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on
ACADEMIC SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:
Archiving, documenting and Translating Indigenous and marginalised languages of West Bengal

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Jadavpur University, India & **University of East Anglia**, UK,
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Introduction

SAYANTAN DASGUPTA[1], JON COOK[2], SUCHORITA CHATTOPADHYAY[3], DANIEL J RYCROFT[4] and ARISTOTELES BARCELOS NETO[5]

This special issue of *Sahitya*, the journal of the Comparative Literature Association of India, emerges from the SPARC project on 'Academic Social Responsibility and the Humanities in India: Researching, Archiving and Translating Indigenous and Marginalised

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Languages of West Bengal' (P2661) granted to Jadavpur University and the University of East Anglia, UK, by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, as part of its Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC) scheme. The scheme was carried out from 2023 to 2026 by a team comprising Sayantan Dasgupta and Suchorita Chattopadhyay (Jadavpur University), and Jon Cook, Daniel J Rycroft and Aristoteles Barcelos Neto (University of East Anglia).

The project derives from earlier work in the area carried out by members of the team in the area of Academic Social Responsibility and the Humanities. In a way, it consolidated the previous work done, and also eked out new trajectories for the future of this collaboration. The SPARC grant allowed the researchers to take on a specific area to fill a research gap within the ASR and Humanities in India rubric. It also facilitated academic exchanges, documentation field trips, and a

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number of translation and dissemination workshops in line with the agenda of the project.

The multilingual Indian context demands an espousal of the values of inclusion within the Indian national imaginary, and an expansion of the reach of our curricular imagination. Both are related to the philosophy and practice of Comparative Literature, particularly in the way it has developed in India, and which is also the institutional space within which this project is housed at Jadavpur University.

The first part of our work focused on developing the ideas of Academic Social Responsibility and University Social Responsibility, and relating them to possible trajectories of pedagogy and curriculum development in the Humanities in India. This entailed theoretical and historicised readings of educational imperatives related to the Humanities, as well as explorations in understanding the scope of collaborative translation for an expansion of the Humanities. This, again, traces its roots back to the trajectory of

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Comparative Literature in India as well as beyond it. It resonates with the Levin, Greene and Bernheimer reports of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) as well as with Buddhadeva Bose's pioneering essay, "Comparative Literature in India", published in the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* all the way back in 1959. Each of these texts discuss the role of translation in and for the holistic study of literature, though the first two are reticent about the prospect of reading in translation, while the latter two champion the cause of translations, and reading literature in translation.

Our SPARC project attempted to disseminate the idea of ASR by (a) organizing courses, (b) organizing seminars and lectures, (c) engaging with the larger scholarly community across the Humanities in India and the UK, and (d) engaging with marginalized language communities in West Bengal, and focusing on partnership and participation in the process of documenting and creating an archive of core texts in

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translation, which could hypothetically result in curricular expansion in the future as well as expand the national imaginary in India.

It was our endeavor to build partnerships with four language communities of West Bengal. Of course, it may be misleading to identify any one language community with a state in India, given the way languages seep over political boundaries in India, and in fact, much of South Asia. The languages featured included two Scheduled languages—Nepali and Bodo, and two languages which are not yet enlisted in the Eighth Schedule—Lepcha and Kudmali. Nepali and Lepcha are also languages that are used, among other places, in the state of Sikkim, while Bodo is spoken in Assam, and Kudmali in Jharkand, Odisha and West Bengal. There are also some Kudmali speakers in the tea gardens of Assam. However, our work focused on these language communities solely in the context of West Bengal.

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The project also sought to partner with leaders, practitioners and scholars from the four language communities it worked with in documenting and researching different folk varieties of cultural expression in these languages. The linguistic cartography of India, and the current state of translation training in the country means that it is very difficult to identify trained translators who can translate from and into Indian languages, and more so between Indian languages. This is an issue we tried to address by resorting to, and building, a model of collaborative translation workshopping. By treating translation not as a solitary, individual speech act, but as a collaborative and consensual method, the research team sought to both understand collaborative translation as a *process*, as well as focus on the *product* emerging from such interactions. The collaborative translation workshop model provided the occasion for discussions not just on the texts and traditions we were engaging with, but also on the dynamics of collaborative translation as an exercise

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itself, as well as its contribution to creating a community representing the texts, a community not restricted to speakers of that language only. This volume, then, is the first of the outputs emerging from the project. We expect that the other two outputs will see the light of day soon—one, a book on Academic Social Responsibility, and the other, an annotated anthology of texts from Nepali, Lepcha, Kudmali and Bodo in translation.

The current volume brings together experts who were involved to various degrees and in different capacities with the SPARC project. Much of the writing in this issue of *Sahitya* is either informed by, or has direct resonance to, the arguments the team was exploring vis-à-vis the concept, development and implementation of ASR. A number of them focus on marginalized areas of study within the Humanities, and on ways in which our outlook on the Humanities may become more inclusive and complete. Rabindranath Tagore's dream of encapsulating the global within one's understanding of the local, as encapsulated in his

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excursus on *visvasahitya* seems to find a direct reflection in a number of the essays in this volume. We consciously collected articles from experts in diverse fields and the essays reflect their expertise within the larger context of Academic Social Responsibility and the Humanities. Each essay has situated and interpreted ASR in diverse contexts, all crucial and relevant to a holistic approach to the understanding of Humanities.

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More than Masala: Decolonisation, Identity, and Mainstream Indian Film

SUMAN GHOSH [1]

> What makes Bollywood a brand is not the content of cinema—as constituted by film narrative[4]—but a certain kind of allure produced by a characteristic visual excess brought in by spectacle, choreography, costume, and music. It is this visual excess that allows Bollywood to become a "lifestyle statement" and enables it to be employed in areas outside cinema itself. (Raghavendra 31-2)

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> … masala cinema comes into play as an all-encompassing genre. The masala films therefore operate with a sense of plurality that conjoins seemingly disparate elements to provide an exhilaratingly escapist and affective experience for the audience. In addition, this kind of experience projects an aspirational wish-fulfilment. Formulae of masala films are drawn from various facets of Indian performance cultures such as Parsi theatre and Ramlila and are then inculcated into a cohesive whole. (Pateer and Hazra par 20)

Over the first quarter of this century, a significant body of scholarship on popular Indian film is predicated upon a lexicon of problematic descriptors, notably 'Bollywood' and 'masala'. This essay argues that these terms, far from being neutral, are academically irresponsible constructs that have profoundly misrepresented the aesthetic and industrial character of

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India's dominant film industry, constrained its global reception and undermined the significant potential for serious scholarly understanding of its vast and varied creative output. In their inability to be inclusive and their use of reductive nomenclature, they prioritise models and ideological premises which have little relevance to the mainstream narrative or cultural practices of the Indian subcontinent. As an alternative step, this essay proposes a revisionary framework based on the framework of academic social responsibility for the scholarly understanding of Indian film based on some of its broader formal, structural, aesthetic and cultural traits.

The term 'Bollywood' gained currency not as an innocent portmanteau but as a pejorative within Indian English language journalism during the 1980s. Its continued and widespread application since the start of this century relegates a vast, unique, and prolific cinematic culture to a derivative, inferior imitation of Hollywood. This framing implicitly suggests a lack of

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originality and artistic merit, defining the industry by what it is not, rather than engaging with its distinct narrative modes, production values, and cultural economy. Similarly, the label 'masala', while evoking the blending of spices, reductively implies a chaotic, undisciplined amalgamation of genres—a 'concoction'—rather than acknowledging the deliberate, complex, and culturally-specific narrative architecture that integrates melodrama, romance, action, and music into a coherent whole for its audience. This trend extends to descriptors like 'curry-western' for films such as *Sholay* (1975), a seminal blockbuster whose profound cultural impact and innovative reworking of generic conventions and rich textual interplay is trivialised by reductive epithets.

The consequences of this imprecise vocabulary are primarily twofold. Firstly, it has fostered a pervasive international perception of mainstream Indian cinema as superficial and unsophisticated entertainment, arguably

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limiting its appeal beyond established diasporic markets and certain regions including the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf states. While the non-resident Indian population, estimated at over 18 million and spread across the Gulf states, North America, and Europe, forms a crucial revenue stream, the potential for broader global crossover and understanding remains circumscribed by these preconceptions. Secondly, and as a direct result, much of the serious engagement, both academic and cultural, with these films has been either narrowly formalist, focusing on song sequences or genre hybridity without deeper cultural contextualisation, or outright dismissive of their narrative logic and societal functions.

Critically, the propagation of this terminology cannot be attributed solely to Western academia, as it has been primarily led by Indian-origin scholars, both within India and in the diaspora, who have uncritically adopted and normalised these labels. While non-Indian-origin

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scholars have not been unenthusiastic bystanders, the initiative and continued ownership of this discursive practice is largely indigenous, with a vocabulary that now relentlessly normalises descriptors such as 'Tollywood'[2] and 'Kollywood' to describe Indian regional film cultures. This insularity carries tangible implications for Indian cinema's cultural standing as it relegates the creative outputs of the world's largest film industry to stray paragraphs and footnotes of serious cultural commentary.

It follows that a paradigm shift in film scholarship is imperative in order to enable a more accurate global understanding of Indian cinema and to harness its full potential as a soft power asset, and that writing about Indian film, especially mainstream film,

[2] 'Tollywood' increasingly seems to refer to the Telugu film industry, even though, historically, since 1932, it referred to the Bengali mainstream film industry which was based in Kolkata's Tollygunge area. See Madhava Prasad. "This Thing Called Bollywood." *Seminar*, no. 525, May 2003, www.india-seminar.com/2003/525/525%20madhava%20prasad.htm.

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demands a decolonised critical framework. This necessitates moving beyond reductive labels towards a precise, respectful, and knowledgeable vocabulary that engages with Indian films on their own terms, acknowledging their unique industrial history, narrative sophistication, and central role within the cultural life of South Asia and its diaspora.

The Western Address of 'Bollywood' and Its Academic Consequences:

> "Compared to longer-established studies of other popular cinemas, such as Hollywood, Bollywood cinema still seems to be in the process of emerging as an area of academic research in the West, and its historical excavation can equally still be considered a relatively young practice. At this stage, the need for Indian film scholars to go back to the beginning of its historical emergence seems logical and essential, so that we may

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> chronologically go about constructing Indian cinema's history and explain how it has evolved into its contemporary form." (Wright 21)

Sidhar Wright's concern for the academic standing of 'Bollywood' cinema in Western academia is a telling example of a questionable tradition of academic scholarship which expects Indian scholarship to pursue cues/directions of academic interest initiated by Western scholars. It is not designed to create new knowledge and insights led by the requirements of the Indian academic and social landscape, but is designed rather to follow Western initiatives and fill in gaps posed by questions that originate there. Consequently, despite commanding one of the largest and most diverse audience bases globally, cutting across linguistic, regional, and socio-economic boundaries, the term 'Bollywood' as a convenient shorthand for Indian mainstream film appears to be directed primarily towards Western audiences. As Rajadhyaksha (2003) argues, the widespread use of this

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term emerged in the late 20th century as part of a global discourse that sought to brand Hindi cinema for international consumption. This nomenclature is not a neutral descriptor; rather, it carries ideological assumptions that shape both popular and scholarly discourses. While convenient for global branding, the term risks reducing the complexity of Indian cinema to a homogenised, exoticised entity tailored for consumption outside its primary cultural context. In so doing, it creates a new kind of Orientalism that undoes decades of rigorous cultural interrogation following Edward Said's seminal work on the subject.

The proliferation of academic scholarship built around 'Bollywood' exemplifies this tendency. Much of this work originates within Western higher education institutions, where the term functions as a recognisable entry point into discussions of globalisation, diaspora, and cultural hybridity (Dudrah 7). For scholars seeking to establish careers in Film and Media Studies,

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'Bollywood' offers a marketable category that aligns with institutional priorities around diversity and transnationalism. However, this convenience comes at a cost. By privileging a term that is neither widely used within India nor reflective of the industry's internal diversity, such scholarship perpetuates a distorted understanding of Indian cinema. It foregrounds narratives of spectacle, song-and-dance sequences, and melodrama—features often highlighted in Western receptions—while marginalising regional cinemas and alternative practices that constitute the mainstream (Gokulsing & Dissanayake 12).

This reliance on 'Bollywood' as an academic construct also raises questions about audience engagement. Texts produced within this framework tend to circulate within scholarly networks, conferences, and journals, finding little resonance beyond academia. Unlike popular criticism or trade journalism, which speak to audiences invested in cinema as a lived cultural

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experience, academic writing on 'Bollywood' often remains inaccessible to those outside the university system. Consequently, it inhibits the wider public understanding of Indian mainstream film, reinforcing a gap between scholarly discourse and popular reception. The irony is striking: while Indian cinema thrives on mass appeal, the scholarship that claims to interpret it often addresses a narrow, specialist readership.

Moreover, the uncritical adoption of 'Bollywood' risks legitimising a nomenclature that many practitioners and critics within India view as reductive or even damaging. It positions Hindi cinema as a derivative of Hollywood—an implication embedded in the very portmanteau—thereby obscuring its indigenous histories and aesthetic traditions (Rajadhyaksha 2003). In doing so, it perpetuates a colonial logic of comparison, where non-Western cultural forms are validated through their proximity to Western paradigms. For a discipline

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committed to interrogating power and representation, this is a troubling oversight.

The wider consequences of this academic myopia are on full display in volumes of published scholarship on Indian cinema. Sample Garett's observations in the introduction to Garret Fay's *Studying Bollywood* (2011).

> Popular Hindi film has been largely overlooked in the West, since its construction and traditions are so unfamiliar. Our film consumption is influenced by Hollywood styles and the methods of European and far eastern cinema, making Bollywood seem over the top. Including such theorists as James Monaco, Studying Bollywood plumbs the richness and underlying quality of this genre.

Two points are noteworthy. Firstly, that film consumption in the West is not lacking in inclusivity, in that it is influenced by Hollywood and European styles, but also that of far Eastern cinema. This includes

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Japanese film and animation, which have had a long and sustained viewership in the West as well as, increasingly, Korean and Chinese film traditions. Hong Kong action film and Taiwanese cinema have made inroads into Western film consciousness, as have Mexican and increasingly Turkish and Israeli screen content. Curiously, Indian mainstream film is the only major film culture that has remained outside the purview of Western film viewing sensibility. While the cultural specificity of the films themselves as well as their distinctive form clearly have a part to play, that is not the entire story, because, as outlined in the second section of this essay, Indian films had been surmounting international cultural and linguistic barriers successfully decades before 'Bollywood' sought to introduce them to international audiences.

The second point is, crucially, that Indian mainstream film, as understood through its sobriquet 'Bollywood' is perceived as a 'genre'. Not as a film

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culture, arguably one of the world's most vibrant cinematic traditions, with an output that straddles multiple languages, societiesand narrative forms, but as a 'genre' with a reductive label which directs readers and scholars of film to perceive the industry's heterogeneity as an amorphous mass, a perception legitimised by a scholarship shorn of rigour, detail and specificity. The perception built by this scholarship becomes even more troubling with the following:

> Tejaswini Ganti remarks that "-ollywood" has become a very generative and productive morpheme to refer to the centers of media production (Ganti, 2012a). The morpheme has generated a number of copycat names all over the world, as each cinematic formation aspires to the level of power and glamour of Hollywood. The Nigerian film industry embraces Nollywood in a similar vein, as an aspirational term, vying for visibility and prominence, and to some extent

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> claiming it in its own limited sphere. For Bollywood, which comprises only twenty percent of India's total annual film production, its aspirations are to be measured in terms of output, glamour, and influence. In an Indian cultural context, where words themselves have the power of summoning what they represent, the very invocation of the term contains the capacity to align itself with Hollywood. (Deshpande and Mazaj 136)

Here, the ill-conceived sobriquet has clearly reduced the identity of Indian mainstream film as an aspirational fringe, creating the impression of a significantly poorer cousin trying to fit into the margins of American stellar presence. This has little to do with the reality of India's mainstream film industry and its directors and stars, whose stellar presence is difficult to rival (Shah Rukh Khan currently has 49million Instagram followers against Tom Cruise's 15 million) and whose 'aspiration'

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is consistently aligned to the needs of their established viewership.

The use of the term 'Bollywood' has been criticised by the more established stalwarts of India's film industry, including actors Om Puri and Naseeruddin Shah, star Amitabh Bachchan and director Govind Nihalani.[3] "It's like being called an idiot all your life and then making it your name," Shah is reported to have said in exasperation.[4] Casting the industry as a Hollywood aspirant also takes away significantly from its unparalleled achievements in finding international audiences since the 1950s, four decades before the onset of 1990s 'Globalisation', with the success of the star actor-director Raj Kapoor's films in Soviet Union, which rivalled the accolades won by director Satyajit Ray in the film festival circuit.

[3] https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/media/entertainment/bollywood-makes-it-to-another-lexicon/articleshow/2243563.cms?from=mdr
[4] https://www.news18.com/news/india/calling-us-bollywood-is-derogatory-naseeruddin-om-268290.html

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The Socialist Tramp: Raj Kapoor's Cinematic Diplomacy and the Construction of Post-Colonial Identity in the Soviet Bloc:

Contrary to the lack of academic responsibility in the scholarship trends identified before, Indian mainstream film has more often than not, accurately read the pulse of its audience groups, and made socially responsible films for their audiences cutting across geographical and cultural boundaries. The remarkable popularity of Raj Kapoor's films in the Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe during the 1950s and 1960s constitutes a unique cultural phenomenon. More significantly, their transnational reception offers a potent lens through which to examine geopolitical alliances, cultural diplomacy, and the shared imaginaries of nations undergoing profound transformation. It was not merely a case of cinematic import but a complex dialogue between two socialist-aligned worlds, revealing much about the construction of post-colonial Indian

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nationhood and its ideological affinities with societies and cultures in the erstwhile Eastern Bloc. The reception of seminal works like *Awaara* (1951) and *Shri 420* (1955), illuminates how Kapoor's melodramatic social realism resonated with audiences grappling with their own narratives of progress, identity, and social justice in the postwar period.

The early cinema of Raj Kapoor explores the contours of emerging Indian nationhood after the 1947 Partition. His films, produced in the nascent years of the republic, actively participated in the project of defining a generalised but inclusive pan-Indian identity. This was a nationhood consciously framed in secular, socialist, and democratic terms in alignment with Indian's Constitution and the programme for its implementation led by Jawaharlal Nehru's government. Kapoor's narratives, while set within an urban, often Bombay (now Mumbai) -centric milieu, universalised the narratives of common people struggling together against the structural

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inequities perpetuated by the rich and powerful in the big city. His iconic tramp figure, Raj, was an Everyman for the new India: orphaned by circumstance (literally in *Awaara*, symbolically in *Shri 420*), navigating a society caught between tradition and modernity, feudal corruption and egalitarian promise, this character embodied the anxieties and aspirations of a citizenry forging a new collective identity from the rubble of colonialism and the promises of independence. The nationhood projected was not one of martial glory or ancient purity, but of moral resilience, where integrity and love ultimately triumphed over cynical materialism, inherited privilege or political expediency.

This vision aligned seamlessly with India's foreign policy direction as a leading Non-Aligned Movement state with pronounced socialist sympathies and a strategic partnership with the Soviet Union. Under Nehru, India pursued a state-led developmental model and professed a socialist pattern of society, creating a

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clear ideological and cultural alignment with the USSR and Eastern Europe. This political framework facilitated the cultural exchange that brought Indian cinema to Soviet screens. The 1953 Indo-Soviet trade agreement was pivotal,[5] but the reception was more than state-mandated; it was wildly popular.

> The de-Stalinizing 'Khrushchev thaw' gifted much-craved relaxations on cultural imports, including cinema, to the Soviet republics. The resultant spike in demand encouraged Raj Kapoor to distribute *Awara* to the newfound socialist market in 1954. Translated as *Bradgaya*, the film's Russian release instantly captivated audiences, catapulting Kapoor as a relatable underdog's idol and a 'sex-symbol' across the Soviet sphere (Fedotova 2013). His impassioned

[5] This agreement, signed on 2 December 1953, included a clause on "payments for the distribution of films" (VII-c) and export and import of 'cinematographic films (exposed)' (schedules A-38 and B38).

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> performance and narration profoundly impacted the Russian cinephile quite like DW Griffith had much earlier. *Awara* sold around 64 million tickets as the third-most viewed foreign film in Soviet history (Fedotova 2013). The Soviet state ensured its translated prints reached the farthest corners, including its expedition camps at the North Pole. Between their two promotional visits to Moscow in 1954 and 1956, Raj Kapoor and Nargis, *Awara*'s star protagonist pair, became celebrities for Russians (Bose 2008, ch. 10). Russian parents chose to name their newborns after their screen names (Reuben 1995, p. 89). Even a decade after its Russian release, *Awara* found a local remake – titled *Avare* (dir.: Semih Evin) – in the Soviet Union's pro-NATO neighbor, Turkey. (Roy 3)

While Kapoor had no assurances of an export market while making Awara, the film's success resulted in

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successive filmmakers, Kapoor included, deliberately including 'proletarian angles' into films to tailor the Soviet market. (Gopal and Moorti 31) Kapoor's films provided a humanistic, emotionally charged representation of socialism that complemented, and at times softened, the harder edges of Soviet propaganda. They depicted class struggle not through doctrinal lectures, but through the personal anguish of the vulnerable, making socialist ideals accessible and deeply sentimental. For audiences in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and beyond—regions themselves integrated into the Soviet project of modernisation—the films presented a relatable narrative of building a just society amidst scarcity and social dislocation. The shared vocabulary of anti-imperialism, collective uplift, and the critique of unbridled capitalism created a powerful bridge, making Indian films a rare Western-friendly cultural product that passed ideological muster.

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An analysis of *Awaara* and *Shri 420* reveals how Kapoor ingeniously packaged these themes of nationhood, identity, and culture. *Awaara*, with its Oedipal drama and courtroom framing, is a profound meditation on nature versus nurture, and the social construction of criminality. The hero Raj's descent into crime is explicitly linked to his unjust expulsion from respectable society by a judge bound by rigid class prejudice. The famous dream sequence, a Freudian ballet, visualises this class anxiety. For Soviet and Eastern European audiences, the film's critique of a legal and social system that perpetuates inequality resonated with official critiques of bourgeois justice, while its emotional core transcended political dogma. Similarly, *Shri 420* tracks the journey of the innocent Raj from rural poverty to metropolitan temptation. The title itself, denoting a "gentleman cheat" under the Indian Penal Code, frames the narrative as a battle for the soul of the new nation. The iconic song "Mera Joota Hai Japani" encapsulates the hybrid, non-aligned identity:

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"My shoes are Japanese, my trousers English, my red Russian hat… but my heart is Indian." This was a perfect allegory for Non-Aligned India, selectively engaging with global blocs while retaining its core identity. The film's climax, where Raj rejects the corrupt city elite to return to his urban poor community, is a powerful allegory for socialist solidarity.

To fully appreciate Kapoor's unique synthesis, a comparison with other socio-realist classics of the period is instructive. Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* (1957) offers a more bleakly poetic and disillusioned critique of a society that commodifies art and ignores human suffering. Its cynicism is profound, its resolution bittersweet. Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zameen* (1953), a landmark of Indian neo-realism, presents a grittier, more documentarian portrayal of peasant exploitation and urban dehumanisation, directly influenced by Italian neo-realism and Soviet cinema itself. While these films were also appreciated by critics in the Eastern Bloc, Kapoor's

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work achieved mass adulation because he fused socio-political critique with the irresistible apparatus of mainstream entertainment: slapstick comedy, lavish melodies, romantic triangles, and the charismatic, Chaplinesque appeal of his own persona. He did not show the unrelenting hardship of *Do Bigha Zameen* nor the artistic despair of *Pyaasa*; instead, he offered a redemptive, emotionally satisfying narrative where socialist values were vindicated through personal sacrifice and love. This formula proved uniquely translatable, making his films a conduit for a soft, affective socialism that audiences from Moscow to Tashkent could embrace.

The phenomenal reception of Raj Kapoor's films in the Soviet sphere was a historical confluence of political alignment, cultural diplomacy, and resonant narrative, with few parallels in the history of film in their ability to transcend transcontinental boundaries of language and culture. His cinema served as a vibrant,

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popular expression of India's post-independence project, articulating a nationhood centred on secular socialism and the moral integrity of the marginalised. This vision found a receptive home in societies undergoing their own versions of socialist modernisation, where audiences saw their struggles mirrored in the triumphs and tribulations of the Indian tramp. Kapoor's success was predicated on his articulationof the ideological underpinnings of the Nehruvian state—and, by extension, the shared values of the Eastern Bloc—within the compelling, universal language of melodrama and song. Consequently, this transnational phenomenon moved beyond mere film history into a revelation of popular culture's ability to become a central terrain for negotiating political identity, forging international solidarity, and imagining alternative modernities during the Cold War.

Within this context, the career of Romanian singer Maria Armarghioalei, known professionally as

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Naarghita, offers a compelling case study. Her deep association with the music of Raj Kapoor's films illustrates a unique transnational cultural flow, wherein Indian cinematic melodies became a vessel for shared emotional expression within the socialist bloc, resonating profoundly with the Romanian experience of the 1950s.

Naarghita's familiarity with Raj Kapoor stemmed from the widespread dissemination of his films, particularly *Awara* (1951) and *Shree 420* (1955), within the Soviet Union and its satellite states. For audiences in 1950s Romania, living under a repressive Stalinist regime, Kapoor's cinematic narratives of the charming, proletarian "tramp" challenging social injustice and bourgeois hypocrisy held potent symbolic power. The core themes of their songs—romantic longing, social idealism, and critiques of inequality—transcended linguistic barriers and resonated with the everyday struggles and subdued hopes of Romanians. Naarghita,

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with her powerful, emotive voice, absorbed these soundtracks, recognising in them a universal language of sentiment that aligned with the Romanian folk and *muzicăușoară* (easy listening) traditions of melodic, heart-felt performance.

Capitalising on this shared cultural currency, Naarghita's artistry became intrinsically linked to Kapoor's oeuvre. She performed both Romanian-language versions as well as original Hindi versions of his hits, embedding them into the national consciousness. Her stage name, a clear homage to Kapoor's legendary co-star Nargis, signalled a deep, personal identification with this Indian cinematic world. This connection culminated in a remarkable journey to India in the early 1970s, a pilgrimage to the source of the music that had defined her career. Her meeting with Raj Kapoor and Nargis was not merely a celebrity encounter but a symbolic convergence of two artistic streams. Furthermore, her audience with Prime Minister Indira

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Gandhi underscored the political dimension of this cultural diplomacy; Gandhi, a key architect of the Indo-Soviet friendship, recognised Naarghita as a cultural ambassador who had fostered popular affection for India within the Eastern bloc.

Naarghita's career provides a unique case study ofthe reception of cultural products circumventing ideological borders to forge unexpected affinities. Her embodiment of Raj Kapoor's music was no mere imitation but a process of cultural translation, whereby Indian filmi melodies were imbued with a Romanian emotional depth, speaking directly to the experiences of her compatriots. Her journey from interpreting these songs in Bucharest to meeting their creators in Mumbai underscores the reciprocal nature of this exchange.

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The Cinematic Diaspora: Indian Film and Cultural Reconnection in the Post-War Caribbean:

The 1940s and 1950s represented a pivotal era for the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, particularly within the working-class communities of Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname, and to a lesser extent, Barbados and Antigua. For the descendants of indentured labourers who arrived between 1838 and 1917, Indian cinema emerged as a potent medium of cultural reaffirmation, providing a vivid, auditory and visual link to a homeland known largely through ancestral memory. The appeal of these films, predominantly from the Bombay studio system, transcended mere entertainment; it functioned as a crucial mechanism for cultural preservation and re-familiarisation within a post-indenture, yet still often marginalised, social context. As Peter Manuel outlines, 'the advent of commercial Hindi films to the Caribbean in the mid- 1930s added a new dimension of Indian cultural presence in the diaspora. By the early 1940s

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Hindi cinema had become widely popular among Indo-Caribbeans, providing what many have perceived as a direct link to the cherished but otherwise remote homeland.' (Manuel 17)

The narratives and aesthetics of 1940s and 1950s Indian cinema resonated deeply with Indo-Caribbean audiences. Mythologicals and social dramas, featuring stars like Raj Kapoor, Nargis, and Dilip Kumar, presented archetypal stories of virtue, sacrifice, familial duty, and romantic idealism that echoed the values sustained within Caribbean culture. Crucially, however, it was the film songs—the playback-sung musical numbers—that formed the core of their appeal. Music and language were the primary vessels of cultural continuity. Hearing Hindi or Hindustani lyrics, set to melodies that blended classical Indian *ragas* with accessible folk tunes, provided an auditory anchor to a linguistic heritage that was gradually eroding under the pressures of Creolisation and English education. The

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songs of Lata Mangeshkar, Mohammed Rafi, and particularly the singer-actor K.L. Saigal, became the soundtrack of diaspora life, played in homes, shops, and at community gatherings, emerging as an Indian sonic reference point within the Caribbean landscape.

Much of this reception transcends language. Manuel makes the point due to the cultural distance and fragility of linguistic transfer and memory, 'that broad essentials of plot may be lost on the many viewers who, while understanding little Hindi, nevertheless enjoy films as cultural icons. Similarly, Hindi film music itself has for several decades been the single most popular kind of music among Indo-Trinidadians and Guyanese, despite their limited ability to understand the songs' lyrics. … For Indo-Caribbean viewers, Hindi films have established a new connection with India itself, presenting an image that is at once colorful, alluring, idiosyncratically modern, and distinctly Indian.' (ibid.)

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For Indo-Caribbean communities navigating their place in nascent nationalist Caribbean societies, these films provided a symbolic repertoire—of dress, gesture, ethical dilemmas, and spiritual ethos—that helped refamiliarise them with a curated version of Indian culture. It was not a simple recreation of a lost past, but a selective engagement that allowed them to negotiate their hybrid present. The films and the attendant tours of star actors and singers served to reinforce a distinct socio-cultural identity, affirming that their ancestral heritage held a glamour, modernity, and emotional depth worthy of celebration, thus fortifying their cultural confidence within the plural, and often fractious, Caribbean social mosaic.

The Embodied Tradition: Aesthetic Lineages in Indian Cinema:

From its inception, the raison d'être of mainstream Indian cinema has been its communication with

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audiences across the Indian subcontinent, imparting it a self-assurance about its identity and its purpose. Defying the reductionist labels conceived and freely applied by 'Bollywood' scholars, the distinctive characteristics of Indian film have withstood the test of time. These include its elaborate mise-en-scène, its integration of music and dance, and its stylised modes of performance—, far from being arbitrary inventions, were complex and sometimes elaborate, modern continuations of pre-existing artistic and cultural practices. These elements find their lineage in the pictorial traditions of Indian painting, the narrative structures of folk and classical drama, and the sonic landscapes of devotional and regional music, creating a cinematic form that is uniquely and intrinsically Indian. To perceive its formal and aesthetic qualities merely as idiosyncratic industrial conventions is to overlook their profound embeddedness within a longer, deeply rooted Indian aesthetic tradition within a vast and complex cinematic ecosystem.

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The visual composition of early mainstream Indian cinema, particularly its mise-en-scène, bears a direct inheritance from the evolution of Indian painting, with the work of Raja Ravi Varma serving as a pivotal bridge. Prior to the colonial era, Indian painting, such as the Mughal and Rajput miniatures, operated on principles distinct from Western perspectival realism. These traditions favoured a flatter picture plane, a syncretic narrative where multiple moments could coexist within a single frame, and a highly decorative, symbolic use of colour and detail. The arrival of European traders introduced techniques of single-point perspective and oil painting, leading to the emergence of a "Company style" that hybridised Western naturalism with Indian subjects. Ravi Varma's paintings, which masterfully synthesised these influences, combining dramatic realism and use of chiaroscuro style to depict Hindu mythological figures and Indian archetypes with a newfound tactile physicality and emotional depth. His paintings, such as *Damayanti Talking to a Swan* or his

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various renditions of Shakuntala, presented the gods and heroes of Indian lore not as abstract icons but as relatable, yet idealised, human beings in recognisably South Asian settings.

This "Ravi Varma aesthetic" became the foundational visual grammar for Indian cinema. Early filmmakers like Dadasaheb Phalke, who began his career as an employee of Ravi Varma, directly looked to these popular oleographs for their visual and character references. The proscenium-bound framing, the dramatic, tableau-like staging of actors, and the carefully orchestrated, often melodramatic, expressions all mirror the composition of a Ravi Varma painting. This legacy extends beyond mythologicals into social and romantic genres. The opulent, palace-like sets, the lavish costumes, and the carefully diffused, painterly lighting in the historical dramas of Sohrab Modi or the golden-era romantic fantasies of directors like Raj Kapoor and Kamal Amrohi continue this tradition. In South Indian

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cinema, the Telugu and Tamil mythological and historical films, such as those by S. S. Rajamouli (*Baahubali*, *RRR*), are explicit modern manifestations of this aesthetic. Their grandeur is a cultural invocation of a pictorial tradition where the visual field is meant to be saturated, spectacular, and evocative of a mythic, rather than a strictly realistic, realm. The mise-en-scène is thus not a neutral container for action but a participant in the narrative, designed to elicit a specific emotional response (*rasa*) from the viewer, much like the classical Indian arts.

Parallel to its visual strategies, Indian cinema's most globally recognised feature, the integrated musical sequence, is similarly derived from ancient performance traditions. The concept of a unified art form, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, where story, music, dance, and poetry are interwoven, is central to Sanskrit dramaturgy as outlined in the *NāṭyaŚāstra*. Classical Sanskrit theatre, such as the plays of Kālidāsa, seamlessly blended

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dialogue with verse and dance.[6] This synthesis was preserved and evolved in various regional folk traditions, such as the *Jatra* of Bengal, the *Tamasha* of Maharashtra, the *Nautanki* of North India, and the *Theyyam* and *Kathakali* performances of Kerala. These forms were inherently musical, episodic, and presentational, directly engaging the audience through song, stylised movement, and heightened emotion.

Indian cinema absorbed this presentational DNA, in which the song-and-dance sequence is not an

[6] Ananda Lal writes in his introduction to Kalidasa (2017) "There was no attempt at creating an illusion, picture-frame or otherwise. Although commentators emphasize the equal importance of the visual and audible portions, the visual spectacle did not depend on sets or scenery, but on costumes, makeup, and the art of acting, which relied on a codified system of stylized gestures and movements to represent everything: gods and goddesses, natural objects, human actions, abstract ideas, and subtle feelings. Not the least important among the audible elements was the poetry, which amply sufficed to suggest the settings of the various scenes. The Sanskrit drama was also a Gesamtkunstwerk synthesizing all the performing arts—music and dance commonly accompanied the play, act 2 of Mālavikāgnimitra and act 4 of Vikrama and Urvaéī providing typical examples." Lal, Ananda. "Kalidasa." *Critical Survey of Drama*, 3rd ed., ed. Carl Rollyson, Salem Press, 2017 pp. 2334.

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interruption but a core narrative and expressive device, a non-realistic mode for externalising interior emotional states of love, despair, joy, or conflict. The influence of specific regional traditions is palpable. In Bengali cinema, the legacy of Rabindranath Tagore's songs (Rabindra Sangeet) and the poetic realism of directors like Satyajit Ray provide a more subdued, lyrical integration of music. Conversely, the Marathi theatre tradition, with its emphasis on musical drama and social narratives, directly influenced the early talkies in Bombay and continues to inform the structure of many contemporary Hindi films. In the Southern industries, the relationship is even more pronounced. Tamil cinema's deep connection with Carnatic music and classical dance (as seen in the films of A. V. Meiyappan or modern directors like Mani Ratnam) and Malayalam cinema's nuanced use of background scores rooted in Kerala's folk music, demonstrate a regional specificity in their musical aesthetic. The song sequence becomes a cinematic utterance that transcends the plot and

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characters and evokes evokes a set of bhavas underpinning the film's narrative.

This reliance on non-naturalistic performance extends to acting styles. Derived from the *NāṭyaŚāstra's* codification of nine primary emotions or *rasa*s and their corresponding physical expressions, acting in much of Indian popular cinema is presentational and codified. The exaggerated expressions of anguish, the stylised postures of romance, and the broad gestures of comedy find their roots in folk drama like Jatra and Tamasha, where actors needed to project emotion to large, open-air audiences without the aid of close-ups. While parallel and art house cinemas, developed a more method-based approach influenced by Western realism and IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association), mainstream films retained the heightened style of performative language familiar to their domestic audience, whose cultural memories enabled them to unerringly interpret the specific cadence of dialogue

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delivery or the symbolic meaning of a particular glance or gesture.

The cinematic landscape of the Indian subcontinent, particularly the prolific output of its Hindi and regional language industries, functions as a vast and dynamic cultural repository. Reductive epithets such as 'Bollywood' and 'Masala' dilute their cultural importance and the quality of serious scholarship about them, compromising both academic integrity and social responsibility. They actively devalue mainstream Indian film's role as a crucial archive of millennia of creative practice, a pedagogical tool, and a living canvas for the region's profound classical and folk traditions. Through a symbiotic relationship between the popular and the traditional, Indian mainstream film has documented, popularised, and re-contextualised the intricate arts of Indian classical music, dance, painting, and architecture for a mass audience. Indian cinema, encompassing both documentary and feature films, has acted as a custodian

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of this cultural heritage, and equally, of engaging with artistic practices from different parts of the world, while reimagining its own identity following its experience of centuries of colonial rule. Its greatest achievement, however, has arguably been its ability to find audiences across continents and its ability to evoke resonances with their social, political and cultural contexts without compromising its own self-identity.

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Lee Maracle and Academic Social Responsibility: Reimagining Knowledge, Resistance, and Community

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The convergence of Indigeneity and academic social responsibility necessitates a radical rethinking of institutional ethics and the purposes of higher education. Avril Bell focuses on the politics of Indigeneity which involves the possibility of facilitating a dialogue between Indigenous activism and the state, urging academia to move beyond symbolic inclusion toward material acts of decolonisation (*The Politics of Indigeneity* 2013). This

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responsibility must locate Indigenous voices and lived experiences at the centre and be grounded in community engagement rather than reproducing colonial hierarchies (*Indigenous Reconciliation and Decolonisation* 2021). Raven Sinclair, Michael Anthony Hart, and Gord Bruyere have also emphasized that Indigenous frameworks of relationality and reciprocity and Indigenous protocols should be crucial for educational and social work practices, shifting the focus from one-way service provision to the building of mutual care and responsibility. (*Wícihitowin*2020). Extending this discourse, Dominic O'Sullivan links Indigeneity to global sustainability, and insists that academic institutions must recognize Indigenous knowledge as essential to achieving social and ecological justice (*Indigeneity, Culture and the UN Sustainable Development Goals* 2023). These scholars demonstrate that academic social responsibility, when informed by Indigenous epistemologies, becomes not merely an

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ethical stance but a transformative practice rooted in relational accountability and community sovereignty.

The interface of Indigeneity and academic social responsibility, therefore, facilitates a reimagination and shifting of epistemic authority, transforming the ways in which knowledge is produced, shared, and sustained within the university space. Such a transformation helps to take cognizance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) as legitimate and essential frameworks for learning and inquiry. Lee Maracle (1950–2021), a Sto:lo writer, activist, and intellectual, exemplifies the process of transformation through formidable scholarship and relentless advocacy which challenged colonial structures within academia. Through her prolific writing, dynamic teaching, and vociferous public engagement, Maracle foregrounded Indigenous perspectives and protocols, fostering relational accountability and ensuring that Indigenous communities are active participants in shaping knowledge and educational practices. In an academic landscape that often privileges Western

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epistemologies, Maracle insisted on a fundamental rethinking of how knowledge is defined, produced, and validated. Her work was not merely about making space for Indigenous perspectives within academic institutions; it was increasingly a sustained critique of the foundational structures that exclude, silence, or appropriate Indigenous Knowledge Systems. As she notes in an interview, the written word is often privileged over oral traditions: "People don't view orality as equal to writing. And of course it is! Particularly in our cultures, because we are oral still." ("Lee Maracle Is an Oral Storyteller First and Foremost — That's Been Key to Her Storied Writing Career | CBC Books") Through her writing, mentorship, and activism, Maracle articulated a powerful vision of academic social responsibility (ASR). Her contributions serve as a resounding reminder to academic institutions of how they might reimagine their responsibilities and practices in ways that are genuinely reciprocal, decolonial, and socially accountable.

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Memory and remembrance operate as vital instruments of empowerment within Indigenous communities, preserving histories that colonial systems have sought to erase. In her essay pointedly titled *"Just Get in Front of a Typewriter and Bleed,"* Maracle articulates this commitment to collective memory, writing:

> I want to be that kind of writer that will be read by generations of children to come…I want this world to never forget its short but cruel history of racial, national and sexual oppression. ("Just Get in Front of a Typewriter": 41)

Through her writing, public speaking, and editorial work, Maracle has not only articulated the lived experiences of Indigenous communities but has also nurtured and amplified the voices of other Indigenous authors, contributing profoundly to the ongoing evolution of Indigenous literary traditions and cultural self-determination.

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Redefining Knowledge Systems:

One of Maracle's most profound interventions in the academic sphere was her insistence on redefining what counts as knowledge. She challenged the epistemological dominance of the Western academy, which often treats Indigenous knowledge systems as peripheral, anecdotal, or folkloric. Maracle argued that these systems are not only valid but vital, offering holistic understandings of the world rooted in lived experience, land-based wisdom, and communal memory. Her critique was not simply about inclusion; it was about shifting the foundations of academic legitimacy to make space for other ways of knowing.

In *I Am Woman* (1988), Maracle's groundbreaking blend of autobiography, political commentary, and cultural theory, she exposes how colonial structures have attempted to erase Indigenous women's knowledge and voices. She writes not from the

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position of a passive subject within the academy, but as an intellectual insurgent—asserting that knowledge is not the sole property of universities or scholars, but is embedded in the land, in stories, in women's bodies, and in community. Academic social responsibility, for Maracle, must begin with listening—not in a superficial or symbolic sense, but with the intent to honour, integrate, and be transformed by Indigenous thought. Combining poetry in calligraphic fonts, inner thoughts in parenthesis, and a prosaic font as emerging from a typewriter for the narration, the text delineates various aspects of Maracle's life from different angles. She writes: "On all these scraps are written the people of my passion." (Maracle, *I am Woman*: 1988) The text is divided into chapters dealing with various aspects of Indigenousstruggles, particularly, women's voices, in combating the evil of racism.

For Maracle, finding language powerful enough to convey the pain of colonization has been a lifelong struggle. Throughout her body of work, one of the most

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enduring themes is the strength that arises from self-knowledge and cultural connection. In her novel *Daughters Are Forever*, this theme is embodied through Marilyn, the protagonist, who receives guidance and wisdom from Westwind—a figure who represents the natural voice and the ancestral knowledge she has inherited from her Indigenous roots:

> Westwind follows Marilyn. He whispers old story as he tugs and nags at her coattails. He is always beside her. He pleads with her to listen. But Marilyn has no memories of reassurance, no cultivation of thought processes that would guide her to hear Westwind…she does not hear the Westwind- borne voices of her ancestors whispering in her ear. (*Daughters are Forever:*38-39)

Maracle sees "reclaiming ourselves" as central for Indigenous communities, linking cultural revival to addressing violence and environmental harm. She

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highlights that Indigenous insights into the interconnectedness of gender, environment, and race offer a crucial contribution to contemporary thought.

> The denial of Native womanhood is the reduction of the whole people to a sub-human level. Animals beget animals. The dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath Native man, comes the female Native. The dictates of racism are thus that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women. (*I am Woman*: 20)

Storytelling as Pedagogy:

Central to Maracle's vision was the idea that storytelling is not simply an artistic endeavour but has pedagogical ramifications. For her, stories were repositories of law, history, cosmology, and ethics and the teachings of elders. She believed that storytelling engages the whole being—intellectual, emotional, spiritual—and fosters a

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mode of learning rooted in relationships rather than abstraction. Maracle inspired an entire generation of writers to move in the direction of deeply embedded IKS. However, she also believed in giving space to the writers. She charts out intergenerational solidarities between authors:

> I help people out — and then you have to let them have the floor. It would be ridiculous not to. You have to praise them and encourage other people to read them. It's a groundswell that's going on with these young writers; I've dreamed of it happening. Before, it was just me and Maria Campbell flapping in the wind all by ourselves. Then Basil H. Johnston came to the scene at the time. One by one, we were just squeezing out books. But now, it's a groundswell. These kids are going to school and graduating, which didn't happen before. ("Lee Maracle Is an Oral Storyteller First and Foremost — That's

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Been Key to Her Storied Writing Career | CBC Books")

The pedagogical approach and an insistence on intergenerational connections find a voice in one of Maracle's most profound novels, *Ravensong* (1993). Set in a 1950s Coast Salish community, the book unfolds tormented lives, a rich tapestry of oral knowledge, intergenerational teaching and cultural conflict through the eyes of Stacey, a young Indigenous woman caught between two worlds. Stacey's journey reveals how stories—those told around the kitchen table, those shared in ceremony, and those embedded in silence—carry immense pedagogical weight. The novel's structure itself challenges linear, Eurocentric narrative forms and embodies the rhythms and ruptures of Indigenous orality. *Ravensong* inspires readers to think of literature not as a passive object of study but as an active mode of teaching and remembering. *Ravensong* highlights one of the major influenza epidemics that struck an Indigenous community during what the author calls "the stupidest of

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times." One of the devastating legacies of colonial rule has been the introduction and spread of epidemics within Indigenous populations, leading to the systematic eradication of communities and, in extreme cases, the annihilation of entire lineages. Amid such turmoil, the novel is dedicated "To all those women who fought the epidemic when this country was not concerned with our health" (*Ravensong*, 1993), honouring the courage and resilience of Indigenous women in the face of systemic neglect and crisis. The novel exposes the callousness of the 'white town,' whose indifference allowed Indigenous people to perish during the epidemic. At the same time, it highlights the power, resilience, and moral integrity traditionally bestowed upon women in Indigenous communities, showing how they navigated and resisted crises in the face of systemic neglect.

The epidemics faced by Indigenous communities find vivid expression in Maracle's *Ravensong*, where the number of lives lost mirrors the historical suffering of her own Squamish community from 1835 to 1954. From

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a population of fifteen thousand, only three thousand remained on the North Shore. Maracle's great-grandmother, T'a'ah, endured the outlawing of her language, medicine, and capacity to care for her family. The gradual decline of women's authority, exacerbated by European contact and patriarchal structures, often contributed to internal community power losses.

Maracle's writing reflects both these losses and the remarkable resilience of Indigenous women. During the epidemics, T'a'ah was the sole survivor among seventeen siblings, singlehandedly sustaining the lineage of the Wolf Clan from 1835 to 1923. In Maracle's Indigenous philosophy, the wolf symbolizes immense responsibility to the community. As she explains in an interview with Margery Fee and Sneja Gunew: "We are Wolf, and we play a very specific role in our community. We're the backward and forward visionaries for people. We're the pack cutters. We're the ones that help people adjust to whatever change occurs." (209)

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T'a'ah, who lived until Maracle was nine, profoundly shaped her upbringing. While Maracle's mother battled single parenting, racism, and sexism, T'a'ah's teachings nurtured her. The cradle board, central to this upbringing, allowed children to observe their world, understand power relations, and shape themselves within it. Maracle's grandmothers wielded significant power, while her grandfathers, though less executive, guided the next generation through stories, ensuring the continuity of the path toward the "good life." Building on this foundation of intergenerational guidance and resilience, throughout her remarkable life, Maracle became a powerful spokesperson for both the generations that preceded her and those yet to come. WWU English professor Dr. Theresa Warburton states,

> It's hard to put into words the impact that Lee Maracle has had on not only the world of Indigenous literatures, but the world of literature and cultural critique in general… She wrote adamantly and with a passion that speaks to the

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> import she saw in her work; a passion that is traceable from her first text to her last. ("Mourning for Lee Maracle | Center for Canadian-American Studies | Western Washington University")

Maracle passed away on 11 November 2021, but she left a legacy in storytelling which emphasised on the decolonisation of the classroom – not just in terms of content but also in structure. For Lee Maracle, Academic Social Responsibility would require the inclusion of oral traditions and narrative practices as legitimate forms of knowledge transmission. One of Maracle's most significant contributions lies in the interconnectedness she forges between oratory, storytelling, and literary expression. For Maracle, as she explains in *Oratory: Coming to Theory*, writing and oratory should never be treated as separate modes of communication. She asks pointedly, "What is the point of presenting the human condition in a language separate from the human experience: passion, emotion, and character…we all

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strive to be orators. An orator is simply someone who has come to grips with the human condition, humanity's relationship to creation, and the need for a human direction that will guarantee the peaceful co-existence of human beings with all things under creation." (*Oratory: Coming to Theory*: 11)

For Maracle, oratory functions as a language that embodies "passion, emotion, and character," whether spoken aloud or captured in written form. In contrast, she critiques the language of Western academia—its theory, rationality, and literacy—for being stripped of these human dimensions: "Academicians waste a great deal of effort deleting character, plot and story from theoretical arguments. (*Oratory: Coming to Theory*: 9)

Maracle's insistence on orality as integral to Indigenous knowledge systems underscores the need for epistemological pluralism—an approach that values multiple ways of knowing (Battiste 2004) (Kuokkanen 2007). Such pluralism, she argues, must be reflected in

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curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment, enabling an authentic space for Indigenous scholarship and resurgence (ASR) within academic institutions. For Maracle, Indigenous Knowledge Systems operate according to distinct ontologies, methodologies and ethical frameworks and is grounded in relational accountability, land-based ethics and communal responsibility. Her fusion of oratory, narrative, memory and lived experience exemplifies a mode of knowledge production that resists compartmentalisation and disciplinary boundaries. In this sense, Maracle's work offers a blueprint for a university that is not just inclusive, but genuinely plural – one that recognises knowledge as relational, situated and accountable to the communities from which it emerges.

Intersectionality and Indigenous Feminism:

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Maracle's work also exemplifies a deep commitment to Indigenous feminist thought—a commitment rooted not in theory alone, but in the lived experiences of Indigenous women navigating intersecting forms of oppression. Gender has been an organizing principle in much of Lee Maracle's works since her early days as an activist, orator and writer. Belonging to Métis and Salish ancestry, Maracle's oeuvre is usually set in the backdrop of overwhelming forces of colonialism, sexism, and racism. The subjugation of Indigenous women also invites introspection into the increasing distance between pedagogy and grassroots activism in the academia. In *I Am Woman*, Maracle writes: "Colonialism did not just dispossess us of land; it attempted to dispossess us of our humanity, our womanhood, our sense of ourselves as women." (13) Through this recognition of dispossession, Maracle insists that reclaiming Indigenous womanhood is inseparable from dismantling the colonial structures that continue to sustain academic and social hierarchies.

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By focusing on various issues which govern the lives of the indigenous women in Canada, Maracle highlights the realities of political graft, domestic and state-governed violence and rank police brutality within a so-called liberal 'post-colonial' democracy. She critiques mainstream feminism, noting that "White feminism does not account for the colonial experience of Native women. Our oppression cannot be reduced to gender alone" ("Racism, Sexism, and Patriarchy" 34). She articulates the processes of a racist nationalism which has enabled the production of a gendered, racialized, and a dispossessed labouring class. Maracle's works invite interdisciplinary approaches which envision a different subjectivity.

Through her versatile creativity, Maracle maps alternate discourses of history, place, nation, gender, and indigeneity. Through her own life, Maracle demonstrated what an embodied, intersectional, and decolonial praxis looks like. Her insistence on accountability—toward Indigenous women, toward community, toward

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history—calls on scholars to go beyond the study of oppression to the work of dismantling it. Academic institutions, she believed, have a responsibility not to observe injustice from a distance but to confront it, structurally and personally.

Mentorship and Community Accountability:

Maracle's commitment to academic social responsibility was perhaps most powerfully expressed through her mentorship. She believed that scholars must be in service to their communities, not above or outside them. Knowledge production, in her view, should never be extractive. Instead, it must be reciprocal, relational, and grounded in the specific needs and aspirations of Indigenous communities. Michelle Cyca writes: "Over her long career, Maracle mentored countless Indigenous writers, thinkers, and activists, always emphasizing the importance of staying rooted in community relevance. She viewed teaching as a form of care and responsibility, one that extended far beyond the classroom. Her

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approach to mentorship was not transactional but transformative, guided by a belief in the collective nature of knowledge and the intergenerational duty to pass it on." (Cyca)

This ethic of reciprocity is present throughout her work. In *Ravensong*, Stacey's struggles and insights are shaped not only by her formal education but by the guidance of her elders, her mother, and the stories embedded in her cultural environment. The novel critiques the alienation produced by Western education systems while affirming the power of community-based knowledge. In *Ravensong*, Stacey is unable to reciprocate the affections of the white boy, Steve. Her rejection of him is not rooted in his whiteness, but in his inability to understand or share her Indigenous worldview. The gulf between their experiences and cultural identities is too vast to bridge, as Steve remains an outsider to the complexities of Stacey's community and its lived realities. His lack of an insider's perspective ultimately renders genuine connection impossible,

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emphasizing the deep cultural divide that shapes relationships in a colonial context.

> until you have experienced the horror of an epidemic, a fire, drought and the absolute threat these things pose to the whole village's survival – and care about it, care desperately – you will be without a relevant context. (*Ravensong* 186)

While Stacey's community suffers devastating losses from the flu epidemic, Steve's father—a doctor—refuses to enter the village to provide medical aid. This act of neglect starkly exposes the racial and social barriers separating their worlds. Stacey is further troubled by the suicide of her classmate, Polly, who takes her own life after being condemned by her community for alleged promiscuity. Both events reveal the harsh moral and social judgments that shape and confine women's lives. Perhaps one of Stacey's most poignant realizations of the profound distinctions between her Indigenous community and the "white world" emerges in the

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following lines: "Polly and Momma were the same women – good-hearted and passionate. In the white world, her Momma would have perished." (*Ravensong*: 106)

Stacey's realization of choice and acceptance marks her gradual movement toward a perspective in which she no longer views her community through the lens of colonial judgment—"their eyes." The emphasis on making choices and embracing others from an essentially democratic and inclusive standpoint is a recurring theme in both novels. The unconditional love extended to the protagonists—Stacey in *Ravensong* and Marianne in *Sundogs* —by their families and communities is both steadfast and transformative. This love acts as a protective and restorative force, enabling them to confront their internal conflicts and overcome the alienation of being "community illiterates" at the outset of their journeys. Ultimately, such love becomes a medium of healing and reconnection, reaffirming the strength and resilience of Indigenous kinship and

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collective belonging. The community, which is Salish gains an increasing and a pervasive presence in the narratives of the two novels. However, in both texts, references to the **Salish community** appear only once. In *Sundogs*, Marianne offers her boyfriend and boss, Mark, a "Salish hint" during lunchtime: "It's lunch time," a good Salish hint. It allows him to say he is busy if he doesn't want me and it leaves a sliver of dignity for the unwanted" (*Sojourners and Sundogs*, 171).

Similarly, in *Ravensong*, the reference to Salish culture occurs when Stacey mistakes her younger brother Jim's behaviour—waiting to be served at the table—for male chauvinism. Over time, however, she comes to realize that Jim, like his father before him, has acquired the "unalterable Salish male practice of complimenting the cook" (*Ravensong*, 108).

As the sole explicit references to a Salish background, these moments underscore Maracle's subtlety: she evokes a cultural ethos so deeply embedded

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in Salish identity that it does not require repeated affirmation. *Ravensong* and *Sundogs* together articulate an Indigenous worldview that operates as the text's foundational logic rather than its stated subject. Maracle insists that this worldview is integral to the narrative itself—and that it is the responsibility of the non-Indigenous reader to engage with and understand it. This insistence also shaped her broader praxis, as her literary and academic work were inseparable from her commitment to strengthening Indigenous intellectual sovereignty and nurturing the next generation of thinkers to carry forward the work of cultural resurgence and resistance.

Critique of Institutional Tokenism

> By the end of her life, she was recognized and embraced by the Canadian literary scene, but she had to fight to get there. In 1988, the Vancouver Writers Festival declined her request to launch her new book *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective*

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> *on Sociology and Feminism* at the festival; she leapt on stage, seized a mic and read anyway. (Cyca)

This delightful anecdote reflects Maracle's journey as an unflinching critic of institutional tokenism. Maracle insists on meaningful change and systemic transformation and not just mere performative inclusion of Indigenous texts in the university syllabi. Maracle demanded that land acknowledgements be followed by land-based policies, that representation be matched by redistribution and that reconciliation necessitated material action and not symbolic gestures. (Winsa 2017). She insisted that social responsibility in academia cannot be mere rhetoric; it must be practice. In her 2018 essay *Scent of Burning Cedar*, she wrote, "I write because I cannot fall silent into a backwash of Canadiana after having produced 15,000 years of story. I write because I want our youth to know that we have value, we have knowledge, and we have a place in this world. The place we have was carved for us by our ancestors, who

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loved us so much that they died that we might live." (*Scent of Burning Cedar | the Walrus*)

This commitment to integrity made Maracle a powerful and sometimes uncomfortable voice within academic spaces. She refused to be palatable. Her presence—on panels, in classrooms, in her writing—was a challenge to business as usual. She held institutions accountable not just for what they included, but for what they excluded, silenced, or distorted. For scholars, educators, and administrators, her legacy is a call to self-examination, transparency, and action.

Toward a Transformative Academic Ethic

In her 2017 collection *My Conversations with Canadians*, Lee Maracle wrote,

> I have seen many of you at book launches, panels, conferences, gatherings of all sorts, including protests against some injustice or other of which there are so many. Not a single Canadian has ever approached me to say: 'Why

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> are there so many injustices committed against Indigenous people?' or 'Why is there not a strong movement of support for justice and sovereignty for Indigenous people's sovereignty movement in Canada?' Canadians love causes, but they love the causes that are far away — out of their backyard, so to speak. (Conversation 1: Meeting the Public)

In her uncomfortable questions and deep-rooted belief in Indigenous ways of knowing, in the power of storytelling, in intersectional resistance, in reciprocal mentorship and in unwavering commitment to community, Maracle provides a blueprint for how academic institutions might evolve toward justice, relationality and relevance. Her vision of academic social responsibility is not only based on the necessity to diversify knowledge base but to decolonize its values, structures, and purposes.

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Maracle's relentless interventions must also be read in terms of Canada's broader social and political landscape. Policies of assimilation, containment and symbolic reconciliation have marked Canada's historical and ongoing management of Indigeneity. Although Canada positions itself as a liberal, postcolonial democracy, the fraught trajectory of the Indian Act, residential school system, contemporary debates around land acknowledgments, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Indigenous sovereignty offer a different tale of settler colonial structures. Through her lifetime and prolific work as an author, elder and storyteller, Maracle has repeated challenged such contradictions. Her work emphasises on the futility of reconciliation without land restitution, political autonomy and material justice. Her critique extends beyond literary or pedagogical concerns and confronts the nation state's ubiquitous reliance on education as a tool of epistemic regulation and cultural erasure. Academic institutions often built on Indigenous land and

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with a history of excluding Indigenous people are not neutral spaces but deeply implicated in the reproduction of settler knowledge systems. Her work resonates strongly with Indigenous resistance movements such as *Idle No More*, which foreground the inseparability of land, law, knowledge and governance. Maracle's writings demand an acknowledgement of responsibility and a resistance to Canada's narrow definitions of expertise and evidence. Her writing demands that necessity of new, emergent paradigms in conceptualising Indigenous struggles. In her work, Indigenous knowledge is not merely cultural heritage, but constitutes a living, political and future oriented system of thought.

Maracle's writing—whether in *I Am Woman*, *Ravensong*, or her essays and speeches—challenges scholars to reimagine knowledge as communal rather than individual, as rooted in land and history rather than detached objectivity. She reminds us that Indigenous peoples have always theorized, always taught, always resisted. The role of academia is not to discover or

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validate this knowledge but to create space for it to thrive on its own terms. In honouring Lee Maracle's legacy, we are reminded that academic social responsibility is not a concept to be theorised alone, but a practice to be lived—through the stories we tell, the voices we amplify, the communities we serve, and the systems we dare to change.

In "Scent of Burning Cedar", Maracle writes:

> Indigenous women writers spend their lives learning the culture of the others and figuring out how to transmit who we are to contribute to transforming the damaging culture that the newcomers brought. We struggle to do this by nurturing a new sensibility on this continent. I struggle with them. Embedded in our story is the new story that is waiting to be born. By writing, I reach a larger audience and can continue to reach greater and greater numbers. Writing has made me an agent of transformation on a grand scale in

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> the world I inherit. I have a voice in many countries. (*Scent of Burning Cedar | the Walrus*)

In essence, Maracle's writings locate the agency of Indigeneity in redefining academic social responsibility as not merely public service or inclusion, but as an ethical and ontological commitment to relational accountability — to people, place, and the planet.

As institutions increasingly speak of equity, inclusion, and reconciliation, Maracle's work serves as both guide and mirror. It demands that we go beyond symbolic commitments and toward structural change. It calls for a pedagogy that is not only decolonial in content but liberatory in intention. And it reminds us that the university must not be a fortress of exclusion, but a site of transformation—a place where knowledge can be used in the service of justice, healing, and collective flourishing.

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The Santiniketan Ashrama Samaja: Integrating Pedagogy as Social Responsibility in the Architecture of Praxis at Visva-Bharati

DHEEMAN BHATTACHARYYA[1]

Part 1

Situating the context of the '*samaja*':

The seed of 'Tagore's University' (Ganguly xvii) was not planted in the formative years of the *Bhramacaryashrama* in 1901as we understand today. "*Yatra visvambhavatyekanidam*" (Bidhusekhar Sastri would utter this to highlight the essence of the asrama)

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was to connect the centre of learning with the *visva*(the world and beyond). Like the idea of the 'Nation', Rabindranath was weary about the education policies which were replicated by the universities set up to create a class that would justify the ways of the British Raj to the colonial subjects (Mukhopadhyay 156).This idea of subjecthood was however quite complex in the context of the subcontinent as 'schooling' the colonial subject had been a zone of contention, reconciliation during the colonial regime and even as the master reformed, redrafted policies or finally left! I shall not deal with the formation of that subjecthood in colonial Bengal. I would rather examine and situate the responses of the subject that would be aligned with Sisir Kumar Das' complex yet apparently open drafting of the multiple possibilities of responses of an author/ thinker within the Indian literary sociology in his ambitious and unfinished project - *A History of Indian Literature*. Being an avid reader of Rabindranath, I feel Sisir Kumar Das was also performing his responsibility as a scholar of a post

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contact zone and albeit in sync with Rabindranath's message on India's history- "BharatbarsherItihash" (38). The poet-pedagogue Rabindranath was perhaps drafting the possibilities of re-thinking the pedagogy of a society that was alienated through the- 'disciplinary' boundaries of colonial pedagogy. It was a collective effort that was endorsed by Rabindranath and his contemporaries who joined him in the school that was established outside the city. Built on ideas of developments that were unnatural to the ethos of learning in the Indian context of, the city - centered learning hubs were inadequate to accommodate the diversity of Indian societies. This article will thus try to chart the development of the *ashrama* into Visva-Bharati (1901 to 1921) and situate the architecture of *vidya-carca* (modes of learning in a more inclusive and effective way) in Santiniketan- Sriniketan. These dual zones of alternative learning became Rabindranath's 'laboratory' of contesting colonial pedagogy in a constructive way. Rabindranath was probably thinking

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about the function of the poet, the artist in a society which was fragmented and fractured.

By tracing the simultaneous developments of the various 'Arts' in Santiniketan and the project of rural reconstruction in Sriniketan, Rabindranath was taking the idea of Visva-Bharati to the society. He wanted to instill the responsibility of the *ashramites*(students, teachers, non-teaching staff members) to connect with the society- in a wider sense to reconcile with '*swadesh*' (belongingness to one's own country, not necessarily 'patriotism' in the narrow sense). This article will thus emphasize on the significance of the vision of Rabindranath in understanding the relationship of academic practices and the *samaja*(not society consciously in its restricted understanding) in a more inclusive sense, often liberating the idea of the 'Individual' in the 'society' that was chartered, utilitarian, and thus required a paradigmatic shift to accommodate the vision of the non-West.

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Plurilingualism and Mother tongue: Verbal and non-verbal communication in Santiniketan

In the note from publisher for the compilation of *Bangla Samskritir Dhara*Amrit Sen identifies the possibility of *Visvavidyasamgraha* first in Bangla and the into other Indian languages as early as 1917-18 (Sen 7). This would gradually become the basic backbone of Visva-Bharati along with the institutes of performing and visual arts and the various mappings of rural development and agriculture at Sriniketan was quite natural and organically coherent. This project was complete by 1921. Since its inception, the *Brahmacaryasrama*, the school founded by Rabindranath in 1901 had endorsed this tripartite idea of an aesthetics of learning (*vidya-carca).* That the basis of knowledge production would be plurilingual, multicultural and multimodal in its essence and practice is evident in the emphasis on language learning by Rabindranath (P. Sen 10). As Visva-Bharati

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emerged as an alternative model- a knowledge hub, an open-air museum of human activity, the dissemination of this unprocessed knowledge required a new structure, rather structures as already existing patterns could not contain this attitude towards learning that would involve 'beauty,' 'joy' and 'propriety'-to be more specific, an over- emphasis on *aucitya*(that which is just and in desirable proportion). The pedagogy was anti-colonial on one hand, and a clarion call for extending our horizon in mapping and simultaneously drafting a blueprint to receive these apparently known and unknown (*jana-ajana*) that we had been encountering through several contacts over the centuries, colonialism being a permanent scar. The architecture of Santiniketan is also an organic testament to this claim on alternative practices (Patha Bhavana- Simha Sadana- Uttarayan conclave structurally and in their practices). Our quest for knowledge in Santiniketan has always been multilayered, often digressing from a particular telos and branching out to acknowledge the multiple possibilities

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of intersections. There were 'passages to' penetrate these knowledge systems that were made to co-exist physically like the old Vidya Bhavana-Patha Bhavana or the plantations around *pampa* lake behind *guhaghar* (the art shared space with a Japanese garden nurtured by Rathindranath, the only surving son of Rabindranath and Pratima Debi, Rathindranath's wife who was a widow extended an architecture of inclusion).

As India emerged as a political identity with her own 'quest for relevance' in the post-independence period, Visva-Bharati quietly nurtured a distinct knowledge system which had become an accepted framework within the nationalist framework then and a pan-Indian model in recent times with the implementation of NEP 2020. The anxiety of the formative years was not how to accommodate the East-West encounter alone, rather a constructive effort in re-aligning, re-emphasising the existing ideologies of connections between languages, cultures, practices

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across the 'World' through an inclusive pedagogy- the response as indicated by Sisir Kumar Das. Interestingly, knowledge was not a necessity for Rabindranath and that is evident in his writings on aesthetics. He was interweaving the multiple possibilities of intersections of '*jnan-carca*' (quest for knowledge) through the introduction of various disciplines within Visva-Bharati that had their own aesthetics- the way they would perceive the *visva* and integrate that understanding in 'life-long-learning.' Sriniketan emerged as a praxis that would take the concept of the university and its academic praxis to the society. This created a possibility of accommodating another form of criticality that came from 'below.' The 'below' was to be realized and worked upon continuously-it is never achieved. Visva-Bharati as a concept demands a dynamic framework to acknowledge the coexistence of diverse possibilities of knowledge production. The disciplinary practices in and around Visva-Bharati is useful to understand the idea of a '*samaja'* which the founder acharya of Visva-Bharati

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had envisioned where austerity became the ethics of his aesthetics. This aesthetics had a responsibility. Art was not outside society.

The Pedagogic shift:

Rabindranath was probably thinking about the responsibility of an academic institution in a post contact zone. In an interview given in Canada that was reprinted in Visva-Bharati Quaterly, Rabindranath is vocal about Europe's status in Asia and why it had been under the scanner (Islam 4). Integrating translation practices would thus have its own politics in the framework of Tagore's university. Since HorySan, the first non-Indian student joining the school in 1902, this idea would gradually take shape (Das Gupta Uma 91). In contesting the impact of colonial modernity Rabindranath was quite vocal in his lecture series '*Atmashakti*' which begins with "What is Nation" and gradually goes to address the '*chhatrasamaja'* (student community). He identifies the

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responsibilities of the educated youth in the colonial context. The following areas might be identified as the cornerstone of his ambitious project of decolonisation:

- Familiarity, commonality, affinity in the plurilingual zone of colonial India
- Significance of Mother tongue
- Assimilation, acculturation in cultural practices
- Beyond grammar: Linguistics and literary cultures
- Orality and Literacy: *ChhelebholanoChhora* (collecting lullabies as orally transmitted cultural heirlooms)
- Verbal and non-verbal communication: The school of the Arts in colonial India and Rabindranath's dialogues with Vallathol and Udaya Shankara
- Rethinking language politics in understanding scientific and other forms of knowledge systems in *Visva Vidya Sangraha* (Sen 7-9)

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The spirit of the *samaja* as opposed to 'World Spirit': towards re-aligning Indian Knowledge Systems

Rabindranath's pedagogic shift is based on his synthesis of the models of learning available in the *sastras*. Responsibility was a form of aesthetics that had to be cultivated. It was hinted perhaps hinted by Kalidasa in his opening scene of *Abhinjnan Sakuntalam.* There is an ethics associated with the aesthetics. The spiritual awakening was more important than an overemphasis on the physical will of the individual. The individual was nourished by the surroundings and hence the project of Santiniketan from the beginning of the late nineteenth century was built on the idea of giving back, sharing in the true spirit of sharing. The responsibility was not a product of an inherent 'guilt' around encroachment or transgression. It was directed towards cooperation and not creating a model that was imposed from above. The path was that of *chittasuddhi* to *atmashakti* (Tagore,

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"Atmashakti" 617) and these translating into *atmanirbharta*- self-reliance that was need of the hour. Interestingly, this state could be achieved through the other arts. Music would become the substratum of the architecture I have mentioned in the title. The inherent *rasa* of Rabindranath's *Song Offerings* can be seen as a culmination of his lived experience of a *samaja* which was unclear to him until he left his comfort of the city and met the rural people of Bengal- that was also the beginning of his designing the school that would be located far away from the artificial space of governance- the city. Self-reliance would become the blueprint of the Sriniketan experimentations and applied field of critical enquiry. The path to *atmashakti* (will force) would then be *dhyana* (meditation), *sadhana (practice* with dedication), *soundarya* (beauty), *karma* (work with ethics and integrity) which were the basic elements of the inherited traditions of our subcontinent. Rabindranath's cosmopolitanism is embedded in this understanding of the world and he understood his

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responsibility as a poet. *Jagate Ananda Jogye Amar Nimatran* (poem "I have found my call..." in EnglishGitanjali) was the call he felt from within to connect with the world.

The Poet Pedagogue: Synergy between learning and society:

The now UNESCO world heritage site was the first site for Rabindranath's experimentation with the architecture of a school that would liberate and not restrict the minds.. He was bringing the process of learning under the sky and modelled it around the *tapovana* knowing fully well the daunting task that he had imposed on himself. The architecture of the school which is now the Patha Bhavana complex is a perfect example of organic architecture which was cosmopolitan and inclusive. It would gradually become a confluence of buildings, murals depicting the cultural heritage of exchanges, transactions, and receptions. The world will find a nest

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not at the cost of effacement of individual identities. Rabindranath would align the Visual art with rural reconstruction where familiarity and equality would be the guiding force to forge new connections with the society. Rabindranath would deploy the Arts to create a fraternity which would contest the precarious society. Art was embedded in the existence. There was a possibility of encouraging criticality through art and that is what Nandalal, Ramkinkar, Binodbehari, Mani da did in moments of anxieties and trained future generations who later became the pillars of the thought processes of the ideology of decolonizing the 'society.' To quote Shivakumar "What Rabindranath did with words, they did with colours and brushes." Santiniketan became the open-air museum of Indian Arts. Rabindranath was aligning the familiar with the mundane, creating the possibility of re-thinking what we were made to overlook. The eco-system of Santiniketan, particularly that of Kala Bhavana should be seen as one of the long-lasting experiments of Arts education. The revolutionary

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Bauhaus in Germany (1919-1933) could be seen as a similar movement in understanding the Arts and society. These were not Utopic, rather attempts to connect with the society through the arts- a quest for relevance. The transculturalism of the Santiniketan experiment was encouraging the possibility of dissimilar response to a similar locale. The responsibility that the practitioners of Santiniketan shared with the founder was non-compliance to any form like 'hindu art.' 'high art,' 'low art' and participated in the process of interrogating 'Nationalism.' If Nandalal was engaging with decorative Japan, Ramkinkar was playing with water colour to forge a connection with the cultural elements of the landscape around Santiniketan. Binodbehari would extend that in his scrolls. It would thus be important to acknowledge the role played by Rabindranath, Coomaraswamy in taking Indian Arts and Aesthetics to the non-Indian zone in the twentieth century. As I had been hinting at the precarious 'society' as an abstraction in relationship with the individual, I would like to move

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towards more concrete evidences by trying to understand the framework through which the Sriniketan experiment could be seen. By the time the British left, leaving India as 'illustrations of poverty in the world,' Rabindranath becomes relevant, often untranslatable as we lost the tools to recognize the responsibility embedded in his *vidya-carca*of his school.

Part II

The 'School': Decolonising the mind, body, and soul

Before analysing how this dream of the poet pedagogue has been translated in the functioning of the institution of national importance over the centuries, it would be worth noting the reception of his '*ishkul'* in 1914 as it would also help us map the journey of the institution's response to the social changes that were shaping up India from within and without. As I had pointed out earlier, that art became the substratum for this change. 'Atmashaskti'

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was connected to self-realization and subsequently to self-governance.

In an article published in *The Daily Chronicle* (January 12, 1914; P 6, Col4) J. Ramsay Macdonald writes about the "Asram" of the Great Bengali Poet. Interestingly, quite poignantly, he connected this with the art movement in Bengal, recollecting what Abanindranath was trying to achieve- the artist graduating into the poet-teacher. It is worth mentioning here what Macdonald reports:

> Moreover, the Santiniketan is no mere seminary for the education of boys. It is alive with the life of India. It is aware of what it is going on outside. It shares in the larger Indian life. The particular interest of the school is the enlightenment of the mass…The villages around are inhabited by the aboriginal Santals, and the boys of the school go out sometimes with football or bat and begin a game. When a crowd

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has gathered the game is stopped and the players talk of knowledge to the villagers. From this an evening class is formed and the Santiniketan boys go out and teach in it. The day I was there about a dozen of these children had come in and were being taught under a tree. They were lively imps with wide interested eyes and so full of life that they could not keep still. They were being shown the delights of the stereoscope and were being taught to describe accurately what they saw. Two boys were looking after them. It was their tribute to India and their service to the reincarnated motherland to which all their youthful enthusiasm was devoted…Everything was peaceful, natural, happy…worthy and well-meaning graduates from Oxford and Cambridge are toiling and perspiring like blacksmiths with heavy hammers to beat and bend the Indian mind into strange forms on strange anvils, and where there is unhappiness and sadness of heart-

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> timorous whispers instead of laughter, doubt instead of hope. (54-55)

Well, this could be deemed a bit patronizing but the ideology of Rabindranath's way of giving back to the society was clear. The school always had its trials and tribulations which affected the poet educator deeply, yet he considered it to the vessel that contained the rewards of his life. He would dedicate it to his countrymen and Gandhi would keep his words in rescuing the vessel as and when required by generating funds for the institution that never accepted and assistance from the British government because the conditions under which they were given were not aligned with the pet's vision of his school. Rabindranath had devoted the proceeds of the Nobel Prize for Literature and the loyalties of his books for the betterment of his school.

> If we were to answer the question that was left unanswered in the article on the review of Rabindranath Tagore's *Nationalism* in The Times

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Literary Supplement (September 13, 1917; P435, Col1/2):

As to immediate practical problems, the book does not give much guidance. If we ask what Sir Rabindranath would like to substitute for the present regime in India, or how the economic needs of mankind are now to be supplied without a complex industrial organization, we get no answer. It is for us to recognize those evils and dangers, and consider the way of salvation.

Rabindranath's answer is reflected in the "League of Vagabonds" (The Times, January 6, 1921, P9, Col 3) where the west recognized the significance of a fellowship of man that would look beyond race, rank, religion.His 'school' would be the answer which was unidentifiable to Europe like many other conjectures of Tagore like the 'Nation.' Europe felt Rabindranath was misunderstanding the conceptual framework of the State and Nation as categories. However, a report published in The Times Educational Supplement (September 21,

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1916; P 140, Col 2) speaks a lot about 'Where Tagore Teaches'. Interestingly the report was published when Rabindranath was touring Japan and the United States. The report documents the education system which was "moral as well as secular, and thereby to provide what is a crying need in Bengal" (Kundu et al, 95). The report further documents the significance of the outdoor classes and they are introduced to elementary experiments in science along with the *sahitya sabhas* and debates organized as part of the curriculum. The report ends with a profound message:

> The boys are encouraged to do social services. They go about the villages, like the Christian missionaries, with books and medicine, which they distribute to the villagers. Without respect of persons or castes they attend to the sick. It is common to see a Brahmin boy of the school speaking words of comfort and administering relief to some poor "untouchable." Thanks to

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> their enterprise, night schools have also been founded for the benefit of such low-caste people. And as they return from the villages, with a clear sky and a soft moon overhead and the giant trees around, do they not hear His silent footsteps in the darkness, and feel that he comes, he comes, he ever comes?

This answer was probably embedded in Rabindranath's lyrical anxieties for his *Jeevandebota*. His religion of man was that of an international cosmopolitan who could look beyond borders. *One Hundred Poems of Kabir* was a collaboration in that direction, his way of serving his society.

Part III

The Sriniketan Project: Aligning academia with the society

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The Institute of Rural Reconstruction was founded in 1923. Sriniketan will trace its identity since then. Rabindranath wanted to integrate health, education, knowledge around latest developments in the sphere of agriculture to be integrated with the agrarian society in and around villages near Surul and Sriniketan. Research became an integral part of this activism where Rabindranath had Elmhirst along with Rathindranath, Tagore's son as the chief architects of this 'ideal society.' Dispensaries and health cooperatives were established. Awareness programme around diseases were integrated into the routine activities. The extension activities that begun in nineteen villages around Santiniketan have now reached out to more than sixty-five villages. In this context, the reminiscences of Swati Ghosh and Ashok Sircar about *Bratibalak Sangathan* is worth mentioning. In *KobirPathshala: Patha Bhavana o Siksha SatrerItihas* we find a comprehensive yet anecdotal history of the formative years of Sriniketan:

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> The nature of education largely depends on the kind of society one wants to build. The education at Siksha Satra was based on Rabindranath's dream of reconstructing rural life. The dream can be expressed through three key words-swadeshi, self-reliance, and cooperation. The education of Patha-Bhavana eventually spread to other schools in the country, and even abroad. However, the type of education imparted at the Siksha Sastra too spread to schools in other parts of the country-not as the brain child of Rabindranath and Elmhirst, but under the term *Nai Talim*, coined by Gandhiji (*The Poet's School*, 224).

We are revisiting the history of the poet's school at another historical juncture in India. It is thus interesting and worth discussing the scope of Sriniketan which had worked towards apprenticeship embedded education models in 1923-25 which has now been acknowledged by the latest education policies across the world. Annual

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training camps were organized during 1924-25. In this context the establishment of *Sikshasatra* (1924) and *Loksikshasamsad* (1936) should be analysed in details. Silpa Sadan, a vocational training was established in 1929 where the students were introduced to handloom, leather, wood, iron, stitching, masonry so that they could become small enterprises of their own. Subsequently 'Silpa Bhandar,' a cooperative was opened in 1937 which sold goods produced by the students. The outreach programmes were brought under a programme called 'Village Visit.' The *Seva Bibhag* of the Ashram Sammilani engaged in serving the rural poor (*The Poet's School*, 168). It is important to situate the staging of plays in Santiniketan. A journey that begun with *Bisarjan* (1903), the essay "Rangamancha", *Saradotsaab*, *Mukut*, *Achalayatan* and others complemented the project of the school. In 1908 *Lakshmir Pariksha* was performed and in 1910 Rathindranath married Pratima Devi, a widow. Apart from the creative engagement, Rabindranath's

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Dhananjay Bairagi will have other implications in the ashrama community- inducting girl students in the performative zone which was erstwhile dominated by male students. Dance, music and theatre will become indispensable in the social inclusion of the *samaja* which Rabindranath had dreamt. *Natir Puja* where Rabindranath played the role of Upali should be seen as a major event in cementing the ideologies of integrating the Arts in developing a society that was in multiple phases of translation. *Rituranga*, *Tasher Desh*, *Chandalika*, *Chitrangada* will contest several stereotypes and simultaneously become tools for generating funds for the institution through their performances.

A project that continues...

In her essay "A Transformational Pedagogy: Reflections on Rabindranath's Project of Decolonisation," Himani

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Bannerji, a direct spun of the poets' school rightly points out that:

> The broader consciousness- raising goal of pedagogy, the essential purpose of education for Rabindranath lies not in teaching literacy, facts, and skills, but in enhancing the self-awareness which helps to link the self with the other, with society and the individual with the world (Bannerji25). Bannerji situates Rabindranath's project of the school as the foundation for social and cultural transformation. Recollecting Sisir Kumar Das's works on the English writings of Tagore, Bannerji would righty situate Rabindranath's cultural interventions as strategic project of decolonization, legitimizing the performativity of the space called Santiniketan- the nest for alternative ideologies, often conflicting but having a dangerous symmetry. Rabindranath's artistic interventions should thus

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be seen as extensions of his radical ideas on societal reciprocity and collective uprising. Amongst many ideas, the idea of a secular society is an eternal work in progress, never to be achieved in the subcontinent, was felt and announced by Rabindranath in the several crises he identified in our societies we cohabit. Rabindranath would thus emphasize on personality, creativity to create the *samaja* he dreamt about to bring social changes in modern India.

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Politics of Language: A Study of Kudmali in the Context of *Jhumur* and *Charyapada*

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I

Language is considered as a contested social practice where power, identity and cultural authority are produced, negotiated and resisted. In multilingual societies like India, in which certain languages are deemed either classical, standard or national, language acts as the site of political negotiation where others are left out as dialect or

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folk speech. These distinctions are seldom made solely on linguistic criteria. Rather, they result from historical processes of colonial administration, nationalist movements, caste order and economic power.The linguistic and cultural marginalization of Kudmali cannot be understood in isolation from the historical positioning of the Kudmi community, which constitutes one of the principal speech communities of the language. Kudmis have traditionally been agrarian cultivators, deeply embedded in land-based labour, seasonal cycles, and ecological knowledge systems. Kudmali emerges precisely from this socio-cultural matrix of Kudmi life—its vocabulary, idioms, metaphors, and affective expressions are shaped by agricultural rhythms, collective work, migration, and village-based social relations. Recognizing Kudmali, therefore, also means recognizing Kudmi cultural knowledge system as a legitimate source of history and meaning.

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From the perspective of Academic Social Responsibility (ASR), this article responds to the ethical imperative of restoring visibility to communities whose contributions have been systematically erased from dominant narratives. The relegation of Kudmali to the status of a "mixed sub-dialect" mirrors the socio-economic marginalization of Kudmis within caste and class hierarchies. Academic institutions, by privileging written, elite, and urban languages, have historically failed to acknowledge agrarian communities like the Kudmis as producers of culture and knowledge. By foregrounding Kudmali as a historically continuous language and situating it within traditions such as Jhumur and the Charyapada, the paper attempts to enact ASR through epistemic redress.

Jhumur, in particular, functions as a cultural archive of Kudmi experience. Its songs encode themes of sowing and harvesting, seasonal separation, labour migration, love, and collective endurance, central elements of Kudmi social life. The use of Kudmali in

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Jhumur performances affirms language as a lived practice rather than a codified system, reinforcing the idea that Kudmi culture sustains its own modes of historical transmission outside institutional literacy. Treating Jhumur merely as "folk" art thus reproduces caste-inflected hierarchies that devalue agrarian aesthetics.

Furthermore, the re-interpretation of the Charyapada through Kudmali and Jhumur unsettles dominant literary historiography that has largely detached early vernacular traditions from the communities that nurtured them. By tracing continuities between Charya language, Kudmali idiom, and Kudmi cultural spaces of Rarh–Jharkhand, the article reclaims Kudmi participation in the formation of eastern Indian vernacular culture. This reclamation aligns with ASR's broader goal of democratizing knowledge and resisting upper-caste and metropolitan monopolies over cultural history.

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In this academic ethical practice, connecting Kudmali with Kudmi culture is not merely an act of linguistic classification but a form ofrecognising the strength of Kudmi culture. It asserts that Kudmi agrarian life, oral traditions, and linguistic practices constitute valid knowledge systems.

The present study attempts to explore the politics of language through a focused study of Kudmali from the perspective of its interaction with an early vernacular text namely, Charyapada and the traditional folk performance form of Jhumur. Kudmali is spoken throughout a large area, including Jharkhand, western West Bengal, northern Odisha, and a section of Chhattisgarh. While widely spoken and deeply rooted in the history of the language, Kudmali has fallen conspicuously from the public lexicon. Often identified as a dialect of Bengali or Hindi since the survey of George Abraham Grierson, its independence and unique linguistic qualities suffer a sense of marginalization.

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This marginalization can be attributed to the socio-economic status of its speakers, who largely come from agrarian, Adivasi and working-class backgrounds. Thus, the politics of language would intertwine caste, class and regional inequalities. Charyapada is often regarded as the earliest available material that ever emerged from eastern Indo-Aryan literature from the eighth to twelfth centuries, written by the Buddhist Siddhacharyas. Its linguistic identity, however, has been a subject of debate. Modern literary histories generally identify the Charyapada as the original source of the standard Bengali, Assamese, or Odia. It demonstrates the reverse appropriation and the manner by which early vernacular texts are appropriated to justify modern linguistic identities, even if it implies that such modern linguistic identities have an identity of a more plural or heterogeneous origin. Jhumur is the oral-based tradition of the living practices of the Kudmali

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speakers. Conducted in agricultural seasons, festivals, and communal celebrations, Jhumur preserves the linguistic forms that few writings have ever attempted to include. But, as Kudmali, Jhumur has been dismissed as nothing more than 'folk', maintaining its marginal status. When analysing Kudmali alongside its interactions with Charyapada and Jhumur, it becomes a case study to show how language politics works for mutual recognition, exclusion, and appropriation. The historical and cultural legacy of Kudmali allows for a much more holistic and ethical reckoning with the linguistic history of India.

II

Kudmali is an Indo-Aryan language and is mainly spoken in the east and the very heart ofcentral India at present, especially in Jharkhand, northern Odisha and north-east Chhattisgarh. Because Kudmali is

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spoken by a large majority over a vast geographical area, it has not been recognized as an autonomous language in official or academic discussions. Bengali and Hindi are commonly used to describe it and, in some cases, it isreferred to by the name of Sadri orNagpuri. These categorizations are not purely descriptive but political in nature.They represent the prevalence of some languages while isolating others. Kudmali's linguistic phenomenon shows that linguistic identity is as much determined by social power as it is by structural characteristics. Kudmali has its own phonological, morphological, and syntactic features which are different from neighbouring standard languages. Its phonetic system retains features and intonation that are not present in the dominant Bengali and Hindi languages, and its verb forms and sentence forms are a little more closely aligned with regional vernaculars. Kudmali vocabulary reflects high levels of linguistic contact, especially with Austroasiatic

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languages, like Mundari and Ho, spoken by the Adivasi communities of the Chotanagpur plateau. Moreover, extended involvement with Magahi, Maithili, and Odia has also enriched its vocabulary. Such multilingual interaction has resulted in a composite linguistic structure without clear boundary between languages or any absolute classification process. Yet, in dominant models of language standardisation, this linguistic hybridity has been seen unfavourably. Language like Kudmali, which does not adhere to one standardised grammar or script, is very often denigrated as being 'corrupt' or 'impure'. Such judgement ignores the traditional context of language development, which happens constantly and collaboratively. For Kudmali, hybridity should be viewed as one of cultural contact, mobility and resilience, not linguistic insufficiency. The marginal status of Kudmali can largely be attributed to its predominantly oral transmission. Historically, the language recognition

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in India has been attached to the written tradition and to a standard script. Kudmali has been mainly a spoken language passed on through songs, folktales, proverbs, ritual speech, and everyday communication, and has been historically excluded from processes of language planning as well as that of colonizing powers. Colonial rulers favoured languages that could be easily codified for governance, and nationalist movements would later spread some languages as symbols of cultural homogenisation. However, Kudmali in both instances remained outside institutional systems. The socio-economic status of Kudmali speakers only contributes to further marginalization. The language is mostly spoken by agrarian communities such as Kudmis and other labouring groups. Historically, such communities have always held lower positions in caste and class hierarchies. Language, therefore, serves as a marker of social identity, perpetuating taboo and exclusion. Speaking Kudmali in public or

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formal settings is often linked with rural backwardness, driving speakers to take on the language of the majority, Bengali or Hindi, for social mobility. Education is essential in this mechanism of linguistic displacement. Kudmali is not integrated into the curriculum at school; so, children are surrounded by prominent languages and their mother tongue is restricted to the household environment from a young age. This results in language attrition over time and slowly a loss of confidence in languages. Such processes are typical examples of indirect influence of the state policy that leads to the extinction of minority languages. Folk music, Jhumur, Tusu, Karam and seasonal ritual songs, are significant linguistic conservations. These are not just linguistic forms that support vocabulary and grammar but serve as the archives of memory, knowledge and collective environmental experience, and social values. Oral performance in this scenario becomes a potent alternative archive in

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the absence of written texts. In recent years, efforts by scholars, writers and cultural activists have been directed to revive Kudmali. Attempts to create scripts, dictionaries, written literature, poetry, short narratives and various other literary types have been operative in the public domain. These attempts, despite being structurally challenged, are in fact, major acts of language assertion. They question and challenge dominant hierarchical attitudes and desire recognition of Kudmali as a language with historical and cultural significance. This means that a new way of thinking is necessary to get to know Kudmali. It can no longer be seen through the lens of inadequacy, but mustered through historical engagement, social adversity and cultural persistence. The language politics surrounding Kudmali demonstrate how power constructs the linguistic value which marginalised classes can maintain in the face of structural neglect of their linguistic heritage.

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Kudmali was never a deformed offspring of one monolithic standard language; instead, it arose naturally from the multilingualism of an Indo-Aryan language interaction with the languages of indigenous communities. This interactive climate, characterized by agrarian and forest-based living, is an essential factor when it comes to the development of Kudmali as a regional vernacular. It is essential to understand that Kudmali originated as a spoken language from real life; from labour and ritual, from communal and cultural expressions. It has developed such as a linguistic formation in and through the activities of cultivating and working communities, particularly those associated with agriculture, seasonal movement and ecological knowledge. This history may elucidate why Kudmali language and idiom still feature so fundamentally in the discussions of land, seasons, agricultural work and social relations. Moreover, the text presents Kudmali as a regional contact language defined by

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ongoing interaction rather than historical linguistic acquisition. Interaction with neighbouring vernaculars and indigenous speech forms further enriched Kudmali (rather than erasing), thereby facilitating its ability to operate fluidly in a variety of social contexts. The lack of written sources early in its existence is not cited as proof of a recent origin. Rather, it is suggested that the long history of Kudmali has been recorded through its embeddedness in folk traditions like Jhumur, where songs, orally transmitted narratives and performance practices, served as linguistic memory repositories.

III

The relationship between the Charya language and the Kudmali language is diverse and deeply spiritual. However, this ancient language of India remains unfamiliar, unknown and rejected by many people even today. Therefore, Kudmali still has no place or mention

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in the discussion of Indian languages and literatures. Kudmali is still only a regional language or dialect. Linguists of different languages have divided Kudmali into dialects. Bengali scholars claim Kudmali as a dialect of Bengali, Maghrebi scholars claim it as a dialect of Maghrebi, Odia scholars claim it as Odia, Maithilischolars attribute Kudmali to being a dialect of Maithili.

Kudmali language and Kudmali culture are rich in their own resources. Kudmali is a pre-Aryan or pre-Vedic language. This language is deeply connected with the culture of the Indus or Harappan civilizations. On the surface, Kudmali may seem to be akin to Prakrit, Maithili or Bhojpuri and may also seem to be an independent language.But this is not the only identity of Kudmali. There are some other characteristics in the Kudmali language that are older than Prakrit or Pali; perhaps it is the original Prakrit-the language that scholars have assumed to be the language of Harappan. The language and cultural history of the Charyas

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survives, albeit partially, in the Rarh-Jharkhand region. The religion, language and cultural heritage of this region arequite old- many traces of which can be found in the language, script, songs, speeches, stories, memories, rituals, festivals and the lifestyle of this region. In the Indian context, the search for multilingual heritageappears to be not as important as the language politics. Therefore, it has not been possible to resolve the debate whether Sanskrit came first or Prakrit or who is the mother of whom. The observations of Pandit Haraprasad Shastri become very relevant-

> The words of Prakrit, Apabhramsha Pali etc. have no specific meaning. Only when they are derived from Sanskrit are they called Prakrit. Ashoka's inscriptions are also Prakrit, Pali is also Prakrit, Jain Prakrit is also Prakrit, the Prakrit of drama is also Prakrit, Bengali is also Prakrit, Marathi is also Prakrit. A language that does not fit into Prakrit grammar is called Apabhramsha. (Mahato 126)

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So, it seems that Kudmalican be claimed as the origin of many languages of India, and the Charya is only a manifestation of this linguistic tradition.

IV

Jhumur is a unique song and dance of the Chotanagpur region comprising parts of Jharkhand, western West Bengal, northern Odisha, and parts of Assam and Chhattisgarh. Grounded in agrarian lifestyle, forest existence, and seasonal rhythms, Jhumur remains a crucial cultural phenomenon for communities of people who are predominantly Kudmali speakers and other regional dialects spoken collectively. Jhumur is a performative art but more so a socio-cultural practice in which language, memory, labour and identity are articulated collectively. Jhumur has close relationships with agricultural calendars, especially seedings and harvests. It was once a musical tradition that was

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most likely observed at fairs and festival time, and in religious activities.It is the essence of traditional rural society. Love, separation, migration, work, nature, social intercourse — constitute the thematic subjects of the lyrics. Kudmali, which is one of the main languages of Jhumur, lends all these emotional and cultural experiences a vocabulary. The prominence of Kudmali in Jhumur demonstrates the strong association between language and reality. In contrast with its standardised literary languages, Jhumur serves to be a type of alternative linguistic archive, to store expressions and idioms long forgotten into written archives. Politically, Jhumur is a space where marginalized communities assert themselves culturally. The performers of Jhumur, who are from agrarian, labouring and Adivasi minorities, occupy socially and economically marginal locations. Their language Kudmali also experiences such marginalization. Jhumur has been increasingly labelled in mainstream cultural

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discourses as 'folk' or 'primitive' with the implicit devaluation of the language and its form. Such categorisation represents the larger politics of language in which cultural legitimacy is actively denied to expressions that do not fit the narrow confines of elite or classical structures. The pain of seasonal migration, labour and the emotional struggles of love-relationships can often be expressed in these songs. They are told through Kudmali, in a language that is immediate and can be shared within the community. This highlights Kudmali's function as an affective, solidarity-based language- one of collective identification and comprehension. The performative quality of Jhumur also strengthens its political meaning. Language in Jhumur cannot be detached from gesture, beat, and social dynamism. Kudmali, as it is found in the Jhumur, is a living evolving practice, not an eternal scheme. Placing Kudmali in the context of Jhumur consequently shows up language politics at the level

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of everyday cultural existence. Jhumur shows how marginalised language makes life not through recognition via official institutions but as communities of practice. The continued existence of Kudmali in Jhumur confirms that it is a carrier of historical memory, ecological wisdom, and social experience. This study centres Kudmali in Jhumur and challenges hegemonic hierarchies which divide 'folk' from 'classical', as well as 'oral' from 'literary'. This paper maintains that Jhumur is a legitimate place for linguistic and cultural production, and it maintains that Kudmali shapes the expressive worlds of the speakers but is overlooked as a system.

V

The period from 8th century to 12th century was the period of writing of Charya Sahajiya literature. Naturally, the relationship between Jhumur and Charya

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Giti deserves special discussion. Many researchers have admitted in one way or another that Jhumur has a very close relationship with the two-thousand-year-old *Gatha Saptashati* and the thousand-year-old Dohapada or song. Not only this, the relationship between Jhumur and Charya is more direct. The language, philosophy, melody and musical tradition of Jhumur and Charya are as close as the two sides of a coin. It can be proved in various ways that the original and main domain of the Charya's writing activities was the Jharkhand region. Personal names, place names and countless village names still carry the undying memory of Siddhacharyas. Even today, the names of Dakini Biswas, Siddhar (Siddha-Charya), Mantra Guru, Yana Guru (Sahajyan) dancers (Vajrayogini?) and dancers (Bhandua) and Jhumur communities (Natgeeti) are directly related to Charya.Surprisingly, what is known to the common people as Dharani, or Jharani Mantra, Bisahari Mantra, are ancient Dohapadas and are also commonly known as

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Chariya, Charya or Chanchair, Jharani Geet or Jhumair Padas written by some Siddhacharyas.

Prominent foreign researcher Per Kvaerne observes in his book *An Anthology of Buddhist Tantric Songs,*

> The songs were originally intended to be sung. This is evident not only from the term Carya-giti (giti "song") itself, but also from the fact that a raga is indicated for each song in the text of the commentary. Each song has a refrain (dhrubapada) indicating that a chorus alternated with a soloist...like the doha, the pada form seems genuinely popular in origin: it is really a folk song adapted to religious purposes.(Mahato 39)

Pandit Haraprasad Shastri discovered the manuscript of Charyagiti from the National Library of Nepal. It is known that a spiritual song called "Chachagiti" is still popular among the pastoral people or rural people of

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Nepal. According to Dr. Shashibhushan Dasgupta, Chachagiti is also known to be very popular among the saints and Buddhist communities of Nepal. Pandit Rahul Sankrityayan has also mentioned Chachagiti in his book *Dohakosh*.

Nevertheless, it can be said with certainty that even in the present day, the importance of Charya is immense on many aspects. Charyagiti is an outstanding archaeological document of the evolution and history of Indian language, literature, society and culture. Naturally, many renowned scholars, researchers and language teachers have conducted insightful and significant research and discussions on Charya language and literature. But it is noteworthy that although the main identity of Charya is a lyric poem, its musical characteristics and identity, i.e., melody, rhythm, and instruments, have remained largely ignored in research.Therefore, it can be said that the relationship between Charyagiti and Jhumur is a thousand- year-old narrative.

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However, it would not be inappropriate to say that Charyagiti is one of the earliest and most important examples of the language, literature and music of not only Rarh, that is, Jharkhand, but also Bengal, Bihar, Odisha and a large region of North, East and Central India. Therefore, it can be seen that the influence and contribution of Charya in the literature and culture of this entire region is still direct and active-especially in the language, ethnicity and geography of Rarh and Jharkhand regions.

One should remember that Charya is first music and then literature. It was not written with the intention of creating literature. Charya is basically songs and it contains spiritual guidelines or guidelines to be followed by simple yogis or Siddhas.Acharya Sen has admitted that the Jantalika and Charcharika Geet are Jhumur and Chanchar. Both of these are popular and widely used folk songs of the Rarh-Jharkhand region. Another noteworthy thing is that the language of Charcharika wasthe language of Jhumur and Chanchar is also the

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native language of Jharkhand. Charchari or Chanchar Geet is thought to be the basis of Charya Geet. Siddhacharyas adopted Chanchar as a medium or vehicle for the purpose of spreading their views and ideology. The word Charya is spoken in Sanskrit. According to the characteristics of Prakrit, it should be 'Chariya',which is also the pronunciation style or common characteristic of the Kudmali language. Surprisingly, the ancient music of Indian tradition, Chanchar or Chanchar Geet, is still popular in Jharkhand. Like Charya, Chanchar or Chanchar Geet of Jharkhand is also Mystical and symbolic. Its language is Sandhyabhasha i.e. Kudmali. Therefore, if we analyse the etymology of the words 'Chanchar' or 'Chariya' from the perspective of Kudmali language, a simple and logical meaning is found.

In the comparative discussion of Charyagiti with Jhumur, Udhwa, Chanchar, Ghera and Chua songs of Rarh-Jharkhand region, one of the main issues is undoubtedly the language of these songs. Surprisingly, it

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is true that Charyagiti has deep similarities with all these ancient folk songs of Rarh-Jharkhand region in terms of tradition, language, composition, poetic style, rhythm and ornamentation. The reason for this is probably the same geographical area of both the songs, religious and cultural similarities as well as some special connection between the people.

It can be said that Charyagiti is a descendant, an imitation of Jhumur and its language is also the language of the original Jhumur, i.e. Kudmali, which is still a widely used and popular folk or rural language of Rarh-Jharkhand. Its linguistic and grammatical characteristics can prove that its linguistic characteristics are much more related to Kudmali than Bengali, Hindi, Odia, Magadhi and Assamese.

While discussing the history of the Charya language, it is a harsh truth that like the political history of India, the real history of the language is also unexplored to a large extent. Perhaps it can be said that

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the history of the language that we find today is largely distorted, discriminatory and purposeful. The imperialistshave always attempted to establish Aryan civilization and culture everywhere. It has resulted in the cultural invisibility of languages like Kudmali. George Abraham Grierson's book *Linguistic Survey of India*observes, "This dialect is the language of a strange people in a strange land." (Mahato 100)

According to Haraprasad Shastri, the total number of words in the forty-six and a half, Charyagiti is 1660. The words are divided into three categories - Sanskrit, Prakrit and Bengali (old-new). Shastri has divided them into these categories. According to his estimate, the percentage-wise breakup of this vocabulary is - Sanskrit: 15%; Prakrit: 25% and Bengali: 60%. According to the famous researcher Dr. Nilratan Sen, Sanskrit is 10%; Sanskrit-derived: 86% and non-Sanskrit: 4%. It is noteworthy that Dr. Sen did not mention the presence of Prakrit or Abhatath-Apabhramsha words. Various scholars have accepted

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the language of the Charya as Shauraseni Prakrit, Apabhramsha or Abhatath. Munidatta has called it 'Prakrit Bhasya'. Charyapada was written entirely in the vernacular of the people or in the vernacular of the country. Dr. Sen has given some list of non-Sanskrit words and it will help to understand the relationship of Kudmali with them (Mahato 101).

চর্যাশব্দ (Words of Charyapada)

কুড়মালিরূপ (Kudmali form)

আলাজালা (Alajala)

আলাঝালা (Alajhala)

আলিকালি (Alikali)

আলিকালি (Alikali)

আলো (Alo)

এলো / এহেলো (Elo/Ehelo)

উঞ্চলপাঞ্চল (Unchol Panchol)

উঝলপাঝল (Ujhal Pajhol)

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উভিল (Ubhil)

উভল (Ubhal)

Dr. Nilratan Sen has mentioned some words of Sanskrit origin. It is a matter of debate whether these are Sanskrit or original Prakrit. For example,

সংস্কৃতজ (Sanskrit Origin)

কুড়মালিরূপ (Kudmali Form)

উজু (Uju)

উজু (Uju)

এহু (Ehu)

এহু (Ehu)

গাজই (Gajoi)

গাজই (Gajoi)

চউকোড়ি (Chaukodi)

চউকটি (Chaukodi)

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Charyapada emerges as something less like an isolated literary relic, and more like a larger vernacular tradition that favoured ease of access and sharing of common cultural materials. Jhumur is an extension of this vernacular philosophy that exists as performance. Based on agricultural cycles, seasonal festivals and communal occasions, Jhumur serves as a shared language of expression for Kudmali-speaking communities. Its songs express feelings and experiences — love, separation, migration, hardships and joy — that flow from the experiences of daily life. Like the Charyapada, Jhumur employs symbolic language and metaphor, but through music, rhythm, and dance in a more immediate and embodied way. The connection between early vernacular textual communication and modern oral culture is emphasized by these two traditions being placed together in a context. Both contest the hegemony of standardised, elite languages by declaring the legitimacy of regional and community-

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oriented speech forms. The marginalisation of Kudmali, reflected in the lack of recognition of Jhumur as a genuine cultural form, resembles later appropriations of the Charyapada into dominant linguistic histories. In doing so, language politics functions through certain selective processes of recognition and exclusion. The Jhumur songs remind that folk tradition, rather than being permanent vestiges of the past, is the product of cultural activities in response to social conditions. This helps us read the Charyapada not as a historical work simply but rather as part of one continuous line of vernacular creativity. Both traditions embody modes of knowledge transmission that rely on memory, performance, and collective participation rather than institutional validation. By situating the Charyapada alongside Jhumur, this work highlights the role of marginal languages, such as Kudmali, in preserving alternative literary and cultural histories. It also insists for a shift on breaking down the divisions

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between written and oral, classical and folk, past and present. Contextualization reveals how vernacular traditions have historically negotiated power, identity and expression.

VI

In conclusion, it may be stated that this study has attempted to explore language politics with a focus onKudmali through the Charyapada and the folk tradition of Jhumur. Building on the linguistic and cultural understanding as embodied in the reference material, for example, in Jhumur's documentary, this paper has suggested that language is a key location for the confluence of power, identity, and cultural memory. Kudmali's marginal position in dominant linguistic hierarchies is not because of linguistic limitations, but the consequence of historical conditions that favour standardised, written, and elite languages as opposed to oral and

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community-based forms of discourse. The paper has tried to dislodge, through locating Kudmali within the history of the Charyapada, a linear and exclusionist narrative of language development. The Charyapada does not appear as the sole child of any one of modern-day languages, but as the result of a plural vernacular, in which regional speech practices (like Kudmali, for instance) were dominant. Acknowledging this plurality makes apparent the politics of literary historiography itself, where early texts are retrospectively invoked as constitutions of contemporary linguistic identities with a tendency to efface subaltern linguistic continuities. The discussion of Jhumur also lends support to the claim that Kudmali endures as an ever-present language through performance, orality, and collective praxis. Jhumur serves as a cultural archive that preserves language forms, social interactions and emotional expressions that are not found in writing. Labour, migration, love, separation and seasonal life, as

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portrayed in Jhumur songs, show how Kudmali serves as the language of daily life belonging to a community. In the marginalization of Jhumur as a 'folk' type, we have also experienced the marginalisation of Kudmali which demonstrates how cultural and linguistic hierarchies reinforce each other. The study also reflects on the tensions resulting from the rise of Jhumur's prominence in popular and commercial realms. This phenomenon mirrors general trends of cultural appropriation, which includes aesthetic appropriation of linguistic and social contexts that are overlooked. Given this reality, modern attempts to maintain Jhumur in its linguistic identity reflect acts of resistance (i.e. linguistic resilience) and cultural self-assertion. In the scope of this paper, the politics of language is discussed, calling for redefinitions of forms like 'dialect', 'folk' and 'standard'. Kudmali, against a background of historical depth, cultural richness, and linguistic endurance, complicates the binaries.

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Recognising Kudmali as a language, and Jhumur as a major site of literary and cultural production, leads to a richer reflection on India's linguistic history. Restoring Kudmali's right to speak and write is not a linguistic goal alone but an ethical or political choice. It reflects the cultural pride of communities which have been historically sidelined in hegemonic accounts. By foregrounding Kudmali in historical texts such as the Charyapada and continuing processes in Jhumur, this article points to linguistic diversity as central to cultural history, rather than peripheral to it.The marginalization of Kudmali reflects a broader politics of language in which dominant regional languages assert authority by absorbing or erasing agrarian speech communities. Reclaiming Kudmali within Kurmi culture thus becomes an act of Academic Social Responsibility, challenging linguistic hierarchies and affirming plural vernacular histories.

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Which language is it? Whose language is it? Ethically responsible language studies

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1. Academic Social Responsibility (ASR) What it is, what it isn't and what it could be in language studies:

A widely accepted theme of value creation and sustainable development in corporate organizations had triggered the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Similarly, in academics, the term - Academic

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Social Responsibility (ASR) has been coined for a concept already practiced to some extent in academia. The idea is to build an equitable space, encourage diversity and practice plurality in a responsible and ethical manner. Globally, this is also in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a means to achieve goals ethically with regards to respective societies.

Languages are inexorably linked to the social being of an individual and a community. It therefore behooves language researchers to already exhibit awareness of the consequences of the outcomes of knowledge production. Regardless of the arcane, scientific goals of linguists' engagement with language and linguistic communities, the direct beneficiaries should continue to be individuals and linguistic communities. This latter perspective, granted, can be vastly complicated but also a challenge for theorising around languages. Modern notions of linguistics as a science, or more exactly a social science were also

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contradistinctive to linguistics as a central approach to humanities. This distinction in methods and approaches led to wrestling languages from peoples and communities and made them as objects of analytical exploration that were couched in empiricism. Here, we would like to bring attention to a well-practiced notion within the scientific study of languages - that is to posit that the mechanisms that underlie languages are not transparent to 'naïve' speakers and hearers. Positing that the speaker/hearer, while being 'competent' in their language was not capable of being 'aware' of the inner workings of language. This making of the naïve subject was not entirely an analytic prerequisite, but presumptive for all modern scientific theories of languages. The discoveries around language notwithstanding, these approaches did ultimately have to contend with social processes that seemingly got interwoven into what the scientific practice would define as a patently linguistic-scientific discovery. An influential turn in this perspective was sought by Hymes (1972) by way of

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somewhat placing the speaker and hearer back into the scheme of objective scientific practice, but transposing communication as an ability that the speaker and hearer possess, Hymes' intervention didn't yet quite take away from the inert and almost 'biological imperative for humans to communicate' style of reasoning. So, the infusion of the social, albeit communication for Hymes here, was an objective goal-directed understanding of language as a system of signs.

2. Language as an extracorporeal object of inquiry:

Throughout the history of human engagement with language, language has been studied more as a skill that our species acquired as an evolutionary outcome and less as a social imperative. The structuralist intervention tries to steer language studies out of social darwinism and sees language as a part of a larger system of signs. However, the study of language as an extracorporeal object of scientific inquiry continues, somewhat

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removed from the social context without which even the evolutionary bearings of language couldn't be explained(Schwartz, 2004). The functionalist import of language as a system of signs notwithstanding, in the context of studies of lesser-known, under-studied, moribund, and endangered languages too, the linguists' imperative has more been archival, focussed on preservation of languages as a system of structurally connected signs, objects, and elements of conveying meaning. Language documentation as a field of linguistics, therefore, has been centered around conservation of language, yet again, somewhat removed from the contexts that brought about the obsolescence in the first place. This socially disengaged resuscitative perspective has had a definitive impact; in that today, archivally, we do have materials on several hundred languages that will inevitably be lost as the last speakers disappear in the mist of time. The role of linguists as technical chroniclers of linguistic processes, commendable as it may be, does warrant several

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questions(Blommaert, 2012). Which languages are we studying? This question is inextricably related to questions around indigeneity, decolonization, and dominant languages. Whose language are we studying? The latter question is related to questions of dominance and therefore also related to questions around decolonizing peoples from language/s. The conspicuous absence of peoples from how language studies have situated themselves within the modern engagement of 'science is not art', is neither surprising nor without intent. Linguists' obsession with form makes the removal of the human from language an inexorable exercise of scientific veracity. Some of these questions have been answered by way of community based linguists who have prioritized the community needs over the scientific imperative to poke and prod into the bare structure of a language. This is not to diminish the relevance of grammatical descriptions towards building pedagogical materials, but it is to reinvigorate language studies with a sharp socially relevant goal.

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A fundamental inequality that typically arises in the relationship between the investigator (researcher) and the informants (participants) in a research setting is that the research often establishes or deepens an uneven power dynamic where authority and control primarily rest with the investigator(Reyhner, 2024). Thus, the overall research process tends to benefit the investigator significantly more than it benefits the informants. It is to ponder upon why does this inequality exist? What are the assumptions and practices within social science research that contribute to this imbalance? Also, if this dynamic is inevitable, can one explore ways of new assumptions and procedures that could be adopted to create a more equitable and plural understanding in social science research. Social scientists have often regarded language as a neutral medium, a window on social reality. However, as many social theorists are of the opinion that most of the time, this view is oversimplified and runs the risk of a homogenous representation which is further removed from 'reality'. It

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is often recognized in contemporary times that language is a social construct and not a neutral medium. Therefore, as suggested by Cameron et al. (1993), social researchers need to take language *qua* language seriously. In this sense – and whether or not it is made explicit – virtually all social research involves researching language.

3. Endangered languages:

In the life of languages, change is the rule rather than an exception. Pervasive variation occurs within any given speech community, and speakers in each generation use their language or languages slightly differently from their predecessors, in both unconscious and conscious ways (Stross, 1975). Through these processes, languages keep responding and adapting to their users' communication needs (Kay 1977), serving as dynamic bridges between the past and the future and as vehicles for the continued, and continuously innovative,

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transmission of a community's knowledges, beliefs, values and practices (Maffi, 2001).

Roughly a third of languages are now endangered (3,193 languages are endangered today, Ethnologue, 2025: https://www.ethnologue.com/insights/how-many-languages-endangered/), often with less than 1,000 speakers remaining. Meanwhile, just 23 languages account for more than half the world's population. On the face of things, it is remarkable that the two fields of inquiry so seemingly different as biology and linguistics should have followed such similar paths toward the same fundamental tenet.

Charles Darwin's Origin of species, published in 1859, crystallized the concept of evolution and elaborated it with the theory of natural selection. In so doing, he managed to consolidate the strains of evolutionary thought, then current in such fields as geology, paleontology, and biology itself. The relevance of Darwin's insights was grasped immediately by the

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German linguist August Schleicher. Four years after the publication of Origin, Schleicher published a pamphlet called Darwinism tested by the science language. Darwin himself recognized the basic affinities between evolutionary biology and historical linguistics. He drew the parallel in his 1871 publication, The descent of man, he declared that, if we could properly classify all the languages of the world, both living and extinct, along with 'all intermediate and slowly changing dialects', we would arrive at 'a perfect pedigree of mankind'. Subsequently, a counter-reaction set in the 1900's which would not accept language as parallel to the concept of the species. It was debated that languages change by cultural selection, whereas, species by natural selection. Schleicher observed in his book, 'Language as it evolves' and he states "No biologist would ever equate a language with an individual member of a species, for the simple reason that humans can choose which language or languages to use, whereas volition does not play a role in determining which species an organism belongs to."

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A more pointed criticism comes from the linguist Johana Nichols' book 'Linguistic diversity in space and time', published in 1992 where she states and I quote, "No evidence of anything like speciation has been found in this or any other typological work. Although linguistics has no analogy to the biological notion of species, it is safe to say, informally speaking, that languages and linguistic lineages are related to each other as individuals or kin groups of a biological species are, not as species in a genus".

Presently, many linguists have remarked on the similarities between the critical situation facing the world's biodiversity and its linguistic diversity. The analogy between the destruction of natural habitat, for species and the traditional social setting, for languages are remarkably similar. Both species and languages have evolved over hundreds or thousands of years to adapt to very specific contexts. If those contexts undergo unprecedented rapid change—as the world's environment and culture are now doing—many species

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and languages will likely lack the resiliency to adapt to the new conditions. Presumably, endemic species and endemic languages are among the most vulnerable to extinction, precisely because they have historically adapted to local conditions only. Conversely, certain species and languages show a great capacity to invade the habitat and social settings of others.

Since linguistic and biological diversity are tightly coupled, they face similarly grim futures. International organisations such as UNESCO, have taken on the issue of language endangerment with the publication of an atlas of endangered languages called "Red Books". The publication of "Ethnologue: Languages of the World" by Gary Simons and Charles Fennig paves the way to understand the graveness of the situation. Similarly, biodiversity has been protected globally through the "Red Data Book", Wildlife protected areas, Sanctuaries, Biosphere reserves etc. However, bridging the gap between endangered species and languages, through policies is of utmost importance.

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Ethnobiologists and ethnoecologists, suggests that linguistic ecologies and biological ecologies are mutually related through human knowledge, use, and management of the environment and through the languages used to convey this knowledge and practices. Language acts as the main repository of and transmission vehicle for knowledge, particularly through the mediation of traditional ecological knowledge. This two-way relationship needs to be brought out and studied in depth. Small- scale societies with a history of continued and unchallenged occupation tend to develop and maintain detailed and accurate knowledge about their ecological niches.

The underrepresentation and alienation of marginalized and minority communities in academia go hand in hand with the lack of adequate support, solidarity and mechanisms within universities. Categories of race, class, caste, gender and sexuality are increasingly prominent discourses of knowledge production and pedagogies. These multiple identities and

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subjectivities resonate in the curricula in no small part due to the presence of scholars from marginalized backgrounds, and thereby intrinsic to decolonial scholarship.

3. Language documentation & revitalization:

Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa critique appropriateness-based approaches to language diversity in education. Based on theories of language ideologies and racialization, they offer a perspective from which students classified as long-term English learners, heritage language learners, and Standard English learners can be understood to inhabit a shared racial posi-tioning that frames their linguistic practices as deficient regardless of how closely they follow supposed rules of appropriateness.

They advocate for rethinking language diversity in education, shifting from a focus on appropriateness to a framework that challenges the normalization of

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standardized linguistic categories. The authors reference research indicating the benefits of bilingual education that supports, rather than eliminates, the home languages of immigrant children (Cummins, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999). They critique assimilationist language diversity approaches and question subtractive language education, in which language-minoritized students are compelled to abandon their native language in favor of the standardized national language. The notion of appropriateness is portrayed as defining standardized linguistic forms as objective and suitable for academic contexts. The article emphasizes how these appropriateness-based methods reinforce racial normativity, with language-minoritized students expected to emulate white linguistic practices, despite their language use being perceived racially by white listeners.

In the Indian context, Mahapatra and Anderson, 2022 look at the languages for learning through the New Education Policy (NEP, 2020). This seems to be

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addressing the challenges of creating a democratic, socially just and progressive education policy for a linguistically diverse and sociopolitically complex India. According to the article, the attempt is 'unambiguous' and a laudable intention to promote multiple languages in education seems to be consistent with Tollefson (2012) which promotes effective 'democratic reform' in educational language policy-making. However, if one analyses the ground realities, there are instances where NEP 2020 is unable to address. Shortage of teachers, lack of congruence between administration and staff, clear policy of implementation are a few which are mentionable. While Biswas (EPW, 2020) opines that the conception and ongoing implementation of reforms in the Indian higher education system are based on ideas that are fundamentally different from the original liberal ideas that fashioned our education system. Based on popular social concerns and external shocks, the focus essentially shifted from encouraging free and critical thinking to forming skills in accordance with the

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requirements of the corporate sector. The reforms also include a definite effort towards delinking education from direct human interaction. This, we have argued, will lead to social fragmentation and would thereby reduce possibilities of formation of collective opinions, which are potential problems for social governance, in general, and for governance of Higher Education Institutes, in particular. Endangered and lesser known languages thus face a layered challenge where students have to negotiate between home language, dominant language and the language of instruction in educational institutions. Often, these are twice removed from the reality and scarcely addressed in a formal educational setup and lead to unfathomable knowledge drain and intergenerational knowledge depletion.

4. Community-based and driven research:

Language as a cultural right and entitlement is enshrined in the Constitution of India under various provisions and

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lists in order to include diverse cultural groups into a political whole. India is administratively divided into States/Provinces primarily on a linguistic criteria. The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and The Official Languages Act gives legal status to 22 languages. They are mostly large languages with speakers numbering in the millions in most cases. Only 2 Indigenous-Adivasi languages have received a place in this official constitutional list, and quite evidently, these are some of the largest Adivasi languages in the country, and the respective groups were able to lobby effectively due to this high population factor and through extended movement based struggles that provided the critical mass to make the State comply. The sad truth with official languages is that it is based on political and economic compulsions rather than social inclusion or the wellbeing of communities as a policy. The Adivasis or Scheduled Tribes (ST) of India number about 8% of the population or more than a 100 million people according to the 2011 Census of India, and speak about 400 indigenous

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tongues. In contrast to these Government census reports, The People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) published by the Bhasha Institute/Adivasi Academy reports that there are over 780 living languages in India (only 122 languages have more than 10,000 speakers/group). The importance of being an official language is that state support and resources become accessible to create systems to perpetuate the use of a language. The dismal neglect of Indigenous-Adivasi language becomes clear with the fact that more than 700 communities have been categorised as Scheduled Tribes through Constitutional orders, and merely two languages on the official list. Recognition as Scheduled Tribes largely functions to increase the representation of Tribal communities in public institutions and development schemes with a focus on socio-economic development. State apathy towards tribal cultures and a longstanding policy of coerced assimilation of smaller cultures into the national mainstream has diluted the standing of Indigenous Peoples in India. This is also reflected in the

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visions of the Educational policymakers in India as they are also a product of colonial education and Western universities, hence their predisposition toward Western science. To place indigenous knowledge in educational corridors, policymakers and curriculum planners are needed who are capable of blending indigenous knowledge and Western science and transform pedagogies that help students examine important values, assumptions, and information embedded in other cultural perspectives. This has the capacity to foster positive attitudes to the multidimensional and multiperspectival cultural world of science. It has the potential to give both teachers and students an enriched understanding of science and its role in promoting sustainable communities and environments through valuing indigenous health practices, environmental protection, and cultivating medicinal herbs, among other benefits. Some countries have acknowledged these importance and have taken the initiative to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge in School and University Curriculum. In

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New Zealand, McKinley,Stewart, and Richards (2004) found that Maori language was used in teaching science activities such as *hangi* (a form of cooking), *kowhaiwhai* and *taniko* (Maori patterns), Papatuanuku (Mother Earth), and names of native plants. For nearly two decades, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, in cooperation with the Cultural Heritage and Education Institute of the village of Minto, has been offering an opportunity for university students in selected summer courses to spend a week at the Old Minto Cultural Camp on the Tanana River under the tutelage of local Athabascan elders and their families. Similar efforts have been initiated in India in recent years which promotes indigenous led education and knowledge production through bridging the inter-generational gap for knowledge production. Nandani Sundar argues the case of adivasi children in central India, their transformation through formal schooling and the way in which new kinds of knowledge comes to replace or co-exist with older forms (2010).

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5.1 Case I: School education in Ghosaldanga, West Bengal, India:

This paper looks into a specific case and history of formation through community engagement, an alternative way of facilitating Indigenous led school education in Ghosaldanga, West Bengal, India. The case study pertinent to the enquire looks at the Ghosaldanga Adibasi Seva Sangha (GASS), a registered society founded in 1987 continues to work with the community towards developing a decolonizing framework for creating equitable spaces for young students through its non-formal tribal day school, Rolf Schoembs Vidyashram (RSV), situated between the two Santal villages Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati. Santali, an Austro-Asiatic language, belonging to the Munda family of languages, was mostly considered as 'oral' language and was not tied to an alphabetic or syllabic script until the mid-nineteenth century. It is spoken by approximately

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7.5 million speakers throughout eastern India and sporadically in Nepal and Bangladesh (Eberhard, Gary and Fennig 2021). It is written in multiple scripts, including modified Roman, Devnagari, Eastern Brahmi, Odiya as well as Ol Chiki script. Since 1996, the RSV school has used mother-tongue (Santali) education to empower tribal students, reducing dropouts by bridging the gap between formal and non-formal education. Recognizing that Santali-speaking children faced alienation in Bengali-medium government schools, RSV developed a unique pedagogy that introduces Bengali through Santali, fostering smoother language transition. Founded by pioneers like Boro Baski and Sona Murmu, the school integrates Santali primers, tribal history, folklore, and music into its curriculum, preserving cultural identity while equipping students for broader education. Former students, now teachers like Padma and Kalidasi Mardi, highlight how RSV helped them overcome language barriers and inferiority complexes. Beyond academics, the school incorporates traditional

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livelihood skills (agriculture, fishery, vermicompost) and established a Museum of Santal Culture (2007) to showcase tribal heritage through artifacts, music, and handicrafts, educating both students and visitors. This holistic approach ensures Santali youth remain rooted in their culture while gaining mainstream opportunities. Major thrust was given on inter-generational learning and aligned its framework with the Santal community's traditional governance system in a sustainable way. Community involvement was also prioritized so as to ensure continuity of engagement and ownership. To make education culturally relevant, the initiative adapted practices to Santal consciousness, avoiding rigid norms that deterred children. Early orientation and pre-school daycare centers addressed both education and severe poverty and malnutrition by providing nutritious meals (khichuri, vegetables, fruits, eggs) to children and pregnant mothers. Beyond nutrition, the centers focused on cognitive and physical development, using games, songs, and dances to teach letters and numbers. The

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organization (GASS) held weekly meetings to discuss health, hygiene, alcoholism, and superstition, fostering community involvement. Parents contributed ideas, and initiatives like kitchen gardens and tree-planting programs strengthened communal ownership. Despite challenges, children from RSV nursery schools performed better in primary school, proving the program's effectiveness. However, difficulties later led to a merger with government schools, highlighting the program's long-term impact on equitable and sustainable education.

5.2 Case II: Jadavpur University-Exeter University project on Decolonizing the Curriculum

Classrooms are not just places of learning and exchange; they are also inherently political spaces in which multiple intersecting inequalities shape and frame the experiences of both learners and educators. Decolonisation of education begins with this realisation,

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to which the only ethical response is a personal and professional commitment to fostering awareness and abolishment of power imbalances that undermine education and social equity more generally (Bhambra et al., 2018).

Discourses on knowledge production and pedagogy increasingly emphasize categories like race, class, caste, gender, and sexuality, reflecting intersecting identities in curricula due to contributions from marginalized scholars. However, despite being essential to decolonial scholarship, academic departments remain dominated by white, male, and often upper-caste (even among South Asian scholars in Western academia) individuals. Marginalized communities face underrepresentation, alienation, and a lack of institutional support, solidarity, and mechanisms for social justice in education. Recognizing the complexity of decolonization, the 'Introduction to Decolonisation' course was jointly developed by scholars from Jadavpur University and the University of Exeter. Designed as a

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primer for students and adult learners, it encourages reflection on why certain ideas, methods, and people are prioritized in curricula while others are excluded—particularly addressing how British colonialism suppressed local knowledges in India and the Global South.

Some scholars argue that complete decolonization is impossible due to colonialism's deep entrenchment (Bhattacharya, 2018; Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2023), viewing it instead as an ongoing process of re-centering marginalized knowledge systems. This requires acknowledging colonialism's lasting effects and adopting new mentalities to challenge dominant structures. As Freire (1970) notes, oppressed communities must lead this work, as oppressors have little incentive to dismantle systems that uphold their power.

This was made possible by ongoing collaboration (initiated in 2014) between the University of Exeter

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(UoE) and Jadavpur University (JU). Both universities have staff with considerable knowledge and experience of the historical and geographical contexts of colonialism, and who have demonstrated sustained commitment to applying decolonial approaches to their teaching and research. Further, each institution has a history of communal political activism advancing decolonial ideas. For instance, at Jadavpur University, staff and students frequently protest against local and national decisions seen to restrict personal freedoms; one prominent example is the 2014 *hokkolorob* ('let there be noise') movement (Chaudhuri, 2019). At the time of the collaboration described here, the University of Exeter was home to the Exeter Decolonising Network, and had just launched a Decolonisation Toolkit. While some may interpret these initiatives as a new form of colonialism, it's undeniable that the Council—despite adopting an internationalist stance—persisted in framing world societies as a hierarchy of national cultures. The resulting resource—a website featuring lesson plans and

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expert contributions—aims to equip both educators and students with foundational decolonization theory and practices.

Details, step to step progress of the project is beyond the scope of this article; the following is a framework that was followed: The project first produced a Google Site[3], featuring 27 expert-led videos grouped into four themes:

1. Introduction to decolonization
2. Decolonization in higher education
3. Decolonization across disciplines

Each theme included key definitions, background information, and case studies, mirroring a syllabus's "core" and "further" readings. Resources were shared via newsletters and workshops at both institutions (Jadavpur

[3](https://sites.google.com/view/introductiontodecolonisation/home)

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University and University of Exeter), though formal impact metrics were lacking.

In Phase 2, the team expanded this into a 12-week module on a dedicated website: https://introductiontodecolonisation.com/ , featuring:

Lesson plans & learning outcomes

1. A module guide with recommended readings (including Phase 1 videos)
2. A glossary of decolonization terms
3. Translated video transcripts in 5 Indian languages (Bangla, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu) to enhance accessibility and challenge linguistic hierarchies.

While Phase 1 videos were repurposed as a "quick introduction" series, Phase 2 solidified the project's structure, emphasizing practical implementation and inclusivity in decolonizing education.

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The team aimed to create a course designed to familiarize learners with decolonisation and encourage them to reconsider their perspectives on—and experiences within—higher education through this lens. We intended for this initiative to draw from diverse viewpoints and lived experiences, integrating, wherever possible, the distinct insights of contributing experts. The goal was for the course to become a core part of our institutions' curricula while also reaching a broader audience beyond our immediate academic community. Additionally, we hoped to establish and strengthen enduring partnerships among the researchers and institutions engaged in this project.

Our research coincided with - and has been followed by - a global rise in nationalist politics across India, the UK, and numerous other nations (Cheeseman et al., 2023). This climate has significantly constrained productive discourse around decolonization and broader social justice issues.

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While international collaboration presents crucial opportunities to address complex global challenges (Waddock, 2013), it is to be acknowledged of its potential to replicate imperialist patterns. Our initiative, alongside similar efforts, aims to mitigate this risk. At this critical juncture, educational interventions like ours are essential. They help learners recognize the consequences of prejudice-driven policymaking while developing tools to combat systemic inequities.

6. Language policy & linguistic justice:

For social scientists, it is an inconvenient reality that the world does not consist of neatly segregated monolingual nations. As a result, legal citizenship—formal administrative membership in a state—is a weak proxy for sociolinguistic affiliation, much less for actual language use. The connection between national identity and state-led language policies is even more ambiguous, not least due to the inherently slippery nature of

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"identity" itself (Blommaert, Jan, 2005)

A crucial emerging focus in language policy research examines how policies develop through complex interactions between multiple actors - not just national governments but also supranational entities and geopolitical forces. Contrary to conventional assumptions, so-called "national" language policies often originate beyond state borders, either imposed by superstate institutions or crafted to secure international alliances. The European Union exemplifies this dynamic: while promoting an official multilingual identity, its language policies are ultimately implemented through national education systems. Meanwhile, across the Global South, the rapid expansion of English-medium education reflects a monocentric vision of globalization centered on Anglo-American economic and political power. This trend is particularly striking in nations like Congo and Mozambique, where English - once negligible - now receives state promotion as governments strategically align with U.S.-led

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financial institutions. These developments fundamentally destabilize traditional conceptions of national identity tied to language, revealing the concept's limitations in an increasingly interconnected world.

Some of the theses articulated in classic studies on nationalism such as Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983), Greenfeld (1992), and Hobsbawm (1990). The concept of language ideologies emerged from Sapir-Whorf linguistic anthropology, referring to culturally situated beliefs about language structure and use (Kroskrity, 2001; Silverstein, 1979; Schieffelin et al., 1998). These ideologies manifest as shared perceptions of linguistic "quality," status, and appropriateness—hierarchies that privilege certain forms over others. Written language, for instance, is typically valorized above spoken varieties; standardized dialects outweigh regional ones; and specialized registers eclipse everyday speech. Bauman and Briggs (2003) locate this ideological framework in Enlightenment thought, particularly in Locke's rationalist vision. Locke championed a deliberately

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elitist linguistics—one that severed language from its oral, folkloric roots (dismissed as irrational and chaotic) to construct a "purified," decontextualized medium befitting modernity's detached individualism. This epistemic shift birthed the very notion of standard language: an ostensibly neutral, prestige form that, in practice, institutionalized linguistic inequality.

Ethically responsible language studies could thus be developed through decolonial approaches (as discussed in this article) to foster equitable and plural understanding in social science research. These frameworks would effectively contribute to a more comprehensive understanding and implementation of ASR. It would hence integrate and encourage ethical governance, sustainable development, and community-based research. This practice would give new paradigms towards co-creation of diverse knowledge systems and actively move towards inclusive practices, the core essence of ASR.

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Social Responsibility and Translation of Nepali Literatures in Darjeeling Himalayas

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Set against the creative crossroads of today's world, translation of literature is still inherently socially responsible, where in it still requires active human intervention while it fosters access to different literatures, preservation, enrichment of language and literary innovation. In this context, translation of Indian literatures still gives voices to the diverse and numerous regional languages of India, facilitating a synergy among the many cultures.These translations not only bridge the linguistic divides of readers but also today constitute a

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key component of the literary studies in the country. While literature and literary theory are continuously at crossroads and always under construction, there are still literatures of people at the margins where translation plays a pivotal role in bringing supressed lived experiences, struggles and cultural synonymity to a wider audience and the centre, while also being a political act to claim identity. The liability of a translator is not therefore limited to onlytransfer language but also a rather complex one wherethey need to be conscious of the impact of their work on society. As Mona Baker makes an observation in her book, *In Other Words,* "it is in the interest of society as a whole for individuals to be accountable for their decisions, in professional life as elsewhere." (Baker 274) It has been widely discussed how translation of literatures, while it mediates cross-cultural dialogues and creates linguistic bridges, also has an ethical accountability and responsibility that pervades far beyond achieving equivalence. In this paper, we will look into the efforts being made in translation of Nepali

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literatures in Darjeeling in the recent years and how these endeavors are being made to offer a voice to the Indian Nepali communities.

The Indian Nepali identity with its histories constantly negotiates with the presence of heterogenous ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities within itself and as such is characterised by plurality. Richard Ashley and R.B.J Walker in, "Speaking the Language of the Exile: Dissident thought in international studies" argue that, "Ambiguity, Uncertainty and the ceaseless questioning of identity- are the resources of the exiles. These are the resources of those who would live and move in these paradoxical marginal spaces and times, and who, in order to do so must struggle to resist knowledgeable practices of power that would impose upon them a certain identity…" (Ashley and Walker 259) At present, in an age of globalization, transnationalism and mass immigration the numerous problems arising from the conceptions of identities, be it social or cultural have consequences on the lived-experiences of an individual

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or a people and there is a lot of ambiguity and uncertainty when it comes to the Nepali identity and also consequently the Indian Nepali identity. It can be argued that it is in this ambiguity translation of the various Nepali literatures becomes pivotal in constituting a more perceptive picture of the plural yet cohesive characteristic of the Indian Nepali people.

Nepali is a language of Indo-Aryan origin that is widely spoken today in the nation-state of Nepal (where it also functions as a lingua franca and an official language), Sikkim, northern districts of West Bengal, Assam, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, many areas of north-east India. The Nepali-speaking communities can also be found in many cities and towns across India. After decades of democratic struggles on part of the Nepali speaking communities in India, on 20th August 1992, the Lok Sabha passed a motion to add the Nepali language to the Eight Schedule of the Constitution of India. In West Bengal the West Bengal Official Language Act of 1961 granted Nepali Language official

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status for state business in Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong.

As discussed earlier the speakers of Nepali are not a homogenous entity but one which is a chorus of numerous and varied ethnic communities that use the language as a lingua-franca which they may have historically adopted due to acculturation, social and economic factors.Kumar Pradhan talks about three distinctive meanings of the term Nepali: Nepali, implying language; Nepali inferring to those who speak the Nepali language and are citizens of the political nation-state of Nepal and Nepali indicating a culturally distinctive people whose members are not confined within the political boundaries of Nepal as a nation-state (Pradhan). In his book *A History of Nepali Literature*, he says Nepali is a language spoken by the people who are also called the Gorkhas or 'Gurkhas.' He further iterates

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how Nepali is described as *Rashtrabhasha*[2], but in India it is the language of a distinct group, a *jatiyabhasha*[3], a race and ethnic group, and when the word Nepali is used to denote a people, it is also to be understood that it is composed of diverse ethnic and linguistic origins.Perhaps it is also important to mention here the term Gorkha falls into the trend of being synonymously used to mean Nepali people. There is still a lot of debate concerning the term Gorkha anglicized as "gurkha" by the British which previously was defined as "martial" consisting of only the Gurung, Limbu, Magar and Rai ethnic population but which metamorphosed to indicate a linguistically homogenous identity that was integrated by a shared history, landscape and common life experiences.In Darjeeling, Nepali is a dominant language where majority of the people who are also diverse ethnic groups like Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Rai speak the

[2]*Rashtrabhasha* directly translates to national language or language of the nation-state.
[3]*Jatiyabhasha* directly translates to ethnic language or language of the ethnicity.

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language, and it can be argued that the language has evolved into not only a lingua-franca but also an important marker of collective identity.

Darjeeling has been famous around the world for its aromatic tea and the panoramic view of the Kanchenjunga. A popular tourist destination the small town has been crowned as the "Queen of Hills" for its Himalayan beauty. When one talks about Darjeeling there is a gaze that focuses on the scenic beauty of the hills which is however mostly bereft or stripped of human population that lives there. One may find very little talk on how difficult and obdurate this beautiful terrain can be for people who have to negotiate with this topography in the course of their day-to-day life.

Parimal Bhattacharya in his memoir, *No Path in Darjeeling is Straight* tries to paint his readers a picture of Darjeeling that has many dimensions. His memoir while narrating Darjeeling does not only include a montage of his memories but also memories of other

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people in snippets from letters, travel logs, anthologies, Bengal district gazetteers, quotes, journals and newspapers. Darjeeling through its narration of the spatial and layered temporal experiences as he negotiates the different moods with the voices of the people who have visited, lived and experienced Darjeeling. The result of which in simple terms is a book about the past, present and future of Darjeeling expressed through a myriad of stories. Similarly, it is translation of these narratives and stories of Darjeeling that work like living archives, actively defining the communities and their cultures, their many shared memories, artistic worldviews, lived experiences as they adapt toemergent contexts.

Suma Priyadarshini. B. K. in, 'The Political Aspects of Translation and Its Influence on Literature' observes, "The translation of Dalit literature into English and other Indian languages has served as a significant political endeavour, granting prominence to under-represented voices and questioning the dominance of

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caste-based power in Indian literature. Translators specialising in Dalit literature frequently employ the practice of "political translation," which involves viewing the translation process as a means to oppose oppression and establish one's dignity." (B.K 746) There have been many individuals, groups, educational institutions, regional publication houses in the Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas, that have been actively working with Nepali literatures, where efforts have been made to translate from Nepali literatures to other languages and from other languages to Nepali literature. Among these includes the efforts of Laali Guraas, a cultural, social and political people's collective, operating from Darjeeling hills, Dooars and Terai regions since 2012. Laali Guraas operates with the combined effort and incentives ofdifferent people in the society from students to the teagarden workers; from the young to the old. While there are those who have been associated with the workings of Laali Guraas since its inception, its representative body is a dynamic coalescence. Although

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it was majorly comprised of student members in the beginning, in time, many different people of the society that included working labourers also joined the collective's efforts in its programs and activities. Their basic and fundamental standpoints manifest political and social issues like questions of nationality and identity, the struggle of laborers, a struggle for a classless society, where education, health, social securities, and civic amenities should be for the benefit of the people and of the society. As such, their endeavors are focused mainly on cultural activities, on political questions, taking standpoints on social realities with campaigns and discussions. They have also arranged medical camps, relief activities during covid times, Nepal earthquakes, Sundarban cyclones, raising questions on Teesta's dam construction and environmental concerns were also campaigned. These endeavors were therefore always alive with discussions on a wide array of social and political issues where distribution of leaflets and posters or literature, also found traction. With foundations built

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on such cultural activities, from mid-2012, Laali Guraas have also been publishing a *patrika*[4] with the same name, envisioned as a bi-monthly with narratives that were aimed at bringing a new progressive change, amore equal society.

They had been publishing small books and pamphlets since the beginning and around the year 2020 Laali Gurass as a full-fledged publication took shape with publications of political literatures and stories reflectingdifferent aspects of the society. Althoughmany original works were also published, translation was prioritised with the certainty that the people's literature needed to be exchanged, that writing should be brought to the Nepali audience, and Nepali taken to readers outside.

Samik Chakraborty of the Laali Guraas collective says that literature has a social responsibility where it

[4] Patrika in English could mean a magazine, journal or periodical usually referring to a publication with articles, stories, and images, often specialized or released regularly.

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works as a stimulus opening new avenues of thought and concepts for people, readers and society which aids in making a person with an evolved sense of thought. He says that this can be achieved not only though literature that are blatant with political propaganda, but the artistic affect and perspective of a writer without any evident political agenda, is also a sensitive and important insight and representation of society- a cause Laali Guraas has rallied for since its inception. The numerous students and individuals of different sections of the society who have dedicated their efforts as writers and workers of Laali Guraas try to publish literature that may not probably be profitable from a business point of view, but they see this dedication as a duty to society.

As of 2025 the collection of Laali Guraas publications of translations includes *Bhramar* into English, originally written in Nepali by Roop Narayan Singh, which is considered one of the earliest modern Nepali novels and is also taught in the Nepali literature syllabus in schools.

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Diary of a Young Girl, By Anne Frank translated into Nepali as *Gopya Kota. The Anhiliation of Caste*, written by B.R Ambedkar translated into Nepali as *Jaatko Unmulan.*

The Russian Revolution: What Actually Happened?, written by Jane Sayer and translated into Nepali as *Rusi Kranti: Ke Bhayeko Thiyo?*;

The Tokolosh, written by Roland Segal and translated into Nepali as *Tokolosh.*

A collection of Palestinian poems translated into Nepali with the title, *Jahan Amahary Kahiley Nidaudainan* (Where the mothers never sleep).

Nun Cha (Salty Tea), originally written in Bengali by Bimal Lama and translated into Nepali as *Nunko Chiya* which recounts the experiences of the writer in the Gorkhaland Movement of 1986.

Letter to a Teacher from School of Barbiana, written by eight Italian boys which criticizes the traditional

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education translated into Nepali as *Barbiana Schoolbata Sikshaklai Patra.*

The Nepali translation of *The Communist Manifesto*, written by Karl Marx and Fedrich Engles.

Satyendranarayan Majumder's book- *Kanchenjanghar Gum Bhangche,*translated as *Biujhiraheko Kunchenjunga,* which retells the lives and struggles of tea-garden workers at the beginnings of the tea industry in the eastern Himalayas under the British.

Devanur Mahadeva's *RSS: The Long and Short of It,* translated into Nepali as *RSS: Lambai Ra Chaudai.*

Apart from these there are also Nepali translations of children's literature: *The Live Hat,* written by Nikolay Nosov and translated into Nepali as *Jiudo Topi.*

Laali Guraas has also worked and published Bengali translations of Nepali literature: *Ajja Ramita Cha,* translated into Bengali as *Aaj Ramita*, which is a popular and important Nepali novel by Sahita Akademi winning

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Nepali author Indra Bahadur Rai, where he explores the questions of identity and the cultural ambiguities of Indian Nepali people of the Darjeeling Himalayas.

Similarly, another significant Nepali novel, *Fatsung* written by Chuden Kabimo, has been translated into Bengali. It is a work of historical fiction that depicts the disillusionment and political turmoil through the lives of the people during the Gorkhaland movement.

Ullar, originally written in Nepali by Nayan Raj Pandey, is another popular novel that reflects social inequality in Nepali society and has been translated into Bengali.

The publications from Laali Guraas sees circulations in mechanisms that are not always fixed, be it literary programs and book fairs, and bookshops in the Darjeeling- Dooars and Terai regions. Samik Chakraborty of Laali Guraas observes that a large part of its readers are senior members of the society as opposed to young people, perhaps owing to the ingress of digital

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media. He also adds that the numbers in their readers have significantly increased among the working-class people of the tea gardens, bazaars and also the towns. The circulation of particularly the *patrika* in urban areas has seen a dwindling trend and young readers are observed to prefer reading in English. Even then, he says the practice of reading Nepali literature is not as abysmal as popularly conceived and discussed, this also being dependent on the proficiency and skill involved in writing, and ability to connect with young readers, where books like *Fatsung* by Chuden Kabimo has revived the interest in reading Nepali Literature.

Viewing the endeavors of Laali Guraas, it can be argued that translation is a crucial tool for bringing a reading culture to the ruralsocieties, fostering intellectual growth. From generating awareness envisioning equitable access of knowledge, translation of literaturesalso becomes a profoundly political act, through their publications Laali Guraas strives to fulfill a political social responsibility. Translation from Nepali to

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Bengali or form Bengali to Nepali seeks to enhance empathy and understanding across regions that have had historical conflicts.

BukAnt Publications, a three-year-old publication house based in Siliguri, worksprimarily with publishingand research. It sees circulation on both offline and online platforms while it also proposes to venture into audiobooks and eBooks as auxiliary pillars. As of today, they have worked with numerous languages and literatures, their corpus of work beyond a hundred titles in seven different languages. The publications from BukAnt sees poetry, fiction, non-fiction, history, folk literature, children's literature, graphic novels and also literary criticism that are mostly connected together with the eastern Himalayas.

The founder of BukAnt Publications, Raja Puniani, a Nepali language poet and performer, says that working with publishing, translating and documenting literature is like "working against the storm", a battle to

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attract people to books which he considers to be heritage that needs to be saved. BukAnt Publications translates to give a dais to voices that need to be heard, the voices of histories and stories of the Himalayas. An avenue to bring social transformation. He says that the process of translation and its publication is an expensive affair and it almost functions as Corporate Social Responsibility for BukAnt publications. They also have been acutely publishing research and documentation of folk traditions and narratives granting wider access to these often-times oral traditions.

While Nepali is a language, we must also attend to the distinctive meaning of Nepali indicating a culturally distinctive people whose members are not confined within the political boundaries of Nepal as a nation-state but speak the language and are synthesized together with shared histories. The folktales and oral narratives of the many ethnic communities that constitute this Nepali identity have been gaining greater accessibility through translation into other languages

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facilitating global communication, cultural understanding, knowledge sharing, preservation and archiving. As Historian Kumar Pradhan points out "Nepali folk literature is made richer both by its intrinsic attributes and variety. An added dimension to its variety hascome from the manner in which Nepali community has evolved.In the process of its evolution, the traditions and tunes, thefables and lores of various lndo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burmanelements have made their contributions to make the aggregaterich." (Pradhan 12) One can observe that owing to Nepali being a lingua-franca, many of these folktales of different ethnicities may have existed in Nepali language and were later also translated and documented in languages like English. At the same time these stories have also been compiled directly from the ethnic languages, written or oral and now accessible in the English language. While the repository of folktales and folksongs are oral usually without any fixed author or authorial identity, they are a repository of culture preserving and transmitting a community's collective

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memory, values, beliefs, customs, and history across generations through oral tradition and informal channels, serving as vital tools for moral education, social bonding, and understanding worldview, reflecting societal norms while also evolving with cultural change.

L. Tamsang has complied, edited and translated the book *Lepcha Folklore and Folk Songs* which is a collection of folklore and folksongs of the Lepcha community where origin stories, expressions of utopia and interdependence with nature are some apparent major themes.*Yathung Mundhumlore*,published by BukAnt publications andcompiled and edited by Sandhya SubbaSingzango has been describes as a "deep rooted research based collection of twenty folk tales", oral narratives that become a guide to the philosophy, wisdom, customs and lived experiences of Limbu ancestors.Another BukAnt publication is *Duwangdum,* a collection of eight Kirat Rai Mythos curated by Spatika Rai, that allows a look into Kirat Rai people's culture, history, and identity.

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Oral traditions encompass cultural context in performance, stories, songs, myths and history, they may not fully transfer to written form and require cultural sensitivity while preserving in written form. One can observe the people from different Nepali ethnicities like Lepcha, Rai and Tamang have themselves become researchers, documenters and preservers of their cultures, with these stories being documented in languages like English and Nepali which have a wider accessibility.

In the terrain of responsible translation of Nepali literatures, the facilitation of translation of Indian Languages by The Center of Translation of Indian Literatures (CENTIL), Jadavpur University is rigorous, continuous and remarkable. While they focus mainly on indigenous and marginalized traditions engaging in translation into English, Bengali and Nepali they have worked with literature of numerous languages like Odia, Asamiya, Bodo, Lepcha, Sadri and Kurux. In collaboration with numerous institutions international,

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national and regional, CENTIL often incorporates collaborative translation workshops, translation training courses, and projects to further translation activities. CENTIL strives to build their ever-increasing volume of translation endeavours for Indian literatures in general and Nepali literatures in particular. Translation workshops aimed towards translation of Nepali poetry, stories, literary criticism, folktales and folksongs are regularly organised, where it is not only the end product of a text translated to a target language that is given prominence, but the practice of consensualcollaborative translation itself is also examined, experimented and valued as a tool of cultural and social exchange and dialogue.The practice of consensual translation involves resource persons or original language speakers during the process of translation, safeguarding authenticity and preservation of cultural contexts.

Some of the published volumes of translation of Nepali literature undertaken by CENTIL include *Tamang Selo: Annotated Text and English Translation*

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Edited by Sayantan Dasgupta and Shradhanjai Tamang; *Call of the Hills: A coursebook of Indian Nepali Literature in Translation* edited by Sayantan Dasgupta and Kabita Lama, and more recently, *Selected Writings from Chandrika: Parasmani Pradhan and Early Nepali Periodical Culture.*

It also becomes imperative to explore the contributions made by India's National Academy of letters, Sahitya Akademi in the context of Indian Nepali literatures. Established by the Government of India in 1954 it plays a vital role in promoting Indian literature through translations and its recognitive encouragement of the same with the Sahitya Akademi Award for Translations. Beside conducting translation workshops and establishing centres for translation, Sahity Akademi also publishes translated works, making them accessible to a wider audience. The recognition of languages by Sahitya Akademi is independent from the recognition of languages by the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India and it had recognised Nepali long before its

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recognition in 1992, and with Indra Bahadur Rai being given the first Sahitya Akademi Award for the Nepali languagefor his work on literary criticism, *Nepali Upanyaska Adharharu* (The Foundations of Nepali Novels). While holding an impressive catalogue of Nepali novels, short stories, plays, history of Nepali literature, children's literature, the national academy of letters is also actively engaged in translation of these texts.

It is also important to comment here how during discussion on any aspect of Nepali literature, the Nepali literature form Nepal cannot be left unattended. While the nation states of India and Nepal are divided by political borders, it is understood that the historical, cultural and linguistic association between the Nepali people of these two countries negates exclusion of literature from Nepal within the context of Nepali literature.Taking Nepali literature to a global audience involves deliberate translation, organizing international literary events, and offering prominence to

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unique cultural themes like indigenous and marginal identity. Translation of Nepali into a dominantly global language like English therefore becomes a powerful tool to realize social exchange. Some important and widely available English translations of Nepali literature are Chuden Kabimo's, *Faatsung* translated into English as *Song of the Soil* by Ajit Baral has now also been added to the BA English curriculum at the SRM University in Sikkim.Buddhisagar's *Karnali Blues* translated into English by Michael Hutt. Hutt's other translations of Nepali works include Laxmi Prasad Devkota's*Muna Madan* in 1996 and Lil Bahadur Chhetri's *Basain* (as *Mountains Painted with Turmeric*) in 2008.Indra bahadur Rai's *Aaja Ramita Cha,* translated into English by Manjushree Thapa as *There's A Carnival Today*.Narayan Wagle's popular and Madan Puraskar winning Nepali novel, *Palpasa Café,* Translated into English by Bikash Sangraula.Parijat's existential Nepal novel *Sirish ko Phool,*translated into English by Sondra

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Zeidenstein with the help of Tankavilash Bharya as *The Blue Mimosa.*

Since the translation of Adhyatma Ramayana by Bhanu Bhakta Acharya in the 17th century made Valmiki's Sanskrit epic assessable in Nepali language, the culture of translation has been firmly established in Nepali language. There has been a plethora of translations of Nepali writings into other languages and other languages into Nepali language. It goes without saying that translation has played a vital role in expanding the literary reserveof Nepali language, with Nepali literary culture imbibing themes, genres and expressions from other languages. While the culture of translation sees a gain in momentum, the individuals, groups, institutions, centres, publications can beincreasing seen to be cognizant of the social implications of translation of literatures. Among those who engage in literary translation- it is seen as an agent of social change. While the retelling of different stories of Darjeeling becomes an expression of the complexities

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and nuances of the lived experiences of the people, these stories also become a powerful social and political tool to understand the world better as envisioned by the translators of Laali Guraas. The societal role that translation plays goes beyond purely academic objectives while promoting indigenous languages through ethical preservation of oral narratives. Illustrating a richer, more vibrant and arguably more perceptive tapestry of the lives of the people's literature it translates, to granting prominence to under-represented voices- translation of literature preserves, accesses and includes not just languages but also the collective human memory, history and varied realities of the society.

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Academic Social Responsibilities and Social Activism: Insights from Shankar Guha Niyogi and Ganesh Devy

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Academic Social Responsibility (ASR) represents the delicate interplay between academic and social spheres. These spheres are not mutually exclusive; they intersect in dynamic, reciprocal ways. This article explores their interconnected functions and examines how each contributes to the practice and understanding of ASR. This article will focus on questions such as how ASR plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between theory and praxis. How does ASR instrumentalise the question

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of Indigenous Knowledge Systems to play a pivotal role in the post-independence Indian context? Does ASR pave the way to place together separate activism originating from their respective political ideologies? If yes, what kind of role does ASR play in that context? This article will unpack these questions with reference to Ganesh Devy's activism and Shankar Guha Niyogi's ideation and practice of activism. Researchers and thinkers are quite apprehensive about placing the names of these two figures in a single sentence, as their respective political ideologies are poles apart and radical in their own ways. However, this article will focus on Devy and Niyogi's activism as advocacy for land-based rights movements, the propagation of land-based knowledge systems, and the provision of overall protection for the local indigenous population, including their health, education, and livelihood practices.

Academic Social Responsibility might give one the impression that it is strictly confined to academic spaces and makes people in the academic circle feel

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'holier than thou.' However, a close examination of this term shows that the academic circle cannot be exclusively drawn from other social spheres, as it works in tandem with people from heterogeneous class and caste backgrounds, especially in India. At the same time, it shifts the horizon for people in academia by including extra-academic spheres in their conceptualisation, as their responsibilities are not confined to classroom spaces and pedagogical processes. In the case of Ganesh Devy's activism, it can be observed that he has built a strong network of activists and researchers from and beyond the concerned indigenous communities. On the other hand, in the case of Niyogi's activism, people from different academic circles and class positions are coming to the Dallirajhara region to help set up garages, hospitals, and schools. Through these forms of activism, a mobilisation process emerges in which a heterogeneous mass forms.

In both cases, this emerging mass acts to ensure education and health facilities, and to protect the

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Indigenous Knowledge Systems, which are hugely dependent on the local indigenous population. Their ideation and practice of activism fostered camaraderie across communities. One can argue that these movements helped pave the way for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Still, it is worth noting that these movements were already in place well before the United Nations conceptualised the goals. Furthermore, these groups of activists sought to foster local land-based knowledge systems and to help develop new skills associated with them, while avoiding any tampering with traditional Indigenous knowledge systems or any unilinear standardisation of terms such as 'well-being' and 'development'.

To further elaborate on the point of Sustainable Development Goals, it is vital to mention the politics of globalisation and globalism and how they influence the conceptualisation of SDGs as propagated by the United Nations. Robert O. Keohane defines globalisation as the manifestation of globalism—a state of interdependence

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across continents involving flows of capital, goods, ideas, and people. He categorises globalisation into economic, military, and socio-cultural dimensions (Keohane and Nye 109). Social and cultural globalisation involves the transmission and imitation of practices across societies, often placing the source culture in a dominant position and the recipient culture in a subordinate one—a process termed 'cultural isomorphism.' This leads to distortions in cultural identity, politics, and individual consciousness.

Globalisation's interdependence raises crucial questions: How are ideas transmitted? Who benefits from this process? Does it truly aid developing countries? While globalisation shortens physical distances through rapid communication, it simultaneously accentuates *cultural distance*—differences in understanding shaped by local politics and institutions. Thus, globalisation does not erase the nation-state but redefines the nature of politics beyond its traditional boundaries.

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Though globalisation has fostered the idea of a 'global village,' stark disparities persist between developed and developing nations. The system, primarily designed by developed countries, serves corporate and financial interests, often undermining local economies and perpetuating colonial hierarchies. Despite claims of openness and progress, globalisation remains tied to the Western hegemonic structures and perspectives. The Western model emphasises unification across cultures and nations, yet for many in developing societies, it signifies a continuation of imperialism. Hence, the experience of globalisation is deeply subjective shaped by one's cultural position, political realities, and historical context.

As a result, the universal nature of the SDGs poses significant challenges in the Indian context. The SDGs, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, emerged as a response to both opportunities and imbalances created by globalisation. Though it is undeniable that the SDGs contain a standardisation element. This trace of

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standardisation can be located in the listing of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs incorporate 'quality' education (SDG 4), 'good' health and wellbeing (SDG 3), and 'decent' work and economic growth (SDG 8) (United Nations). Other than these specific SDGs there are 14 more goals which deal with poverty, hunger, gender ineuality, sanitation, clean energy, industry infrustructure, climate action etc. However, this article will structurally focus on SDG 4, SDG 3 and SDG 8 as these goals directly linked with the core argument it posits.

These sepcific adjectives, such as 'quality,' 'good,' and 'decent,' have culture-specific meanings, significance, and politics. In the context of India, the adjectives mentioned above do not have a unilinear meaning, and imposing such unilinear standards further complicates the politics of the center and its peripheries. It should always be questioned what quality education, good health, well-being, decent work, and economic growth signify in the Indian context. This article

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comceptualises the term 'localisation' in contrast to 'globalisation.' In this context, 'localisation' underscores cultural traits and attributes in a more local, Indian way, where components such as education, health, well-being, and economic growth are not compared to alien cultural parameters. It highlights the local cultural community's demands in the Indian context.

In this background, this article highlights Ganesh Devy's activism concerning Indian indigenous communities, their cultural lives, and languages as an example. It is to be mentioned that the activism Devy and his team have performed to date has structurally endorsed community representation and empowered their agency. Ganesh Devy is a thinker and cultural activist who is based in India. Devy was a professor of English at the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda from 1980 to 1996. In order to initiate his work with the Denotified Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) and other marginalised indigenous communities of India, he left that job in 1996. He initiated the nationwide language

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survey, called the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI), which documented around 780 languages in India, whereas the Indian government has constitutionally recognised only 22 languages (Devy).

Ganesh Devy has made substantial contributions to the preservation of language and culture by establishing centers such as the Bhasha Research and Publication Center (1998) and the Adivasi Academy (1999). This article will highlight the functions and activities of the Bhasha Research and Publication Center and Adivasi Academy, which emphasise community well-being and participation and support entrepreneurial initiatives within the indigenous communities of that region.

At this point, it is crucial to mention Bhasha's and Adivasi Academy's stance on working with the indigenous communities. The organisations view the world's cultural heritage inclusively and consider indigenous culture a serious field of research. As part of

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its inclusive research ethics and methodology, this organisation believes in community leadership development. In line with the leadership-building objective, all planning for developmental projects and documentation activities involves community members. All these actions unite people and make them aware of their social, anthropological, and political aspects in local and larger scapes. This leadership-building agenda also emphasises the sustainability of these communities. Bhasha believes that entrepreneurial organisations established under its guidance and that have grown over time should receive independent recognition and affiliation at some point. As a result, the primary goal of sustainability, which Bhasha conceived in the Chhote Udeipur region, was adopted by these other organisations and spread to other marginal indigenous communities residing in rural and urban areas.

From the Chhote Udeipur region, every year, nearly 60,000 tribal people migrate in search of livelihood, which destabilises all these people's lives

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and, at the same time, the entire anthropology and ecology of this belt. G N Devy, in his multiple books and interviews, has stated that the main objective of his activism is language. So, it is unquestionable that if the ecology and anthropology of a region are destabilised, the survival and existence of the region's languages are also destabilised. To address this issue structurally, he focused on and preserved the anthropology of this demography. So he highlighted the need to build infrastructure to protect the health, knowledge system, indigenous arts, and cultural practices, and to stabilise their sources of income. Here, Adivasi Academy can be considered a model. This model can yield fruitful results when applied in a given location, taking into account the actual needs and requirements of the communities residing there.

The Adivasi Academy dedicates itself to making local indigenous communities self-reliant and to preserving their languages and innate knowledge systems. There are several departments in the academy,

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such as Basanthshala- the residential school, Vaacha- the museum exclusively endorsing indigenous culture has gained national and international eminence; a health section named 'Prakruti Clinic,' which has its own lab capable of running laboratory tests and with regular visiting doctors from the city and a library with 5500 books where aspirants from the local villages visit and prepare for their competitive exams. There is also an agricultural section that cultivates various seeds and provides them to local farmers, and a textiles section capable of producing textiles through dyeing, seeding, and weaving—all of which inspire, influence, and exemplify indigenous, eco-friendly textile production.

Basanthshala, established in 2006, is a residential school that now serves sixty students from local indigenous communities, most of whose parents are migrant laborers from underprivileged backgrounds. The school's core mission is to prevent children from entering the migrant labor system and to protect them

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from malnutrition. All students receive free food, education, and lodging (Rathwa 117).

Basanthshala follows a multidisciplinary, multilingual pedagogy. Students learn in four languages—their respective mother tongue, Gujarati, Hindi, and English. Rather than imposing a single language, teachers learn from the students' diverse linguistic backgrounds and use those languages to build communication. In this way, students shape the classroom's linguistic environment (Rathwa 118).

Because most students come from agricultural families, the school's guiding philosophy is *"Ek hath me kitab, dusre hath me fawda" (Books in one hand and plough on the other)*—a balance of academics and practical life skills. Classes are named Prakruti, Jagruti, Sanskriti, Swakruti, and Pragati, corresponding to grades 1–7. Across these levels, students receive training that supports daily living, incorporates indigenous learning methods, and nurtures imagination through activities

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such as storytelling and story writing in their mother tongues. These stories are disseminated for a wider reach through the institution's social media handles.

In 2021, Basanthshala was registered with the Gujarat government, enabling it to issue transfer certificates and help students pursue further studies after completing their time at the school (Rathwa 117).

In his book *The Question of Silence* (2019), Devy mentions a disease called sickle cell anemia that became an epidemic in Amaravati, Maharashtra (Devy 89). To understand and resolve the situation, the Maharashtra government formed a committee. Later, it was observed that this disease is present among the indigenous people of the Chhote Udeipur region. The symptoms of sickle cell anemia include frequent pain, swelling of the hands and feet, frequent infections, delayed growth and puberty, and vision problems. This disease shortens a human being's life span. To understand the overall health situation, Ganeshji and his

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team organised several health camps in Western Gujarat, home to several indigenous communities. Adivasi Academy continues to run regular health camps in that region and maintains proper documentation.

The Adivasi Academy is also working on traditional textiles from the region. The local Rathwa community used to weave their own clothes from threads. The weavers themselves prepared all the ingredients for this. The traditional cloth made by local weavers is called 'Kasota'. However, Kasota, as a form of conventional attire, is no longer used due to the modernisation and corporatisation of cultural practices.

The former director of the Adivasi Academy observed that the Kasota weaving tradition was rapidly declining and required patronage and proper infrastructure to survive. In response, the academy began efforts to revive the craft. With the support of local Kasota weavers, they established five pit looms and resumed production. To ensure long-term sustainability,

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they developed a business plan that includes showcasing Kasota in metro cities, attracting target buyers, and securing fair remuneration for the artisans. They aim to increase the visibility of these weavers and to earn them long-overdue recognition at national and international levels (Meena 98).

Alongside this, the academy has built a self-reliant, eco-friendly production system. They cultivate jhimti (indigo) by renting land and use indigo and other plant-based dyes for their textiles. The academy hosts the whole dyeing and weaving setup, supported by trained professionals.

Sustainability is further strengthened through knowledge-sharing. The academy invites external experts to conduct research and train local indigenous communities, ensuring that artisans learn the entire process—from dyeing to weaving. As a result, several community members are now skilled, independent

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practitioners capable of managing the entire production cycle themselves.

However, this article argues that Ganesh Devy is not the first to advance alternative perspectives on sustainability. Devy has repeatedly acknowledged his grounding in Gandhian philosophy. From the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, during the height of the Non-Cooperation Movement, Gandhi articulated his vision for an educational system rooted in local culture and indigenous knowledge—an explicit contrast to the English system shaped by Macaulay's Minute. Central to Gandhi's educational thought was the ideal of self-reliance and sustainability. He therefore proposed handicrafts as the organising principle of the school curriculum, a vision he elaborated in "Nayi Taleem" or "New Education". For Gandhi, integrating handicrafts allowed students to bridge school and work life, foster an activity-based approach to learning, and cultivate independence from an early age ("Nai Talim | Village Swaraj: Complete Book Online").

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This reveals a crucial point: Gandhi's conceptualisation of education was inherently political. He sought to free education from the colonial framework that marginalised indigenous pedagogies. His advocacy emphasised local and regional diversity in educational practice, supporting a more localised model that resisted imperial influence ("Nai Talim | Village Swaraj: Complete Book Online").

The Wardha Scheme of Basic Education significantly shaped early plans for inclusive education. In 1937, Gandhi outlined his concerns about India's failing education system in *Harijan* and later reiterated them at the National Education Conference in Wardha. The scheme produced three key resolutions: seven years of nationwide free and compulsory education; adoption of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction; and an activity-based curriculum centered on productive work rather than examinations. To support this, the scheme emphasised grounding education in the physical and social environment, with craftwork as a central

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component ("Wardha Scheme of Education 1937 – GKToday").

In post-independence India, the contributions of the Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMS), the Chattisgarh Mines Sramik Sangh (CMSS), and Shankar Guha Niyogi to economic sustainability in the Chattisgarh mining area should be noted. It is also worth noting that the structure of Adivasi Academy resembles the activism of CMSS, CMS, and Shankar Guha Niyogi. The modus operandi of the Adivasi Academy takes into account the overall sustainability of human life, incorporating education, health, economic sustainability, preservation of the mother tongue, and the cultural traits associated with it. The CMSS and CMS had taken cognisance of these same pointers before the Adivasi Academy entered the arena of activism in a different part of India, catering to the local communities of that region.

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The Chattisgarh region can be best described as "rich land inhabited by poor people." Shankar Guha Niyogi and the organisations involved in his politics sought to address sustainability issues by destabilising the paradox of 'rich land' and 'poor' people. The vested interest in dominating Chhattisgarh's economy and politics persisted from colonial times. As a result, there has been a historic rush to exploit the region's natural resources, with nearly no concern for the poverty and neglect the local people were subjected to. In this context, Niyogi's activism is intricately tied to the story of mining and development in Chhattisgarh's Adivasi heartland. In 1977, Niyogi became the secretary of the trade union organisation of Dallirajhara. In this period, Niyogi and organisations aligned with his ideology experimented with social struggle interventions in the social sector, giving rise to new slogans such as *"Sangharsh Ke Liye Nirman, Nirman Ke Liye Sangharsh" (Build for Struggle, Struggle to build)* (Sen 75).

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The social setup of the mines and the township adjacent to them constituted two worlds, inextricably linked by the lack of homogeneity among the working class of the mines. This trait of lack of homogenisation can be regarded as the typical manifestation of the 'two Indias': people with technical education, training, and secure salaries, who came from more developed parts of the country and brought their own regional cultural baggage. In contrast, the local people of this region were tied to the contractors under the lease and were referred to as 'unskilled laborers' (Sen 71). As a result of the mines' management's failure, a pervasive sense of alienation emerged. In this context, the CMSS engaged with local people to address life issues, not just bread-and-butter issues. To provide low-cost teaching aids for science education, CMSS founded the Shaheed Garage, where they trained the youth in technical education.

On the other hand, to address the deteriorating health conditions of the local people, they set up Shaheed Hospital, and the CMSS appealed to the

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workers, seeking volunteers to take responsibility for running the hospital and to be trained as health workers. Shaheed Hospital still prides itself on the fact that its management, even today, is almost entirely in the hands of the local people who worked and trained there. The CMSS also founded Shaheed School for the children of the mine's contractual laborers, where they promoted education in their mother tongue without tampering with their 'Chhattisgarhi Identity.' Under Niyogi's leadership, six primary schools and an adult education program for illiterate workers were established (Sen 72). Prior to this, there was no provision for the education of the children of contractual laborers.

As a first step in their research, young scholars are taught about their ethical responsibilities. There are many ethical responsibilities regarding one's respective research. However, there is a vast difference between learning about and performing those responsibilities. Academic Social Responsibilities intersect with ethical duties in this context. This article focuses on activism

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aimed at protecting land-based indigenous knowledge systems and lifestyles. For this purpose, it concentrates on the corpus of work by Ganesh Devy and Shankar Guha Niyogi. The fulcrum for choosing these two political personalities is that their work shows clear overlap across different social, cultural, and political dimensions, such as health, education, ensuring a secure source of income, and community representation, which prevent concerned communities from social and political destabilisation.

It is a fact that, through education and community relationships, the two personalities they developed over time were reflected in their corpus of activism. This is the steering factor for community mobilisation and the secured participation of the masses, comprising people from heterogeneous backgrounds but dedicated to a common cause. Without the participation and representation of the respective community members, these activisms have no meaning in a broader context. The ethical responsibilities Devy and Niyogi

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learned about through their respective academic and social trajectories were transmitted to the community members, and the transmission process remains in flux as the institutions continue to operate at full strength to date.

At this juncture, it is essential to note that the term 'Academic Social Responsibilities' encompasses a range of experiences, understandings, learning, and unlearning processes one goes through in and beyond the academic sector. As a result of these processes, the educational and other social sectors form a reciprocal relationship. Through this, a particular kind of atmosphere is created in which one can bridge the gap between theory and praxis. Devy and Niyogi's activism in this context is no exception. Through their respective activism, they attempted to sensitise community members to their social, political, and economic situations. This sensitisation process further propelled them to take action against their adverse situations and inspired them to advocate for themselves. Subsequently,

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it instrumentalised the question of indigenous knowledge systems to play a pivotal role in their respective contexts.

During Shankar Guha Niyogi's time in the Dallirajhara region, people from diverse areas with different educational and occupational backgrounds gathered. Among doctors, Binyak Sen and Asish Kundu were the first ones to arrive, and they came in response to the union's stated need to start a hospital and maternity home that would prevent deaths of the adivasi mine workers (Sen 70). As a result of their efforts and the local adivasi people's cooperation, the Saheed Hospital came into being. Arvind Gupta, an IIT graduate and crusader of popularising science, spent over a year at Dallirajhara. A big name today in the development of low-cost teaching aids for science education, he worked to set up the Shaheed Garage (Sen 71). There are several personalities, like A.P. Shukla from IIT Kanpur, Dr Sharat G. Lin, a human rights and peace activist from California, Vidyasagar Gadgil, and Mariette Correa, graduates from Tata Institute of Social Sciences,

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Mumbai, who stayed in Dallirajhara and contributed to the development of this region in their own respective capacities (Sen 74).

In the case of Ganesh Devy's activism, community representation and the formation of community leadership were further strengthened. The Rathwa community, an indigenous community in India, predominantly inhabits the Chhote Udeipur region of Gujarat state, where the Adivasi Academy is located. The people in charge of the various sections of the Adivasi Academy are from the Rathwa community and have completed a postgraduate diploma course in Tribal Studies. During this course, they came into contact with and were trained by various intellectuals, writers, and activists, including Mahasweta Devi, Dr Bhagwandas Patel, Lakshman Gaikwad, Kanji Bhai Patel, and many others. Basanth Rathwa, who is in charge of Basanthshala; Narayan Rathwa, who is in charge of the Vaacha museum; and Bhav Singh Rathwa, who is in charge of library operations, all completed the

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postgraduate course and later joined the academy (Rathwa 103).

It is evident from the facts mentioned above that the activists involved in their respective movements underwent a sensitisation process that enabled them to understand the broader political dynamics affecting their communities. It is crucial to underscore the class positions of these communities with respect to Devy and Niyogi's class position. Niyogi completed his education from the Industrial Training Institute, and Devy completed his PhD from a public university. Niyogi was well exposed to the Naxalite Movement led by Charu Majumdar, so he had an understanding of the political and social pulse of the contemporary Indian state. On the other hand, Devy had exposure to different academic institutions around the globe. As a result of this exposure, he recognised the intersection between academia and other social sectors across different socio-cultural contexts. Their receptive experiences and exposure help constitute their own understanding of

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ethical responsibility, which was successfully transmitted to community members over time. Niyogi and Devy's political ideologies are poles apart, but their perceptions of Academic Social Responsibility have brought them to a similar page.

As this article focuses on activism regarding land-based indigenous knowledge systems, it is essential to mention one contemporary event in India. The Deucha-Pachami-Devanganj-Harisingha coal block in Birbhum district is home to traditional forest dwellers, predominantly Santhal, who live there. In April 2011, the Indian central government announced that the coal ministry would auction 58 coal blocks across seven states. Of these, Deucha Pachami in Birbhum, West Bengal, has the largest coal reserve. In December 2015, the West Bengal Government established a special purpose vehicle, Bengal Birbhum Coalfield Limited, to develop a mine in the Deucha Pachami region. From 2018 to 2020, the West Bengal government did no work, but from 2021 onwards, it started to progress on the

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mining project. It is surprising that the state authorities, which first came to power in 2011 by asserting that its primary political agenda was to ensure land rights in the context of the Singur–Nandigram issue, are now promoting mining projects that will destabilise the livelihoods of local Indigenous communities and harm local biodiversity. In 2025, the local indigenous people began to build resistance as they realised the proposed mine would occupy over 11,222 acres, of which over 9,100 acres (81%) were indigenous land. As many as 4134 houses located on the coal block belong to people from the Scheduled Tribes, the Scheduled Castes, and other minority communities. The resisting indigenous communities have refused to accept compensation or rehabilitation in exchange. They fear forceful eviction and loss of houses, agricultural land, water bodies, and forests in eleven mouzas of five-gram panchayats in Mohammadbazar block, affecting 53 villages of that region (*DEUCHA PACHAMI and COAL MINING - PRELIMINARY FACTSHEET: A Documentation*).

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Past events in this region show that many have been displaced and dispossessed due to the construction of large dams and the establishment of mining-related industries or stone quarries. An estimation shows that more than 21000 people will be displaced, of which 43% will be Adivasis from the Santhal community. The Santhal community is an indigenous group that strongly believes in the ideology of "*Jal-Jangal-Zamin,*" - a delicate balance between environmental resources without exploiting them (Ray). If the mining project takes place, they will not only be dispossessed from their homeland, but also their right to natural resources and livelihood based on foraging and forest dwelling would come under threat. Subsequently, their land-based knowledge systems and life practices, which are handed down to this indigenous group from generation to generation, will automatically come under threat. To resist, the local Santhali people have formed a platform, the Gram Sabha Samanya Hool Committee (GSSHC), to fight for Adivasi rights and against land appropriation. In

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their defense, the government claimed that most of the mining project would be carried out underground, without requiring any evictions (Basu). However, the government has failed to produce a substantial plan for waste management, pollutant processing, and the rehabilitation of local biodiversity (*DEUCHA PACHAMI and COAL MINING -PRELIMINARY FACTSHEET: A Documentation*).

The local indigenous people demand that they do not want coal Mines for development; instead, they are in dire need of schools, hospitals, and functioning primary health care centres. This is the juncture where the activism of CMSS, CMS, and Ganesh Devy plays a crucial role as they identified the fundamental needs of the local indigenous people and acted accordingly to safeguard the free flow of land-based knowledge systems and life practices. Through their activism, they introduced modernised medical and educational practices that worked in tandem with existing indigenous traditional practices.

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In the current Indian state, where resisting voices go through an arbitrary scanning and structural profiling processes, indigenous voices are aphyxiated by the state-sponsored repression systems often implemented by the forms of different policies. In this context, acts of resistance, such as the Deucha-Pachami case, the Narmada Bachao Andolan, or the Bhima Koregaon-16 case, have faced consistent state-sponsored threats, which are nothing but the 'new normal'. The core argument of this article was to ephasise, underscore and underline the different forms of activisms which are functional to protect and constitute advocacy for land-based knowledge systems and indigenous communities. For this it concentrated on the trajectory of two activists— Shankar Guha Niyogi and Ganesh Devy. However, one takes into cognisance that in order to have a better grasp how state-sponsored repression operates in contemporary India—particularly in relation to marginalised communities and land reforms—it is essential to examine the policy-drafting process, the

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clauses embedded within these drafts, and the strategic machinery of NITI Aayog. Writers and activists like Gautam Navlakha, Arundhati Roy, Late Gauri Lankesh and many more have critiqued specific policies from time to time in their own voices. As a result at times, they had to pay the price even with their lives and incarceration processes.

In this context, learning about the ethical responsibilities of a student, a researcher, or an academic serve as a sensitisation process. It paves the way to bridge the gap between theory and praxis. On a broader scale, Academic Social Responsibilities, as a concept and practice, can forge a space where individuals from different backgrounds can build camaraderie to resist state-sponsored atrocities against marginalised indigenous communities and to support land-based rights movements and knowledge systems.

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Reframing Collections, Rethinking Responsibility:

Reflections from a Collaboration with the Ipswich Museum, United Kingdom

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This paper explores how Academic Social Responsibility (ASR) can be practised within the context of anthropological and ethnographic museums, where research involves not only the study of objects but also an ethical engagement with the histories and communities they represent. Drawing on my collaboration with Ipswich Museum (UK), the paper

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examines how academic research can help to revisit, reinterpret, and ethically reframe the museum's Oceanic collections, many of which have yet to receive systematic study.

Rather than positioning museums as passive custodians of the past, the paper approaches them as active partners in an ongoing academic commitment to social responsibility. It reflects on the ways in which curatorial research can foster transparency, accountability, and inclusivity by re-evaluating provenance, addressing historical inaccuracies, and foregrounding the cultural complexity of objects. The case study will pay particular attention to materials from Kanaky/New Caledonia and Fiji, including a Kanak axe bound with European cloth, clubs, tapa, and ceremonial artefacts, alongside a wider range of objects from Ipswich Museum's Oceanic collections.

The discussion situates this work within the decolonial turn in museum and heritage studies. It

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proposes that ASR entails sustained attention to the social lives of objects, the responsibilities of researchers towards communities of origin, and the shared commitments that link museums and scholars. Ipswich Museum, in particular, places strong emphasis on connecting research with collections and fostering ethical collaboration. By reflecting on the early stages of this partnership, the paper considers how working with ethnographic collections can embody the principles of academic responsibility in practice.

Introduction:

In recent years, Academic Social Responsibility (ASR) has increasingly been discussed within the humanities in relation to questions of knowledge production, ethical accountability, and the legacies of colonialism. Rather than positioning academic work as neutral or detached, this body of scholarship has drawn attention to the responsibility of research practices to engage with social

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inequalities, epistemic hierarchies, and the lived consequences of interpretation (Rycroft 2023: 1-5). Within this perspective, responsibility is not understood as an abstract moral stance, but as something that takes shape through situated, dialogic, and practice-based forms of scholarship, attentive to plurality, inclusion, and the conditions within which knowledge is produced (Pathak 2025: 26).

Within museum and heritage studies, these concerns intersect with what has been widely described as a decolonial turn. This shift has involved a critical re-examination of classificatory systems, representational authority, and the colonial epistemologies embedded in museum practices, moving attention away from objects as static carriers of knowledge and towards the processes, relationships, and temporalities through which meanings are produced, stabilised, or contested. In this context, responsibility is increasingly located in the everyday practices of documentation, description, and care, rather than solely in the final narratives presented

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to the public. Building on these discussions, this article approaches ethnographic collections as sites where responsibility is enacted through everyday curatorial and research practices, and where objects with complex trajectories make visible the ethical stakes of working with historically layered and unevenly documented materials.

My research at Ipswich Museum sits at the intersection of my work as an anthropologist of Oceanic material culture and my long-standing attention to the ethical dimensions of cultural representation in museums. Approaching the collections from this standpoint, shaped by years of working with the material and documentary histories of Oceanic objects, meant entering the museum with a specific awareness of how responsibility begins long before interpretation, in the institutional practices that determine how objects are classified, handled, and made legible. My previous research on Kanak collections, and on the European textiles woven into the process of their crafting, has

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shown me that responsibility is formed upstream, at the earliest stages of collection management and documentation, through the routines and decisions that classify, store, and render objects intelligible. This perspective shaped the way I approached the Ipswich materials, attentive not only to the documentation but also to the gaps, hesitations, and inherited descriptions that condition how these collections can be understood.

It was within this framework that my collaboration with Dr Aurogeeta Das, Ipswich Museum's Senior Curator for Cultural Policy (and the recently appointed University Lead for Colchester + Ipswich Museums Service), took shape. From our first conversations, it became clear that responsibility is not something museums hold on their own, nor something researchers can enact independently. Instead, it emerges in the space between institutional infrastructures and scholarly intentions. What follows in this article is therefore not a report of results, but a reflection on how responsible academic practice unfolds in the day-to-day

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work of examining ethnographic collections. It explores how responsibilities are distributed, how they become visible in the smallest decisions, and how both researchers and institutions participate in shaping the futures of objects whose pasts are often fragmented or unevenly recorded.

How Museums Shape Knowledge:

Museums, particularly those holding anthropological collections, are spaces where academic practices, political claims, and inherited responsibilities converge and collide. Within this landscape, ASR becomes less a framework than a process of articulation and reworking of stories, absences, and the conditions that make knowledge possible.If ASR asks scholars to recognise the social implications of their work, ethnographic collections entail, and indeed compel, a deeper sense of responsibility, shaped by issues of provenance, colonial

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histories, under-documentation, and the relationships of belonging that tie them to their communities of origin.

Museums carry an authority sedimented over time, built through scientific classification and institutional memory, an authority that still shapes how publics learn about cultural heritage (Fromm 2016: 92). Yet this position also places museums under an ethical obligation to reconsider how knowledge is produced, classified, and shared. Recent debates in museum and heritage studies have foregrounded a shift from object-centred narratives towards more participatory and inclusive approaches, where interpretation is understood as polyphonic and fluid rather than fixed. This shift reflects a growing recognition that the perspectives held by source communities, visitors, and researchers coexist with curatorial expertisewithin museums and can meaningfully and collaboratively reshape how collections are understood.

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In my work with Oceanic collections, especially those from Kanaky, I have often seen how apparently technical decisions about cataloguing quietly determine which stories can be told. When I follow an object from the database line to the storage room and back to the label, I can see how much has been simplified, lost, or frozen in the process. This is not unique to Oceania, but anthropological collections make these tensions especially visible, because they condense colonial trajectories, highlight fragmentary documentation, and reveal the expectations of different publics.

Within the broader decolonial turn, museums appear less as neutral containers than as active producers of cultural narratives. The ways objects are catalogued, described, and interpreted influence which histories come to the forefront, and which remain marginal (Stylianou-Lambert *et al*. 2014: 567). The Oceanic materials I work with are often linked to generic attributions or outdated terminology. Reopening these records, and acknowledging documentary instability, has

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concrete analytical consequences for both communities of origin and future researchers (Fromm 2016: 92; Russi 2024: 5). Careful documentation, attentive also to intangible dimensions, becomes the baseline condition for any later collaboration, whether with source communities or with academic partners.

These classificatory frictions are precisely where ASR becomes meaningful for me. Attending closely to the museum's records, including accession registers, card catalogues, and object history files, becomes part of the work of responsibility itself. These documentary traces reveal how provenance is constructed, where gaps and silences persist, and how received categories continue to shape interpretation. This attention is particularly significant when future collaboration or engagement with source communities may depend on what has been preserved, omitted, or lost.Read in this way, the slow and attentive work of revisiting documentation, tracing provenance, and probing unresolved questions can be understood as grounded in

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process rather than outcome, aligning with broader reflections on responsibility in the humanities as a situated, relational, and temporally extended practice (Blakey and Mitchell 2017: 3).

Much of the current literature on museum ethics draws attention to how documentation and interpretation shape the possibilities available to objects, influencing the narratives they support and the relationships they enable (Stylianou-Lambert *et al*. 2014: 567; Fromm 2016: 92; Russi 2024: 5). In practice, "generic attributions" often appear in museum records as broad labels such as "Pacific", "Oceania", or "Melanesia". In some cases, this reflects limits of available evidence, where the available documentation does not allow for a more precise localisation; in others, it results from inherited cataloguing conventions, in which large regional taxonomies have functioned as a substitute for specificity. I have repeatedly encountered objects whose material features or forms strongly suggested a more localised origin, yet whose records retained only a

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sweeping regional category. Such classifications do not merely simplify description; they shape how objects can be retrieved, compared, and contextualised within and across collections.

The problem is not uncertainty itself, but how institutions manage it. In museum catalogues, material labels frequently take on the status of established facts, regardless of how those identifications were produced. This gives classificatory language a disproportionate authority, shaping interpretation while masking its own conditions of possibility. Treating the distinction between confirmed knowledge, informed attribution, and lack of evidence as optional or immaterial obscures the power relations embedded in documentation practices. Making these distinctions explicit is therefore an ethical necessity, as it resists the stabilisation of interpretive categories that risk turning provisional readings into authoritative narratives.

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Attempts to render knowledge fully coherent or universally legible can reproduce forms of epistemic exclusion rather than resolve them, particularly when working with histories shaped by non-translation, value-incongruence, and uneven relations of power (Rycroft 2023: 27–29). From this perspective, uncertainty and partiality are not failures of scholarship, but conditions that must be acknowledged if historical and anthropological work is to remain attentive to positionality, relationality, and the uneven grounds on which knowledge is produced. Rendering uncertainty visible thus becomes an ethical commitment, foregrounding the limits and responsibilities of interpretation over the authority of definitive or closed claims.

Questions of responsibility become particularly visible at the level of material description. In my previous work on Kanak collections, materials that are historically and politically significant, such as European textiles incorporated into objects, often became difficult

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to discern once translated into catalogue entries, where they were omitted or absorbed into broad descriptors that neutralised their interpretive significance. Similar issues arise with other materials that appear in museum records with a degree of apparent precision. For example, stone components may be identified as jadeite, nephrite, or serpentine, or wooden elements attributed to specific tree species, without any traceable indication of how these determinations were reached. Such identifications may be inherited from earlier records, collector notes, local knowledge shared at the point of acquisition, or later curatorial inference, yet the conditions under which they were produced frequently remain undocumented.

Processes of simplification can also carry explicit political implications. In other institutional contexts, I have encountered objects originating from West Papua catalogued solely under national or administrative labels such as "Indonesia" or "Irian Jaya", a dynamic that echoes more recent debate surrounding the naming of Kanaky/New Caledonia. While these terms may appear

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neutral within a database, they obscure contested histories and ongoing struggles over sovereignty, and they stabilise a geopolitical framework that is neither uncontested nor historically fixed, without implying intentional misrepresentation. In such cases, cataloguing practices do not simply organise information; they participate in shaping how objects are read and which historical and political narratives are foregrounded or silenced.

This framework also reframes the role museums play in supporting researchers. During my preliminary discussions with Dr Das and the Ipswich Museum staff, I encountered a strong institutional commitment to making collections researchable: preparing access, offering guidance, sharing internal records, and identifying areas where new research is needed. The museum's ongoing work to create resources and tools for researchers, including clearer cataloguing structures and transparent documentation, demonstrates how responsibility is not limited to public-facing interpretation but extends to the

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conditions that make academic work possible. For me, this support is not a secondary detail but part of the broader system of ASR, where responsibilities are distributed between researchers and institutions.

Methodologically, my work combines close visual and material analysis with provenance review and the slow, ongoing process of revisiting databases and drafting short interpretative texts in conversation with the curatorial team. Through this approach, I trace how responsibilities move between objects, researchers and institutions, and how even seemingly minor decisions become part of the ethical labour of working with collections.

Inside Ipswich Museum: Curatorial Practice, Support, and Institutional Ethics:

Ipswich Museum offers a particularly revealing context in which to reflect on ASR in practice. Established in the mid nineteenth century as a civic institution intended to

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inspire and educate the people of Ipswich, the museum was shaped by the collecting rationale of the Victorian period, when specimens and artefacts were gathered from across the world in an effort to build a comprehensive vision of nature and diverse cultures. This history remains visible today, both in the breadth of the natural science collections and in the global scope of the anthropological materials. The institution has changed considerably since those early decades. Archival accounts describe a museum that was historically under-resourced and constrained by limited space yet already engaged in critical self-reflection about its displays and interpretative choices (Jones 1979).

More recent documentation presents a museum undergoing significant redevelopment and renewal. Alongside the architectural restoration of the historic building, the institution is redefining its identity around accessibility, research, and public engagement (Ipswich Museum 2023a). The official website describes an institution modernising its galleries while preserving its

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Victorian heritage, expanding exhibition rooms, creating new research and conservation spaces, and improving visitor facilities such as learning areas and public amenities (Ipswich Museum 2023b). These changes form part of a broader effort to open previously unseen areas of the museum and create conditions for displaying a larger portion of the collections than ever before. This redevelopment reflects a vision that positions Ipswich Museum as a civic institution rooted in local histories but connected to global narratives, where research, participation, and cultural accessibility coexist as central priorities (Ipswich Museum 2023a; 2023b).

My collaboration with Ipswich Museum began within this landscape of transition, and from the outset the institution's commitment to supporting research was made tangible rather than conceptual. During my early conversations with Dr Das, the responsibilities the museum assumes internally became immediately visible. She and her colleagues not only prepared access to the storerooms, arranged object viewings and retrieved items

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from the collections, but also carved out time in their work schedules to guide me through storage materials, historic files, and areas of the catalogue that required further attention. These actions, small in appearance yet substantial in practice, shaped the conditions that made this project possible.

This article is based on object-centred research conducted during repeated visits to Ipswich Museum, which began in November 2025 and will continue throughout 2026, alongside a semi-structured interview carried out in November 2025 as part of the preliminary phase of the collaboration. The interview was structured around open-ended questions intended to reflect on curatorial practice, institutional responsibilities, and the ethical dimensions of working with ethnographic collections.

In the interview, Dr Das described enabling research as a curatorial responsibility in its own right: opening the storage facilities, sharing the museum's

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documentation, explaining gaps, and being transparent about what is known and what remains uncertain. She framed this work as part of a wider institutional effort,which included plans to create what she called a "research toolbox" for scholars, building upon an idea first conceived and put into practice by her former colleague, Glynn Davis, previously Senior Curator for Collections and Learning at Colchester Museums.

The toolbox is conceived not only as a set of intellectual resources but also as a practical support system for those working with the collections. It will consist of guidance notes with pertinent contacts, contextual histories, cataloguing protocols, and clearer workflow structures designed to help researchers navigate records and understand the museum's internal documentation. Alongside these elements, there will be a small physical kit to accompany researchers in the analysis. This will include protective gloves, a measuring tape, relevant templates or labels, building layouts, and other basic tools for careful handling and

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close looking, the kinds of tools that make object-based work possible in practice. For her, bringing together these conceptual and material components is part of the same responsibility: enabling research not through abstract principles but through tangible forms of care that shape how scholars encounter and understand the collection.

Integrating this interview into the methodology is essential, because it offers a view of responsibility as it is practised inside the museum rather than declared in formal documents. In our conversation, Dr Das was careful to describe the museum's decolonising work not as a programme with fixed steps, but as an ongoing process shaped by limits, uncertainties, and the need for transparency. She emphasised that the museum does not position itself as speaking on behalf of others but rather understands its ethical responsibility as making visible what is known, what remains unclear, and what cannot yet be reconstructed from the available evidence. For her, responsibility begins with honesty: a willingness to

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recognise the structural gaps inherited from earlier collecting practices and to resist the temptation to present definitive narratives where the evidence is partial.

What emerged most strongly was her attention to the ethics of interpretation. She reflected on how many objects have long been framed through colonial taxonomies and simplified cultural categories, and on the need to exercise greater care and to devote more time to revisiting existing descriptions rather than reproducing them automatically. In her view, decolonisation is not an outcome but a form of attentiveness that requires questioning assumptions, creating space for the knowledge researchers can bring, and preparing the ground for conversations with communities of origin when circumstances allow. She described this work as "care that happens behind the scenes", the kind of labour that is rarely evident in exhibitions but fundamentally shapes how the museum understands its own holdings.

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A crucial part of this care, she added, is transparency about the interpretive process itself. She emphasised the importance of making visible who has researched what, when, andwith what kinds of constraints, so that future researchers and communities can trace how knowledge about an object has been produced. For Ipswich Museum, acknowledging the hands and voices that shape catalogues is not an administrative detail but an ethical practice: a way of recognising that interpretation is cumulative, situated, and always open to revision. In this sense, the position she articulated resonates strongly with the principles of ASR: responsibility appears here not as a single corrective act, but as a shared practice grounded in openness and the acknowledgement of limits. What I encountered in this interview was not a museum asserting authority over the past, but one committed to recognising its gaps, making transparent the processes through which knowledge is produced, and rethinking

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inherited frames so that alternative readings and future dialogues can emerge.

My work with the collections from Oceania began with the objects from Kanaky and Fiji, both because of my previous research and because these materials capture not only the cataloguing challenges present across these holdings but also because they indicate the range of object types that will play a significant role in the museum's future permanent displays. The museum's records for these objects are often sparse, uneven, or tied to broad geographical labels such as "Oceania" or "Melanesia", categories that flatten cultural specificity and obscure the distinct histories of each object. As I moved between rooms, accession registers, and digital catalogues, I encountered objects whose provenance was recorded in only a few words, or whose descriptions relied on terminology inherited from colonial taxonomies. This is not unusual in anthropological collections, but encountering these gaps first-hand made their implications especially visible.

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The objects themselves carry complex itineraries. The Kanak axe bound with European cloth (IPSMG:R.1936.118.6) is a telling example: absent from the database category of New Caledonia and recorded only in its earliest accession entry, it combines European cloth with other, less documented materials whose functions and histories have not yet been studied. These elements point to additional layers of use, modification, or repair that would merit future technical and contextual investigation. Similarly, several clubs from Fiji are described generically, their local terminologies omitted or absorbed into broader typologies. These gaps do not diminish the value of the objects, but they shape the possibilities available for research, interpretation, and future collaboration with communities of origin.

Working with these materials requires a form of responsibility that is both technical and ethical. On the one hand, there is the practical work of reviewing the catalogue, revisiting terminology, identifying inconsistencies, and tracing what can be reconstructed

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from 'history files'. On the other hand, there is the responsibility of recognising where evidence is insufficient, where uncertainty must remain visible, and where new research can meaningfully contribute to the museum's understanding of its own holdings. The work is slow, but this slowness is part of the ethical commitment: an approach that prioritises accuracy, attentiveness, and care over the production of quick interpretative answers. In this sense, analytical responsibility lies not only in interpretation, but in the cumulative effects of small documentary decisions, which shape how objects will be encountered and understood over time. Such forms of responsibility unfold over time and through repeated encounters with objects and records, where meaning is not revealed all at once but emerges through sustained, embodied engagement with materials and their histories (Blakey and Mitchell 2017: 7-8).

In an ideal scenario, transparency about the motivations, limits, and positionality of contemporary

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record-keepers would be incorporated into museum records themselves. Making visible how and why information has been produced helps ensure that ambiguities inherited from past record-keeping practices are not inadvertently reproduced, but remain open to future questioning and reworking, as discussed further below.

Understanding Responsibility as a Shared, Ongoing Practice:

Working with ethnographic collections makes ASR unavoidably concrete. The kind of objects I examined at Ipswich Museum rarely come with stable narratives; instead, they sit within layered histories shaped by incomplete documentation, uneven provenance, and interpretive choices inherited from earlier curatorial systems. In this context, responsibility takes shape as a principled practice: one that is enhanced through the

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handling of objects, reading catalogues, and acknowledging what cannot as yet be known.

The interview with Dr Das made this especially visible. What became clear is that responsibility in this context is not only about how objects are interpreted, but also about how research itself is structured. She outlined three forms of responsibility that the museum must assumewhen working with external researchers: establishing shared expectations and aligning research aims with institutional priorities; providing access not only to objects but to the broader documentary ecosystem that gives them meaning, including history files, card catalogues, and accession registers; and finally, situating each object within its wider collecting networks, recognising that no part of the collection exists in isolation.

These points rarely appear in published guidelines, yet they significantly shape how knowledge is produced and circulated. In describing these

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responsibilities, she also drew attention to the unevenness of the museum's archival records, shaped by generations of curators, donors, and collecting practices. For her, transparency is not simply about publishing provenance data but about making visible the processes, limits, and decisions through which interpretation takes shape.

A particularly compelling element of our discussion concerned authorship. She stressed that interpretation is never neutral, and that museums have a responsibility to document the standpoints, contexts, and constraints within and throughwhich knowledge about an object is produced. Tracing these interpretive lineages, she suggested, is what enables future researchers and communities to understand how certain narratives came to dominate while others remained unspoken.

At the same time, she highlighted the practical constraints that complicate this work. Every research visit requires staff supervision, specialist knowledge, and

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time, resources that are increasingly stretched. Rather than framing this as a limitation, she sees it as part of the museum's wider decolonising work: recognising structural constraints, negotiating them openly, and still striving to create an environment where research can contribute to more balanced and accountable interpretations. This connection between practical realities and ethical commitments is where her account overlaps most strongly with the principles of ASR, which identify responsibility not as a single gesture but as a shared, ongoing negotiation between institutions, researchers, communities and the collections themselves.

This perspective reframes ASR as a shared field of commitment. Hearing Dr Das articulate the museum's position made me more attentive to the ways in which my own work participates in this circulation of responsibilities. For me, it means recognising that the work I do on terminology, provenance, and object histories is not separate from the museum's responsibilities but intertwined with theirs. For the

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museum, it means supporting researchers not only through access but through honesty about limitations and through practices that keep interpretation open to revision and dialogue, rather than hardened into fixed narratives. Seen from this angle, responsibility towards communities of origin, as well as diaspora and descendant communities, does not begin only at the moment when collaboration becomes possible, but much earlier, in the preparatory work that must precede any engagement. Facilitating access to resources, ensuring their availability, and creating structurally conducive conditions is necessarily a part of this task.

Future Work, Limits, and Continuing Care:

While the previous sections have examined how responsibility operates within present curatorial and research practices, this final section shifts attention to the temporal conditions that precede and shape future forms of collaboration. The early stages of my collaboration

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with Ipswich Museum have shown how ASR becomes visible not through broad institutional statements but through the careful practices that shape everyday research. Working with collections from Oceania is highlighting how much responsibility lies in the smallest decisions over time: revisiting terminology, acknowledging uncertainty, tracing provenance through fragmentary records, and recognising the limits built into earlier curatorial systems. These tasks may appear technical, yet they structure how objects will be understood in the future and what forms of dialogue may eventually become possible with communities of origin.

The conversations with Dr Das emphasised that museums hold their own responsibilities in this process: to make their records accessible, to be transparent about gaps, to support researchers with context and guidance, and to articulate clearly the conditions under which knowledge has been produced. These gestures, modest in appearance, contribute to the creation of a research

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environment attentive to the cumulative and situated nature of interpretation.

At the same time, this project remains at an early stage. The possibilities for future research, reinterpretation, and eventual community engagement depend not only on academic commitment but also on institutional resources, staffing, and time. Acknowledging these limits is part of the ethical landscape in which ASR operates. In the absence of direct dialogue with communities of origin, objects are often interpreted through documentary frameworks inherited from earlier collecting contexts, in which classificatory priorities and descriptive conventions reflect historical power relations rather than contemporary cultural meanings. This can restrict the kinds of meanings objects are able to carry, reducing culturally specific materials, practices, and relationships to generalised descriptors that fail to reflect their social and cultural significance.

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For this reason, responsible work cannot consist in postponement or inaction, but in sustained efforts to refine, verify, and expand existing knowledge. This includes cross-checking records, consulting specialists across disciplines, and questioning inherited classifications, so that objects are not prematurely exposed to the public through simplified or misleading narratives. Premature claims to decolonisation or engagement, when not grounded in careful documentary work, risk reproducing new distortions rather than unsettling inherited ones. Fragile or opaque documentation can silently constrain even well-intentioned collaborative projects, narrow the terms of dialogue and shifting the burden of interpretation onto researchers or communities rather than recognising these limitations as institutional and historical. From this perspective, care does not lie in producing closure or definitive answers, but in resisting premature simplification and keeping interpretative questions open over time. Treating uncertainty as something to be held

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responsibly, rather than resolved too quickly, preserves the possibility for future reinterpretation and for forms of engagement that are not shaped by distorted or incomplete foundations.

Seen in this way, ASR does not coincide with moments of public engagement or collaboration alone, but with the often-invisible work of preparing ethical, documentary, and institutional ground on which future encounters with collections and communities may eventually take place on less distorted terms. What this collaboration has revealed is that responsible work with anthropological collections begins long before definitive outcomes can be reached and consists in creating conditions for thinking together rather than delivering resolved solutions.

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The Precarity of Praxis and Intersectional Solidarities: A Visual Lens into Critical University Studies

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The Neoliberal University and the Crisis of Critical Praxis:

The contemporary university exists in a state of contradiction. Institutionally dedicated to producing and sharing critical knowledge, it also functions as a more corporatised entity driven by market logics, audit cultures, and what Shore and Wright (2015) term

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"technologies of governance" that prioritise accountability metrics over intellectual depth. This is especially apparent in the United States via its tenure system; in the United Kingdom through its Research Excellence Framework (REF) and in India via the Academic performance indicator (API) to just name a few. This contradiction becomes more pronounced with the idea of Academic Social Responsibility (ASR), which suggests that universities will actively support social justice, democratic engagement, and progressive social change beyond their campuses.

Within Critical University Studies (CUS), scholars have documented how neoliberalisation reshapes higher education through privatisation, precarious labour conditions, managerial governance models, and the subjugation of pedagogical and research practices to economic imperatives (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Giroux, 2014; Molesworth et al., 2011). Collini (2012) argues that the marketisation of British universities has fundamentally altered their social

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mission, turning students into consumers and knowledge into a commodity primarily valued by economic returns. Similarly, scholars examining the Indian context have identified how commercialisation, caste hierarchies, and centralised control mechanisms limit critical pedagogy and democratic campus cultures (Pathania, 2018; Sundar, 2018).

The concept of praxis, understood in its Gramscian formulation as the dialectical unity of theory and practice aimed at emancipatory social change (Gramsci, 1971), becomes particularly fragile within this institutional context. Faculty and students who seek to translate critical theoretical commitments into tangible political action on campus or in surrounding communities face systematic disincentives such as casualised employment that discourages activism, institutional disciplinary procedures, withdrawal of resources, and exclusion from governance structures. As Chatterton et al. (2010) observe, the university has become a site where radical thinking is both encouraged

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and policed. We have seen this most pronounced in recent years, where academic freedom has been ironically used in the United States and the United Kingdom to backtrack on trans rights and legitimise transphobia (Webster, 2024) whilst heavily policing student activists who have spoken out against the ongoing genocide in Palestine, often violently through expulsion and even deportation (Alqaisiya and Perugini, 2025).

This paper intervenes in these debates by examining how spatial practices, specifically unauthorised visual interventions on campus infrastructure, constitute forms of precarious praxis that both expose and resist the neoliberal university's domestication of critique. I focus particularly on how gender-nonconforming students in an Indian university context utilise the campus as sites for articulating refusals of administrative binary gender categories, thereby creating what Fraser (1990) terms "subaltern counter-publics" that challenge institutional

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heteronormativity. At the core of this consideration is also what Madhok (2024) calls an urgent intervention into the lack of conceptual diversity in the humanities and social sciences towards an anti-imperial orientation.

Critical University Studies and Spatial Politics:

The university campus operates as a contested terrain where institutional authority and grassroots resistance engage in ongoing struggles for spatial and symbolic dominance. Scholars working within CUS have increasingly recognised that the physical infrastructure of the academy, including its architecture, landscaping, visual culture, and circulation patterns, actively produces and reinforces hierarchies of power (Lefebvre, 1991; Gulson and Symes, 2007; Temple, 2014). University space is never neutral but rather constitutes what Foucault (1977) conceptualises as a disciplinary apparatus designed to produce particular kinds of

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subjects who are compliant, governable, and aligned with institutional norms.

The campus functions as a privileged site where this contestation becomes materially visible. They simultaneously serve as spaces of institutional control through official signage, branded materials, and architectural design, and as canvases for unauthorised expression that challenge the university's carefully curated self-presentation. The concept of the palimpsest, a manuscript page from which text has been scraped or washed off to make room for new text, yet traces of the old remain, offers a productive metaphor for understanding campus spaces as archives of struggle. Each removal of these visual artefacts or institutionalisation involves the continuous negotiation between administrative discipline and student or faculty resistance.

This layering fundamentally articulates what de Certeau (1984) terms tactics of everyday resistance,

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wherein marginalised subjects strategically appropriate spaces owned and controlled by institutional power. While institutions deploy "strategies" calculated actions enabled by spatial ownership and panoptic surveillance, subordinated groups employ "tactics", opportunistic interventions that exploit temporal gaps in surveillance and control. The university campus thus becomes a crucial medium through which those excluded from official university channels can claim visibility, articulate dissent, and forge solidarities across lines of difference (also see Dasgupta, 2016).

Gendered Space and the Neoliberal University:

From a feminist geographical perspective, this spatial politics takes on particular significance. Feminist scholars have extensively demonstrated that institutional space is inherently gendered, historically designed to privilege cisgender masculine subjects and exclude or marginalise women, non-binary individuals, and gender-

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nonconforming people (McDowell, 1999; Spain, 1992; Peake, 2016). The neoliberal university, despite its increasingly prominent public commitments to diversity and inclusion, commitments that often constitute commodified forms of ASR deployed for reputational management (Ahmed, 2012), typically perpetuates cisgender heteronormative assumptions through its built environment, administrative systems, and tacit cultural norms.

Ahmed's (2012) concept of non-performativity proves particularly useful here. She argues that universities make extensive institutional commitments to diversity through policy documents, mission statements, and administrative positions, yet these commitments function primarily as speech acts that document good intentions rather than as performative utterances that transform institutional reality. Diversity discourse becomes a way of not doing diversity work, allowing institutions to appear progressive while actual structural inequalities remain intact or intensify.

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In the Indian context specifically, this gendered spatial politics intersects with caste hierarchies, class stratification, religious divisions, and linguistic hegemonies (Chakravarti, 2003; Rege, 2006). Dalit feminist scholars have demonstrated how upper-caste educational institutions systematically exclude or marginalise Dalit women through spatial segregation, cultural violence, and the normalisation of Brahminical patriarchal norms (Paik, 2014). Gender-nonconforming students from Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, or working-class backgrounds thus face compounded vulnerabilities that privileged institutional diversity initiatives routinely fail to address, instead focusing on liberal inclusion models that leave structural oppression fundamentally unchanged (Banerjea, Boyce and Dasgupta, 2022; Kumar, 2023; Mohanty, 2005).

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Visual Culture, Counter-Publics, and Performative Resistance:

Visual interventions constitute what Butler (1990, 2004) recognises as performative acts that do not merely represent pre-existing identities but actively produce new political subjectivities through the very practice of unauthorised inscription. When gender-nonconforming students inscribe critiques of binary gender categorisation onto university infrastructure, they engage in what Butler terms "gender trouble" the strategic deployment of parody, excess, and refusal to denaturalise normative gender categories and expose their constructed, contingent character.

These visual practices suggest the idea of a subaltern counter-public, a parallel space for discussion where marginalised groups create and share their own perspectives. In these areas, subordinated communities express different views on their identities, interests, and

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material needs, often opposing the mainstream narratives. Unlike mainstream publics that claim to be universal while ignoring or pushing aside dissenting voices, counter-publics acknowledge their specific and incomplete nature. They provide their own networks for communication, affirmation, and political action. This allows those left out of dominant circles to envision and pursue new ways of belonging and resisting. Warner (2002) extends this analysis by distinguishing between publics constituted through official, institutionally recognised forms of address and counter-publics formed through refusal, negativity, and oppositional consciousness. Counter-publics do not merely seek inclusion within existing structures but fundamentally challenge the terms through which inclusion is offered, often through cultural practices that dominant institutions deem illegitimate or unintelligible. Campus graffiti that refuses administrative gender categories exemplifies this counter-public formation, creating

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visibility and community for those rendered administratively impossible by bureaucratic systems.

A Visual Lens into Precarious Praxis:

This study employs visual ethnographic methods to analyse student interventions on campus infrastructure. My methodological approach recognises the epistemological complexity of studying resistance practices that deliberately refuse authorial attribution. Following Sholette (2010), I understand anonymity not as an obstacle to analysis but as itself a meaningful political strategy that prioritises collective action over individual recognition and protects vulnerable actors from institutional reprisal. I therefore do not attempt to identify specific creators of visual interventions but rather analyse these materials as collective articulations emerging from marginalised academic communities.

The 'Visual Lens' methodology I employ draws on Rose's (2016) critical visual methodology, which

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emphasises three sites of meaning-making: the site of production the site of the image itself, and the site of audiences. I utilise spatial analysis informed by Lefebvre's (1991) conceptual triad of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces to understand how visual interventions challenge institutional spatial regimes. I also adopt a discourse-analytical approach following Foucault (1972) to situate these local interventions within broader systems of power/knowledge that constitute gender and institutional authority. I am particularly attentive to what Halberstam (2011) terms "low theory" forms of knowledge produced outside or against academic conventions, refusing the clarity and systematicity demanded by institutional discourse. The visual interventions I analyse constitute low theory in this sense: they are deliberately crude, ephemeral, unauthorised, and excessive, yet they articulate sophisticated critiques of institutional violence.

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Case Study: The Administrative Violence of Binary Gender:

[Image 1 - In black spray paint across a metal shutter, three checkbox options are vertically arranged: 'Male', 'Female', and 'Fuck you'. A checkmark is in the box next to 'Fuck you'. The style is intentionally crude and striking, created quickly with black spray paint on a light background.]

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The qualities of this visual intervention warrant close semiotic analysis. The choice of black spray paint on a light-coloured surface maximises legibility; this message is intended to be read by everyone in the campus space. The handwriting style is neither purely utilitarian nor elaborately artistic; it occupies a middle ground that suggests both urgency and intentionality. This is not spontaneous vandalism but a deliberate form of political communication. The textual content employs strategic wordplay that disrupts normative gender categorisation through what Derrida (1976) would recognise as différance, the simultaneous deferral and differentiation of meaning. By reproducing the bureaucratic form of checkbox gender selection (a visual citation of administrative documents used in university admission and employment processes) and then offering "Fuck you" as a selectable category, the intervention performs several simultaneous critical operations.

It makes visible the violence inherent in mandatory binary gender classification. What appears as

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a neutral administrative procedure, a simple checkbox on a form, is revealed as a coercive demand that individuals sort themselves into one of two exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories. Those whose genders exceed, refuse, or complicate this binary are rendered administratively impossible; they literally cannot proceed through university systems without falsifying their existence. The third option thus articulates justified rage at this erasure while also creating space, however temporary and precarious, for those who cannot or will not comply with binary gender demands.

This visual intervention also enacts what Butler (1990, 2004) theorises as gender performativity, the understanding that gender categories are not natural facts that precede social recognition but are instead produced through repeated citation of regulatory norms. The checkbox format itself exemplifies this citational structure. Every time an individual checks 'Male' or 'Female', they participate in reproducing the naturalness of binary gender. By introducing a third option that

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rejects the terms of classification entirely, the intervention demonstrates that this system is neither necessary nor exhaustive but rather a contingent arrangement of social power. The visual rhetoric guides interpretation through spatial arrangement. The vertical columnar structure prompts the eye to read from top to bottom, moving through the normative options before arriving at the critical third category. This progression enacts the critique it describes, beginning with apparently neutral categories, exposing their bureaucratic violence, and finally arriving at an epistemological and political refusal. The checkmarksymbol of completion, correctness, and administrative legibilityis strategically deployed to mark illegibility itself, turning the grammar of compliance into a vocabulary of resistance.

The choice of material substrate merits careful attention. A corrugated metal shutter is an inherently temporary surface: it will be opened, closed, potentially repainted or replaced. This impermanence mirrors the precarity of gender-nonconforming existence within

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institutional space. Just as this graffiti might be erased by campus maintenance (itself a form of institutional censorship), students and faculty who challenge gender norms face potential expulsion, denial of promotion, harassment, or administrative marginalisation. The material conditions of the intervention's production thus metaphorically express the vulnerability of its creators and the communities they represent.

Significantly, there is no signature, no claim of authorship, no QR code linking to an activist organisation's website. This anonymity serves multiple functions beyond protecting creators from disciplinary action. It refuses the neoliberal imperative toward personal branding and CV-building that characterises contemporary academic life, where even resistance must be documented as "impact" to be valued. It suggests collective rather than individual authorship, implying that this intervention emerges from shared experiences and political commitments rather than individual genius. And it prioritises the message over recognition, enacting

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a politics of solidarity that contrasts sharply with the university's obsession with measuring and crediting individual achievement.

Institutional Response:

[Image 2 – Several individuals, likely university maintenance staff, are shown painting over the visual intervention described in Image 1. Blue paint is being applied to the shutter, obscuring the previous

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intervention. The photograph captures this erasure in progress, documenting the institutional response to unauthorised spatial appropriation.]

The institutional response to student visual interventions adds another layer to the campus palimpsest. Choosing to paint over them rather than addressing the student grievance reveals specific institutional anxieties and control strategies. Erasure reflects what Scott (1990) calls the "public transcript", the official, visible display of institutional authority. Through erasure, the university demonstrates its control over physical space and reaffirms the boundary between authorised and unauthorised communication. This act recognises its importance. If these interventions were truly insignificant or invisible to institutional power, they would not require any response. Erasure thus paradoxically affirms the political power of unauthorised visual culture even as it seeks to eliminate it.

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From a labour perspective, the maintenance workers tasked with removing graffiti occupy a precarious position within the university's class structure. Often employed through outsourced contracts rather than as direct university staff, these workers receive minimal wages, limited benefits, and little institutional recognition (Bousquet, 2017). They are deployed to enforce institutional spatial control yet have limited stake in or control over institutional decision-making. This setup exemplifies the broader contradictions of neoliberal university governance, where casualised labour is used to protect the institution's public image while remaining excluded from its supposed democratic community.

Intersectional Solidarities and the Limits of Institutional Inclusion:

The visual artefacts analysed here do not exist in isolation but participate in broader ecosystems of

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campus resistance and counter-public formation. This convergence reflects what Crenshaw (1989, 1991) theorises as intersectionality, the understanding that systems of oppression are co-constituted and mutually reinforcing rather than additive or parallel. Gender-nonconforming students in India face compounded vulnerabilities that cannot be adequately addressed by single-axis frameworks focusing solely on gender, caste, or class (also see Dasgupta 2025). The spatial politics of campus spaces thus becomes a site where these intersecting struggles can be articulated together, creating what Collins (2000) terms a 'matrix of domination' that refuses compartmentalisation.

The idea of solidarity is vital yet deeply intricate in this context. Mohanty (2005) warns against false universalisms that claim sisterhood or shared struggle while prioritising privileged experiences and marginalising those most vulnerable to multiple, intersecting oppressions. Genuine solidarity demands what she refers to as "feminist solidarity across borders",

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a practice of coalition-building that recognises difference, challenges privilege, and centres the knowledge and leadership of those most marginalised by existing power structures. Therefore, visual interventions can act as spaces for fostering intersectional solidarity when they resist the university's tendency to compartmentalise and domesticate critique.

Conclusions:

This analysis demonstrates that authentic ASR is understood as translating critical theory into transformative political practice. This exists in deep tension with the operational logics of the neoliberal university. While institutions increasingly use the language of social justice, diversity, and community engagement for reputation and competitive edge, they simultaneously discipline, marginalise, or eliminate those who pursue praxis that genuinely challenges existing power relations.

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The visual interventions discussed here exemplify what I call 'precarious praxis' as forms of critical engagement that function outside or against institutional approval, performed by actors with minimal institutional security, creating critiques that are vulnerable to immediate erasure but capable of spreading beyond institutional control. This precarity is not accidental but structural; it arises directly from the contradiction between the university's declared commitments to critical thinking and its material investment in maintaining hierarchies of class, caste, gender, and other axes of oppression.

Yet precarity also creates opportunity. The very conditions that make radical praxis risky, such as casualised labour, increased surveillance, and restricted speech, also foster shared experiences of institutional violence that can serve as a foundation for building coalitions across different forms of marginalisation. The university campus, as a space of unauthorised inscription and palimpsestic struggle, materialises this potential for

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coalition. It offers a place where gender-nonconforming students, caste-oppressed students, contract workers, and faculty resisting managerialism can make their struggles visible and establish connections that institutional structures often seek to hinder.

For scholars committed to CUS, this analysis highlights several essential actions. Firstly, we must oppose the university's co-optation of critical discourse by upholding commitments to praxis that go beyond institutional acknowledgement or reward. Secondly, we need to develop methodologies capable of recognising and valuing diverse forms of knowledge production, such as anonymous graffiti and spatial appropriations that institutional frameworks might dismiss as non-academic. Lastly, we must foster solidarities that link struggles within universities to broader movements for social transformation, rejecting the false division between academic and activist work.

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The neoliberal university prefers critique to stay within classrooms, conference papers, and peer-reviewed journals; spaces where dissent can be monitored, credentialed, and declared politically inert. The visual interventions analysed here reject this containment. They insist that critique must emerge in the world, occupy space, and disrupt the smooth operation of institutional life. This is praxis in its most fundamental form; the refusal to accept the status quo, paired with the imaginative construction of alternatives, however temporary or fragile they may be.

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Curriculum as a Site of Social Responsibility: The Politics of Canon-Making in Indian Universities

TIAS BASU[1]

The university curriculum of literary departments is not a static archive but a dynamic terrain which not only reflects pedagogic aspirations but also works as a site of societal negotiations. In India, this terrain is particularly complex, as the disciplines of literatures were first institutionalized with colonial motivations, resulting in the imposition of an anglocentric canon. This paper

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argues that the evolution of the literary syllabus in post-independence Indian universities represents a sustained exercise of Academic Social Responsibility (ASR). It looks at the conscious and often contentious process of curricular reform as a primary mechanism through which literary academia has sought to address historical inequities and fulfill its ethical commitment to a more just and representative society.Tracing curricular shifts from the 1950s to the present, the paper examines the post-independence nationalistic project of incorporating Indian writers, the subsequent push to include regional Bhasha literatures, and the critical interventions made by feminist and Dalit movements. Through a focused case study on the inclusion of marginalised and Dalit literature, it analyzes how the journey of these texts from the margins to the mainstream syllabus constitutes a direct response to calls for social justice, fundamentally challenging the aesthetic and political foundations of the traditional canon.The paper will look at the cases of Visva Bharati and Jadavpur University, two of the

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primary sites of higher education that consciously moved away from the British system of education to understand their interventions in canon formation. The paper will specifically investigate how the new curricula of the literature departments of these universities helped in the formation of newer discourses in literary studies that envisaged social equity in their own terms.

> We must find some meeting-ground, where there can be no question of conflicting interests. One of such places is the University, where we can work together in a common pursuit of truth, share together our common heritage, and realise that artists in all parts of the world have created forms of beauty, scientists discovered secrets of the universe, philosophers solved the problems of existence, saints made the truth of the spiritual world organic in their own lives, not merely for some particular race to which they belonged but for all mankind. (Tagore 171)

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Institutionalised education has always had definite purposes, functions, and power to influence. Education, when designed to be imparted, almost inevitably goes beyond the primary object of mere knowledge acquisition. Responsibility, in the context of curriculum, is not an extraneous element but is built into the very procedures by which texts are selected, valued, and transmitted within institutions. The paper begins from the premise that the literary syllabus is a historically produced structure of obligation—to whom and to what does a department of literature understand itself as answerable when it decides what counts as "literature" worth teaching in a given time and place? In colonial India, much like the universities built on the Oxford model, Calcutta University's departments of English and, later, Bengali, operated within an apparatus designed to produce a colonially useful elite through the study of a narrowly defined, Anglocentric canon. In contrast, Visva-Bharati and the National Council of Education in Bengal, which later transformed into

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Jadavpur University, emerged as conscious experiments in reconfiguring that structure of obligation, attempting to realign their concerns, and in turn, literary study with other constituencies, like regional language communities, anti-colonial nationalism, and eventually movements arising from historical forms of oppression. Reading these shifts through an idea of "responsibility" foregrounds curriculum not as a passive reflection of social change but as one of the means by which institutions attempt to or inadvertently intervene in the social order.

The Responsible Canon: Curriculum, Social Justice, and the Politics of Literary Studies in India

Within debates on University Social Responsibility (USR), responsibility is increasingly conceptualised not only as outreach activity but as something that inheres in core practices such as curriculum design and assessment. This perspective is useful for thinking about the study of

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humanities in Bengal because it legitimises treating the syllabus itself as a site where universities negotiate their obligations to different publics. The discourse of USR stresses that universities are answerable, not only to the state or to an abstract ideal of knowledge, but also to historically marginalised groups whose experiences have long been excluded from formal education. When one tracks the movement from a canon centred on Shakespeare, Milton, and the English Romantics in colonial Calcutta to syllabi that gradually make room for Tagore, for vernacular literatures under the rubric of "Indian Literature," and eventually for Dalit and feminist writing, one is witnessing a series of decisions about which publics the institution chooses to recognise and to serve.

Max Weber's reflections on the vocation of the scholar offer one way of sharpening this sense of answerability. Weber distinguishes between an "ethic of conviction" and an "ethic of responsibility," warning that

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intellectual work cannot absolve itself from the consequences it helps to produce, even when it claims value-neutrality. (Weber 101) Applied to curriculum, this distinction surfaces in the tension between appealing to disinterested aesthetic criteria and acknowledging that every selection, every construction of a canon, has consequences for who is formed as a subject, who is made visible, and who is rendered peripheral. The early Calcutta University curriculum in English can be seen as operating with an ethic of conviction that took for granted the universal value of the English canon, while sidestepping the responsibility for how such a canon would function in a stratified, colonised society. Nationalist projects at Visva-Bharati and the National Council of Education, Bengal, in contrast, attempted to act under an ethic of responsibility: they recognised that continuing to centre only English texts would help reproduce the very hierarchies they opposed and therefore sought to alter the canon in light of desired social consequences.

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Responsibility here is not just a matter of good intentions; it is mediated by the institutional logics of cultural capital. Pierre Bourdieu's analyses of education and culture demonstrate how curricula and canons operate as mechanisms of social reproduction, naturalising the tastes and dispositions of dominant classes as if they were universal standards. (Bordieu 250) In colonial Bengal, proficiency in English literary culture functioned as a powerful form of cultural capital for the bhadralok, conferring access to bureaucratic employment, social prestige, and a sense of distinction vis-à-vis both the colonial rulers and the wider colonised population. When Calcutta University consecrated the English canon as the basis of literary education, it was also helping to stabilise this distribution of capital, making mastery of certain texts a condition for participation in the public sphere. To speak of responsibility in this context is to ask whether institutions merely participated in the reproduction of an unequal social order, or whether they attempted to

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redistribute cultural capital by reconfiguring what counted as legitimate knowledge.

The alternative institutions in Bengal can then be read as sites where responsibility is negotiated through struggles over cultural capital. Visva-Bharati, founded by Tagore, sought to de-centre the metropolitan canon by integrating Bengali literature, folk traditions, and comparative civilisational study into a curriculum that refused the colonial separation of "high" and "low" knowledge. The National Council of Education similarly attempted to anchor higher education in Indian languages and nationalist aspirations, rather than in the needs of the colonial bureaucracy. These were not simply symbolic acts of cultural pride; they were attempts to redirect the flow of institutional recognition toward different linguistic and social communities. Instead of treating English literary culture as the sole currency of value, these experiments tried to convert other forms of cultural capital—Bengali literary

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traditions, anti-colonial thought, non-European aesthetics—into academically recognised resources. Responsibility, in this account, lies in the institutional willingness to change what it rewards and legitimises. (Chakraborty 520-36)

Linking Weber and Bourdieu allows for a more nuanced account of responsibility than either framework offers alone. Weber emphasises that responsibility requires an orientation to the foreseeable consequences of one's actions, which in the case of syllabus design include the shaping of students' imaginaries and the reinforcement or contestation of social structures. Bourdieu, on the other hand, reminds us that agents act within fields whose rules and distributions of capital constrain what is thinkable and practicable. For a professor in the English department at colonial Calcutta, the range of responsible action was limited by examination systems, colonial policy, and local class aspirations; to suddenly abandon the English canon

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might have seemed both professionally and socially unviable. For reformers at Visva-Bharati or NCE Bengal, responsibility involved not only an ethical stance but also a strategic sense of how to shift the field—how to build new curricula, recruit sympathetic faculty, and persuade students and patrons that other canons mattered. Responsibility becomes a relational practice: an effort to act differently from within a structure one cannot simply step outside.

Bringing these theoretical strands back to the post-independence period, the emergence of "Indian Literature" as a curricular category can be understood as another attempt to recalibrate responsibility in conditions that were no longer overtly colonial but remained deeply unequal. Within USR discussions, there is growing emphasis on the curriculum's role in promoting social cohesion in diverse societies and in addressing internal exclusions tied to caste, gender, and region. In the Indian institutional context, the move toward "Indian

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Literature" in literature departments, including English over the years, can be understood as a response to the responsibility of representing the nation's plurality. Yet, as critics have pointed out, this move often re-inscribed hierarchies by privileging certain languages, regions, and "classical" texts over others. A Weberian ethic of responsibility would require syllabus designers to reflect on these patterned exclusions, while a Bourdieusian lens would ask how far such reforms actually redistributed symbolic capital to previously marginalised literatures.

The later inclusion of Dalit and feminist writing intensifies these questions. When Dalit autobiographies or feminist re-readings of canonical figures enter the syllabus in literature departments, the institution assumes a responsibility both to those writers and to students from historically oppressed communities who may now find their experiences named within curricular space. At the same time, it risks incorporating radical literatures into the very structures of distinction they once

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contested, turning them into examinable objects that confer cultural capital on those who can interpret them correctly. Responsibility, then, cannot be equated with inclusion alone; it must be understood as an ongoing negotiation of how inclusion is done, for whom, and with what reflexivity about its unintended effects.

The paper proceeds on the assumption that these theoretical resources—Weber's ethic of responsibility, Bourdieu's analysis of cultural capital and reproduction, and the more recent USR discourse—allow one to tell a different kind of institutional history of literary studies in Bengal. Instead of narrating a linear progress from colonial to national to inclusive syllabi, the argument foregrounds the patterned ways in which different institutions construed their obligations: to empire, to nation, to language community, to subaltern groups, and to the abstract ideal of literature itself. In this reading, Calcutta University, Visva-Bharati, or NCE Bengal/Jadavpur are not simply stages in a teleology of

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decolonisation; they are competing answers to the question of what a responsible literary canon should do, and for whom. The following sections will trace these answers across time, showing how responsibility is inscribed in the everyday decisions about which texts students in English, Bengali, and other Indian language departments are asked to read, remember, and reproduce.

Changing Responsibilities: Colonial Necessities and Decolonial Motivations

The literary curriculum in colonial Bengal did not start from nothing. It built on earlier institutions that linked literature to colonial needs. Fort William College offers a key example. Lord Wellesley founded it in 1800 to train British civilians in Indian languages and customs. Indian scholars like Ram Ram Basu and Mrityunjay Vidyalankar created the first modern Bengali textbooks there. These included works like *Prabhoda Chandrika* in 1818 and adaptations of *Hitopadesha*. The college used

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these texts to teach Europeans and a growing educated elite class. This process canonized certain Indian works and framed Bengali literature as a tool for governance. In Weber's terms, responsibility lay in this choice of what to teach. The college shaped literary education to serve British goals, prioritizing utility over cultural value.

This approach grew stronger with Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute on Education in 1835. Macaulay rejected support for vernacular languages. He called for English education to create "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." (Macaulay 55) This idea shifted resources from Oriental institutions like the Calcutta Madrasa to English schools. It promoted the English literary canon as a source of moral progress. (Auckland 102) Texts by Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth became central. Responsibility became narrow and practical. The goal was to train loyal administrators, not independent thinkers. English skills

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also gave the elite access to jobs and status. This created a hierarchy where English stood above Indian languages.

Calcutta University made this system official when it received its charter in 1857. As an affiliating university, it set standards for hundreds of colleges. By 1956, it oversaw 274 institutions, including missionary colleges like St. Xavier's and government ones like Hooghly College. English honors courses focused on Homer, Shakespeare, and Scott. Exams tested memory of key passages that taught imperial values like duty and order. The Bengali department came later. Apart from classics, it included eminent figures like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Vidyasagar. But these served as supplements to English works. From Bourdieu's view, this setup reproduced social inequality. The canon gave cultural capital to a middle class. English mastery became the key to public life. Vernacular literature supported local identity but stayed secondary. The university's reach extended far, from Punjab to Ceylon

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until 1904, helping spread a uniform English-focused syllabus across the region. (Nayar)

Nationalist education in Bengal responded to this colonial model. It grew from political opposition more than planned social responsibility. The Swadeshi movement after the 1905 Bengal partition sparked demands for self-reliant learning. The National Council of Education (NCE), founded in 1906, complemented this effort. It created Bengal National College and rejected Calcutta University's exams. The curriculum emphasized Bengali, Sanskrit, and practical sciences. Although it did not completely discard western education or the study of English, its curriculum tried to maintain a balance between the Indian and western components. This especially reflected in the teaching of humanities, and most certainly in the teaching of literature. The ultimate goal was to propagate national education free from British control. This national education would not stand in exclusion from western

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education, but would dissociate itself from the colonial production of knowledge. This political choice redistributed cultural capital. It valued vernacular languages over English dominance. The NCE Bengal went through a number of transformations and finally received government affiliation as Jadavpur University in 1955.

Visva-Bharati showed its alternative approach in a humanistic way. Rabindranath Tagore started it in 1921 at Santiniketan. It grew from his 1901 Brahmacharyashram school. Tagore criticized Calcutta's exam-focused system as "cramming mills." English stayed but paired with Upanishads and Tagore's global ideas. Tagore's vision of an institute that could highlight the treasures of the East and Asia to the world found meaning in Visva-Bharati. Visva-Bharati also linked literature to rural work through Sriniketan. Politically, it opposed communal division. Humanistically, it preserved language diversity. Literature became a tool

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for harmony, not just national pride. These nationalist efforts served political goals first. Yet their humanistic focus created social responsibility effects. NCE courses reached beyond elite bhadralok students. Visva-Bharati tied literature to community needs. Bourdieu helps explain the challenge. Reformers worked within university rules but changed them. They used political support like Tagore's fame to build new programs.

Prior to 1947 and after independence in 1947, the institutions also began negotiating with the "Indian Literature", trying to understand what may constitute Indian Literature, define the term, and incorporate it in the curriculum. The Indian state promoted this category. It encouraged study across languages to build national unity. Jadavpur University started Asia's first Comparative Literature department in 1956. It used translations of Kalidasa, Kabir, Tamil Sangam poetry, and Bengali mangalkavya. Calcutta University's Bengali honors added Hindi works by Premchand and Telugu by

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GurramJashua. Visva-Bharati included Urdu and Tamil to support diversity. This reflected constitutional goals for diversity after states reorganized by language. Responsibility now meant fairness to India's regions.

This period showed social responsibility growing. Political nationalism gave way to ethical inclusion. Universities addressed caste, gender, and regional divides. Gaps still remained. "Indian Literature" favored classical Sanskritic texts. Owing to hierarchies of languages in terms of recognition by the Indian state, many languages and literary traditions were pushed to the margins. The definition of Indian Literature and inclusion into the Indian literary canon was mediated by the complicated procedure of inclusion into the 8th schedule of the constitution and of recognition by the Sahitya Akademi, which again, in turn, was informed by electoral politics and majoritarian concerns. Dalit voices like NamdeoDhasal appeared only in the 1980s. Feminist works by Mahasweta Devi stayed limited at first.

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The Case of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University:

Jadavpur University's Department of Comparative Literature offers a prime example of Academic Social Responsibility (ASR) evolving from decolonial nationalism to subaltern inclusion. Established in 1956 as Asia's first such department, it inherited the National Council of Education's (NCE) *swadeshi* legacy from 1906. Rabindranath Tagore's 1907 "Visvasahitya" lecture at the NCE provided its intellectual seed. Tagore, in his lecture, initiated the idea of World Literature in the Indian context as had been done by Goethe earlier. Tagore talks of freeing literature from the narrow boundaries of provincialism and the practice of World Literature, relating it to his idea of universalism. It was only after the establishment of the institutional Department of Comparative Literature in 1956 that the practice of comparison in India assumed a structured but

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inclusive method. This method has incorporated changes, widened its horizon and has also moved towards an orientation that is specific to India and that seeks to explore the problematics of Indian literature. Tagore envisioned world literature as a collaborative human edifice, linking aesthetic and ethical senses beyond colonial divides. This foundation framed the curriculum as responsible to India's multilingual pluralism rather than Eurocentric canons.

Buddhadeva Bose founded the department, blending Sanskrit, Bengali, and Western classics. The 1956 syllabus balanced Greek/Latin with comparisons between *Ramayana* and *Iliad*, and Aristotle's *Poetics* alongside Bharata's *Natyasastra*. Early courses emphasized aesthetic systems and ethical imperatives across cultures, fostering creativity—three of the first five students became poets. English literature held space (Renaissance to Modernism), reflecting colonial structures, but Bose's translations of Baudelaire and

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Kalidasa signaled breaking away from the English canon. He sought to break from British literature while reviving ancient traditions for modernity. Responsibility here meant nurturing non-hierarchical relations, countering Calcutta University's anglocentric focus.

The BA syllabus traced literary systems chronologically: ancient (Vedic hymns, Odyssey), medieval (Kalidasa, Dante), Renaissance (Shakespeare, Montaigne), and modern (Wordsworth, Bankimchandra). This synchronic-diachronic approach equipped students to map inter-literary flows. MA courses introduced thematology and genology, analyzing myths and genres across languages. Talking about the primary course structures of Comparative Literature in Jadavpur University, Buddhadeva Bose (9) has written:

> …the B. A. course is planned on a historical or vertical basis, and the M. A. organised on a thematic or horizontal plan. In other words, we intend to give our B.A. students

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> a solid grounding in literary history, both in India and the West, with the help of a few basic and typical texts. Exhaustive textual study of the prescribed works will not be insisted upon, but students will be made familiar with movements in ideas (e.g. the Renaissance, the Enlightenment), the rise and development of literary forms (e.g. the sonnet, the novella) and clashing or complementary concepts such as Classicism, Romanticism and Naturalism. We will know the outlines of the antiquities in Europe and India and the medieval and modern ages in Europe and Bengali literature.

The comparative approach at Jadavpur University fundamentally differed from traditional single-language literary studies by emphasizing cross-cultural dialogues and interpretive frameworks that transcended linguistic boundaries. While traditional approaches often focused on chronological literary histories within isolated

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language traditions, the comparative methodology encouraged students to examine textual relationships across cultural and temporal spaces. A closer look at the syllabi of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University would indicate the same. ManabendraBanyopadhyay, a student of the first batch of the M.A. course and a practitioner of Comparative Literature, has written:

> That day Buddhadeb spoke at length about this new subject, and he said that since it was going to be taught here, there would be a greater emphasis on Indian literature — epics would be taught, but not just Homer or Virgil; the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as well. The *Gita*, the *Upanishads*, the *Dhammapada*, and stories from the *Jataka* would also be taught. Bengali literature would be covered—from the medieval period right up to contemporary poetry and fiction. One would have to read Dante and representative works of Italian literature. From

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> German, there would be Goethe—not just *Faust*, but also *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and to read his *Divan*, attention would be given to Hafiz as well. From Romanticism to Symbolism—the intricacies of poetry. One would have to read Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy. One would have to read—Victor Hugo as well as Baudelaire and even Rimbaud. As examples of modern German literature, one would have to read Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse too. While reading Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*, attention would also be paid to the story from *Vetala Panchavimshati*. And so on, and so forth—many such things. (Bandyopadhyay 116)

Amiya Dev in his essay titled 'Comparative Literature in India' discusses an apriori location of comparative literature with regard to aspects of diversity and unity in India and talks of how defining Indian literature is both singular and plural is problematic and how in case of

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India, the study of literature should involve the notion of inter literary process and a dialectical view of literary interaction. Dev (5) writes:

> …Indian literature is not an entity but an inter literary condition in the widest possible sense of the concept… The inter literary condition of India, we should remember, reaches back much farther than its manuscript or print culture. For instance, bhakti -- a popular religious movement as both theme and social issue (stretching from the eighth to the eighteenth century) - - had a variety of textual manifestations in various Indian languages. Dev argues that the relationship between Indian commonality and differences as the primary site of comparative literature.

The 1970s marked a pivot to "Indian Literature," not for nationalism but relational necessity—texts thrive in shared histories. Syllabi integrated regional overlaps: Premchand (Hindi), Gopinath Mohanty (Odia),

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Mahasweta Devi (Bengali), alongside Sangam poetry and mangalkavya. Courses like "Comparative Modern Indian Literature" covered novels (Ashapurna Devi, Mulk Raj Anand), plays (Utpal Dutt, Vijay Tendulkar), and poems (Nirala, Agyeya). This abandoned Sanskrit-centrism, embracing multilingualism, orality, and performativity. By 2003, the syllabus reflected genology (Narrative I/II: Homer-Valmiki to Austen-Bankim), thematology (Reason/Romanticism: Rammohun Roy-Shelley), and area studies (Africa, Latin America, Bangladesh). Faculty specializations ensured interdisciplinary depth. UGC Special Assistance in the late 1990s funded East-West relations, translation workshops (inter-Indian languages keeping aside English), and Indian historiography texts. Responsibility shifted from nationalist politics to archiving material productions, elite-marginal dialogues, and print-oral histories. Weber's ethic of responsibility appeared in anticipating consequences—vernacular focus

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redistributed cultural capital, per Bourdieu, beyond bhadralok elites.

A look at the syllabus of the department would suggest that post-1990s, marginalized voices entered via cultural studies and knowledge systems. Courses like "Comparative Cultural Studies" included Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" (subaltern resistance), Ambai's stories (feminist subjectivity), and Bama's works (Dalit womanhood). "Event" courses traced Axial Era shifts (Athens-Magadha) to modern exclusions, linking Upanishads to Gandhi's Hind Swaraj. Dalit literature engaged mainstream subversion: NamdeoDhasal, Daya Pawar alongside bhakti-sufi clusters; performativity drew ethical witnesses to suffering. Feminist modules in the research courses addressed sexualities, gender politics via Mahasweta, IsmatChugtai, and Latin American testimonios (Elena Poniatowska). 2003 BA/MA syllabi featured "Literatures of Contact" (Soyinka's *Bacchae of Euripides*, adaptations of Brecht)

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and "Cross-Cultural Literary Studies" (reception of Shakespeare in Bengal). These enacted ASR ethically: responding to 1990s demands from marginalized communities, national conferences on Dalit literatures, and eventually research projects undertaken by the Centre for Translation of Indian Literatures.

Responsibility matured relationally. Early conviction (Tagore/Bose: universal humanism) yielded to consequentialism—postcolonial gaps in canon (caste/gender) prompted inclusions. Bourdieu illuminates: syllabi redistributed capital via translations, area studies (Africa-Latin America solidarity against oppression).

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Academic Social Responsibility in Crisis: Bengal's Response to the 1890s Plague and Covid-19 Pandemic

ABHIK SARKAR[1]

The relay of knowledge from academic circles to the masses is vital in ensuring public wellbeing and environmental conservation especially in the event of any crisis such as an epidemic or health emergency. In such a situation, it is incumbent upon the academicians to take the responsibility of giving the right information to the public at the right time, so as to mitigate panic and also combat wrong information. This paper offers a comparison between the plague epidemic (1890s) in India and the Covid-19 pandemic in India (2020 – 2021),

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focusing on West Bengal. It looks at the preventive measures taken by the government, and the rumors that were in circulation during these periods, with similarities and differences aimed at their nature and impact. The study also looks for evidence on whether poor information dissemination is conducive to spreading of rumors and examines initiatives taken during both epidemics as examples of Academic Social Responsibility (ASR).

Rabindranath Tagore's effort to bridge the gap between the literate elite and the rural masses by establishing Sriniketan in proximity to Santiniketan—envisioned as a hub for education-based socio-cultural rebuilding in a natural, rural environment—can be considered one of the very first and most powerful examples of Academic Social Responsibility, long before the term itself was even coined. Borrowing conceptual motivation from such nascent movements, the ensuing research explores and critically examines early evidence of Academic Social Responsibility during

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crisis situations, primarily relating to the plague epidemic in the nineteenth century. In the same way, the paper looks at ASR initiatives taken throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to illustrate how academics contribute to raising public awareness, offering support, and combating misinformation. With a focus on such examples, this study highlights the importance of intellectual exchange and knowledge sharing to address societal challenges, especially during times of crisis.

1890s Plague epidemic and the Impact of Information Deficit:

In the closing decades of the 19th-century, India was ravaged by plague epidemics in different parts of the country, and a serious health emergency was instituted. The British rulers were surprised and confused on how to handle the calamity. The kind of death toll that was being experienced was unheard of before and this led to a kind of state of panic among the general masses and

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their colonial masters who were equally panic stricken trying to reduce the level of contamination since no remedy was available and scientific empirical research on such a cure were still in progress. According to David Arnold, the International Sanitary Conference held at Venice in 1897 led to a great jeopardy of goods being imported from India because the magnitude of the epidemic was known worldwide. This direct threat was commerce to Britain. In addition to that, the British administration was already growing uneasy due to the growing nationalist sentiment in India and the increasingly troublesome cities in India where there were many social tensions owing to large populations, poverty, and disease. The administration saw the ignorance and hostility of the Indians as hindrances to progress. In response to these challenges, the British government passed the Epidemic Diseases Act in 1897, which was supposed to allay fears among foreign countries and save India from economic and epidemic doom. This legislation was direct outcome of the British

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need to control the plague epidemic, deal with the aftermath and bring a semblance of stability to the region. (Arnold, ''Disease Rumor and Panic'' 116)

The dominant tensions related to the plague epidemic in India were created mostly by the British colonial administrators who saw an immediate intervention imperative using knowledge of the devastating effects that the Black Death had in eighteenth century England. The British administration in India, though there was scant epidemiological knowledge of plague then, decided to take stringent public health measures to reduce its transmission. According to Arabinda Samanta, the colonial masters did not find it necessary even to educate the local people let alone involve them in the decision-making process, indicating a huge epistemic gap between the colonial masters and the subjects. (Samanta 110) The actions the British took had a stated objective of disease control, but a more critical look can reveal another objective of mass control, whom the rulers viewed as illiterate and

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ignorant. Lack of transparency and participation in their implementation created a situation of mistrust, fear, and abhorrence among Indians against British administration. However, it is important to remember that the central motivation behind such health intervention was a severe epidemic avoidance objective and also to ensure sustainability. In this context, it would be opportune to revisit some of the preventive health measures specified in the 1897 Act and evaluate the social obligations of the colonial masters about their subjects.

According to R. Nathan's '*Plague in India*' (vol. 2), some of the key regulations issued by the British to prevent the plague epidemic in India include:(196 – 210)

- A Health Officer shall have the authority to enter and inspect any dwelling, upon reasonable suspicion of infection, with prior notice. The Officer may conduct cleaning measures as may appear to him necessary to prevent further transmission of disease.

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- In case of failure to comply with a requisition to abate a suspected infected dwelling, the Chairman may summarily eject all occupants or reduce the number of occupants in such a manner and to such an extent as may appear to him necessary.
- If any hut or shed is, in the opinion of the Health Officer, injurious to health, and likely to spread disease, then the Chairman, after giving notice, may cause it to be destroyed; and the building and materials thereof shall be pulled down and destroyed by burning, or otherwise.
- The Chairman shall, on recommendation of the Health Officer, select a site upon which a hospital may be constructed or where an already existing building can be converted to isolate plague patients.
- If the Plague Authority deems a house visit warranted, personnel will proceed to such a

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location. If there are obstacles or the occupants refuse to cooperate, then the Authority may:

- Force entry into the premises, and
- Detain and provide medical exam to anyone suspected of carrying plague.

- The Plague Authority may require that an inquiry be held in each case into the cause of death, and unless satisfied otherwise shall treat such a case as one of plague.
- The medical officer can prohibit a building from being used as a dwelling if it is either occupied by a sufferer from plague or is insanitary and unfit for human habitation. The owner or occupier cannot use the building until the competent authority gives an order allowing them to. The officer may, if necessary, remove occupants by force.
- Special burial grounds and cremation grounds for plague patients may be selected and set apart by

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> the Chairman, and it shall not be lawful to burn or inter the body of a plague patient elsewhere.

A close scrutiny of these regulations reveals that the government conferred on Health Officers visiting homes during plague unbridled authority. The constant use of the phrase "as it may appear to him necessary" effectively gave inspectors powers to make investigations as they saw fit. This principle of discretion is striking in that it allowed Health Officers to do pretty much as their judgment dictated without being held liable by binding regulations or any external control. Furthermore, according to Nathan, the regulations had provisions for the protection of all people acting under the Act, which reads that "No suit or legal proceeding shall lie against any person for anything done or in good faith intended to be done under this Act" (Nathan 138). This clause served to protect Health Officers from civil liability and gave them the freedom to do their work with little sense of responsibility. Taken together, such absolute authority plus legal immunity created a

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situation where Health Officers could go on to apply extreme measures with minimal restriction

The knowledge system related to the disease was then limited to the ruling elite, who knew about the decimating role of the Black Death in eighteenth-century England and the severe plague outbreak in Hong Kong in 1894 (Arnold, ''Disease Rumor and Panic'' 116). Moreover, they knew that the international community did not want to import goods from India, as mentioned above. However, knowing all these things, the colonial administration did not find it necessary to spread knowledge about the disease, its treatment, or its prevention among the general public. Instead, the regime adopted tough regulations for the public, which reflects the top-down modality of crisis management. The question also arises about the 'social responsibilities' of the government during the plague. The non-inclusive and non-transparent attitude of the administration increased the gap between the authorities and the Indian public, creating a situation where misinformation and rumors

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could spread. Critical analysis of these rumors highlights the negative consequences of limited access to knowledge, especially during crises. The government lost an opportunity to develop a knowledgeable and more compliant response among the people by not engaging in an informed knowledge exchange with the general public. This case points to the importance of inclusion and transparency in communication during crisis management. The rumors were:

- The intention of the government was to interfere with and destroy caste and religious observances, with the ultimate design of forcing Christianity on the 'natives' of India. (Samanta 130)
- The Viceroy has met a yogi in some remote part of the Himalayas and promised he would sacrifice two lakhs of human lives to the goddess Kali, the Mother, to save the British Empire in India. (Samanta 130)

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- Three days of quarantine would be enforced, and no one would be allowed to leave Calcutta forth with.
- The plague workers and the European soldiers would visit every house to examine men and women and inflicted persons would be immediately removed to hospital.
- The Viceroy will visit Calcutta on May 15, 1898, when men and women would be inoculated forcibly. The soldiers would be called out soon and inoculation enforced compulsorily with plague serum made of cow-blood. (Samanta 131)
- A patient infected with plague was forced to take poison in the plague hospital in Manicktolla, Calcutta, was forced to take poison in the guise of medicine, which brought instantaneous death. People regarded plague hospitals as 'The temple of Yama', the house of horrors, the place of killing the sinners. 'He has gone to Manicktolla'

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became a euphemism for 'He has gone to his resting place.' (Samanta 136)

- The authorities were trying to poison the poor in order to be rid of their ever-growing numbers. (Arnold, ''Disease Rumor and Panic'' 116)
- The authorities were trying to break their caste by giving them forbidden food or through the 'defiling' touch of the foreigners. (Arnold, ''Disease Rumor and Panic'' 116)
- They were being taken to hospitals in order to kill them and cut up their bodies. (a reference to the loathed practice of medical dissection) (Arnold, ''Disease Rumor and Panic'' 116)
- Indians were being captured and taken to hospital in order to extract a body fluid used to protect the lives of Europeans. (Arnold, ''Disease Rumor and Panic'' 116)
- The ambulance vans were constructed in such a fashion and its interior smeared with such deadly poison that even the healthy were converted to

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> corpses. People dreaded the ambulance vans more than death. (Samanta 136)

The widespread anti-British feeling is reflected in the rumors surrounding the plague outbreak. The lack of information about the disease and the preventive measures taken ensured that people confused their ignorance with something more sinister. This event demonstrates the outcome of keeping knowledge within a select group of individuals and not sharing that knowledge in the service of humanity, especially when faced with disaster. The rules that provided inspectors with the "force" needed to break into homes further escalated the situation and caused panic and apprehension among those in general life. The confrontation thus created is delineated in Rabindranath Tagore's 1916 novel Chaturanga, as he describes the panic and fear that plagued Calcutta during the plague outbreak. According to Tagore, “People were panic-stricken and extremely anxious, not so much for the dread of the disease, but more for the coercions and

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persecutions that were inflicted upon them by the peons and orderlies who went with their official badges on."

Dr Radhagobinda Kar and the Early examples of Academic Social Responsibility:

Before the nineteenth century, Western and European populations living in India knew very little about what Indian diseases were and how to treat them. Western medical practices had been limited to a few European enclaves and ports within India. Since seaport arrivals came by water, the first western medicine was applied in port health checks for incoming travellers. They gradually gained acceptance over time among English-speaking Indians. However, the growth of Western medicine in India was not unopposed; it was constantly interacting with indigenous systems of medicine. Indian physicians, particularly Ayurveda-trained physicians, opposed the slow but visible growth in influence of Western medicine. A historical examination suggests

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that Western medicine took almost one hundred years (1800–1914) to establish itself in India. Its greatest peak occurred during the late nineteenth century plague epidemic (Arnold, Colonizing the Body 14).

A look into the plague years in India shows that the rapid virulence of the disease, unprecedented for the Indian context, was responsible for significant mortality and inadequacy of preparation. Physicians had no consensus as to treatment. Although many medical practitioners recommended W. M. Haffkine's inoculation method, it is not feasible to state with certainty that this was a very successful therapy. The editor of the Bengali journal *Swasthya* believed in 1305 BS(CE 1898) that so far, no treatment for the malady had yet been determined and that physicians recommending remedies were simply shamming efficacy and hoodwinking patients. In addition, the use of the inoculation process instilled fear within the minds of the general Indian public; as Arabinda Samanta cites The Plague Commissioner James A. Lowson in 1897, "the

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pain and discomfort of the inoculation were so extreme that unless the procedure could be applied to an entire community simultaneously, the experience of inoculating a few individuals typically led the majority to avoid any vaccination" (Samanta 123). Poorer communities could not afford the benefits of Western medicine, leading to a wider ecology of dislocation.

It is in this prevailing confusion over the plague epidemic that Dr.Radhagobinda Kar, a popular Western medicine practitioner, emerges as a key actor. He realized that his fellow countrymen were being deprived of all essential information related to the nature and treatment of the disease, since discussions and controversies were mostly restricted to European doctors and those with access to the prevailing knowledge system. Dr. Kar realized the vast gap between those who knew and those who did not know, with the latter continuing to fall victim to the disease in droves, while the former remained safe. He highlighted the importance of spreading necessary information among the common

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people of this country who did not have any access to it. In response, Dr. Kar embarked on the project of paraphrasing the accumulated plague knowledge in simple Bengali, which helped spread vital information to the common people.

In 1898, Dr. Kar published a concise treatise, *'Plague,'* comprising of 100 pages in which he explained the 'definition, short history, causation, symptoms, classification, prognosis, morbid anatomy, and treatment' of the disease in lucid language. His main intention was to inform the lay public about the facts of the epidemic, including the regulations issued by the government under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.

In the preface, Dr. Kar acknowledged the government's 'benevolent' intentions and aimed to mitigate the rumors and panic generated by the strict preventive measures. He extracted relevant regulations from the 'Government Gazette, dated 10th February, 1897' and the 'Calcutta Gazette Extraordinary dated 30th

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April, 1898,' which he deemed essential for public knowledge.

Furthermore, Dr. Kar included practical chapters like 'Hints to Householders,' which provided necessary directions to householders to prevent infection. Some of these directions are as follows:

> 'The contagious germs of plague are known to proliferate in dark and damp environments. It is essential, therefore, to ensure that houses are adequately illuminated by sunlight. In the interest of maintaining a hygienic environment, trash must not be allowed to collect within the house and wastewater must be routed into the drainage system.'
>
> 'Observations in Bombay and other infected localities have shown that those who sleep out of doors seldom or never take the infection, while their fellows who sleep indoors in ill-ventilated rooms crowded with occupants are often

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attacked. A means of preventing invasion of the house, therefore, is to arrange for free circulation of air within it by night, the doors and windows being left open to admit it freely.'

'It usually gains entry through open wounds or abrasions on the body. All wounds, therefore, should be immediately and thoroughly cleansed with carbolic acid or other antiseptic solutions to prevent infection, followed by the application of some ointment that keeps the wound dry.'

'It is also important to wear protective footwear when nursing plague-infected patients, afterward cleaning oneself with phenol or carbolic acid to avoid any possible contagion.'

'Lavatories and damp areas should be regularly cleaned and disinfected with chloride of lime. The drainage system should also be maintained and cleaned regularly. Notably, there is no

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> established direct link between plague transmission and drainage systems.' (74-75)

Dr. Kar gave a detailed account of the research and inoculation procedure of Dr. W.M. Haffkine. He even quoted an interview with Dr.Haffkine, who claimed that his inoculation program was highly successful in India. According to Dr. Kar, Dr.Haffkine said that during an 1897 inoculation program, 2100 people were inoculated, while 6000 people were not inoculated. At the end of the epidemic, it was found that 1400 of the uninoculated persons died due to the disease, but only 36 people who had been inoculated died (89).

Dr. Kar referred to numerous observations made by Dr.Haffkine in support of the efficiency of the inoculation process, presumably to allay skepticism and instil faith in Dr.Haffkine's work since there was so much controversy over the plague treatments. Continuing, Dr. Kar also mentioned the supportive

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testimony of Dr. Harvey, who recognized the value of Dr.Haffkine's process indeed (101).

Through his works, Dr. Kar attempted to spread the knowledge of plague among the general public, which is Academic Social Responsibility. Sharing one's knowledge means fulfilling one's responsibility towards society for being in a privileged position of knowing and thereby trying to bridge the gap between the aware and the unaware. Dr. Kar's treatise, *'Plague,'* may be considered one of the early examples of Academic Social Responsibility that reflected his commitment to increasing awareness among the general public for its better well-being through the sharing of information on critical issues.

Sister Nivedita and the Early examples of Academic Social Responsibility:

Sister Nivedita of the Ramakrishna Mission took cognizance of the plague situation in Calcutta and

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proactively initiated measures to address the crisis. She appealed to the editors of The Indian Mirror and The Statesman, urging the educated class of society to emerge from their safe enclaves and contribute to relief efforts. Recognizing the importance of disseminating information during this crisis, she sought to bridge the knowledge gap between the enlightened section, who possessed essential knowledge about the epidemic, and the larger, uninformed segment of society, who were helplessly succumbing to the disease. Sister Nivedita's effort is an early manifestation of 'Academic Social Responsibility' in which she utilised her position and knowledge to galvanise action and raise awareness about the epidemic. As such, she demonstrated an ethos of translating academic knowledge into practical action, by which the needs of the most marginalized and vulnerable peoples could be met. Her initiative underlines the importance of knowledge dissemination and community engagement in times of crisis, as it denotes the critical

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role that intellectuals and institutions can play in fostering social change and assuaging human suffering.

In a letter to the editor of The Indian Mirror, dated March 1899, Sister Nivedita gave a heart-rending account of what she had witnessed in the slums of North Calcutta and pleaded for intervention on the part of the educated class. According to her assessment, the poorer class of families that lived in *bustees* were ready to receive the help of educated persons, especially those recommended by doctors, who showed tenderness as well as clear-headedness. As she wrote, "The poorer class of families, living in *bustees*, are only too thankful to resign the care of a patient into the hands of an educated person whom the doctor recommends, and who is evidently tender and clear-headed at the same time" (211). While the Health Officers had been using suspicious ways of inspecting the infected houses and washing them with disinfectants, Sister Nivedita believed in the application of a friendly and gentle approach to conquer the disease. She asserted the use of

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proper and adequate cleanliness, a dire need in slum areas, and called upon educated people "can disseminate exact and scrupulous notions of cleanliness" and "try to point out to less educated neighbours the need of detailed and anxious cleansing of various parts of the house with water, mixed with disinfectants" (212). Not only did Sister Nivedita raise this call for cleanliness, but she also suggested practical and cheap measures that could be applied by the poorer section. She pointed to the effectiveness of Perchloride of mercury as a disinfectant useful and "ridiculously cheap," whose "solution may be used in all places needing flushing." Further, she emphasized that houses, roads, lanes, yards, walls, and roofs must be thoroughly cleansed and filth disposed of by burning old rags and decaying matter. In this respect, Sister Nivedita highlighted the social role of the educated class by urging them to explain these measures to the people in a kindly and inoffensive manner and guiding them in carrying out these instructions without patronage. As she wrote, "It would

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surely be possible for all of us, in a kindly and inoffensive way, to explain these things to the people about us, and to help them, without patronage, to carry out our instructions" (212). This appeal epitomizes her devotion to spreading awareness and enabling practical action in the face of the plague epidemic, thus demonstrating what is called academic social responsibility.

Sister Nivedita further commented that the Ramakrishna Mission was making leaflets in Bengali, containing simple instructions on cleanliness and the use of disinfectants, for distribution among the public. She stressed that accurate information should be shared: this time of epidemic was a crisis period, demanding "to make true ideas on this point common property" (213).

Her letter to the editor of The Statesman, dated April 1899, outlines positive results that have accrued from applying knowledge of the elite enclaves for the benefit of society. In it, she emphasized the sordid

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conditions of the poor drainage system in Calcutta's slums and the sanitary imperatives needed in these areas. Nivedita gave a detailed account of the number of huts, little bye-lanes, length of drainage in these slums, showing the results of her effort at galvanizing the educated class into assisting the poor and uninformed. Unlike the British preventive measures, which had generated massive protests, mass exodus, and rumors, Nivedita's friendly efforts produced positive results. She wrote,"We are succeeding beyond expectation. The need was even greater than we had imagined; the people – once assured that we are private persons working from disinterested motives, -- begged our helping with interior cleansing and have listened gladly to our advice about sanitation and disinfectants. They have allowed and even invited us to enter their houses and have not been afraid to show us their terrible poverty. There are something like a couple of miles of drain and lane, three days ago unutterably filthy, where today an Englishwoman can walk without annoyance" (215).

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Nivedita's work is a good example of how much can be achieved in the area of public health through community-based initiatives and knowledge sharing, and how collective action may transcend social cleavages for positive change.

On 22nd April 1899, Sister Nivedita gave a lecture at the Classic Theatre in Beadon Street for which Swami Vivekananda was the president. A large gathering of university students, Europeans, and professors at different colleges listened to the lecture in which stress was laid upon the urgency of providing knowledge to the bigger public and, therefore, the social responsibility of the educated class. Nivedita spoke of her experience about the slums in North Calcutta where educated people had unitedly come forward to help the slum people during the epidemic. Though the progress in this regard was satisfactory, "the main work yet remains to be done". "We want this one thing, the education of the people by practical example. Let us with our own hands perform the necessary service" (219).

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Nivedita's lecture epitomized the spirit of Academic Social Responsibility, as it motivated a large number of students to sign up as volunteers for her proposed work (220). The stress on pragmatic implementation, community involvement, and sharing of knowledge appealed to the target audience and thus elicited a concrete response from the educated class.

Covid-19 and Academic Social Responsibility:

More than a hundred years after the plague, India faced another health disaster in Covid-19, which was unique and different from other epidemics as it was an intercontinental pandemic that had already infected nations worldwide. Contrary to the plague epidemic in India during the 1890s, the Government of India, during the Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2021), issued preventive measures that are non-coercive and widely disseminated to the public. The government made conscious efforts in making necessary awareness and information about the

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disease, its treatment, and prevention available to the general public. This was done with the aim of making sure that knowledge is not confined in specialized enclaves. However, as observed throughout history, health emergencies often generate rumors. Misinformation in the case of the plague was said to be mainly due to poor information dissemination in the Indian masses.

A close look at the government measures and rumors during the Covid-19 pandemic in India reveals a notable absence of pervasive anti-government sentiment underlying the rumors.

Preventive Measures taken by the Government of India during Covid-19 Pandemic:

Order and Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Dated – 15. 04. 2020 & 23. 03. 2021 -

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- Wearing face cover is compulsory in public places. In workplaces and during transport. MHA order and guidelines, (MHA, 23. 03. 2021, page 5)
- Individuals must maintain a minimum distance of 6 feet in public places. Shops will ensure physical distancing among customers. (MHA, 23. 03. 2021, page 5)
- Spitting in public places will be punishable with fine, as may be prescribed by the State/UT local authority in accordance with its laws, rules or regulations. (MHA, 23. 03. 2021, page 5)
- No organization/manager of public places shall allow gathering of more than 5 persons. (MHA, 15. 04. 2020, page 9)
- All persons who have been directed by the health care personnel to remain at home/ institutional quarantine for a period as

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decided by the local health authorities. (MHA, 15. 04. 2020, page 7)

- Persons violating quarantine will be liable to legal action. (MHA, 15. 04. 2020, page 7)
- As far as possible, the practice of WfH (Work from Home) should be followed. (MHA, 23. 03. 2021, page 5)
- Whoever makes and circulates a false alarm or warning as to disaster or its severity or magnitude, leading into panic, shall on conviction, be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to one year or with fine. (Section 54, Disaster Management Act, 2005)

Rumours during Covid-19:

As noted by Rubal Kanozia*et al* the rumors were:

- Many messages on social media talked about the impending scarcity of essential commodities and the possible disruptions of demand and supply

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chains of the market prompting people to resort to panic buying and hoarding of ration and consumer goods all over thecountry.

- A video of a Muslim man spitting on policeofficers to escape quarantine and another ofMuslim community members throwing stones onpolice also went viral. Video messages showing Muslim restaurant owners spitting on food, mosquemembers licking utensils and a Muslimvendor spitting on fruits and vegetables to allegedly infect people with the virus took peopleoff guard.
- The viral messageswent on to explain the 'scientific' basis for clappingat 5 p.m. (the time given by the PM in hisspeech), claiming how some astrological phenomenaat the time combined with sound energy generatedthrough utensils and claps will kill the virus, just liketemple bells were used to purify environment in ancient days.

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- The Indian poultrymarket suffered a loss of over 21.68 million US dollars(`1.6 billion) a day due to fake news linkingthe spread of COVID-19 to chickens. Farmers have been forced to destroy poultryproducts, kill or dump chickens, as a result of theregular dissemination of fake messages linking thespread of virus to eating of chicken or any type of meat.
- From March 19 till May 2, over 300 deaths in India occurred due to the pandemic lockdown, including 80 suicide cases where people killed themselves due to the fear of being tested COVID-19 positive, loneliness or depression and losing jobs. (p. 58 – 60)
- One of the most bizarre pseudoscientific cures included drinking cow's urine and in one such incident, a cow urine party was also organized in New Delhi to prevent and cure the virus (The Hindu, 03. 12. 2021).

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The nature of rumors that were disseminated during the Covid-19 pandemic was very different from the rumors spread during the plague epidemic, reflecting a marked shift in government approaches to crisis management. The measures taken by the Government of India in preventing the spread of Covid-19 indicate much greater awareness of the role of knowledge dissemination than in the case of the British government's response to the plague epidemic of the 1890s. The effort by Dr. R.G. Kar and Sister Nivedita in the plague epidemic is illustrative of the potential role of awareness and knowledge sharing in managing health crises. The measures taken by the Government of India during Covid-19 reflect a similar awareness, underlining the imperative of timely and accurate dissemination of information.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the problem of an "Infodemic" (coined by the director general of the WHO, T. A. Ghebreyesus): the accumulated volume of information makes it difficult to

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separate fact from fiction. This is generally attributed to widespread use of social media. The rumors circulating during this time also give insight into the psychological factors emanating from joblessness and economic uncertainty; indeed, suicide cases were reported.

In this context, the role of academics and people from the academic sphere is important in promoting awareness, giving medical and educational support, and countering misinformation. The subsequent examples of ASR initiatives underline what collaboration can achieve in responding to health emergencies and providing food, medicinal assistance, and education to marginalized groups; awareness about the pandemic and associated rumors also form a part:

Jadavpur Commune:

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The effort put in by the Jadavpur Commune during the COVID-19 pandemic therefore stands out as a pertinent example of how ASR works. Academic Social Responsibility refers to the ethical obligation of universities and their members-students, scholars, faculty, and alumni-to extend their knowledge, resources, and institutional capacities beyond the classroom and actively respond to societal needs. In moments of crisis, ASR demands that the academic communities translate intellectual capital into meaningful social action.

In response to the national lockdown announced in March 2020, a collective effort of students, research scholars, and alumni from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, came forward with a grassroots endeavor called the Jadavpur Commune to assist the communities that suffered most due to the pandemic. The Commune knew that health workers and delivery personnel did not have the option to stay indoors, hence they made sure that effective hand sanitizers and face masks were distributed

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among these workers. When even the market was selling substandard and ineffective products, the group became responsible for arranging quality sanitization materials, in keeping with a research-based and ethical approach emanating from the academic community at large.

As the initiative picked up steam, the Commune expanded its scope through coordinated outreach on social media platforms, particularly Facebook. This digital engagement facilitated transparency, community participation, and sustained funding—hallmarks of responsible academic intervention. Going beyond immediate health needs, the Commune started a daily free food program across multiple locations in Kolkata, including Jadavpur Station Road, Gariahat under the bridge, and the Charu Market area. Employing a cook who had lost his livelihood due to the lockdown, the initiative helped assuage hunger and unemployment, as it served 350–400 people daily. University staff, workers, and volunteers collaborated to organize transportation

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and distribution, illustrating the collective social commitment of the academic ecosystem.

Further entrenching its ASR orientation, the Jadavpur Commune began addressing the educational crisis that children in slums faced. With schools closed and digital access out of the question, slum children were effectively cut off from learning. Since April 2020, university students have volunteered to provide free education through interactive and context-sensitive learning methods, using pictures, music, and later structured lesson plans. The learning centers established are **PritilatarPaathshala**, **Bhagat Singh er Paathshala**, and **Ashu TimirerPaathshala**. The last one still continues to work beyond the peak of the pandemic.

This sustained engagement by the Commune, in collaboration with left-wing organizations and grassroots networks, reflects how academic spaces can serve as sites of social solidarity rather than isolated knowledge production centers. Bringing together intellectual

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awareness, ethical responsibility, organization skills, and community participation, the Jadavpur Commune embodies how ASR can be meaningfully performed during moments of social crisis. In other words, Jadavpur Commune shows that ASR is not just an ideal but a praxis wherein academic communities mobilize privilege, skill, and resources for social justice, equity, and collective benefit.

Chetna:

Chetna is a strong example of 'Academic Social Responsibility' (ASR) in action. It shows how academic communities can use their knowledge and skills beyond the classroom to support society during crises. This initiative started in Kolkata during the COVID-19 pandemic, responding to increasing mental health challenges caused by prolonged uncertainty, isolation, and loss. A core team of nearly 30 student volunteers from various academic backgrounds focused initially on

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helping Kolkata residents through structured mental health interventions.

As the pandemic worsened and its psychological effects spread, students and scholars from across West Bengal recognized the importance of this effort and joined in. This collaboration allowed Chetna to significantly broaden its reach, reflecting the essence of ASR—where scholars and learners feel responsible for applying academic knowledge to promote social well-being. The initiative conducted around 50 to 60 online sessions that tackled critical mental health issues like gender-based violence, grief and loss, and depression due to quarantine. Each session drew 200 to 250 participants, creating a safe, informative space for dialogue, reflection, and mutual support.

A key contribution under Chetna's ASR-focused approach was the **Psychological First Aid** course. This online program featured respected psychologists who shared professional insights and practical strategies to

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cope with mental health challenges related to the pandemic. By making psychological expertise accessible to the public, the program reinforced the idea of academia as a socially responsive institution.

Additionally, Chetna's **Buddy Program** organized webinars that centered on mental health issues stemming from COVID-19, with 70 to 80 participants in each session. These interactions built a sense of community, empathy, and shared resilience—values that are central to Academic Social Responsibility.

Through awareness-building, education, and emotional support, Chetna showed how academic initiatives can respond ethically and proactively to societal needs. Its ongoing efforts during the pandemic illustrate that ASR is not just a theoretical idea, but a practical approach. It prioritizes mental health, inclusivity, and social care during crises, setting a valuable example for future academic-led social

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initiatives. (Sourav Sarkar, personal communication, November 24, 2025)

Red Volunteers:

Red Volunteers demonstrates the application of 'Academic Social Responsibility' (ASR) in the sense that it showcases how the academia can utilize their knowledge, abilities, and value systems in a collective bid to fulfill the pressing needs of society. The left-leaning social organization was formed on April 22, 2021, in Kolkata in light of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic that had left the entire world in shambles, particularly in terms of the shortage of oxygen and medical facilities.

Red Volunteers were formed with a membership of 83 people consisting mostly of young members who were initially just students; however, they were able to translate academic knowledge into action. Following the mission and objectives of ASR, Red Volunteers reached

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out to society by engaging in activities such as conducting door-to-door RT-PCR tests and also expanded their services to different districts in West Bengal in a planned and team-oriented manner as one would learn in academic institutions such as planning and problem-solving skills.

Each unit of the district had four to five specialized teams functioning underneath them. There was a team for providing oxygen, another for the delivery of food, groceries, and medication to people who could not leave their homes, a third for updating them on the status of hospital beds as well as nursing homes on a constant basis, and then a final team for overseeing patients with low oxygen saturation who had contracted the COVID-19 virus.

Apart from providing medical aid in an emergency situation, the Red Volunteers were also committed to the general social responsibility implied in Academic Social Responsibility by focusing on

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development needs in disadvantaged and remote areas with inadequate infrastructure. The Red Canteens and Red Kitchens offered economical meals, while Red Ambulance services provided fast patient transfer. These activities demonstrate the potential of academically driven social engagement in promoting development and social justice.

Red Volunteers, as a whole, provides a shining example of Academic Social Responsibility that students and academically engaged young people made use of intellectual capabilities and collective action in order to tackle the crises that the world was facing and prove once again that academia is a strong force that drives social change.

Verified Oxygen Leads of Bengal:

A Facebook page was formed on 28th April 2021 with the aim of spreading correct and verified information about the availability of oxygen during the second wave

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of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a devastating effect in India. It was a point when the shortage of oxygen was at its peak, and people were having difficulties accessing verified sources when this intervention program took place, largely conducted by students.

Modelled on the cornerstones of 'Academic Social Responsibility' (ASR), the page demonstrated the ability of the academic community to go beyond the boundaries of the classroom and contribute towards meeting the pressing needs of the community at large. Based on verification and updated on a timely schedule of three hours for each posting on oxygen suppliers and availability and contact details to prevent the spread of inaccurate information, the posting started on a small scale by students of Kolkata but soon spread throughout the state of West Bengal.

This project is an exemplary model of Academic Social Responsibility, disseminating how current and

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future students, as part of academias, can apply their learning abilities, thinking, technical literacy, and sense of responsibility towards creating social change through these very tools. Also, this project is an exemplary model explaining how academia can play an exemplary role in creating socialization and forming social resilience during a major crisis by acting proactively towards such crises and acting in the welfare of society.

The amount of work done by academicians and other individuals during both epidemics, indicative of Academic Social Responsibility, shows the importance of collaboration in raising public awareness and working for marginalized segments. Examples like these point out that academics do have a responsibility to take on the role of sharing knowledge and encouraging intellectual exchange, particularly when crises are unfolding. Finally, this research stresses the need for academics to engage with society, inspire critical thinking, and wise decision-making, aiming at benefitting the environment and humankind. This will be possible if we recognize

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that ASR can provide a bridge toward an informed, empathetic, and resilient society, much better prepared to deal with future challenges.

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Cultural Heritage and Linguistic Traditions of the Bodo Community in West Bengal

ASIT BARAN NARJARY[1]

Community Background:

The Bodo community in West Bengal has traditionally been concentrated in the Terai and Dooars regions. They are ethnically Mongoloids, but have acquired different nomenclatures all over South Asia, reflecting their wide geographical dispersal. In Nepal, they are called *Meche*, the name having been derived from their settlement in early times along the Mechi River; in Bangladesh, as *Mech Bongshi*; in Assam, as *Boro Kochari* or *Boro*; in

[1] General Secretary of the Pashchim Banga Bodo Sahitya Sabha.

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Tripura, as *Tippara*; in Nagaland, as *Dimasa Kochari*; and in Jammu and Kashmir, as *Beda* or *Bodo*. The Bodo community of West Bengal is generally treated as a sub-group of the larger *Bodo* community. However, although the government records in West Bengal identify them as *Mech*, the community members are predominantly *Bodo*, whereby they self-identify in a way distinct from the Boro community in Assam. In West Bengal, the main concentration of this community can be found in the districts of Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, and Darjeeling.

Historially, it is said that around five thousand years ago, five tribes, namely *Meche*, *Koche*, *Lapche*, *Limbu*, and *Rai*, migrated from the Bod regions of old Tibet to the Indian subcontinent, perhaps because of a famine in their homeland. Of these, the *Meches* first settled in the Mechi River regions of Nepal and afterwards in the West Bengal area through the Nathu-La Pass, and it is also said that the name *Nathu-La* itself is

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of Bodo origins. The *Koche* tribe migrated towards the Assam region along the Sankosh River, while the *Lapche*tribe settled in the hilly areas and now identify themselves as Lepcha.Additionally, the "-*Limbu* and *Rai* tribes migrated to the Kalimpong area.

Language and Identity:

The Bodo community in West Bengal speaks the Mech language, which is officially recognized by the Government of India as the Boro language. Despite this recognition, notable differences exist between the Boro language as spoken in Assam and its variant spoken in West Bengal. These differences are primarily phonological, and the Mech language is generally regarded as a regional dialect of the Boro language of Assam. The linguistic distinction is also reflected in the terminology used by the communities themselves: the Bodo community in Assam refers to their counterparts in West Bengal as *Bwrdwnari*, meaning "Boro people from

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West Bengal," while the Mech community in West Bengal refers to the Assamese Boros as *Sanjari*, signifying "Boro people from the east of West Bengal."

In terms of settlement patterns, the Bodo community in West Bengal traditionally established their villages in forest-adjacent areas and regions characterized by extensive fertile agricultural land. Although they inhabit the Terai and Dooars regions, it is noteworthy that Bodo settlements are largely absent in the vicinity of tea gardens. During the British colonial period, the colonial administration was unable to recruit the Bodo population as laborers for tea plantation work. Consequently, the British were compelled to import laborers from distant regions such as Chhotanagpur. Oral histories and community narratives suggest that the Bodos valued personal autonomy and independence, preferring self-directed agricultural and subsistence activities over wage labor under colonial authority.

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Script and Transmission:

Although the Government of India has recognized the Devanagari script for the Boro language, the Bodo community in West Bengal has adopted the use of the Bengali script to write in Boro. This has happened because there are no educational institutions in West Bengal where Boro language education is conducted in the Devanagari script. Bodo speaking communities in Assam are in the habit of using the Devanagari script to represent the Boro language in written form.

Over the years, there have been some efforts to encourage the Bodo community in West Bengal to adopt the Devanagari script. For the last three years, the organization *Pashchim Banga Bodo Sahitya Sabha* has been active in making the Bodo community aware of reading and writing in the Devanagari script. This effort involves some publications in the form of books and magazines in the Devanagari script, as well as conducting seminars, workshops, and quiz competitions

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to ensure more awareness about the script among the Bodo community. Additionally, the organization has identified 138 primary schools across West Bengal where a significant number of students—approximately 20 to 25 in each school—belong to the Bodo community. In these schools, elementary-level instruction in the Boro language using the Devanagari script is provided for one hour before or after regular school hours. What is important to be noted here is that no external cost has been incurred by running these educational activities; rather, these activities are made possible by the contributions of the members of that organization.

Folk Songs:

The Bodo people represent a rich and diverse folk music tradition, covering almost all the types of songs depicting their socio-economic life, cultural practices, and relations with nature. These folk songs incorporate agricultural or farmers' songs, ritualistic songs which are

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connected with religious and ceremonial performances, fishing songs, wedding songs, and representative songs voicing community identity. Seasonal songs and love songs no less form part of their important musical repertoire to express emotions, social values, and the cyclical rhythms of rural life.

A) Religious Songs

The religious practices entertained by the Bodo community revolve around the worship of *Bwathau*, which is the symbolic form of the five elements of nature. Here, *Bwa* means five, while *Thau* translates to elements. This aptly translates the religious nature of the Bodo tribe, which lies in their reverence for the basic elements found in nature. *Sijou*, which is a cactus plant, symbolically represents *Bwathau*. This could mean that the plant symbolically represents the strength found with the Bodo tribe, given its ability to withstand different climatic elements.

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The religious rituals related to the worship of *Bwathau* have a chief priest who conducts the rituals, and his religious chants are chanted in a song form and form a very important genre of religious folk songs. The worship of Bwathau marks a well-combined presentation of both *Methai* and *Moshanai*, which mean song and dance, respectively. In this worship, eighteen different types of *Moshanai*, collectively referred to as *Kherai*, are performed. The different types of *Moshanai* essentially depend upon the act of imitation of nature.

Next, after the completion of the principal puja, the Kherai dance is performed. For example, *Dausari Moshanai*, whose name is derived from *Dausari,* a bird commonly known as the Indian Myna or *Shalikh*. This dance is an imitation of the actions of the bird, and *Bibaar Moshanai,* representing the blooming of flowers, is the manifestation of the prayer for happiness, as it is performed after the completion of the puja as a symbol of the blooming of flowers.

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B) Baishagu

Baishagu is one of the most important festivals of the Bodo community, which is intricately tied with the folk songs and dance of the community. Baishagu literally means "before all seasons," as the word is made up of *Bai* (season) and *Agu* (before). Baishagu is the first day of the calendar year of the Bodo community, with the festivities commencing on the last day of the month of Chaitra, lasting for seven days. Baishagu is known by the fact that the festivities are continuous, with community dancing and collective merrymaking.

The songs linked with Baishagu are mainly romantic, and there is involvement of both men and women in singing and performing these dances. Usually, it is the women who sing and perform the Baishagu songs and dances, and they are accompanied by men who play traditional musical instruments. These musical instruments consist of five different kinds, which are *kham* (a drum, equivalent to *khol*), *jottha* (cymbals),

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kholtop (a percussion musical instrument made of a bamboo base), *sharinja* (a bowed string musical instrument, equivalent to a violin), and *shiphung* (a flute musical instrument). The festival starts with worshipping the cattle ritually, which is an act of agricultural prosperity, and has strong links to worshipping Bwathau.

Food has a prime importance during this festival, and an extensive range of traditional food items is prepared and served during this occasion. Among these, *Petta*, which consists of sweet and steamed rice, has strong folklore and cultural importance.

C) Agricultural Songs

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood of the Bodos, where rice, along with jute, mustard, and other crops, is cultivated. However, it may be stated here that the Bodos possess a vast amount of cultivated land, which is rich and fertile. Thus, the community places great importance on what is known as "independce" of labor. As such, there is no practice of tenant farming,

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which is, as a matter of fact, a common practice among many other communities, as the Bodos do not like to work as laborers on someone else's farm. Instead, they prefer to work on each other's farms based on what is known as *Shauri*, which is nothing but a practice of working together as a sign of friendship.

Shauri practices continue to be a significant social entity, and it has been identified with a corpus of folk songs associated with agriculture. These songs can be jointly sung after different agricultural activities such as ploughing, growing, reaping, or winnowing crops. The songs have a multifaceted role as they help minimize fatigue, develop coordination between laborers, or create a mood of joy or social cohesion while working. But it has been observed that some members of the social group believe that the dominant emphasis on cooperative working or the associated social values of Shauri might have impacted the commercialization of agriculture. This has resulted in

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unexplored economic potential because of a large amount of fertile land available with members of the Bodo social group.

D) Na Gurnaay (Fishing Song)

Na Gurnaay refers to a genre of folk songs that relate to the fishing practices of the Bodo people, which mainly consist of women's choruses. It normally involves about 20 to 25 women singing these songs while jointly undertaking fishing and sometimes in conjunction with their regular activities, which include bathing in rivers. Besides, the Na Gurnaay folk song was specifically sung during the monsoons when water was in plenty and thus made common practice for joint fishing by many people.

The performance of Na Gurnaay has multiple tasks, which play a social as well as practical role for the communities it serves. Singing while fishing helps maintain the rhythm designed for collective labor, keeping the moods of the women elevated while minimizing physical fatigue associated with fishing

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activities. Na Gurnaay also encourages collective socialization of the women through its performance associated with subsistence aspects of Bodo society.

E) Habani (Wedding Songs)

Habani is the corpus of folk songs associated with wedding rituals practiced by the Bodo community. These songs depend on the different rituals in the marriage ceremony and follow rituals like the reception of the bride in the groom's household and saying farewell to the bride in her familial household. Every ritual situation is associated with specific songs, which convey the emotions of departure, happiness, and continuity.

One of the important cultural practices of Bodo families is the existence of the holy area called *Naw-Ma*, situated on the northern side of every Bodo household. In Bodo language, *Naw* represents house, while *Ma* represents mother, symbolically translating to the "mother of all houses." This holy area called the *Naw-Ma* is essentially the worship area of Bwathau and is

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considered the most sacred area in every Bodo household. Access to this area is entirely forbidden to strangers who come from other households or who are not members of Bodo society or religion. In fact, daughters who have married and become part of other households also are forbidden to enter the *Naw-Ma* of their original household.

In the marriage ceremonies, the bride is placed inside *Naw-Ma* before proceeding to the groom's residence. It is at this point the women, named *Bairathi*, perform *Habani* songs that literally ask the bride to come out of this consecrated area before proceeding to her new home with her groom. The songs highlight how important this rite of passage is as far as a strong association between music, domestic space, and society is concerned in Bodo marriage rituals.

F) Baguram-Ba (Traditional Dance Song)

Baguram-Ba is deemed to be the best representation of the traditional dance song for the Bodo community and

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is a significant part of their identities as a community. Though there are different forms of *Baguram-Ba* songs, currently, there is an initiative to unify the nature of this song. This comes as a result of a seminar that has been scheduled for discussion and adoption of a unified form of the song, indicating there is a desire by the community to showcase their unity in their musical traditions through this song. Essentially, *Baguram-Ba* is significant as not just a performance piece, but also as a representation of Bodo community continuity.

In addition to these broad folk-song types, there is a rich body of other traditional songs which are preserved by the Bodo community, such as **woodcutter's songs**, **Love Songs**, **Songs based on Daily Life**, and **Weaving Songs**. These songs demonstrate, further, the integration of music with working life as well as with society, which again emphasizes the Bodos' intimate relation to nature, occupation, and social life.

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Folk Tales:

The well-developed Bodo folk tale tradition is narrated during day-to-day activities in the fields by skilled storytellers among workers or agricultural laborers. It not only entertains them but also purifies their soul. Till today, over thirty folk tales have been preserved in the Bodo language, covering themes like love, heroism, and moral values.

Besides these shorter ones, there are very long folk tales that may be carried through a whole day of narration. Indeed, many such extended stories remain to be fully recorded, but some efforts are being made to preserve them for the future. One such is **Nijawm Phagla**-a story about a man who disguises himself as a madman and spies on a queen-and that too remains unfinished, and it is still being part of the living oral tradition.

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Print and Media Presence

The Bodo people of West Bengal represent a very slowly developing literary tradition over the last several decades. The first work of poetry, 'Bibaar', was published in 1964 in the Bodo language using the Bengali script. Thereafter, very little happened in terms of the literary production of the Bodo language due to limited readership. In recent years, however, organizations such as the *Pashchim Banga Bodo Sahitya Sabha* have rejuvenated literary production by compiling and publishing annual collections of poems written in the Bodo language. An important medium that showcases current Bodo poetry, the yearly anthology entitled 'Awraithai' (which means Recitation), has just released its latest edition containing sixty-three poems.

Apart from poetry, the community has published journals to reinforce literary interaction. The first monthly journal, 'Thungri', was published in 1996 but ceased after three years. At present, various journals are

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circulating such as 'Sanjarang' (Rising of the Sun at Dawn), published from Alipurduar; 'Laijou' (Young Banana Leaf), from Kolkata; and 'Raidaushuli' published from Terai and Dooars. The annual poetry journal 'Awraithai' is also circulated from Terai and Dooars region.

The Bodo community of West Bengal has produced several eminent intellectuals and literary figures who have made significant contributions to the study, preservation, and creative expression of Bodo history, culture, and language. Among them, Ramesh Chandra Suba stands out as a distinguished scholar and anthropologist who has worked tirelessly toward the documentation and preservation of Bodo culture and linguistic heritage.

Another notable figure is Satyendranath Mondal, whose scholarly work *Mech Somaj Ebong Sanskriti*, written in Bengali, offers an important historical and

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cultural study of the Bodo (Mech) community and serves as a valuable resource for a wider readership.

In the field of creative literature, Bidyut Kumar Basumata has made significant contributions as a short story writer and poet writing in the Bodo language. His poetry collection *Gwdwi Gwkha Gwbab* (Sour, Hot and Sweet) has been included in the syllabus of the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies at Gauhati University, reflecting its academic and literary significance. Another of his poetry collections, *Dwbwi Finnai Dinga*, along with the former, has been published by the Pashchim Banga Bodo Sahitya Sabha.

Ajendra Nath Brahma, a poet and a West Bengal Civil Service (WBCS) officer, has also contributed to Bodo literature through his poetry collection *Sonani Lauthi* (The Golden Stick). Similarly, Dr. Nitai Kumar Karjee has enriched Bodo poetry with his collection *Gwthar Mwdwm* (Concrete Body). In addition, Asit

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Baran Narjary is known for his poetry collection *Bibarni Motho* (Bud of a Flower), which further reflects the growing literary output of the Bodo community in West Bengal.

Apart from the literary contributions, the Bodo community is also carrying out technological and cultural endeavors to preserve and celebrate their culture. In the year 2025, a YouTube channel called 'Bodo Mech Time' was established in an endeavor to record and share the practices of the community through online platforms. Their cultural traditions and practices are also being encouraged through fashion shows, where the young generation is exposed to traditional garments, musical instruments, and household utensils. The women's and men's attires include the *Dokna*, *Aronai*, and *Gamchha*, respectively, dressed in a saree, dupatta, and dupatta manner, respectively.

Preservation Efforts:

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This is in contrast to Assam, where the Boro community has seen many of its people discontinue the use of the Boro language. Yet in the state of West Bengal, even small Bodos have existed for generations in the practice of the Bodo language. In the recent past, however, the use of the Bodo language has slowly diminished in the younger community because of the prominence of the Bengali language in day-to-day activities and education.

Realizing this problem, some social organizations and language activists have begun programs in those villages to spread the importance of maintaining their mother tongue, besides learning Bengali and English.Parents have been motivated to spend at least an hour a day, for example, during lunch or dinner, speaking Bodo.

At the same time, the demographic problem has been raised by some activists, and it has been stressed that without adequate growth, this language will further decline, and they have spurred parents to have at least

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two children. There are also efforts being made to get official support from the state government. The activists have demanded that they be allowed to impart education in the Bodo language in primary schools, where at least 40% of the students belong to the Bodo community. This alone will greatly help in language preservation, as the members have already been able to translate some 4,000 textbooks up to class two, from Bengali to Bodo, through their own resource mobilization and support from the Bodo community in Assam. These books have been employed presently for teaching before or after school hours. Moreover, a pictorial Bodo dictionary is being worked upon, and three workshops have been conducted, and a total of seven workshops have been organized to bring it to completion. All these efforts put together show that the Mech/Bodo language is being properly preserved for the coming generation.

Based on a personal interview with Abhik Sarkar, conducted on 13 Jan. 2026 in Kolkata.

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Cultural and Linguistic Heritage of the Lepcha Community in West Bengal:

Folk Traditions, Literature, and Contemporary Initiatives

JIGME WANGCHUK TSHERING[1] and **SUKSING LEPCHA**[2]

Community Background:

The Lepcha tribe is one of the indigenous ethnic groups of West Bengal, characterized by their unique culture, language, costume, and traditional folklores. The

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[1] Editor of some renowned magazines sponsored by the Tribal Department Govt. Of West Bengal.

[2] Scholar, writer, and cultural advocate from the Lepcha community of Upper Pochok, Git-Dabling, West Bengal.

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majority of the Lepchas reside in the hill districts of the Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Kalimpong regions. Available historical records say that the Lepchas were the earliest settlers of the hills of West Bengal, inhabiting the region before the arrival of the other ethnic groups. From Sikkim to Siliguri, no other ethnic groups resided within this region before the Lepchas, as reflected by the available records. At the present, it is estimated that 80 percent of the Lepchas stay within the Kalimpong area, with 20 percent within the vicinity of the Darjeeling region.

Many Gazetteers of West Bengal support the fact that during the time of British entry into the hill areas, the Lepcha community was the only aboriginal community inhabiting these regions. This historical presence of the people is further supported by the naming of the local flora, fauna, and a number of geographical regions derived from the Lepcha language. Traditionally, the Lepchas are nature worshippers and like to live in proximity to natural environments,

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particularly in forested village areas. They have kept themselves away from modern industrialization and urban civilization, leading a life deeply rooted in nature.

The people are very reliant on natural resources and have a belief that forests and nature contain all necessary means for their sustenance. The Lepchas have very rich knowledge of plant-based medicine. The Lepchas are very famous for their calm nature. They are very proud of their moral character of their language; their language does not contain words that may be intended for offending people. For that reason, their language is always termed *Rong Aaring*, which means 'Divine Language'.

Language and Script:

The Lepcha tribe speaks an ancient language called *Rong Ring*. Today, it is collectively called the Lepcha language. The writing script of Lepcha is called *Rong Aming* and *Rong Chyoming*. They symbolically represent

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"male" and "female" notions respectively. However, over time, the use of the Lepcha script has been gradually declining due to the increasing influence of dominant regional and national languages. Moreover, it is an issue of grave concern that today there are no government schools in West Bengal where Lepcha language is taught. Consequently, although Lepchas speak *Rong Ring* in their own social setup, they are forced to speak Nepali whenever they interact with people of different tribes, particularly Nepalis. There are many settlers of Nepali origin in Lepcha-inhabited areas.

Geographical Distribution:

Geographically, the Lepcha community is mainly dispersed across Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Kalimpong districts, with the largest number being from Kalimpong. In addition to Kalimpong town, Lepchas inhabit various villages around it, such as Tasiding, Nase, Tarzong, Bong Batta, Dongra, Sang Se, Pudung, Loleh, Kongki

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Bong, Nimbong, Git Beyong, Nim, Mang Zin, Long Shyol, TodeyTangta, Lingsay–Lingsekha, and Kasyam. In the Darjeeling area, Lepcha villages fall within Mane Bhanjan, SukhiaPokhri, Kulung Dung, Rimbik, Takdah, TaklingSingritam, Karmi, while a small number dwell within the Darjeeling town itself. In the Kurseong subdivision, Lepcha people fall within Sittong I, II, and III.

Oral Traditions:

Folk Song:

The Lepcha people have a very rich and varied repertoire of folk songs associated with different aspects of their socio-economic and spiritual lives. These songs are in the genre of wedding, harvesting, grass cutting, ritual praying, and fishing. Folk music occupies the pride of place in the Lepcha cultural expression and is conventionally performed with indigenous musical instruments.

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Prominent among them are the *Pongtong Palit* or flute, which is widely used in ritual prayer songs and other forms of music too; *Tung Buk* is more appropriately known as the Lepcha guitar; *Tungdar* or the drum; *Po Potek* is a percussion instrument made of bamboo; *Suthsang* is a lot like a Lepcha violin; and *Bom Puthit* is made of bamboo and is supposed to mimic the sounds of birds. It is these instruments altogether that give Lepcha folk its characteristic musical identity.

Major genres of Lepcha folk songs may be classified as follows:

A) **Numkyo Bree:** The Numkyo Bree songsare traditional songs in the Lepcha community, sung during the wedding ceremony in a bid to grant the newlywed couple a smooth and prosperous marital relationship. The songs that come underNumkyo Bree, in the traditional setting, were sung in a way that they do not require any musical accompaniment;

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however, of late, musical instruments of the traditional Lepcha communities have come into play in an effort to adapt the traditional practice.

B) **Jo Maal:** Jo Maal is one of the typical Lepcha agricultural folk songs, which are sung while ploughing paddy fields, mainly dry ones. It takes places in the month of May and June. These songsare sung collectively by both men and women during their agricultural activities that will help to dissipate physical tiredness and maintain rhythm and coordination while working in the field. Traditionally, Jo Maal is sung without instruments in the open field; nowadays, it has also performed on the stage during cultural programs, and traditional musical instruments are used for it.

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C) **Religious:** Nature-worshipping tribes like the Lepcha have various folk songs of a religious nature, which are full of reverence towards nature or nature symbols. Such folk songs are a significant genre of folk music of the Lepcha, being closely associated with rituals and seasons. There are various types of religious folk songs, which are as follows:

1. **Chyoo Rum Faat:** The songs are showcased as an act of worship and reverence for the mountain, Kanchenjunga, which is a greatly revered spiritual center in the Lepcha faith. The natives feel that there is an invisible spiritual or dreamland referred to as *Nimaayel Kyoung* inside the Kanchenjungafrom where all the Lepcha songs have originated. It is celebrated in the month of November as an act of gratitude to the mountain deity through the performance of the 'Chyoo Rum Faat'.

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2. **Muk Zik Ding:** This genre of songs is sung by the Lepcha people in worship of Mother Nature. These are the songs performed in the months of February and March and happen to reflect the Lepcha worldview of harmony between man and the natural environment.

3. **Layng Rum Faat:** These songs are associated with the adoration of Mother Earth or the ancestral land. Generally, Layng Rum Faat is observed during April and May of each year, as it coincides with agricultural cycles and seasonal transitions.

4. **Tungrong Rum Faat:** This genre consists of songs in praise and worship of Tendong Hill, which is associated with a mythological story among the Lepcha community about a flood that occurred due to the Teesta and Rangeet rivers. The ritual ceremony takes place in the month of January to remember divine protection and survival.

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5. **Sakyoo Rum Faat:** These songs are devoted to the worship of the Himalayan range and are performed in the month of November, emphasizing the spiritual importance of the mountains in Lepcha cosmology.

   In the Lepcha religious vocabulary, the name *Rum* represents 'God', and *Faat* is identified as 'Offering'.

D) **Naamaal Naambun Naamsung:** This genre of music encompasses those associated with NaamaalNaambunNaamsung, which are New Year celebrations among the Lepcha tribe. NaambunNaamsung is celebrated within the month of December, though it differs depending on when its *tithi*actually falls, that is, whether it is early, in the middle, or towards the latter part of December. This genre of music is significant in creating awareness of transition as well as functioning as a social glue among the inhabitants of the Lepcha tribe.

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E) **Apraya Vom:** ApravaVom is the practice of composing songs spontaneously for any given topic or situation. As far as the Lepcha nomenclature is concerned, *Vam* is 'song.' For example, composing songs at any given time and place such as ceremonies, weddings, and religious functions (*puja*) can be denoted as *Lee Aapraya Vam*, as *Lee* means 'house,'(songs composed during housewarming ceremonies), *Bree Aapraya Vam* for songs written during the wedding ceremony, as *Bree* means 'wedding'.

A distinctive feature of Aapraya Vam is that it is performed without instrumental accompaniment and is composed and transmitted orally rather than in written form.It is an example of how the creative abilities of the Lepcha community in terms of improvisation are recognized and how oral transmission is valued in the preservation and passing on of their music and language.

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F) **Reyon Ong Beyop:** These are traditional Lepcha fishing songs sung while working at fishing, using a fishing net. These songs are sung in a group while fishing together and also function as a cultural practice for coordinating labor or strengthening social bonding. Being part of the folk tradition, Reyon Ong Beyop reflects upon the special rapport between the Lepcha community and the natural environment, especially rivers and the aquatic resources within them.

G) **LenchyoVom:** LenchyoVom is a traditional Lepcha genre of songs related to love, expressing feelings and relations between people within the community. These songs are an integral part of the Lepcha oral tradition and are performed without instrumental accompaniment.

H) **Beeknak Vom:** These are songs that are sung during grazing and can be sung by men as well as women. They are songs that do not relate to any

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particular time and can be sung at any time during the year.

I) **Ong Chyok Vom:** Ong ChyokVom are songs which are normally sung while drawing water in bamboo vessels. These are normally sung by women but are not associated with a specific season. They are part of the routine labor songs.

J) **Byok Teoit Vom:** This consists of cutting songs that are sung while taking part in the process of cutting grass. The songs play a role in coordinating actions and keeping a rhythmic connection with farming.

K) **Jo Dyang Vom:** Jo DyangVom is the name given to the songs sung during the harvesting of rice. These songs help to coordinate the harvesting of rice, thus emphasizing the strong link between the Lepchas and the natural resources they utilize.

L) **Chyaapmong Fo Vom:**ChyaapmongFoVom is a traditional folk song sung by the Lepcha

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community. This folk song revolves around the theme of a river bird. The song is derived from a story or a tale that is very much known to the community of Lepchas.

Folk Tale:

Apart from the rich tradition of the Lepcha folk songs, the community has a rich tradition of folk tales. Some of these folk tales are **SuthongTkruk** (The Tiger and the Toad), **Ryot Kup Sung** (The Tale of an Orphan), and **Rolong Mung An Kundung Put** (The Tale of a Ghost). So far, over 25 Lepcha folk tales have been documented. In addition to this, numerous others are currently being recorded and preserved. The stories are very important to the community because they can be considered part of the oral literary tradition.

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Print and Media Presence:

The Lepcha community in the state of West Bengal has made significant contributions to literary preservation through a number of magazines and literary works. Some of the magazines include a quarterly magazine called *Achuley*, while others include *Panu GaybooAchyok*, *Aathing K. P. Tamsang*, *Thikung G. B. General Manwaring*, which come out on a yearly basis. All these magazines appear to be bilingual in nature; that is, they appear in both English and Lepcha. In regard to literary preservation through written form, a number of poetry books or storybooks have been produced in the Lepcha language, reflecting a sustained effort to document and transmit their cultural heritage through written media.

Notable Scholars and Writers:

There have been a number of distinguished scholars and writers who have played a crucial role in preserving and

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promoting the culture of the Lepcha people of West Bengal. They include K. P. Tamsang, Dr. B. C. Roy, G. B. General Manwaring, Dr. R. K. Sprig, L. S. Tamsang, A. K. Fonning, and Patrick Sada. All these scholars and writers have played a very crucial role in recording the language, stories passed from one generation to another, folk literature, and practices of the Lepcha people.

Preservation Efforts:

The Lepcha community has developed a tradition of **Night Schools** wherein senior members of society impart their knowledge to young generations regarding Lepcha language, script, culture, and oral traditions. This is not just done in educational institutions; in fact, it continues in many households as well, wherein elders pass their language and culture to young ones. At present, there are around 40 Night Schools functioning in some corner of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. This tendency was prevalent right from the inception of the

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Lepcha settlement in small group settings of these regions.

Although there are no schools in West Bengal at which Lepcha language is currently taught officially, recent developments have been undertaken since 2025 by Lepcha language and culture experts to educate the young generation in some areas of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA). The Lepcha community hopes that these initiatives would bring positive results, but they are finding it difficult due to some constraints, especially in terms of funding, as these are currently self-supported initiatives. In fact, while there is support from the state government in terms of an entity such as the *West Bengal Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board* to ensure Lepcha welfare, it is believed that it requires more efficient and dedicated members to undertake initiatives like maintenance of Lepcha language and culture.

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Recognition and Future:

In order to receive greater recognition and support in West Bengal among the Lepcha community, an apparent requirement is to create awareness among other communities about the culture and heritage of the Lepcha people. Creating awareness among the other communities will help in developing a joint approach to ensure support for all efforts toward maintaining the linguistic and traditional identity among the Lepcha community in West Bengal.

Based on a personal interview with Abhik Sarkar, conducted on 14 Jan. 2026 in Kolkata.

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Harvest, Ritual, and Femininity: The Tusu Festival among the Kurmi of Bengal

BINAPANI MAHATO[1]

Har–Bitang Culture in Eastern India:

In the eastern part of India, under the vast geographical territory of the Chhotanagpur Plateau, which includes the northern part of Odisha, the entire Jharkhand state, and the western part of the West Bengal districts, the Har-Bitang culture is prevalent. This culture is deeply embedded in the agrarian lifestyle that this culture observes. The culture is related to human beings who are associated with the cultivation of the earth and the

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rearing of the soil for the purpose of agriculture. The term "Har" denotes human beings, especially the agriculturists who toil for cultivation of the soil. Alongside these individuals, there are others who contribute to the cultivation of the soil by providing the relevant resources that are necessary for agriculture, including ploughs, iron-based tools, wooden tools, etc. These groups that assist the farmers are called *Bitang*. The term *Bitang*, which stands for 'friends,' illustrates the association these two groups share with one another in their interaction with the Har. Rather than having a relation of 'service,' *Bitang* assist the Har farmers as 'partners' in agriculture. This partnership between these two groups ensures the successful continuation of agricultural activity on one end and supports the economic growth of the area as a whole. The Har Bitang cultural system symbolizes an association that prioritizes cooperation, interdependence, and mutual responsibility in society.

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The Kurmi Community, the Origin of Tusu and the Time and Duration of the Tusu Festival :

Among these ancient agrarian societies, the Kurmi are one of the most distinguished groups. Significantly, the Tusu festivities originated in the Kurmi society, in which these ceremonies possess particular cultural significance. Tusu is considered the final function in the series of Kurmi ritualistic events that stretch over time, thus denoting considerable importance. It is initiated on the last day of the Bengali month of *Agrahayana*, usually in mid-December. Subsequent to this, the Tusu festivities continue over the whole period of the Bengali month of *Poush* until the final day, coinciding with *Makar Sankranti*. This way, the Tusu festivities extend over a continuous period of about thirty days. The duration of the festivities reflects considerable significance in the lives of the Kurmi society because these festivities gradually stretch over time.

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Ritual Practices: Harvest and Worship of Paddy:

One of the major ritual practices of the Tusu festival is the ceremonial treatment of the last bundle of paddy harvested from the field. It is treated as most sacrosanct and is worshipped in accordance with established ritual tradition. After the ritual is performed, it is being brought from the field into the house very carefully and gently, often being carried on the head as a sign of respect and then installed within the house. After such ritual mobility, the paddy is threshed and then deposited in the house to mark its entry into the household store of food. In this process, the paddy undergoes a series of symbolic transformations and takes different names according to its spatial and ritual status. When it stays in the field, the paddy is called *Dhani Thakuran*, *Thakuran* meaning a goddess. When, in this ritual procession, it is carried upon the head, the name given to it is *Dini Thakuran*, and after being finally kept inside the house, it is called *Dimni Thakuran*. Successive naming thus

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marks the journey of the crop from the field to the house as a sacred one. A proverb well known in the Kurmi dialect goes like this: *"Je Dini sei Tusu Moni,"* which means that "she who is Dini is none other than Tusu Moni." The equation of Tusu with this sacrosanct form of paddy is, therefore, overt. It is from this belief that Tusu has come to represent the crop goddess and, more importantly, the presiding deity of paddy, the central input in the Kurmi agrarian economy.

Preparation of the Tusu Structure:

Tusu does not take any anthropomorphic shape, nor does he have any idol representing him. The last of the paddy gathered, however, is instituted in the home and worshiped in the form of Tusu. During performances of this festival, young girls and lasses go to the fields, cook rice, and then have a joint meal of this rice. After this, they collect, in a collective manner, paddy grains that have fallen in the field and then transport these grains to

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their homes. These grains are then used to obtain rice, which is further ground into a fine powder. The rice powder is then mixed with a liquid form of cow dung gathered from a calf, poured into an earthen container, and then kept in a room in the home, where a clean and purified space is designated by drawing a qualitative *aalpona*, using a solution of cow dung, and then filling this area with a mixture of rice powder and water. Similar designs of "aalpona" are also depicted on the earthen pot, which consecrates the pot itself. Moreover, rice husks, called "tush" in Bangla, mixed with cow dung and rice powder, are dried and made into the form of balls, which are kept inside the pot. Finally, the paddy is kept on top of the contents of the pot, and the earthen pot is covered with an earthen lid. This structure prepared inside the pot is worshipped as "Tusu," representing the sacred dimension of the crop and emphasizing the association between the crop, religious practice, and space.

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Symbolism and Offerings:

The structure of the ritual in the concept of Tusu is also symbolically connected to the womb of the woman, emphasizing the concepts of fertility, rebirth, and the potential for creation. Tusu is treated as the goddess of crops, yet in the cultural concept of the Kurmi people, it is exclusively understood as a young lass rather than a pregnant woman or an elderly woman. The word *Moni* in the language of the Kurmi people means young lasses, and thus the goddess Tusu is called *Tusu Moni*. The importance of the youthful approach to the god is the potential for plant growth and the fertility in the agricultural cycles. The goddess is offered the *Bandu* flower, which has a specific color, red, and is located on the Sal tree, whereas the part from which the flower emerges is different in form from the rest of the tree. The *Bandu* flower is considered indispensable to the worship of Tusu and occupies a central place in the ritual offerings. Alongside it, five additional types of vegetable

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flowers—such as eggplant flower and tomato flower—are also offered, further reinforcing the agricultural symbolism of the ritual. Throughout the month of *Poush*, Tusu is worshipped regularly with lamps, flowers, and other ritual items. Each evening, following the daily *puja*, members of the Kurmi community gather to sing devotional and festive songs, making collective singing an integral component of Tusu worship and an important medium for expressing communal devotion and cultural continuity.

Songs as Rituals:

Singing songs during the Tusu festival is the main act of worship and is presumed to be the real puja of the deity. The songs are ritual utterances, akin to mantras, in the context of Tusu worship. It is during this collective singing that the Karmaiti-young working girls of the community-become fully immersed, carrying on until well past midnight. The songs are thematically arranged

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around a variety of themes that reflect the imaginative and relational ways in which Tusu is conceived. Some songs describe:

A) the establishment of Tusu, for example, *'Amra je mai Tusu khapi ho/ Aghran Sankranti diney go'*

B) playful interaction with Tusu, who is envisioned as a young girl; others describe

C) feeding her or adorning her with jewellery, for example, *'Aaso Tusu boso Tusu Mon shanto kori go/Mon bhoriye khabe Tusu chira gur ark hoi go'* and *'Mai ke kobo mai ke kobo moner kotha/ Humro loge aani de mai prem churi kajol lata'*. Certain songs narrate

D) taking Tusu on a journey, drawing on the idea that she has come to her father's house from her in-laws, thereby evoking the social experience of married daughters returning to their natal homes, for example, *'Amar Tusu kashi jabe palki chori u-bela/bihan belay dekhay aanbo maraporir koyla tola'*.

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E) There are also songs voiced from the perspective of Tusu's mother, expressing maternal concern and emotional resistance to any negative remarks made about her daughter, for example, *'Ke bole lo ke bole lo amar Tusu kalo lo/ Bishnupurer holud aani ga koribo aalo lo'*. Through these varied thematic expressions, the songs articulate affection, care, social roles, and emotional bonds. Together, they form an oral repertoire that sustains the ritual, emotional, and cultural dimensions of Tusu worship.

Immersion and Cosmological Significance:

On the last day of Tusu puja, which coincides with Makar Sankranti, a ritual structure of Tusu is reverently placed on a brightly decorated structure formed by bamboo stick decorations and colored papers, which is referred to as 'Choudol.' The 'Choudol' serves as a symbolic medium for Tusu, representing her departure as well as return to her in-laws' house. Decorations on the

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'Choudol' consist of flowers prepared using colored papers, which symbolizes the five primary elements: earth, water, fire, air, and ether, with an emphasis on providing a cosmological context to the rituals as well. Tusu is then immersed in a river, i.e., in moving water, but not in a pond or stagnant water of any kind. Moving water is symbolically equated with the 'in-laws' house' of Tusu, reinforcing notions of 'flow' and 'continuity' in ritual practices. Moreover, a symbolic similarity between the duration of Tusu Porob, i.e., thirty days, and the 'menstrual cycle' of a woman, which lasts for twenty-eight days, serves to emphasize the close association between fertility, regeneration, and Tusu being a ritual related to nature itself.

Tusu Festival and the Reflection of Women:

The significance of Tusu as a festival is also best described as deeply embedded in the theme of women, especially in terms of its content as well as the substance

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of the celebration. First and foremost, the image of Tusu herself can be understood in terms of a young daughter returning home to her father's house during the course of the celebration, which makes reference to the theme of families as well as the position of women in agrarian society. Second, in terms of the participants of Tusu worship or puja, it is best understood that the primary participants are little girls who play the relevant roles in the worship as well as the songs that are sung during the course of the Tusu celebration. Additionally, it is older women who play supportive roles in the appropriate conduct or consummation of the puja. This is also in consideration of the fact that the subject matter that defines the songs sung during the course of the Tusu celebration is exclusively the theme of women, especially in terms of play, care, or nurturing.

Based on a lecture by Binapani Mahato.

Transcription: Abhik Sarkar

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