressive manner by which the Maulana's faith in the Shaikh became more firm<sup>19</sup>. Here it is important to mention the *Khilafat-Nama* which Shaikh Nizamuddin obtained from his *murshid* (mentor), Khwaja Fariduddin Ganj Shakar. In it was the *Ijzat Nama* (permission)<sup>20</sup> to teach the '*Tamhidat-al- Muhtadi*' (authored by Abu Shakoor Salmi), a book on the principles of religion. This meant he got the certificate that Shaikh Farid had taught him this book and now he could teach this book to others.

In the *majalis* of the Sufis, the most popular *Tafsir* that was taught and studied, and of which we find several references is the '*Tafsir-i-Madarik*', authored by Hafizuddin Abdullah bin Ahmad Nafsi (ob. 1310 C.E.). Especially, amongst the *Chishti* circles, this *Tafsir* had a stronghold. We find evidence that this *Tafsir* was taught by the *Chishti mashaikh*.<sup>21</sup>

*'În waẓîfâh Tafsîr Madarik tarîqâh sulûk mashâikh îshân ast'*

(This litany of the *Tafsir-i-Madarik* is the method of the way (*suluk*) of the saints of this order).

The *Chishti* Sufi Shaikh Husam-u'd-din Manakpuri (ob.1449 C.E.) would be busy with the Quran and would try to understand its meaning and always kept the *Tafsir Madarik* and if he found any difficulty in comprehending any verse of the Quran he would consult it<sup>22</sup>. Similarly, another famous Sufi Khwaja Husain Nagauri (ob.1496 C.E.) along with preaching, was also busy in the dissemination of religious sciences. His daily routine included the teaching of *Tafsir Madarik* about which he was very particular.

Moreover, during the period under review, the Quranic issues, its meaning or comprehension or any point of view were discussed in the *Majlis*. The *Tafsir* books that were used for this purpose were the *Tafsir Kashshaf*, *Tafsir Razi*, *Tafsir Zahiri*, *Tafsir Nasiri*, *Tafsir Basara* and *Arais-ul-Bayan*<sup>23</sup>. Other than these subjects it was essential to teach *Tasawwuf* (mysticism) in the *majlis*. During the period under study, the *Awarif-ul-Ma'arif*, *Fusus-al-Hikam*, *Kash-al-Mahjub* and *Qut-u'l Qulub* were the famous books of mysticism taught in the Sufi *majalis*<sup>24</sup>. In this way, these *majalis* of the Sufis served the purpose of providing important information about the *Quran*, *Hadith*, *Fiqh* and proved to be an important medium of diffusion of knowledge.

### C. Self-study and research

The teachers and scholars of the period other than teaching and learning would conduct personal study and research to enlarge and increase their knowledge of a particular subject or field. We have several evidences that in spite of the lack of facilities for printing and publication of books, there was no shortage of important books on particular topics and subjects. Other than borrowing books from each other, the scholars also travelled to distant places in search of important books. The scholars themselves would make these copies ready for their personal use and also to gift them to their friends, teachers and *Mashaikh*. One of the disciples of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, Rukn-ud-din Chihmar, was very fond of calligraphy. He copied many books and presented it to his spiritual mentor.

Amongst them, were the copies of *Tafsir-i-Kashshaf* and *Mufasssal*<sup>25</sup>. Another scholar, Maulana Zain-ud-din Dehlavi presented a copy of *Sahih Muslim* to Shaikh Sharf-u'd-din Yahya Maneri<sup>26</sup>. During that period, there were also such scholars who, while copying particular books of different subjects, would also write their keys and marginal notes so that while reading, the scholar would not have to face the difficulty of separately referring to the key or commentary of a particular work<sup>27</sup>. Some scholars were so fast in writing books that

they would copy hundreds of pages just within two or three days<sup>28</sup>. Other than the individual scholars there was also a group or section that came into existence, who adopted this work as a full time profession, called *Warraq* and *Nassakh*. They were professional copiers who would keep investigating for the need and demand of books and made copies ready for sale for their scholars when the need arose<sup>29</sup>.

#### D. Libraries

Other than the *Warraq* and *Nassakh*, there were also expert copyists and calligraphists. It is obvious that a display of their talents would be there in the form of compilations and writings of books which, specially would be installed in the royal libraries. These libraries which were an important part of the educational activities of the administration also served as institutes for the spread of knowledge<sup>30</sup>.

During the same period, Delhi's famous Sufi Nizam-ud-din Auliya had a huge library in his *Khanqah*. His *Khanqah* was in the town called Ghiyaspur in old Delhi and all scholars and seekers of knowledge benefitted from it. Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehlavi writes in one place, while describing the circumstances of Shaikh Siraj-u'd-din Uthman:

*'Wa bad az ân peshe Maûlânâ Rukn-u'd-diîn, Kâfyâ, Mufaşsal wa Qudûri. Wa Majma-al-Bahrain tahqîq karda, bad az naqal Shâikh Nizâmuddîn qan, se sâl dîgar tâlîm kard wa bazi kutub az kutubkhânâh Shâikh key waqf bud wa jâma'hâ wa khilâfatnâmâ key az khidmat Shâikh yâftâ bud bâ khûd bard.'*<sup>31</sup>

'Later, he made a deep study of *Kafiyah*, the *Mufasssal*, the *Quduri* and the *Majma-ul- Bahrain* under Maulana Ruknuddin, then for three years, he received higher knowledge from Shaikh Nizamuddin by benefiting from his library which was an endowment. And finally, he took with him the robe and '*Khilafat Nama*' which he received from the *Shaikh*.'

Libraries were a part of the royal expeditions. Other than the Sultan and nobles, the scholars also possessed private libraries and had their private collection of books<sup>32</sup>. The use of paper is likely to have facilitated the copying of books and book trade. It also enabled large collections of books to be accumulated by individuals, kings and nobles who had extensive libraries. For example, Firoz Shah Tughlaq's library contained a large number of books on astronomy and astrolabes<sup>33</sup>. For instance, we know that during Muhammad Tughlaq's reign, there were about one thousand *Madrasas*<sup>34</sup> but not a word is mentioned about the existence of libraries which were usually inside the *Maktabas*, *Madrasa* and *Khanqahs*. An estimate can be got by glancing at the large libraries of Hindustan, Pakistan and Great Britain and taking a look at the collection of manuscripts which were related to Hindustan of that period. But in these institutions, only those manuscripts have reached which, after the decline of the Sultanate came in the custody of the government. But those books of private libraries belonging to families of scholars which were neglected by later generations and with time have gone waste, no estimate can be formed. Due to the absence of printing press, sometimes shortage of books was faced by the people. During the period under review, availability of books on different subjects like arts and sciences particularly *Tafsir*, *Hadith*, *Fiqh* and important sources is evident from the sources and references mentioned in the presently available books which were compiled during that period. In the compilations and compositions hundreds of not only names of books but paragraphs and passages from other sources are to be found but the books are missing. Thus, we can infer that the non-availability of these books imposed minor difficulties but this was not such a problem that it could become an obstacle for the personal study and research of scholars.

### **Stages of Education**

From the material available in the contemporary sources, we can infer that during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there was no division or fixation of groups and there was no forming of standards or grades (*darjat*). During that period, the teaching and learning depended

upon the books of study and if at all, a division of various stages of education is possible, then it can be done on the basis of teaching of subjects alone. Many modern scholars like Rafiq Saeed Ahmad, have according to the present system, divided the stages of education into three i.e. primary, secondary and higher learning<sup>35</sup>.

When the Muslims arrived in India, the method they adopted for the provision of education is that according to custom, the reading of the Quran was taught first, by a teacher, generally called a *Muqri*. The *Fawa'id-ul-Fuad* testifies that Nizam-u'd-din Auliya was taught to read the Quran by a Muslim convert, *Shadi Muqri*<sup>36</sup>, initially a Hindu slave who was an expert *Hafiz* and could recite the Quran according to the seven methods of recitation<sup>37</sup>.

Mir Khurd informs us that after the Quran some Persian books were generally taught. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya's mother sent him to the *maktab* where he completed the Quran and read Persian books which were generally taught as Persian was the language of administration<sup>38</sup>. It is evident that an elementary knowledge of Arabic was also imparted so that an individual could understand the meaning of the verses of the holy Quran and was in a position to translate the famous *Hadith* (traditions).

After this, in the next stage Arabic and Islamic sciences were taught which consisted of two stages. Mir Khurd writes that Nizam-u'd-din Auliya after completing *Ilm Fiqh*, *Usul-i-Fiqh* started with the books of the stage of *Fazl*<sup>39</sup> which testifies that there was a stage of *Fazl*". In other books another word used for *Fazl*" is *Muntahiyana*"<sup>40</sup> and this is the stage which is explained as higher learning.

Of the stage prior to this stage, we do not find specific information in the books but in view of the term *Fazl* modern scholars have given the name *Ilm Zaroori* or compulsory education to the previous stage and who completed this stage was called a *Danishmand* (scholar)<sup>41</sup> Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya desired to give the *Khilafatnama* to Maulana Siraj-



u'd-din Uthman but when he realized that the Maulana had not even completed the stage of *Danishmandi*, he said, 'First the knowledge of this stage is very essential'<sup>42</sup>. Maulana Fakhruddin Zarradi was present in the *majlis* and he said that within six months he would make him a *Danishmand* or *Maulvi*.

Thus, the study of this stage was initiated with the study of *Sarf* (etymology) and it seems with '*Mizan*' the initial Arabic study was initiated, in fact, whatever is taught in *Sarf* i.e., the benefits of *gardan*(conjugation), *Ta'alil* (changing one of the weak letters to another) *qawa'id* (rules or principles of grammar) etc. were memorized by him. Maulana Fakhruddin Zarradi wrote a book for Maulana Sirajuddin entitled '*Tasrif-i-Uthmani*'. As mentioned above, other than *Sarf* and *Nahv* (syntax) he studied '*Kafya*' and *Mufussal*' and in *Fiqh*, *Quduri* and *Majma-al-Bahrain* from Maulana Ruknuddin Inderpati<sup>43</sup>. Thus, in the compulsory stage i.e., *danishmandi*' we can presume that *Sarf*, *Nahv* and *Fiqh* were taught.

Mir Khurd informs us that Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya studied *Hidaya*, *Bazdawi*, *Kashshaf*, *Mashariq* and *Masabih* from Maulana Jamaluddin.<sup>44</sup> Probably, these were the subjects taught in the '*Ilm Fazl*' stage. The *Tafsir* '*Kashahaf*'<sup>45</sup> and the *Tafsir* '*Madarik*'<sup>46</sup>, *Mashariq-al-Anwar*; *Masabih* were commonly used books on religious sciences. Other than *Nahv* (Etymology) and *Sarf* (syntax), *Adab* (Literature) *Maani-o-Bayan* (Rhetoric and figures of speech) etc. were also taught. In *Ma'qulat*, the study was limited to '*Qutbi*', '*Sharh Sahai*'<sup>47</sup>. Here, it is important to mention that amongst the modern scholars the first person to discuss the syllabus in detail was Maulana Manazir Husain Gilani. Surveying the books of study in medieval India, it can be understood that the subjects for study and the extent of discussions with reference to the subjects are significant factors of the courses of study. A clear division of separate grades or stages and allotment of classes in the process of the education are required which is completely found missing in the system of the education of medieval India.

Thus, the use of terminology such as '*Nisab-T'alim*' or 'syllabus of education' is not very correct because we do not find any proof of the existence of any such administrative committee or *Ulama* meetings which decided and fixed the courses of the study for a particular stage of education based on any specific curriculum in the process of the educational system. Thus, in the discussion of education in the medieval period, it would be more pertinent to use the term 'instruction of subjects or books' instead of the term 'curriculum' or 'syllabii' of education.

### Conclusion

We may conclude that the *Chishti* Sufis played a significant role in disseminating knowledge. Other than the *Majalis* in the *Khanqah*, other methods like directly approaching the teachers who were experts in the subjects was prevalent. Also, the *Chisti* Sufi scholars conducted personal study and research to widen and enhance their knowledge of a particular subject or field.

The libraries which were a significant element of the educational activities of the administration also served as institutions for the dissemination of knowledge. It is evident that there was no specific syllabus or curriculum but specific books on *Fiqh*, *Hadith*, *Tafsir*, *Tasawwuf* and other subjects were researched and studied in detail. Thus, the *Chishti* Sufis played a pivotal role and were highly instrumental in enlightening and illuminating the intellectual traditions of Medieval India.

### References

1. Shimmel, Annemarie, (1975). *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, University of North Carolina Press, North Carolina. p. 356.
2. Jaffar, S.M., (1939). *Some Cultural Aspects of Muslim Rule in India*, S. Mohd Sadiq, Peshawar. p. 79.
3. Husain Yusuf, (1937). *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay. p. 81.

4. Qalandar, Hamid, (1959). *Khair-ul-Majalis*, (ed.) Nizami, K.A., Institute of Historical Research, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. p. 253.
5. Sijzi, Amir Hasan, (1894). *Fawa'id-ul-Fuad*, Newal Kishore, Lucknow. p.182.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
7. Mir, Khurd, (1302 A.H.), (1885 A.D.). *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, Matba-i-Muhibb-i-Hind, Delhi. p. 534.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 534.-35.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 535.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 536.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 539.
12. *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, (1885 A.D.). *Op. cit.*, p. 316.
13. Bilgrami, Gulam Ali Azad, (1910), *Ma'athir-ul-Kiram*, Mufid Aam Press, Agra. pp. 221-22.
14. Ali Rahman, (1914). *Tazkira-i-ulama-i-Hind*, Newal Kishore, Lucknow. p. 338, Bhatti, Muhammad Ishaq, (1974). *Fuqaha-i-Hind*, Vol.1, Idara-i-Saqafat-i-Islamia, Lahore. pp. 294-95.
15. Allama, Abdu'l Hayy b. Fakhru'd-Din-al-Hasani, (1966). *Nuzhat-u'l-Khawahir*, Vol. 2, Oriental Publications Bureau, Hyderabad, Osmania. p. 123. *Fuqaha-i-Hind*, (1974). *Op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 285-86.
16. Nizami, K. A., (1974). *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the thirteenth century*, Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delli, Delhi. p. 43.
17. *Fawa'id-ul-Fuad*, (1894). *Op. cit.*, pp. 126-27, Makhdumdaza, Abdullah. (1983). *Siraj-ul-Hidaya*, (ed.) Sajjad Husain, Indian Council of Historical Research, Delhi. pp. 51, 60, 105, 120, 125.
18. *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, (1885 A.D.) *Op. cit.*, pp. 278-79. *Fuqaha-i-Hind*, (1974). *Op. cit.*, Vol.1, p.257.
19. Dehlavi, Shaikh Abdul Haqq Muhaddith, (1332 A.H.). *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, Matba-i-Mujtabai, Delhi. p. 97.
20. *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, (1885 A.D.). *Op. cit.*, pp. 127-28.

21. *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, (1332 A.H.). *Op. cit.*, p. 186.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
23. *Khair-ul-Majalis*, (1959). *Op. cit.*, p. 83, 120. *Siraj-ul-Hidaya*, (1983). *Op. cit.*, pp. 60, 125, 126, 145, 163, 164, Nizami, K.A, (1980). *Tarikh-i-Mashaikh-i-Chisht, Idarah-i-Adabyat-Delli* Vol. 1, Delhi. pp. 407, 410, 412.
24. *Khair-ul-Majalis*, (1959). *Op. cit.*, pp. 23, 58, 155, 178, 249. *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, (1332 A.H.) *Op. cit.*, pp. 163, 195.
25. *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, (1885). *Op. cit.*, p.327.
26. *Nuzhat-u'l-Khawatir*, (1966). *Op. cit.*, p. 24.
27. *Ma'athir-ul-Kiram*, (1910). *Op. cit.*, pp. 48, 225, 229.
28. *Ma'athir-ul-Kiram*, (1910). *Op. cit.*, p. 43, *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, (1332 A.H.). *Op. cit.*, p. 250.
29. *Fawaid-ul-Fuad*, (1894). *Op. cit.*, p. 45. For details see: Gilani, Manazir Husain, (1987). *Hindustan mein Musalmanon ka Nizam Ta'lim wa Tarbiyat*, Nadwat-ul-Musannifin, Delhi. pp. 51-54.
30. Rafiq, Said Ahmad, (n.d.), *Islami Nizam-i-Ta'lim*, Idarah-i-Tasnif wa Talif, Karachi. pp. 25 & 34.
31. *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, (1332 A.H.), *Op. cit.*, p.181.
32. *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, (1332 A.H.). *Op. cit.*, pp. 87, 250. *Ma'athir-ul-Kiram*, (1910). *Op. cit.*, p. 265.
33. Anonymous, (1999). *Sirat-i-Firoz Shahi*(Facsimile edition of the manuscript), Khudabaksh Oriental Public Library, Patna. p. 320.
34. Shahbuddin, Al Umari, (1934). *Masalik-u-Absar fi Mumalik-ul-Amsar*, (Trans.) by Otto Spies, Department of History, Aligarh. p. 24.
35. See, (n.d.), Rafiq, Saeed Ahmad, *Islami Nizam Ta'alim*, Idarah-i-Tasnif. pp. 55-56, 264-74.
36. *Fawaid-ul-Fuad*, (1894). *Op. cit.*, p. 154.
37. *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, (1885). *Op. cit.*, pp. 110-11.
38. *Ibid.*, p.110.

39. *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, (1885). *Op. cit.*, pp. 100-101.
40. Badayuni, Abdul Qadir, (1868). *Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh*, (ed.) M. Kabiruddin Ahmad Ali, Vol. 1, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta. p. 324, Badayuni, Abdul Qadir, (1865). *Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh*, (ed.) W.N. Lees and Munshi Ahmad Ali, Vol. 3, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta. p. 67.
41. *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, (1885). *Op. cit.*, p. 298, *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, (1332 A.H.), *Op.cit.*, p. 67, pp. 80-81, 98-99, 144, 150.
42. *Siyar-ul-Auliya*, (1885). *Op. cit.*, p.298.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 299.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
46. *Akhbar-ul-Akhyar*, (1332 A.H.). *Op. cit.*, p. 186.
47. Gilani, Manazir Husain, (1987). *Op. cit.*, pp. 196-200.



## WAR WEAPONS OF THE *AHOMS* OF MEDIEVAL ASSAM: A STUDY IN MILITARY AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

**Dr. Anupal Saikia**

Assistant Professor, Department of History  
DCB Girls' College, Jorhat, Assam

**&**

**Ms. Ankita Kalita**

Assistant Professor, Department of History  
Kamargoan College, Kamargoan, Assam

### Abstract

*Archaeological sources such as monuments, inscriptions, coins, artefacts etc. are crucial for understanding and reconstruction of history. In this paper, the weapons used by the Ahoms, who established a kingdom in medieval Assam and ruled for almost six hundred years are taken for study to understand the history of war weapons and its socio-cultural linkage. Some of the weapons were discovered in various times in and outside of Assam. Some of the weapons are kept in different public places such as archaeological sites, museums etc. These are the weapons not only used in warfare, but also are the symbol of heritage and part of the culture of the Ahoms. From the iron smelting for manufacturing the weapons to the epigraph inscribed on Bortop (big gun), the biography of the weapons speak a lot for the unique features of the material culture of the Ahoms. Weapons they used were varied and played the most significant role in historical*

*situations and trajectories. It is an investigation into the past with the help of information collected from literary sources, in addition to the implements themselves.*

**Keywords:** *War weapons, Medieval, Ahoms, Military, Cultural.*

## **Introduction**

Weapons are the major objects used by the archaeologist to interpret the developments of pre-historic period. With the study of weapons and their related identities, we can understand the discourse of ‘cultural evolution’ and ‘human history’ from the very beginning of human race till the present day. These weapons are varied in nature, since men used to invent weapons as a part of their struggle to survive and develop. With the development of warfare in human history as violent encounters with others, making of war weapons became an integral part of human life.

The beginning of institutionalised warriorhood and weaponry developed, specifically for use in battlefield was a major turning point in the history of warfare and ancient society<sup>1</sup>. The weapons, thus, became a driving factor in determining the course of a particular society and political entity. The weapons as objects, therefore, have the potentiality to speak about the historical trajectories and material culture. The study of weaponry in the context of historical enquiry requires addressing multiple issues, as the weapons are not only the tools for the battlefield, these are the part of human culture and emotion.

In most cases, establishment, consolidation and the decline of a historical state is unavoidably linked with either victory or defeat in wars. In the context mentioned above, an attempt is made in this paper to study the weapons particularly used in warfare by the Ahoms, the dynasty that ruled almost six hundred years (1228-1826 C.E) in Assam, the north-eastern part of India in medieval period.

The Ahoms are originally a section of Tai speaking group of the Mongoloid race of the regions of South East Asia who dwelt in Mongolia and in the south western part of China to the south of the river Yang-tse-kiang<sup>2</sup>. From there, some of them migrated as far as Yunan, mainly because of conflicts with Chinese people<sup>3</sup> and established their principalities.

Subsequently, in the sixth and later centuries, they occupied the large territory from Sheuli valley down to the Irrawaddy River in upper Burma and established a number of Tai states such as Mong-mit, Hsen-wi etc<sup>4</sup>. The Ahoms, who are identified as Tai-Ahom migrated to Assam from upper Burma and established their rule in the upper part of the present state of Assam. Though, there exists a number of contradictory opinions regarding the original homeland of the Ahoms, we can believe that Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom in Assam and his people came to the Brahmaputra valley of Assam from the nearest station of the Tai living people who spread from western Yunan to upper Burma<sup>5</sup>.

From the beginning of their rule in 1228 C.E., to become the single largest power of the state by the later part of seventeenth century, the Ahoms adopted and implemented different policies and technologies to consolidate their rule. The superior production system, continuous expansion of agricultural land, efficient administrative system, the policy of socio-cultural assimilation along with the unique military administration made the Ahom rule possible in the place unknown to them. The techniques and technologies that the Ahoms used in warfare and defence system had a significant role in the successful completion of six hundred years of rule in Assam.

During the entire period, the Ahoms had to subjugate a number of local rulers and principalities of the neighbouring hill tribes along with their involvement in conflict and battles against the foreigners such as Mughals, who were defeated at the hands of the Ahoms often.



### Weapons of warfare of the Ahoms

The Ahom military men used different implements which had potentiality for war and weapons of real nature, intended for offensive and defensive purpose. The weaponry used by the Ahoms were both locally originated weapons and weapons brought with them from their homeland. The defensive implements of the Ahoms included *Tupi* (cap for head), *Gati* (a thick skin jacket) for upper body, *Dhal* (small revolving shield) and *Baru* (big revolving shield) made of rhino, buffalo and deer skin. The offensive weapons used by them included *Dhenu-Kanr* (bow and arrow), *Barchah* (spear), *Taruwal* (swords) of different kinds, *Yathi* (flat spears), different types of *Da* (dagger) and *Hangdang* (traditional sword of the Ahoms).

The Ahom military men used bow and arrow for targeting long distances and they were mainly of three types - *Bardhenu* (large bow), *Chutia Dhenu* (made by Chutiyas, original inhabitants) and *Karpahi Dhenu* (bow using iron head arrow) along with the normal bow<sup>6</sup>. Bows and arrows were considered more powerful weapons than the dagger and swords used by them. The sharpest arrow used in these types of bows was the *Singgimuri* arrow. This arrow has a very sharp and pointed iron head. This iron head has inverted thorns on one or both sides. If it gets into the body, it cannot be pulled out. The Ahoms also made another highly poisonous arrow with the head of a thorn made of cane thread, mixed with poison. It is known that such poisons were brought from the Naga or Mishimi tribe of neighbouring hill areas<sup>7</sup>. *Hengdang* was a major weapon of the Ahoms and special to them. These were of different types-some were straight and had edges on both sides, some were wide on the handheld side and pointed on the front, some were long and slightly folded. Likewise, there were different ways of using *hengdang* and the names of different kinds of *Hengdang* were-*Kampai*, *Khara*, *Tega*, *Junrabi*, *Lukhno*, *Archchal* and *Dhup*. Along with the *Hengdang*, the Ahom soldiers also carried with them a *kiris* (small and short kind of *hengdang*) on their waistbands.

### **Canon-Hiloi and Bortop**

The Ahoms were known for the use of firearms in the battlefield and they used *Hiloi* and *Bortop*, the artillery of light and heavy weight and size respectively. It is still not possible to locate the actual date of the introduction of artillery in the Ahom army, mainly due to lack of records and the '*buranjis*' - the chronicles of the Ahoms are not unanimous in this connection. But it is true that the Ahoms did not bring firearms with them from their motherland. In the case of India, Babur is known as the first one to have used gunpowder in 1526 C.E., at the Battle of Panipat.

On the other hand, Tavernier, the French traveller, who visited Assam in the seventeenth century is of the opinion that artillery and gunpowder were first invented by the Ahoms and from them, the art of preparing gunpowder was passed into Pegu and then into China<sup>8</sup>. But local records including archaeological ones, do not bear such information. It can be believed that the gunpowder, artillery gun and matchlock was first used in North East India and J. N. Sarkar also confirms that during the time of Ahom king, Suhungmung Dehingia Raja, heavy artillery guns were used in Assam around 1505 C.E<sup>9</sup>. But again, Edward Gait observes that, "the use of firearms by the Ahoms dates from the close of the war of 1532-1533 C.E., against the Mohammedans. Until then, their weapons had consisted of swords, spears and bow and arrows"<sup>10</sup>. *Hiloi* and *Bortop* were the major weapons used by the *Ahoms* in the medieval period. Along with the Ahoms, the Chutias, Naras and Mughals also used *Bortop* as per records found in the *buranjis*. Lila Gogoi, a renowned person, who had made valuable contributions to the study of history and culture of the Ahom, records the existence of various types of matchlocks (*Hiloi*) and artillery guns. The twelve types of matchlocks as recorded by Gogoi are *Gathiyani Hiloi*, *Ramchengi Hiloi*, *Pahulangi Hiloi*, *Hat Naliya Hiloi*, *Kamayani Hiloi*, *Jambur Hoiloi*, *Pani Hiloi*, *Jamur Hiloi*, *Touwa Hiloi*, *Kesai Hiloi*, *Basadari Hiloi* and *Houka Hiloi*. Big artillery guns or *Bortop* were mainly of five types - *Biyagom* (big size), *Hatimuria* (as like elephant head), *Turbaki* (captured from Turbaks), *Mitha Hulung* (*Bortop* captured from Chutias), and *Baghmuria* (as like tiger head).

Some other types of *Bortop* were also used by the Ahoms, such as *Tini-Chari mukhia*, *Dumukhia*, *Saraimara*, *juriyamara*, *Singhmukhia*, *Lajuathaka Bortop* etc. These are different in size and shape and accordingly, their weights are varied and which are also decorated with designs as shown in figure 1. (A) and 1. (B). Some of the *Bortops* were too heavy to carry and therefore, they were placed in strategically important places which could cover long distances. *Buranjis* record that even elephants were used for the movement of the *Bortops*.

In an inscription on *Bortop*, it is recorded that the weight of it is 29 *mounds* and 29 *seers*, which means approximately 1050 kgs<sup>11</sup>. In the middle of the *Bortop*, there are two or more iron posts, according to the size of the *Bortop* that had helped to hold and placed the *Bortop* in the battlefield. Large numbers of cannon balls of different sizes were found at Kharghuli, Guwahti. Gunpowder was produced locally by the Ahoms. Assamese artisans made cannon by mixing bell-metal, brass or copper with other metals<sup>12</sup>.

War is not fought with weapons alone. The success in battle depends on proper engagement of multiple factors such as tactics, courage, intelligence, deep sense of patriotism and so on. The Ahom made appropriate use of all these techniques in winning battles and their military history is full of stories of victory in most of the battles.

The Ahom soldier, for example, who joined in battle against the Mughals is found equipped with “two stacks of arrows, two quivers, one bow, two torches, one shield, one *chalatalia* for wearing on the body, one bar *chata* (umbrella) in front, one pair of *chak* (article necessary for firing a gun). The soldiers on the front row were each given two bundles of chalk for the matchlocks.

The Borphukan (the commander in-Chief) himself took this kit, and others followed suit<sup>13</sup>. Both the Ahom infantry and navy used all types of weapons in the battlefield. The Ahom soldiers initially did not

have to engage in much naval warfare to establish their kingdom but later, strengthened their naval department to fight against the enemy coming from the west<sup>14</sup>. This fact particularly can be seen in their conflict and battles against the Mughals. The Ahom military men efficiently used *hengdang*, bow and arrow, and *hilo* for naval warfare along with other weapons. They made various types of boats and built a particular boat for the installation of *hilo* known as *hiloichara* boat.

*Bortops* were kept ready at the entrance of every fort or rampart built throughout the state. Along with the greater boundary of royal place and its peripheral areas, these canons were also installed in different places of the western part of the state like Jogighopa, Saraighat, Pandu, Guwahati, Kajali, Kaliyabar to prevent any invasion from that direction. These places were strategically important for the Ahoms, since foreigners like the Mughals entered Assam from these sides. Cannon balls made of tight stones were used by the Ahoms.

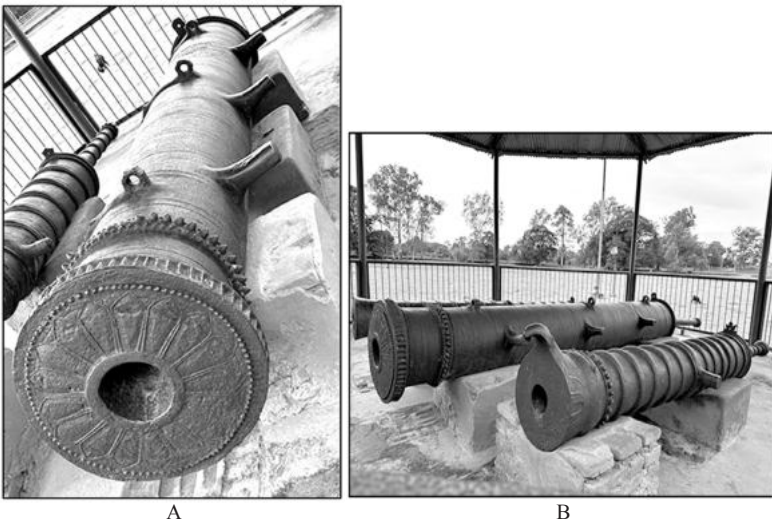


Figure 1: Front(A) and side view(B) of *Bortops* preserved in *Talatol Ghar* (Royal palace of the Ahoms) Sivasagar by Archaeological Survey of India. Source: Photographs by authors.

### **Weapons and the warriors**

Under the Ahoms, there was no permanent and standing warrior class. All competent men in the age group of 16 to 50, known as '*paik*' had to serve the state both as warrior and civilian. The observation of Padmeswar Gogoi is remarkable- "the *Ahoms* were essentially a fighting and ruling race, less bothered about religion than material prosperity and national freedom"<sup>15</sup>. The tradition is that all the males were socialised into the warrior roles early, in boyhood.

### **Reviewing weapons in cultural context**

The ambiguity or multi-functionality of material culture usually indicates that weapons cannot be understood to be merely tools of war. Weapons often maintained identities of age, gender, rank or group identity<sup>16</sup>. Weapons are the most potential tools for saving lives of individuals and protecting tools of the sovereignty of the state, particularly, in ancient and medieval societies. The celebration of weapons of war is therefore, common to every society. The emotions and cultural expressions associated with the war weapons as symbols of glory and identity continued for generations and became the elements of cultural heritage. Weapons are therefore found depicted in art and culture.

### **Manufacture of weapons-the use of iron**

Production of war weapons is a visual expression of the development of material culture. The use of iron had a significant role in the formation of the Ahom state in medieval period, particularly its transformation from tribal to feudal economy<sup>17</sup>. The weapons used by the Ahoms were made mainly of bamboo and iron. *Dhenu-Kanr*, *Yathi*, *Barcha* etc. were made of bamboo and the other major weapons such as *Da*, *Hengdang*, *Taruwal*, *Hiloi*, *Bortop* were made of iron. The Ahoms manufactured their weapons from iron, extracted locally by using indigenous technology from iron-ore. A particular section of people known as '*losaliya*' engaged in the profession of extracting iron from iron-lore. These weapons were manufactured in a particular smithy by a

blacksmith and the unit of people engaged in this work were known as *kamar khel*. The *Bortops* in the Ahom era were made of iron ore in the Tiru Hill. A special earthenware vessel was used to melt the iron. The vessels were made by mixing ash prepared by burning *Bora* rice with special clay collected from Tiphuk in Sivasagar district. The scientific significance of such vessels was that they never burst no matter how much heat was applied. *Shal* and *Chandan* wood fire were mainly used for heating and smelting the iron. The melted iron was poured into moulds.

There were a number of professional groups (*khel*) engaged in the production of different weapons-*dhenususa khel* (associated with making of bow and arrow), *yathipatiya khel* (associated with making of spear), *hiloidari khel* (making of *hilo*), *kamar khel* (associated with production of iron objects), *losaliya khel* (associated with iron smelting). Canon balls were made by the *Hilakuti khanikars*. The Ahoms also produced gunpowder and the *Kharghariya khel* involved in this job were the associated unit of the army<sup>18</sup>.

### **Cannon inscriptions of Ahom period**

The most significant aspect in reviewing the *Bortop* is the epigraph inscribed in it. Along with the copper plate inscriptions, stone inscriptions, bell-metal inscriptions, rock inscriptions, these cannon inscriptions provide valuable insights into the past. Cannon inscriptions are the inscriptions engraved on the surface of the *Bortops* which made them more precious. A *Bortop*, for example, preserved in *Talatol Ghar* or royal palaces in Sivasagar district contains an inscription that records the name of king as Sri Sri Swarganarayan Saumareswar Udayaditya Singha, *Saka* 1593 (fig.2). The Ahoms were well known for their habit of keeping records of events which is proved through these inscriptions, along with the tradition of writing chronicles (*Buranji*), famous as regional historical tradition in medieval India. The inscription on *Bortop* provides lots of information of the period concerned such as the time of manufacture (mainly in *Saka* or *Hijri* era), the name of the manufacturer,

the occasion, name of the ruler and so on. The inscriptions also contain the name of the ruling authority from whom they captured the *Bortop* after defeating them in battle, if it so exists<sup>19</sup>.



Figure 2: *Bortop* containing an inscription preserved at *Talatal Ghar* (Royal Palace), Sivasagar by Archaeological Survey of India.

Source: Photograph by authors.

### Weapon as symbol

The weapons like *Hangdang*, *Bortop* of the Ahoms, are the symbols of their glory and pride. Apart from the use in battle, the *Bortop* was considered as auspicious on some other occasions also. The sound of the *Bortop* was considered as sacred outside the battlefield. The occasion of ascending the throne by the king which was known as '*singarigharat utha pratha*', the birth of a child in royal family, the first entry to the road, temple or palaces were shown royal honour by sounding the cannon. The vertical division of society into numerous professional groups was a feature of the Ahoms. The hierarchy of post, office and even weapons was there in the Ahom society. The most interesting aspect of the use of the *hengdang* was that it could be used only by kings, commanders and royal officers like *Buragohain*, *Borgohain* and *Barpatra Gohain*. *Hengdang* is the symbol of Ahom military strength and royalty. The Ahoms believed that the king of heaven (Lengdon) when he sent Khunlung and Khunlai

to rule, offered a *hengdang* to khunlung addressing in the following way: 'I am giving you the *hengdang* from the *adya sakti* (real power) and tying it to a post. Those who rebel against you bring him to bow down to it. And if the edge of the *hengdang* turns towards him, cut him instantly, otherwise don't'.<sup>20</sup> It was the tradition of the Ahoms that a *hengdang* is kept in a pillar of the royal place and the royal officers had to take an oath touching that particular post.

At the time of ascending the throne, the king also used to cut a buffalo using the *hengdang*. An officer was welcomed by offering a *hengdang* when he returned from battlefield after defeating the enemies. *Hengdang* is also a part of culture as it is used in the Ahom's marriage ceremony known as '*Chak-long*'. It is the custom of the Ahoms that during the ritual of marriage, the bride picks up the *hengdang* from the *sarai* (platter) and hands it over to the bridegroom, asking him to subdue the enemies and protect his family and work for the welfare of the country. The bride also offers a cloth called '*kavas-kapur*' to the groom and addresses him to protect all by wearing this piece of cloth<sup>21</sup>. The tradition of taking the oath by holding the *hangdang* is a living practice in the '*chak-long*' marriage ceremony of the Ahom community<sup>22</sup>. *Hengdang* is considered as 'sacred' in the Ahom cultural tradition. It was the custom among the Ahoms that along with the other the properties, the son inherited a *hengdang* from his father<sup>23</sup>. Various objects along with weapons were systematically deposited during the burial of the Ahoms. The deposit of *hengdang* in '*Maidam*'<sup>24</sup>, the burials of kings and members of royal family of the Ahoms was a common feature. The objects used during the lifetime of the deceased were deposited with the body with a belief of being used by the deceased after the death<sup>25</sup>.

There are references in the history of the Ahoms of giving weapons as rewards or token of achievements or promotions. It was the tradition of the Ahoms that the alliance with neighbouring principalities and foreign powers was confirmed with the exchange of goods along with weapons such as *hengdang*. *Deodhai Asam Buranji* (Ahom chronicle) records



the offering of a *Borhiloi* to Ahom king, Dihingia Raja<sup>26</sup>. In some of the religious rituals, the Ahoms used the weapons. *Rik-khan*, a religious festival observed at the time of putting away of the weapons after the end of war where it is wished that they remain functional and strong. In the *barsamanor puja*, the symbol of a bow made by bamboo was used<sup>27</sup>. In the ritual of the first outing of a newly born baby boy, a bow and arrow was offered to him as mark of being a warrior and protector of the State<sup>28</sup>. Games using weapons also prevailed during the Ahom rule, such as *taruwal khel* (game of sword) *lathi khel* (game of spear), *kanr khel* (games of arrow)<sup>29</sup>.

Even in modern day Assam, in order to keep the spirit of nationalism and to create patriotic feelings, the reference of *hengdang* is given in most of the times as a specific symbol of heroism, courage and patriotism. The statue of Lachit Borphukan or his portrait, the military general who led the Ahom army against the Mughals and defeated them in the battle of Saraighat is always seen holding a *hengdang*.

## Conclusion

In the military history of Ahoms and particularly, their wars against indigenous and foreign powers, weapons played the most significant role. It was because of their capability and successful use of the weapons with other military and warfare technique that the six hundred years of rule by a particular dynasty was made possible. The Ahoms' victory over the Mughals, the expansionist power of India proved the superior technical and military power of the Ahoms. As it is mentioned in the introductory note, it can be said that the war weapon plays a significant role in the continuation of a political entity in a particular time. While it was their military strength and technique of warfare that enabled the migrated Ahoms to establish and consolidate their rule in Assam, the weakness and disappearance of the same also led to the decline of the state. J. N. Sarkar mentions that it was around 1505 C.E., during the rule of Ahom king, *Suhungmung Dihingia Raja* that the use heavy artillery started in Assam and reached its height during the time of King Rudra

Singha (1696-1714 C.E.)<sup>30</sup>. Though the beginning date is debateable, it is true that after King Rudra Singha, military weakness began in Ahom Kingdom which can be linked with the gradual decline of the kingdom in the later period. Both historical and archaeological records prove the fact. No cannon inscription is found in the period after 1739 C.E. The practice of warfare declined from the days of King Shiva Singha and King Pramattra Singha to an indescribable level during the reign of King Gaurinath Singha along with the manufacture of weapons of different kinds.

During the reign of King Gaurinath Singha (1780-1794 C.E.) the blacksmith's shawls disappeared and not only the firearms but also swords, sticks, spears, arrows and even knives were no longer made. Lila Gogoi informs that from the time of King Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769 C.E.), the making of *singimuri* arrow was gradually decreased. The weapons of war are the first resource of defence and unless the weapons of war are adequate and more capable than those of the enemy, defeat is inevitable. The coming of Captain Welsh in 1792 C.E., who was invited to pacify the Moamoriya rebellion of 1769 C.E., was more unfortunate for the military department. The Assam *buraniji* records that Purnananda Buragohain, the royal officer, although he tried to train the military with the help of a British officer, had to wait for the British to provide guns and gun powder<sup>31</sup>. As a result, the Ahoms were unable to withstand both the civil and foreign invasions they faced in the later part of eighteenth and early part of nineteenth century. Both the Moamoriya rebellion, an internal revolt and the repeated attack of Burmese from 1817-1826 C.E., exposed the weakness of the Ahom state and ultimately, led to the signing of Yandaboo Treaty in 1826 C.E., between the Burmese and the British, who got involved to pacify the contemporary political unrest in the region, thus marking the end of Ahom rule in Assam.

Weapons are major archaeological elements for understanding the *Ahoms*. The inscriptions on *Bortop* are the solid information for reconstructing the history. The inscriptions are evidences for writing

the history of Ahom-Mughal conflict of the period 1615-1682 C.E. Ahom-Mughal conflict which excited the seventeenth century political discourse of Assam, including the historic battle of Saraighat (1671 C.E.), proved the efficient military technique, traditional and guerrilla attack of the Ahoms and their overall victory over the Mughals. Those canon inscriptions record the acquisition of *Bortop* from the Mughals by the Ahom kings-Jayadhwaj Singh, Chakradhwaj Singha and Gadadhar Singha. From the manufacture of the *Bortop* to its design and inscriptions, *Bortop* was the symbol of glory and prestige of the Ahoms. It reflects the technological developments of the period, the power and capability of the skilled labour, the physical strength of the users of *Bortop*.

## References

1. Vandkilde, Helle, (2015). "Conflict and War, Archaeology of: Weapons and Artifacts", in James D. Wright (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social & Behavioural Science*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Vol. 4, Oxford: Elsevier. pp. 607-613. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.96008-2>, Accessed on 24th March 2023.
2. Gogoi, Padmeswar, (1968). *The Tai and Tai Kingdom with a Fuller Treatment of the Tai-Ahom Kingdom in the Brahmaputra Valley*, Guwahati University Press, Guwahati. p. 32.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
4. *Ibid.*
5. (Nath), Gogoi, Jahnabi, (2002). *Agrarian System of Medieval Assam*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi. p. 25.
6. Gogoi, Lila, (2011), "Ahom Yugor Ranar Aahila" in *Dr. Lila Gogoi Rasanawali*, Vol.I, (compilation of the works of Dr. Lila Gogoi) Published by Pradyut Hazarika on behalf of Banalata, Dibrugarh. p. 225.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
8. Rajkumar, Sarbananda, (2017). *Itihase Soaura Chasahata Bachar*, Banalata, Dibrugarh. p. 250. (original source from J.B. Tavernier, *Travels in India*)

9. Sarkar, J.N., (1994). 'The Ahom Administration' in H.K. Borpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive history of Assam*, Vol. III, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati. p. 67.
10. Gait, Edward, (2013). *A History of Assam*, in Chandan Dey (ed.), Bina Library, Guwahati. p. 96.
11. Cannon inscription of Gadadhar Singha, *Saka*, and 1604 source: Neog, Moheswar, (2008). *Prachya-Sasanavali*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati. p. 218
12. Rajguru, Sarbeswar, (1988). *Medieval Assamese Society*, Pankaj Kr Rajguru Asami Milanpur, Nagaon, Assam. p. 330.
13. Bhyan, S. K., (2010). *Lachit Borphukan and His Times*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati. p. 170 (originally quoted from Assam Buranji, which contains an account of the wars with Raja Ram Singha, titled, *Ram Singhar Yudhar Katha*, obtained by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati)
14. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
15. Gogoi, Padmeswar, (1968). *Op. cit.*, p. 543.
16. Vandkilde, Helle, (2015). *Op. cit.*, pp. 607-613.
17. Purkayastha, Sudeshna, (2007). 'Iron Industry in the Brahmaputra Valley: *Loh Shalias* and the *Kamars* (late Medieval to mid colonial period)' in *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. XXXIV, New Delhi, pp. 152-166.
18. Rajkumar, Sarbananda, (2017). *Op. cit.*, p. 60.
19. Total sixteen numbers of cannon inscription are so far discovered in and outside of Assam. Moheswar Neog compiled and edited all those inscriptions in his book *Prachya-Sasanavali*. For details of the inscriptions see -Neog, Moheswar, (2008). *Op. cit.*, pp. 214-220.
20. Naobaisha Phukan, Padmeswar, (2019). Naobaisha Phukanar Asom Buranji, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati. p. 5.
21. Gogoi, Lila, (1979). *Tai Sanskritir Ruprekha*, Sribhumi Publishing Company, Calcutta. p. 118.
22. The authors have the opportunity to present in such marriage of the Ahom community in upper Assam where the bride takes the oath in the presence of *Ahom* priest where hundred numbers of earthen lamps are lit.

23. Chetia, Umesh, (2016). *Ahom Buranji Aru Sanskrutiti*, Kiron Publisher, Dhemaji, p. 153.
24. The Ahom had a unique tradition of burying the bodies known as 'maidam' of kings, queens or officials, which they brought from their homeland is a part of their rich culture and tradition. It is known that the Tai people have maintained the tradition of *maidam* since their settlement in China.
25. Rajkumar, Sarbananda, (2017). *Op. cit.*, pp. 77-86.
26. Bhuyan, S. K., (1962). *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, Department of Historical and Antiequalitarian Studies, Guwahati, p. 106.
27. Gogoi, Lila, (1979). *Op. cit.*, p. 70.
28. Rajkumar, Sarbananda, (2017). *Op. cit.*, p. 64.
29. Gogoi, Lila, (1979). *Op. cit.*, p. 136.
30. Sarkar, J.N., (1994). *Op. cit.*, p. 67.
31. Gogoi, Lila, (2011). *Op. cit.*, p. 227.



## FOREIGN SERVICE SYSTEM UNDER THE AHOMS

**Mr. Suren Das**

Assistant Professor

Department of History

Bhattadev University, Bajali, Assam

### Abstract

*Indian history witnessed very few ruling dynasties whose reign sustained for a long span of time like that of the Ahoms. The Ahoms were descendants of the Tai people, originally from the Chinese province of Yunnan who reached the Brahmaputra Valley in 1228 C.E. and settled in the upper portion of Assam and ruled it for six long centuries, a record period in Indian history next only to the Cholas. Siu-ka-pha, the founder of the Ahoms laid the pillar of a sound civil administration which was further upgraded by his descendants; and in due course of time, they developed a full-fledged foreign department to be headed by Majindar Barua, i.e. Foreign Secretary. It was actually Pratap Singha, the seventeenth ruler of the Ahoms, who started the reorganization of the Ahom diplomatic service. The Ahom kings appointed a number of Katakis, i.e. envoys or ambassadors, as we understand in modern terminology under the foreign service department. They settled important diplomatic and political issues by dint*

*of their intelligence, eloquence, knowledge and advocacy. They were imparted proper training so that the country's pride and honour were maintained abroad. A class of secret envoys known as Bairagi or Boragi and Sannyasi were also appointed who visited the places in disguise to accumulate information regarding customs and manners, dress, culture, political conditions and report the same to the king. The Brahmanas were preferred as envoys as they were considered to be good orators, eloquent, having persuasive skills. The Ahoms set a very high standard of individual quality and public morality for their envoys. The indispensable qualifications of the selected diplomats were honesty, trustworthiness, intelligence and tact; dishonest and undignified ones were punished.*

**Keywords:** *Civil administration, foreign service, envoy, abroad, diplomat.*

## **Introduction**

The Ahoms ruled in Assam for almost six hundred years, remarkably a long period in Indian history. Actually, very few dynasties in India could claim credit for having ruled for such a long period. Undoubtedly, they had something unique in their administration and other systems which enabled them to rule a land for such a long period. They had a well- organized regular foreign service system to maintain diplomatic relations. The Ahom embassy maintained diplomatic ties with states, principalities or countries, great or small, both during the time of peace or war. Such states were the Mughal empire (with the Viceroyalty at Dacca and Faujdari at Rangamati), Koch Bihar, Cachar, Jayantia, Dimarua, Khyrim, Bhutan, Manipur, Tripura, Khamjang, Nara or Mogaung (Mungkong).<sup>1</sup>

During the initial four centuries of the Ahom rule in Assam, the king seemed to have dealt with the foreign states with the help of *Kataakis*, the Ahom envoys for foreign affairs. The *Kataakis* were intelligent,

erudite and educated and had the ability to tackle any situation pertaining to foreign affairs as far as bilateral ties of the Ahoms with any power were concerned. Settlement of important diplomatic and political issues depended on their capability, skill and advocacy. So, the *Kataakis* were provided regular training from the state, with a view to ensuring the nation's honour abroad. Apart from being couriers of messages, the *Kataakis* wrote histories of the countries visited and introduced knowledge of etiquette and customs and industries learnt in foreign countries to Assam.<sup>2</sup>

### Methodology

For the proposed paper, a historical method of analysis is followed. The data accumulated from secondary sources have been analysed and evaluated.

### Discussion

The Ahoms shared much similarity with the Shan states of Upper Burma because of their affinity in case of language and traditions and hence, they always sent envoys to these states. They maintained close relations with the Shan state of Mogaum in Burma, whose inhabitants they looked upon as their brothers and kinsmen.<sup>3</sup> Pratap Singha, one of the greatest rulers of the Ahoms was not satisfied with the performance and the standards of literary excellence of the ambassador who represented the Ahoms at the court of Narnarayan in Koch Bihar. So, he started the task of reorganizing the Ahom diplomatic service. The Ahom language continued to be the medium of conversation between the king and his nobles, but Hindus were often appointed as envoys (*bairagis* and *kataakis*) in preference to Ahoms, who were sometimes found wanting in intelligence.<sup>4</sup> The Brahmanas were considered as good orators, having the skill of persuasion. He appointed Brahman envoys from some selected families at the courts of the Koch kings and the Mughal rulers in Bengal. One of the reasons for entrusting the Brahman *Kataakis*, if we believe Wade,<sup>5</sup> one of the four *Kataakis* was sent by Raghudev for marrying his daughter to Pratap Singha, while the two Brahmanas only folded their



hands, the Sudras prostrated themselves before the latter. This experience convinced Pratap Singha that the Brahman scholars would be able to retain the honour and dignity of the Ahoms abroad.

However, in accordance with expediency, which was a guiding principle in their polity, the Ahoms did not permanently neutralize the non-Ahom envoys i.e. debar them from service for ever. Non-Brahman experts in tribal affairs, Ahom and non-Ahom, were sent to conduct negotiations with the hill tribes of the borders, who needed greater sympathy and understanding than the more subtle logic of the Brahmins.<sup>6</sup> The Ahom *Katahis* still continued to be sent to the Shan states of Upper Burma, Manipur and Bhutan, as well as to the neighbouring and hill states.

A class of secret itinerant emissaries in disguise, popularly known as *Bairagis* and *Sannyasis* were also appointed by Pratap Singha for all sorts of information about states. The function of the *Bairagis* was to observe the political and social condition of the people in foreign countries.<sup>7</sup> These secret agents in the guise of mendicants were to communicate to the king regarding the customs and manners, dress, political condition of the countries that they were asked to visit. Again, *Majindar Barua* or *Bar Majumdar* served as his Foreign Secretary as well. As such he had to be conversant with foreign languages, in order to read and write letters of and to foreign countries.<sup>8</sup> Dancers and prostitutes were also customarily used, as it happened in many countries in the contemporary times, to find out secrets from the enemy generals, delay action and pass secret messages to their own generals, ministers and other officials.

The Ahoms set a very high standard of individual quality and public morality for their envoys; and they were expected to follow them without fail. The indispensable qualifications of the selected diplomatic personnel were honesty, trustworthiness, intelligence and tact. Dishonest and undignified ones were punished.<sup>9</sup> Pratap Singha considered it a criminal offence for his *Katahis* to beg favours and take gifts from anyone abroad, while in diplomatic service.

When Kalia, the Brahman *Kataki*, obtained gifts of money, cloth and brass pitchers from Raja Satrajit of the Mughals on the plea of theft in his house, and the king learnt of this from the report of Naoboichha Saikia, he became indignant at the unethical conduct of Kalia, thundering: 'He is my ambassador. What business had he to ask for and obtain articles from a Bangaal or foreigner? He has belied the trust, imposed on him by me.' Kalia was executed along with six other Brahman *Katakis*, one escaping, before the facts were clarified by the Barphukan that the envoys were offered the gifts unsolicited.<sup>10</sup> Lachit Barphukan also had one *Kataki* chained with iron fetters when he found the latter displayed greed for flying wooden birds at the camp of Ram Singh during the Mughal invasion in Assam.

The department of Ahom Foreign Service, as reconstituted, had two different wings: the internal secretarial set-up; and foreign ambassadorial service. The Foreign Department was to carry on diplomatic correspondence with other countries in accordance with the traditional Ahom protocol and procedure fixed by the government. This included in the reception of the foreign ambassadors who brought letters from their own states, and to make suitable arrangements for their reception and departure. Such foreign letters, addressed either to the king or the ministers or other officers had, according to customary practice to be sent within a duly sealed envelope and carried by envoys to the Ahom court.<sup>11</sup> The letters had to be sent through the *Katakis* always along with costly gifts. It was the prime duty of *Majindar Barua* i.e. Foreign Secretary to be ever present at the court with the king to read out the messages to the latter, sent by any foreign king and also prepare drafts supposed to be sent as replies to the court of any foreign state. Before dispatch, such royal diplomatic correspondence was customarily scrutinized. These the kings did not sign, but were stamped with the royal lion- symbol and facsimile of his name which were kept with the *Majindar Barua* and these were coloured, and used to be fixed on the envelopes and sealed with the lion seal and sent through an envoy or the foreign courier who brought the original letter.<sup>12</sup>

The foreign ambassadors were received at a specially raised camp at a few yards' distance from the royal court. They could not approach the Ahom king directly except those from Mogaung, the Nora country as both the Ahoms and the Noras belonged to the same ethnic group. When a neighbouring ruler sent ambassadors to the Ahom court, it was customary, for them to wait on the frontier, while the kings' orders were being obtained. Transport was then provided for them to the capital where the *Barbarua* supplied them with food the first day and the three great Gohains on the three succeeding days.<sup>13</sup> The foreign envoys had to abide by the court protocols.

Before visiting the king, they had to interview the three *Dangoriyas*<sup>14</sup> individually and sometimes the *Barbarua*, another important officer of higher rank. When the king sits at the *Barchora*<sup>15</sup> the ambassadors were led before the royal presence, where they were to show due respect following the Ahom custom of revering their king, offer precious presents, explain the motive behind their arrival in detail and hand over the letters of the kings that they represented. The *Majindar Barua* read these letters to the three *Dangoriyas*. If the reply was to be given immediately it was drafted in Persian or Devnagri or Ahom on gold-illuminated and ornamented paper, put in an envelope with facsimile of the king's name and symbol and finally sealed with royal seal. Or it was sent through an envoy. If the reply was not sent immediately, the three *Dangoriyas* discussed the matter and sent it later. The departing envoys were usually escorted by their Ahom counterparts up to the frontier and, if necessary, to the foreign courts.<sup>16</sup>

On the external level, the Ahom foreign service was manned by special officers, belonging to three special *khels* (clan/group), two open and one secret. *Katakis* and *Khaunds*<sup>17</sup> were the open ones, while *Langta (naked) Baragis* were the secret ones. The *Kataki* performed their duty as messengers, envoys or ambassadors, as we understand in the terminology of diplomatic relations in modern times. They were again divided into three classes viz. *Bara* (senior), *Maju* (intermediate) and

*Saru* (junior); and had two wings: domestic and foreign. Their prime duty was diplomatic transaction on behalf of the Ahom king, both at the foreign court and also within the kingdom.

An intelligent senior envoy (*Barkataki*) was sent the correspondence meant for the emperor at Delhi or the Sultan at Gaur, and he had to present it in full uniform. The envoys served as an important limb of the Ahom espionage system.<sup>18</sup> They were assigned the duty of accumulating vital details of the foreign countries they visited, e. g. institutions, customs, roads and embankments, strength and weakness and any other information to pass them to their own authorities, so as to take any counter measures in the near future.

The *Katakis* were the bearers of sealed letters to ensure their secrecy. The envoys had to be cognisant of their contents in order to orally explicate their objectives before the accredited officers of the countries visited. For entering into some agreements with the latter, the *Katakis* were headed by a *Barkataki*.<sup>19</sup> He regulated the activities and movements of the *Katatis*, verbally enquired of the matters under consideration and passed the replies to the *Barbarua* who received from the other side. The duty of *Katakis* did not end merely with acting as couriers of messages and letters from one state to another either way. This was of immediate significance. Every envoy had to submit written reports of his activities and findings of the type of *Tripura Buranji*, *Jayantiya Buranji* and *Kachari Buranji*.<sup>20</sup>

A notable institution pertaining to the Ahom Foreign Service was the office of the *Khaund*, which served for foreign espionage. Rudra Singha is credited with the creation of this new office. Rudra Singha abandoned the policy of isolation followed by his predecessors and encouraged intercourse with other kingdoms and sent envoys to visit the contemporary rulers of other parts of India.<sup>21</sup> He created a special *Khel* called *Bairagi*, whose function was to visit different countries and report the king of the nature of the social and cultural life led there.<sup>22</sup> He sent

men to Delhi to learn Mughal music and brought architects from outside Assam for constructing the palace and other buildings within the site of the new capital city at Meteka, which was named Rangpur.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

The Ahom rulers described Assam as *Sonar Saphura*, a casket of gold, which must not be opened to the foreigners.<sup>24</sup> This necessarily indicated the self-isolation policy of the Ahoms which echoed the attitude of the east and south-east Asian nations *viz.* Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Bhutanese etc. and wanted to remain aloof from outside contact. Shihabuddin Talish, the Muslim chronicler, who accompanied Mirjumla during his Assam invasion in 1662 C. E. also described the attitude of the Assamese in these words: “No Indian kings in former times ever conquered Assam. Even the intercourse of foreigners and the Assamese was very limited. They allow no stranger to enter their territories and they prevent their own people from leaving their country.”

However, settling in Assam, the Ahoms soon realized that the policy of seclusion would not serve their purpose of becoming master of the north-eastern part of this country. Hence, they adopted a pragmatic policy in regard to outsiders. It was actually Pratap Singha (1603-1641), the seventeenth ruler of the Ahoms who organized the Foreign Service department well to enable it to tackle diplomatic issues effectively. Again, Rudra Singha (1696-1714), the thirteenth ruler of the dynasty was the only king who had one sort of pan Indian notion and sent envoys to places *viz.* Bengal, Orissa, Delhi etc. besides north-eastern states for various purposes. Rudra Singha adopted deliberate measures for encouraging intercourse with other nations and sent envoys and messengers to visit the contemporary rulers of other parts of India.<sup>25</sup> He introduced some new traditions borrowed from other countries which his envoys brought to his notice; and he also thought them to be standard and suitable for the Ahoms. Undeterred by considerations of race and religion, the Ahoms led their foreign policy to be guided by sheer political necessity, which was, therefore, remarkably unorthodox.<sup>26</sup>

## References

1. Sarkar, J. N., (2004)., 'The Ahom Administration' in H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. III, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati.p.59.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
3. Baruah, S. L., (2020). *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Ltd., New Delhi., p. 404.
4. Gait, E., (2023). *A History of Assam*, Global Net Publication, New Delhi. p. 140.
5. Wade, J. P., (1927)., '*An Account of Assam*', in Benudhar Sharma (ed.), R. Sarma, print, Kuntaline Press, Calcutta. pp. 252-53.
6. Sarkar, J. N. (2004)., *Op. cit.*, p. 59
7. Acharyya, N. N., (2003). *The History of Medieval Assam*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi. p. 115.
8. Quoted by J. N. Sarkar in '*The Ahom Administration*' in H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, vol. III from *History of Majumdar Barua family*, Sadar Amin, pp. 141-42; *Buranjis*, p. 211.
9. Sarkar, J. N., (2004). *Op. cit.*, p. 60.
10. Sarkar, J. N., (2004). in '*The Ahom Administration*' in H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. III from Assam *Buranji* obtained from the family of Sukumar Mahanta, para 117, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati.
11. Sarkar, J. N., (2004). *Op.cit.*, p. 61.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Gait, E., (2023). *Op.cit.*, p. 478.
14. The three ministers of the Ahoms viz. Burhagohain, Bargohain and Barpatragohain.
15. The council-chamber of the Ahom kings.
16. Wade, J. P., (1927). *Op.cit.*, p. 79.
17. A post created by King Rudra Singha whose duty was to observe manners and customs of foreign people, make purchase for the king.
18. Sarkar, J. N., (2004). *Op.cit.*, p. 62.

19. *Ibid.*
20. Quoted by J. N. Sarkar (2004), in ‘*The Ahom Administration*’ in H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol.III from *Buranjis*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, p. 201.
21. Gait, E., (2023). *Op.cit.*, p. 186.
22. Barua, S. L., (2020). in *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Ltd., New Delhi. p. 292. Also see Harkanta Sarma Barua Sadar Amin (1930) *Assam Buranji*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam. p. 64
23. Baruah, S. L., (2020). *Op. cit.*, p. 292.
24. Bhuyan, S. K., (1965), *Studies in the History of Assam*, in Srimati Lakshewari Bhuyan (ed.), Nabajiban Press, Calcutta. p. 150.
25. Gait, E., (2023). *Op. cit.*, p.308.
26. Baruah, S. L., (2020). *Op. cit.*, p. 402.



## DEATH AND OTHER THEMES: REVISITING A PRE-COLONIAL NAGA SOCIETY THROUGH THE MYTH OF MEYUBA

**Mr. Taliyanger Changkiri**

*Research Scholar*

*Department of History and Archaeology*

*Nagaland University*

### Abstract

*With the arrival of colonial administration and along with it, Christianity, there was a sudden wave of change in Naga society that resulted in discouragement of the continuation of many existing traditions which, along with the absence of a writing tradition, left a great void in the understanding of past societies. However, such values survived in the form of folklore through oral narration. This article is an attempt to study a pre-colonial Naga society using the genre of myth from the Ao Naga Village of Changki. Myth is an important genre of traditional literature which, with careful interpretation and treatment throws light upon various ideologies and values of a society.*

*The society under study is a tribal society which saw rapid transition and sudden shift from its old traditions to new lifestyles. This is an attempt to understand past beliefs and rituals, economic and social life, an individual's status*



*and relationship with society, through oral narratives. The article intends to highlight an interdisciplinary approach in understanding folklore through the lens of sociology and anthropology.*

**Keywords:** *Ao Naga, Changki, oral narration, myth, land, status, death, slavery.*

## **Introduction**

Myths and beliefs comprise aspects of a culture. Like other traditional societies, the ideas, beliefs, traditions, and cultures of the Nagas that are followed have been foregrounded through folklore and myth. Nagas are a group of people belonging to the Mongoloid race who reside in the north-eastern part of India. The people lived in a land with high peaks and beautiful landscape surrounded by various species of flora and fauna; as a result, the Nagas had a close relationship with nature, which was evident from the manifestation of it in every belief and idea. It was seen in songs, lore, tales, and myths and was passed down from generation to generation. Nagas are by tradition, master storytellers. The art of narration and story-telling, stimulating the interest of listeners was a gift that had been among the Nagas since time immemorial. The folklore was passed down from generation to generation; the traditions and customs had been learned through practice. Folksongs, tales, myths, and legends were transmitted orally. According to an Ao Naga tradition, there was a written script along the way, but it was lost.

During the age, when there were no sharp differences between darkness and light and men and beasts lived together, there was a written script that was written in animal hide and hung on the wall. One day, when the people were away in their fields, a dog dragged it down and ate it up<sup>1</sup>. The art of writing among the Nagas was established only after the coming of colonial administration. The early writings about the Nagas could be seen in the form of tour diaries and travel records of the early colonial administrators. Though their works are wrapped in so many

flaws and some historical and factual inaccuracies, they left remarkable records about the Nagas. The missionaries to the Naga hills also left valuable records, which were followed by administrators like J.P. Mills and J.H. Hutton, who published monologues on the Nagas. Though the inception of written knowledge had been very late, progress was fast. Within a short span, the Nagas caught up with the new ways of learning, and as of today, there have been numerous volumes of writings about the history of the Nagas.

When the Nagas accepted Christianity in 1872, it was a turning point, not only in the aspect of religion but also highly impacted the society as a whole. With rapid changes in society, the importance of oral tradition and history is diminishing. It must be noted that, at the same rapid rate at which the Nagas caught up with the new trend, the old ways began to disintegrate. There should be a realization that a great deal of the history of the Nagas needs to be explored and documented. The importance of studying oral traditions is often ignored. Folklore, tales, myths, and legends are often taken as mere narrations that were listened to in the evening by the fireside. The factuality embedded in it is often not realized.

In a broader scenario, the narrations as a whole are losing their importance. The Nagas belong to a society that possesses vibrant traditions and a colourful culture. Despite their unique and many positive cultural characteristics, they have often been looked upon from a different perspective, and the true nature of their character and spirit has not been seen and appreciated.

Moreover, the modern generation of Nagas is failing in its part to appreciate and uphold the good values of tradition. No doubt, the culture is kept alive through the festivals and cultural events, but its true nature is slowly losing its grip. The historical approach to studying myth and folklore is also very recent among the Nagas. It is the need of the hour for the indigenous scholars to take up such a task to interpret and reinterpret

their own history. Changki village is one of the oldest and largest villages in the Ao area, and it is also the area where the mythical legend under study is based. The given society was chosen because despite being a very old society with a rich tradition, little or no efforts were made to study it and record the folklore earlier.

### **Socio- cultural life of Changki Ao Naga Society**

Changki village is located within coordinates of 24° 22' east latitude and 26° 31' longitude in the Mokokchung district of Nagaland which is situated in the north-eastern part of India. Due to its close proximity to Assam, the people had close contacts with the Ahoms. The village was called *Bordobia* by the Ahoms. Like other Naga villages, Changki Ao Nagas were also practicing headhunting, which was stopped after the coming of colonial power. The village has been divided into two *khels*: *Süngdakba* (upper *khel*) and *Ayim Anet* (lower *khel*). The Changki society follows the unilineal principle of patrilineal descent<sup>2</sup>. The society is divided in terms of clans, and there are 13 clans in Changki. Equal respect was given to both men and women, but men enjoy a far better position as compared to women. The inheritance is through the males, where the eldest son is the heir and gets the major share of the family property. Women are not allowed to participate in any decision-making bodies like the village council. Both men and women receive equal opportunities for education.

As far as the political organization is concerned, Changki village follows the age-group political system, in which a boy who reaches the age of sixteen or so will enter the age group system, which will move up progressively every three years. Traditionally, when they reach the age of forty-four to forty-seven, they will become the junior councillors known as *Samen Nuzaba*, and after another three years, they will become the senior councillors, known as *Samenthi*. However, with the progress of time, the system had been followed with little modification. The Changki people are primarily agriculturists who traditionally had been following *jhum* cultivation; however, in the 1920s and 1930s, when the British

surveyed the land, wet rice cultivation was introduced, which had become the primary economic activity of the people. Along with this, many are government employees, some working in the private sector or engaged in private home-based businesses. Geologically, Changki land is at the junction of four types of litho-logical units: the Barail, Alluvian, Tipam, and Girujan formations<sup>3</sup>. It has rich coal deposits, and as a result, many are engaged in coal-related activities and businesses. Timber logging is common among the people.

Changki people, like the other Ao Nagas, followed the indigenous religious and belief system. However, after the coming of American Baptist missionaries to the Ao Naga area, people gradually accepted the new faith and established the Baptist church in 1901. Thus, the Changki people are Christians of the Baptist denomination, and with the conversion to Christianity, they gave up all the ancient religious beliefs, including the traditional Ao festivals such as *Moatsü* and *Tsüngremong*<sup>4</sup>. It was both a boon and a bane, as with the coming of Christianity came education, which opened the eyes to Western perception of ideas, which impacted the people greatly over time, while the traditional values and ideas that were essential components of a society were forgotten gradually.

### **Oral narration of Meyuba**

Myth is derived from the Greek word '*muthos*', meaning words uttered from the mouth. Like many other Naga tribes, the tradition of transmitting narratives and cultural values was done through utterances by word of mouth and passed on from one generation to the next. Because of its many ingredients and its broad applications, it is not an easy task to define myth.

According to a group of German scholars, myth is believed to be entirely a personification of nature. In the early days of psychology, Freudians explained myths as mechanisms of wish fulfillment, while Jungians considered them as expressions of the collective unconscious.

According to Sir James Frazer, myth dealt with themes of ‘death, birth, and resurrection’. Another theory considers ‘myth’ simply as a traditional or fantastic story that concerns supernatural events or gods<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, myth can be understood as a traditional story with elements of truth that has an ideology accepted by the people, often consisting of supernatural entities or events narrated as real experiences in the past. It explains the values and concerns of society.

Similarly, legends are stories that happened in the past and usually centre around a hero, whether they are made up or factual. Early anthropologists tried to access myth as a window to explore and bring out the ethnographic details of a culture. Franz Boas regarded myths as ‘cultural reflectors’ and Malinowski saw myth as a social charter and a direct expression of its subject matter<sup>6</sup>. Temsula Ao divided the oral tradition of the Ao Nagas into three categories: primary tradition, secondary tradition, and tertiary tradition. Primary tradition was inclusive of the narration of a particular tribe, and such tradition continued to govern community life. Secondary tradition pertains to the tradition of a village, and narrations are quite outside of the primary tradition. This was followed by tertiary tradition, which dealt with the lore of a particular clan<sup>7</sup>.

The main protagonist of the narration, Meyuba, belonged to the *Changkiri* clan of Changki village. He was a descendant of Imlisangba, who was the founder of the lower *khel* of the village. The founding clans had the pick of the sites in the village for home sites and land for cultivation in the surrounding forests<sup>8</sup>. The founding clans, therefore had the advantage of acquiring a vast amount of land and enjoying the rights of ownership by virtue of being the first settlers. Therefore, it was very evident that Meyuba inherited huge plots of land from his ancestors. Changki territory is vast, covering an area of 148.615 sq. kms, the Jhumming area extends by 71.1675 sq. kms. As a result, there is enough fertile land for cultivation. For Changki people, land is highly valued, it is the source of livelihood, production and wealth. Meyuba was a very wealthy man in the village who owned many slaves and cultivated a huge tract of land. He found favour even in the eyes of the spirit of the site.

As a result, the spirit guarded his lands and cultivation. Any outsider who entered the property without the approval of the spirit was seen as trespassing, and ill fate befell the trespassers in the form of sickness or death. Those who wished to enter the property had to prove their good relationship with Meyuba to the spirit. One of his servants was said to have entered the cultivation site without any declaration, which resulted in his death. Meyuba was furious when he learned about it and had a heated argument with the spirit, which convinced it to revive the deceased servant.

Mesosangla was one of the slave girls of Meyuba; she was a very smart woman, quick at household chores, and she would go every day to the forest to collect firewood with her friends. Her hardworking skills and her smart nature contributed to Meyuba's growing wealth. This created jealousy in some people, which resulted in a conspiracy to destroy his wealth.

Therefore, an evil plan was plotted and they convinced the friends of Mesosangla to be a part of it. The plan was to kill her. One day, when they went out to collect firewood as usual, they pushed her down a waterfall. It was made to look as though she fell from a cliff. The particular area where Mesosangla landed still bears the mark of her fall (Figure 1).

Since falling off a cliff was considered an unnatural death, it was expected of Meyuba to observe the purification rites, which he initially refused to do, responding, "For the death of a slave girl, an individual more worthless than leaves of trees, he cannot be duty bound to perform the rites." But eventually, he had to comply with it, which resulted in the burning of his entire wealth. He buried his coins in pots, he was given the seed of *Athi* (*Entada pursaetha*) to be planted over the site where he buried the pot. Sensing their greedy intention, he boiled the seed the whole night and planted it. As a result, the seed failed to grow, and the site of its burial was never known.

The following year, blessings were overwhelming; it was the time for harvest. It was so plentiful that the effort of an entire community was needed to harvest the paddy. Yet again, jealousy arose among the same people who previously plotted his downfall.

Therefore, when they harvested the paddy, they would intentionally thrash it on the ground with force, which resulted in the detachment of rice grains from the plant, thus, making the quantity lesser. Seeing this evil act, Meyuba's wife was heartbroken. But he assured her that no matter what their intentions were, the spirits would always bless their share. True to his word, that year, they harvested paddy filling seven granaries. Since then, the people realized that it was a futile effort to meddle with Meyuba, who had found favour with the spirits.

The site which he cultivated the following year after the rite of purification was done comprises present day *Longtsuen* and *Sangpaen* (Figure 2). The site of *Longtsuen* is presently a colony in Changki village which is inhabited by the descendants of Meyuba and the site of *Sangpaen* is presently a Jhum fallow and a cultivation site that also belongs to his descendants. In the site could be seen, the bamboo grove of the bamboo species *Bambusa balcooa*, indigenously known as *longmi*, which was said to have been planted by Meyuba (Figure 3). Both the sites are located not very far from the site of *Sangpangmen*, the habitation site of Imlisangba, the patron who set up the lower khel of the village and an ancestor of Meyuba.

### **Identification of Socio-Cultural elements**

Several key socio-cultural elements can be identified from the aforementioned myth of Meyuba:

#### **Theme of status**

Status of honour was what was most desirable for the Nagas. It was not something that was acquired during the lifetime of a person, but the honour was expected even in the afterlife. Head hunting and a

feast of merit were part of Naga culture and brought the most honour to a person. Even among the Aos, the successful collection of heads was one way of ensuring name and prominence during a man's lifetime and a glorious memory after his death<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, the feast of merit was a criterion for ensuring a good social status and honour in a society, and as a result, it was an ambition of every Ao to proceed as far as he could in the series and thereby, gain honour, both in this life and after death<sup>10</sup>. There are two elements of the concept of status evident from the myth of Meyuba: his enormous amount of wealth and his favour in the eyes of the spirit. Throughout history, many legendary figures have been associated with the element of the supernatural, be it King Arthur with his magical sword, Excalibur, or Attila the Hun, being considered the scourge of God by the Romans.

Similarly, in the world view of the Nagas, a legendary figure was always associated with having magical powers or being favourably regarded by spirits, which elevated the status of the individual to that of a larger-than-life figure. A person's social status is taken to be very important when a supernatural element is added to it. Through the narration of the myth of Meyuba, it can be inferred that he is associated with having a special kind of relationship with a supernatural entity that lives in a parallel realm that existed in the world. The spirit was known as *Potsürong*. It could be identified as a kind of *Lijaba* that lived in Changki village.

According to W.C. Smith, *Lijaba* means 'earth walker', a spirit that 'walked as a man among men', commanded 'sickness and disease', and contacted 'chosen people'<sup>11</sup>. The occurrence of a metaphysical entity in a narration could be fictitious tall claims completely outside the realm of scientific explanation, but the episodes as true claims are kept in the collective memory of the people. In the Ao Naga worldview, if a person was favourably viewed by the spirit, he was bound to be blessed. A wealthy individual was to enjoy a high and respectable social status in the society.



No poor man could organize a feast of merit; it was an event where enormous amounts of wealth were thrown. According to sociologists Max Weber, status was defined as 'positive or negative social estimation of honor'<sup>12</sup>. Wealth was not necessarily recognized as a status qualification, but in the long run it became inevitable and the association was clear. As a result, Meyuba, besides being a member of a founding clan and one who owned a huge amount of land was bound to be wealthy and a high social status was expected.

### **Theme of Death Ritual**

According to Plato, the soul was immortal and would remain after the physical destruction of the body. He explained that fear of death is only natural. On the contrary, Epicurus explained that the soul is mortal and suffers destruction in death, and therefore the fear of death is irrational<sup>13</sup>. As far as the understanding of death among the Ao Nagas is concerned, the former view seems to hold true. According to W.C. Smith, Aos does not believe death means his extinction<sup>14</sup>. Aos did not believe that death was an end but a transition into the land of the dead. They believed in the concept of natural and unnatural death. A natural death was seen as the fulfillment of one's duty in this world and elaborate preparation was done for the transition into the afterlife; however, an unnatural death was regarded with resentment.

In those cases, the consequences of death were highly feared. The fear was not about the loss of mortal life or the biological body, but rather the misfortunes and ill fates that would follow if the death was not treated properly. The appeasement of the spirit was very common. A similar fear of negative consequences related to death is seen in the mythical legend under study. As per the narration, the death of Mesosangla was a murderous act of some jealous-minded individuals; she was murdered in a manner that was seen as accursed. Her death was meant to be seen as falling to her death from a cliff. Certain forms of death, such as 'mauled by a wild beast, or by snake-bite, or falling from a cliff or tree, or drowning, or burning, or in childbirth', were considered

unnatural deaths<sup>15</sup>. In the Ao Naga world view of death, passing on in such a manner was a disgrace to the community because it was taken as the deities were not happy with the individual and thus, a curse was sent upon the person. So, during such an event, purification rites were necessary to be observed by the family of the deceased.

Further along the narration, we could see the family of Meyuba bound to observe the rituals of purification; his granaries and fields were burned, and his wealth was destroyed. It was customary for the family at that period of time because it was a common belief that an individual's misdeeds would bring suffering, not only to himself but to others as well.

During such an event of death, segregation of family members of the deceased was done; they killed all the animals of the household and tore the roofs of granaries and the house so that the rain would spoil everything. They abandoned their clothing, money, and crops for the year<sup>16</sup>. This tradition, however, is no longer followed in the modern day as far as the Changki Ao Naga Society is concerned. With the coming of Christianity, the significance and importance of traditional spirits and deities diminished, and along with it, the traditional ideas and beliefs surrounding the dead were replaced with the new concept of ideas thought by the religion.

### **Theme of slavery**

The system of slavery existed in many parts of the world at different stages of history. From the ancient classical world of Greece and Rome to the modern era of the southern states in the USA, such a system was in existence. Similar to the other Ao Nagas, the owning and selling of slaves was prevalent in pre-colonial Changki society. According to J.P. Mills, the Ao Nagas owned large numbers of slaves, not only from neighbouring tribes but also among their own<sup>17</sup>. The existence of slavery is found through the narration under study. There are two indications about slavery: firstly, the boy slave whom the spirit killed, and secondly, Mesosangla, the slave girl who was killed.

According to L. T. Hobhouse, a slave was a man who was regarded as the property of another, 'without rights, pure chattel; in other cases, he may be protected in certain respects, but so may an ox or an ass'<sup>18</sup>. The treatment of slaves among the Ao Nagas was however, very liberal as compared to the slavery that was followed in other parts of the world, and the slaves generally enjoyed more of a familial treatment than that of a subjected individual who was living at the mercy of the master. There is no denying the fact that the individual rights of the slave were lost once he was taken into the household of the masters; he forfeited every right he enjoyed as a free man, and he even lost the rights of the clan or society he originally belonged to.

This is also evident from the narration under study: when Mesosangla died, the community expected the household of Meyuba to perform purification rites, which he initially refused by remarking, "For the death of a slave girl, an individual more worthless than leaves of the trees, he cannot be bound to perform the rites". This indicates that the status of the individual was seen as very low. Even the Changki term for slave, *Alari*, refers to a worthless person<sup>19</sup>. They were understood as individuals who had no rights whatsoever.

However, the fact that the slaves were human beings was not compromised. He was now a part of the master's household. Every master's fate was also his. He had to work for the master, and his well-being was the master's responsibility. When the slave boy of Meyuba was killed by the spirit, he took upon himself the responsibility as a master to stand up for the life of the slave boy by challenging the act of the spirit, which was a daring act because great fear of the spirits was common among the community because displeasing the spirits would often bring ill fate. This indicates that the life of a slave was also valued as highly as the life of a human being, and that the overall treatment was good enough that after the colonial powers came and slaves were freed, 'many elected to stay with their masters rather than go home'<sup>20</sup>.

## Conclusion

During precolonial times, the Ao Nagas had an organized platform for learning, though it was done orally. Both boys and girls had their respective dorms where various traditional knowledge was taught, from basic life skills to village histories. A periodic event known as *küpok* was often organized among the different clans of Changki Ao Naga Society, where the elders would often teach clan history and principles to the younger members of the clan. The folk stories and tales were often narrated with the intention of imparting certain lessons to the younger generation or society as a whole. It was a way of keeping things together. Most often, the associated myths were added, which generated a sense of fear among the people, thus creating a favourable environment to live in.

For instance, the spirit of *Potsürong* has no relevance in modern, Christianized Changki society; however, in the earlier society, its powers and malevolence were so feared that people knew not to transgress. The spirit, in actuality could just be an idea that existed in the collective consciousness of the people, but that was enough to restrain the people from doing misdeeds. The narrations were also often narrated to give a sense of pride and to foster a stronger fraternity among the clan members. Following the ancestors' footsteps is a much-emphasized value among young people. In such instances, legendary figures like Meyuba, who was seen as invincible by virtue of being a righteous being, stands right to the given motive. However, what is most important to a modern historian studying past societies are the meanings that are explicitly or implicitly embedded in the narrations. With the passing of time and the coming of new trends, traditions are slowly losing their relevance, and we can no longer see the organized learning platform where we learnt the traditional values and knowledge. As a result, the zeal for learning about the past is dying down. Younger Nagas, often listen to such narrations as mere stories with little or no sense of relevance in their individual lives or society as a whole.

A careful study of the folklores, myths and legends becomes important through which not only the narrations are recorded and documented but also the good values arising from it would be brought about which can be incorporated in modern life. It will also make the people more curious about life in the past; respect for tradition will grow and will make young minds and scholars explore more which will contribute to the development of various fields and disciplines.

### Acknowledgements

*I would like to thank Prof. Tiatoshi Jamir, Professor, Department of History and Archaeology, Nagaland University for going through the first draft and giving valuable comments. I would also like to thank, Mr. Imtinochet Changkiri, Administrator, Mission School Changki for providing oral narrative of the subject and allowing me to get access to the school library. And lastly, Mr Aolepden Changkiri for accompanying me to the sites.*

### References

1. Ao, Temsula, (1999). *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, Bhasha Publications, Baroda. p. 8.
2. Longkumer, Jumayangla, (2009). *Change and continuity in Tribal Villages: A sociological Study*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi. p. 199.
3. Changki Ayu Rongmen (Changki dictionary), (2018), compiled by Changki Ayim Asem Senso Mungdang (CAASM), Changki. p. 3.
4. Longkumer, Jumayangla, (2009), *Op. cit.*, p. 282.
5. Over, Raymond Van, (1980). *Sun songs: Creation Myths from Around the World*, Meridian Book, New York. pp. 7-8.
6. Dundes, Alan, (1984). *Sacred Narrative: Reading on the theory of Myth*, University of California Press, Berkley. p. 193.
7. Ao, Temsula, (1999), *Op. cit.*, pp.10-11.
8. Longkumer, Jumayangla, (2009), *Op. cit.*, p. 217.
9. *Ibid*, p. 46.
10. Mills, J.P., (1926). *The Ao Nagas*, Macmillan & Co Ltd, London. p. 257.

11. Smith, W.C., (1925). *The Ao Naga Tribe of Assam*, Macmillan & Co Ltd, London. p. 78.
12. Gerth, H.H. & Mills, C.Wright, (1946). *From Max Webber: Essays in Sociology*, Oxford University Press, New York. p. 187.
13. Hubb, Alexina, (2017). *A Psychological and Philosophical Understanding of Death: An Analysis of Platonic and Epicurean Philosophy in Modern America*. Honors Bachelors of Arts, Xavier University, Cincinnati. p. 2. <http://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/hab/32> (Accessed on 26 March 2023).
14. Smith, W.C., (1925), *Op. cit.*, p. 107.
15. Mills, J.P., (1926), *Op.cit.*, p. 283.
16. Smith, W.C., (1925), *Op.cit.*, p. 105.
17. Mills, J.P., (1926), *Op.cit.*, p. 211.
18. Bottomore ,T. B., (1986). *Sociology: A Guide to Problems and Literature*. Blackie & Son Ltd, Bombay. p.185.
19. CAASM, (2018), *Op. cit.*, p.12.
20. Mills, J.P., (1926), *Op. cit.*, p. 211.



Figure 1: The spot where Mesosangla died. The hollow mark is said have created when she fell on it. (Source: Taliyanger Changkiri)



Figure 2: Cultivation area of Meyuba at the present day site of Longtsuen and Sangpaen. (Source: Google Maps).



Figure 3: Bamboos in this site is believed to be planted by Meyuba. (Source: Taliyanger Changkiri)



## **A STUDY OF SELECT WOODEN SCULPTURES PRESERVED IN THE ASSAM STATE MUSEUM, GUWAHATI, FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ART**

**Dr. Rashmita Phukan**

Assistant Professor

Department of History, Nowgong College (Autonomous)  
Assam.

### **Abstract**

*The tradition of wood carving, along with the growth of other art forms such as manuscript painting, mask making, ivory works as well as textile making witnessed a growth following the advent of the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement in Assam under the initiative of Srimanta Sankardeva from the second half of 1400 CE. The movement not only had a social dimension intended towards reforming the society, but also left its impact in the domain of art and culture. The various art forms of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement have been broadly placed in the category of the 'Sattriya School of Art'.*

*The Assam State Museum located in the city of Guwahati has played a crucial role in preserving the wooden sculptures and panels collected from different satras all over Assam. An attempt has been made in this paper to discuss select wooden sculptures and panels with*



*special reference to the techniques of carving the images and the influence of different artistic styles.*

**Keywords:** *Sankardeva, Wooden, Artistic, Sattriya, Style.*

Prior to the advent of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam, under the initiative of Srimanta Sankardeva, wood carving tradition existed in early Assam that was clearly reflected in the sculptures of the period. The history of wood carving in early Assam is datable to 606 CE when the ruler of Kamaarupa Bhaskaravarman is said to have gifted carved boxes of panels to King Harshavardhana.<sup>1</sup> The region of Doiyang-Dhansiri valley, with its rich material remains has provided evidence of syncretistic images- Hari-Hara, Sankara-Narayana and also Visnu from the site of Deopani, Golaghat.

Under the Ahoms also, the existence of a class of wood carvers called *barhoi* received royal patronage.<sup>2</sup> Wood carving however received tremendous patronage during 1500-1600 CE with the propagation of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam under Srimanta Sankardeva (1149-1568 CE) and his disciple Madhavdeva (1489-1596 CE). The popularity of wood work must have been an outcome of its easy availability and as practicing this art was not inclined to class or caste distinctions.

Preparing wooden artefacts constituted a central part of the livelihood of the common masses and these artefacts mostly adorned the *satras*. The establishment of *satras*<sup>3</sup> constituted one of the important aspects of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam. The Vaishnavite *satras* emerged as important centres of these art forms and also preserved the wooden artefacts. The technique of relief carving was generally followed in the *satras* of Assam where figures are carved on flat wooden panels. Both high and low relief carving are found. In some instances, a third variety of wooden panel is seen marked by the existence of foiled arches at the top not being attached to any surface background.<sup>4</sup> Wooden panels generally served a decorative purpose for the inner and outer walls of the *satras*.

The collection of wooden panels preserved in the Assam State Museum, Guwahati consist of divine, semi-divine as well as human and demonic figures. The paper will however, focus on the Surya and Ravana wooden panels recovered from Sri Sri Auniati Sattrā, Majuli and Sri Sri Sundaridiya Sattrā Barpeta respectively and the Vaishnavite wooden panels and images recovered from Sri Sri Bordowa Than, Nagaon. The wooden panel, having the sculpture of Surya collected from Auniati sattrā has a low relief carving.<sup>5</sup> In the panel, Surya is depicted holding four arrows in his right hand probably showing the release of light in four directions and a bow in the left hand. The deity is seen riding a chariot driven by Aruna his charioteer (Fig. 1). The panel also shows Surya wearing an upper garment and also a scarf that hangs down from his neck while the lower garment in all probability resembles a dhoti.

He is also shown wearing a boot in his right foot. The figure demonstrates frontal carving techniques while the figure of the horses and Aruna has been carved in profile. The other low relief panel is the wooden panel depicting the demon Ravana. Ravana here is seen seated in *padmasana* posture with the depiction of two Ahom lions on each side. (Fig. 2). The body is carved as abnormally large and the nine heads are seen fitting with the body. Among the salient characteristics of the panel, the entire figure including the ten heads represent frontal features. While nine of the heads have been carved in a straight manner, the tenth head has been carved over the fifth head. Such a representation displays one of the unique characteristics of Ravana images in *Sattriya* style. The reason behind making the head in the centre big and the remaining nine heads being carved around it probably may have been done to use them while performing as *Sattriya* masks.

The depiction of varied Vaisnava images in the wooden panels constitutes another significant class collection, housed in the Assam state museum. The carvings are in high relief and have been collected from Bordowa Than. One such wooden panel depicts the Chaturbhuja form of Visnu in his Kurma *avatara* (Fig. 3). The deity here is depicted with

*ayudhas- sankha* in the lower left hand, *chakra* in the upper left hand, *padma* in the lower right hand and *gada* in the upper right hand.<sup>6</sup> Floral and geometrical designs are seen on the sides of the panel. The upper portion depicts the deity in human form while the lower portion is in the form of a tortoise. Physiognomical features reflect Mongoloid traits such as flat nose, wide eyes and thick lips.

According to Manoranjan Dutta, the late medieval sculptures of Assam particularly of Kurma Vishnu, the deity appears to have been swallowed by the tortoise rather than depicting the two body features separately.<sup>7</sup> Another wooden panel is that of Chaturbhuja Narasimha. The figure here is depicted in *sthauna* form (here Narasimha is seen attacking the asura, Hiranyakasipu).<sup>8</sup> The sculpture of Narasimha shows the upper portion in the form of a lion and the lower portion in human form. (Fig.4). The panel shows Narasimha in the act of tearing the belly of demon Hiranyakasipu and the asura is seen holding a *khadga* in his right hand and a *khetaka* in his left hand. While discussing the artistic features of this panel, the fierce look of Narasimha seems to be lacking here because of absence of sharp pointed teeth and nails. Mention may be made about another wooden panel with high relief carving from Sri Sri Bordowa Than. It has the panel of Parashurama carved on it. Here, Parashurama is shown in a standing posture with a *khadga* in the right and a *parashu* in his left hand. (Fig. 5) Interestingly, the figure depicts Mongoloid characteristics such as flat nose. One of the unique features of this image is the existence of *jatas* or dreadlocks shown flowing behind the shoulders. Further the garment that the image is seen wearing is somewhat unique. It may either resemble a dhoti existing above the knee or a one-piece garment with a belt around the waist. The figure is also seen wearing bangles.

A careful analysis of the artistic traits exhibited in the sculptures depicted in the wooden panels reveal regional idioms with respect to facial features. Moreover, the frontal characteristics exhibited by the sculptures constitute one of the predominant features of the medieval

sculptures of Assam.<sup>9</sup> While the local idioms of the sculptures cannot be ignored, art traditions prevailing in other parts of India also played an important role in influencing the technique of making the images.

For example, the Surya panel that shows the deity wearing boots was a popular feature in northern India.<sup>10</sup> It must also be mentioned that the cultural contact of Assam with the Islamic empire as an outcome of the conflict between the Ahoms and the Mughals left its imprint in the domain of art as well. The exchange of ideas must have followed in the long run influencing the artistic creations of the region. This is particularly seen in the form of use of coats and turbans characteristic of the wooden panel of Surya and Kurma Visnu. Thus, although the wooden panels can be broadly placed within the Sattriya school of art, nevertheless the assimilation of different art styles is clearly traceable. For example, during the rule of the Ahom monarch Rudra Singha (1696-1714 CE) many Mughal elements witnessed their coming into Assam.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore quite likely that these artists having their own skills and ideas transformed the local Assamese art form, adding variations. Hence, a perfect amalgamation of ideas must have taken place in the long run leaving a deep imprint on Assam's art tradition.

## References

1. Cowell Edward Byles, Thomas F.W., (trans.) (1897). *Harshacharita of Banabhatta*, Delhi, Varanasi and Patna, p. 214.
2. Das Jugal, *Assamer Lok Kala*, (1968). Publication Board Assam, p. 18.
3. Monastery generally associated with the Neo-Vaishnavite movement of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Assam
4. Barpujari H.K., (ed.) (2007). *The Comprehensive History of Assam Vol III*, Publication Board Assam, p. 364.
5. Dutta Manoranjan (1990). *Sculptures of Assam*, New Delhi, p. 118.
6. Deka Liky (2023-24). *An Iconographical Study of a Few Wooden Panels Preserved in the Assam State Museum*, Kalā, - The Journal of Indian Art Congress, Volume XXVIII, p. 61.
7. Dutta, Manoranjan, (1990). *op. cit.*, p. 117.

8. Rao Gopinath T.A., (1914). *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol.I, Part I, Madras, p. 18.
9. Barpujari H.K., (2007). *op.cit.*, p. 364.
10. Rao, Gopinath T.A., (1914). *op.cit.*, pp. 311-312.
11. Deka Liky, (2007). *op.cit.*, p. 63.



Fig. 1: Surya wooden panel



Fig. 2: Panel Depicting Ravana



Fig.3: Kurma avatara



Fig 4: Narasimha Avatara



Fig 5: Parasurama



## RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN MID- SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MUGHAL BENGAL: A STUDY IN THE ALTERATION OF MASS FAITHS AND THE EMERGENCE OF DYNAMIC RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

**Mr. Imon-ul-Hossain**

Ph.D. Research Scholar

North Eastern Hill University, Shillong

### Abstract

*This paper is a study of religious beliefs in the mid-seventeenth century Mughal Bengal in which three major religions that dominated mid-seventeenth century, were Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Outside these major religions, this work focusses on newly emerging folk beliefs that were distinctive from the dominant religions. The folk beliefs were mainly rural in nature. As a result, the marginal people adhered to such faiths in large numbers. Subsequently, they encouraged the worship of many local deities. Such practices of the period have been reflected in the composition of some important literary texts based on the eulogies of these particular Gods or Goddesses. One of the most important things in this period was the prevalence of various forms of Goddess worship at the folk level, which had not been seen in earlier centuries of Bengal. However, the superiority of the Goddess faith did not prevent the male-centric worship in Bengal. In this work, the examples of two Sufi saints from Burdwan*

*have been considered. It is seen that the Sufis did not have a stronger influence on the rural society than that of the Pirs, who were also well connected with the marginalized people. The coming of Christianity led to the emergence of a new socio-cultural profile in Bengal. This led to the establishment of numerous churches, which further aided in the development of Christianity in Bengal. However, in contrast to Hinduism and Islam, the impact and influence of Christianity on the people of Bengal was comparatively limited.*

**Keywords:** *Bengal, Mughal, religious, folk beliefs.*

## **Introduction**

Religious beliefs played a significant role in medieval Indian socio-cultural life. It comprised various identities of faith among the major and minor communities. Such differences were region specific too. Since the early medieval period, Brahmanism seems to have enjoyed increasing patronage of the remarkable royal dynasties of Bengal. Among them, two emerging God cults were favoured by the Palas - that of Siva and Vishnu. The advent of Islam in Bengal occurred in the thirteenth century through the invasion of Bakhtiyar Khalji. Islam, since its beginning, had the main objective of converting the non-Muslims, which was considered to be a holy act and duty. The Muslim powers, thus, followed this theoretical objective of stabilising a theocratic state in India. However, Islam did not get thoroughly embedded in Bengal's soil by mere political success as it was heavily influenced by social organizations. In Bengal, the forcible conversion process was deficient as the Muslims were a minority as compared to the Hindus, like in other parts of India. The adaptation of Islam gave a natural opportunity to the lower caste Hindus and the Buddhists in this century. This appeared because of the fact that the Brahmins had lost their prior paramountcy in every sphere of society since the early medieval period and that was followed by clashes with Buddhism and as a result of Brahmanical revivalism in the Sena period when the Buddhists of the Pala period had been persecuted.<sup>1</sup>

## I

Mid-seventeenth century Bengal witnessed the growth of different religious beliefs and trends. The enumeration of the term Hindu has been mentioned differently because both Tavernier and Thevenot regarded them as ‘idolaters’, while Manucci simply identified them as Hindu.<sup>2</sup>

The account of Thevenot provides us with the instances of idol worship. He found the Jagannath temple to be much more popular among the dwellers near Ganga. He alluded thus,

“the province of Oulesser, which we called Bengala, and which idolaters name Jaganat; because of the famous idol of the Pagod of Jaganat which is there, is inhabited by Gentiles no less fantastical in point of religion, than those of Halabas; and this one instance may serve for a proof of it...”<sup>3</sup>

In the Digvandana section of the *Anadimangal*, various places of worship in Bengal like Ranaghat (present Nadia district), Rampur and Tarakeshwar (both present Hooghly) for Siva worship, and Burdwan for Devi Sarvamangala worship have been mentioned. If we observe the verses here, the poet referred to different places of worship in Bengal, like Ranaghat and Tarakeshwar for Siva worship, and Burdwan for Sarvamangala worship. Further, he compared Tarakeshwar with Varanasi.<sup>4</sup>

For a very long time, Bengal remained the heartland of Vaishnavism. The emergence of Chaitanya movement in the mid-fifteenth century provided a boost for its wider spread from rural to urban life, particularly through *Sankrittan*. Shah Noorur Rahman has argued that many contemporary *Mangalkavyas* such as *Raymangal*, *Shastimangal*, *Sitalamangal*, *Kalamamangal* indicate a transformation of the Hindu faith in which Vaishnavism appears to have lost its prior influence over society.<sup>5</sup> However, the verses of Chaitanya Vandana can be found in both *Anadimangal* of poet Ramdas Adak and Ruparam’s *Dharmamangal*.



For example, it is mentioned in *Anadimangal*:

“Come together, friends, and greet “Hari” while hearing  
Chaitanya’s praise”.<sup>6</sup>

(The poet mentioned Navadipa as the birthplace of Vaishnavism.  
He asked his friends to say Chaitanya’s name aloud)

Similarly, Ruparam’s *Dharmamangal*, imitated from  
*Anadimangal*, deals in a similar fashion:

“Listen intently to Chaitanya’s eulogy, everyone, and speak  
the name “Hari” aloud in a close, trustworthy voice.”<sup>7</sup>

(Ruparam’s *Dharmamangal* was an imitation of *Anadimangal*, so  
he mentioned Chaitanya in the same way.)

The examples given above reflect the Vaishnava influence in  
some of the Bengali texts. Further, some verses related to the eulogy  
of Radha Krishna can also be found in the works of contemporary poet  
Syed Murtaza and Syed Sultan which has been mentioned later. But due  
to a lack of evidence we are unable to identify whether Vaishnavism  
continued in its earlier form of the *Sankrittan* movement among the  
masses.

One of the most remarkable features of this period was the  
prevalence of folk beliefs among the rural population. The *Manasamangal*  
of Ketakadas, written in the mid-seventeenth century, describes the story  
of Goddess Manasa and Chand Saudagar in which Chand is a Bengali  
merchant who was fond of Lord Siva. He does not worship the snake  
deity Manasa.

As a result, he suffered bitterly, perhaps because of the curse of the  
deity, Manasa.<sup>8</sup> *Manasamangal* delineated the superiority of the Goddess  
to God Siva and even regarded Manasa as Visva-Mata, which signifies  
the transformation of faith among the peoples as well as the ultimate  
dominance of the Goddess. This becomes evident from the perusal of the  
following verse from *Manasamangal* quoted below:

“Oh Goddess, I have to obey you even if I lose my honour.  
The universe’s goddess declared, “True, true, true.” Hear,  
O Gods, what Behula has to say.”<sup>9</sup>

(In this verse, Manasa is referred to as Visva-Mata, or the mother of the universe. This verse also demonstrates Manasa’s superiority over all Goddesses.)

In every section of this literary text, the main theme revolves around the subject of a constant clash between the Goddess and God. The Goddess Manasa ultimately emerges as the winner, and she punishes Chand Saudagar, who worshipped Lord Siva. Yet another aspect of this conflict is the power struggle which took place between a dominant male God and an indigenous female Goddess. However, in different parts of Bengal, Devi Manasa has been worshipped in various forms, including as the Goddess of snakes and the Goddess of prosperity and blessings. In the present day Bangladesh, we come across extensive use of Nag-Ghats, which ascertain its relevance among the indigenous peoples who identify it as the symbol of the generative force of this deity.<sup>10</sup>

In particular, among the lower caste peoples of Bengal like Bauri and Bagdi, etc., Goddess Manasa is still venerated as the chief household deity.<sup>11</sup> Some other contemporary texts like the *Durgamangal* of Rupnarayan Ghosh, and *Sasthimangal* of Krishnaram Das, have also glorified the female Goddesses like Durga, Kali, and Sasthi, respectively. The *Kalikamangal*, considered to be the masterpiece of Krishnaram Das, was apparently composed by him on the order of the Goddess Kali on the auspicious day of Krishnapakka.<sup>12</sup>

It is mentioned that the Devi instructed him to write a eulogy about her, even referring to what could be the subject. His second notable work was *Sasthimangal*, which was composed in 1679 C.E. Only ten verses of the text have survived till date.<sup>13</sup> Sasthi was a folk deity who was supposed to have no Puranic or mythological roots. The story of this text was related to a lady Lilavati, who played an effective

role in establishing the worship of Sasthi by disseminating her glory. However, after completing the mission in different countries, the Devi arrived at Saptagram with her endeared Lilavati. After disguising herself as a Brahmin woman, she entered the secret house of King Satrujit of Saptagram.

At that time, she saw that the queen was eating fish. On being asked by the queen, she said that she had come from Burdwan, where she lived with seven sons and one daughter. She was there for the holy bath at the Ganges and also to worship Sasthi. Thereafter, she defined the miraculous story of Devi, where she enunciated the incident of Sai Bin's wife (a character of this poetry) who was blessed with seven sons by Sasthi Devi. Consequently, the Devi's curse brought about a disaster at the time of her parturition as all the children were abducted by cat after birth. But, following the sorrow of this mother, the Devi became kind and returned the children, whereby she started to be worshipped by this woman for her graceful conduct.

After hearing this story, the Queen and all of her servants began to worship Devi Sasthi.<sup>14</sup> *Raymangal* was another remarkable work of Krishnaram Das, which enunciated several rural folk beliefs of remotest Bengal and incorporated the folk tiger God in the Sundarban area named Dakshin Roy. It also mentions the crocodile God, Kalu Roy.<sup>15</sup> Regarding the admiration of Goddess, another contemporary work *Durgamangal* of Bhabani Prasad during the second half of the seventeenth century provides us with important inputs.<sup>16</sup> Although this work was based on the *Markandeya Purana*, it defines the story of Lord Rama's worship of Durga. He praised the Goddess as the locomotive of blessings, wit, and saviour of human misery. By highlighting the story to show how the Goddess had been revered by the Gods, Bhabani Prasad tended to establish the supreme power of Goddess Durga over the other deities. Yet another work was *Durgamangal*, which was composed by Rupnarayan Ghosh, who was a near contemporary of Bhabani Prasad. His work was also based on the *Markandeya Purana*.

The subject of *Durgamangal*, however, marks a minor difference from the earlier one. The subject of this text is surrounded by the story of Dhanapati, a merchant by profession who had two wives. One day, his second wife lost a goat in the pasture land. On the instruction of Brahmanas, she worshipped Durga and got the goat back.<sup>17</sup> There is a common tendency in the major *Mangalkavyas* like *Manasamangal* and *Sasthimangal*, that the Goddesses were forcefully trying to assert their position through the medium of someone who was inclined to abide by the orders.

In the case of Manasa, it was Behula, the daughter-in-law of Chand Saudagar, who had been directly compelled by Manasa to convince her father-in-law for her worship. Simultaneously, the same fact can be seen in *Sasthimangal*, where Devi Sasthi's fellow Lilavati was working for the popularisation of worship. In both of them, the basic objective was to increase the relevancy of their worship among the rural peoples of Bengal. The evolution of folk worship was also related with a minor healing power, the female deities possessed. The example of *Sitalamangal* can be found in the *Skanda Purana* and *Bhavaprakash*, where she appeared to be the Goddess of smallpox. During the period of our study, the same Goddess Sitala of Krishnaram Das had a significant impact in the context of curing smallpox as a folk medicine in seventeenth-century Bengal.

Let us now explore the connections, if any, of the folk Goddess cults with any specific castes. Though we have no concrete evidence suggesting this relationship, a perusal of the contemporary literature might help us in our investigation. It is revealed in the *Manasamangal* of Ketakadas that Manasa was trying to dominate Chand, who was Vaishya by caste, while the author, Ketakadas, was a Kayastha.

Incidentally, the author of *Sasthimangal*, Krishnaram Das, was also a Kayastha. Ramdas Adak, the composer of *Anadimangal*, was a Kaivarta (fisherman) by profession. Bhabani Prasad, the author of *Durgamangal*, belonged to Vaidya family. The author of *Dharmamangal*,

Ruparam Chakrabarty, belonged to a native Brahmin family of Burdwan, whose father used to teach in a local toll (village school). Hence, it can be seen that the authors and their stories came from diverse caste affiliations like Brahmins, Kayasthas, Vaishyas, Vaidyas, and Kaivartas, instead of particular caste influences from the local folk beliefs.

## II

Several contemporary sources help us to focus on the condition of Muslims, considered to be a dominant community in Bengal's society at that time. The references contained in some of the near-contemporary sources provide us with glimpses of the mundane practices and beliefs of the Muslims. For instance, the prevailing caste system of Muslims, including Sayyids, Mullahs, and Qazis, was recorded by Bipradas, the author of the *Manasa Vijaya*, who lived in the late fifteenth century.<sup>18</sup> This reflects the type of hereditary casteism that prevailed among the Muslim community of Bengal - a practice in deviation from the basic tenets of Islam.

Also, Mukundaram Chakraborty, a sixteenth-century poet, enumerated in his *Kavikankan Chandi* not only the occupational caste distinction of the Muslims but also the finer aspects of the social relationship between Hindus and Muslims. One of the most important aspects of his writing is that he shows how Muslims were deviating from the hidebound principle of Islam due to their hereditary affinity with previous religious beliefs.<sup>19</sup> It may, thus, be construed from the above that they abstained from the basic objectives of Islam in a significant manner. Sometimes they were more influenced by the ideas of superstition, which could be the effect of their native environment.

An example in this respect was the fear of evil spirits, which was clearly borrowed from the Hindu society. Especially at the time of childbirth, these norms were mostly followed.<sup>20</sup> The Goddess of smallpox, Sitala, was also popularly being worshipped by the marginal Muslims of that time.

During the pre-Mughal period, we come across many confusing descriptions in the writings of European travellers with respect to their identification of the Bengali Muslims. The Muslim residents of Gaur, for example, were referred by Duarte Barbosa as “respectable Moors”. This description was based on the previous records of Bengal.<sup>21</sup> Similar treatment of the Muslims can be traced in most of the contemporary accounts in this period of study. Thevenot notes,

“The Country was kept in far better order under the Patan Kings, (I mean) before the Mahometans and Moguls were Masters of it because then they had Uniformity in Religion. It has been found by experience, that disorder came into Mahometan- it with, and that diversity of Religions there caused corruption in Manners”<sup>22</sup>

His remark on Mohammedan and Mughal or Patan appears to be equal, with no clear distinction between the two, i.e., the former is religion and the other two are royal dynasties. Among the people of Bengal, the doctrines of Sufism acted as a pivotal force that created a new dimension in the field of religious syncretism. It was a shift away from Islam’s hidebound ritualistic approaches, which was tilting towards liberal ideas. The Sufis sought to discover the spiritual world through their mystic path rather than the fundamental law of Islam, i.e., *Shariah*, and emphasized love for God as the only means of salvation.

However, the arrival of Sufism on the Bengal frontier also brought about two significant historical changes: the significant mystic preaching of Sufi saints, facilitating the process of Islamization and, more importantly, the localization of Islam in Bengal, and the growth of harmonious relationships in all spheres of society. The most important characteristic of the Sufi movement in Bengal was its native or localized nature rather than that of the dominant mode which prevailed in other parts of India. This distinction in Bengal gave birth to a new offshoot which is popularly known as *Pirism* - a form of joint worship of the Hindus and the Muslims in Medieval Bengal.<sup>23</sup> The popularity of the Sufi

faith in Bengal can be traced to two contemporary examples. There was an established belief among the rulers that the blessings of Sufi saints brought prosperity, durability, and peace to their reign.

In this context, mention may be made of prince Azim-us-Shan's visit to the tomb of Sufi saint Shah Behram Sakka at Burdwan, after the death of Raheem Khan, a rebel chieftain. There is another interesting story about the discourse between Azim-us-Shan and Sufi, Bizeed of Burdwan. This story has been described in the *Tarikh-i-Bangala* of Salim Allah. Azim sent his two sons, Sultan Farruksiyyar and Sultan Karimuddin (Muhammad Karim Mirza) to invite the saint to his court. However, on account of his superior status, Karimuddin did not descend from his horse.

On the contrary, Farruksiyyar descended from the horse and eagerly went ahead to visit the Sufi with huge respect and veneration. The Sufi placed himself in the palanquin and holding his hands told Farruksiyyar, "you are a king, seat yourself; and may the almighty prove favourable to your wishes".<sup>24</sup> Farruksiyyar and the Sufi together reached the court in one palanquin, and Azim-us-Shan took him to his chamber.

Here, Azim also sought his blessing so that he could be the next successor after the death of the reigning emperor. The Sufi answered, "that which you require, I have already bestowed upon Farruksiyyar; my prayer, like the arrow which has left the bow, cannot be recalled".<sup>25</sup> Hearing such unexpected words from the Sufi, Azim-us-Shan was bitterly dissatisfied, but he controlled himself; knowing the further impact of the saint's anger and bid him farewell with great honour.

The evidences from contemporary Bengali texts also highlight the features of *Pirism* and reflect upon the composite identity of the Bengali society. Ruparam Chakrabarty's *Dharmamangal* expresses his adoration for *Pir* Ismaili, who was painted as the protector of the jungle and destroyer of robbers, and Daria *Pir* Kalu Ray- the Crocodile deity, for river worship.<sup>26</sup> The same instance of *Pir* eulogy can be found in the *Anadimangal* of Ramdas Adak, viz., *Pir* Ismaili, and Rasuvi Kha *Pir*.<sup>27</sup>

In all the above cases, the folk figure of the *Pirs* can be identifiable. They were different from the dominant Sufi orders and merged with ordinary local faiths. In the *Raymangal*, its author Krishnaram Das makes a mention of Dakshin Roy, who was worshipped by the marginal Hindus of South 24 Pargana. Incidentally, the deity was also highly revered by the Muslims of this region as *Pir Bara Kha Gazi*. The text contains another example of a devotee, Puspadatta, whose father had somehow gone missing. Puspadatta is said to have worshipped the *Pir* on his way and even sacrificed a goat and hen to achieve his goal.

“From a distance, the *Pir*’s shrine is visible; the humble honour the sanctity, and sacred hens and goats are offered as sacrifices in thy name.”<sup>28</sup>

(Puspadatta saw the shrine of *Pir* from a distance. *Pir*’s holiness was honoured by him, who sacrificed a goat and a hen in his name).

The references of *Pir* worship, however, were mostly centred around the areas of south Bengal. In this consideration, we should also keep in mind that the earlier mentioned Sufi Shah Behram Sakka and Sufi Bizeed’s fame was not so deep among the subaltern people of Bengal as compared to the *Pirs* of the *Mangalkavyas*, who had a direct connection with rural Bengal. Here, the similarity between the *Pirs* and the deities of *Mangalkavya* was that they had all been venerated because of the fear and prejudices prevalent among both the Hindus and the Muslims.

### III

During the period of the study, regular visits of Europeans can be witnessed. The Europeans basically came for two purposes: commercial and religious, or, missionary works. There were Dutch, Armenian, Portuguese, English and French visitors in terms of their respective national identities. Christianity happened to be the common faith for all of them despite the prevalence of different schools of thoughts. The European settlements in Bengal gave new perspectives on social scenarios that can also be regarded as the historical phase of foreign Bengali interaction. The Portuguese, being the first, and the most



prominent European to settle in Bengal, founded many churches. One of them was the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Murghihatta in Calcutta. Its origin can be traced back to 1690 C.E., when Job Charnock gave the Portuguese a plot at an old fort for constructing a chapel.

For a transitory period, the Augustinians erected a chapel over it, which was later demolished by Sir John Goldsborough. In this regard, an incident of competition and hostility can be seen among the Christians of Bengal who belonged to different nations of Europe. For example, the case of Sir John Goldsborough, who discovered that the merchants of the company married black wives who were Roman Catholics, but they were very inclined toward the Augustinian friars.<sup>29</sup> There was another instance of a church at Nagori in Dacca, known as the Church of St. Nicholas of Tolentino. Incidentally, the construction of the church first started at Bhusana - the present Faridpur district of Bangladesh. This church played a vital role in the spread of Christianity in eastern Bengal.

However, as per the missionary records, the land for this church was not fully acquired until 1695 C.E., due to the troubles caused by local landlords. Eventually, the Nagori Church became the main centre of missionary works. Thereafter, the church was dedicated to St. Nicholas of Tolentino.<sup>30</sup>

Another example of a church known as the Church of the Lady Rosary at Dacca, built in 1679 C.E., can be mentioned here.<sup>31</sup> The Armenians were among the earliest settlers in Bengal who set up churches. The Armenian church at Chinsura, which is regarded as the second largest church in Bengal is a fine example of Armenian presence. It was constructed by the extreme dedication of the pious Margar family, who laid its foundations in 1695 C.E. Khojah Johanness Margar, a prominent member of this family, died in 1697 C.E., and had a tomb there along with an inscription.<sup>32</sup> Many references of European settlement can be seen in contemporary sources. Manucci visited two factories in

the Dhaka metropolis, one English and one Dutch.<sup>33</sup> Simultaneously, Thevenot, while describing the European residences at Dhaka, raised the comparison that the English and Dutch houses were more solid than those of the native people. He wrote- “most of the houses are only built of Canes, covered with earth: the English and Dutch houses are more solid because they have spared no cost for the security of their goods”.<sup>34</sup>

The gradual advent of Europeans had also resulted in the founding and expansion of various settlements associated with the Christian monasteries in Bengal. Hence, there emerged, what we call as a new affluent, foreign-Bengali discourse. It is on record that Manucci had negotiated with Mirza Gul, the governor of Bengal province, on behalf of a Jesuit father to build a church at Hooghly.<sup>35</sup> Manucci even noticed many Christians, white and black Portuguese, with a church being served by a monk named Agostinho at Dhaka.<sup>36</sup> Thevenot, while talking about Dhaka, mentioned the existence of an Augustinian monastery.<sup>37</sup>

Manucci took note of a prominent group of Christian monks as Friars.<sup>38</sup> No better description is found about the Europeans than in the contemporary Bengali texts titled, *Brahman-Roman Catholic Sambad* written by Dom Antonio. Dom Antonio was of Bengali origin and was said to have been a prince of Bhusana, originally located in the Jessore-Faridpur area of present Bangladesh.

Perhaps, this Bengali historical text records the most important theological discourse between Hinduism and Christianity in seventeenth-century India. It not only expounds the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism, but also thematizes it as a mutual understanding between these two religions through their debates over different issues like the concept of God, *avatar* (incarnation), *karmafal*, sin, and destiny.<sup>39</sup>

As the missionary work continued relentlessly, Christianity developed as a major religion towards the end of the seventeenth century. In this regard, it got support from the newly converted natives, such as

Dom Antonio, who led an all-out campaign for the spread of the Roman Catholic religion in Bengal. Another factor that worked here was the deep-rooted social problems in Hinduism, which provided a natural scope for Christian missionary activities.

### Conclusion

Religious beliefs in mid-seventeenth century Bengal reflected the mental and social behaviour of the people. The diversity in faith can be seen in the major religions, where none of them could claim any paramount influence over society. During the mid-seventeenth century, rural Bengal saw the growth of various folk figures which came to be regarded on par with gods and goddesses.

One of the most important facets of these religious beliefs was the superiority of goddesses above gods, which ushered in the process of the construction of a dynamic psychology of gender identity. The significant aspiration of Muslim society during this period was the alteration of Sufism, which gave birth to *Pirism*. This school of faith popularised folk beliefs among the Muslims in rural Bengal.

As a result, they deviated significantly from the original tenets of Islam. In this respect, it can also be noticed that sometimes the *Pirs* associated and assimilated with the folk Gods of Hindus, because of which they were admired together by Muslims and Hindus. Such factors of joint worship shaped the composite profile of Bengal. Mid-seventeenth century Bengali religion formed another important aspect as this period witnessed the advent of the Europeans.

Regarding the condition of Christianity, some references can be found in the accounts of the foreign traveller and some other secondary works of later dates. However, one contemporary Bengali source, in particular, helps us to form an idea about the dimensions of mutual discourse between Christianity and Hinduism in the mid-seventeenth century. In that case, it has been noted that Christianity largely influenced

the Hindu society as compared to the Muslims. The main reason was that the conversion process of Christianity was centred around the Hindus. During the mid-seventeenth century, the number of native Christian settlements can be traced to both south and east Bengal (present Bangladesh). The coming of Christianity, thus, helped in the formation of a new religious heritage in Bengal.

### References

1. Al-Ahsan, Abdullah, (1994). "Spread of Islam in Pre-Mughal Bengal", *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol. 2, No-1, International Islamic University, Malaysia, pp. 41–55.
2. Manucci, Niccolo, (2015). *Storia Do Mogor or Mogul India*, Vol. II, (Trans.) with introduction and notes by William Irvine (reprint), Andesite Press, USA, p. 94.
3. Thevenot, Jean De., (1949). *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, edited by Surendranath Sen, National Archives of India, New Delhi, p. 94.
4. Adak, Ramdas. 1345.B.S (1938). *Anadimangal*, Basanta Kumar Chattopadhyay (ed.), Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Mandir, Calcutta, p. 6.
5. Rahman, Md., & Shah Noorur., (2012). *Hindu-Muslim Relation in Mughal Bengal*, Progressive Publisher, Kolkata, p. 54.
6. Adak, Ramdas, (1938). *Op.cit.*, p. 3.
7. Chakrabarty, Ruparam, 1351 B.S(1944), *Dharmamangal*, Sukumar Sen & Panchanan Mandal(ed.), Sahitya Sabha, Burdwan, p. 8.
8. Khemananda, Ketakadas, (2018). *Manasamangal*, Bijan Bihari Bhattacharya (ed.), Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, p. 90.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Roy, Priyam Kumar, (2020). "Exploring the Mangalkavya: A Narrative of the Pretext of the Textual Universe", *Ensemble-A bilingual peer-reviewed academic Journal*, Vol. 2, No-1, Dr. Meghnad Saha College, pp. 143–154.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

12. Sen, Sukumar, (2012). *Bangala Sahityyer Itihas*, Part-II, (reprint), Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, p. 257.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 266.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
17. Sen, Sukumar, (1940). *Bangala Sahityyer Itihas*, Part-I, Modern Book Agency, Calcutta, p. 603.
18. Chatterjee, Anjali, (1967). *Bengal in the Reign of Aurangzib 1658-1707*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, p. 208.
19. Rahman, Md. Shah Noorur, (2012). *Op.cit.*, p. 40.
20. Sarkar, Jagadish Narayan, (2009). *Hindu-Muslim Relation in Bengal: Medieval Period*, Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delli, Delhi, p. 58.
21. Eaton, Richard M., (1993). *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 132.
22. Thevenot, Jean De, (1949). *Op.cit.*, p. 95.
23. Rahman, Md. Shah Noorur, (2018). "Religious and Cultural Syncretism in Medieval Bengal", *The NEHU Journal*, Vol. XVI, No-1, Shillong, pp. 53–77.
24. Salim Allah, Munshi, (2016). *Tarikh-i-Bangala*, A Narrative of the Transactions in Bengal During the Soobahdaries of Azeem us Shan, Jaffer Khan, Shuja Khan, Sirafraz Khan, and Alyvirdy Khan, Francis Gladwin (Trans.), Wentworth Press, USA, p. 26.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Chakrabarty, Ruparam, (1944), *Op.cit.*, p. 16.
27. Adak, Ramdas, (1938). *Op.cit.*, p. 7.
28. Sen, Sukumar, (1940). *Op.cit.*, p. 267.
29. Campos, J. J. A., (1919). *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, Butterworth & Co (India), Calcutta, p. 239.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
32. Seth, Mesrovb J., (1897). *History of the Armenians in India: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Luzac & Co, London, p. 37.

33. Manucci, Niccolo, (2015). *Op.cit.*, p. 86.
34. Thevenot, Jean De, (1949). *Op.cit.*, p. 95.
35. Manucci, Niccolo, (2015). *Op.cit.*, p. 90.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
37. Thevenot, Jean De, (1949). *Op.cit.*, p. 95.
38. Manucci, Niccolo, (2015). *Op.cit.*, p. 89.
39. Antonio, Dom, (1937). *Brahman-Roman Catholic Sambah*, S. N. Sen (ed.), Calcutta University, Calcutta, pp. 1–59.



## CRISES AND MIGRATION: MULTAN IN THE LATE SEVENTEENTH AND EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

**Dr. Umar Nazir**

Assistant Professor (Contractual)  
Government Degree College Sopore, Jammu & Kashmir.

### Abstract

*During the Mughal period, there was frequent movement of resources, people, and money, enabling considerable interactions among regions. The Mughal rulers' quest to administer an uninterrupted political domain led to the setting up of an assortment of urban centres throughout the realm. The connection between the production sector and trade, which grew and strengthened during this period, drew the region of Multan into a vast network of trading worlds. However, in comparison to the prior decades of stability, the second part of the seventeenth century was a period of uncertainty for the region of Multan and its commerce. In this study, I intend to consider some of the gravities that waned the ceaseless exchanges in the region. The study examines the circumstances that impeded commerce and caused significant discomfort to the people, leading them to seek alternate solutions. For the end of the "classical" era of the Mughal empire and its impact on the region of Multan, the lesser-known manuscript Kitab*

*Jamm-i Badi, and the letters of Abdu'l Bilgrami have been used, besides other sources.*

**Keywords:** *Multan, Trade, Multanis, Bhakkar, Suba, Sarkar.*

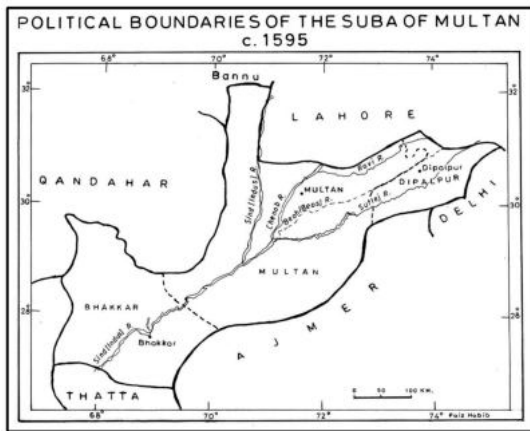
## Introduction

In the course of the history of medieval India, the sixteenth century witnessed several political events of enormous significance. The Mughal empire, built on the wreckage of the Delhi Sultanate in 1526 C.E., was by far the most consequential of these changes. With the Mughal state and the congenial spaces, it provided, the regional economies like Multan opened up their wings. The state apparatus and the economy of the *suba* were intrinsically connected. Multan's rise to the status of a *suba* under Akbar was primarily determined by its strategic importance provided by geographical location and economic prosperity. Geographically, the *suba* of Multan was bounded by Lahore on the east, on the north by Kabul and Qandahar, on the south by Thatta and Bikaner, and on the west by the different mountain ranges.<sup>1</sup> Due to its topographical characteristics, the *suba* was a river desert basin that encouraged interaction between settled and nomadic communities (pastoralists). Hence, pastoralism and sedentary communities complemented each other differently in economic life.

This feature of *suba* is effusively documented in Yusuf Mirak's gazetteer, *Mazhar-i Shahjahani* (1634)<sup>2</sup> and *Khulasatu-t Tawarikh* of Sujan Rai Bhandari (1695).<sup>3</sup> The rivers of Punjab, particularly the Indus, Chenab, Ravi, and Sutlej, meticulously shaped the region of Multan.<sup>4</sup> Human habitation<sup>5</sup> and economic exploitation<sup>6</sup> of the *suba* were significantly influenced by riverine courses and the physical characteristics of the *suba*'s topography that they shaped. The existence of many overland and riverine routes and booming commercial activity harmonized the *suba*'s physical complexity and connected it to different regions. Multan stood at the crossroads of overland and riverine routes



that connected Mughal north India with Qandahar, Kabul, Persia, Central Asia, and the Arabian Sea. It was one of Mughal India's north-western entrepôts, which drew merchants from all directions, resulting in forming of a network of trade routes. The existence and vitality of such routes in the Mughal period are well brought out by historical accounts.<sup>7</sup>



The political map of the *suba* of Multan, c. 1595. Mr. Faiz Habib, senior cartographer, CAS, Dept. of History, A.M.U., Aligarh, UP, prepared the map

The *suba* was located in the rich agricultural zone of the north-west, created by the Punjab Rivers. This natural bounty of agriculture was further enriched by the use of a sophisticated irrigational device, the Persian Wheel, for which we owe to Babur its description.<sup>8</sup> From this, the *suba* generated a sophisticated manufacturing economy, which helped in the expansion of economic transactions. The *suba* was described as “very wealthy, well stocked and plentifully supplied with all necessities and conveniences man desires.”<sup>9</sup> The connection between the production sector and trade, which grew and strengthened during this period, drew the *suba* of Multan into the vast network of the trading world. It had developed a significant potential for marketability of its manufactured production, and as a result, it engaged in a substantial amount of commerce. A number of towns flourished, which served as principal emporia and driving engines of commerce. Multan,<sup>10</sup> Bhakkar,<sup>11</sup>

Darbella,<sup>12</sup> Kandiaro<sup>13</sup> and Gambit<sup>14</sup> were the main towns. Furthermore, the influx of European merchant companies, along with silver, had created a demand for manufactured products throughout Mughal India. As a result, during the first half of the seventeenth century, an essential river-borne trade developed in the *suba* of Multan, notably through the agency of English Company merchants who exported Multan textiles to Europe, Turkey, and Persia via Sind ports.

The following table shows procurement of textiles from the *suba* of Multan by the English Company merchants. The entire information has been taken from *The English Factories in India, 1618-69* (hereinafter *E.F.I.*). Since none of its thirteen volumes are numbered, they have been cited according to the years assigned to them, which are shown beneath the title page of each volume.

S. No.	Date of the purchase	Place of purchase	Quantity/ value of goods	References
1	27 Nov. 1643	Darbella	Total purchase of 4000 to 5000 pieces intended.	<i>E.F.I., 1642- 45</i> , p. 123
2	28 Nov. 1644	Darbella and Kandiaro	Total purchase of 10, 000 pieces intended.	<i>E.F.I., 1642- 45</i> , p. 203.
3	1646	Kandiaro	Total purchase of 400 to 500 corge intended.	<i>E.F.I., 1646-50</i> , p. 13.
4	21 Feb. 1646	Kandiaro	300 corge bought	<i>E.F.I., 1646-50</i> , p. 28
5	21 Jan. 1647	Kandiaro	Total purchases worth Rs. 7500.	<i>E.F.I., 1646-50</i> , p. 72.
6	3 Feb. 1647	Kandiaro	Total purchases worth Rs. 1000	<i>E.F.I., 1646-50</i> , p. 101.
7	9 March 1647	Darbella	Total purchases intended to get only two <i>corge</i> a day owing to the purchases made by Bhakkar merchants	<i>E.F.I., 1646-50</i> , p. 117

8	21 June 1647	Darbella	Total purchase 27 bales <sup>15</sup> of cloth.	<i>E.F.I., 1646-50</i> , p. 113.
9	Sep. 1647	Kandiario	Total purchase of 600 <i>corge</i> intended.	<i>E.F.I., 1646-50</i> , p. 153
10	Nov. 1647	Kandiario	330 <i>corge</i> of cloth purchased.	<i>E.F.I., 1646-50</i> , p. 171.
11	6 Jan. 1648.	Nasarpur and Kandiario	Total purchases of 10000 pieces of partly Nasarpur and partly of Kandiario intended.	<i>E.F.I., 1646-50</i> , p.188

In comparison to the prior decades of stability, the second part of the seventeenth century was a period of uncertainty for the *suba* of Multan and its commerce. This condition was brought about by a number of factors. Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that the Indus river became more difficult for large boats to navigate.<sup>16</sup>

Multan's prosperity was heavily reliant on its location as a junction for overland trade routes.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the riverine route also played an important role in this prosperity.<sup>18</sup> Much of the *suba*'s well-being and success hinged on its central location in the transportation of commodities to the port of Thatta along the Indus River and Persia via the Qandahar route.<sup>19</sup> This commercial significance of the *suba* appears to have waned in the latter part of the seventeenth century.

Available evidence shows a decline in the riverine trade which adversely affected not only the city of Multan but also the hinterlands attached to it. For instance, Thevenot records:

Multan was heretofore a place of very great Trade, because it is not far from the River Indus; but seeing at present, Vessels cannot go up so far, because the Chanel of that River is spoilt in some places, and the Mouth of it full of shelves, the Traffick (Trade) is much lessened, by reason that the charge of land-carriage is too great.<sup>20</sup>

Tavernier also noticed this development.

Multan is a town where quantities of calicoes are made and they used to be all carried to Thatta before the sand had obstructed the mouth of the river; but since the passage has been closed for the large vessels they are taken to Agra and from Agra to Surat, as are also some of the goods which are made at Lahore.<sup>21</sup>

This obstruction of the Indus River, however, was not a permanent characteristic, contrary to what Chetan Singh has argued. If it had been a persistent problem, Sujan Rai Bandari (author of *Khulasatu-t Tawarikh*), who has given an extensive description of Punjab rivers and their courses and Hamilton, who had sailed over the Indus river towards the close of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, would have been aware of it.<sup>22</sup>

However, the stumbling block might have continued for long enough to cause significant discomfort to those impacted, leading them to seek alternate solutions. Both Thevenot and Tavernier considered this phenomenon accountable for the economic downfall of Multan, something that one and two years of reduction in commerce could not have produced, implying that the silting of the Indus was of a more serious character.<sup>23</sup> Aurangzeb's plan to construct a new port named *Aurangabander*, on the Indus mouth might have been a bid to establish a more accessible harbour.<sup>24</sup> The creation of a new port itself signifies the condition of the time. It is well brought out in the tenth letter of *Adab-i Alamgiri*.<sup>25</sup> The letter reads as:

An order obtained the nobility of issue, that this *murid* should set out in writing (*ma'ruz darad*) a true statement of the income of the port, which he has founded (*ahdas karda*) in [the province of] Tattah. Hail to the *qibla* of the inhabitants of the world. The income of ports (*banadir*) depends upon (*munhasir*) two things; the duty of ten per cent upon trade-goods, (*ushr-i-mal-i-tujjar*) and on passengers' fares (*naul*) and freight (*kiraya*). The ten per

cent on goods has invariably (*hargah*) been remitted, as a gesture of charity on the part of your Majesty; (*ba tasadduq-i-farq-i-mubarak*) and one ship, (*yak manzil-i-jahaz*) belonging to this *murid*, which had been in Surat, was brought to this [new] port this year, but has made no voyage so far. The ship '*Bad-awurd*', which belongs to the Imperial government (*az sarkar-i-khalisa-i-sharif girifta*) is not yet fit to sail (*mukammal nist*). Moreover, ships from other ports have not yet begun to visit (*amad-urafi wa nagashta*) this port; nor have merchants from other places begun to throng (*taraddud*) there. How then can a true account of its income be given?

It further reads as:

The things necessary for regulating a newly established port, such as building a fort, and constructing a harbour (*tamir-i-furzat*) and so on have been suitably completed. Almighty God willing, it will soon become flourishing; (*raunaq khwahad girift*) and with the passage of time it will become a source of income (*ba dakhil khwahad amad*). The true purpose (*matlab-i-asli*) of this *murid* in establishing this port was, that some curiosities and rare objects (*tuhf wa nawadir*), worthy to be offered at Court, will most probably come to hand.<sup>26</sup>

Aurangzeb's effort proved ineffective since the new port appeared to have been utilised solely by a ship belonging to the prince himself.<sup>27</sup> It probably sank into insignificance as soon as Aurangzeb's special interest was withdrawn. The following letter explicitly clarifies:

A letter of 1655, written by Munshi Abu'l Fath to Muhammad Sultan (then at Court) to represent certain matters to the Emperor, suggests that the new port had already been abandoned. After denying a suggestion that he had a ship built at Surat for his private trade, the Munshi

says, that a ship being built at Tatta had been carried off by a robber - the *zamindar* of Kakrala of Letter 2. Had Aurangzeb's port been even a partial success, would he not have had his ship constructed there?<sup>28</sup>

The same is recorded in English factory records as well. In a letter dated March 8, 1651, it is mentioned that "Prince Oranzead had deserted making a Seaport because he had found it inaccessible for shipping of any reasonable burthen."<sup>29</sup> As a result, merchandise had to be conveyed overland, resulting in a significant rise in transportation costs and, ultimately, a reduction in the amount of merchandise that could be carried. Thevenot reports:

The traffick is much lessened, by reason that the charge of land-carriage is too great but whereas the Commodities went heretofore down the Indus at small Charges, to Tatta, where the Merchants of several Countries came and bought them up, they must now be carried by land as far as Surrat, if they expect a considerable price for them.<sup>30</sup>

Tavernier also opined that due to this adversity, the commodities of Multan were transported to Lahore than to Surat.<sup>31</sup> The transportation of goods from Multan to Surat, which was a greater distance than the Thatta, might be explained by the fact that Surat had grown into a significant business centre, drawing more merchants.<sup>32</sup>

Multan suffered a serious setback. Few merchants ventured in commodities produced in *suba* Multan due to the high expense of land transportation.<sup>33</sup> The ramifications of the merchants' virtual desertion from the *suba* Multan were so severe that even artisans began to flee to more prosperous locations. Tavernier makes it clear:

As this carriage is very expensive but few merchants go to make investments either at Multan or Lahore. And indeed many of the artisans have deserted; thus has much diminished the revenues of the Emperor in these provinces.<sup>34</sup>

What did the end of the ‘classical period of the Mughal period’ hold for the *suba* of Multan? Did it lead to the compromise of the power in the *suba*? Or, were the economic variables/structures of the *suba* of Multan sufficiently robust to have withstood these profound political transformations? Looking at the sources, we find the reflection of a decline in commercial activities with the dawn of the eighteenth century. The situation grew so severe that anyone who wished to make a remittance direct to distant places like Agra and Kannauj from Multan found it extremely impossible. This is explicitly stated in the letters written by Abdu’l Bilgrami, a Mughal officer stationed at Bhakkar *sarkar*. He explained the problem of despatching money to Bilgram (near Kannauj) to his son in 1708. In one of the letters, he writes:

In Bhakkar, there is no banker (*mahajan*) who can draw a *hundawi* on Akbarabad (Agra) or Kannauj. The *hundawi* from here is drawn on Multan; from Multan on Lahore; from Lahore on Akbarabad, and from thence on order for payment in *chalam* (current rupees) is issued on Kannauj. In such circumstances, one has to get a *hundawi*, written out at four places carefully; ensuring specification of rupee, mintage and year of issue (in which payment is to be made).<sup>35</sup>

So Bilgrami recommended his son to draw a *Jawabi* (reverse) *hundi* from Bilgram for Bhakkar discounted by a *Mahajan* or *sarraf* so that all the subsequent stages would be managed by *mahajans*, to save the burden of tracking the bill of exchange from one city to the next.<sup>36</sup> From the above-stated evidence, it is clear that there were no *mahajans*/bankers of great cities like Agra at Multan and Bhakkar. It would only be the case when the trade of Multan with the rest of the Mughal empire was not large enough to need a direct credit exchange mechanism.

A multitude of causes may have contributed to the long-term disturbance of commerce in the *suba* of Multan. It is probable that this process started in the late 17th century and was intensified following political developments. The political turbulence and instability of the

eighteenth century played a key role. The consequence of this sort of political climate was reflected in a number of unlawful activities. The local officials took advantage of the weakening of the centralising tendency of the Mughal state and indulged in illegal exactions. This aspect is well brought out in the documents of *Jamm-i Badi*.<sup>37</sup> In one of the *arzdasht* (petitions) documents, there is a lengthy moralistic statement followed by a description of specific malfeasance committed by the local officials in the two *sarkars* of the *suba*, Bhakkar and Siwistan.<sup>38</sup> Such illegalities preyed on the merchant class mostly. This source finds this arbitrariness to be unjust. It argues that the merchant class should be duly consulted and that whatever tax a merchant ought to be paid should be appropriated only. Some of the officials were described in a ruthless way to portray the picture of contemporary society.

For instance, for the *muhasilan* (tax collector) and *payadagan* (foot-soldiers), phrases like ‘devil like tax gatherers’ and ‘demon’s disposition’, respectively have been used.<sup>39</sup> These two officials participated in a forcible seizure of goods and transported them to the designated market. They falsely declared that the rate they had assessed was following the court’s regulations. The assessed rate included all other expenses such as *chaukidarana* (cost incurred by the custom officer), *muhasilana* (fees charged by the bailiff), *daroghana*, (expenses for superintendence), etc.<sup>40</sup>

All this deteriorated the condition of merchants. For instance, the range of illegal taxes can be understood by the fact that previously a camel laden with commodities was moving from Alor<sup>41</sup> to the city and were supposed to pay only three *dams*. In contrast, during this period, 36 *dams* were charged.<sup>42</sup> All sorts of merchants (big and small merchants) were listed as being impacted, with no way out except to comply with the demand for money. Similar unlawful rulings by local officials have been recounted in this source. It says that a *fatwa* had been issued by the *fuqaha* (jurists) and *ulama*, in which a boat could be hired on *ijara* (rent) from the owner and subsequently rented out to the merchant at a high rate. The profit from this should go to the royal treasury. The *Jagirdars*,



therefore, issued orders mandating the corresponding action. The *mutasaddis* were entrusted with the *ijara*, to which merchants had also consented (i.e., hiring boats on profit). Those who resisted (particularly boatmen or *mallaha*) this oppressive policy were trapped in ‘dark cells’ and humiliated for their opposition. For a long time, the impoverished boatmen had ceased operating their boats.

Wherever a merchant happens to come, the officers having forcibly seized the boats charge from him whatever they like for their use, and leaving a little with the boatman, the rest is distributed among the *darogha*, *mushrif*, *tahvildar* the foot-soldiers and all the functionaries. Later on, they take a bond of agreement (*tamassuka*) from the boatman (*mallah*) and send the Qazi it to get his seal affixed. All this is treated as a legal matter (*ma'amulat-isharai*); and if the boatman hesitates he is badly beaten up. When the boats ply downstream or in the opposite direction they forcibly realize tax (*hasil*) from them and then only allow them to go, calling this again a *shariat* exaction. On this account merchants and boatmen have decided that they would only pay the established or customary cesses like *muhari* (writing or sealing tax), and *misri* (city tax), and none else.<sup>43</sup>

Local circumstances worsened to the point that widespread oppression and extortion made it look “as if dooms day has come to this country.”<sup>44</sup> Due to the deterioration of local governance,<sup>45</sup> agriculture suffered greatly, culminating in emigration.<sup>46</sup> In the *Jamm-i Badi* collection, there is also a *dastak* (permit) bearing a seal of Farrukh Siyar’s prime minister Saiyid Abdullah Khan Bahadur Zafar Jang. It reads:

The *gumashta* (agents) of *faujdar*, *rahdar*, *guzarbanan*, *zamindar* and *chaudhari* in the *suba* of Multan from Bhakkar to Siwistan not to exact illegal cesses from the boats of merchants such as *rahdari*, *muhari*, *misri*, weighing of boat (*wazan-i kashti*), *muqaddami* etc. They have to realize only the sanctioned cesses on the goods of these merchants.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the information furnished by *Jamm-i Badi* collection of documents further endorsed the theory of the 'Agrarian Crises' of Irfan Habib.<sup>48</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, both the Mughals and the Safavids started losing hold of their domains. If the waning of the Mughal empire led to the deterioration of Multan city, the collapse of the Safavids damaged the base of Multani merchants in Persia irreparably. The glory of the Safavids started declining in 1722 with the invasion of the Ghilzai Afghan confederation. Isfahan, the capital of the Safavids and the home of the thousands of Multani merchants, was occupied by Afghan invaders.

An Armenian traveller, Petros di Sarkis Gilanentz was a keen observer of the Ghilzai invasion. In his account, Petros writes that Afghans demanded 25,000 *tomans* from the Multani merchants to ensure their safety and security. But the Multani merchants could not produce the said amount as the money was not readily available due to the investment of capital in business ventures. The Afghans, in return, violently destroyed the settlement of Indian merchants.<sup>49</sup> According to Petros Di Sarkis Gilanentz:

Only a few Indians were left in the town; these people had advanced money to the Mohammadans against promissory notes (*sanad*) and jewels, gold, silver and house ornaments (*zinat*). Mahmud took all these valuable from them without payment, not even regarding them as forming part of their indemnity. The shops of those Multanis who had died or had fled were consequently closed but Mahmud had them opened and seized all their contents.<sup>50</sup>

Central Asia, at this time, likewise presented a bleak image. The region was experiencing escalating political upheavals.<sup>51</sup> In this regard, Muzaffar Alam writes, "Central Asia was in a state of deepening political crises. The governments in the Uzbeks Khanates had ceased to be effective. The resurgence of tribal forces and increasing interference of the Kazakhs and Turkmen in Bukhara and Khiva resulted in the disruption of economic life."<sup>52</sup>

The consequences of the collapse in commerce were so adverse in the *suba* that Multani merchants began to migrate in large numbers to the more prosperous locations. A number of letters sent by the Rajput rulers of the several kingdoms of Rajasthan to the merchants of Multan, offering them various privileges and benefits for establishing their commercial enterprises in their separate states, are preserved in Rajasthan's historical archives. A large number of Multani merchants migrated to Rajasthan, lured by the facilities and concessions given by the local rajas. Finding trading activities more profitable, Multani merchants began to establish their business setups in different commercial places. For instance, well-known Multani merchants like Gopal Das Khatri, Dwarka Das Khatri, Lila Ram Khatri, and Tek Chand Khatri were given exemptions up to fifty percent from taxes like *rahadari* and *don* on establishing their commercial setup in the city of Jodhpur.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, the networks of trade survived because the trading world did not depend on a single centre only. In other words, the vitality of these networks resided not just in trade but also mobility. Beneath the eighteenth-century crises lay the emerging regional kingdoms like Rajasthan, which, due to the need for capital, opened a larger and more direct role for the merchants.

The 18th century was, thus, marked by widespread instability across the Muslim empires. The long-established networks of the Multani merchant community, which had spread reputation, profit, and trustworthiness throughout the seventeenth century, now disseminate 'a climate of insecurity.' This led to the merchants' declining optimism in the markets. Despite this profound state of gloom, trade continued. Some of it was the kind that occurred 'all the time' on a local level.

## References

1. Habib, Irfan, (1986). *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. sheets p. 4A, 5A.

2. Mirak, Yusuf, (1962). *Mazhar-i Shahjahani*, Syed Pir Husamuddin Rashidi (ed.), Sindhi Adabi Board, Jamshoro, Hyderabad-Sind. Vol. II. pp. 3-32.
3. Bhandari, Sujan Ra'i, (1918). *Khulasatu-t Tawarikh*, Zafar Hasan (ed.), J. & Sons Press, Delhi. pp. 61-64.
4. Habib, (1986). *Op.cit.*, sheet. 4A-B.
5. For the *pargana* list of Multan *suba*, see Fazl, Abu'l, (1892). *Ain-i Akbari*, M. N Kishore (ed.), Nawal Kishore, Lucknow. Vol. II. pp. 160-64; Bhandari, (1918), *Op.cit.*, pp. 61-64.
6. Pelsaert, Francisco, (2011). *Jahangir's India: The Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert*, Moreland and P. Geyl (trans.), Idarah-i Adabiyāt-i Delli, Delhi. pp. 30- 31; Thevenot, Jean de, (1949). *The Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, Surendranath Sen (ed.), The National Archives of India, New Delhi. p. 77.
7. Foster, William, (2012). *Early Travels in India, 1583-1619*, Low Price Publications, Delhi. p. 236; Purchas, Samuel, (1906). *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, James Maclehose and Sons, Glasgow. Vol. IV. pp. 267-73; Manrique, Fray Sebastien, (1927). *Travels, 1629-43*, C.E Luard (trans.), H. Hosten (ass.), Hakluyt Society, London. Vol. II. pp. 221, 222, 233; Pelsaert, (2011). *Op.cit.*, pp. 31, 32; Bhandari, (1918). *Op.cit.*, p. 61; Khan, Sher Muhammad, (1977). *Zubdat al- Akhbar*, Ahmad Nabi Khan (ed.), Idarah Tahqiqat Pakistan, Lahore. p. 18.
8. Babur, Zahirudin Muhammad, (1922). *Baburnama*, Annette Susannah Beveridge (trans.), Hakluyt Society, London. Vol. II. p. 468.
9. Manrique, (1927). *Op.cit.*, Vol. II. p. 257.
10. Pelsaert, (2011). *Op.cit.*, p. 31; Foster, William, (1906-27). *The English Factories in India* (hereinafter *E.F.I.*), 1634-36, (13 Vols.) The Clarendon Press, Oxford. p. 129; Foster, (1906-27). *E.F.I, 1637-41*, *Op.cit.*, p. 136; Manucci, Niccolao, (1907-8). *Storia Do Mogor 1656-1712*, William Irvine (trans.), Low Price Publications, Delhi. Vol. II. p. 399; Bhandari, (1918). *Op.cit.*, p. 61.

11. Foster, (1906-27). *E.F.I. 1634-36, Op.cit.*, p. 129.
12. *Ibid.*, 1637-41, p. xx.
13. *Ibid.*, 1642-45, p. 163.
14. *Ibid.*, 1655-60, p. 129.
15. 1 bale= c. 98kgs, see Haider, Najaf, (2002). 'Global Networks of Exchange, the India trade and the Mercantile Economy of Safavid Iran', in Iran Habib, (ed.), *A Shared Heritage The Growth of Civilization in India and Iran*, Aligarh Historians Society, Delhi. p. 194.
16. Earlier it was John Spiller who described the shallow nature of the Indus in 1646. Foster, (1906-27). *E.F.I. 1646-50, Op.cit.* p. 60. It is mentioned, 'In maine places were forced where was not a foote water, to drawe the boates by mere strength upon poles into deep water, one after another, untill we came into the tides way.'
17. Manrique, (1927). *Op.cit.*, Vol. II. pp. 251-8.
18. Pelsaert, (2011). *Op.cit.*, p. 31. Pelsaert observed that due to services of three rivers, the Ravi, the Behat and the Sind, the Persian trade was extensive. Manrique, (1927). *Op.cit.* Vol. II. p. 257.
19. Foster, (1906-27). *E.F.I. 1637-41, Op.cit.* p. 137. It is mentioned in the factory records, 'From Lahoare to Tutta the usuall transport of goods is downe the river in flatt bottom boates of a thousand and 2,000 maens; first by Multan, 150 course; 11 dayes journey by land, and in soe much tyme we accomplished it by water. Heere is paid custome of all goods that either goe for Candahar or else downe the river to Sinda, at 2 ½ per cent., besides some other charges at the Gaut [ghat] or passage, which will amount [to] ¼ per cent more.' Manucci, (1907). *Op.cit.* Vol. I. p. 58. The prominence of the Indus trade even during Manucci's time is proved by him. He writes, 'Many Arabian and Persian vessals' at a place which was on Indus at a distance of twelve hours' journey from the sea.'
20. Thevenot, (1948). *Op.cit.*, p. 77.
21. Tavernier, Jean Baptiste. (1977). *Travels in India, 1640-1667*, William Crook (ed.), V. Ball (trans.), Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi. Vol. I. p. 73.

22. None of these informants mentioned this phenomenon of Indus.
23. Thevenot, (1948). *Op.cit.*, p. 77; Tavernier, (1977). *Op.cit.* Vol. I. pp. 73-74; Floor, William, (1993-94). *The Dutch East India Company (VOC) and Deiwel Sind (Pakistan) in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Institute of Central & West Asian Studies, Islamabad. pp. 23-4. It is mentioned, 'During the Aurangzeb's governorship of Thatta and Multan, some hydrological changes at the delta made the Indus river desert Laribander and it became an unimportant place.' Even those sailing the Indus in the nineteenth century mentioned the impact of silting. See also Burnes, Alexander, (1973). *Travels into Bokhara and a Voyage on the Indus*, Oxford University Press, Karachi. Vol. III. pp. 255-6; Burnes, Alexander, (1843). *Cabool: A Personal Narrative of a Journey to, and Residence in that City*, John Murray, London. p. 2.
24. Floor, (1993-94). *Op.cit.* p. 23; Sarkar, Jadunath, (1973). *History of Aurangzeb*, Longmans, New Delhi. Vol. I. p. 68. Some information is also given in English Factory records. Foster, (1906-27). *E.F.I., 1651-54*, *Op.cit.* p. 4.
25. Aurangzib, Muhammad, (1972). *Adab-i Alamgiri*, Vincent John Adams Flynn (trans.), Australian National University, Canberra. p. 27. In this letter it is stated "the principal interest of this letter is in Aurangzeb's spirited defence of his management of a new port which he had set up in his province. Its name is not stated; its future is uncertain; and it probably sank into insignificance as soon as Aurangzeb's special interest was withdrawn. Thatta's earlier prosperity had vanished; the new port might have been nearer the sea, to allow ships to reach it more readily. It is clear that 1651 must have been the first year of the port's operation, for Aurangzeb defends himself against an allegation that he has furnished no account of its revenues by explaining that so far there have been none."
26. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*

29. Foster, (1906-27). *E.F.I., 1651-54, Op.cit.*, p. 52.
30. Thevenot, (1948). *Op.cit.*, p. 77.
31. Tavernier, (1977), *Op.cit.*, Vol. I. p. 74.
32. The difficulties in transporting commodities to Thatta via the Indus river are obvious from a letter written by John Spiller and Nicholas Scrivener on March 31, 1652, to the Surat council. It mentions, "dare not bring the vessel over the bar for fear she would not be able to pass it again, but unless the weather improves, it will be difficult for her to embark her cargo." Foster, (1906-27). *E.F.I., 1651-54, Op.cit.*, p. 118.
33. Tavernier, (1977). *Op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 74.
34. *Ibid*; Khan, Iqtidar Alam, (1976). 'Middle Classes in Mughal Empire', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 5, Number. 1, Delhi. p. 42. Iqtidar Alam Khan says, "By the end of the seventeenth century, a large number of Khatri families had settled in the commercial centres of Gujarat."
35. *Abdul Jalil Bilgramis Letters, Persian Text on Even and Translation on Odd Pages*, (1978). Oriental Miscellany, Calcutta. Vol. I, pp. 156, 274, 276, 278, 282.
36. *Ibid*.
37. *Jamm-i Badi*, Transcribed, No. 124, Centre of Advanced Study Department of History, AMU, Aligarh. This Persian source has not yet been published and is at present in manuscript form. *Jamm-i-Badi* compiled by Jan Muhammad Munshi, son of Muhammad Arif, presumably after 1733-34 A.D. This source covers the period from 1703-4 to 1733-4 A. D.
38. *Ibid.*, ff. 38b-39a.
39. *Ibid*.
40. *Ibid*.
41. Alor was a *pargana* in Bhakkar *sarkar*. Mirak, (1962). *Op. cit.*, Vol. II. pp. 5-6.
42. *Jamm-i Badi, Op.cit.*, ff. 38b-39a.
43. *Ibid*.
44. *Ibid.*, p. ff. 39b-40a.

45. *Ibid.*, p. ff. 41a-42b. Local officer rivalries and submitting false reports to the court appeared to be prevalent at the time.
46. In one of the documents, it is written that “the past and the present governors (*hukkam*), in order to increase the cultivation and habitation in the *parganas* established crop sharing (*batai*) and or concessional rates (*kamdastur*) in accordance with the produce of land (*hasil-i zamin*) and capacity for cultivation land (*istidad-i mazru*), so that these be levied on all the three crops. However, whatever was remitted on account of crop-failure owing to flood and drought, for the relief of the peasantry, has now been levied and large amounts collected. This has greatly distressed the small peasantry (*reza riaya*) who have withdrawn their hands from cultivation.” *Ibid.*, ff. 40a-b.
47. *Ibid.*, p. f. 75b.
48. Habib, Irfan, (2014). *Agrarian System of Mughal India 1557-1707*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. pp. 82-90, 364-406. Habib writes that the flight of the peasants from their lands was a common phenomenon and it was growing in momentum with the passage of years.
49. Gilanentz, Petros di Sarkis, (1959). *The Chronicle of Petros di Sarkis Gilanentz Concerning the Afghan Invasion of Persia in 1722, The Seign of Isfahan and the Repercussions in Northern Persia, Russia and Turkey*, Caro Minasian (trans.), Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon. pp. 35-36. This statement goes contrary to what Surendra Gopal has argued. The author says “Indian traders had a substantial presence in Iran in the Seventeenth century. They were able to keep up their numbers in the first half of the eighteenth century despite adverse political situation, both in Iran and India.” Surendra Gopal, (2004). ‘Indian in Iran in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century’ in Mansura Haider, (ed.), *Sufis, Sultans and Feudal Orders*, Manohar, New Delhi. p. 391. It is likely that the author has not taken into consideration the account of Petros Di Sarkis Gilanentz, who was the eyewitness of the Ghilzai invasion.
50. Gilanentz, (1959). *Op.cit.*, pp. 35-36.



51. Lockhart, L., (1938). *Nadir Shah*, Luzac, London. pp. 35-45; Savory, Roger, (1980). *Iran under the Safavids*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp. 226-54.
52. Muzaffar Alam, (1994). 'Trade, State Policy and Regional Change, Aspects of Mughal-Uzbek Commercial Relations, C. 1550-1750', *Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 37, Number. 3, 1994, Leiden. p. 244.
53. *Khas Rukka Parwana Bahi* No. 1, Baisakh Vadi 4, 1825 (1763 A.D.), Jodhpur Records, R.S. A.B cited in Gupta, B.L., (1987). 'The Migration of Traders to Rajasthan in the Eighteenth Century', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 48, New Delhi. pp. 312-317.



## EVOLVING PERSPECTIVES: NATIVE RESPONSE TOWARDS THE COLONIAL BUREAUCRACY IN MALABAR

**Ms. Souda MT**

Research Scholar

Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi.

### Abstract

*Examining bureaucratic practices becomes a gateway to understand the power dynamics and cultural transformations that marked the colonial encounter. Understanding the native perspectives on colonial bureaucracy necessitates a journey into the complex dynamics of resistance, acceptance and negotiation and that unfolded against the backdrop of imperial administration.*

*This exploration delves into the multifaceted ways the native people of Malabar responded to the colonial bureaucracy. The paper aims to unravel the layers of agency exercised by the natives in navigating the bureaucratic landscape, from accommodation and adaptation to expressions of dissent and resistance.*

**Keywords:** *Malabar, bureaucracy, resistance, acceptance.*

The East India Company which ruled parts of India in the eighteenth century took steps to introduce separate judicial and political administration in its territories. As Bernard Cohn says, “In the second half of the eighteenth century, the East India Company had to create a state through which it could administer the rapidly expanding territories acquired by conquest or accession. The invention of such a state was without precedent in British constitutional history”.<sup>1</sup> The political authority of the colonial state gathered upon many mechanisms like the legal system, bureaucracy, education etc., for conserving and applying its power which was necessary for the formation of the colonial policy. Being a part of Madras Presidency, the British introduced colonial bureaucracy in Malabar during the nineteenth century and this was done in order to control the region and its population.

Malabar began to witness the presence of an alien government in their daily lives during the British Raj. There was a gradual replacement of custom by law, as well as the creation of a highly centralized administrative machinery that took over functions that had previously been undertaken by village groups or major landholders. The departments of government increased. This employed a wide range of government officers, from clerks to Deputy Magistrates. Postal offices, law, railways, educational institutions, mills and factories, municipalities, banks, commercial firms, newspaper offices, and several others threw open, vast opportunities for natives. The employment of this new system was an instrument and ideology of the British Government. It also began to mediate and regulate human actions through their forms. The new occupations offered a distinct socio-economic identity.

The introduction of British bureaucracy in colonial Malabar elicited varied and nuanced responses from the native population. All, including Nairs, Ezhavas, Muslims, and other depressed sections, got opportunities to get involved in the colonial bureaucracy; the first two castes that absorbed and utilized Western ideas in Malabar were the Nairs

and Tiyya communities. Tiyyas served as a group in Malabar in the first two decades of powerful the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> It has been said that most of the land revenue officials at the beginning of the twentieth century were Nairs even though Tiyyas had equal economic and educational status; subsequently, they enjoyed social prestige.<sup>3</sup>

The British Government acknowledged that their service preference would be given to those who had received English education. As the service under the British was reserved for the English-educated person, there was a feeling of a surety that the English educated would get a job in government service. When the Nairs and other upper caste people were reluctant to rush for English education because of their caste inhibitions, Tiyyas utilized the opportunity to undergo English education.<sup>4</sup> Tiyya links with the British, especially their women as concubines and wives of white army men stationed in Cannanore, from the early nineteenth century improved their economic standing, F. Dunsterville noted:

Initially, during the Company rule, a sizeable section among them had become economically prosperous through trading links with the English, which, in the course of time, even led to loosen conjugal ties with the colonizers, 'their caste rules not making so much objection to temporary alliances as other castes'. They are a very industrious class and can boast of having many wealthy and clever men among them, but the great majority of them are more or less poor: under the British government many Tiyyans have risen to important positions, but in Cochin no Tiyyan has succeeded in getting on, caste prejudices being still too strong for them.<sup>5</sup>

They tried to escape their traditional setting when they found an opening in the colonial world. The social mobility of lower castes was acquired through their access to higher education, and consequent employment in the government service.<sup>6</sup> The Tiyyas, despite their

relatively low social status in the Hindu caste hierarchy, produced a high percentage of middle-class professionals and bureaucrats during the colonial period.

Mappilas were hardly concerned about English education, which practically kept the colonial administrative spaces away from their life. There were instances of resistance and opposition of Mappilas towards British rule and bureaucratic impositions. Resistance movements were often triggered by economic hardships, changes in land tenure systems, and perceived injustices in implementing colonial laws. The introduction of British bureaucracy often led to a transformation of traditional socio-economic structures. The displacement of traditional authorities and establishing new administrative units profoundly impacted local governance.

According to Conrad Wood, “The establishment of British rule in Malabar gave rise to apprehension among the Malabar Mappilas since Mysore hegemony had provided them with unique opportunities to advance their interests at the expense of the high-caste Hindu hierarchy.”<sup>77</sup> It is also said that in the colonial history of Malabar, “British rule with its insistence of landlord rights had re-established and vastly enhanced the position of the Hindu upper caste Nambuthiris and Nair *Janmis* (many of whom had driven out by Tipu Sultan), and correspondingly worsened the condition of the largely Muslim leaseholders and cultivators.”<sup>78</sup>

Throughout British rule in India, whenever new economic regulations, interpretations, and legislative enactments were brought in, the structure of society was affected, and much resistance and many uprisings were reported. “The major cause of all these civil rebellions taken as a whole was the rapid changes the British introduced in the economy, administration and land revenue system.”<sup>79</sup> The Mappila Rebellion of 1921, which included the murder of Collector H.V. Conolly, exemplified a violent reaction against British policies, especially related to land revenue and taxation. Economic grievances fuelled instances of non-cooperation, protests, and even violent

uprisings. The rebellion, primarily led by the Mappila Muslims, was a notable response to perceived injustices in land revenue policies and administrative system.

Even though Mappilas constituted the major part of Malabar, they showed a negative approach towards colonialism and Western education.<sup>10</sup> Mappilas of Malabar were obstinate in this attitude. Their economic and educational backwardness is limited to employment in government service. Most literate Mappilas received education in *madrasas* linked to mosques, primarily focusing on religious teachings with minimal attention to secular subjects. Their involvement in modern education remained relatively insignificant<sup>11</sup>. This educational scenario had significant ideological and social implications.

Firstly, the early socialization of Mappilas was predominantly shaped within a religious context. The reluctance of coastal Mappilas to embrace colonial culture may be linked to memories of the anti-European struggle they led in preceding centuries, as evidenced by their celebration of battles fought by the prophet and his companions in Arabia, including local struggles like “Malappurampada”. In fact, anti-colonialism was being nurtured in the minds of Mappilas in the interior regions of South Malabar through reciting *Badarpattu*, *Uhudpattu*, *Malappuram Padappattu*<sup>12</sup>, *Cheroor Padappattu* etc.<sup>13</sup> which laid down the cultural context of the anti-colonial struggles of Mappilas in South Malabar.

Secondly, the emergence of a professional middle class was limited among them, leading them to adhere to religious ideologies and follow the guidance of traditional intellectuals.<sup>14</sup> Mappilas initially held a considerable presence in the revenue and police administration in South Malabar Taluks. Yet, suspicions about their loyalty led to a shift, favouring upper-caste Hindus for appointments in these departments. This change, coupled with the pro-landlord stances of the British administration, deprived Mappilas of a crucial avenue for advancement in rural Malabar.

Post-1800, most appointees to *Adhikaris* and *Menon* positions were from the Hindu owning class, despite Munro's 1817 recommendation to include Mappilas in these roles,<sup>15</sup> which local officials did not implement.<sup>16</sup> The first Mappila *tahsildar* was appointed in 1842.<sup>17</sup> Efforts to integrate Mappilas into government service after 1840 did not substantially alter the situation, as the upper caste continued to hold most subordinate positions.

Given the poor representation of Mappilas in administrative services<sup>18</sup>, they perceived the administration as antagonistic to their interests, viewing it as a system designed to bolster the power and position of upper-caste Hindu landlords. The revenue policies favoured Hindus and decisions safeguarded their interests. This perception had roots in the early years of British rule, with expressions of concern dating back to 1802<sup>19</sup>, reflecting apprehensions about biased complaints and justice.

William Logan found that Mappila peasants lacked faith in the judiciary, believing the religious and social standing of litigants unduly influenced court decisions<sup>20</sup>. The limited exposure of Mappilas to modern education and the pro-landlord bias in administrative practices significantly restricted the hegemonic influence of the colonial state.<sup>21</sup> The primary interaction with the administration occurred through the state's coercive apparatus, sparking opposition, resentment, and an increasing anti-British consciousness. Traditional intellectuals played a central role in shaping and reinforcing these sentiments.

One can see that most of the persons from Malabar who took up positions in colonial bureaucracy belonged to highly reputed families in Malabar. There are shreds of evidence that show that most of the native officers belonged to the high-ranking economic group. The younger sons of prominent *taravadus* went for education and jobs in colonial bureaucracy. When we look into the details of the bureaucrats at different levels, the majority mainly belonged to economically and socially wealthy

groups and families of high status.<sup>22</sup> The family's social and economic background, the parents' occupational status, etc., drove them to join or become part of the colonial administration. The family members of these officers held middle or high-level positions, either in government service or local administration, as district officers, *tahsildars*, *zamindars*, large land owners, religious scholars, etc.

The families of the bureaucrats were able to get an early foothold in the administration and had an advantage in terms of future employment prospects. In several families, the first generation started as village officials, and the second and third were able to rise to higher positions of *munsifs*, magistrates, judges, and senior civil servants.<sup>23</sup>

As a member of Chettur *taravadu*, Sankaran Nair once told Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, that his family had the honour of holding the highest and lowest executive posts under the government.<sup>24</sup> The office of the Village *Munsiff* was owned hereditarily by the *karnavar* or head of Chettur *taravadu*.<sup>25</sup> His father, Ramunny Panikkar, started service as a clerk under H.V Conolly, the Collector of Malabar, and held the highest post open to an Indian, which was that of *tahsildar*; and his father's brother was *sheristadar*, or head of the Collector's office.<sup>26</sup> Another person, Chettur Madhavan Nair, also served under the British. The status of the parents may help to provide an index to the son's status.

For a somewhat achievement-oriented system, the administrative system has been injected into a society wherein what one is by birth has always been of prime importance. The Nairs staffed the lower and middle levels of the administrative machinery of colonial Malabar by the middle of the nineteenth century. By then, it had become common to send children to study English by Nairs. English education enabled them to capture and influence the colonial bureaucracy to an extent. The Nambutiri Brahmins, despite their role as regional partners of colonialism, initially refrained from modern education. Their self-imposed orthodoxy



and conservatism, combined with a reluctance to mingle with the broader society and foreign culture, kept them aloof from western education until the reform movement within the community during the 1920s. The Nambutiri community's delayed engagement with English education proved advantageous for other communities, particularly the Nairs, who held a position just below them in the traditional social order. Generation after generation, members of Nair community rose to higher levels of administration.

However, at the level of the *amsam*, the long arm of the Law was a wooden one, and the *adhikaris* held the strings.<sup>27</sup> While the older generation was exclusively employed in the management of property and cultivation and the local Raja's army, the subsequent generations continued primarily with the same occupations under the colonial state, such as revenue administrators. In comparison, the younger generation shifted to more modern occupations like urban professions. Education, although commonly used as an indicator of status, was also an important factor in recruiting. Similarly, in terms of education, we find that traditional schooling was predominant in the first two generations. From the younger generation onwards, there was a steady increase in the number attending modern schools and studying up to High School and even University. The institution where one was educated was also considered.<sup>28</sup>

While education was expensive during that time, a family had to give up a potential earner during his period of study. Hence, the mere requirement of a college degree for those taking examinations helps to guarantee some measure of wealth.<sup>29</sup> The Malabar Tenancy Commission noted that the *kanamdar* form a large section of the middle class in Malabar, chiefly drawn from the professional classes, government servants, and people of status.<sup>30</sup> The British always tried to favour the upper caste people through all the possible ways, with a view to maintaining a group which was loyal to the British power. Colonialism found in Nairs, a natural ally because they were the managers of the land

in Malabar for *janmis*, whose knowledge in affairs of land revenue could be useful for the former. They were traditionally soldiers, administrators, government officers and therefore, culturally powerful. Such social and cultural capital of Nairs was an additional attraction for the colonial masters. This explains why Nairs became the first to join colonial spaces and taking to reform. It has been said that the majority of the land revenue officials at the beginning of the twentieth century were Nairs even though it is claimed that Tiyyas had equal economic and educational status.<sup>31</sup>

Cherumas and other marginalized sections of society faced barriers to accessing English education and opportunities for government employment. In Malabar, their enrolment in schools was resisted by Nairs and Tiyyas who aimed to maintain their subordinate status. Due to their low position in the traditional caste hierarchy and limited resources, these marginalized groups encountered challenges in pursuing educational advancement. When parents' occupations were evaluated on a scale combining modernity and status, they were ranked highest on caste. Significant chunks of the bureaucrats from Malabar represent the higher levels of their social order; broadly speaking, they are a ruling class. They were also reinforced by local influence and authority, vested with cultural and economic capital.

Even if they were not economically well off, they were people from the upper class. The government realized that the common people always accepted the legitimacy of these native officials as landed elites, and it would make it easy to administer the public. They always tried to favour them in all possible ways to maintain a group loyal to the British power.<sup>32</sup> Through this, they realized that the legitimacy of both parties will be maintained if they included them as part of their government. It resulted in the negotiation between colonizers and the colonized. On the one hand, British colonialism in Malabar never had attempted, in any way, either to destroy or to hamper the traditionally privileged classes. How they chose their career was also significant. It revealed a group of ambitious but dutiful sons following what they perceived as the best

occupational choices available. They saw that the service represented the highest attainment for any young man. If they wanted a decent and secure life, government service was considered as the best option. The importance of family preference in career choice was crucial at a time when every son was a representative of the family. The respectability, security, and the status of a career in government service were shown in the performance of the examination.

As a result of colonial institutions and policies, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of various new professions in Malabar. One of them was the legal profession. Several courts were formed throughout the country during the British occupation.<sup>33</sup> To note that, most of the educated men from Malabar went to study Law.<sup>34</sup> It is important to know why they considered Law as a good job. Caste panchayat dispute resolution had begun to be handled by courts. By 1931, the Calicut district alone had 30 superior civil courts, more than any other territory under the presidency combined. A community that places a high value on personal property ownership rights will inevitably require a legal and judicial framework to defend such rights.<sup>35</sup> Some of the people did plan for a teaching career, discovered that they could not live adequately on a teacher's salary, and then decided to obtain a law degree. It was not only a matter of ensuring economic security, but they also aimed at social benefits.

In some cases, these *vakils* obliterated the *taravadus*, which were already in bad shape "Their objective is to establish new instances throughout the land," according to Moyarath Sankaran, who published his memoirs. If anyone fell prey to their trap, they would destroy both the individual and the house. The majority of them are unemployed Nairs who despised hard labour. Lawyers and courtrooms are frequently addressed in the writings of this period, most notably in Chandu Menon's *Sarada* and in some of Moorkoth Kumaran's short stories. The advocates, largely Nairs and "migrant" Brahmins, rose to prominence as authority figures and quickly dominated the middle classes, participating in literary and

public life. Pleaders played a vital role in this new environment. If the parties could not attend in person, a provision was made for them to represent the suits through agents or deputies. An agent could use this to argue on behalf of the party as *vakil*.

By then, the native people in Malabar were ignorant about the Law. They realized that the Law is a part of the state and that becoming a lawyer is identical to becoming a part of the state. They recognized that they had some power with the colonial backing, that they became the representative of the state and the representative of the people at the same time. Their knowledge of working with the judiciary, the power and privileges derived from official status, and their financial position helped them increase their land holding.<sup>36</sup>

Kesava Menon discussed that lawyers can significantly contribute to society if they consider their duty at a higher level. It is not good to consider that a lawyer's job is just to earn money.<sup>37</sup> They could ease the burden and increase the well-being of others. Astonishingly, lawyers greatly influence legislation, administration, and public organizations in other countries and are considered the pillars of upkeeping the Law and justice in society.

Getting into colonial bureaucracy was not an easy task for common people but it was easy for the upper caste to become a part of it. The early local administrators put on the new garb of bureaucrats under the colonial circumstances and treated government service as of much higher value than that of the former, especially Tiyyas.<sup>38</sup> The public service thus served as the ladder for higher posts and corresponding socio-economic standards.<sup>39</sup>

The Nairs, with sufficient resources and existing literacy rates, seized the opportunity for English education. This enabled them to maintain their traditional dominance by monopolizing bureaucratic positions in Malabar and fostering the growth of a middle class within

the community. English education, functioning as a life belt for the Nairs, equipped them with new employment opportunities created by foreign rulers. The impact of bureaucratic structures and administrative practices was felt across different strata of society, and natives responded in diverse ways, reflecting their socio-economic backgrounds, cultural contexts, and perceptions of British rule. The perspectives on British rule and bureaucracy in Malabar evolved, including elements of acceptance, resistance, and negotiation.

While initial reactions might have been marked by resistance, subsequent generations saw individuals from different sections of society and prominent families engaging with the colonial state and bureaucracy, often for education and employment opportunities. In colonial Malabar, the recruitment to the bureaucracy was primarily based on attributes and rarely achieved characteristics. Attributed characteristics are mainly social, economic, and cultural related to birth and achieved characteristics are primarily economic and consist of skills either self-acquired or gained through a formal education system.

## References

1. Cohn, Bernard S., (1997). *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, Delhi. p. 57.
2. Menon, Dilip, (1994). *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in Southern India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp. 22-30.
3. Achuthan, K. R., (1971). *C. Krishnan*, Sahithya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam. p. 47.
4. General literacy of the Thiyya community was 17.5% and English literacy was only 0.9% for males. See Eighteenth Tour Report of Lord Pentland, October 14 to 25th 1917, 75, RAK, Calicut. The total Thiyya population as per 1921 census was 330,080 and total literate people were 69,394, of which literate in English were 4,850. 42. Census of India, (1922). Vol. xiii, Madras, Part ii, Imperial and Provincial Tables, Madras. p. 78.

5. Dunsterville, F., (1898). *Illustrated Guide to the Madras Railway*, Higginbotham & Co., Madras. p. 124.
6. Uppoth Kannan, Diwan Bahadur E.K Krishnan, belongs to the Tiyya Community and held the highest posts as Deputy Collectors and Sub-judges under colonial administration. C. Krishnan, Churayi Raman, Potheri Kunhampu, Muliyl Krishnan, Moorkoth Kumaran etc., served as *vakils*.
7. Wood, Conrad, (1976). 'The First Moplah Rebellion against British Rule in Malabar', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 543-544.
8. Sarkar, Sumit, (1983). *Modern India, 1885-1947*, Macmillan, New Delhi. p. 49.
9. In 1772, Governor-General Warren Hastings in Bengal enacted laws to punish dacoity and robbery from the individual offender to his family and village. For more details, see Kaye, John William, (1853). *The Administration of East India Company*, Richard Bentley, London. pp. 380-81.
10. According to the 1871 census report, Mappilas exhibited a minimal inclination towards education. In 1817, only 2.7% or 15,693 individuals among them were literate, a figure that marginally increased to 62,344 or 2.2% by 1921. In the same year, the district's total literate population was 393,020, constituting 13% of the overall population. Census Report, 1871, 355; Census Report, 1921, 350.
11. In 1911, only 486 Mappilas were literate in English, a notable contrast to 5895 Nairs and 2897 Tiyyas. Census Report, 1911, 81-82.
12. Padappattu (war songs) are the Mappila songs written in Arabi-Malayalam language, describes the fame and glory of the men participated in anti-colonial struggle in Kerala during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Malappuram Padappattu written by Mahakavi Moinkutty Vaidyar in 1879, chronicles peasant struggles in Malabar during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, notably the revolt against British-backed feudal

- landlords in 1763, instigated by a conflict between local landlord Para Nambi and the British tax collector Ali Marakkar.
13. Cheroor Padappattu written by Mammadkutty and Muhyudheen of Cheroor in 1842, recounts the battle led by Mamburam Saydalavi Thangal against the British in 1843 at Cheroor in Malappuram district, where Mappilas, in alliance with oppressed classes, confronted the local representative of the British regime, Kaprattu Krishna Panikkar.
  14. Panikkar, K. N., (1989). *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar 1836-1921*, Oxford University Press, Delhi. p. 53.
  15. Munro, Thomas, (1817). *A Report on the Revision of the Judicial System in the Province of Malabar*, 4 July. Calicut, p. 13.
  16. Only 20 Mappilas were among 81 Adhikari, none were village accountants, and only twenty out of 142 village peons. Strange, T. L, (1863). *Correspondence on Moplah Outrages* (hereafter CMO), Vol. I, 1849-1853, Madras. p. 214.
  17. The Hindus, who had monopolised these posts till then represented against this shift in the policy and ascribed the Mappila outbreaks to the leniency shown by the Collector. On the contrary, the collector argued that no outbreak originated in any village presided over by a Mappila headman. CMO, Vol. I, pp. 216 - 220.
  18. Throughout the first half of the century, Hindus dominated the positions of tahsildars and village officials, with an 1851 report indicating a disproportionate share for Hindus in Ernad Taluk, where the population was evenly divided between Hindus and Mappilas. Only 20 Mappilas were among 81 Adhikaris, none were village accountants, and only 20 out of 142 village peons. CMO, Vol. I, p. 214.
  19. As early as 1800, Athan Gurukkal gave expression to this sentiment: 'None of us is safe, some one or the other will prefer complaints against us, and the evidence of Nairs shall be received and we shall all be apprehended and hanged', Malabar District Records, Political, 1800, p. 281.

20. Report of Malabar Special Commission, (1882). Vol. I, Government of Madras, Madras, Para 263.
21. Panikkar, K. N., (1989). *Op. cit.*, p. 59.
22. K.P.S Menon, Chettur Sankaran Nair, Chettur Madhavan Nair, KP Kesava Menon, Chengalath Kunhiramamenon, K Madhavan Nair, K Ramunni Menon, O Chandumenon, etc., were the examples for those who held highest posts under British administration.
23. Panikkar, K. N., (1989). *Op. cit.*, p. 30.
24. Menon, K. P. S., (1967). *Builders of Modern India: C Sankaran Nair*, The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Delhi. pp. 9-11.
25. *Ibid.* The Chettur taravadu was one of the ninety-nine families in the Mankara village of South Malabar, each of which had the obligation to contribute one soldier to the Zamorin's army whenever required. During Tipu's invasion, some of these families were converted to Islam, and many others had taken refuge in the Western Ghats, so much so that when this region was ceded to the East India Company in 1792, the number of families had dwindled from ninety-nine to forty. And at the beginning of this century, only two taravadus were left, of which one was Chettur.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Menon, Dilip, (1994). *Op. cit.*, p. 7.
28. Sankaran Nair's early education began in the traditional style at Palakkad. It continued in schools in Malabar till he passed the Arts examination with a first class from the Provincial School at Calicut. Then he joined the Presidency College, Madras. In 1877, he took his degree in Arts, and after two years, he graduated in Law from the Madras Law College. Madhavan Nair's early education was from the Pachaiyappa's High School, Madras, and the Victoria College, Palakkad; he graduated from the Madras Christian College and Madras Law College before pursuing his higher education at the University College, London, and qualified as a lawyer from the Middle Temple.
29. Kesava Menon remembers the difficulties faced by his father when



he wanted to go to England for a Barrister degree. His family was not able to find huge money for his studies. Still, his father somehow managed to send his son to England. His father had to borrow money to study his child because his family was not financially sound, even if he belonged to a royal family. His father gave importance to education and was very loyal to the government. Menon, K P Kesava, (2012). *Kazhinjakalam*, Mathrubhumi Books, Kozhikode. p. 35.

30. Madras Tenancy Committee Report, p. 6.
31. Achuthan, K. R., (1971). *Op. cit.*, p. 47.
32. Panikkar, K N, (2002). *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony: Intellectual and Social Consciousness in the Colonial World*, Anthem South Asian Studies, New Delhi, p. 173-174.
33. Sreejith, K., (2022). *The Middleclass in Malabar: A Social History*, Taylor and Francis Group, London & New York. p. 18.
34. For example, after his matriculation Kunhambu had to discontinue his studies due to family's financial problems. He had to join the government service as postmaster. Later studied law and became vakkil. Though by profession he was an advocate, he proved his talents in banking, press and publications. He was a typical colonial intelligentsia to work as lawyer and social reformer. Kunhambu, Potheri, (2013). *Saraswathivijayam*, Chinta Publishers, Thiruvanthapuram. p. viii.
35. Embree, Ainslee T., (1979). 'Land Holding in India and British Institutions' in Robert E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, Manohar, New Delhi. p. 37.
36. Panikkar, K. N., (1989). *Op. cit.*, p. 30.
37. Menon, Dilip. (2012). *Op. cit.*, p. 47.
38. Innes, C.A., Evans, F.B., (1908). *Madras District Gazetteers: Malabar and Anjengo*. Vol. 1. Madras Government Press, Madras. p. 522.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 499.



**LEARNING OF *TEROOVERKADOO*  
*MOOTIAH (FIRÛVÉRKÂDÛ MUTIAH)*  
IN MADRAS: AN EXEMPLAR FOR  
EDUCATION IN THE LATER DECADES  
OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

**Dr. Anantanarayanan Raman**

Commonwealth Scientific & Industrial Research Organization  
Underwood Avenue, Floreat, WA 6024, Australia

**Abstract**

*A narrative entitled ‘An Historical and Chronological Journal of the Life of Terooverkadoo Mootiah’ dated 24 January 1795 is available in the Oriental Repertory of 1808, edited by Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1808), a Scottish geographer and hydrographer with the British admiralty and published by George Biggs of London. The present article brings to light details included in that narrative with supplementary annotations and remarks.*

*Terooverkadoo Mootiah* (read as *Firûvérkâdû Mutiah*; TM), impresses as a learned person, well-informed and trained in several Indian languages, besides English, especially when no formal, western-style educational institution existed in India. Joshua Ehrlich (Department of History, University of Macau, Macau) remarks that a ‘Madrasi scholar’ and ‘translator’ *Teroovercadoo Mootiah* was an active subscriber to and promoter of publications in the 1790s (Ehrlich, J., file:///C:/Users/raman/Downloads/Ehrlich, Subscription Publishing and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Indian Print Culture–3.pdf, accessed on 1 April 2024).

TM came from *Firûverkādû* (c. 30 kms.<sup>2</sup>, 13°9' N; 79°55' E) that occurs 16 kms. west of Madras (now, Chennai) and presently, a Grade III municipality in *Tirûvallûr*-district administration. The *Firûverkādû* municipality includes *Nûmbal*, *Vîrarāgava-pûram*, *Ayanam-pakkam*, *Pérûmal-agaram*, and *Kôlādi* villages (see Thiruverkadu Municipality, <https://www.tnurbantree.tn.gov.in/thiru-verkadu/>, accessed on 6 March 2024).

Thomas Munro's *Minutes on Native Education* of 10 March 1826 - an early report on education of Indians - clarifies that a little more than 12,000 schools existed in the Madras Presidency in 1820s, at the rate of one school for c. 1000 people (Gleig 1830, p. 407-413). The 'schools' recorded in Munro's *Minutes* may have come into existence after 1800. No details of either their start dates or the nature and quality of education offered are available in that document.

However, the *Report of the Indian Education Commission* led by William Wilson Hunter (The Hunter Commission 1883) speaks elaborately about formal and informal education in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Samuel Saththianadhan's (1894) *History of Education in the Madras Presidency* is an authoritative document that speaks of the development of formal, western-style education in the Madras Presidency.

The *Oriental Repertory* (*OR*) was printed and published in London with an intent to promote knowledge of the geography, history of the Indian subcontinent, and Indian culture. It was edited by Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1808), a Scottish geographer and hydrographer, who started his life as a Writer (clerk) with the East-India Company in Madras in 1752 (Phillimore 1945). Only two volumes of the *OR* were ever issued: the first in 1791-1793 and the second in 1794-1797. The re-issued volume in 1808, also labelled as the 2<sup>nd</sup>, includes TM's narrative entitled 'An Historical and Chronological Journal of the Life of *Terooverkadoo Mootiah*' dated 24 January 1795.

**Context, intent, and scope of TM's narrative in the *Oriental Repertory* (1808)**

Towards the end of the narrative, TM indicates that he was born on 2 September 1761 and was married to three women, of whom two had died previously. In p. 570, he says:

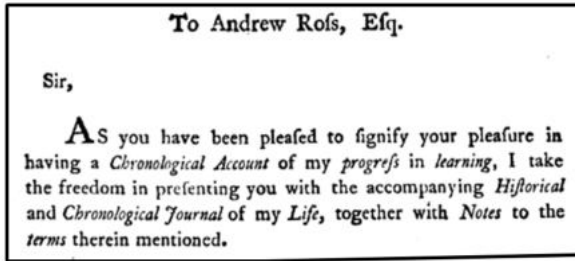
‘... I am still amusing myself with books of my library; as  
God Almighty has not yet been pleased to recommend me  
to such a service as is suited to me’

which suggests that he was not in a suitable employment, in spite of his wide learning of different languages, including Sanskrit and Tamil and a strong versatility of English.

In p. 567, he speaks highly of his father *Terooverkadoo Ramalinga Moodeliar* (*Firúvérkādū Ramalinga Mūdaliar*) and acknowledges that *Ramalinga Moodeliar* had spent considerable money on his learning. In addition, TM admits that *Ramalinga Moodeliar* enabled him to procure many *Sanskrit* and *Tamil* (referred as *Malabar*) palm-leaf manuscripts and English books for his personal library.

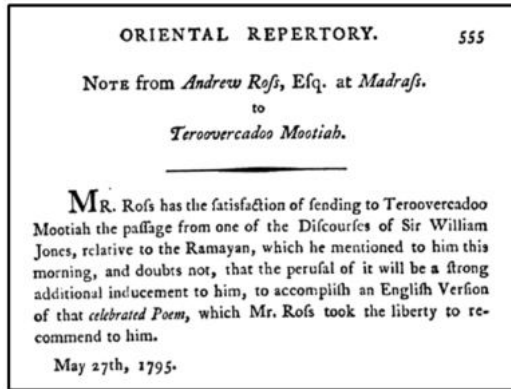
‘An Historical and Chronological Journal...’ is an autobiographical essay, referring particularly to TM's learning. One Andrew Ross, a free merchant living in Madras from 1752, requested TM to describe details of his learning, which has resulted in this narrative published in *OR*. Ross also served as an alderman (= councillor) with the Corporation of Madras, which was operational since 1688 (Basu 1993). Ross resigned his aldermanship in 1775. He officiated as a member of the jury that probed into the unnatural death of George Pigot (1719-1777), governor of Madras, in May 1777. Ross lived within Fort St. George precinct (13°08' N, 80°29' E), although it appears that he owned a house in *Marmalong* (presently *Mambalam*; 13°02' N, 80°13' E) and another in the neighbourhood of Saint Thomas Mount (13°00' N, 80°11' E). Highly likely, Ross occasionally used TM as a translator, interpreter (*dwi-bāshī*) (Basu 1984).

However, Ross appears to have held TM in high esteem and regard, impressed by his erudition (Box 1). How TM's article reached Alexander Dalrymple and how it was processed before publication in *OR* are not explained.



Box. 1. Extract from p. 555 referring to the intent and purpose of the article published in *OR* (1808).

The regard Ross had for TM's scholarship is evident in his action reported in *OR* (1808) dated 27 May 1795. The background for this narrative becomes apparent from the persuasion of TM by Ross seeking him to translate Vālmikī's *Rāmāyanam* (hereafter, *Vālmikī Rāmāyanam*) into English (Box 2), while referring the then recent article 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India' by William Jones (1746–1794) - a renowned philologist in Calcutta and a supreme-court judge in Fort William - that referred to India's celebrated epic *Rāmāyanam* and its hero *Rāmā* (Jones 1794).



Box 2. Extract from p. 555 referring to Andrew Ross's request to TM.

Responding to Ross positively, TM seems to have done a short English version of *Vālmikī Rāmāyanam*, which is not traceable. However, that TM completed an English version is clear from his response to Ross (Box 3; Mootiah 1808, p. 557–558). In his response to Ross, TM incidentally makes sharp comments on the then available *Sanskrit*, *Tamil* (referred then as *Malabar*), and *Telugu* (referred then as *Gentoo*) versions of *Rāmāyanam* (Mootiah 1808). Some of TM's comments are incorrect, when viewed against modern commentaries and interpretations. For example, TM identifies the date of *Kambar* of *Tēranzhūndūr* (11°02' N, 79°34' E) - the author of *Rāma-Kātai*, the first *Tamil* edition of *Rāmāyanam* - as c. 200 BCE, i.e., 20 centuries ago, whereas we know that *Kambar* lived in *Çōzha Nādū* in 12<sup>th</sup> century CE, only nine centuries ago (Raghava Iyengar 2003).

Further, TM says in p. 556,

‘Lately a Native, who was unacquainted either with the *Samscrita* (*Sanskrit*), or with the poetic *Tamil*, wrote himself a treatise in prose, in the vulgar (= popular) style of the *Tamil* language, under the title *Rāumāyana vāuchaka* (read as *Rāmāyana vāchakā*); ...’.

TM aggressively criticizes the *Rāumāyana vāuchaka* as absurd and misrepresented, because it strongly differs from *Vālmikī's Rāmāyanam*. TM considers the *Vālmikī Rāmāyanam* original. To supplement his criticism, he indicates that the *Rāmāyana vāchakā* opens with a conversation between *Vībīśanā* and *Rāmā*, which, according to TM was absurd, conflicting with the opening segment in *Vālmikī Rāmāyanam*. In p. 557, he says:

‘... for instance, this prosaic *Raumaiana* (*Ramayana*) begins with a dialogue between *Vebheeshana* (*Vībīśanā*) and *Rauma* (*Rāmā*); a circumstance very absurd as being contrary to the text; ...’

The terms ‘lately’, ‘native’, and ‘prosaic’ are vital here to determine to which edition of *Rāmāyanam* TM is alluding to. Because he speaks of *Kamban* and *Rāma-Kātai* in an earlier segment of his response to Ross,

highly likely TM is not referring to *Kamban* or *Rāma-Kātai* here. The next Tamil version of *Rāmāyanam* was *Rāmā Nātakam* (not *Rāmāyana vāchakā*) by *Sērkaṇṇi Arūṇaṇṇala-k-Kavī* (1711-1779), first read out to public in *Sri Rangam Ranganatar* temple hall in 1772 (Rajagopalan 1978).

Does TM refer to *Arūṇaṇṇala-k-Kavī*'s *Rama Natakam* as absurd and unrepresentative? Not clear. In high likelihood, TM does not refer to *Arūṇaṇṇala-k-Kavī*'s creative work, since it is in verse form and not in prose form.

On the several interpolated and extrapolated stories that abound in regional editions of *Rāmāyanam*, Challa Radhakrishna Sarma (1994) of the Department of Indian Languages, Madurai University, Madurai (Box 3) says that such interpolations and extrapolations are reasonable and justifiable, when viewed from the context of the richness of a language. TM does not speak well also of *Ranganāṭa Rāmāyanamū* (*Telūgū*) composed in the early decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The extant explanation on the authorship of *Ranganāṭa Rāmāyanamū* is that *Guna-budda-Réddy* and the purported author - *Ranganāṭa* - are the same person, implying that *Ranganāṭa* was the sobriquet of *Gūna-budda-Réddy*.

In contrast, TM says that *Gūna-budda-Réddy* was the son of one *Viltala Réddy* and he employed poet *Ranganāṭa*. TM unfavourably comments on another edition of *Rāmāyanam* - the *Āṣkara Rāmāyanamū* (c. 14<sup>th</sup> Century) - in his memorandum to Andrew Ross.

In contrast, Sarma (1994, p. 36 - 37) speaks highly of the *kāvya* nature of *Āṣkara Rāmāyanamū*. In summary, TM's judgmental opinions on different regional-language versions of *Rāmāyanam* are unfavourable. But he is dodgy in his response to Ross and does not support his arguments with either reasons or evidence.

A few new stories or details which are not found in Valmiki are found in both *Ranganatha Ramayanam* and *Kamba Ramayanam* ; and these deviations or interpolations of new stories were made with a view to adding some more qualities to the characters already created by Valmiki. The deviations appear to me justifiable as they have a purpose behind them . Further, both the Telugu and Tamil poets have approached the subject with great devotion, keeping at the same time their individuality undiminished. They are more sympathetic towards the minor characters in the story.

Box 3. Comment by C(halla) R(adhakrishna) Sarma  
(1994, in preface).

### TM's formal learning (1766 - 1781; 15 years)

#### 1766 - 1772.

Initiated into reading and writing skills of *Sanskrit*, *Tamil*, and *Télugû*, with particular focus on *Sanskrit* and *Tamil*, tutored by one *Lakshmana Iyer* (Note 1), also initiated into basic reading and writing skills of Persian and tutored by one *Abdul Hakeem Sahib* (Note 1). His learning commenced when he was five years old and he completed this phase when he was 11 years old: six years of learning.

#### 1772 - 1774.

Initiated into reading and writing of *Marâti* he was tutored by one *Shankara Rau[r]* (Read as *Śankara Rau*) (Notes 1, 2). Two years of learning and he learnt between 12 and 13 years of age.

#### Towards the end of 1774.

Completed basic learning of the languages *Sanskrit*, *Tamil*, *Télugû*, Persian, and *Marâti* (13 years of age).

#### 1774. In p. 565, TM claims:

‘I acquired the skill in copying prose and verses in the high and poetical Tamil’.

This can be interpreted in two ways: that TM could read, understand texts (prose and poetry) from other sources and re-inscribe



them on new palm-leaves, as a copyist. Alternately, he could write high-quality Tamil prose and poetry. An overlap with his time of language learning? (13 years of age).

#### 1774 - 1775.

Higher-level learning of *Sanskrit* by studying texts of *Cauvya* (read as *kāvyā*) genre (e.g., *Raghūvamsa*, *Nishida*, *Maukha* (read as, *Mauka*, Note 3), *Nātakā* (e.g., *Śākūntalā*, *Mūrārī*), and *Alankarā* genre (e.g., *Appayya Dikṣitā*'s *Kūvalālayanda Kārikā*, 16<sup>th</sup> century; *Vaidyanatha*'s *Pratāparūdrīyā* or *Pratāparūdrāya-śōbūśāṇā* [TM mentions as *Partāparūdreya*], 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries). Tutored by *Emba Iyengar* and *Ranga Aṣṛyā* (Note 1) (13-14 years of age).

#### 1775 - 1776.

Higher-level learning of Tamil occurs by studying the grammatical text *Tōlkāppiam*. Referring to *Tōlkāppiam*, TM uses a metaphor 'ac(h)romatic part' of the language, implying 'colourless', 'dull'. And the use of this metaphor is curious. TM lists his learning of a few other literary works including grammar, such as *Yāpparūn-kalak-kārikai* (said as *Cārīky*), *Nannūl*, *Ilackkia-vilakkam*, *Firū-k-kūral*, *Ṣivaka Ṣintāmani*, *Pēriya Pūrānam nīkandū*, and *Fēvaṣāram*. Tutored by one *Vadūka-nata Pandāram* (Note 1). The *nīkandū* he mentions includes many versions and editions written in diverse periods (see <https://ta.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kālavariṣaiyil-nikaṇṭukaḷ>, accessed on 27 February 2024): starting from *Ṣéndan Divākara Nikandū* by Jain Mūnī *Dīvākara* in c. 700 CE to the most recent e-version: *The Visual Thesaurus in Tamil* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20150811210307/http://stream1.tamilvu.in/tvavt/VT.htm>, accessed 27 February 2024). My best efforts did not provide any lead to *Ilackkia-vilakkam* and *Fēvaṣāram*. (13-14 years of age).

#### 1777.

Higher-level learning of *Sanskrit* occurs by studying *Vyākarna* and *Farkasāstrā*. Tutored by *Rama Sastri* and *Kuppurāma Sastri* (Note 1). (15 years of age).

1779.

Initiated into *Siddhāntāgama*. Tutoed by *Vatāranya Sastri* (Note 1). (18 years of age).

1780.

Instructed in scholastic readings in English at an English school run by one *Soorya Pelly* (*Sūrya Pillai*?) (Note 1). (19 years of age).

Early 1781.

TM joined the Evangelical Lutheran Missionary Reverend Johann Philip Fabricius (1711-1791) (TM spells as 'Febricius'), who was supervising the printing press in Vepery, Madras from 1761 (Note 4). Under the tutelage of Fabricius, TM read *The Preceptor: Containing A General Course of Education Wherein the First Principles of Polite Learning are Laid Down in a Way most Suitable for Trying the Genius, and Advancing the Instruction of Youth* (12 Parts: Illustrated with Maps and Useful Cuts, 1769, 560 pages) by Samuel Johnson and Robert Dodsley

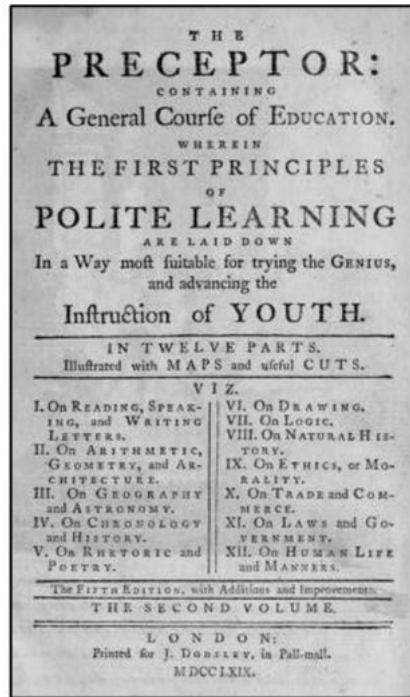


Fig. 1. Cover page of *The Preceptor* (1769).

of London (published by James Dodsley, Pall Mall, London). The cover page of this book is reproduced in this article to provide an idea of the contents (Fig. 1), which include a range of topics from reasoning and logic to human life and manners. (20 years of age).

### **Late 1781.**

Initiated into basic reading and writing skills of Latin, tutored by one Walter. However, this training did not last long because Walter died shortly after. (20 years of age).

### **1782 - 1793. Next 12 y of TM's his life.**

He says (pp. 567-568),

'I continued to amuse (= engage) myself with Samskrita (Sanskrit) and Malabar (Tamil) Authors, such as *Etēhāsā* (*Itihāsā*) and *Pōōrānā* (*Pūrānā*), &c. &c., and also of the English Authors, such as the Old and New Testaments, William Ward's large English Grammar, Chambers and Johnson's Dictionaries, &c. &c.'

Several *Itihāsā*-s and *Pūrānā*-s are known in India. For example, the known *mahāpūrāna*-s are 18 (Pusalker 1955). Whether TM read all or only a few of them is unclear from his declaration in pages 567-568. Moreover, the use of '&c.' (*et cetera*, shortly *etc.*) is unhelpful to reconstruct details of what he may have amused himself! The 'old' and 'new' Testaments obviously refer to the Bible.

I could track down details of William Ward's 'large English Grammar' published in 1767: *A Grammar of the English Language: in Two Treatises. The First, Containing Rules for Every Part of Its Construction; ... The Second, Shewing the Nature of the Several Parts of Speech, and the Reasons of Every Part of Construction*, published by Etherington, York (pages 271).

Similarly, I could locate details of <Chambers and Johnson's Dictionaries>. Whereas, many of the present-day readers would be familiar with the pioneering effort of Samuel Johnson of London (1709–1784) in compiling the first dictionary of English language (1755), the *Cyclopædia: or a Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, ... by Ephraim Chambers of London (1680-1740) is possibly less known. This 2-volume set was published by J. & J. Knapton, et al. in London in 1728.

A brief note on the *Cyclopædia: or a Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, ... by E. Chambers would be of help and even interest to readers, because this can be confused by modern readers with the Chambers Dictionary. Ephraim Chambers's was an early encyclopaedia in English that comprehensively treated many aspects and dimensions of arts and sciences of that period (Fig. 2).

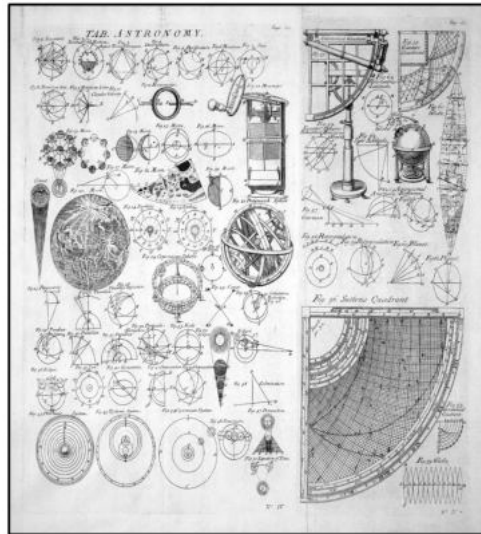


Fig. 2. A random page from Ephraim Chamber's *Cyclopædia* (1728) with details on Astronomy (for explanation of labelled letters see original file: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cyclopaedia\\_Chambers\\_-\\_Volume\\_1\\_-\\_0204.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cyclopaedia_Chambers_-_Volume_1_-_0204.jpg), accessed 28 February 2024).

Alphabetical arrangement of words and themes and numerous cross references were the strengths of this book. It spoke of 47 branches of knowledge, with classified articles on each, rendered in the most helpful manner to the reader. Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopædia* inspired Denis Diderot (1713-1784) and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert (1717-1783) to bring out the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* in 1751. The later editions of Chambers's *Cyclopædia* were made by *la Société Typographique*, Lausanne, Switzerland. What is today known as the *Chambers's Encyclopædia*, first published in 1860,

bears no link to Ephraim Chambers's *magnum opus* but was the outcome of the effort of brothers Robert and William Chambers of Edinburgh in 1859. These brothers also first published the *Chambers Dictionary* in 1872.

### **Translation work: from English to Tamil**

**1793.**

TM translated three of the pamphlets written by James Anderson on silkworm cultivation in Madras.

A brief note on James Anderson (1739-1809), who developed a private botanical garden, popularly referred as the <Anderson's Garden>, in Nungambakkam, Madras (presently Chennai) in 1778-1792, which existed until 1828. Tippu Sultan, ruler of the Mysore Kingdom (1750-1799) was introducing sericulture in Mysore during Anderson's time in Madras. Taking the cue from this economic enterprise, Anderson imported silkworms from Bengal into Madras in December 1790, and for the next six years he tried to impress the English East-India Company (EEIC) officials in Madras into silk production. In the Nungambakkam garden, Anderson established several species of *Morus* (Moraceae, mulberry) among other plants. With his conviction that the climate of Madras was the most conducive for silkworms (*Bombyx mori*, Lepidoptera: Bombycidae), he was enthusiastic about rearing silkworms.

By 1790, he recognized the need for the host plant, species of *Morus*, if the silk industry were to be established. He was not the first to import worms into Madras. Because previous efforts had failed, he persuaded the EEIC to get its officers, stationed in Madras, to start planting mulberry in preparation for the arrival of silkworms (Raman 2011).

**1794.**

TM translated a text referred as the 'modern history of Madura', written in popular Tamil into English on the request of Andrew Ross. Rajayyan (1974), in his monograph on the history of Madurai mentions *Madurai-t-tala-varalārū*, with no further details in pages 54-55. Possibly

this was the book, which TM translated. Towards the end of the same year, TM translated the Sanskrit almanac (*pañcāṅkam*) for the year *Ānanda* complying the request of Andrew Berry, a medical doctor in Madras and nephew of James Anderson of Madras (see Raman 2011). TM further indicates here that this translated work of his was highly appreciated (TM uses ‘approved’ here) by John Goldingham (1767–1849). For details on John Goldingham, the first official Madras Astronomer, see Raman (2012).

### Footnotes used in TM’s narrative

In this narrative, TM studs his article copiously with explanatory footnotes, explaining many local Indian language words and terms used by him. For example, he explains terms such as *Vyakarna* and *Tarkka* (Sanskrit) in p. 565, *Itihāsa*, *Pūrāṇa*, and *Siddhānta* (Sanskrit) in p. 567. Similarly, in the page (564) wherein he speaks of *Yāpparūn-kalak-kārikai* (= *Cārīky*), *Nannūl*, *Ilackkia-vilakkam*, *Firū-k-kūraḷ*, *Ṭṭvaka Ṭintāmani*, *Pēriya Pūrānam*, *nīkandū*, and *Fēvaṇṇāram*, he explains the nature of each text and supplies brief details of the author of each of them.

### Remarks

1. One revelation from TM’s narrative on his educational experience is how education was available to people who could afford it and how effectively it was phased. Taking TM’s narrative as an example, we could surmise the pattern in formal learning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Education in India is deeply rooted from ancient times, when interested youth generally approached appropriate masters (*gūrū-s*) and learned over days, weeks, months, and years residing with them. Mostly information and knowledge were transmitted orally, although palm-leaf resources were used as texts. Broadly, holistic education was on focus, including subjects ranging from philosophy and astronomy to mathematics and languages. In the specific instance of TM, who lived in the later decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Madras, seems to have developed learning plan of gaining basics of several languages relevant to Madras of that

time and mastering Tamil and Sanskrit. By saying ‘gaining the basics’ I mean that TM must have acquired necessary skills to communicate orally and in written medium in *Télugu*, *Marāṭi*, and Persian.

2. The British introduced a European-model of school education, emphasizing employability and discipline. This European model became popular, with learners gaining government jobs because of basic English-language literacy. Education based on local languages and belief systems also persisted, which largely was responsible for freedom movement and the eventual fructifying of Indian-education system after 1947.
3. Mostly information and knowledge were transmitted orally. Broadly, holistic education was focussed, encompassing subjects ranging from philosophy and astronomy to mathematics and languages. Western style schools (high schools) started appearing only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first such formal school was St. Mary’s Charity School established by the Rev. William Stevenson, the Chaplain of Fort St. George between 1713 and 1719. He was instrumental in starting the St. Mary’s Charity School (presently, the St George’s Anglo- Indian Higher Secondary School) for 30 pupils, which happens to be first western-style-education-based school in the whole of India and even South Asia. The school moved around from North Black Town, Broadway, Egmore, and Chintadripet, before settling in its present location in Shenoy Nagar in 1904.

## Notes

1. No details traceable.
2. TM spells ‘*Śankara Rau*’ as ‘*Śankara Raur*’ suggesting that the presently widely used ‘Rao’ or ‘Rau’ surnames have derived from the term ‘*Rayar*’, a corruption of ‘*Raja*’.
3. *Mauka*: The *pūrāna* refers to ‘records’ of ancient India’s extensive cultural history, historical legends, religious ceremonies, diverse arts and sciences. Eighteen *mahāpūrāna* are known totally

*consisting of 400,000 metrical couplets and estimated back to several centuries in BCE.*

4. This Vepery printing press later became the SPCK (Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge) Press, and subsequently the Diocesan Press.

### **Bibliography**

- Anonymous, Sir Charles Wilkins, K. H., D. C. L., F. R. S. (1837). *The Annual Biography and Obituary*, Vol. XXI, London, pp. 69-72.
- Basu S. N. (1984). 'The Dubashes of Madras', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1984, Vol. 18, Cambridge, pp. 1-31.
- Basu, S. N. (1993). 'Madras in 1800: perceiving the city', *Studies in the History of Art*, Vol. 31, Washington, D. C. pp. 221-240.
- Chambers, E. (1728). 'Cyclopædia: or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, ...' J. & J. Knapton, J. Darby, D. Midwinter, A. Retteworth, J. Senex, R. Gosling, J. Pemperton, W. & F. Innys, J. Osborn & T. Longman, C. Revington, J. Hooke, R. Robinson, F. Clay, A. Werd, E. Symon, D. Browne, A. Johnson, and T. Osborn, Vol. 1, London, p. 1044; Vol. 2, London, p. 1076.
- Dodsley, R. (1769). *The Preceptor: Containing a General Course of Education, wherein the First Principles of Polite Learning are Laid Down in a Way Most Suitable for Trying the Genius and Advancing the Instruction of Youth*, J. Dodsley, London, p. 560.
- Gleig, George Robert, (1830). *Major-General Sir Thomas Munro, Bart. and K. C. B., late Governor of Madras., with Extracts from his Correspondence and Private Papers*, Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, London, Vol. II, p. 454.
- Hunter Commission, The (1883). *Report of the Indian Education Commission*, Government of India, Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, p. 639.
- Johnson, S. (1755). *A Dictionary of the English Language, ... A History of the Language and an English Grammar*, J. & P.



- Knapton, T. & T. Longman, C. Hitch & L. Hawes, A. Millar, and R. & J. Dodsley, London, p. 2340.
- Jones, W. (1794). '*On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India*', Asiatic Researches or Transactions of the Society, instituted in Bengal, for inquiries into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature, Vol. 1, Calcutta, pp. 188-235.
  - Mootiah, T. (1808). 'To Andrew Ross, Esq., Memorandum shewing the difference between the Samscritick, Tamilian and Gentoo Râumâyânâs', Oriental Reportary (hereafter, OR) Vol. II. pp. 556-558.
  - Phillimore, R. H. (1945). 'Historical Records of the Survey of India, 18<sup>th</sup> Century', Volume I, Surveyor General of India, Survey of India, Dehra Dun, p. 400.
  - Pusalker, A. D., (1955). 'Studies in the epics and purāṇas', Hindustan Cellulose & Paper Company, Bombay, p. 225.
  - Raghava Iyengar, R., (2003). 'Kaviccakravarti Kampar', e-edition republished in 2003 under Project Madurai, Madurai Tamizh Literature Electronic Archiving Programme, <https://library.bjp.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1207/1/RaghavaIyengar.pdf>, accessed 18 February 2024.
  - Rajagopalan, K. R. (1978). 'Seerkazhi Arunachala Kavirayar and Rama Natakam'. *Journal of the Sangeet Natak Akademi*, Vol. 10, New Delhi, pp. 10-17.
  - Rajayyan, K., (1974). 'History of Madurai (1736-1801)', Madurai University Historical Series # 1, Madurai University, Madurai, p. 483.
  - Raman, A., 2011. 'Economic biology and James Anderson in eighteenth century Coromandel', *Current Science*, Vol. 100, Bangalore, pp. 1092-1096.
  - Raman, A., 2012. 'Looking back: Goldingham and the Madras observatory', *Madras Musings*, Vol. XXII, Chennai, pp. 5-6.
  - Randall, D., 1958. 'Dodsley's Preceptor-a window into the eighteenth century'. *The Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries* Vol. 22, Rutgers, pp. 10-22.

- Sarma, C. R. (1994). 'The Ramayana in Telugu and Tamil: a Comparative Study', *Lakshminarayana Granthamala*, Madurai, p. 177.
- Satthianadhan, S. (1894). 'History of Education in the Madras Presidency', Srinivasa and Varadachari & Company, Madras, p. 295.
- Ward, W. (1767). 'A Grammar of the English Language: in Two Treatises. The First, Containing Rules for Every Part of Its Construction; ... The Second, Shewing the Nature of the Several Parts of Speech, and the Reasons of Every Part of Construction', Etherington, York, p. 271.



## ROLE OF BREKLUM MISSION IN UPLIFTMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN OF KORAPUT DISTRICT

**Dr. Raghumani Naik**

Assistant Professor (S-III)

PG Department of History, NSCB College  
Sambalpur University, Odisha.

### Abstract

*Koraput district of South Odisha is proclaimed as Nature Lovers' Paradise because of its vast nature, diversity of flora and fauna habitat. It is the habitat of Adivasis and Dalits. It was an inaccessible region due to mountains, rift valleys, rapid falls and dense forests. For this reason, this region was completely isolated from the mainstream for centuries together and remained backward and undeveloped. People were illiterate. Education for women was a distant dream because it was considered 'unbecoming of the modesty of the women.' Womanly activities were confined to hearth and home only. Therefore, for the women of this inaccessible region, Koraput was passing through a 'Dark Age.' At this juncture, the Breklum Mission of Germany reached Koraput on 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1882 C.E. and heralded a new epoch for the education of women in this district. It established schools, hostels, boarding homes, Bible classes, a theological seminary and introduced the zenana system to improve the education of the women of this area.*

**Keywords:** *Breklum Mission, women, schools, hostels, boarding homes, theological seminary.*

## **Introduction**

Woman has all along been suffering the unreasoned male hegemony. The women of undivided Koraput met the same destiny as that of women elsewhere in the world. But what was more aggravating for the tribal women and for that matter, women in this part of Odisha was their utter poverty, ignorance and miserable health conditions.

It will be in the fitness of things to shed light on the position of women of Odisha, especially of undivided Koraput district on the eve of the coming of the Breklum Mission in 1882. It was in a precarious condition. They did not have any social identity. Nor were they able to come out from their daily routine-bound life. They were considered objects of enjoyment and machines for producing children, rearing them and maintaining household work from dawn to dusk. They were prohibited from learning because a belief was that attainment of knowledge would be ‘unbecoming for the modesty of women.’<sup>1</sup> They were cobwebbed with a number of superstitions and social norms.

It was a part of their chore to collect forest products and sell it in the daily markets, rear cattle and do agricultural as well as manual work as labourers for the upkeep of their families. They played an important role in the tribal economy. On the other hand, the Dalit women were doing small scale business and manual work to assist their families. Besides these compulsions, what used to mar their lives were social evils like infanticide, child marriage, widowhood and the practice of polygamy in the tribal society.

In this critical situation of women of this area, the Breklum Mission of Germany came to Koraput and raised a ray of hope for them. It took some bold steps to break the traditional barriers. A new age was heralded in the face of the so-called ‘Dark Age.’

### **Breklum Mission**

The formation of Breklum Mission on 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1876 C.E. was the brain child of the Rev. Christian Jensen, a pious priest of Breklum in the Northern part of West Germany.<sup>2</sup> To produce missionaries, he set up a Home Mission known as ‘Breklum Mission Seminary’ on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1877 C.E. He made the workers of the mission well-versed in the Biblical gospels and the words of Christ so that these prospective missionaries would send forth “Christianity across the dark world where enlightenment had never cast its ray.”<sup>3</sup> Rev. Ernst Pohl and Rev. Harmann Bothmann were the pioneer missionaries in Koraput. Education for the women and children was the basic aim of this mission.

### **Mission’s manuring at the root**

It was a well-proven realization of the Mission that sans progress in the field of education other developments were impossible. Hence, it took up the work from the point where it was needed to be started. The mission decided to impart both Biblical knowledge, general education and religious knowledge to women to make them fit for society and development of their mental and spiritual life since the Mission realized that the nation’s development was closely associated with the educational development of its women folk and the Gospel of God would not reach their houses otherwise.

Women are an integral part of society and they have also equally contributed to promote social harmony. What the Mission first did was to provide education to the Christian women. Care was taken to make them efficient in the skill of reading and writing by teaching them the Bible. The wife of Johannes Timm, for example, taught biblical stories to women as early as 1893 C.E.<sup>4</sup>

The women folk found it comfortable to be taught by the wives of Rev. Timm and Rev. Gloyer. The seminary took it to be its self-vested responsibility to provide special training for those women who were found competent in reading and writing so that they could make them teachers in ministry.

Indeed, Rev. Gloyer was looking for some women who could be imparted training and would help in preaching the Gospel. Secondly, the missionaries in Koraput apprised the authorities of the Breklum Mission of the need for a deaconess in the Jeypore Estate. So, two batches of missionaries, two members in each, were sent to Koraput in 1905 and 1909 respectively, to monitor and accelerate the mission. One of the deaconesses was in charge of the Christian hospital and another was in charge of the girls' boarding school and training of women in the Bible. The third looked after the work among women in the villages. The three were stationed at Kotpad. The fourth took up *zenana* work in the town of Jeypore.<sup>5</sup>

The wives of missionaries took interest to provide education to the non-Christian women because the missionaries were denied access to these women. For example, orthodoxy being an inseparable part of life, the non-Christian women had no scope of going outside their houses. Therefore, special training was given to the Christian women so that they could interact effectively with these women. Knowledge in theology was given to the wives of seminary students.

Mrs. Speck (wife of Rev. Siem Speck (1903-1913), who knew Odia was a nice choice as a teacher for the native learners, whereas Mrs. Gloyer (wife of Rev. Ernst Gloyer (1888-1916) was in charge of instructing the wives of the missionaries who were joining camps for the purpose. These missionaries used to preach to men while their wives preached to women. This type of togetherness was highly instrumental in making the gospel popular among the people. Mrs. Leuckfeld was always with her husband during his camp and was teaching women.<sup>6</sup>

Women missionaries were stationed in the town areas and that used to help the deaconess who was in charge of it. They used to visit non-Christian women and preach the gospel. Rev. W. Ahrens' sister was always in touch with the Muslim women whom she taught the gospel. So, many non-Christian families were converted to Christianity through this personal contact. Subsequently, the mission decided to introduce

education for the women of this region. Therefore, it took a number of steps to impart education to them mainly to read, write and listen. Thus, the mission was started.

### **I. Establishment of Girls Schools**

There was neither any school for girls nor were they allowed to join any co-educational system. After 1871 C.E., a remarkable change and development in education that occurred in Southern Odisha was insight. Up to the year 1873-74 C.E., there were no girls receiving education in this district<sup>7</sup>. So, Breklum Mission took praiseworthy initiatives in this regard and established schools for the girls in this region.

### **II. Establishment of Co - Boarding Homes**

Boarding homes or orphanages were the prime centres for educational activities. The mission started boarding homes in all its mission stations from the very beginning. It established boarding homes both for the boys and the girls and for providing free lodging and education to the orphans, destitutes, hopeless and helpless students. Besides that, students from rural areas, who had no facility to study in a primary or higher elementary school, were also kept in the boarding with a minimum boarding fee. The main authority of the Boarding Home generally was the local missionary who had the power to keep the inmates in the boarding home. The inmates of the boarding home had to follow the rules of the boarding. The parents of the inmates had to pay eight annas (0.50 rupees) towards the boarding fee per month. For the very poor inmates, the Church had to pay fees to the boarding authority. If a student was studying in a higher elementary school or in a high school and failed in any class due to laziness, her parents had to pay more money towards her boarding fee.

Some of the notable boarding homes were<sup>8</sup>:

1. Koraput Boarding Home in 1888 C.E., starting with one boy but the number suddenly increased to 58 boys and 27 girls. Mrs. Timmcke was house mother in this boarding home from 1899 C.E. to 1914 C.E.

2. Kotpad Boarding Home (both for boys and girls) in 1891 C.E. with 7 children and it increased to 13 children in 1896 - 97 C.E. This was called 'Boarding and Care School.'
3. Doliambo Boarding Home (boys and girls)
4. Laxmipur Boarding Home (boys and girls)

So, Breklum Mission was the forerunner of co-education in this isolated district before independence. Boarding homes came into existence because of two primary reasons. Orphans were accommodated there and the children in rural areas got opportunity to get education where there were no educational opportunities for the girl students in particular.

The students were imparted secular education, spiritual guidance and also vocational training in these boarding homes. They were also overcoming the caste differentiation by staying and eating together. Nevertheless, many boarding orphan girls got married to many well-educated, converted Christians. Above all, the mission provided stipend to aspirant girls for higher education.

### **III. Establishment of Day Boarding homes**

Besides boarding homes, the mission was running the Day Boarding in all small stations and in mission villages. In those times, boarding homes were like the mid-day meal schemes of present day, which supported the nutrition of the children as well as encouraged school attendance. In India, these were called boarding homes but in the Breklum mission reports, (in German language) these were called '*Kosthauser*'.

### **IV. Theological Seminary- A spiritual institution for imparting religious knowledge to women**

The first step taken by the Mission was to educate Christian women. Those who were qualified to read and write were given special training in the theological seminary for the future ministry of the Church. It was



established at Kotpad in 1896 C.E. to disseminate spiritual knowledge to both men and women. The wives of the seminary students were also trained theologically. Mrs. Speck was young and experienced in Odia language to teach the wives of the seminary students.

#### **V. Zenana system - A new method to educate upper caste women**

The mission introduced an innovative system known as *Zenana* or *Senana* system for women confined to their homes. Informal training was given to the middle and upper class women in the art of home management as the missionaries had less opportunity to talk directly to the women during their preaching time and the non-Christian women were always inside their homes. Special training was given to Christian women to approach the non-Christian women. Despite that, the mission engaged one of the deaconesses to take up *zenana* work in the town of Jeypore. Some wives of missionaries were made to assist the deaconess.

A door-to-door approach was used. The outcome was outstanding. The sister of Rev. W. Ahrens had become popular among the Muslim women. She could talk to them about Christ and his teachings. Consequently, many non-Christian women were brought into the Christian fold. Sunday schools were also organized to provide education to adults and house wives. Lady missionaries took the onus to spread literacy among the rural uneducated women and non-Christian women in this system.

#### **VI. Establishment of Girls Hostels**

A hostel for girls was started by Mrs. Timm in 1901 C.E. at Kotpad with 16 girls. In 1904 C.E. a girls' school was built just outside the hostel campus. There were 100 girls in 1906 C.E. and 125 girls in 1913 C.E.<sup>9</sup> A primary school for the girls was established at Kotpad and the Girls' Upper School at Kotpad was upgraded to a Middle English School. The table below shows the number of girls attending school in this area from 1932 C.E. to 1937 C.E.<sup>10</sup> A new school building was built in 1927 C.E., with the help of 104 girl students.

Year	No. of Students
1932	367
1933	533
1934	441
1937	353

This large percentage of girls' attendance increased because of the establishment Girls' boarding homes and the Girls' school at Kotpad. It was by dint of work of the American missionary, Agatha Tatge that female education touched a new height at Kotpad. This enabled the two deaconesses, Otty Jessen and Mathilde Jespersen to take up the work abandoned by Agathe. However, these two deaconesses had to leave India following their incompatibility with the missionaries. Thereafter, R. Speck took over the charge of this school. After the two deaconesses had left India on account of differences of opinion with the missionaries and the Mission Boards, the station missionaries Rev. Gloyer, Rev. Meyer and Rev. R. Speck took the responsibility of this school.

### **Bible class for women**

Regular Bible teaching under the seminary was introduced among the girls. The wives of Rev. Timm and Rev. Gloyer taught some girls and women in their respective places. The wife of Johannes Timm, for example, used to relate Bible stories to women as early as 1893 C.E. The women were found to be very interested to learn from the missionaries.

Furthermore, the mission introduced a Bible women's class by 1954 C.E., and ten women were admitted into the seminary. Each of them was given rupees seventeen as stipend.<sup>11</sup> It was for the first time that the seminary trained full time 'Bible women.' Of course, short courses' training was given to some interested women at different times. To instruct the Bible women, 'Danish Mission Society' was requested to send a lady missionary. During their training period, as Tauscher writes, they had to go to preaching camps in the villages. After completion of the

Bible women training, they were deputed to the Deanery headquarters where they organized women's fellowship groups, taught Sunday school girls, and visiting the parish centre to instruct women.<sup>12</sup> Even today, in every Deanery, there is a Bible woman working actively among Christian and non-Christian women.

### **Role of Church Council and Synod for the development of Women's education**

Church Councils and the Synod prepared women to make them serve the Ministry of Church in future. It was realized that women were the only means to approach the non-Christian women. Therefore, much attention was given to the development of women not only educationally but also spiritually. The following decisions were taken in the Synod in 1942 C.E.<sup>13</sup>: More girls were sent to the boarding homes. During confirmation class, young girls were properly acquainted with the details of the Bible. Care was taken for the proper training of the wives of workers.

Before marriage, the daughters of the workers were given proper instructions in the main pastoral stations. The newly married couple were encouraged with the gift of Bible and hymnal books. In each Deanery and Parish centre, a women's association was formed (SIC). Till 1947 C.E. no women had been a member of any of the congregational councils. So, the Kotpad Panchyat suggested that two women would be selected as representatives of the Synod. Since then, women have been representing Synod.

### **Establishment of Women Fellowship Groups**

Women fellowship groups also visited nearby villages to preach the Gospel and along with that, they gave special instructions on hygiene, childcare and nutrition. Finally, it came to a stage that instructing women became a priority and importance was given to it in the congregation. It was decided in the Church Council that wives of gurus and pastors should teach the women of their respective villages.

### **Steps for Intellectual Growth and Women's Freedom**

The objective of the Mission was to make them sensible, moral, industrious and pious young women. It aimed to make them good wives for the native Christians. So, it introduced such measures for them. Women leadership training was organized for the wives of pastors and evangelists. Bible women were produced in the seminary and deployed for evangelistic work among the women. Girls were taught housewifely skills such as, sewing, knitting, basket making and spinning for earning their livelihood. Church Council also decided to involve women in the election process of Synod and other missionary activities.

### **Bissam Cuttack Christian Hospital introduced training courses for women**

Christian Hospital of Bissam Cuttack started a school of Nursing, under the leadership of Mrs. Nancy Henry. It launched two years ANM training and three years of GNM training programme. It was meant to train nurses for CHB itself. This training was mostly given on subsidy and concession basis. Each year, 10 ANM and 20 GNM took admission and had to pay a minimum price (7-8 thousand only). After passing the course, they had to serve the institution for two years on a stipend basis and thereafter, they got regular appointment. The hospital provided training, boarding and lodging free of cost to girls from poor families.<sup>14</sup>

### **Conclusion**

True development is always holistic in nature. Learned and farsighted as the missionaries were, they planned for all-round development of the tribal women and children. Mere financial support would not have brought about change in them. Therefore, they first spotted all the weak areas and then took action to improve them. As a result, at present, many Christian women who are in services and outside of the Churches have an opportunity to study in mission schools. The Breklum Mission brought golden days to the women who had been grovelling in darkness. The mission pioneered the movement of women's education, which was a noble step. It was through education that the women of this area came to realize the importance of their position.

By initiating measures to enlighten the women, the Mission brought to the limelight, the issues of Indian women for public debate and discussion and thereby, facilitated a change in the indigenous attitude towards the status of women. It resulted in various reformist legislations and the beginning of a new movement for the emancipation of women. The women Christian missionaries used to visit the women of high caste and had comprehensive discussions regarding education, health and personal development. Following the Mission's initiative, a number of Christian women since are associated with religious and social activities in the capacity of pastors, preachers, secretary of women's associations. They mark their presence in social work and eradication of HIV/AIDS and female awareness programmes. Presently, they have organized a Women Desk at Jeypore, Central Office to address various problems related to women. Christian widows' Ashram was also established to care for (*achhyut*) ladies who were neglected by their respective families.

In 1909 C.E., the Deaconess Hermine Knuth came to Jeypore and took care of the 'Outcastes Asylum.' She treated patients in her home and visited many houses and taught women of high castes. In the changing scenario, they are no more considered inferior to men. They participate in every socio-political, cultural and religious activity of society and are able to manage themselves without depending upon the male members, either in the family or outside the family.

## References

1. Padhi, B.C., (1992). *Socio-Economic Conditions of Tribals under the British Rule (1803-1936)*, Punthi Pustak, Kolkata, p.166.
2. Samantroy, N., (1964). *History of Odia Literature (1803-1920)*, (Odia) Jagannath Rath publication, Bhubaneswar, pp.45- 47.
3. Das, Bhaskar, (1985). *Social and Economic life of South Orissa*, Punthi Pustak Cuttack, pp.155-157.
4. Timm, Jonathan, (1893). '*Ist Quartely Report*,' of Kotpad Church (Trans) by Anthon Asha, Jeypore, Koraput, p.12.
5. Tauscher, Rudlof, (1939). '*Schleswig Holstein Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society*', ISPCK, Kashmere Gate, Delhi, p.153.

6. Tauscher, Rudlof, (1935). '*Nutano ambado*' (New Message), Christian Mitra, Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Mission, Jeypore, Koraput, Third issue, p. 3.
7. Report of the Indian Education Commission, Vol.J. p.11 (A.S.O.B.77-T.N.A. Andhra Pradesh, 3rd Feb.1882, p.15.
8. Waack, Otto, (1997). '*Church and Mission in India, Vol-1, (1876-1914)*', ISPCK, Kashmere Gate, Delhi, pp.517 - 18.
9. Tauscher, (1939). *Op.Cit.*, p.153.
10. Waack, (1997). *Op.Cit.*, p.13.
11. Timm, (1893). *Op.Cit.*, p.8.
12. *Church Council, Kotpad, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session Resolution No.9 (3) 11<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> November, 1953, p.3.*
13. *Church Council, Nabarangpur, 5<sup>rd</sup> Session, Resolution No.36, 16<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> November, 1954, p.2.*
14. *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, Christian Hospital Bissam Cuttack, (1954-2004), Breklum Mission, Jeypore Koraput, p.14.



## INTERTWINED LEGACIES: A MUSEUM AND AN ART SCHOOL IN MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY MADRAS

**Ms. Vaishnavi Ramanathan**

Independent art historian and curator  
Vepery, Chennai

### Abstract

*This paper traces the intertwined legacy of art and science in mid-nineteenth century colonial India. Taking the case of a museum and an art college in the city of Madras, it analyses the manner in which the training of its founders (Edward Balfour and Alexander Hunter - Scottish surgeons) shaped the character of these institutions. The collective emphasis on art and science that emerged at the institutions was the result of a network of individuals and institutions whose values were centred in ideals of progress, knowledge and commerce, while also being inflected by the colonial environment. By studying the ways in which art and science shared a common space in the early history of the art college and museum in Madras, this paper brings to the fore, strands of the fluidity of boundaries between art and science in the mid-nineteenth century.*

**Keywords:** *Art, museum, art education, colonial history, Madras.*

## Introduction

This paper traces the formation and early history of a museum and an art college in colonial Madras and tries to understand how a shared concern for arts, science and industry, that predominated thinking in mid-nineteenth century Britain also shaped the establishment of these two institutions. The primary mission of museums in colonial India was to document and, classify and thereby to harness, the vast resources of the land, now ruled over by the British and also to educate their ‘native’ subjects in the forms of knowledge in which they were presumed to be ignorant. Given the importance of the museum to the colonial agenda, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, public museums began to emerge in cities such as Madras, Calcutta and Bombay.

Contemporary with the emergence of public museums, art schools also began to emerge in the subcontinent: first in Madras in 1850, followed by Calcutta, Bombay and Lahore. Their creation was yet another colonial tool for disciplining the hand and the mind. Art schools, from their inception were caught between potentially conflicted aims - to elevate the taste of the people by introducing the fine arts, and at the same time, to improve the industrial arts of the country.<sup>1</sup>

In this uneven terrain of art pedagogy in the subcontinent, museums had an important role to play by acting as repositories of the best examples of Indian arts and craft that would serve as points of reference for students and artisans.<sup>2</sup> It was for this reason that museums in the subcontinent, which had until then focused on history and science, began to add the nation’s art to their collections.<sup>3</sup>

In tracing the association between the museum and the art school, and the manner in which a certain kind of art entered the museum space, what is evidently missing is a deeper understanding of how the two worked alongside each other. Furthermore, while diverse aspects, including prevalent ideas of science, contributed to the character of art education in countries such as Britain in the nineteenth century, boundaries between disciplines have discouraged scholars from recognizing this.<sup>4</sup>



Drawing from this point, the intention of this paper is to bring forth unexplored links - between the colonial museum and the art school, using the example of the Madras School of Arts (MSA) and Government Central Museum (GCM) Madras, and between the evolving disciplines of art and science at these institutions.<sup>5</sup> Through this, the present paper: (1) creates a fuller picture of the manner in which a momentum to improve arts, science and industry emerged across contemporary institutions (2) brings to the fore the network between institutions and individuals that shaped these ideas and gave impetus to them.

The paper addresses a further lacuna. Studies on Indian art schools have largely ignored the manner in which individual art administrators and artists reacted to the colonial art education system.<sup>6</sup> This study, therefore engages with institutional history taking cognizance of the individuals who played key roles in their establishment- in this case, Edward Balfour and Alexander Hunter, who were both medical men and served as the first Superintendents of the GCM and the MSA, respectively.

### **The Context**

Edward Green Balfour (1813-1889) was a Scottish surgeon who arrived in India in 1834, and by 1871 had risen to the position of Surgeon General in the Madras Medical Department. In Madras, his role went beyond the practice of medicine. He served as the agent to the Court of the Nawab of the Carnatic, was instrumental in setting up the Madras Muhammadan Library, established museums in Madras and Bangalore, and published extensively.<sup>7</sup> He was also secretary of the Central Committee in Madras to procure objects for the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. Three years younger than Balfour, Alexander Hunter (1816-1890) was also from Scotland. While he initially wanted to pursue a career in art, he eventually opted to become a surgeon, since he felt it would allow him to maintain some connection with the arts.<sup>8</sup> He obtained an MD from Edinburgh University, while also studying at the Schools of Design in Edinburgh and Paris. He arrived first in Bengal, and in 1843, in Madras.<sup>9</sup> It was while working as Zillah Surgeon at Chinglepet, that he

initiated a project for prisoners to make bricks and pottery. The success of this venture and the possibility of furthering it led him to set up the School of Arts on 1 May 1850. In his own opinion, it was his training in medicine that had prepared him for this venture as the variety of subjects medical men had to study qualified them to give ‘sound opinions on many subjects.’<sup>10</sup> Apart from their training, the times in which Balfour and Hunter lived were also conducive to their embarking on such projects. The post-Enlightenment context of the nineteenth century was one where an individual was expected to have some knowledge of varied fields. Edinburgh, in particular, where both Balfour and Hunter studied, was renowned as a centre of intellectual activity with many learned societies dedicated to medicine, arts, law, archaeology, botany etc.

Learned societies, in their quest to disseminate knowledge, frequently established museums through which people could gain knowledge in an empirical manner.<sup>11</sup> This was a pattern than was repeated in India also. Hunter was part of the culture of societies and museums, both in Edinburgh and Madras. Similarly, Balfour was associated with the Madras Literary Society (MLS), the preeminent, learned society in Madras, which played a crucial role in establishing the GCM. One can also contextualise Hunter’s and Balfour’s work within the developments in Victorian society. In the light of the Industrial Revolution that contributed so much to the prosperity and power of the country, there was a general reverence for science. Prince Albert wrote:

Science discovers these laws of power, motion, and transformation: Industry applies them to the raw matter, which the earth yields us in abundance. Art teaches us the immutable laws of beauty and symmetry, and gives to our productions forms in accordance with them.<sup>12</sup>

This thought process, which significantly impacted education and museum making in Britain, was also to have ramifications in India. The fact that both Hunter and Balfour were from Scotland, where the nature of education and intellectual pursuits had a decided focus on improving industry also influenced the nature of their work with MSA and the GCM.<sup>13</sup>

### **Knowledge and its Uses**

In Madras, efforts to set up the museum preceded Balfour's arrival. The MLS suggested that setting up a museum would facilitate scientific inquiry, aid commerce and improve the poor economic situation in the Presidency by developing non-agricultural resources.<sup>14</sup> These efforts finally attained fruition in 1851. The GCM opened in the upper part of the College of Fort St. George with its collections comprising rocks and minerals from the MLS as well as duplicates of objects sent from Madras for the Great Exhibition.<sup>15</sup>

The first museum in India that received the support of the government, the GCM owed much to Edward Balfour, who was then chairman of the Committee of the MLS and volunteered his services to run the institution, serving as the officer-in-charge until 1859. While working on an honorary basis in the initial years, from mid-1855 he began to draw a salary of Rs 100 per month.<sup>16</sup> At the time of its formation, the GCM consisted of a Museum of Natural History and a Museum of Practical or Economic Geology. The latter was aimed at creating a demand for agricultural products and art manufactures of the region, at identifying new raw materials that could be used in the arts, and at illustrating the application of science to the arts.<sup>17</sup> In 1855, a zoological garden was also added to the GCM.

The Government Central Museum at Madras, as the name suggests, was conceived as a central repository of knowledge intended to function as part of a network of museums in the region. Its main role was to collect and transmit knowledge between the centre and the provinces, between the colony and the metropole, and also between Europeans and the natives. The manner in which the knowledge so accumulated in museums was used made the colonial museum waver between 'economic and social enlightenment ideals'.<sup>18</sup> For example, in GCM proudly noted its work in providing information on native materials that could be put to varied uses.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the museum's agenda also went beyond this framework as there were also specimens from places

outside India, apparently displayed with an educational purpose in mind. However, in a world where knowledge helped gain economic, social and intellectual mobility, it did not take long for knowledge to become useful in one way or another.

A case in point is the department of Geographical Geology in which the objects ‘irrespective of their economic relations, serve to illustrate the various branches of Natural History’.<sup>20</sup> Here, Balfour sought to create a comprehensive collection of the minerals and rocks from the various districts of the Madras Presidency and arrange them geographically by location.

In 1853, Balfour wrote to the government that duplicates from this department could be used to form a similar department for specimens from the Madras Presidency within the Museum at the India House, London. In the light of the railways and other large-scale engineering projects then under construction in British India, such a collection would allow decision makers in London to know if suitable materials were available in India.<sup>21</sup>

### **Art and Science at the Museum**

Given that the GCM was accountable to a range of stakeholders, its evolution was anything but cohesive. Invariably, despite the claims of creating a systematic knowledge base about the country, museums, as they actually emerged in colonial India, were in no way encyclopaedic.<sup>22</sup> Instead, the nascent institution of the Indian museum often consisted of a medley of items reflecting the interests of various groups associated with it. In Madras, while Balfour wanted to create a museum that would do justice to the country’s scale and diversity the reality was quite different.<sup>23</sup>

Balfour’s reports submitted to the government highlight the varied pace at which the different departments within the museum evolved. The rapid growth of the collection coupled with the museum’s popularity meant priorities had to be set. In terms of naming and display, the Museum

of Natural History was prioritized over other sections. In addition to the fact that natural history constituted the bulk of the museum's collection, this was also because natural history was considered an area in which Indians lacked knowledge, and hence was an educational priority. The focus on natural history was not unique to Madras but was a feature common to the early museums in the subcontinent.<sup>24</sup>

Also at play here is the question of the museum's evolution as an institution. In the West, museums evolved from 'cabinets of curiosity' composed of varied man-made and natural items. However, from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century objects were separately displayed along disciplinary lines aligned with either art or science. Ways of thinking about natural science influenced the presentation of art objects in museums.<sup>25</sup>

Science thus came to dominate the physical and intellectual atmosphere of museums. Furthermore, in the second half of the nineteenth century, museums in Europe and in the colonies, played the leading role in the production of scientific knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Seen from this angle, one can understand both the priority given to natural science in the GCM and the fact that men of science, such as Balfour, George Bidie and Edgar Thurston, were at its helm. So where did 'art' fit into this scheme of things?

Balfour writes that 'works of Art in the Museum are, as yet, few, and these for the most part consist of a collection of ancient sculptures in marble and granite'.<sup>27</sup> That objects of antiquity were not a priority in the early days of the GCM was the norm for colonial museums, where objects of economic value were given priority.<sup>28</sup> The 'arts' then included subcategories including the 'decorative arts', 'ornamental arts' and 'art manufactures', as well as its use as a general term. At the GCM, such classes of objects formed part of the Museum of Economic Geology, where objects were displayed that would 'keep the people of this country acquainted with the Raw products of the world and with the progress of the Arts amongst this and in other nations.'<sup>29</sup>

While it is not possible to know the exact contents of the Museum of Economic Geology, records show that the museum had in one room, a 'great number of curious and interesting objects illustrative of the manufactures, manners, customs, and religions of various peoples, chiefly Asiatic'. Referred to as the 'Ethnological room', this also contained ethnological heads acquired from the Schlagintweit brothers of Germany.<sup>30</sup> Comprising a large number of plaster or copper heads, hands and feet, these represented the various peoples of South and Central Asia. The nature of the casts, aided by the entrepreneurship of the brothers, helped the items find a place in museum collections across the world. In Madras, the MLS recommended the purchase of the heads noting that despite its value the cost of the entire set was 'very moderate', estimated at not more than 2000 rupees.<sup>31</sup> This amount was by no means small, given that the yearly expenditure for the museum at the time was around 10,000 rupees. The fact that the Government paid for the set, despite its price, is illuminating. It shows the value placed on ethnography as a tool necessary to the colonial enterprise.

Even as the casts arrived in Madras in batches, it was possible for Balfour's successor, Mitchell, to arrange only some of them since beginning in 1859, the museum was undergoing renovation. After the renovations were completed in the following year, the set was placed in the 'Ethnological room', together with models and machinery that had been ordered from England.<sup>32</sup> One could say that while engaging in the project of ordering the world through exercises of collection, classification and cataloguing, the museum, in its early years, functioned according to its own order constrained by space, the presence of officers who worked with the museum amidst their other tasks, and the ever-growing collection itself. The activity of collecting, which seemed an urgent necessity, especially in the earlier days, and the tasks of classifying and cataloguing, had to be balanced to ensure that the museum fulfilled its role efficiently. That this internal order was not satisfactory is evident from the changes that took place in the museum in the decades to come. This shift can be understood by tracing the fate of the models of machines that entered the museum collections.

### **Models of Machinery and Tools**

Models, in their architectural, scientific, ethnographic or artistic manifestation, had an important place in Victorian culture, which valued ideas of progress, innovation and learning through seeing. At the Great Exhibition of 1851 and at the Madras Exhibition of 1855 (in which Balfour and Hunter had organisational roles) various types of models were present.<sup>33</sup> Around the time of the Madras Exhibition, Balfour requested to purchase models and machinery of various kinds to create a model room in the museum. Having remitted a sum of 120 pounds to England, both Balfour and Mitchell eagerly awaited the arrival of these items.<sup>34</sup> A total of seventy items, consisting of agricultural and other implements, and models, finally arrived in 1861.<sup>35</sup> However, when Edgar Thurston became Superintendent in 1885, his first official act was to limit the museum to natural history, ethnology, archaeology, arts, manufactures and raw products of South India. Hence, the models from England, and those that had been subsequently collected were given to the College of Engineering.<sup>36</sup> A collection that was diverse thus became more streamlined. Does this indicate Balfour's lack of vision for the institution? It does not appear so. Archival records indicate the clear vision with which he had to create an institution that would be comprehensive in its collection, accessible to people in its approach and location, serve to educate and amuse people, and improve industry.

Within this agenda to improve industry, the models had an important place. Models were not just illustrative of technology but were also considered an important step in the engineering process. At the same time these were also not without appeal to the public. Audiences in Britain were enthralled by live demonstrations of machines at the exhibitions organized by the Mechanics' Institutes that emerged in the country.<sup>37</sup> While it is not possible to ascertain whether the models of machinery at the GCM were operated or not, it is possible to contextualize their display within the larger efforts to improve industry, which was considered a necessity in a country like India, where manufacturing was still time-consuming and labour intensive.

### **The Emphasis on Industry**

The urge to improve industry and to introduce education in matters related to production and manufacturing, was not solely the concern of the museum. The GCM, under Balfour, was part of a network of like-minded and energetic individuals leading other institutions in the city that were similarly involved in gathering knowledge and disseminating it through publications, exhibitions and museums. These activities, set against the backdrop of the Great Exhibition, in which these individuals were also involved, created a collective energy that sustained each individual as they embarked on their respective enterprises. Furthermore, these synergies also allowed institutions to envision a shared future.

In 1850, discussions were underway to bring together various societies (the Madras Polytechnic Institution, the MLS with its museum and the Agri-Horticultural Society) in one central and accessible site.<sup>38</sup> The MSA was also part of this network of institutions; Balfour was part of the working committee of the School, Hunter consistently donated objects to the GCM while also arguing for establishing museums of raw materials and manufactures in each presidency, with a school of industry attached to it.<sup>39</sup> Hunter also shared a close association with the Polytechnic where he delivered lectures and forwarded geological and pottery samples.

The Madras Polytechnic Institution is critical to understanding the collective momentum that propelled the formation of institutions such as the GCM and MSA. Founded in 1846, the Institution owed its origin to J.H. Kenrick who served as the Honorary Secretary. The Institution's aim was twofold: 'dissemination of Scientific Knowledge' and the 'improvement of the Arts and Manufactures of the country'.<sup>40</sup>

To fulfil these objectives, the Institution displayed scientific equipment and models at the museum in its premises, offered prizes for improved designs of utilitarian items and arranged lectures on topics that might practically help a worker in his field. While their success



in improving native manufactures was not palpable, the Polytechnic represents a significant moment in history. It shows that the activities of Balfour and Hunter did not take place in isolation, but were part of the larger efforts taking place in Madras towards improving industry, using local resources and in applying principles of science to the arts. Hunter was aware of this as he wrote of the several initiatives in Madras, including the Polytechnic, directed towards improving the manufactures, while attributing their failure to the absence of collective and well-directed effort.<sup>41</sup>

The Polytechnic is also relevant here for another reason. Modelled along the lines of British Mechanics' Institutes, it formed a link between activities in Madras, and in Britain and other parts of India. In the early nineteenth century, Mechanics' Institutes were important venues of education for the common man in Britain and served as the foundation for colleges of art and technology.<sup>42</sup>

In India, the British took efforts to form a Mechanics' Institute in Calcutta in the 1830s while similar initiatives emerged in other parts of the country too.<sup>43</sup> While not much is known about the Madras Polytechnic, it can be seen as a precursor to the MSA. It may not be too much to say that the success and failures of this institution-to improve native manufactures and industries, efficiently use resources, and apply scientific knowledge to manufacturing - served as an example for Hunter in his own ventures. It is therefore fitting that the Polytechnic served as the venue for a meeting held in February 1851 where it was decided to form a School of Industry connected to the School of Arts.<sup>44</sup>

Hunter considered establishing the School of Industry essential because he felt that there were not many avenues for an honest livelihood in Madras, thus leading to poverty. Prior to this, when Hunter was stationed in Chinglepet, he had begun experiments to develop pottery using the materials that were found in abundance in the Presidency. While the tools and methods of manufacture adopted by the local potters

were rudimentary, he found that labour was cheap and the potters were skilled at ornamentation. His learning from this venture made him realize the value of division of labour in the manufacturing process, the usage of mechanical appliances, and the value of mineralogical knowledge.<sup>45</sup>

When he later founded the School of Industry, the aim was therefore, to improve and refine the production of utilitarian objects so that items that were until then imported could be locally produced and to tap into the natural resources of the country.<sup>46</sup>

At the MSA, Hunter focused on identifying and developing local geological and botanical resources by going on excursions around Madras, establishing correspondence with the public to exchange information, and sharing his findings through the *Indian Journal of Arts, Sciences & Manufactures*, which he edited and largely wrote. At the School, instruction was provided in the manufacture of bricks, paving and roofing tiles, pottery, water-pipes, blacksmith's work, etc. The school, as it evolved, became an important centre of manufacture, where items, not available elsewhere could be procured.

The emphasis on manufacturing items with commercial value was a concern that was shared by art schools across India. The intention behind establishing art colleges was to improve Indian art forms and using it for manufacturing items adapted to British tastes that would find a ready market. In order to achieve these anticipated results, a suitable pedagogy was required, for which the authorities looked to Britain, which was then on a similar path to improve its design and art manufacture.

### **MSA and the Study of Nature**

In Britain, one of the steps taken in the direction of design reform was the introduction in 1852 of the National Course of Instruction, a curriculum of art instruction. By this date, Hunter had already established the MSA, composed of the School of Arts and School of Industry. The former was established in 1850, with the aim of 'improving the taste of

the native public as regards beauty of form and finish in the articles in daily use among them.<sup>47</sup> Here instruction was given in subjects such as practical geometry, free-hand drawing, machine and plan drawing, perspective and botanical drawing and flower painting.

The study of various forms of nature was an important aspect of the curriculum at MSA and helped students cater to the local demand for illustrations of natural history.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, nature, studied and transformed through principles of design, could also be a source for ornamental motifs and forms for art manufactures. As Hunter argued botanical forms had the most perfect forms in nature.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, some of the ceramics produced at the MSA incorporated designs inspired by particular plants. For Hunter, there was also a Christian dimension to such sources of inspiration.

The Arts . . . need no greater recommendation than this – they lead to the contemplation, first, of the objects of nature; then, to the discovery of her varied beauties; and from that, to the Bestower of them all, who gives the power to appreciate them.<sup>50</sup>

In Britain, at around the same, there was a rich cluster of ideas that connected art, design, science and nature. Inspired by German philosophers, including Goethe, there emerged a way of thinking in which nature was seen as a manifestation of eternal principles of beauty. Consequently, in the mid-nineteenth century, the stylized plant form came to be seen as the ideal of beauty. Furthermore, ‘art-botany’, or the study of plants for the sake of decoration, became an important aspect of mid-nineteenth century design teaching in London.<sup>51</sup> It was embraced by designers and artists of the time, including Richard Redgrave, who formulated the National Course of Instruction.<sup>52</sup> According to this philosophy, while nature, particularly botanical forms, had the power to inspire great design, the solution was not to imitate it blindly. Instead, it was felt that by studying nature closely, one could discover the underlying principles and thereby, arrive at designs that would indirectly, yet in essence truthfully, imitate nature.

It was precisely this aspect that was pointed out by Redgrave in 1854 when Hunter sent him samples of works produced at the MSA. Criticising the manner in which students were encouraged to produce designs from nature, Redgrave advocated that students should proceed to the stage of designing only after they had gained the skill to observe, execute, and acquire a thorough knowledge of the principles of design. He further argued that it was the absence of a systematic curriculum at the MSA that had resulted in false designs wherein naturalistic forms, unassimilated by the language of design, were used as motifs.<sup>53</sup> It was probably his recommendation for a defined course of instruction that resulted in the adoption of the National Course of Instruction at the MSA. However, rather than adopting the British system fully, Hunter adapted it for the Indian environment. Furthermore, since he played an advisory role in many art institutions, the MSA became the centre supplying drawing lessons, curriculum plans and teachers across India. In this way, the MSA played an important role in shaping the early years of art education in colonial India.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

The MSA and GCM were harbingers of a new visual and artistic culture to the subcontinent. Combining their endeavours with ideas of science, that was then at the forefront of thought, these institutions also ushered in urban modernity; in the 1860s, the MSA produced terracotta fountains and flower pots for the newly emerging urban civic spaces in Madras.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the idea of a public zoo which Balfour adopted from Europe was new to India. First introduced in Madras, this led to the emergence of the museum-zoo-garden complex that has been described as a key space of modernity in the late nineteenth century colonial Indian city.<sup>56</sup>

Through people friendly policies, Balfour worked to make the GCM a truly public institution. However, around fifty years after its founding, the GCM was criticised for being a 'college of corpses'.<sup>57</sup> By this time, the zoo had also moved out of the premises and the museum

was much changed in form and spirit. Similarly, Hunter's priorities at the MSA were also viewed critically in the later years. The 1923 prospectus of the institution claimed that it had been established when art in the West had been at its lowest ebb. The reason given for this was due to the passion of the time for scientific training, which led to a belief that everything - including art and design - could be 'analysed, classified and tabulated'. The prospectus continued that such a world-view had damaged the arts, and asserted that science and art were distinct.<sup>58</sup>

Such critical reflections of institutional priorities are inevitable over time. However, it is worth remembering that the MSA and GCM emerged at a historic moment when taxonomies of knowledge were not clearly demarcated. The fields of 'art' and 'science' overlapped and the activities of the two institutions manifested these intersections. Secondly, when Hunter and Balfour embarked on their endeavours they were working against the current, setting up institutions that were new to the country, trying to convince both the government as well as people of the merit of their ventures. Diligence, innovativeness, a spirit of enquiry and commerce coupled with a sense of humanity- characteristics that were instilled in them as a result of their medical profession as well as the times in which they lived, played an important role in laying the foundation for these two pioneering institutions.

## References

1. Mitter, Partha, (1994). *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India: 1850-1922 Occidental Orientations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.37.
2. Singh, Kavita (2009). 'Material Fantasy' in Gayatri Sinha (ed.), *Art and Visual Culture in India, 1857-2007*, Marg Publications. pp. 40-57.
3. Thakurta, Tapati Guha, (2004). *Monuments, Objects, Histories Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India*, Columbia University Press, New York. p.50.
4. Dohmen, Renate, (2020). 'Art Industry and the Laws of Nature: the

- South Kensington Method Revisited', *Open Arts Journal*, Issue 9, pp.23-42. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2020w03>. Accessed 22 April 2022.
5. This paper follows Deepali Dewan's doctoral thesis that refers to the art institution founded by Alexander Hunter as the "Madras School of Arts" rather than by the other names that it was known by throughout its history. Dewan, Deepali, *Crafting knowledge and knowledge of crafts: Art education, colonialism and the Madras School of Arts in nineteenth-century South Asia*, 2001, PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minnesota. At present, the MSA and GCM are referred to as Government College of Fine Arts and the Government Museum, Chennai respectively.
  6. Kantawala, Ami, (2012). 'Art Education in Colonial India: Implementation and Imposition', *Studies in Art Education*, Vol.53 Number 3. pp.208–22. *Jstor*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24467910>, 210. Accessed 22 April 2022.
  7. Anwar, S., (2010). 'The Balfour contribution to Muhammadan Modernism', *Madras Musings*, Vol. 19 Number 23; Raman, A., (2014). "'Edward Green Balfour (1813-1889) and his Contributions to Indian Agriculture and Forestry', *Current Science*, Vol.106 - Number 11, Bangalore. pp.1594-1600.
  8. 'Impulse to Industry in India', *Spectator*, London, 29 January 1859. <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/29th-january-1859/13/impulse-to-industry-in-india>. Accessed 22 March 2024.
  9. Noltie, H.J., (2017). *The Cleghorn Collection: South Indian Botanical Drawings 1845-1860*, Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, p.153.
  10. Hunter, Alexander (1850). 'Answers to the Correspondents', *Indian Journal of Art, Science and Manufacture* (hereinafter IJASM), Vol.1, Number 1, Madras. pp. 86-91 at 91.
  11. Hume, A., (1847). *The Learned Societies and Printing Clubs of the United Kingdom*, G. Willis, London. p.13.
  12. Timbs, John, (1851). *The Year-Book of Facts in the Great Exhibition of 1851: Its Origin and Progress, Constructive Details*

- of the Building, the most Remarkable Articles and Objects Exhibited, etc.*, David Bogue, London. pp.20-21.
13. See Yanni, Carla, (2005). *Nature's Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York. p.92.
  14. Aiyappan, A., (1951). 'Hundred Years of the Madras Government Museum (1851-1951)', *Madras Government Museum Centenary Souvenir (1851 - 1951)*, Principal Commissioner of Museums, Government Museum, Chennai. pp. 1-58 at 2.
  15. For details on how the museum was formed see Nair, Savithri Preetha (2007). 'Economic Logic versus Enlightenment Rationality- Evolution of the museum-zoo-garden complex and the modern Indian city, 1843-1900' in Suzanne MacLeod and Sheila Watson (ed.), *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed*, Routledge, Oxon. pp.61-71.
  16. 'Report of the Government Central Museum' (1859). *Madras Administration Report 1858-59*, Government Press, Madras. p.1.
  17. Balfour, Edward, (1853). *Reports on the Government Central Museum, Madras*. Fort St. George Gazette Press, Madras. p.10.
  18. Nair, Savithri Preetha, (2012). 'Edgar Thurston at the Madras Museum (1885-1909): The Multiple Careers of a Colonial Museum Curator' in Sarah Longair and John McAleer (ed.), *Curating empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience*, Manchester University Press, Manchester. pp. 168-87 at 168.
  19. Balfour, Edward, (1855). *Reports on the Government Central Museum, Madras and on the Government Museums at Bellary, Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Mangalore, Ootacamund, Rajahmundry, Asylum Press, Madras*. p.27.
  20. *Ibid.*, p.12.
  21. 'Report on the Government Central Museum' (1854). *Records of the Madras Government*, Fort St. George Gazette Press, Madras. p. 45-46.
  22. Singh, (2009). *Op.cit.*, p.43.
  23. Aiyappan, A., (1951). *Op.cit.*, p.9.

24. Thakurta, (2004). *Op.cit.*, p.47.
25. Singh, Kavita. (2003). 'Museums and the Making of the Indian Art Historical Canon' in Shivaji K. Panikkar et al (ed.), *Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art*, DK Print World, New Delhi. pp. 333-57 and 334-335.
26. Nair, (2012). *Op.cit.*, p.168.
27. Balfour, (1853). *Op.cit.*, 17.
28. Singh, (2009). *Op.cit.*, p.46.
29. Balfour, (1855). *Reports on the Government Central Museum, Madras and on the Government Museums at Bellary, Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Mangalore, Ootacamund, Rajahmundry*. Madras, Asylum Press, Madras. p. 15.
30. *Administration of the Madras Presidency during the year 1860-61*, (1861). Fort St. George Press, Madras.p.160.
31. 'Proceedings of Scientific Societies', *The Madras Journal of Literature and Science* (hereinafter MJLS), Vol. 4, Number 7 New Series, (April-Sept 1858), Madras. p.154.
32. *Administration of the Madras Presidency during the year 1860-61*, (1861). Fort St. George Press, Madras. pp. 159- 160.
33. *Madras Exhibition of Raw Products, Arts and Manufactures of Southern India, 1855: Reports by the Juries on the Subjects in the Thirty Classes into which the Exhibition was divided*, 1856, Athenaeum Press, Madras. p.80.
34. *Administration Reports of the Madras Presidency for the official year 1859-1860*. 1860, Madras, 57; *Madras Administration Report 1858-59*, *Op.cit.*, pp. 5-6.
35. *Report on the Administration of Madras Presidency, During the year 1861-62*, (1862). Fort St. George Gazette Press, Madras. p.178.
36. Aiyappan, (1951). *Op.cit.*, pp. 29-30.
37. Dohmen, (2020). *Op.Cit.*, pp. 29-30.
38. (January- June 1850), 'Proceedings of the Mad. Lit. Society and Auxiliary Royal Asiatic Society', *MJLS*, Vol.16, Number 37, Madras. pp.267-268.



39. Hunter, Alexander, (1850). 'Appeal to the Public', *IJASM Part 1*, Madras. p.289, Similarly, the catalogue of the Great Exhibition also notes that a Museum of Economic Geology had been set up attached to the School of Industrial Arts. *Second Report of Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851 to the Right Hon. Spencer Horatio Walpole, &c.&c., one of Her Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State*, 1852, W. Clowes and Sons, London.p.11.
40. *First annual report of the Directors of the Madras Polytechnic Institute, established 1st Oct., 1846*, 1847, J. Wright, Madras. p.6.
41. Hunter, Alexander (1850). 'Madras School of Industry', *IJASM Part 1*, Madras. 555.
42. Dohmen, (2020). *Op.cit.*,pp. 28-29.
43. Mitter, (1994). *Op.cit.*, pp. 30-31.
44. 'Madras School of Industry', *Op.cit.*, pp.555-557.
45. Hunter, Alexander, (1850). 'On the Improvements which have been made in the Pottery of India, showing the Results of a Series of Experiments tried at Chingleput', *IJASM*, Vol.1 Number 2, Madras. pp. 93-103.
46. *Report on Public Instruction in the Madras Presidency for 1854-55*, (1855). Fort Saint George Gazette Press, Madras, p.45.
47. *Papers relating to Maintenance of Schools of Art in India as State Institutions*, (1898). Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta. p.62.
48. Dewan, (2001). *Op.cit.*, p.56; Hunter, Alexander, (1850). 'Extempore Address', *IJASM*, Part 1, Madras. 282-283.
49. Hunter, Alexander, (1850). 'On Modelling Foliage, Ornaments, Figures, and Animals from Nature', *IJASM*, Part 1, Madras. p. 21.
50. Hunter, Alexander, (1850). 'Introduction', *IJASM, Part 1*, Madras. p.3.
51. Keyser, Barbara Whitney, (1998). 'Ornament as Idea: Indirect Imitation of Nature in the Design Reform Movement', *Journal of Design History*, Vol.11 Number 2, Oxford. pp. 127-144 at 127-128, JSTOR.

52. Brett, David, (1995). 'Design Reform and the Laws of Nature', *Design Issues*, Vol.11 Number 3, Cambridge, MA. pp. 37-49 at p.39, JSTOR.
53. *Madras School of Industrial Art, Mr. Redgrave's Report*, Report, India Office Records, IOR/L/PJ/1/95 : 1853-1859.
54. Dewan, (2001). *Op.cit.*, p 82-89.
55. *Ibid.* p.49.
56. Nair, (2007). *Op.cit.*, pp.62-65.
57. Sreenivasa Iyengar, P.T., (1907). *The Madras Educational Exhibition 1907: A Paper on School Museums*, Dowden & Co, Madras. p.3.
58. *School of Arts and Crafts Madras: Prospectus*, 1923, Government Press, Madras. pp. 24-25.



## AWAKENING PEASANTRY AND THE ROLE OF THE EARLY NATIONALIST ASSOCIATIONS IN TAMIL NADU

**Dr. R. Kuppan**

Associate Professor

Department of History, Government Arts College, (Autonomous)  
Nandanam, Chennai.

### Abstract

*The economic policies implemented during the colonial period, along with the burdensome land revenue system and forest regulations, significantly altered the agrarian framework and led to the impoverishment of the ryots. This situation gradually fostered a sense of discontent among the ryots towards the colonial administration. They began to voice their opposition to the British agrarian policies, which they perceived as the fundamental cause of their hardships. The main focus of the paper is to show the peasants' dissent against colonial policies manifested in various forms, one of which was the traditional and discreet method of submitting petitions to colonial officials, outlining their grievances and seeking remedies.*

**Keywords:** *Peasants – Exploitation – Land tax - Chengalpet District – Madras Mahajana Shaba - Ryotwari System – Indian National Congress – Swadeshi Movement - Home Rule Movement.*

The term 'ryot' designated all peasants to Thomas Munro who introduced the Ryotwari settlement in Tamil region.<sup>1</sup> Numerous petitions were previously submitted by ryots across various regions of Tamil Nadu; however, the petition presented by the peasants of Chengleput in 1854 was the most significant. This petition represented a collective initiative by a group of ryots from the Chengleput District and Madras. It vividly highlighted the dire economic circumstances faced by the peasantry as well as other social groups such as weavers and artisans, under colonial rule. The petition's tone was assertive, directly attributing the myriad problems to the government's actions.

In addressing the plight of the ryots, the petition asserted that the British government inflicted considerable harm on Indian agriculture. The petition also condemned the government's neglect in constructing essential infrastructure such as roads and canals, as well as the imposition of a twelve percent interest rate on land tax arrears. In its conclusion, the petition implored the government to save and protect peasants from ruin and starvation.

An examination of the petition revealed that the ryots perceived colonial governance as the source of their difficulties and held the belief that the government had the capacity to address their issues. The petitions were presented by peasants from various parts of the Tamil region at different intervals. They primarily focused on economic grievances, including the excessive burden of land taxation, coercive revenue collection practices, oppressive forest policies, and the salt tax, among others, ultimately attempting to express their concerns without success. At the conclusion of the nineteenth century and the onset of the twentieth century, a comparable sense of discontent among peasants was often articulated through the press. The ryots sought the attention of the press to bring their sufferings and grievances to light. This aspect was significant, as it contributed to the widespread awareness of the challenges faced by the peasantry. Consequently, it enabled them to garner sympathy and support from various other social factions.

A different manifestation of peasant dissent involved the divestiture of their land, which constituted their sole means of livelihood. This transfer of land occurred throughout various regions of Tamil country. The oppressive burden of land taxation compelled many to consider abandoning agricultural pursuits. The government actively promoted the sale of land, resulting in thousands of peasants becoming landless labourers or relocating to different areas. A notable observation from a ryot regarding the agricultural profession was particularly striking. He stated that it would be preferable for the ryots to flee to tiger-infested jungles rather than endure the rule of such a tyrannical government.<sup>2</sup>

The transfer of land occurred across various regions of Tamil Nadu. Even minor tax arrears prompted ryots to sell their properties. For instance, the joint *pattadars* of Veeramangalam village in the Thanjavur District relinquished their entire land in 1900 due to an outstanding arrear amount of Rs. 18 (*rupees*) -11 (*anas*) -3 (*paisa*).<sup>3</sup> During the period from 1878 to 1883, the average annual number of registered land sales in the Madras Presidency was 50,259, which increased to 84,186 between 1883 and 1888. The average annual value of immovable property transactions in the Madras Presidency was Rs. 1,007 lakhs from 1878 to 1883, Rs. 1,089 lakhs from 1883 to 1888, and Rs. 1,399 lakhs from 1888 to 1893.<sup>4</sup> This situation illustrated a new form of silent protest, characterized by the ryots' abandonment of their agricultural occupations. This form of protest was neither organized nor premeditated. Rather, it was a response to the circumstances that compelled the ryots to take such a drastic action.<sup>5</sup>

An additional instance illustrating official harassment and the passive resistance of peasants was the 'Chengleput Scandal.' In 1881, Seethapathy Naidu, the *tahsildar* of Kanchipuram Taluk, ordered the confiscation of the land holdings of certain ryots in Vadagaput village due to their failure to pay land taxes. The ryots contended that they were still within the time frame to settle their arrears and asserted that the *tahsildar*'s actions stemmed from their refusal to pay him a bribe.<sup>6</sup>

Following the ryots' complaint, the government initiated an inquiry. The inquiry committee interviewed over 250 ryots but ultimately dismissed their allegations. Those ryots who did not comply with the summons to provide evidences were arrested and imprisoned. The outcome of the inquiry and the subsequent actions left the ryots disheartened.

In December 1881, they approached the newly appointed Governor, Grant Duff, to present their grievances regarding the entire situation. The Governor instructed the Board of Revenue to investigate further. The Board, not only upheld the findings of the previous inquiry but also sought severe penalties for the ryots who had allegedly made false accusations against the *tahsildar*. Legal actions were initiated against the ryots, including the village *munsif*, who had testified against the *tahsildar* during the inquiry. The village *munsif* was subsequently dismissed from his position, arrested, and sentenced to eighteen months of rigorous imprisonment.<sup>7</sup> The matter escalated significantly as the press and nationalist leaders condemned the handling of the situation. In January 1882, a group of six leaders, including G. Subramania Iyer, took action by establishing the 'Chengleput Ryots Relief Fund' to assist the Chengalput ryots with their legal expenses.<sup>8</sup> By March 1882, they had raised Rs. 900 through public contributions.<sup>9</sup>

In May 1882, the situation took a significant turn when the *tahsildar* initiated legal proceedings against B. Rangasamy, a ryot from Vadagaput village, accusing him of providing false testimony. Arthur F. Cox, the newly appointed sub-collector assigned to investigate the matter, meticulously examined the village records and questioned the *tahsildar*'s authority in seizing the ryots' holdings in 1881.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, Cox exonerated Rangasamy and prepared a report for the Board of Revenue, highlighting discrepancies in the village records and the *tahsildar*'s improper actions. However, prior to the report's submission, it mysteriously vanished, leading to widespread suspicion directed at the *tahsildar*.<sup>11</sup> When Cox opted to suspend Sitapati Naidu, the *tahsildar* fled, prompting the issuance of an arrest warrant.<sup>12</sup> The trial against the

*tahsildar* took place in July 1882, resulting in Sitapati Naidu receiving a sentence of two years of rigorous imprisonment on charges of stealing some incriminating official documents<sup>13</sup>, which was later commuted to one year by the High Court.<sup>14</sup> In May 1883, the government further reduced his sentence, granting him release from the remainder of his punishment. This case underscored the resilience of the ryots in their struggle against colonial administrative practices. Mullay, an ardent sub-collector of Chengalput, was cited by *Swadesamitran* as a notable example of an official who employed exceptionally harsh measures to recover outstanding *kist* payments during a period of monsoon failure, thereby plunging the farmers in his district into regrettable conditions.<sup>15</sup>

The ryots, already burdened by land revenue, were additionally obligated to pay various other taxes, which led some to take their own lives, while others chose to leave Salem.<sup>16</sup> This incident exemplified the legal awareness of the peasants and their readiness to confront even high-ranking revenue officials, when subjected to oppression. These events illustrated the growing resentment among the ryots of Tamil region towards the colonial authorities, as well as their passive resistance to British rule. Throughout their fight against the British, they consistently garnered significant support from nationalist movements.

From the outset, nationalists rallied in support of the ryots, bringing their struggles to the attention of the government and advocating for redress. The Madras Native Association (M.N.A.), recognized as the first nationalist organization in South India, played a leading role in championing the ryots' cause. The nationalists of the M.N.A. realized that oppressive tactics were utilized for tax collection, resulting in the mistreatment of those ryots who could not meet their tax obligations. When the ryots found themselves powerless against the officials, the M.N.A. intervened on their behalf. In 1852, the M.N.A. drafted a petition and presented it to the British Parliament, calling for a comprehensive investigation into the administration of the British in India prior to the renewal of the Company's charter. This petition highlighted the sufferings

of the ryots and other issues faced by Indians to the British Parliament members. The summary of the extensive petition emphasized that the primary grievances of the petitioners stemmed from excessive taxation and the accompanying harassment during its collection, as well as the inadequacy, delays, and costs associated with the British Courts of Law.

Furthermore, the petitioners expressed their urgent needs for the construction of roads, bridges, and irrigation works, alongside improved educational provisions for the populace. They also sought a reduction in public expenditure and a form of local governance that would better promote the welfare of the subjects and the prosperity of the nation.<sup>17</sup> Although this demand was denied, the M.N.A. persisted in voicing its dissatisfaction regarding the land revenue policy. Revenue officials resorted to the widespread use of torture to extract revenue. The distressing accounts of these tortures peaked in 1850, prompting the attention of M.N.A. Gajalu Lakshminarasu Chetty, one of the founding members, who appealed to the British Parliament to establish a committee to investigate the grievances of the ryots in the Madras Presidency.<sup>18</sup> In October 1853, Danby Seymour, Chairman of the Indian Reform Society, travelled to India to assess the overall situation, during which the M.N.A. highlighted the burdensome land revenue system.

Two of the M.N.A. members accompanied Seymour as he visited various locations, including Cuddalore, Trichinopoly, Kumbakonam, Salem, and Tirunelveli. Seymour became thoroughly convinced of the grievances presented by the M.N.A. to the British Parliament and called for an investigation into the land revenue system in southern India.<sup>19</sup> He asserted that the excessive land tax was a significant contributor to numerous issues and condemned the maltreatment of ryots by revenue officials. He described Madras as being in the worst and most wretched condition.<sup>20</sup> His allegations against the Madras government compelled it to establish a 'Torture Commission'. In response, Lord Harris, the Governor of Madras, appointed E.F. Elliot, H. Strokes, and J.B. Norton to investigate the reported instances of torture within the Madras



Presidency.<sup>21</sup> The Commission's report acknowledged the use of torture and other coercive tactics by revenue and police officials.<sup>22</sup> The personnel applied personal violence against ryots.<sup>23</sup> The significance of this report was realized in its revelation of the exploitative agrarian policies of the colonial administration. The M.N.A.'s campaign against the revenue policy fostered a greater awareness among the ryots regarding the exploitative nature of colonial rule.

The Triplicane Literary Society emerged as a notable organization that voiced its criticism of the colonial revenue policies during the late 1860s.<sup>24</sup> The Society contended that the British authorities were accountable for the escalating impoverishment of the agricultural community within the Madras Presidency. It asserted that the government's singular focus on augmenting revenue resulted in increased assessments and the use of substandard collection methods, ultimately leading to the demoralization of the ryots.<sup>25</sup>

The establishment of the Madras Mahajana Sabha (M.M.S.) in 1884 marked the beginning of a political agitation aimed at highlighting the arbitrary revenue policies imposed by colonial authorities. The periodic conferences held by the M.M.S., representing various regions of Madras, critically examined the detrimental impacts of the colonial government's economic strategies, particularly concerning agrarian issues. Key concerns that drew the attention of the M.M.S. included the enforcement of forest and salt regulations, as well as the burdensome land tax. The conference urged its members to compile data regarding the implementation of forest laws, including instances of hardships resulting from the prosecution of offenders, the large-scale impoundment of livestock, and the poor health of these animals.<sup>26</sup> To gather firsthand information, the M.M.S. dispatched several small teams to engage with ryots in rural areas. In Coimbatore, a team led by Narasimulu Naidu visited local villages to collect insights on the enforcement of forest regulations. In addition to these study reports, the M.M.S. also received numerous petitions and complaints from various individuals.<sup>27</sup>

The second conference of the M.M.S. took place in Madras in December 1885. Its significance was underscored by the participation of representatives from distant regions such as Tirunelveli, alongside a substantial attendance from ryots across Tamil region, particularly from Vellore, Coimbatore, and Trichinopoly.<sup>28</sup> The delegates, including ryots, expressed their sentiments passionately, critiqued the forest laws, and recounted the difficulties they faced due to the enforcement of these regulations. The conference adopted resolutions calling on the government to investigate the implementation of the forest laws.<sup>29</sup>

The agrarian issues subsequently emerged as a significant concern within the political activism of the M.M.S. For instance, in a memorandum presented to the Secretary of State in 1886, the M.M.S. explicitly expressed its opposition to any initiative aimed at imposing a forest and salt taxes on the populace, arguing that the tax burden had become excessive and had reached its limit.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the M.M.S. served as a collective platform for the ryots and other individuals from various regions of the Madras Presidency to initiate a political movement against colonial economic policies. The involvement of the ryots in this political agitation indicated their gradual alignment with a political organization, thereby uniting with other social groups similarly dissatisfied with colonial rule. This regional resistance to colonialism expanded into a nationalist movement with the establishment of the Indian National Congress (I.N.C.) in 1885. The period following 1885 witnessed a significant resurgence of opposition to the colonial administration. The nationalist press advocated for the plight of impoverished ryots, critiqued government actions, and raised awareness of agrarian issues, thereby nurturing an anti-colonial sentiment.

The colonial agrarian policy emerged as a significant economic concern that the I.N.C. emphasized during its anti-colonial movement. Nationalist leaders prioritized the issues surrounding the excessive assessment and burden of land revenue, utilizing Congress platforms to voice their opposition to the government's land revenue policies.

Throughout nearly all annual sessions of the Congress from 1888 to 1903, the colonial agrarian policy was scrutinized, and resolutions addressing various facets of the land revenue system were adopted each year. There was a profound dissatisfaction within the Congress regarding the colonial agrarian policy, with a prevailing belief that the British were accountable for the economic hardships faced by the ryots.

A central argument presented by the Congress in its discussions was the excessive land assessment, which they identified as the fundamental cause of agrarian issues.<sup>31</sup> In the inaugural session of the I.N.C. in 1885, P. Rangaiah Naidu, a delegate, proposed a resolution highlighting the poverty of the agrarian population and urged the government to take immediate action to alleviate this poverty.<sup>32</sup> During the sessions held in Calcutta (1896), Amraoti (1897), and others, the Congress accused the colonial government of impoverishing the people through excessive taxation and over-assessment.<sup>33</sup> The Congress contended that the recurrent famines and the suffering of ryots during these crises were, in part, attributable to the over-assessment practices. This charge against the British was reiterated by the Congress in its subsequent annual sessions, where they called for, among other reforms, a reduction in land assessment.<sup>34</sup>

The nationalist critique of land revenue policy intensified as the century approached its turn. R.C. Dutt, known for his stringent criticisms, asserted that the colonial land revenue system stifled agricultural development, impoverished the peasantry, and exacerbated the severity and impact of famines.<sup>35</sup> He noted that the colonial agrarian framework imposed excessive rents on farmers, thereby obstructing their potential for progress.<sup>36</sup> He found support in numerous nationalist figures, including G. Subramania Iyer from the Tamil region. During the Congress session of 1902, Iyer emphasized that poverty represented the gravest challenge facing the people and urged the government to address this pressing concern.<sup>37</sup> He consistently underscored this issue in his writings and speeches. In an article titled 'Future Trouble and British

Rule,' published in *Swadesamitran* on 28th May 1908, he argued that the burdensome land and other taxes, along with lavish expenditures and the decline of Indian industries under British government, had led to famine and plague.<sup>38</sup> The district-level conferences, held periodically, addressed the connection between famine and excessive land assessment while criticizing the agrarian policies implemented by the colonial government.<sup>39</sup> They called for a reduction in land assessment, as famine had become a persistent issue. The colonial authorities were urged to conduct an investigation into the economic conditions of villages to reveal the hardships faced by the ryots.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, they insisted that the land settlement, established sixty years prior, should be revised, and that assessments should only be increased in response to a significant rise in prices.<sup>41</sup> The nationalist press also characterized famines and widespread poverty as consequences of colonialism, advocating for a reduction in taxes.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, Congress nationalist leaders and the press endeavored to shape public opinion to highlight that colonial rule was a key factor in the impoverishment of the ryots.

The implementation of forest laws faced significant condemnation from the Congress, district associations, and the nationalist press. In the Congress session held at Allahabad in 1892, P. Kesava Pillai highlighted the hardships endured by the ryots as a result of these laws and the behaviour of lower-ranking forest officials. Additionally, district-level conferences voiced their disapproval of the forest regulations, calling for the allocation of adequate land for unrestricted grazing in every village, as well as the provision of free permits for grazing, the collection of leaves for manuring, and materials for agricultural tools and thatched roofs.<sup>43</sup> This sentiment was similarly reflected in the nationalist press.<sup>44</sup> The I.N.C. held the view that the financial distress experienced by the ryots was a direct consequence of the colonial revenue administration. Consequently, it called for significant reforms to the existing revenue framework. They argued that the prosperity of an agrarian nation like India could not be

achieved without a clear limitation on the state's demands for land revenue. The rationale behind their call for a permanent government demand on land was that ryots would be disinclined to invest in improving their land if the government retained the authority to raise assessment based on the increased income generated from such improvement.<sup>45</sup> Justice Ranade was among the early nationalists advocating for the establishment of permanent government policies regarding land in his various writings on the agrarian issue. This call was embraced by the Congress in 1889, leading to the passage of a resolution urging the government to take prompt action. Prominent figures such as R.C. Dutt and the nationalist press campaigned vigorously for the permanency in the demand on land.<sup>46</sup>

The colonial agrarian policy significantly influenced political movements. During the Swadeshi movement, G. Subramnia Iyer, V.O. Chindaram Pillai, and Subramiasiva focused on issues such as the poverty faced by ryots and the heavy burden of land taxes in their speeches and writings.<sup>47</sup> However, it is important to note that the movement did not succeed in mobilizing the entire peasantry, except in certain regions. This limitation was largely due to the lack of organization among ryots around their specific demands at that time. Additionally, the Swadeshi movement represented merely the inception of modern mass politics, making it challenging to engage the entire peasantry in political activism.<sup>48</sup>

Annie Besant actively addressed agrarian issues during the Home Rule Movement. Through her public addresses and written works, she brought attention to the colonial agricultural policies, the scarcity of food, the increasing impoverishment of farmers, and various other agrarian challenges.<sup>49</sup> She encouraged the people to engage in her Home Rule initiative, stating that they must consider poverty, understand its implications, and recognize the suffering caused by hunger, particularly for the hundred million agricultural workers on the brink of starvation.<sup>50</sup> Besant and her supporters consistently emphasized the necessity for widespread agitation that included the active involvement of farmers, aiming to unite all segments of Indian society within the movement.<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, the movement primarily attracted urban participants and struggled to extend its reach into rural communities. Nonetheless, it laid a significant foundation for the growth of nationalist activism in rural areas, especially among farmers, contributing to the mass mobilization of anti-colonial efforts in the years that followed under Gandhi's leadership.

The colonial authorities sought to implement a new land revenue system in the newly acquired territories of the Madras Presidency, experimenting with various approaches. The periodical reassessment of land values, predominantly reflecting an upward trend, has consistently elevated the status of land as a commodity. This development has prompted an influx of non-agricultural individuals, such as intermediaries, traders, and lenders, to increasingly invade the land. In fact, this group had been instrumental in relegating ryots with limited means to a state of extreme poverty.<sup>52</sup>

Initially, the ryotwary system was introduced in the Salem and Baramahal regions, followed by the permanent revenue settlement and the village lease system, both of which ultimately failed.<sup>53</sup> Subsequently, in 1820, in pursuance of the orders of the Court of Directors there was general introduction of the ryotwari settlement in the Madras Presidency<sup>54</sup>, with a substantial portion of Tamil region incorporated into this system by 1857. The colonial revenue system aimed at maximizing the extraction of agrarian surplus, resulting in arbitrary land revenue demands. This over-assessment of land taxes led to the financial ruin of the ryots, who found themselves unable to meet their tax obligations.

In response, the colonial government resorted to coercive tactics for revenue collection, often subjecting the ryots to severe mistreatment. Such circumstances compelled the ryots to seek loans from moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates, plunging them into a cycle of debt from which they could not escape.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, many ryots were forced to sell or mortgage their land and possessions to survive. Intensification and extension of agrarian activities and extraction of labour in the

wake of the implementation of the Ryotwari and Zamindari settlements proceeded apace throughout the nineteenth century indicated the sufferings of the ryots and who received diminishing returns for their hard labour. Diminishing returns forced the many landless ryots to seek their fortunes in towns.<sup>56</sup> Economic hardships faced by the ryots were further exacerbated by colonial forest regulations that infringed upon their traditional rights to forest resources. Overall, the colonial agrarian policies inflicted significant harm on agriculture and led to the destitution of the ryots in the Tamil region.

The economic struggles faced by the peasantry and their hardships under colonial rule significantly influenced the growth of the anti-colonial movement. The M.N.A. emerged as the first nationalist organization to address the issue of torture on ryots. It effectively brought to light the suffering endured by the ryots due to the brutal practices of revenue officials. This advocacy resulted in the establishment of the Torture Commission, which revealed the harsh methods employed in tax collection by these officials. Following the decline of the M.N.A., the M.M.S. took up the cause of the ryots and created a forum for the ryots and other nationalist figures to voice their grievances against colonial authority. For the first time, ryots from various areas of the Tamil region participated in significant numbers in the conferences organized by the M.M.S., fostering a sense of political awareness among them.<sup>57</sup>

The formation of the I.N.C. marked a significant shift in the agrarian issues, elevating them to a national concern. The Congress accused the British authorities of driving the ryots into poverty and called for reforms in the land revenue system. Prominent figures such as Ranade, R.C. Dutt, and G. Subramania Iyer articulated the exploitative nature of colonial revenue policies through their writings and public addresses. In this effort, provincial organizations and the nationalist press played a crucial role in disseminating the economic grievances of the ryots, fostering awareness among the people regarding the profit-driven motives of the British government. The agrarian issues garnered

serious attention from nationalist leaders during both the Swadeshi and Home Rule Movements. They brought the flawed agrarian policies to the forefront, emphasizing the necessity for a widespread political agitation against British rule. Their efforts aimed to integrate the peasantry into the anti-colonial movement.

Although their initiatives did not receive significant traction until 1918, they succeeded in cultivating an anti-colonial sentiment among the peasantry and raising awareness about the exploitative nature of colonial agrarian policies over time. This development eventually contributed to the expansion of the social and economic base of the nationalist movement by incorporating the peasantry into its struggle against British colonialism and imperialism since the third decade of the twentieth century.

## References

1. Ludden, David., (1989). *Peasant History in South India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi. pp. 104-105.
2. *The Hindu*, (1883, 14 November). 'Madras Native Newspaper Report'. p.7
3. G.O. No. 823, (1902). Revenue (Press) Department, 9 September.
4. *Note on Land Transfer and Agricultural Indebtedness in India*, (1895). Government of India, Delhi. pp. 35-36.
5. Ganeshram, S., (2016). *Pathways to Nationalism: Social Transformation and Nationalist Consciousness in Colonial Tamil Nadu, 1858-1918*, Manohar, New Delhi. p.201.
6. *Report on Tamil Newspapers for the Week ending*, 4 February 1882, 'Madras Native Newspaper Report'. p. 3.
7. Soundararajan, Saroja., (1997). *Madras Presidency in Pre-Gandhian Era- A Historical Perspective*, Lalitha Publications, Pondicherry. p. 161.
8. Parthasarathy, Rangaswami., (1978). *A Hundred Years of The Hindu*, Kasturi & Sons Ltd, Madras. p. 11.
9. Suntharalingam, R., (1980). *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1891*, Rawat, Jaipur. pp. 166-168.



10. *Proceedings of the Board of Revenue*, Vol No. 4644, 20 June 1882.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, No.5107 (Miscellaneous), 19 June 1883.
13. *Ibid.*, No. 6155 (Miscellaneous), 12 August 1882.
14. *Ibid.*, No. 5579 (Miscellaneous), 3 July 1883.
15. *Swadesamitran*, (1890). 22 February 1890. 'Madras Native Newspaper Report'. p.4
16. Rajendran, N., (1994). *The National Movement in Tamil Nadu, 1905-14*, Oxford University Press, Madras. p.21.
17. Suntharalingam, R., (1967). 'The Madras Native Association: A Study of an Early Indian Political Organisation' in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. IV, No. 3, SAGE, Delhi. pp. 238-239.
18. Pillai, Parameswaran., (1896). *Representative Men of Southern India*, Price Current Press, Madras. p.156.
19. Reddy, M.P.R., Jagannadham, A., (1870). *Gajula Lakshminarasu Chetty: Life and Times-1806-1868*, Clio Book Club, Kavali. pp. 10-11.
20. Suntharalingam, R., (1967). *Op.cit.*, pp. 239-245.
21. Jagathesan, P., (1986). 'Madras Police Act of 1859 and Police Reform' in *Proceedings Volume of the Sixth Annual Session of the South Indian history Congress*, Hyderabad. p.81
22. Seal, Anil, (1968). *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Late Nineteenth Century*, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi. p.200.
23. Jagadeesan, (1981). 'Torture Commission in Madras Presidency' in *Proceedings Volume of the Second Annual Session of the South Indian History Congress*, South Indian History Congress, Trivandrum. p.173.
24. Khan, Sulaiman, H.K., (2009). *The Nationalist Movement and Its Reflection on Congress in Tamil Nadu (1885-1947)*, Vijay Pathippagam, Anganikuppam. p.16.
25. Suntharalingam, R., (1967). *Op.cit.*, pp.165-166.
26. G.O.No.2499, (1886, 1 December). Public Department, *Report of the Madras Mabajana Sabha for 1885-1886*, Madras. p. 38.

27. Suntharalingam, R., *Op.cit.*, p. 225.
28. G.O. No. 2499, *Op.cit.*, (1886, 1 December).
29. *Ibid.*
30. Nanteeswaran, S., (2008). *Socio-Political Awakening in Tamil Nadu*, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Madras, Chennai. p.76.
31. *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty- Third Session of Indian National Congress held at Madras, December 1908*, (1909). Madras. p. 131.
32. Zaidi, A.M. (ed.), (1985). *Congress Presidential Addresses, 1885-1900*, Vol. I, Indian Institute of Applied Political Research, New Delhi. pp.342-345 and 372-374.
33. *Report of the INC*, p. 41.
34. Ganeshram, S., *Op.cit.*, p.206.
35. Bipan, Chandra, (1991). *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India*, People's Publishing House, Delhi. p. 398.
36. Joshi, P.C., (1967). 'Pre-Independence Thinking on Agrarian Policy' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25 February, Bombay. p. 449.
37. *Report of the INC*, (1902). p. 72.
38. *Swadesamitran*, (1908) G.O. No.1212, *Judicial (Confidential) Department*, 2 September 1908.
39. G.O. No.568, *Revenue (Press) Department*, 30 June 1902; G.O. No.603, *Public Department*, 6 July 1903; G.O. No.695, *Public Department*, 3 August 1903; G.O. No 807, *Public Department*, 18 October 1907; G.O. No. 253, *Public Department*, 13 April 1909; G.O. No.662, *Home (Judicial) Department*, 21 March 1917.
40. G.O.No. 695, *Public Department*, 3 August 1903.
41. G.O. No. 627, *Public Department*, 27 August 1906.
42. *Swadesamitran*, 12 February 1900, 'Madras Native Newspaper Report', p. 5. *The Hindu Janabhushani*, 26 May 1888, M.N.N.R.,1888, p. 122; *Swadesamitran*, 20 February 1900, M.N.N.R., p. 72; *Vikata Dutar*, 2 May 1891, M.N.N.R., pp. 113-114; *Suryalokamu*, 9 September 1900, M.N.N.R., p. 256.
43. G.O. No.603, *Public Department*, 6 July 1903.

44. *Swadesamitran*, 26 September 1890, 'Madras Native Newspaper Report', 1890, p. 206; *Kalanidhi*, 1 September 1891, M.N.N.R., 1891, p. 231; *Janamitran*, 25 March 1893, M.N.N.R., 1893, p.95; *Desabimani*, 6 December 1893, 'Madras Native Newspaper Report' 1893, p. 318; *New India*, 22 September 1916.
45. Bipan Chandra, (1964). 'Two Notes on the Agrarian Policy of the Indian Nationalists, 1880-1905' in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. I, No. 4, April-June 1964, SAGE, Delhi. pp. 143- 173.
46. *Ibid.*
47. G.O. No. 1542, (1911). *Judicial Department*, 3 October 1911. Extracts from C.I.D. Reports, pp.362-367.
48. Bipan Chandra, et al., (1992). *India's Struggle for Independence*, Penguin Books, Delhi. p.132.
49. G.O. 1435, (1917). *Public Department (Confidential)*, 8 December 1917. p.4
50. *New India*, 30 December 1915. 'Madras Native Newspaper Report' 1915. p.6
51. *Ibid.*, 10 July 1915. 'Madras Native Newspaper Report' 1915. p.3
52. Chandrababu, B.S., (2012). *Essays on Societal History: Some Reflections*, Pavai Publications, Chennai. p.116
53. Raju, Sarada, A., (1988). *Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency, 1800-1850*, Executive Service, Madras. p.20.
54. Jeyaraj, Varghese, S., (2017). *Socio-Economic History of Tamil Nadu 1565-1967*, Anns publications, Uthamapalayam. p.145.
55. *Extract from the Proceedings of the Board of Revenue*, 20 May 1841. Madurai District Collectorate Records, Vol. 8910, p.127.
56. Ludden, David, (1989). *Op.cit.*, pp.155-156.
57. Nanteeswaran, S., (2008). *Op.cit.*, pp.67-74.



## BEYOND DIVERGENCE: VITHALBHAI PATEL'S ROLE IN SHAPING VALLABHBHAI PATEL'S IDEA OF MUNICIPAL *SWARAJ*

**Mr. Aditya Sundwa**

Senior Research Scholar

Indian Institute of Technology Indore, Indore.

&

**Dr. Shomik Dasgupta**

Faculty of History

Indian Institute of Technology Indore, Indore.

### Abstract

*This paper revisits the prevailing scholarship on the political dynamics between Vallabhbhai Patel and Vithalbhai Patel, which commonly asserts their divergence in political methods and means. Contrary to this assumption, we contend that there exists at least one instance where Vithalbhai's perspectives served as an intellectual context for Vallabhbhai.*

*Through an analysis of Vithalbhai's critique of the District Municipal Bill of 1914 in the Bombay Legislative Council and a comparison with Vallabhbhai's initiatives in the Ahmedabad municipality, we argue that Vithalbhai's critique significantly influenced Vallabhbhai's subsequent administrative actions aimed at establishing municipal swaraj.*

**Keywords:** *Vithalbhai Patel, Vallabhbhai Patel, municipal swaraj, Ahmedabad municipality, local self-government.*

## Introduction

G.I. Patel, biographer of Vithalbhai Patel, elucidates the political rapport between the Patel brothers, portraying Vithalbhai as an ‘architect’ and Vallabhbhai as an ‘engineer’. He opined that Vithalbhai ‘could plan out things on a large scale, while Vallabhbhai could execute things that had been planned for him by men in whom he had implicit faith.’<sup>1</sup> G.I. Patel notes that Vithalbhai’s ‘greatest handicap was that he had hardly any lieutenants to carry out his plans.’ G.I. Patel contends that Vallabhbhai never adhered to the political methods and means adopted by Vithalbhai.

In this paper, we offer a counterargument to G.I. Patel’s perspective by presenting two key arguments. Firstly, we assert that Vallabhbhai Patel’s administrative endeavours within the Ahmedabad municipality were driven by a political initiative we conceptualise as ‘municipal *swaraj*.’ This concept denotes Vallabhbhai’s efforts to bolster the authority of elected councillors in municipal governance. We examine his administrative initiatives, including actions against corrupt officials, responses to colonial town planning initiatives, and endeavours to emancipate municipal schools from governmental oversight. Secondly, we argue that Vithalbhai Patel’s critique of the District Municipal Bill of 1914 provided the intellectual context for Vallabhbhai’s conception of municipal *swaraj*.

A short background of the political development in Bombay and Ahmedabad during the second decade of twentieth century is relevant here. Upon Vithalbhai’s entry into the legislature, Bombay introduced the District Municipal Bill of 1914 in its legislative council. This Bill proposed the institution of a municipal commissioner as the executive head for municipalities with populations exceeding one lakh. Vithalbhai contested the bill, arguing that it contravened the fundamental principles of local self-government. Despite his objections, the bill was ultimately passed by the council.

As a result, Bombay appointed a municipal commissioner for the Ahmedabad municipality in 1915. However, this posed challenges as the commissioner began to intervene in municipal affairs. In response, the elected councillors of Ahmedabad municipality turned to Vallabhbhai for assistance. Shortly after assuming his role in January 1917, Vallabhbhai initiated several administrative initiatives aimed at instituting municipal *swaraj*.

Historians of political thought frequently overlook the intellectual contributions of both Vithalbhai and Vallabhbhai. Vallabhbhai is often marginalized within the context of Gandhian movements, being labelled merely as ‘a staunch Gandhian’ and ‘lieutenant of Gandhi.’<sup>2</sup> It is often argued that Gandhi provided the ideological framework for Vallabhbhai’s political endeavours, implying that Vallabhbhai lacked independent political thought.

For example, his efforts against corrupt municipal officials are often viewed through the lens of the Champaran satyagraha, suggesting that he was replicating Gandhi’s actions against colonial authorities.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Vallabhbhai’s initiatives to liberate municipal schools in Ahmedabad are often interpreted as manifestations of Gandhian principles, such as boycott, within the municipal setting.<sup>4</sup>

Vithalbhai’s contributions, on the other hand, are frequently overlooked, as he was adaptable in his political strategies, adjusting them as circumstances evolved to attain *swaraj*. Unlike Gandhi, his political approaches were pragmatic rather than moral-driven, shifting from moderation to extremism as his political career progressed. He opposed colonial rule across various arenas, including legislatures, municipalities, and Gandhi-led movements. Consequently, historians often assume he lacked an independent political ideology. However, it is crucial to contextualize Vithalbhai’s political thought within the specific issues he addressed, as political thought entails response to particular political challenges. Understanding Vithalbhai’s political thought necessitates examining his responses to the political dilemmas he encountered.

The scarcity of primary sources pertaining to Vithalbhai's political thought also presents a challenge to scholarly inquiry. Unlike Gandhi, Vithalbhai did not maintain detailed diaries or author texts like '*Hind Swaraj*.' Additionally, he did not preserve his personal or public correspondences, further complicating efforts to understand his political thought.<sup>5</sup>

Further, Vithalbhai's significant contribution in colonial India is often attributed to his involvement in local self-governing bodies and legislative assemblies, initially in the Bombay Legislative Council and later, in the Central Legislative Assembly. While these institutions were colonial in nature, it is a common assumption that they played no role in the freedom struggle.

However, it is important to recognize that Indian participants in these institutions held their own perspectives on political issues, which they frequently articulated. For example, Vithalbhai expressed his views on local self-government in India, opposing government actions he deemed detrimental to its development. Although the colonial government disregarded his opinions, this does not negate the existence of his political thoughts.

To address this gap in the literature, this paper has been structured into two sections. The first section examines Vithalbhai's critique of the District Municipal Bill of 1914. The second section investigates Vallabhbai's administrative initiatives within the Ahmedabad municipality which were aimed at establishing municipal *swaraj*. Finally, the paper concludes that Vithalbhai's critique of the District Municipal Bill of 1914 offered an intellectual context for Vallabhbai's concept of municipal *swaraj*. One year after Vithalbhai joined the Bombay legislature assembly, the Bombay government proposed a Bill in the Bombay legislature assembly. The Bill was titled as District Municipal Act of 1914 (Bill no 1 of 1914). The Bill sought to further amend the District Municipal Act of 1901 to fulfil its two main objectives. First was

to assimilate the administration of the important municipalities in the presidency 'more closely to that of the city of Bombay' by introducing institution of municipal commissioner as the executive head of the municipalities.

The second was to remove the defects in the District Municipal Act of 1901 which were hindering the practical working of that Act.<sup>6</sup> However, it was not the first time when the District Municipal Act of 1914 was being amended. It was previously amended in 1902, 1903, and 1912.

Nevertheless, the 1914 amendment proved to be controversial as it sought to take away the administrative powers of the municipality and vest them in the municipal commissioner. The Bill was initially proposed to provide for the institution of the municipal commissioner on an experimental basis and for the purpose, it was to be applied to the Ahmedabad municipality only. The Bill stated that if the institution of the municipal commissioner proved to be successful, it would be introduced at the other municipalities.<sup>7</sup>

For the purpose, the population limit in the original Bill was kept to one lakh and fifty thousand, which included Ahmedabad only. However, when the Bill was sent to the select committee after the first reading, the limit was brought down to a population of one lakh, and above which now included along with Ahmedabad, Surat, Poona, and Karachi.

Further, those municipalities which had a population of less than one lakh were allowed to have a municipal commissioner if the concerned municipality passes a resolution by three-fourth majority demanding so. With this the institution of the municipal councillor became a fixed entity in Bombay. The proposed policy divided the municipal administration into two parts namely, the municipal government and the executive government. It provided that the municipal government should vest in the



municipality and the executive government should vest in the municipal commissioner.<sup>8</sup> However, the problem arose when the government introduced a clause stating that the powers of the president, including the powers related to general supervision and control over the executive should be given over to the municipal commissioner.<sup>9</sup> It was argued that in order to avoid the ‘evil of dual control and conflict of authority’, it was crucial to do so.<sup>10</sup>

However, it is important to note that this clause was not part of the original Bill and was added later when the Bill was before the select committee. As the original Bill did not propose to disturb in any way the powers of the president, Vithalbhai did not oppose the Bill during its first reading on the 17 March 1914. Vithalbhai was also a member of the select committee for the Bill and objected to the introduction of the clause which delegated the powers of the president to the municipal commissioner. It is important to note that the select committee consisted of ten members. Out of which eight were non-official members. Vithalbhai was ‘sole dissident’ to the principles of the Bill in the select committee.<sup>11</sup> He opposed the very institution of municipal commissioner in the select committee.<sup>12</sup>

Vithalbhai argued that if enacted, the Bill would ‘interfere with the principles of local self-government.’<sup>13</sup> The Bill was seen by him as being against the principles of the local self-government as it raised the question whether the absolute municipal government was vested in the municipality or not.<sup>14</sup> Commenting on the Bill, Vithalbhai opined that ‘a legislation which deprives the municipality and committees of most of their powers and the president of all his powers is really in furtherance of the interest of local self-government.’<sup>15</sup>

As powers of financial control and general supervision were not left in the municipality, the management of the municipality by the municipal commissioner as executive officer would allow him to be an autocrat.<sup>16</sup> He considered the presidential power of general control and supervision essential to establish a check and balance in the municipal

administration and argued that there should be at least one person who can control the municipal commissioner's actions. He also opined that the conduct and actions of the municipal commissioner must be open to fair and full criticism by the body.<sup>17</sup>

The select committee did not consider Vithalbhai's comment on the Bill and argued that real power would stay with the municipality as the financial powers vest in it. The municipal commissioner would have to work within the budget allotment made by the municipality. He had no power to vary or alter the budget sanctioned by the municipality.<sup>18</sup> However, the municipalities were also given certain other powers such as 'to require the municipal commissioner to furnish them with returns and reports on any matter appertaining to municipal administration.'<sup>19</sup> The hollowness of this power could be understood by a statement of Chimanlal Setalvad. Setalvad argued that the municipality could not upset what the commissioner had done or could not direct him to do a particular thing, it was 'always open to them to express as to what, in their opinion, should be done in a particular matter.'<sup>20</sup>

Another way in which Vithalbhai sought to retain the autonomy of municipal administrations was by opposing the interference of the colonial executive authorities in the municipal administration. He presented a minute of dissent against the clause which authorized the district collector to set aside any municipal election. He argued that the executive authorities should not be allowed to interfere with the matters of the elections.<sup>21</sup>

However, despite this opposition the clause was not omitted.<sup>22</sup> When the select committee did not consider Vithalbhai's opinion, he sought to oppose the Bill during the second reading in the legislature assembly. During the second reading of the Bill, Vithalbhai argued that the Bill was 'retrograde in character.' To justify his claims, Vithalbhai referred to the Act of 1884. The Act of 1884 is an important milestone in the history of local self-government in India. It was enacted by Lord

Rippon's government. Vithalbhai argued that the basic principle in which the Act of 1884 was based was that 'the people of this (Bombay) presidency should be encouraged to learn something in the way of managing their own affairs themselves.'<sup>23</sup> For the purpose the Act left the entire management of the municipal administration of the *mofussil* in the hands of various committees which were composed of elected members. On the contrary, the 'sole object of (proposed) Bill', he opined, was to delegate 'executive functions of a municipal body (to) one paid officer to be called a municipal commissioner.'<sup>24</sup>

Vithalbhai opined that the District Municipal Act of 1901 was also enacted to implement the same principle. The District Municipal Act of 1901 amended the Act of 1884 and gave the municipalities power to appoint executive officers to do executive work. This was a discretionary power as the municipalities were free to decide whether they wanted to appoint an executive officer or not. However, Vithalbhai opined that the Act of 1901 allowed the colonial government to interfere in the municipal administration. The Act gave the governor in council, power to require a municipality to appoint a chief officer and to delegate him all or any of its powers.<sup>25</sup>

Vithalbhai questioned the very necessity of the proposed Bill. He argued that there were enough provisions in the Act of 1901 for the smooth functioning of the municipal administration. Most of the city municipalities in the Bombay presidency had appointed the chief officers that too they have taken their chief officers from the government service.<sup>26</sup> Further, if a municipality had failed to appoint a chief officer, the governor in council could require the municipality to appoint a chief officer under the section 177 of the District Municipal Act of 1901.

However, Vithalbhai opined that the government might argue that a municipality might not delegate sufficient powers to the chief officer. He reminded the council of the power vested in the governor in council to require a municipality to delegate some of all its activities to the

chief officer. Again, Vithalbhai reminded that the Act of 1901 empower the governor general in council to require any municipality to have an executive officer appointed by the municipality of a grade and efficiency which he considered necessary.<sup>27</sup> It is true that the municipality was given power to formulate the rules regarding the staff to be employed, the duties to be performed, and salaries to be paid. Laws formulated by the municipalities could become effective only after the approval of the governor in council.

In this way, the Act of 1901 vested enough administrative power in the governor in council to maintain control over the municipal administration of a municipality.<sup>28</sup> However, these powers were discretionary and could be used in special cases when a particular municipality was not able to manage its affairs. In day-to-day administration, the governor in council refrained from interfering with the municipal administration.

Vithalbhai opined that the Act of 1901, not only allowed municipalities to manage their executive functions but also to elect their executive officers and to delegate some or all of their executive powers to such officers.<sup>29</sup> This mechanism allowed different municipalities to function differently according to their needs. The proposed Bill, on the other hand, was aimed at making the administration of the mofussil municipalities identical to that of Bombay municipality. Vithalbhai opposed it and argued that an Act cannot be suitable to all the municipalities in the presidency. Rules, he argued, should be framed in such a way that were more suitable to their local condition.<sup>30</sup> He argued that the discretion should be vested somewhere with regard to the 'differential treatment of different municipalities'.<sup>31</sup>

So Vithalbhai argued that there was no need to enact the proposed bill as there were enough provisions in the current laws which allowed municipalities to function smoothly. The sole objective of the Bill, he opined, was to reduce the power of elected councilors.<sup>32</sup>

To make his case clear he referred again to the District Municipal Act of 1901. The Act of 1901 gave the authority to the president of the municipality to 'watch over the financial and executive administration.... Over which he presides.' The proposed bill would take away this right away from the president of the municipality and center it around the municipal commissioner. In this way, the proposed bill would provide for municipal administration which would have a 'figure-head president and a municipal commissioner with powers unlimited.'<sup>33</sup> He also opposed the power given by the Bill to the municipal commissioner to be present at every municipal meeting. He opined that such powers to municipal commissioner would force municipal councillors to refrain from criticising his conduct. He suggested an alternative that 'the president should have the power to ask the municipal commissioner to withdraw from the meeting, if in his opinion, the question or questions to be discussed at that meeting necessitate the exercise of such power.'<sup>34</sup>

However, when another amendment was presented which inserted the words, 'unless his presence is not required by a resolution arrived at by two-thirds of the members for the time being present at the meeting' after the words 'being present at a meeting of the municipality,' Vithalbhai withdrew his amendment.<sup>35</sup>

So far Vithalbhai's activities appeared to have been geared towards the administrative autonomy for the municipalities. This can be also seen in his views on the appointing authority for the municipal commissioner. He opined that since the municipality would bear the burden of the pay of the municipal commissioner and the consequent other expenses, it should have a say in the selection of the municipal commissioner. He opined that 'when municipalities have got to employ municipal commissioners against their wishes, it is the ratepayers that will suffer.'<sup>36</sup>

Further, he noted that if the municipality was not given an absolute right to select a municipal commissioner, it must at least be authorized to suggest the names of some persons from whom the governor in council may make the appointment.<sup>37</sup>

Vithalbhai again emphasised the autonomy for the local self-government institutions at the Local Self-government Conference in Poona, where he presided. He emphasized the urgency of the situation, stating, 'we want and want immediately is not a concession here and a concession there, but a pull up altogether a complete change of policy and the grant of local self-government without any reservation.'<sup>38</sup>

Despite opposition from Vithalbhai, the Bombay legislature assembly passed the District Municipal Bill into law in 1914. Consequently, a municipal commissioner was appointed for Ahmedabad municipality as its executive head. However, these administrative changes proved unsuccessful. For instance, after the law was enacted, the Ahmedabad Municipality's annual reports showed that official duties were vaguely defined, and the administrative procedure was, as the Municipality President Ramanbhai Mahipal put it, 'negligible'. The 1916-17 edition of the report revealed that the municipality suffered from poor infrastructure, with bad roads and insufficient water supply.<sup>39</sup>

This administrative inefficiency arose due to frequent changes in municipal commissioners. For instance, two I.C.S. officers vacated the post before J A Shillidy's appointment in 1915.<sup>40</sup> Shillidy's tenure also did not improve the administration. The situation deteriorated to the point where Vithalbhai, a Bombay Legislative Assembly member, officially requested an explanation from F.G. Pratt, the senior most colonial official in Ahmedabad, and demanded that the municipality's annual reports for 1915-16 and 1916-17 be presented in the Assembly.

Vithalbhai's inquiries in the Legislative Assembly demanded responses. In his report on the Ahmedabad municipality, F.G. Pratt admitted that there had been 'practically no progress' since 1915.<sup>41</sup> He attributed this stagnation to (mostly Indian) Municipal Councillors who obstructed the work of Municipal Commissioners rather than collaborating with him. However, Pratt's report overlooked systemic deficiencies and mismanagement within the Ahmedabad Municipality.

For example, disruptive policies implemented by Shillidy adversely affected the municipality's day-to-day operations, leaving it ill-prepared to address public health crises. During the 1917 plague outbreak, elected municipal councillors were rendered powerless as executive authority rested solely with the municipal commissioner due to the newly enacted law. Consequently, there was widespread dissatisfaction against elected municipal councillors.<sup>42</sup>

Under the newly enacted District Municipal Act of 1914, the elected municipality had limited authority, hindering their ability to oversee Shillidy's administrative excesses. Moreover, due to Shillidy's high-ranking position in the colonial administration, municipal councillors were reluctant to confront him. This led to a dire situation, prompting Sir Ramanbhai Mahipal, president of the municipality, to seek assistance from Vallabhbhai. We note here that Ramanbhai, also a member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly, initially supported the institution of the municipal commissioner when the related bill was debated in the assembly.<sup>43</sup>

Vallabhbhai acceded to Ramanbhai's request to join the municipality. Upon assuming office in January 1917, he discovered that interference from Bombay had empowered a clique of corrupt and ineffective officials within the municipality.<sup>44</sup> Vallabhbhai initiated inquiries into these officials and ensured their replacement with accountable and competent administrators and public officers. Throughout his tenure, Vallabhbhai adhered to a policy of investigating and replacing errant officials.

Between 1917 and 1928, Vallabhbhai took disciplinary action against six high-ranking municipal officials appointed by the colonial government in Bombay. These officials, including Municipal Commissioners John Shillidy and Alfred Master, Chief Municipal Officer I.R. Bhagat, Water Works Engineer R.C. Wadia, Municipal Engineer Verner Macassey, and Honorary First-Class Magistrate Bahadur

Hussenkhan Dhanekhan faced consequences due to their disregard for municipal councillors and professional incompetence. He not only took action against these officials but also authored a resolution instructing municipal officials to adhere to the resolutions of the municipality. Importantly, the resolution also emphasised that municipal officials could not henceforth refuse to carry out the decision of the municipality.<sup>45</sup>

Vallabhbhai's administrative actions aimed to uphold municipal autonomy. For example, consider the case of Shillidy and his disregard for municipal authority. In 1915, the Ahmedabad Municipality faced challenges concerning Shuskar Lake, a property spanning 53000 yards valued at one lakh rupees. This property had recently been transferred to the municipality by the colonial government in Bombay in September 1914.<sup>46</sup> The Municipal Board became embroiled in controversy when F.F. Munshi, a Municipal Councillor, claimed ownership of the property and filed a judicial case, which was eventually overruled by the District Court.<sup>47</sup> Shillidy formed an alliance with Munshi, who had invested significantly in the colonial government's war bonds.<sup>48</sup> By 1916, Munshi felt confident enough to file a new case regarding the Shuskar Lake in the Bombay High Court. However, the High Court upheld the decision of the District Court, resulting in Munshi's loss.<sup>49</sup>

During this period, the Shuskar Lake was neglected, leading to it becoming a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Concerned, the Ahmedabad Municipal Board contacted Shillidy in August 1916 for advice on maintaining the lake, only to be informed that the municipality did not own it. Two months later, in October, the board asserted that the Shuskar Lake was indeed part of their property. When Shillidy did not respond positively, the matter was referred to the colonial government in Bombay.<sup>50</sup> Shillidy also informed Bombay that the municipality had no interest in Shuskar Lake.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, by the end of the year, the issue remained unresolved. In January 1917, F.G. Pratt intervened, affirming that the Shuskar Lake belonged to the municipality.<sup>52</sup> This was unexpected as Pratt was not typically supportive of the municipality.



In October 1917, his report to the Bombay Legislative Assembly on the Ahmedabad Municipality had even opined that ‘Shillidy had applied himself with great energy to the work of Municipal administration’ but received no support from municipality staff.<sup>53</sup> Shortly after joining the municipality, Vallabhbhai began investigating the case involving Shillidy.<sup>54</sup> Within three months, in March, he directly contacted Shillidy, requesting information about the Shuskar Lake. Shillidy responded the following month, but his answers were not satisfactory. Vallabhbhai waited until May before presenting a resolution to the municipal board, stating that Shillidy had not provided adequate details about the Shuskar Lake. He also reported instances of Shillidy’s misconduct towards Municipal Councillors, including tampering with official documents to suppress further inquiries.

On 7 June 1917, Vallabhbhai proposed a resolution in the municipality for Shillidy’s resignation, citing his mishandling of issues related to the Shuskar Lake and his support for an incompetent Municipal Engineer, Verner Macassey. Vallabhbhai also asked the Municipality President, Ramanbhai, to send a copy of the resolution to Bombay.<sup>55</sup> In subsequent resolutions, Vallabhbhai inquired about Shillidy’s water supply policy in the city and his financial transactions from 1914-1917.<sup>56</sup> The municipal board passed Vallabhbhai’s resolution regarding Shillidy’s misconduct and indulgence in corruption. Vallabhbhai himself documented the outcome, stating that ‘The Municipal Commissioner Mr. J.A. Shillidy was recalled by the government in August 1917, and hence further correspondence in this matter also stopped.’<sup>57</sup>

So far Vallabhbhai’s municipal policies appeared to have been geared towards achieving administrative autonomy from Bombay. This can also be seen in his education policy. He sought autonomy for municipal schools, asserting that that municipality had substantial but only limited authority. Bombay’s interference in the policies and operations of municipal schools was notable, with bureaucratic obstacles hindering the implementation of compulsory primary education in

Ahmedabad.<sup>58</sup> Vallabhbhai began advocating for freeing municipal schools from Bombay's control in June 1918.<sup>59</sup> The launch of the non-cooperation movement by Mohandas K Gandhi offered Vallabhbhai a political opportunity to liberate municipal schools from Bombay's control. Grounded in the principle of boycott, the movement advocated for the gradual withdrawal of students from government schools.<sup>60</sup> However, Vallabhbhai opted not to boycott municipal schools. Instead, he reinterpreted the Gandhian concept of boycott, leveraging it to eliminate government influence over municipal schools.

The government retained authority over municipal schools through its education department. This department in Bombay oversaw school examinations, inspections, teacher recruitment, appointments, transfers, and conducted examinations. Despite this oversight, municipal schoolteachers' salaries were funded by the municipality.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, Bombay allocated funds for municipal schools, covering half of the total expenditure incurred by the municipality on these educational institutions.

To free the municipal schools from government control, Vallabhbhai implemented two measures. Firstly, during the non-cooperation movement, he facilitated the passage of a resolution by the municipal board to forego government funding for the schools. Secondly, he ensured the adoption of another resolution barring the Bombay education department from inspecting municipal schools or administering final exams.<sup>62</sup> However, Vallabhbhai encountered resistance from both Bombay authorities and within the municipal board regarding his efforts to emancipate the municipal schools.

Vallabhbhai managed to secure a notable degree of autonomy concerning government oversight and examination of municipal schools by the education department. It was decided that the government's role in these areas would be minimal. An inspection of municipal schools was conducted by the Education department in August-September 1924.

However, the nature of this inspection underwent significant changes following an agreement between the municipality and the government.<sup>63</sup> The Director of Education for the northern division emphasized that ‘when the inspectors deal with the Municipal schools, they should scrupulously maintain the honour and dignity of the Municipal Board.’<sup>64</sup>

Vallabhbhai’s political initiatives regarding town planning were also aligned with the concept of municipal *swaraj*. One such initiative was the City Wall Scheme, also known as Scheme Number Five, devised by A. E. Mirams, the consulting surveyor to the government of Bombay, in 1916. This scheme proposed the removal of Ahmedabad’s historic city wall, replacing it with a ring road, and involved the relocation of a significant portion of the population from the area. It also outlined plans to widen a road from Delhi gate to Astodia, construct seventeen gardens along the road, designate twenty open spaces for public use, and establish two markets and a reading room.<sup>65</sup> By 1923, when the municipal board was suspended, the municipality had obtained approval from Bombay to proceed with the implementation of the scheme.<sup>66</sup>

Soon the scheme witnessed opposition from the residents of Ahmedabad as city wall held historical and religious significance as a cultural relic for them.<sup>67</sup> One such protest meeting was organized by the Kalupud Seva Samaj and chaired by Seth Mangaldas Girdhardas. Vallabhbhai attended the meeting and proposed a resolution against the ‘declaration of scheme and the hasty committal of the municipality’ without proper scrutiny. He clarified that his opposition was not against the scheme itself but rather, he advocated ‘the postponement of thereof till it was properly scrutinised by the newly elected board.’<sup>68</sup>

Rather, he opined, the opposition was against the manner in which the proposed scheme was being implemented. He explained that the suspended municipality had only approved the rough outline of the scheme, contingent upon the government providing the land beneath the city wall to the municipality.<sup>69</sup> The suspended municipality had also

asked Bombay about the extent of financial assistance it would provide for the scheme, but Bombay's response came only after the municipality was suspended, which Vallabhbhai deemed unsatisfactory.

In another case, Vallabhbhai opposed Kalupur relief road scheme. The Kalupur relief road was also proposed by A. E. Mirams in his report on the City Wall Improvement Programme Scheme in 1919. It outlined the construction of a sixty feet wide and 6000 feet long road, stretching from Saker Bazaar near the Ahmedabad railway station in the west to the Bhadar in the east. The scheme required the displacement of 5000 people, covering an area of 63,175 square yards, and was estimated to cost 41.5 lacs.

Similar to the city wall scheme, the managing committee of the suspended municipality also attempted to implement the Kalupur relief road scheme between 1922 and 1924. In this instance as well, Vallabhbhai did not oppose the scheme itself, but rather opposed its implementation by the Bombay government without taking local grievances into account.

At a political rally held on 7 October 1923, during another period of municipal suspension, Vallabhbhai clarified that 'Let me make it clear that our opposition does not mean that the scheme should be scrapped or that it should be dropped. Our clear demand is to postpone it till the people's representatives are returned to the Municipality and they explain the scheme to the people after examining it in terms of the risks and expenses involved.'<sup>70</sup> Vallabhbhai opined that the decision related to the town planning should be made by the elected representatives of the people.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Vithalbhai's critique of the District Municipal Bill of 1914 underscores his perspective on local self-government in India. He argued that indigenous village republics once provided essential services such as sanitation and water supply but were dismantled during the East

Indian Company's rule. Despite attempts to revive these institutions after 1884, colonial laws on local self-government were seen as regressive, as they undermined the core principles of self-governance by granting excessive power to the colonial government to interfere into the day-to-day affairs of these institutions. Vithalbhai emphasized the importance of elected representatives in local governance, advocating for their autonomy in decision-making concerning health, town planning, and water supply. His opposition to the Bill focused on preserving municipal autonomy, questioning provisions that encroached upon the powers of elected officials and centralized authority in the hands of a municipal commissioner. His critique was rooted in concerns about maintaining the autonomy of elected municipalities.

Vithalbhai's ideas regarding municipal autonomy laid the groundwork for Vallabhbhai's political endeavour to establish municipal *swaraj*. Vallabhbhai applied Vithalbhai's principles within the local context of the Ahmedabad municipality. Upon joining the municipality, Vallabhbhai promptly initiated administrative measures aimed at enhancing the municipality's autonomy. Our conceptualization of Vallabhbhai's notion of local autonomy portrays the municipality as an independent unit of governance, wherein all decisions of local significance are made by elected representatives without colonial interference. Vallabhbhai's administrative actions, including efforts against corrupt municipal officers who undermined elected councillors, endeavours to liberate municipal schools from government oversight, and positions on town planning, indicate his commitment to establishing municipal *swaraj*.

## References

1. Patel, G I., (1950). *Vithalbhai Patel: life and times*, Shree Laxmi Narayan Press, Bombay. p.534.
2. Spodek, Howard, (2011). *Ahmedabad: shock city of twentieth century India*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington. p.71.
3. *Ibid.*, p.50-1.

4. *Ibid.*, p.74.
5. Governor of Bombay, Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Governor of Bombay, 1914, Vol. LV, 1914, Bombay Government, Bombay. p. 28.
6. *Ibid.*, p.320.
7. *Ibid.*, p.713.
8. *Ibid.*, p.778.
9. *Ibid.*, p.782.
10. *Ibid.*, p.479.
11. *Ibid.*, p.676.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p.350.
14. *Ibid.*, p.779.
15. *Ibid.*, p.782.
16. *Ibid.*, p.782-3.
17. *Ibid.*, p.779.
18. *Ibid.*, p.479.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Patel, G I., (1950). *Op. cit.*, p.75.
21. Governor of Bombay, *Op. cit.*, p.484.
22. *Ibid.*, p.674-5.
23. Patel, G I., (1950). *Op. cit.*, p.74.
24. *Ibid.*, p.67.
25. *Ibid.*, p.73.
26. *Ibid.*, p.68.
27. *Ibid.*, p.68.
28. *Ibid.*, p.69.
29. *Ibid.*, p.69.
30. *Ibid.*, p.70.
31. *Ibid.*, p.71.
32. *Ibid.*, p.70.
33. *Ibid.*, p.72.
34. Governor of Bombay, (1914). *Op. cit.*, p.777-8.
35. *Ibid.*, p.789.

36. *Ibid.*, p.822.
37. *Ibid.*, p.802.
38. *Ibid.*, p.196.
39. Krishna, Balraj, (2021). *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Rupa Publication, New Delhi. p. 33.
40. *Ibid.*, p.32.
41. Pratt, F G., (1917). 'Report of the commissioner, N. D., on the working of the Ahmedabad municipality for the year 1915-16' In *Proceedings of the legislative council of the Governor of Bombay*, Vol. LV, Government Central Press, Bombay. p.741.
42. Pathak, Devavrat and Pravin Sheth, (1980). *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: from civic to national leadership*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad. p.33.
43. Governor of Bombay, (1914). *Op. cit.*, p.779.
44. Pathak, Devavrat and Pravin Sheth, (1980). *Op. cit.*, p.36.
45. *Ibid.*, p.189.
46. Patel, Vallabhbhai, (2018). *Sardar municipal work, Ahmedabad, 1917-25*, National Archives of India, New Delhi. p.6. <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/53403>. Accessed 28 February 2023.
47. Parikh, Narhari D., (1953). *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Vol. 1, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad. pp.28-29.
48. Krishna, Balraj, (2021). *Op. cit.*, p.36.
49. Patel, Vallabhbhai, (2018). *Op. cit.*, p.126.
50. *Ibid.*, p.126.
51. Patel, Vallabhbhai, (2018). *Op. cit.*, p.6.
52. Krishna, Balraj, (2021). *Op. cit.*, p.36.
53. Pratt, F G., (1917). *Op. cit.*, p.742.
54. Patel, Vallabhbhai, (2018). *Op. cit.*, p.126-131.
55. *Ibid.*, p.128.
56. *Ibid.*, p.13-14.
57. *Ibid.*, p.16.
58. Pathak, Devavrat and Pravin Sheth, (1980). *Op. cit.*, p.92.
59. *Ibid.*, p.70.
60. Sarkar, Sumit, (1989). *Modern India, 1885-1947*, St Martin's Press Inc, New York. p.204.

61. Parikh, Narhari D., (1953). *Op. cit.*, p.132.
62. Patel, (2018). *Op.cit.*, p.94.
63. Pathak, Devavrat and Pravin Sheth, (1980). *Op. cit.*, p.215.
64. *Ibid.*, p.212-3.
65. *Ibid.*, p.252.
66. The municipal board was suspended by the Bombay for two years between 1922-24.
67. Pathak, Devavrat and Pravin Sheth, (1980). *Op. cit.*, p.252-3.
68. Chopra, P N., (2015). *The collected works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Vol.1, Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, p. 262.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
70. Spodek, Howard, (2011). *Ahmedabad: Shock City of Twentieth-century India*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington. p. 77.





## UNEARTHING THE COLONIAL ROOTS: AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH IN POST-COLONIAL INDIA

**Dr. Vinod Kumar Singh**

Assistant Professor

Department of History, School of Liberal Arts

Noida International University, Gautam Budh Nagar, U. P.

### Abstract

*Agricultural research became a tool of British administrators to organise the production and knowledge of rural communities in the early decades of the 20th century. The establishment of the Imperial Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) at Pusa in 1905 and the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) at New Delhi in 1929 are mentioned as key developments in this regard. The article also discusses how the nation state in independent India marked a shift in the mode of production relations characteristic of the colonial period, and how the nation-state sought to develop and establish its apparatus.*

*The study tries to develop a framework in which the nation-state is assumed to be weak in controlling agricultural research in independent India, whereas, the British colonial period was a different kind of governance in which constitutional reforms of 1919 subsequently gave provinces autonomy in the agricultural subject. The text*

*further highlights the role of middle-class expert elites in the institutionalisation of sciences in the 1950s and 1960s, and how the centralisation and reorganisation of agricultural research during this period catered to the imperatives of the modernisation of Indian agriculture.*

**Keywords:** *Agriculture research, regionalisation, ICAR, Modernisation, farmer suicide.*

## **Introduction**

In the early decades of the twentieth century, agricultural research became a tool of British administrators to organise production and know-how of rural communities. Lord Curzon, a young enthusiast and experimenter took notice of the Voelcker's Report on the Improvement of Indian Agriculture (1891). The recurrent famines made colonial rulers find a solution by the agricultural administration of country. That is how the Imperial Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) at Pusa in 1905 and the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) at New Delhi in 1929 got established. One of the conditions laid down was that the Council's activities should be periodically reviewed by some disinterested expert, and in 1936, Sir John Russell was invited to make an extensive tour of the provinces.<sup>1</sup> Curzon remarked about the new initiatives in scientific agriculture as the step forward for practical (industrial) agriculture.

Post-independence India witnessed that Jawaharlal Nehru mixed emphasis of colonial structures of institutions with the research on local relevance. The village development projects became an essential feature of colonial and postcolonial India. The emergence of middle-class expert elites led to the institutionalisation of the sciences in the 1950s and 1960s. British rule embarked on the commercialisation of agriculture and expected research institutes in India to provide empirical data and specimens for theorising scientific knowledge in England. As a result of this, cash crops such as cotton, sugarcane, jute and tea were given preference over food crops. The present study specifically aims to

identify the historical actors responsible for the creation of agricultural knowledge and research that changed its goals and structure with interference from social, political, and economic structures in colonial and post-independence India.

### **Nation State and Agriculture**

The formation of the nation state in independent India marked a shift in the mode of production relations characteristic of the colonial period. In its nascent phase of state organisation, the nation state sought to develop and establish its apparatus. The study tries to develop a framework in which the nation state is assumed to be weak in controlling agricultural research in independent India, whereas, the British colonial period was a different kind of governance in which constitutional reforms of 1919 subsequently gave provinces autonomy in the agricultural subject.

In the 1950s, Nehru sent teams of scientists all over the world to search for appropriate models of organisation in agricultural research, e.g., China. The low-cost indigenous farming and production-centric foreign technology transfer was employed in agricultural development. The real challenge before Nehru pertained to both the financial and experts' training in the field. Dr. M. S. Randhawa, in the 1960s suggested that technology transfer from Japan or any country will not work unless the slightest difference in climate and occurrences of pests were studied again and again.<sup>2</sup>

This gave a free hand to conduct agricultural research at provincial experimental stations, according to their regional and local demands. The research was carried out by research institutes in the colonial period to collect raw data for experimentation to be further pursued in metropolises (London, for instance) to determine which crop could be grown in Indian soil, under what conditions to achieve the desired trade qualities by crossing exotic strains with Indian ones. Although colonial economic interests predominantly determined agricultural research in the colonial period, the imperial administration realised that they could not retain the regime without feeding the colonised people, and

so, later on, some food crop research on wheat and rice was conducted. The agricultural research program emphasised food production after the Bengal famine (1943) and as a post-war reconstruction plan for major economic and social reforms. The Indian National Congress demanded complete *swaraj* and industrialisation for the economic development of the Indian subcontinent.

Post-independence India ushered in concentration on the food requirements of famine-stricken and landless peasants due to rehabilitation after the Partition of India in 1947. The centralisation and reorganisation of agricultural research during the 1950s through the intervention of international donor agencies such as the TCP, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundation catered to the imperatives of the modernisation of Indian agriculture. The food self-sufficiency program achieved its goal of funding economic development in India by supporting Meghnad Saha's industrialisation dream, indigenous capitalist class, and modernist Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

The greater powers of coordination and controlling agricultural research towards a homogenous model of food production all over India led to the first serious reorganisation of the ICAR in 1965. This introduced the Green Revolution after the reorganisation of the ICAR, which was powerful enough to introduce technology and use of chemicals in the Indian agricultural scenario. Agricultural science is generally regarded as an applied science that is linked to agricultural production. The historical background of the formation of ICAR in 1929, as well as its administrative and organizational aspects, has been discussed to pinpoint its capacity to manage agricultural research and extension in the early years of its existence.

### **Regionalisation of Agricultural Research**

The Great Economic Depression, 1929-33, which caused cultivators immense distress is a common phenomenon in India. Economic planning and its impact on agricultural research during the colonial and postcolonial periods are detailed in this paper. Policy

orientation, which impacted the orientation of agricultural research in India, was discussed during the study period. The colonial policy of surplus extraction remained the purview of British India for promoting sugarcane and cotton research on cash crops for industries.

As a consequence of the Second World War and the Bengal Famine, the emphasis on food crop production shifted. The regionalisation of agricultural research in India after 1945, eventually became the basis for the centralisation of agricultural research for additional crop production and commercialisation planning. This is so because regionalisation focuses on coordination and control of funds, intellectual resources and development of crops throughout India.

In the Five-Year Plans, the first three plans, until 1966, dealt with the emphasis shifting from agriculture to industrialisation and food production policy. The third FYP introduced the Green Revolution paradigm after 1966, which gave serious note to technological innovation and started to introduce technology transfer to Indian agricultural institutions from abroad, particularly the USA. There was regionalisation of agricultural research as transnationally organised or coordinated research that involved entities from a number of countries within a region.<sup>3</sup> This international cooperation set the path for institution building on the pattern of US land grant colleges, for which coordination between the Centre and State government was ensured. The techno-scientific agenda of the Indian State was to prioritise economic development over agricultural transformation from local relevant research to national production-centric enterprise.

The institutionalisation of agricultural research in India witnessed four phases: internationalist moment research from 1929 to 1940, agricultural research during the Second World War from 1940 to 1945, regionalisation of research from 1945 to 1955, and centralisation and reorganisation of research from 1955 to 1965. The regionalisation phase was the transformation period of agricultural

research in collaboration with donor agencies like Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation. It changed the political economy of India and the world in agricultural development. On education, the Indo-US agreement on educational exchange was signed on February 2, 1950 at New Delhi by Prime Minister of India and US Ambassador that led to the establishment of US Educational Foundation in India and the Fulbright Program in India.<sup>4</sup>

### **Colonial roots of Policy and Agricultural research**

Returning to the discussion of Britain's imperial policy in India, there was no progress or development in any field of knowledge, unless England could find economic benefits from it. The nature of agricultural research between the 1930s and 1940s involved greater autonomy in the selection of research problems for scientists in the provinces as well as some of the central research institutes. Traditional universities primarily conduct research in the local context in provinces, unhindered by the central mandate of the ICAR to meet the imperial specification of coordination and homogeneity in the research.

After the commencement of regionalisation of research in 1945, production-centric preferences emerged that went forward in post-independent India. The ICAR and GOI tried to shape agricultural research through the constitution of various fact-finding committees in the 1950s, with technological and financial assistance from foreign donor agencies.

Early attempts to reorganise the ICAR took place in 1950s by the teams such as the Joint Indo-American Team on Agricultural Research and Education (1954) and the Second Joint Indo-American Team on Agricultural Research and Education (1959). Nehru, not too keen to give up the organisation of agricultural research on the singular model of any country, incorporated institutional policies of Britain. Agricultural research in Britain gave the widest freedom of control over its own research programme, for the reason that decentralised control works.<sup>5</sup>

During the post-Nehru period, the effective coordination between the central and state governments to grant full administrative and functional autonomy to the ICAR was undertaken to develop agricultural institutions in India, based on the US land grant college model.

Agricultural research to be uniform at the centre and states for technological component introduction, served the purpose of the state agenda of development. Techno-scientific enquiry overpowered the agricultural sciences after the reorganisation of the ICAR in 1965. The evolution of scientific enquiry in agriculture by mapping the changes in the mode of administration and functioning of the ICAR is an approach to unearth the post-independence organisation of agricultural research in India.

### **Debate on basic, applied and local research**

The priorities of agricultural research in colonial and postcolonial is often highlighted by consensus over basic and applied research, where local research caters to region-specific farming communities. One has to understand the factors responsible for the transformation of agricultural research through the role of ICAR as the central actor and nodal point of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS). Sir Albert Howard clearly stated before the Agricultural Board meeting of the IARI in 1906, that Western scientific application procedures should conform to local conditions. The American expert, Dr. T. C. Byerly was quoted at the invitational address delivered at the Fourteenth Annual Conference at Ohio (USA), March 25, 1959, that, until the physiological mechanisms (basic research) are understood, the adaptability of diseases and pests to new crop varieties and new pesticides would be a problem.<sup>6</sup>

Currently, Indian agricultural research systems have three foundations: ICAR to control and coordinate at the national level; state agricultural universities (SAU) to focus on regional research; and the private sector to derive business benefits from these agricultural research

initiatives. Following Howard's footsteps, traditional Indian practices were not rejected, but developed in consonance with modern agricultural science. Disciplines have started to develop with variations in regional research by engaging with other scientific fields, such as genetics, plant physiology, chemistry, and botany. Free interaction among scientists from various parts of the globe and collaborative research with institutions abroad catalysed the development of agricultural science in India. This phase took some initiatives in building a scientific-interdisciplinary knowledge approach towards traditional farming practices until the 1950s. The research schemes and investigations in the period between 1929 and the 1950s involved long-term research schemes aimed at understanding the phenomenon of growth and problems related to the survival of crops and livestock.

### **Role of the ICAR**

The ICAR regulated the studies at the national and regional levels by performing its role as a dispenser of funds without conducting any research under its own name. The standing scientific committees of the ICAR were constituted to examine and scrutinise research schemes related to a wide spectrum of crops and livestock. In addition, these committees act with reference to regional specifications to suggest schemes for the cultivation of suitable crops. The widespread nationwide network of specialised research stations under the ICAR and the agricultural universities, working with and through the national extension service, have contributed significantly to raise productivity by developing and diffusing better varieties and practices.<sup>7</sup>

Local research combined with western agricultural sciences was instrumental in adjusting traditional agriculture with the modern notion, which would strengthen poor local communities. Furthermore, new employment avenues in the agricultural sector do not significantly increase the input costs. It might carry the hallmark of grassroots innovations, improvisation of simple tools using fewer energy sources, and promotion of local products embedded in their culture.



This mode of sustainable agriculture persisted until the 1950s, before modernisation and capitalisation of the agricultural program replaced traditional decentralised agricultural systems that complemented heavy industrialisation.

### **Modernisation and Planning in Agriculture**

The modernisation of agriculture with the introduction of FYPs from 1950 to 1965 pressed for the technologisation of Indian farming, which involved the introduction of tractors, tube wells, fertilisers, pesticides, irrigation technologies, and massive hydroelectric power projects. The modernisation approach to Indian agriculture affected the autonomy of research under state governments which focused on the local and regional research problems which the researchers were free to choose. The ICAR found it very difficult to coordinate research projects at the state level due to the complexity emerging from the local emphasis of the Indian agricultural research system. Agriculture was integrated into sustainable development which would feed people and minimise ecological risks. There was enough subsistence culture to prevail as well as locals sensitive to conserve soil fertility and save water waste. This also ensured preservation of the nutritional quality of the grains. This was because local research was conducted on and for the manufacture and use of cheap insecticides, fungicides, etc., from low-cost indigenous materials. Decentralising agricultural research was effective in discovering new knowledge that would develop rural industries as well. These small-scale industries were capable of generating employment and acted as a source for an efficient decentralised economy, ensuring a more or less equitable distribution of national income. The introduction of a modern agricultural system based on capital and chemical-intensive inputs was more effective in generating profit and making farmers dependent on the global economic system.

Policymaking during the first three FYPs was concentrated on meeting with the establishment of a national S&T system around the imperative of creating a strong nation. With the attainment of independence and the end of the Second World War, India was prioritising agricultural

research in food production to address the concern of food security. Moving ahead, the country formulated the Scientific Policy Resolution of 1958 which talked about scientific research in all its dimensions-pure, applied, and educational-to develop scientific manpower. To fulfil these objectives, the ICAR was reorganised by bringing a number of research institutions in the fields of agriculture, animal husbandry, dairying, and fisheries under its control. Formulation and implementation of the Indian agricultural policy of the ICAR. Thus, the reinvention of the role of the ICAR in monitoring and guiding agricultural research faced tumultuous power sharing between the central government and provincial governments after the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (1919).

Independent India after 1947, due to lack of defense and S&T infrastructure for military-industrial complexes, remained dependent on developed countries such as the US, Germany, and the UK for technology transfer. The state was engaged in building steel plants, dams, and nuclear sciences. This is why some institutes still conduct agricultural research which is local and regional in nature. This localisation of research and the development of various regions were inextricably linked to the development of the rural economy.

Orienting applied research was based on technology transfer from developed countries to meet farmers' needs (translated into economic and political interests by the nation-state). This transformation reflected the ICAR reorganisation in 1965. The fundamental aspects of scientific enquiry in agriculture became obsolete in this endeavour to foreground national interests and its developmentalist agenda. The space and resources were occupied by large science institutions in the field of industrial and nuclear research for economic development and defense.

### **Farmer Suicide and Americanisation of Indian Agriculture**

The unbearable debt burden on peasants and the import of food grains questioned the relevance of the Indian agricultural research system's effectiveness at both the policy and operational levels. Why do farmers commit suicides? A technical solution to the crises in the

agricultural sector shies away from a socio-historical context. The crisis of drought and irrigation issues is still dealt with selectively by the Indian state because it rarely contributes to the expansion of the neoliberal market and satiates corporate agendas in the sector. Mechanisation increased the cost of seeds and other inputs of agriculture, which farmers were not in a position to tackle. The Green Revolution played a major role by contaminating food with pesticides and fertilizers. The costly fertilizers, hybrid seeds, and irrigation equipment reduced small-scale farmers from leaving their farming land in search of other occupations. The suicide rate emerged as part of the change in the cultivation process, where farmers who could afford capital-intensive inputs were able to grow crops.

If crops fail for the season, then the high debt created by the purchase of fertilizers and irrigation facilities led to suicides. The excessive use of fertilizers and insecticides has adverse effects on the fertility of soil and changes, the physicochemical properties of the latter, causing an imbalance in the nutrient supply to the plants. Major irrigation projects initiated to support the commercialisation of agricultural production for market-centric economies have lowered the water table and other ecological crises. Water logging, reduced soil fertility, and increased pesticide resistance are detrimental to agricultural productivity. The consequences of the intensive use of toxic chemicals in crop cultivation (in the form of pesticides, fertilisers and ripening agents) and loss of nutrition are vital concerns for the health of the Indian population.

The Green Revolution has been the basis for agricultural production and the future of India to achieve self-sufficiency in food production. The centralist mode of agricultural research carried out mainly in irrigated areas and some areas of large landholdings have deprived the involvement of a large section of dry land farming communities. The centralised plant breeding of the green revolution yielded its best results in more favourable agricultural environments; most resource-poor farmers in marginal areas have not benefitted from the improved varieties.<sup>8</sup>

From the perspective of uniform knowledge generation, research introduced from international agencies on Indian soil had only second-order considerations for local adaptation and testing. Even agricultural universities and local research institutions were hindered by the institutional structure of the ICAR to work for local concern and the task to be undertaken by seed trial farms around the country. American-trained agriculturalists had impaired valuable contributions which local farmers, breeders, and scientists in universities might have initiated, which would be integrative to the economy of rural India. Given the fertilizer-rice price ratios, the small percentage of irrigated acreage and the absence of the necessary genetic material, it seems highly unlikely, that even a big increase in government research and extension expenditure by the government of British India would have caused a green revolution before 1947.<sup>9</sup>

The displacement of the poor rural population to cities is the result of the Green Revolution, which did not undertake the responsibility of rain-fed and dry agriculture areas. The adoption of a developmentalist model that promotes huge profits from agriculture and the lack of ethical responsibility towards poor rural farming communities has led to the collapse of the agricultural sector in India. The American techno-scientific model of agricultural research ruined the traditional agricultural knowledge base of developing countries, such as Mexico and India.

In the second half of the twentieth century, developed countries (capitalist economies under the USA) assured food security. Research on fertilizers, farming machinery, and pesticides was conducted at regional research stations through the ICAR in the Second FYP. The Nehru-Mahalanobis model of national economic development was followed in planning. The TCP between US agencies and the ICAR heralded a reductionist science, imposing an irrigation and fertilizer-responsive cultivation method at the national level. The techno-scientific research programs required centralisation of all research activities carried

out by various institutions in the country. Thereafter, a homogenous model of agricultural development was imposed in the mid-1960s. The reorganisation of ICAR became instrumental in realising a centralised agricultural research system. The state must settle its developmentalist goals.

## Conclusion

The article discusses the historical development of agricultural research in India during the colonial and postcolonial periods. It highlights how agricultural research became a tool for the British administrators to organise production and knowledge of rural communities. The establishment of the Imperial Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) at Pusa in 1905 and the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) at New Delhi in 1929 is discussed. The study aims to identify the historical actors responsible for the creation of agricultural knowledge and research that changed its goals and structure with interference from social, political, and economic structures in colonial and post-independence India.

The article also discusses the regionalisation of agricultural research in India after 1945, which eventually became the basis for the centralisation of agricultural research for additional crop production and commercialisation planning. The emphasis from agriculture to industrialization and food production policy is also highlighted.

## References

1. Nature, (1938). 'Agricultural Research in India', *Nature*, Vol. 142, Number 3604. p. 964.
2. Clark, Colin, (1960). 'Agricultural Research in India', *Nature*, Vol. 185, Number 3604. p. 414.
3. Perrault, Paul T., (2000). 'Regionalisation of Agricultural Research: Implications for Planning' in Govert Gijsbers et al. (eds.), *Planning Agricultural Research: A Sourcebook*, CABI Publishing, Wallingford. p. 17.

4. Mishra, J. P., and Arunachalam, A., (2022). 'International and National Collaborations in Agricultural Research and Development' in Pathak, H., Mishra J. P., and Mohapatra T., (eds.), *Indian Agriculture after Independence*, ICAR, New Delhi. p. 358.
5. Keen, B. A., (1942). 'Agricultural Research Institutes and the Future', *Nature*, Vol. 150, Number 3801. p. 283.
6. Krauss, W. E., (1959). 'Agricultural Research Today and Tomorrow', *Bulletin of the Entomological Society of America*, Volume 5, Number 2. p. 63.
7. Vaidyanathan, A., (2000). 'India's Agricultural Development Policy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 35, Number 20. p. 1735.
8. Laxmi, T., P. S. Janaki Krishna, and Pakki Reddy, G., (2007). 'Changing Paradigms in Agricultural Research: Significance of End-User Involvement', *Outlook on Agriculture*, Volume 36, Number 2. p. 120.
9. Pray, Carl E., (1984). 'The Impact of Agricultural Research in British India', *The Journal of Economic History*, Volume 44, Number 2. p. 440.



## REDISTRIBUTING LAND EQUALLY: LAND REFORM MEASURES IN POST-INDEPENDENCE ASSAM

**Ms. Anamika Saikia**

Research Scholar

Department of History, Dibrugarh University, Assam.

**&**

**Dr. Bipul Chaudhury**

Assistant Professor

Department of History, Dibrugarh University Assam.

### Abstract

*After the annexation of Assam by the British in 1826, the land system of the region was changed and since then, land reforms include not only tenancy reforms and redistribution of land for the benefit of landless cultivators but it was also conceived as a device for rural socio-economic transformation. Along with land, the agrarian question is one of the most important, complicated problems being faced by many underdeveloped countries like India. The article mainly focusses on the aims and objectives of the land reform acts enacted by the Assam government after independence and also discusses the assembly debates of various political parties, regarding the implementation of the land reform measures in Assam.*

**Keywords:** *Agriculture, landlords, peasant, sharecroppers.*

## Introduction

After independence, considerable emphasis was laid on land reforms as a part of national policy. The ruling Congress party was compelled to formulate its land reform policy because ‘land to the tiller’ was the battle cry with which the Indian peasantry joined the freedom struggle led by the Congress party. At that time, to get the support of the peasants, the Congress party committed to land reforms for the peasants. Land reforms became the political strategy for the Congress government. The board objective set forth was, firstly to remove such motivational and other impediments to increase agricultural production which, arise from agrarian structures, inherited in the past and secondly, to eliminated all elements of exploitation and social injustices within the agrarian system.

In 1947, the Congress Agrarian Reform Committee was appointed and the Committee recommended the abolition of all semi-feudal forms of exploitation and granting of ownership rights to those who undertake personal cultivation. On 8<sup>th</sup> August 1945, the working committee of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee decided to set up a Standing Committee to study the land problems of Assam and advise the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee to adopt land reform policies in this respect. In 1946, the Congress came to power in Assam and the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee turned its attention to land reforms. It affirmed that the actual tiller of the soil should become the owner of it. It was also an essential prerequisite for self- sufficiency in food grains.<sup>1</sup>

The important land reform Acts enacted in Assam, since independence are as follows:

1. The Assam Adhiars Protection and Regulation Act 1948
2. The Assam State Acquisition of Zamindari Act, 1951
3. The Assam Fixation of Ceiling on Land Holding Act, 1956
4. The Assam State Acquisition of Land Belong to Religious or Heritable Institution of Public Nature Act, 1960.
5. The Assam Consolidation of Holding Act, 1960



A new tenancy legislation called the Assam Temporarily Settled Areas Tenancy Act was passed in 1971, repealing the old Act of 1935. Even after India's independence, Assam passed legislation in 1947 to protect the interests of the tribal, inhabiting the plain areas. In pursuance of this enactment, certain areas in the submontane region land were declared as tribal belts, where settlement of government waste land and alienation of land by tribals and non-tribals were regulated by special-provisions, so as to afford protection to the tribals in matters relating to land. Under the direction of the Act 30, tribal belts were constituted in the areas, predominantly inhabited by the tribal people in the plain districts of Brahmaputra Valley. By another Act, namely, the Assam Assessment of Revenue- free Waste Land Grants Act of 1948, the free-simple estates were assessed to land revenue, so that they lost the basic character of proprietary estates.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Assam Adhjar Protection and Regulation Act 1948**

The Assam Adhjar Protection and Regulation Act, 1948 received the assent of the Government on June 3, 1948. This Act was the first official attempt to protect the interests of the share-croppers, by fixing the maximum rent to be paid by them. The preamble of the Act mentions 'to provide for the protection of the tenants of the agricultural lands paying rent in kind.'<sup>3</sup>

While introducing the Assam Adhjar Protection and Regulation bill in the Legislative Assembly in 1948, Shri Bishnu Ram Medhi, the then Revenue Minister of Assam stated that, "As a matter of fact we have received a large number of complains and enquiry and in these we have found that exorbitant rate of rent in kind is realized from the tenants and on refusal they are evicted and great hardship is caused. It has been brought to our notice that the amount of rent in kind is taken to such an extent that very little is left for the actual cultivator for his maintenance. For the purpose of giving protection to the actual tenant we have introduced this, Bill."<sup>4</sup> He also pointed out that not only the landlords pay very little revenue to the government even in the ryotwari areas but they also take away half of the produce simply because they own the land.

In the Assembly, there were other spokesmen who raised their voices on behalf of the landlords. They fought for the interests of the landlords and went against the ryots. Before the passing of the Bill, Mohammad Saadulla, in 1948 said that it was all very well to say that the bill was to protect the interest of the *adhiars* but this bill entirely ignores the interests of the landlords who are in distress during the present time of communist agitation.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, a number of landlords protested against the proposed bill and they stated that the distribution of land by the government is not workable and therefore, should not be imposed. Sadulla also claimed that if the bill was imposed without looking after the interests of the landlords, the landlords will be forced to go to the Civil courts and through their claims will get the lands and try to cultivate it through their own tenants or by hiring labourers and poor people who may be quite willing to work on wages.<sup>6</sup> The Congress member Nilamani Phookan explained that, “we are to look at the interest of 96% of the cultivators of land and not to the 4% of the landlords or capitalists or big people who are holding lands for generations depriving these cultivators for generations of their dues.”<sup>7</sup> According to him, this bill was only an intermediary step to uproot the whole system of landlordism.

However, the bill was passed and the then Revenue Minister B. Medhi claimed that the government made elaborate enquiries both through official and non-official sources and was satisfied that the bill was urgently necessary. He, however, could not help but point out that this bill not only looked after the interest of the *adhiars* but also the interest of the rent receivers. If there is any failure or refusal on the part of the *adhiars* to deliver the landlord his due, then the landlord can come to the officer and demand eviction of the defaulting *adhiars*.

Under the provision of the Act, the rent was fixed at 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the produce but when the landlord supplied the plough cattle it was to be 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the produce. Thus, the first step towards the agrarian reforms was taken by the Congress government in post - independence Assam. When

more than one crop is grown on a particular plot of land, the landlord will get his share only of the major crops. According to the Act, an *adhiar* was also to get cultivation rights on the Adhi land until he willingly left it. He had to leave the land if he voluntarily relinquishes or secondly, if he is ordered by an Adhi Conciliation Board to vacate the land.

The Adhi Conciliation Board may, however, order an *adhiar* to vacate the land on the following grounds:

- a. If the land is bonafide required by the landlord for 'personal cultivation.'
- b. If an *adhiar* has used the land in a manner which renders it unfit for the purpose of cultivation.
- c. If an *adhiar* has failed to deliver within the prescribed time to a landlord such a share or quantity of the produce as he is bound to deliver.
- d. If the *adhiar* kept the land fallow for two consecutive years without reasonable ground or sublet it to others.

The Adhi Conciliation Board was established in specified areas. The board consisted of one member from landlords, one member from *adhiars*, from the area concerned with the Revenue Department as Chairman, to ensure that the provisions of the Act were followed and that there was no illegal eviction of an *adhiar*. The board also settled any dispute arising between the landlord and *adhiar*.

Although in accordance with the Adhiar Protection and Regulation Act, the State Government tries to give the sharecropping system a legal recognition and aims at protection of the sharecropper against rack-renting and illegal eviction, because of the absence of effective implementation of the legislation, it failed to lower the rates of rent and change the traditional system of sharing the cost of cultivation and the produce of land. The rural economic survey conducted by the government of Assam, during the period 1948-49 revealed that half the crop was the common rate of rent in the districts of Darrang, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur and Nowgong.<sup>8</sup>

In the event of eviction, the Act provides for the retention of minimum area of 10 *bighas* of land by the Adhiar. Although the Act strictly restricted the landlord's right to evict the *adhiars*, before the enactment of the Act, the landlords were evicting their *adhiars* according to their wishes. In Golapara district, the President of an 'Anchalik Panchayat' stated that on his initiative, a few cases of illegal eviction were brought before the Adhi Conciliation Board, but in most of the cases, the verdicts of the Board were in favour of the landlords.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the "land hunger" of the *adhiars*, they did not like to take the risk of being black-listed by the landlords who leased out their land. The State government constituted the Adhi Conciliation Board to settle the disputes that occurred between the landlord and the *adhiar*.

However, in reality, in the absence of any records regarding share-tenancy, it became difficult for the member of the board to ensure justice in the settlement of disputes. The *adhiars* generally believed that the verdicts of the Adhi Conciliation Board were likely to go against their interest because of the manipulating tactics of the richer section of landlords and unsympathetic attitude of the revenue officers.

### **Abolition of the Intermediary**

The Assam State Acquisition of Zamindaris' Act, 1951 received the assent of the President on July 27, 1951. The Act was enacted to provide for the acquisition by the state of the interests of the proprietors and tenure holders and certain other estates of Goalpara, Garo Hills and Cachar. It also extended to the permanently settled areas of the State, the Lakhiraj estates within the boundaries of the permanently settled estates and the acknowledged estates of Bijni and Sidli.<sup>10</sup>

Although the government enacted the Act for acquisition of the intermediary rights, the implementation of the Act was very slow. The intermediary right already had been acquired in Goalpara district, but in Karimganj sub-division out of 5,031 estates 4,731 estates had

been acquired up to June, 1965. The acquisition work was started in Karimganj sub-division only in 1960 but in the Karimganj sub-division, the revenue officer was still engaged in the preparation of the draft of the record of right. The main reasons behind the obstacles of the speedy implementation of the legislative provisions were the lack of trained and adequate administrative machinery and the absence of up-to-date record of rights.

Sri Mahendra Mohan Chawdhury, the then Parliamentary Secretary, who introduced the Assam State Acquisition of Zaminadri Bill, stated that, "The revenue, government receives from the estates does not come up even to one percent of what the zamindars receive from their first intermediary, not to speak of their tenants. This has deprived the *raiya*ts of their legitimate benefits and has rendered the land revenue almost entirely inelastic for about a century and a half, depriving Government at the same time of the benefit of higher prices of crops, increase in the value of land, extension of cultivation or growth of towns."<sup>11</sup> The Act also sought to simplify existing tenures of land by bringing the zamindari areas in line with the ryotwari areas to evolve a uniform method of revenue administration all over the state and to increase the revenue resources of the Government.<sup>12</sup>

The abolition of Zamindari system was expected to improve the economic conditions of the tenants. While introducing the Assam State Acquisition of Zamindaris' Bill in the Legislative Assembly, Shri Mahendra Mohan Chowdhury observed that, "our new found freedom will come to naught if we cannot free the poor *raiya*ts from the yoke of Zamindari system and place the *raiya*ts of these areas on the same status with their brethren in the temporarily settled areas."<sup>13</sup> With the implementation of the Act, the tenants of the acquired estates were required to pay rent directly to the government at the rate which was changed by the intermediaries, before the acquisition of their rights. After the acquisition of the estates of the big zamindars, a section of the tenants had been deprived of various rights they enjoyed under the zamindari system.

In Goalpara district, the tenants of some big zamindars were getting wood, bamboo and thatching material from the forests of their estates at a nominal cost. But now they had to buy these materials for house holdings, fencing and agricultural implements. The Act had taken away not only the rights and interest of the big zamindars but also the rights and interest of the whole body of proprietors, tenure holders and other intermediaries.

The Act was very liberal in allowing the big zamindars to retain vast areas of agricultural land. They were allowed at least 400 *bighas* (133 acres) of agricultural land. The limit of 400 *bighas* may be relaxed in the case of proprietors who have undertaken large- scale farming on co-operative basis or by the use of power- driven mechanical appliances.<sup>14</sup> For solving the chronic land hunger in the state and improving agricultural efficiency, it was essential that only that quantity of land should be allowed to be retained by the proprietors and other intermediaries which they could operate with maximum efficiency under the existing method of cultivation.

### **Ceiling on land holding**

The uneconomic size of the great majority of the landholdings, inequality in the ownership and use of land and landlessness of a considerable portion of the population were some of the serious defects of the agrarian structure of Assam. The report on the survey of the Rural Economic Conditions conducted by the Government of Assam during the period 1948-49 showed that in the district of Darrang, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur and Nowgong 11.26% to 18.48% of the households were landless, 31.81% to 37.66% households had holdings below 10 *bighas* and 12.21% to 17% households had holding between 10 and 15 *bighas*. In the course of the debate on the Ceiling Bill, in 1957, the then Revenue Minister of Assam stated that in Kamrup that 17.6% people were without land and 66.3% people had less than 10 *bighas* and in Gaolpara 20.4% people were without land and 52.3% people had less than 10 *bighas*.<sup>15</sup> The Assam Government enacted The Assam Fixation of Ceiling on Land

Holding Act, 1956 to impose limitations on the amount of land holding by a person. The Act received the assent of the President on December 7, 1965. The Act extended to all the districts in the plains Division of the states of Assam that are Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Nowgong, Darrang, Kamrup, Goalpara and Cachar. This process of ceiling of land holding began during the Second Five Year Plan in most of the states.

The provisions of the Act were not applicable to the a) lands held by the State Government of Assam or by the Union Government of India or by any local authority; b) Lands belonging to any religious or charitable institution of public nature; c) Lands held for special cultivation of tea or purpose ancillary thereto and lands exceeding 150 *bighas*, utilized for large scale cultivation of citrus in a compact block by any person before January 1, 1955. Under the Act, no person was entitled to hold as owner or tenant lands which exceed the limit of 150 *bighas* in the aggregate. In the case of orchard land, the area of holding land may be increased by a maximum of 30 *bighas*. The excess land over the ceiling limit was to be acquired by the State Government on payment of compensation to the owner or the tenant. If the land was acquired from a tenant, the Government was entitled to settle it with the sub-tenant. If the tenant kept the land fallow for two years without any valid reasons or has failed to pay the rent to the government then the tenants would be evicted from that land.

In 1959, as provided in the Ceiling Act a State Land Reforms Board with five members, two officials, two non-officials and one chairman had also been functioning to advise the Government to carrying out the provisions of the Act and to formulate policies in matter of land reforms and also to evaluate progress and effect of land reforms from time to time.<sup>16</sup> The fixation of ceiling on land holding was expected to reduce the disparities in the ownership of land and to increase the size of uneconomic holdings by redistribution of land. But only about 63,000 *bighas* (about 21,000 acres) of land had been declared surplus and about 9,000 *bighas* had been taken possession of up to March, 1965.<sup>17</sup> The

fixation of ceiling at 150 *bighas* for all classes of land and the inordinate delay in the implementation of legislative measures rendered ceiling legislation ineffective and it failed to achieve its objective. It also failed because the holdings above 150 *bighas* were few in number.

The rural economic survey revealed that less than 1% of the holdings in the districts of Darrang, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur and Nowgong were above 100 *bighas*. The national sample survey report on land holding shows that only 21% of the ownership holdings were of the size of 150 *bighas* above. The provisions regarding relaxation of ceiling limit for orchards, efficiently managed farms on which heavy investment had been made and private land of the permanently settled areas reduced the impact of ceiling legislation.

As a result of transfer and partition the area under agricultural holding above 150 *bighas* (50 acres) came down from 1, 620,000 *bighas* (540000 acres) in 1953-54 to 72,000 *bighas* (24,000 acres) in 1960-61.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, because of the lack of support of the village community the effective enforcement of the land reform measures did not happen. Author N. C Dutta, in his survey found that about 19% of the persons of the village community were aware about the ceiling act. Mostly the cultivating tenants and the small landowners were ignorant of it.

### **Consolidation of holding**

The Assam Consolidation of Holding Act 1960 received the assent of the President on June 25, 1960. It was an Act provided for consolidation and prevention of fragmentation of agricultural holdings. The Act was extended to all the plain districts of Assam. Under the provision of the Act, the State Government was to constitute a Gaon Panchayat or an Anchalik Panchayat established under the Assam Panchayat Act, 1959 and to act as the Consolidation Advisory Committee in the special area. The Board would assist the Consolidation officer in preparing and implementing the scheme of consolidation.



Under the principles of the board consolidation would be made as far as possible by way of exchange or amalgamation on the owners voluntarily agreeing to it before the consolidation officers. The consolidation officer would ensure that in allotment of consolidation land every such person get as far as possible, the same area or same of value as the original area or value of such person. Allotment of consolidated plot would be practicable to the owner who held the largest area in the plot. Owners belonging to the same family would be allotted adjacent plots.

After the issue of allotment order, the new owner would be entitled to take possession of the new holding allotted to him. If there was any standing crop in the new holding on the date of enforcement, the person from whom possession had been taken would be given the option to tend, harvest and gather the said crop. According to the provision of the scheme, after the enforcement of the scheme, the settlement officer would cause then existing record-of-right of the area for revision.

### **Acquisition of land for Religious and Charitable institutions**

Manorama Sharma stated that according to a rough estimate given by the *bhakats* of the Garamur Satra during an interview, the *Satras* had about 36,000 *bighas* of land at the time of the British occupation. Later in 1910, the then Gosain Jogesh Chandra Goswami bought about 500 *bighas* of land at Ajeraguri in North Lakhimpur and so the *satra* land increased somewhat. The Auniati had, according to the District Gazetter, 21,000 acres of *lakhiraj* and 60 acres of *nisfkhiraj* lands. Even if there were some discrepancies in this calculation of the amount of land owned by the *satras*, it was evident that *satras* had considerable landed wealth.

Under these circumstances, in the absence of a proper survey and reliable land records, authentic claims on land did not come to light and these institutions became a strong pillar of feudal agrarian structure. They leased out land to tenants for cultivation which was not favorable

to the latter. After independence, the pressure created by the growing mobilization of tenants and the ruling political parties led to direct intervention in the agrarian domain of the *satras*.

All the land belonging to these institutions were kept outside the preview of the Assam Fixation of Ceiling on Land Holding Act, 1956. Thus, as a part of land reform measures to bringing the tenants of the religious and charitable institutions in direct relation with the State Government and acquiring the land in excess of the bona fide requirements of these institutions for residential and allied purposes, the Assam State Acquisition of Lands belonging to Religious or Charitable institutions of Public Nature Act 1959 was enacted. The Act received the assent of the President on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1961. The Act provided for the acquisition of the land of religious or charitable institutions which included *Satras*, *Maths*, public temples, public *wakfs*, public mosques, *dargahs*, *gurudwaras*, churches etc. All the acquired land would be settled with the *raiyyat*, in occupation of it on the date of notification of acquisition. If the land acquired was not under the occupation of a *raiyyat* on the date of notification, then the land would be settled with the landless cultivators.

Even after a decade, since the legislation was passed, in 1973, the state government had acquired only 2, 88,970 *bighas* (38,684,413 hectares) of land from 143 such institutions.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, till the early seventies, the offer of settlement to the standing tenants had not made any satisfactory progress. A note of the Government stated that in case of land acquired from religious and charitable institutions, the progress was not at all satisfactory, due mainly to the absence of reliable record-of-rights of tenants, as the management of lands by temples etc. was not as organized as those of the Zamindars. However, the government posted one Principal Revenue Assistant, equivalent in status to Deputy Collector in each sub- division to look after these works. It was considered necessary to have a full-scale operation of preparation of record-of-rights in respect of lands under these authorities.

In later years, more lands were brought under the acquisition act. By 1990, about a total area of 3, 30, 157 *bighas* (44,198,117 hectares) of land belonging to some 197 religious and charitable institutions was acquired under the provision of the act. While among 46,000 *bighas* of land were distributed among the occupancy and the landless tenants until September, 1990.

Although the Government made various provisions for the implementation of the Act, it was noted that because of the absence of effective implementation no visible impact was observed even after more than three decades of its enactment. Not only was the dominant intermediary responsible for such a delay of implementation of the Act but also the conservative higher judiciary and insensitive bureaucracy were equally responsible for it. On the other hand, the lack of proper and authentic up-to-date record-of-right also hampered the process of land reform.

### **Assam Tenancy Act of 1971**

The Assam Temporarily Settled Area Tenancy Act widened the definition of the word tenant to include any person who cultivates land of another person on crop sharing basis and also classified tenants into occupancy and non-occupancy tenants. A tenant can acquire the occupancy right if he had been tilling the land from continuously three years. The Act fixed the maximum rent in kind at  $1/5^{\text{th}}$  of the produce and case rent was fixed at three times of land revenue. The Tenancy Act of 1971 introduced a new chapter, providing the produce for acquisition of intermediary and ownership right by occupancy tenants and other tenants on payment of fixed compensation to the landlords. The compensation was fixed 50 times the land revenue. The Act also contained provisions against forcible acts of ejection by landlords.

By the Act the Acquisition of occupancy right was made easier by shortening the holding period from 12 years to 3 years. The tenants who had held land for a period of less than three years continuously were termed as non-occupancy tenants. They were also only given the right to

possession. Under the main features of this Act, the definition of tenant was widened to include *adhiars*, *chuktidars* and share croppers. Under the Act, the government has the power to acquire rights in favour of occupancy and non- occupancy tenants cultivating holdings on payment of compensation. An option has also been given to the occupancy tenants to acquire such rights by depositing the compensation until the government does so. Specific provisions have been provided regarding eviction of tenants.

An occupancy tenant shall not be ejected by the landlord except in execution of a decree on the ground that he had used the land in a manner, which renders it unfit for the purpose of tenancy. In case of non-occupancy tenants, eviction can be affected if the land was unfit for the purpose of tenancy, or the breach of conditions of the contract, which made him liable for eviction. The Act prohibited unauthorized eviction in the form of voluntary surrender.

Although the 1971 Tenancy reform Act was a faithful attempt to bring radical change in the agrarian system, it is important to note how far it achieved its desired goal. The most crucial issue is the recording of the tenant's name in the government record of right. Although recording started in Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur and Darrang initially, in early seventies and was subsequently extended to Kamrup, Goalpara and Sibsagar areas, the situation on the whole, was not very encouraging.

In the most cases, the tenancy was mostly oral; no written document was exchanged between the landlord and tenant. In the case of *adhiars*, because of their weak social and economic status, were normally not in a position to claim their rights or to see that proper entries were made in the records in their favour.<sup>20</sup> No evidence was available in the hand of *adhiars*. Although the relationship existing between the landlord and the *adhiar* was essentially feudal in nature, their relationship was mainly based on dominant-subordinate relationships and age-old customs and practices define such a relationship.

## Conclusion

The main component of the programme of land reforms in Assam after independence was abolition of intermediary tenures, tenancy reforms and ceiling on agricultural holdings. The laws for the abolition of intermediary had been implemented effectively; on the other hand, in the field of tenancy reform and ceiling on the land holdings, the enactment of law was inefficient. Legislation forms only the first step towards achieving the various goals and objectives prescribed by the government, the real test of success is however the actual implementation and the resultant consequences. Though the government enacted several Acts for land reforms after independence, the enactment of laws was slow and ineffective. The government took special steps for the preparation of records of rights in some areas for strengthening the revenue administration and for the wellbeing of the re-settlement operation in the state by submitting two schemes for inclusion in the annual plan of 1963-64 with 50% assistance from the Planning Commission. However, the schemes had to be dropped in the course of reorientation due to the emergency in the country.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, it is also notable that the ineffective implementation of the land reform measures was the immediate and subsequent consequence of the Peasant Movement in Assam in a later period.

## References

1. Das, Swarnalata, (1997). *Agrarian Problem and Politics of Assam Particularly in the District of undivided Goalpara during the post-independence period (1947-1990)*, Department of Political Science, Guwahati University. p. 57.
2. Goswami, Atul, (1986). *Land reforms and Peasant Movement*, OMSONS Publications, Guwahati. p. 40.
3. Dutta, Narendra, Chandra, (1968). *Land problems and Land reforms in Assam*, Chand & Company Pvt Ltd., New Delhi. p. 58.
4. Report of Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, (1948). Vol. I, No. 3, p. 128.

5. Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, March-April, (1948). Vol. I, No. 2, p. 129.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
7. Borgohain Rooplekha, (1992). *Politics of Land Reforms in Assam*, Reliance Publishing House, New Delhi. p. 49.
8. Dutta, N. C., & Narendra, Chandra, (1968). *Land problems and Land reforms in Assam*, Chand & Company Pvt Ltd., New Delhi. p. 36.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Dutta, N. C. & Narendra, Chandra, (1968). *Op. cit.*, p. 61.
11. Report of Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, (1948). Vols. II, No. 17, p. 1199.
12. Mali, D. D., (1989) *Economic Problems and Planning in Assam*, OMSONS Publication, New Delhi. p. 75.
13. Report of Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, Vols. II, (1948). *Op. cit.*, p. 1203.
14. Dutta, N. C., & Narendra, Chandra, (1968). *Op. cit.*, p.49.
15. Report of Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, (1957). Vol. 1, No. 20, p.1506.
16. Survey of Land Reform in Assam.
17. Ministry of food and agriculture, department of agriculture, Government of India, Annual Report, 1964-65; cited by N. C. Dutta, p. 84.
18. National Sample Survey Report on Land Holding, No.66, p. 60, cited in N. C. Dutta p. 86.
19. Sharma, Manorama, (1990). *Social and Economic change in Assam: Middle Class Hegemony*, Ajanta Publication, Delhi, p. 125.
20. Karna, M. N., (2004). *Agrarian Structure and Land Reforms in Assam*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, p. 80.
21. Survey of Land Reform in Assam, p. 2.



## AGHORAMŪRTI – A RARE MANIFESTATION OF ŚIVA

**Ms. S. Nithya**

Research Scholar

Department of Historical Studies

C.P.R Institute of Indological Research, Chennai

### Abstract

*Aghoramūrti, one of the sixty-four forms of Śiva is said to have emerged from the 'Aghora' face of Śiva and is considered as one of the fiercest manifestations of Śiva. Though the mukhaliṅgas show sculptural depiction of the 'aghora' face, the full iconic form of this aspect developed in the later period. This sculptural representation of Aghoramūrti is seen in very few temples of Tamil Nadu like the Śvētāranyēswarar temple at Tiruvenkadu. The significance of this ugrā form of Śiva and its iconographic details are studied in this article.*

**Keywords:** *Aghora, Aghoramūrti, mukhaliṅga, Śvētāranyēswarar*

Śiva is worshipped as Pañcānana (having five faces) each of which faces a specific direction, symbolizing the five elements of nature.<sup>1</sup> The *Pañcabrahma Mantrāni* of *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* describes the five faces of Śiva which are Iśana, Tatpuruṣa, Aghora, Vāmadēva and

Satyojāta.<sup>2</sup> In this form, he is of the nature of five Brahmās.<sup>3</sup> The Aghora face of Sadāśiva (facing the South) represents the fire element of the *pañca bhūtās*.<sup>4</sup> Sculptural depiction of Śiva as Pañcānana is seen in the *mukhalingas* (Pl.I).

The origin of Aghora is described in the *Uttarabhāga* of *Liṅgapurāṇā*, according to which, when the *kalpa*<sup>5</sup> of yellow colour ended, the creator Brahmā praised the supreme Parabrahman who appeared in the form of Aghora as a black-complexioned boy wearing black garments, a turban, sacred thread, crown, garland, all in black.<sup>6</sup> *Skanda Purāṇa* mentions Aghora as the face of Śiva facing the south which is dark like a cloud.<sup>7</sup> This form of Śiva presides over the principle of intellect<sup>8</sup> and represents the support of the physical body, the sense of taste, of colour and of fire.<sup>9</sup> *Viṣṇudharmōttara* reiterates that Aghora represents the fire element<sup>10</sup> and has a face that carries the aspect of fierce Bhairava.<sup>11</sup>

The significance of Aghora, the mode of worship and the *mantra* is mentioned in the *Śiva Purāṇa*,<sup>12</sup> the *Liṅga Purāṇa*<sup>13</sup> and the *Skanda Purāṇa*.<sup>14</sup> The Aghora *mantra* gives protection to the practitioner and is destructive of all kinds of sins including *Brahmahatyā* (killing a Brahmin).<sup>15</sup> It is considered as the *ugra* form of Śiva and the worship of this form is prescribed for the kings to attain success against enemies and to gain victory in wars.<sup>16</sup> The auspicious day to perform these rituals is ‘*Aghorachathurdaśī*’ which is the fourteenth *tithi* of the month of *Phalguni*.<sup>17</sup>

### Aghoramūrti in iconographic texts

In the *Skanda Purāṇa* Aghoramūrti is mentioned as *nīlavarṇa* (blue in colour) holding *kuṭhāra*, *vēda*, *aṅkuṣa*, *pāśa*, *śūla*, *kapāla*, *dhakka* and *akṣamālā* in his hands and the deity is mentioned as *chaturmukha* (four-faced).<sup>18</sup> *Kāranāgama* mentions the deity as *jwalakēśa* (flames surrounding the head), *trinētra* and the forehead marked with ashes in the shape of a crescent moon. The two fore-arms of the deity hold a *triśūla* horizontally. The other hands are shown holding a *vētāla*, *khadga*, *damaru*, *kapāla*, *khētaka* and *ghaṇṭa*.<sup>19</sup> According to the *Rūpamaṇḍana*,



the face of Aghora is terrifying set with three eyes; there are fangs of teeth on either side of the mouth; a garland of human skulls is seen on the head and a garland of scorpions adorns the neck. The deity is adorned with snakes as ear-rings, *keyūras*, *hāra*, *yajñopavīta*, *kaṭisūtra*, anklets and so on. Aghoramūrti should be blue like the *nīlotpala* and *jaṭās*, yellow, and these should be adorned with the crescent moon. The left hands should bear in them the *khaṭvāṅga*, the *kapāla*, the *kheṭaka*, and the *pāśa* while the right ones, the *triśūla*, the *paraśu*, the *khaḍga*, and the *daṇḍa*.

There are three significant forms of Aghoramūrti/Aghorāstramūrti mentioned in the *āgamas* viz., *aṣṭabhuja* (eight-armed), *daśabhuja* (ten-armed) and *dvātriṃsathbhuja* (thirty-two armed). In *Uttara Kāranāgama* the deity is shown holding *triśūla*, *damaru*, *pāśa*, *kapāla*, *daṇḍa*, *dhanus*, *bāna*, *khaḍga* in the eight arms and a *vṛṣabha* (bull) is also depicted near the deity. The complexion is dark like a storm cloud and the neck is blue in colour. The deity is shown clad in the skin of an elephant or the lion adorned with the ornaments made of snakes and scorpions. The body is covered with the ashes of the cremated dead ones. His face is terrifying with three eyes and fangs of teeth. His hair is bound with a serpent. The image is surrounded by images of demons and goblins. The deity must be draped in red coloured garments and adorned with red flowers.<sup>20</sup>

*Daśabhuja* Aghoramūrti is mentioned in the *Pāñcarātra āgama*, as *trilōchanam* (three-eyed), with terrible fangs of teeth and holding *paraśu*, *damaru*, *khaḍga*, *khēṭaka*, *bāna*, *dhanus*, *sūla*, *kapāla* on the upper arms while the lower arms show *abhaya* and *varada* mudras.<sup>21</sup> *Śivatattva Ratnakara* gives an account of *dvātriṃśadbhuja* Aghoramūrti (thirty-two armed). The deity is has a *jata-makuta* adorned with a crescent moon on it. He is *trinetra* and carries *abhaya*, *khaḍga*, *sūla*, *cakra*, *damaru*, a bone, *bāna*, *gada*, *padmam*, *kapāla*, *jñānamudra*, *kuṇḍa*, *aṅkuśa*, *akṣamāla*, *khaṭvāṅga* and *paraśu*; in the left hands, *varada*, *khēṭaka*, *śaṅka*, *pāśa*, *mudgara*, *nāga*, *agni*, *mriga*, *ghaṇṭa*, *dhanus*, *katyavalambita-hasta*, *ratnas* or *gems*, *kumudam*, *kumbham*, *pustakā*. He is adorned with a *ruṇḍamāla* and is depicted standing on a *prēta*.<sup>22</sup>

### Sculptural representation in temples

Though the concept of Aghoramūrti already existed in the Mukhalinga from the second century B.C.E at Bhita, it continued and was popular during the Kushana, Gupta, and later periods. The full iconic representation (anthropomorphic) of Aghoramūrti form of Siva is depicted in Tamil Nadu in a few temples viz., Śvētāranyēśwarar temple at Tiruvenkādu (Pl.II & Pl.III), Bhaktavatsalēśvarar temple at Tirukkaḷukunṇam (Pl.IV & Pl.V), Dhenupurīśwarar temple, Pattīswaram (Pl.VI) and Arunāchalēśwarar temple at Tiruvaṇṇamalai.

Aghoramūrti is generally sculptured and installed in the temple in a form described in the *Uttara Kāranāgama* (eight-armed). In this work, the name Aghōrāstramūrti is used for this deity. In Śvētāranyēśwarar temple at Tiruvenkādu, such a sculpture of Aghoramūrti is seen in a separate shrine. The main sanctum houses the liṅga called ‘Śvētāranyēśwarar’ but the temple is very famous for the worship of Aghoramūrti.

The sculpture is around six feet tall and is made of stone. The deity is eight-armed and a *prabhāvali* made of stone surrounds the deity. The *Sthala Purānam* of the temple narrates the story of a demon Maruthvāsura, who with the boon granted by Brahma was troubling the *dēvas*. The *dēvas* prayed to Śvētāranyēśwarar and then Naṇḍi was instructed to fight the demon. But Maruthvasura was extremely powerful and could not be defeated by Naṇḍi. Hence, Aghoramūrti appeared to kill him but when the demon surrendered before the fearsome Aghora, he was pardoned. A bull (Naṇḍi) is seen near the right leg of the deity and the demon (Maruthvāsura) is shown near the left leg in this sculpture aligning with the *sthala purānam*.<sup>23</sup> The demon’s image is clearly seen in the bronze icon (Pl.III) of the same deity present in the shrine.

Similar sculpture is found in Bhaktavatsalēśvarar temple at Tirukkaḷukunṇam but not in a separate shrine. The temple is huge with four *gōpuras* and three *prakāras*. In the inner *prakāra*, there is a finely sculpted seven feet tall Aghoramūrti (Pl.IV). Apart from this huge sculpture there are carvings of the deity with all the exact same features

on the pillars of the sixteen pillar *maṇḍapa* in this temple (Pl.V). Another such sculpture is seen in Dhenupurīśwarar temple at Pattīśwaram. The temple has a finely chiselled sculpture of Aghoramūrti in the *maṇḍapa* of the second *prakāra*. This image is made of stone and is relatively smaller in comparison with the sculptures mentioned above but has the same attributes (Pl.VI).

The characteristic features of the above-mentioned sculptures are similar with slight variations in the dimensions. In all the above-mentioned temples, Aghoramurti has *jwālakēsam* and a *kirīta makuṭa*. There is a crescent moon adorning the *makuṭa*. He is depicted as *trinētra* (three-eyed), raised eye-brows, and *ugra-damṣṭrā* (protruding fangs of teeth). He is *aṣṭabhuja* with the upper right arms holding *vēṭala*, *khadga* and *damaru* while the upper left arms holding *kapāla*, *khētaka* and *ghaṇṭā*. The two lower arms carry a *triśūla* at an angle as to pierce. The deity is adorned with *ruṇḍamāla* which extends a little above the feet and other ornaments made of snakes and scorpions. The deity is shown in a *pratyaliḍha* in a striding pose. The depiction of a bull (Nāṇḍi) on the right side and of a demon (Maruthivasuran) near the left leg in the Aghoramūrti sculpture in Śvētāranyēśwarar temple (Pl.II & Pl.III) is not seen in the sculptures from the other temples. There is a *nāga* on the *Kirīta makuṭa* of the deity in Dhenupurīśwarar temple which is not seen in the other sculptures mentioned earlier. Apart from these slight variations, the attributes are same in the sculptures.

## Conclusion

It is understood that worship of Śiva as ‘Aghoramūrti’ was recommended for the kings to gain victory in wars, to get rid of sins like *Brahmahatya* and to attain all the riches in life. This explains the installation of this deity in the full iconic form (anthropomorphic) in very few temples of Tamil Nadu.

## References

1. Linga Purāna, Uttarabhaga, 14.1
2. *Taittiriya Aranyaka* 10.17-21 and *Siva Purāna, Śatarudra saṃhitā*, 3.22
3. *Ajitāgama, Kriyā-pāda, pātala* 2.30. and *Vātulā Shuddhaka*, 7.15.
4. Sivaramamurti. C., *Satarudriya: Vibhuti of Siva's Iconography*, I Ed, 1976, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, p.35.
5. A *kalpa* is a cosmic duration which is considered as a day of Brahma or one thousand yugas equal to a period of four hundred and thirty-two million years of mortals. Each *kalpa* is presided over by a particular form of Rudra. For instance, the *Śvetalohita kalpa* has Sadyojāta as the presiding deity, *Rakta* has Vamadeva, *Pītavāsas* has Tatpuruṣa, *Śiva* has Aghora and *Visvarūpa* has Iśāna.
6. *Linga Purāna, Uttarabhaga*, 15. 1-6.
7. *Skanda Purāna, Brahmōttara Kāṇḍa - Siva Kavaca*.
8. *Siva Purāna, Śatarudra saṃhitā*, 1.42.
9. *Siva Purāna, Śatarudra saṃhitā*, 1.46.
10. *Viṣṇudharmōttara*, 3,48,2. 'TējastvAghoram Vikiyātam'
11. *Viṣṇudharmōttara*, 3,48,5. 'dakṣiṇam tu mukham raudram Bhairavam tatprakīrtitam'
12. *Śiva Purāna*, 2.1.11.
13. *Linga Purāna*, 1.14-15.
14. *Skanda Purāna*, 3.3.10 & 7.92. 8-9.
15. *Linga Purāna*, 1.15. 1-6.
16. Gopinath Rao T.A., *Elements of Hindu Iconography, Vol - II, Part I*, Second Edition, 1985, Motilal Banarasidas Publishers, New Delhi, p.197.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
18. *Skanda Purana, Brahmottara Kanda*, 12.10  
*Kuṭhāra vedāṃkuśapāśaśūlakapālaḍhakkākṣaguṇāṇḍadhānaḥ  
caturmukho nīlarucistrinetraḥ  
pāyādaghorō diśi dakṣiṇasyām*

19. *ŚrīTattvanidhi*, Vol 3, 2004, Oriental Research Institute, Mysore, p.27.
20. *Uttara Kāranāgama*, Patala 72, *Prathiṣṭa vidhī*, 12-25.
21. *Pañcharātra āgama*, *ŚrīTattvanidhi*, Vol 3, 2004, Oriental Research Institute, Mysore, p. 25.
22. *Śivatattva Ratnakara*, *ŚrīTattvanidhi*, Vol 3, 2004, Oriental Research Institute, Mysore, p. 24.
23. Agaramudhalvan, *Tiruvenskaatu Thala Varalaaru*, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1989, Sveranyeswarar Swami temple publication, Tiruvenkadu, Sirkazhi, pp.10-11.



Plate I: A four-faced mukhalinga, 10th century, Asian Art Museum  
Photo: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mukhalinga>



Plate II - The stone (*left*) and Plate III bronze (*right*) images of Aghoramūrti at Śvetāranyēśwarar temple, Tiruvenkadu, Tamil Nadu. Photo: [www.dailythanthi.com](http://www.dailythanthi.com) posted on 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2022



Plate IV- Aghoramūrti at Bhaktavachalēswarar temple, Tirukkaḷukunṇam, Tamil Nadu  
Photo: [www.thirukazhukundram.com](http://www.thirukazhukundram.com)



Plate V - Aghoramūrti in Pillar  
at Bhaktavachalēswarar temple,  
Tirukkaḷukunṇam, Tamil Nadu  
Photo: [www.thirukazhukundram.com](http://www.thirukazhukundram.com)



Plate VI - Aghoramūrti in Pillar at  
Dhenupurīswarar temple, Pattīswaram, Tamil  
Nadu

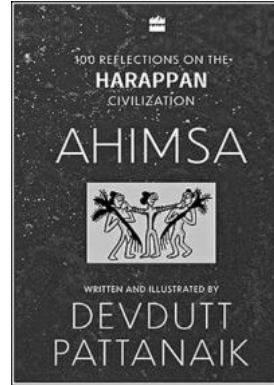
Photo: <https://archive.org/details/ElementsofHinduIconographyVol.IIPartII>



## Book Review - 1

### AHIMSA: 100 REFLECTIONS ON THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

**Author** : Devdutt Pattanaik  
**Publisher** : Harper Collins India  
**Year** : 2024  
**Pages** : 272  
**Price** : Rs. 500/-



It was on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1924, that John Marshall, Director General, Archaeological Survey of India announced in the *Illustrated London News*, London, that the Harappan civilization had been discovered but was unable to determine the period accurately except to point out that it was ancient and was a grand find. It pushed back the known history of India by a few millennia. The discovery opens up a new historical vista, and is likely to revolutionize our ideas of the age and origin of the Indian civilization. The year 2024 is commemorated as the 100<sup>th</sup> year of the discovery of Harappan/Indus Valley Civilization.

To commemorate this historic milestone in India's past, Devdutt Pattanaik explores key facets of the Harappan Civilization, accompanied by his signature illustrations. In *Ahimsa: 100 Reflections on the Harappan Civilization*, Pattanaik, a renowned writer on Indian mythology and culture, focuses on one of the world's earliest urban societies. With his distinctive approach, he combines storytelling, scholarly analysis, and philosophical insights to offer readers a fresh and engaging perspective on the ancient Indus Valley Civilization.

There is a lot to like and dislike about this well-written and engaging set of reflections on ancient Indus life and culture. It does not hesitate to examine its biases: “much of our acceptance of the past is a function of the present,” writes the author<sup>1</sup>, and “what I present are not arguments . . . these are not free of my prejudices. So, approach this book in the spirit of curiosity, not combat”<sup>2</sup>. Pattanaik makes the most of this license to bring up a range of sophisticated reflections on what we might surmise about the people, culture and times during this seminal period of the subcontinent’s history, when the first cities were established and much of what we have since loosely called Indian culture emerged. One may not agree with all of his reflections, but they are worthy of attention and easy to digest in a hundred single page sections flanked by an introduction and conclusion.

One of the book’s key strengths lies in its thoughtful design - each of the hundred sections is paired with a line drawing of the seal, object, or figure being discussed. This visual element actively engages readers, encouraging them to immerse themselves in the arguments and think critically about the topics presented.

One of the author’s major propositions is that the ancient Indus civilization was largely peaceful, thus the title, *Ahimsa*, which means non-violence and is a key ethical principle in numerous ancient Indian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism which as per the reviewer’s point of view is obscure, “No civilization has ever survived without engaging into a war”.

He is affirming the “soft power” of ancient Indus culture, and while one may argue as to the merits of this interpretation (many of the seals discussed show or hint at violence, for example or see the discussion, (“How peaceful was Harappan Civilization?”)), Pattanaik extends it by suggesting his hypothesis that the ancient Indus trading class of merchant-guilds, was manned or supervised by a priestly class, austere monks who also traded.



The idea is not far-fetched, considering the deep involvement of religious orders in trade throughout history, both in India and beyond. Buddhism and Hinduism, for instance, spread east, west, and north in pursuit of economic opportunities in the millennia that followed. Religious networks often served as effective trade conduits, carrying both goods and beliefs across vast distances. The frequent reference to Jainism also seems not appropriate. It is usually dated nearly two thousand years after the decline of the Indus civilization, but its combination of a non-theistic belief system and a strong connection to commerce aligns with the distinct and exceptional profile of the Indus civilization. This is his own interpretation or assumption. The elites of this ancient society likely shared an extraordinary and innovative worldview.

He highlights possible connections between the animals depicted on seals, especially the “*Paśupati*” seal, and the later Jain Tirthankaras. It is hard not to wonder whether the remarkable creativity of the Indian subcontinent in shaping and evolving religious beliefs finds its roots in the ancient Indus civilization.

Pattanaik asserts that “Harappan cities rose primarily to satisfy the Sumerian demand for ritual goods”<sup>3</sup>, though this remains speculative given the intermittent and unclear records of trade with Mesopotamia. However, the internal trade within the vast Indus civilization - one of the largest of the ancient world - could have sustained robust economic activity and supported thriving trade networks. Pattanaik’s frequent comparisons between the Indus and Mesopotamian civilizations, spanning culture, art, and religion, enrich the discussion with a valuable cross-cultural perspective on the Bronze Age. He demonstrates an acute awareness of how ancient peoples interacted, influenced one another, and built on shared innovations, often complicating the quest for purely indigenous origins. Notably, he speculates that the so-called “priest-king” might have been of Western Asian origin, citing examples like “A “Priest-King” at Shahr-i Sokhta?” Pattanaik also makes the intriguing observation that “merchants across the world, in later times, saw India as

the home of stories”<sup>4</sup>. He leverages this idea to interpret illustrations on pottery, suggesting they could be among the earliest examples of global tales, such as the fox using pebbles to raise water in a pot or tricking a bird into dropping its meat.

The book seeks to connect various later traditions to their possible roots in the Indus civilization, inviting readers to reflect on the depth and diversity of these traditions. While many of the conjectures are supported by recent scholarship, some remain speculative. Pattanaik acknowledges the contributions of no fewer than fifty experts, crediting them at the end of the book. He also critiques the “cantankerous debates” that sometimes arise among scholars, offering this perspective: “The alternative is to listen to other truths and negotiate with multiple truths, a skill that ancient Harappans probably developed. For they worked with multiple merchant-guilds, spread across multiple cities, located in multiple geographies, and served multiple markets. This enabled them to be less violent, if not non-violent, and more accommodating of differences”<sup>5</sup>.

In his conclusion, Pattanaik advocates for an inclusive and expansive understanding of cultural traditions, celebrating the diversity that defines the Indian subcontinent today and likely existed in the ancient Indus era. Drawing from artifacts, he references depictions of “queer folk” on Harappan figurines as evidence of this diversity. He further delves into genetic studies and addresses the gaps between the Indus and Vedic periods, boldly stating, “In our obsession with the Vedas, we are so focused on Aryan fathers that we forget Harappan mothers. We forget that the Indian river has many more tributaries besides the Vedic one.”<sup>6</sup>

Pattanaik also emphasizes the geopolitical context of the Indus civilization, pointing out that many Indus-era rivers flow through regions beyond modern India. Iconic cities such as Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, now situated in Pakistan, remind readers of the civilization’s influence, which transcends modern national boundaries in both a literal and figurative sense.

True to Pattanaik's distinctive style, these illustrations not only depict the physical characteristics of the artifacts but also aim to evoke their cultural and philosophical essence. However, from the reviewer's point of view most of his illustrations look like caricature work, raising a doubt as to the authenticity of the actual artifact representation. These reflections form a powerful closing argument for *Ahimsa*, urging readers to embrace a nuanced and interconnected view of history. This approach makes the book a commendable contribution to inform popular discourse on the Harappan civilization, fostering curiosity about the complex layers of South Asia's ancient heritage.

Note: All quotes are from the reviewed text

**Dr. Aarti Iyer**

Assistant Professor

C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar Institute of Indological Research.

The C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, Chennai.

### References

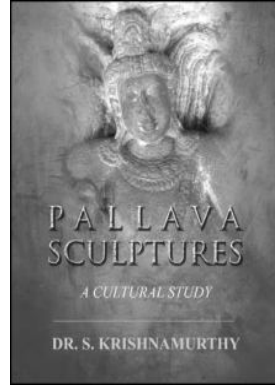
1. Pattanaik, Devdutt, (2024). *Ahimsa: 100 Reflections on the Harappan Civilization*, Harper Collins, New Delhi. p.8.
2. *Ibid.*, p.27.
3. *Ibid.*, p.37
4. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
5. *Ibid.*, p.11.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 20



## Book Review - 2

### PALLAVA SCULPTURES: A CULTURAL STUDY

**Author** : Dr. S. Krishnamurthy  
**Publisher** : Research India Press,  
New Delhi  
**Year** : 2024  
**ISBN** : 978-81-968-274-4-1  
**Pages** : 244 with 490 illustrations  
**Price** : 5500



The book is one of the exceptional works on the art history of the Pallavas. The author attempts to correlate art with the social aspects of the people. The period he has chosen for his study is around 500 years of the Pallava history i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> c. CE. The author's objective and hypothesis is to see how the art of the Pallava dynasty reflects the cultural and social aspects of the common people of that time. To achieve his goal, the author has systematically studied the Pallava monuments. According to the author, "The study of sculptures forms a fascinating field, as it reveals to the researcher a graphical picture of the people of those times when the creator of these artistic wonders lived and witnessed the life around him. Thus, these sculptures link to the past, as obtained through the study of literature and inscriptions". Hence, he has chosen a wide range of sculptures from the Pallava period of the above said timeline. The author has given an exhaustive list of 172 temples that belong to the Pallava dynastic period based on architecture and inscriptions. In this book, he has given a good number of illustrations chosen from nearly 65 temples of the Pallavas. These temples were selected because of their potential

sculptural wealth that facilitated the study of the social and cultural history of the Pallavas. Apart from these, the author also concentrates on the loose sculptures of this particular period that are available in the museums.

For a comprehensive study of the chosen topic, the author has divided them into several chapters. The content of the book covers a total of 11 chapters namely, the people and their dwelling, dress, headdress and footwear, coiffure, ornaments, household articles, articles related to the royal court, musical instruments, pastime activities, weapons and warfare, as also flora and fauna. The data was collected by the author for analysis of the material culture of the people and he has used sources of literature and inscriptions for his study.

The introductory chapter has a detailed history of the Pallavas and Tamilnadu during that time. The author has discussed various topics like history of the Pallava dynasty, origin, Prakrit and Sanskrit Charters of the Pallavas, contributions of the Imperial Pallavas, Art and Architectural development, scheme of sculptures and styles of the contributors.

In the second chapter on the people and their dwellings, he discusses how the royal and common people are represented in the sculptural art of this period. The author mentions, according to their depiction they were classified as royal members, courtesans, servants like guards, fly-whisk bearers, umbrella bearers, army personals, religious personages like sages and ascetics, temple servants, musicians, dancers, and other professionals. Apart from that he also identifies the sculptural depictions of the royal court, palaces, houses of the common folk and forts etc., by analyzing their structural patterns as illustrated in the sculptural panels.

In the third chapter, dress, headdress and footwear patterns found in the sculptural representations are analysed. The author finds some sort of uniformity in the dressing style, irrespective of gender and status,

of the portrait sculptures. According to the author, the sculptures depict a diaphanous style in their clothing like upper garment, lower garment, sacred thread, waist cloth or band, and a few other features, exclusive to this period which would help one to identify the period of these sculptures if they are found loose.

He further explains how gods, celestial beings, royals, sages, and male and female figures were represented with a standardized style of dressing in their multiple representations in the sculptures. He also describes various types of footwear found in the sculptures by analyzing them in intricate detail. Crown, tiara, turban and helmet (protection for warriors) are the headdresses explained by the author with their sculptural representations in detail. While describing the headdresses of the female sculptures, the author states how they differ from the ones represented in the sculptures of gods and male figures. *Krita makuta*, *karanda makuta*, *ardhamakuta*, decorated with medallions, turbans of different styles and headdresses found on the sculptures of children are well explained in this chapter.

A separate chapter on coiffure explains various kinds of hairstyles that were adopted by both men and women in this period. Straight, curly and matted hair types are noticed in the sculptures of both men and women and they were arranged in different styles. The author explains in detail, the *Jatamakuta* and *Jatabhara* hair-dos that are found on the Saivaite sculptures and in particular, on the various forms of Siva while explaining several others. In the next chapter, we find different types of ornaments found on the sculptures of the Pallavas. It is stated how important ornaments were in the day-to-day life of the people and how they are reflected in the sculptural art. Ornaments found on these sculptures from head to toe are well explained by the author with minute details. Head ornaments like *agrapatta* or *laltapatta*, *kesapatta*, ear ornaments like *patra-kundala*, *makara-kundala*, *bali*, *sarpa-kundala*, *sroni-sutra*, *kinkinis* etc., neck ornaments like *kanthi*, *hara*, shoulder and arm ornaments like *kankanas*, *keyuras*, *bhujanga valayas*, *prakoshtha*

*valayas*, torso ornaments like *yajnopavita* and its varieties, *channavira*, *udara-bandha*, waist ornaments like *katisutra*, *mekhala*, leg ornaments like *silambu*, *kinkini*, *padagam*, are described in detail with illustrated examples.

Sculptural representations of household articles are well explained in a separate chapter. Vessels of day-to-day use like storage pot, miniature pot, vases in the form of a bottle gourd, water jar, bowl, dish, dish stand, tray are all identified by the author in the sculptures and explained well with detailed descriptions. Flower baskets, umbrellas, lamps and types of furniture seen on these sculptural panels are unique to the Pallava style. The author also tries to give a detailed description of the materials used to produce these products. The chapter exhibits the musical instruments and enlightens us with information about the advanced stage of classical art that prevailed in the Pallava country. An analysis has been made by the author before identifying them, by reviewing the sources of literature. He classifies them into string, percussion, wind and solid instruments. He has given fine examples of sculptural representations of the same.

In an attempt to capture the cultural life of the people, the author explores the sculptural panels to find their pastime activities. He succeeds in finding a few depictions of them but these are very limited on the walls of the Pallava temples. They are found in the form of martial arts, such as fighting with sword or cudgel and shield, wrestling, hunting and rarely in the practice of drama. He also states that a few inscriptional and literary references from this period mention pastime activities like cock-fight, puppet shows, dance and music, street drama, juggling and gambling are practiced by the common folk. Hordes of representations of weapons are found on the sculptural panels of Pallava and they are well explained in a chapter.

The author also explains the variety of flora and fauna that are depicted in the sculptural panels in a separate chapter. He points out that the artists are well aware of the leaf, flower and fruit shapes of the flora

and are well-differentiated in each of them. He also states that various kinds of animals and birds are found presented in the sculptural art of the period like elephants, lion, deer, monkeys, dog, boar, horses, bull, goat, swan cock, etc. by the artist. He says that the artists also had the creativity to design mythical animals like Yali and Makara out of their imagination.

This book is the outcome of the research work done by the author for his doctoral degree. Hence, he has given a detailed study of the literature review found on the Pallava dynasty and also a good number of bibliographical works that have helped the present study. This book will serve as an important source of study of the art history of Pallavas.

**Dr. G. Balaji**

Associate Professor,  
C.P.R. Institute of Indological Research,  
The C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, Chennai.



## Guidelines for Contributors

1. The Journal of Indian History and Culture welcomes well researched and detailed articles of not more than 3000 words on any aspect of Indian history and/or culture in one way or another.
2. The Journal of Indian History and Culture adheres to a rigorous double-blind reviewing policy in which the identity of both the reviewer and author are always concealed from both parties.
3. The submission should comprise not more than 3000 words in Times New Roman font, Size-12, Double spaced, A4 page paper size, including the references in MS Word format, with up to 10 illustrations in JPG or JPEG format. Contributions in PDF format will not be accepted.
  - a. **Please send us your article typed on MS Word (2010 version) ONLY. No version of Android, IPad, WPS Office, IMax, etc. will be accepted, nor will articles typed on mobile phones or iPads and Tablets be accepted.**
  - b. **Not more than 10 illustrations per article will be accepted.**
4. All articles must be printed on one side of A4 paper with margins on all sides and double spaced throughout (i.e. including quotations, notes, references and any other matter).
5. All articles must include 4-6 keywords, and an abstract of about 200 words should be included. Abstract should not be repeated verbatim in the paper. The contributors' degree(s), affiliation(s) and complete postal and e-mail address should be included.
6. The papers must be written in English. Authors who write in a language different from their mother tongue must have their text edited for English language before sending them for submission.
7. Diacritical marks may be used in articles on pre-modern history. Italicised words can have diacritics as required. Please follow F. Steingass, "A comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary" for Arabo-Persian vocabulary. A list of diacritical marks is given at the end of the guidelines for reference.

8. All non-English words and book titles need to be in italics, even when in the text of the paper. (For example: bund, farmān, pro bono, per diem, etc.)
9. Use ‘eighteenth century’ and ‘1970s’. Spell out numbers from one to ninety-nine; 100 and above may remain in figures. Dates must be written as 1st January, 2023.
10. Use single quotes throughout. Double quotes should be used within single quotes. Double quotes can be used for direct speech. Quotations of 45 words or more should be indented from the text with a line space above and below.
11. All tables and figures should be numbered and cited in the text. Source details for all tables and figures should be mentioned irrespective of whether or not they require permission.
12. Do not distinguish between Primary and Secondary references. When references are listed, providing a detailed Bibliography also is not required. All details must be given as endnotes. These notes may include brief explanations only.
  - References should mention author’s name, (year of publication). book title, publisher, place of publication and page number(s).
  - In the case of journal articles, it should include author’s name, (year of publication). article title, journal title, volume number, issue number, place and page number(s).
  - Articles in the edited volumes should include author’s name, (year of publication). article title, editor’s name (ed.), book title, publisher, place and page number(s).
    - Use *Ibid.*, and *Op.cit.* (in italics), for repeated references accordingly.
    - Complete details need to be given in the References section of the paper. (Please see examples below.)

The following examples illustrate the style to be followed:

#### Books

- Krishna, Nanditha, (2017). *Hinduism and Nature*, Penguin, New Delhi. p. 70.

Articles in journals

- Bhattacharya, U., December 2017. 'From Surreys to Management: The Early Colonial State's Intervention, in Water Resources of Bengal', Indian Historical Review (hereinafter IHR) Vol. 44 Number 2, Chennai. pp. 225-251.

Articles in edited volumes

- Ananthakrishnan, S., (2015). 'Critically Evaluating the Uprising in the Tamil Country' in G.J. Sudhakar (ed.), Popular Uprisings in India with Special Reference to Tamil Nadu 1750-1857, CPR Publications, Chennai. pp. 43-51.
13. Avoid the use of internet sources, except when essential and cite the source, writer's name, article title, page numbers, if available, and the date of accession.
  14. Papers which have to be heavily reviewed linguistically and re-written, or do not follow the editorial guidelines, will be sent back to the authors for correction.
  15. Send your paper / review to  
The Editor  
Journal of Indian History and Culture  
CPR Institute of Indological Research  
1 Eldams Road, Alwarpet  
Chennai 600018  
E-mail: [jihc.cpriir@gmail.com](mailto:jihc.cpriir@gmail.com)
  16. An identical electronic copy with author's details may be sent as an e-mail attachment to [jihc.cpriir@gmail.com](mailto:jihc.cpriir@gmail.com).
  17. Papers submitted without complete reference details as illustrated above are liable to be rejected.

**Book Reviews**

Author(s) may send 2 copies of their published book(s) for review in JIHC with a covering request for review. It is the prerogative of the Editor to select the reviewer. Books will not be returned.

**Deadline**

The contribution must be submitted within the stipulated time.

## Authors

Authors should give a written and signed undertaking in the given format with their covering letter in both soft and hard copies of their article.

### Undertaking by the Author

1. The paper is original and written by me / us.
2. The paper has not been previously published and has been submitted only to JIHC.
3. Permission has been obtained for material taken from other sources (including my/our published writing).
4. My / Our paper does not infringe on rights of others, including privacy rights and intellectual property rights.
5. The data included in the paper is true and not manipulated.
6. The data presented in the paper is my / our own. I / We have secured permission from the sources for data reproduced in the paper.
7. I / We have adhered to research guidelines of my / our field.
8. I / We will contact the editor to identify and correct any material errors upon discovery, whether prior or subsequent to the paper's publication.
9. I / We have represented authorship of the paper accurately and ensured that all individuals credited as authors participated in the actual authorship of the work and all who participated are credited and have given consent for publication.
10. I / We assure that there is no apparent conflicting or competing interest in the publishing of my / our paper.
11. In case any claims are made on my / our paper, I / we accept full responsibility for the same and absolve the Journal of Indian History and Culture of all responsibility.

Place:

Date:

Signature:

Name

### **Reviewers**

Reviewers shall

- Maintain the confidentiality of the review process.
- Immediately alert the journal editor of any real or potential competing interest that could affect the impartiality of their reviewing and decline to review where appropriate.
- Conduct themselves fairly and impartially.

### **Disclaimer**

- The Editorial board retains the right to accept / decline the article / paper for publication in the Journal.
- JIHC will not be responsible for the views of the author expressed in the published article.
- Plagiarism is illegal and author will be responsible for any plagiarized matter used in the article. JIHC accepts NO liability for the same.
- All decisions of the Editorial Board will be final and binding.
- Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned if unpublished.

## DIACRITICAL MARKS

### International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration

#### Vowels

Devanāgarī	Diacritical Marks
अ	a
आ	ā
इ	i
ई	ī
उ	u
ऊ	ū
ऋ	r̥
ॠ	r̄
ऌ	l̥

Devanāgarī	Diacritical Marks
ए	e
ऐ	ai
ओ	o
औ	au
ॠ	m̐
ऌ	h̐
ॡ	ṃ
ॢ	ṣ
ॣ	ṣ̄

#### Consonants

Devanāgarī	क	ख	ग	घ	ङ
IAST	ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa
Devanāgarī	च	छ	ज	झ	ञ
IAST	ca	cha	ja	jha	ña
Devanāgarī	ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण
IAST	ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa
Devanāgarī	त	थ	द	ध	न

IAST	ta	tha	da	dha	na
Devanāgarī	प	फ	ब	भ	म
IAST	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma
Devanāgarī	य	र	ल	व	
IAST	ya	ra	la	va	
Devanāgarī	श	ष	स	ह	
IAST	śa	ṣa	sa	ha	

## Consonant clusters

Devanāgarī	क्ष	त्र	ज्ञ	श्र
IAST	kṣa	tra	jña	śra

## Tamil - Transliteration Table

அ	...	a	ஊ	...	ñ	ஜ	...	j
ஆ	...	ā	ஈ	...	t̪	ச	...	ś
இ	...	i	ஊ	...	n̪	ஶ	...	ṣ
ஈ	...	ī	ஊ	...	t̪	ஸ	...	s
உ	...	u	ஊ	...	n	ஹ	...	h
ஊ	...	ū	ஊ	...	p	க	...	k
ஏ	...	e	ஊ	...	m			
ஐ	...	ē	ஊ	...	y			
ஔ	...	ai	ஊ	...	r			
ஒ	...	o	ஊ	...	l			
ஓ	...	ō	ஊ	...	v			
ஔ	...	au	ஊ	...	l̪			
க	...	k	ஊ	...	l̪			
ங	...	ṅ	ஊ	...	r̪			
ச	...	c	ஊ	...	n̪			

**Statement showing ownership and other particulars about the  
Journal of Indian History and Culture**

**FORM IV  
(see Rule 8)**

1	Place of Publication	Chennai
2	Periodicity of Publication	Annual
3	Printer's Name	Mr. Nagarajan, Pinpoint Printers
	Nationality	Indian
	Address	Triplicane, Chennai – 600005
4	Publisher's Name	Dr. Nanditha Krishna
	Nationality	Indian
5	Editors' Name, Nationality, Address	Dr. G.J. Sudhakar Indian
6	Name and Addresses of individuals who own the newspaper and partners, shareholders holding more than one percent of the total capital	C P Ramaswami Aiyar Institute of Indological Research The C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation 1 Eldams Road, Alwarpet Chennai - 600018

I, Dr. Nanditha Krishna, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

**Dr. Nanditha Krishna**

Director

CPR Institute of Indological Research