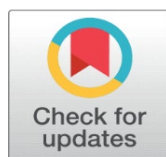


CONCEPTUALIZING THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL NATURE OF FOLK PRACTICE AS ANTHROPOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Folklore is a dynamic process, and it appropriates the changes in society while simultaneously retaining the elements of tradition and the past to ascertain its continuity of tradition and contemporary relevance. Considering folk practices, the earlier studies had encountered the stereotypical notions constructed around the folklore materials and folklore processes. And some of these notions implied the characteristics of folk practices as traditional, rurality, outdatedness, superstitious, archaic, static, not contemporary, and, to the extent, as irrational. Thus, the later studies on folk practices had to prove the role of folklore in explicating the complex relationship humans have with the nature, cosmos and supernatural on the one hand and in contemplating the reflections of their creativity, unconsciousness, and their cognitive encounters in their socio-cultural life on the other hand. However, there are two striking features, namely, anonymity and community representation, that make folklore a more individual creation with community ownership, and it facilitates the study of folklore folk practices as a first step towards understanding the dimensions of community life. Therefore, while representing the ethos of a community, folklore and folk practices show inclusiveness and accommodativeness by providing either intersection between different communities or by identifying points of convergence or divergence. By taking a few examples from the Santal community of Odisha, this article emphasizes the point that folk practices are rich and meaningful sources that play a significant role in understanding the community life by relating them with “cognition and values” Dundes (1975) and also by making us realize how they “bring unconscious content into consciousness” (1975: xi).

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is not a customary practice to begin with the working definition of Alan Dundes and it cannot be ignored as it broadly conceives both the categories of ‘folk’ and ‘lore’, and also tends to clarify the role and nature of each of them in their existence. According to him, “[t]he terms ‘folk’ can refer to any group of people

whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is – it could be a common occupation, language, or religion – but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions, which it calls its own. In theory, a group consists of at least two persons but generally, most groups consist of many individuals. Individual members in a group may not be knowing all other members, but they will probably know the common core of the traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group have a sense of group identity” (1965:2). But realizing the size and nature of the materials, that make the definition of lore as tough as possible, he provides a list of potential customs that are the product of the folks. Thus, he understands that “these materials and the study of them are both referred to as folklore. To avoid any confusion, it might be better to use the term ‘folklore’ for the materials and ‘folkloristics’ for the study of the materials” (1965:3). There are many definitions that can be found in the *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* (1984). For Marian W. Smith, “[i]t is usual to define folklore either literally as the lore of the folk or, more descriptively, in terms of an oral literary tradition” (SDFML 1984: 402) and for MacEdward Leach, “Folklore is the generic term to designate the customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs, etc; in short, the accumulated knowledge of a homogeneous unsophisticated people tied together not only by common physical bonds but also by emotional ones which colour their every expression, giving it unity and individual distinction” (SDFML 1984: 401-402). Including these two, given as samples, all the definitions in the SDFML collectively offer ways to look at the materials as well as to present These definitions presented here and other definitions (not included here) collectively offer ways to look at the folklore materials (lore) and also to highlight that identification folklore items under the four major categories such as ‘oral traditions’, ‘social customs and beliefs’, ‘material culture’ and ‘performing arts’ is an essential aspect of folklore studies.

To ignore the demerits and by considering its accommodativeness, the definition of ‘folk’ given by Dundes is relevant in the context of Santal tribal community for its identity of sharing a common culture. The term facilitates the understanding of the process of formation of group identity among the people of a single community whose population is distributed across different geographical locations in India and neighbouring countries. Similarly, the term facilitates our understanding of the cultural differences of the same community living in the same geographical location, for instance, religion or religious belief as a factor that disintegrates into small groups. Thus, the ‘folk’ must be understood in a larger context as it brings together disintegrated small groups of a particular community for a common purpose, i.e., to develop a sense of group identity. This binary of ‘folk’ + ‘lore’ provides ample scope for an in-depth study by folklore scholars for whom identification and classification of folklore materials is not a hard task, since the analytical categories of folklore materials are not the creation of folks. However, the identification of materials becomes an essential task for scholars as each discipline establishes its boundary by identifying and limiting the materials it handles. According to Kenneth S. Goldstein “[f]or historian these materials consist of historical data, for the literary scholar they consist of literature, for the folklorist they consist of the materials which he calls folklore” (1964:1). Thus, scholars who work on their folklore materials might have either collected by themselves directly from the field or used the collections available in libraries, archives, etc. Unlike amateur scholars, professional folklorists are expected to be thorough with the collection methods and techniques for folklore materials, theoretical knowledge for the identification of folklore materials and also with analytical/ interpretative tools for studying the materials that are the products of folklife, i.e., manifested in their

original contexts for fulfilling various requirements of people. Thus, the folklore fieldworks must focus on (folklore) materials, (folklore) process and (folklore) ideas in which the materials refer to the genres and sub-genres, the process denotes the actual process in which folklore is manifested and the folklore ideas are concerned about the folks and their attitudes, feelings, themes, and aesthetics, and social and psychological reactions to the folklore materials Goldstein (1964). Importantly, the conceptualization of folklore material could expand the horizon and it integrates some of the elements such as 'folk', 'material', 'context', and 'process' that together make the studies on folk practices more contemporary and relevant to the current issue, that is, the proposition that 'folk without lore' or 'lore without folk' could not yield anything desired and unimaginable too.

The Sarhul, for example, is a spring festival celebrated by the tribal communities in Jharkhand and neighbouring states to mark the occasion of the flowering of Sal trees. The first phase of the festival is the worship of their village deities who protect the tribal communities. Sal flowers are used in the worship of the deities and the Pahan or village priest plays an important role in performing all the activities associated with rituals. The elaborate rituals are performed in Sarna the designated private space meant for worship. However, the second phase of the Sarhul is the festival in which people sing and dance together in the places where the public or members of the other communities are having access to watch. Although it is a collective event of tribal communities, the difference could be seen among the tribal communities in terms of deities worshipped and the festival costumes. The significance of Sarhul is that it provides opportunities for the tribal communities for showcasing their identity for the non-native people – by moving away from ritual context to the celebration and festival. This translocation gives complexity to the Sarhul and thus, the parts of the Sarhul cannot be studied in isolation or in a decontextualized situation. Therefore, the context in which folk practices exist is vital for folklife studies, and also it must be noted that contextual information is essential for the collection of those items.

Possessing the knowledge about the nature and flexibility of 'natural' (original) context, understood in three types viz. highlight formal (organized, required, and sometimes scheduled), semi-formal (expected but required) and informal (incidental, casual, unscheduled, not required, or unexpected), is an important criteria for a successful data collection Goldstein (1964) and it is as well necessary for understanding the method of collection of social and physical settings along with the nature of transmission of folklore. In the case of Sarhul, training the future generation is not being done through a separate process; rather, the learning happens through their participation in the folk practices or actual performance, and the Sarhul can be seen as one of the visible examples for participatory community learning. The contemporariness of Sarhul as one of the examples of folk practices is presented here by explaining the signifying aspect of the origin story (myth) of the Santal community as well as it is providing a description of the present social position and social order. Moreover, this paper also delineates the significant role of cultural practices for the Santal community in educating the younger generation about the need of having appropriate social relationships and social behaviours - supported by the symbolic functions of folk narratives.

2. MATERIALS - THE SANTALS OF ODISHA

This ethnographic account of the Santal community living in the state of Odisha is developed based on secondary sources. Some of the ethnographic data have been collected by one of the authors of this article who is hailing from the research area

and working on the traditional knowledge systems of the Lod has. However, there are references to the folk practices of the neighbouring states that have been utilized as a way of signifying the role of folk practices and also for meeting the objectives of this study. The state of Odisha is known for hosting 62 tribal communities, which is a larger number compared to other states in India, and the tribal population in the state is 22.8 per cent of the total population as per the 2011 census. The most interesting feature of the demography of the state is that the Mayurbhanj district is having 58.7 per cent of the population of the Santal community. The Santals do not claim Odisha as their birthplace, rather through the available legend they admit that "Ahiri pipiri" is their birthplace and "Chaichapmpa" is their fort located somewhere in Bihar [Patnaik \(2002\)](#). Later they came to the Chotanagpur plateau and also occupied the adjoining districts of Midnapur and Singh hum, and it was at the end of the eighteenth century they settled permanently in the Santal Parganas. The language of Santali spoken by the Santals belongs to the group of Astro-Asiatic sub-family of the Austric family and bilingualism is common among the Santals as they also speak Odiya. Their village is associated with a sacred grove known as 'Jaher' which consists of trees such as Sal (*Shorea robusta*), Asan (*Terminalia elliptica*), and Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), etc., - an abode for their local deities. The transition from traditional to modern life could be seen in their use of household items such as furniture and utensils, and also it can also be found in the materials and items used in dresses and other adornments. For the Santals, rice is the staple food, and they eat all varieties of meat and fish items. Handia is their traditional drink, and it is a rice beer offered when old friends and guests visit their place. Besides, this local drink is also offered to their folk deities. Like other communities, they have a different notion of the concept of birth and death, and Damodar Jatra is well known for the immersion in the ashes of dead people. The social organization is well governed by customary laws and their unwritten regulations control their social and cultural behaviours. The Santals are known for having a rich tradition of oral literature, particularly folktales, myths, legends, etc. The members of the Santal community are aware of their origin myths, and the meaning of the myth is highly significant, and it reflects the point of universality when considering the creation of human beings. The detailed ethnographic aspects of the Santals of Odisha are available [Archer \(1984\)](#), [Bag \(1987\)](#), [Bodding \(1942\)](#), [Majumdar \(1956\)](#), [Mahapatra \(1986\)](#), [Orans \(1965\)](#), [Ray \(1975\)](#), [Troisi \(1979\)](#)

3. EXAMPLE ONE - THE ORIGIN MYTH OF SANTAL

The origin myth of Santals is quite enchanting for different reasons and foremost one is that it establishes blood relationships not only between all the clans of the community but also with different caste groups. The summary of the myth is given here: 'Long ago the earth was covered with water, and it was the abode for deities. The condition prevailed then was different - while pebbles floated cotton sunk into the water. On one of the stones, a plant named Karam Siram grew on which the deities used to climb up and down. Two birds known as Hans and Hanseli built their nest on the plant and laid two eggs. Two Manmis (human beings - named Pilchubudhi and Pilchubudha) came out of the eggs and the Sun and the Moon - the two paramount deities took initiatives for getting earth for the Manmis. They had discussions with the kings of the nether regions. It was decided to deposit soil on the back of tortoise to create the earth. Once the earth was created, the problem of food for the Manmis was also solved. On a fine day, the Manmis prepared and subsequently consumed an intoxicating drink, and the intoxicated Manmis cohabited and produced twelve sons and twelve daughters. After some time, one

day, Pilchubudhi took the daughters to the forest and the Pilchubudha took the sons to the forest. When both the old people disappeared, the sons and daughters spent some time in the forest and later they cohabited. Their family expanded and resulted in twelve clans (viz. Hansdah, Murmu, Khisku, Baski, Besra, Tudu, Hembrum, Soren, Marandi, Core, Pauria and Chapea). Meetings by all the clans held at several places to formulate rules and regulations ended the rules and regulations could be formulated and it was named Seri Sar jam which is worshipped till today. The expansion of the family led to the creation of separate castes as per the articles they took for their family. Those who took meat became Munda, Santhal, Ho, etc., and those who took coconut became Brahman. This is how several castes were originated as per the articles they took as their share' (Nityanand Patnaik 2002: 45-47). This origin myth is knitted in a narrative format that is suitable for the conception of a mythological world with different characters performing various actions for the fulfilment of the narrative paradigm. And the objective of the narrative imposes a kind of condition that is required for achieving the goal of constructing the universal meaning of the purpose of creation of the earth which is essential for human beings to live on it. To pay careful attention to the myth, however, one could realize the nature of relationships that is established between the characters and the multiplication of human beings on the surface of the earth. The myth presents the trajectory of the history of formation and development of social norms and other customs that bind the community and mould their behaviour even today. The implication is that there was a point in the history of human development that was not witnessed by any rules and regulations - collectively known as customs and customary practices. And another point that is surfaced is that it was the period that the human society had to face the complications of issues in the absence of customs and customary practices. The inference from the historically prevailed conditions shows that there was a cognitive realization of the existing conditions as well as the ability to find out a way out of the crisis and to construct the 'harmonious life.' The myth conveys, at the next level of implications, the point that there was a realization of the importance of coexistence with nature that might have been achieved by accommodating various elements of nature into their ecosystem for the purpose of passing them on to the future generations.

4. EXAMPLE TWO – KARAM/KARMA FESTIVAL

The Santals in Odisha are known for their colourful, attractive, and vibrant Karma festival and this ritualistic festival receives wide attention as it seems to "fulfil" various requirements of the community in a larger context. The Santals are not free from any kinds of external influence as well as from the modernization and globalization phenomena, and even Hinduism has also have made its influence on this community. Considering the minimum impact of the external elements on the community, however, the folk practices are used to enhance their sense of identity. The Karma is celebrated as a harvest festival and it is regarded as the most sacred and auspicious by the tribal communities living in Odisha and the neighbouring states such as Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, and Assam. Similarly, apart from the Santals, Baigas, Oraons, Binjhwaris, Mundas, Majhwars, Hos, Khortha's, Korbas, etc., are some of the groups who are also independently involving in the festival. The worship or ritual is in honour of the deity Karam or Karmas ani in anticipating good fortune and prosperity. Other than ritual elements, the Karam festival has a lot more to offer for an in-depth study as it is being an amalgamation of rituals, dance, and celebration – that is, together with the Karam emerges as an elaborate and beautiful dance festival occupying a public

domain to be consumed by both the tribal and non-tribal spectators. Further, the attractive costumes and attires of the participating male and female community members of the Santal community is an interesting aspect of the festival, and they reflect their indigeneity, solidarity, and aesthetics. Although there are few studies available on Karma festival of Santals of Odisha [Behera \(2016\)](#), [Bhowmick \(1999\)](#), [Chand and David \(1999\)](#) and other states, this study explores the cognitive dimension of some of the folk practices supported by narrative discourses. Although this article refers to the folk practices of the Santals of Odisha, as a matter of convenience, the discussion and findings could be seen as having relevance and validity for the same community living other parts of the state or elsewhere. Similarly, as other tribal communities are also celebrating the Karma festival both in Odisha and other parts of the country, the characteristics of 'folk' as an inclusive or a umbrella term, discussion on the issue of construction of tribal identity can be appropriated and generalized by augmenting the available factor of unifying elements of individual community by accommodating common features and also by ignoring the elements of variations.

The Karma celebration is associated with the elaborate ritual process that begins with rigorous fasting by both men and women. An offering is given to the deity for getting blessings for good fortune and prosperity. As a symbolic form for showcasing their eternal relationship with the forest, the metaphorical form for nature, a Sal tree will be planted in a particular place known as 'akhara' and girls and boys make dance around the planted tree. The Karma ritual is filled with fruits and flowers, and even the branches, garlanded on the next day, are washed with milk and 'handia', the rice beer before they are placed at the particular arena. The holding of Sal tree in one hand and others in a chained manner signifies the community unity that becomes possible because of nature. The artists sing the Karma song and dance in a rhythmically appealing to the enjoyment of the audience with the pattern of stepping, bending, jumping, dwindling to the tune of musical instruments (pipes like Thumki, Chhalla, Payri and Jhumki), and the drum ("timki") used in the dance. The songs describe nature, an invocation to Karmasani, and they are also about the desires, aspirations of people, love, and humour. The motif of the dance is considered as highly religious and ritualistic with a focus on the principal intention of worshipping the Karma deity for the good fortune, peace, and fraternity – that is, a more humanistic dimension could be seen reflected during the ritual dance. The eastern state of Odisha's one-fourth of the population comprises tribal communities, which are known for possessing a vast amount of cultural treasures including folklore, creative expressions, and traditional knowledge systems. The circle is formed by the dancers by holding their arms around the next dancer's waist and dance together rhythmically for the vibrant tune. The ethnic costumes and jewels are attractions that reflect their aesthetics and beauty consciousness in their dance moves.

The month of Bhadra is earmarked for the celebration of Karma and it begins from Bhadra Sukhla Ekadasi, the eleventh day of the moon, and singing and dancing along with drumming will be in full swing with the active participation of boys and girls, and interestingly, the festival lasts for several days. In other words, in two distinct ways, this festival is celebrated collectively by the participation of community members ("villagers"), and also at the familial level in the courtyard by inviting friends and relatives with music, dance, liquor and feast. Few days before the festival, the Dihuri and Naik meet at the Dubar on a fine evening to finalize a date for the Karam jatra and notify the villagers. On a particular day, the fasting Dihuri goes to the jungle and cut the Karam tree branches and plant them on the altar. Now women go around the plant and while doing so they make tongue undulating

sounds. The girls bow down before the Karma branch and say, "O Karam Raja, O Karam Rani, we are making Karam Dharam" and now the elderly man who knows the legend of Karam and Dharam narrates the legend for the younger generation. People prepare cakes and other delicacies and guests from other villages visit their relatives. The event is marked with a feast, dance, drinking and rejoice throughout the night. On the next morning, after the Dilhuri gives an offering to the sacred Karam, he hands over the branches to the boys to be taken house to house. During the parade, at every house woman prays the Karam Raja by washing his feet by pouring water on the branch, and fowl will be sacrificed, and its blood will also be dropped at the bottom of the branches. Finally, the Karam branch will be immersed in a water body. There are few stories ("legends") associated in support of the Karam worship and they are referred to here.

4.1. KARMA STORY ONE

Once upon a time, there were seven brothers who were hard-working agricultural labourers. It was a routine practice that when the husbands were on duty in their field, their wives used to carry their lunch. But it did not happen on a particular day. The hungry brothers were very furious and irritated. When they returned home, they found their wives singing and dancing about the Karam tree in front of their courtyard. The irritated brothers uprooted the Karam tree and threw it into the river. As a result, the (Karam) deity was insulted, thereafter they faced drought, and starvation and all the brothers wandered everywhere. Finally, a priest who happened to be there gave them the remedy. Soon they found the Karam plant and subsequently worshipped it to regain their prosperity.

4.2. KARMA STORY TWO

Once there were seven brothers and six oldest brothers used to go to their agriculture field and the youngest stayed at home. The last brother and wives of six brothers were engrossed in singing and dancing around the Karam tree without realizing that they forgot to carry food to those in the field. On their return, the furious brothers snatched the Karam plant and threw it into the river. The younger brother left the home and since then evil days fell on the remaining brothers. But on a fine day, the wandering brother found the Karam plant floating in the river. And with excitement and reverence, he propitiated the god to restore everything back to its original state. Thus, the god restored it and all the brothers were reunited and gained their lost prosperity.

4.3. KARMA STORY THREE

A prosperous merchant with his successful trip returned home with loaded metals and other valuables. It used to be a routine practice that he will be given a rousing welcome by his wife and other family members at the harbour before he gets down from the vessels. Now, after reaching the harbour he waited for the ceremonial welcome by his fellows, but it was not a usual day for him. To his dismay and unexpectedness, it was the day of the Karam festival, and thus his wife and all other relatives were busy singing and dancing around the Karam tree grown in their courtyard. Thus, the irritated and insulted merchant uprooted the Karam tree and threw it into the sea. The merchant's act triggered the wrath of the god who punished him by submerging the vessel. The merchant who lost all his valuables consulted a priest, and with the direction of the priest, the merchant wanted to

propitiate the Karam God. He found the floating Karam tree and restored it to its original place. In return, the Karam God restored all his wealth and prosperity. Interestingly, all these legends happened to end with the statement that 'since then the Karam festival was celebrated with fanfare.' Like the Sarhul festival, the Karam festival is also considered the identity of the tribal communities living in these states and it serves the community in the modern context with more spirit and enthusiasm by appropriating the tunes of contemporariness.

4.4. EXAMPLE THREE – THE ARCHERY COMPETITION

The archery competition known as bheja tun is another cultural event of the Santals of Odisha being organized on the next day of Makar Sankranti each year. Though it appears as a simple competition among the youngsters to target a banana tree with their arrows, there is a story behind it that can be seen as a way of fulfilling a cognitive role. Being an agricultural-based festival, it is celebrated by other tribal communities in parts of India as a mark of thanking the sun god for a good harvest. The day falls on the month of Magha or as per the Christian calendar falls either on the 13th or 14th of January as per the Christian calendar. Although the festival is celebrated across the state with full enthusiasm, high attention is paid with much joyfulness and high spirits in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh and Keonjhar. A special item known as 'makar chaula' is prepared on this occasion with raw rice, molasses, coconut, sesame, honey, milk, etc., and once it is prepared it will be distributed to people after offering it to the god. It is an important festival that brings together or integrates both the tribal and non-tribal communities living in Odisha, and though it is considered that due to the acculturation process, the Santals might have absorbed into their cultural realm, it may not be the same as it is the festival that is being celebrated across the world by different communities in different names. Apart from cleaning of houses, whitewashing, and other preparation well in advance, this festival is marked with sports, cockfight, ram-fight, and archery competition etc. Among all the sports and competitions, this article pays attention to the archery competition as it is relevant to drive home the objective of this paper. The folk practice of archery completion is supported by the following oral narrative.

4.5. THE STORY

A long time back there was a King who ruled a kingdom, and he had a queen. The royal couple did not have any children. The queen was in love with a black cobra before her marriage and their relationship continued secretly even after her marriage. The king became aware of the queen's relationship. When the king was in the forest hunting on a fine day, he happened to see the black cobra having a romance with the queen. The furious king released the arrow which killed the cobra at once. When the queen's heart was filled with sorrow, she heard a supreme voice saying, "bury my head in front of your entrance!" After the queen buried the head, a tree sprouted at the spot and only she could recognize it. After the death of the cobra, there used to be heated arguments between the king and the queen. On all the occasions of the arguments, the queen wanted to defeat the king. Once she asked him to tell the name of the plant present at the entrance, but she put the condition that the king's body would be pierced with an arrow if he failed to tell the name. He tried and tried but in vain. Then the arrangement was made to pierce the king's body by arrows released by the country people and thinking his last day nearing, the king called all his kith and kin for the last meeting before his death. On hearing the news, his youngest sister who lived in a faraway place took a journey along with her children to meet her brother. On the way, she with her children took a rest under a

tree. While they were resting, they heard that a vulture sitting on the top of the tree was talking to her children (nestlings) instructing them that they would leave the next by tomorrow. However, the nestlings retorted by asking her mother “why tomorrow?” Then the mother replied that the king would be killed tomorrow so it could bring human flesh. And it explained the tradition prevalent among the vultures. As per the tradition, the mother narrated that the nestlings must fly away from the nest in search of their own food once they were fed with human flesh by their mother. The baby birds were interested to know why the king would be killed. The mother bird told them that he couldn’t tell the answer to the queen’s question about the name of the plant. The baby birds asked their mother whether she knew it or not. In the conversation, the mother bird told her baby birds the name of the plant. The king’s sister who was overhearing the conversation of the bird and its children rushed to the palace to save her brother. She reached the palace and the people from Mundas, Hos, along with Santals were ready with the bow and arrow to pierce the king’s body. The sister met the king secretly and conveyed the name. Thus, it became the turn of the queen to be killed and she was kept in the place of the king. All the people were anxiously waiting to release the arrows. When they released the arrow, the queen’s body suddenly disappeared, so the arrows stuck into the plant growing at the entrance. The tree was known by everyone as “Kaira” which in Santali means banana and thus it was a banana tree. Since the incident happened on the next day of Makar Sankranti, the archery competition is still being held on a particular day [Patnaik \(2002\)](#).

5. METHODS/METHODOLOGY

Folk practices cannot be understood in isolation and their relationships with other practices help each other in their own sustainability and mutual legitimization. The interrelationships among the practices strive to function as the foundation of the socio-cultural life of the society. More precisely, the folk practices, including medicinal practices, are not developed independently but rather have evolved interdependently and interconnectedly for fulfilling the needs as well as achieving the goals of the society. For delineating the aspect of mutuality and reciprocity of relationships among the folk by placing them within the cognitive and epistemological settings, and also by drawing data from both fieldwork (observation method) and secondary sources on rituals and cultural events of the Santal community of Odisha, this study provides a functional framework which enables the study of traditional medicinal practice as instance as a way to provide a framework for understanding folk medicinal practices as instances. In this study, both descriptive and interpretative methods have been proved to be productive in exploring the dimensions of folk practices.

Discussion - I

There are three kinds of examples of folk practices given here: the first involves an etiological story or origin myth of the Santals that supports and legitimizes their acceptance of clan structure, customary practices, folk/group existential practices; the second is an instance of folk practice of Karma/Karam festival that has active participation of tribal communities; and finally, the third deals with the cultural event of archery competition. At the outset, it needs to be realized that the broadest definition of the term ‘folk’ emphasizes the multiple existence of ‘folk practices’ across different geographical locations that reflect variations as well as non-variations among the same communities or unrelated social groups. Second that invigorates our interest is that these folk practices are persistence through time and

space, that is, they are being epitomized for getting transmitted from generation to generation and the transmission is happening through culturally arranged communication process involving a method of participatory learning as part of socio-cultural obligations. The question, however, is that could we see this transmission as a performance or an effective communication process in a socio-cultural setting? The affirmative answer could situate folk practices within a larger domain of culture as a knowledge system that needs to be transmitted to the future generation within a given society. Therefore, understanding the folk practices as part of the cultural knowledge system could clarify that they have to fulfil an inevitable role amidst the processes of external influences, and the folk practices either withstand as it is or go far adaptation in a conducting way in order to provide the sustainability to the community. It depends on the inevitability of the folk practices, either to withstand or to get adjusted to the modernization than the perceived assumption that they may disappear or cease to exist from the practice. Further, there are instances to prove that both the modernization and globalization processes have provided opportunities for communities to create new folk practices either by modifying the existing form or creating altogether a new form. Agreeing to the point that those folk practices have cognitive functions to play for the sustainability of the community, the relevance of them for the community depends on their poetic or aesthetic appeal and projections. That is, more than the message the folk practices carry within them, the nature of content and style together or independently play a significant role in giving acceptability by the community members on the one hand and also from the 'outside' spectators on the other hand. Further, it is also important how the content is appealing and fascinating by way of presentation and use of special features either of language or other stylistic elements. In other words, the projection and presentation of contents of any folk practices are indispensable aspects that are responsible for how the folk practices have to be received and appreciated by the people. It implies that apart from the collection of material and documenting the processes by which they are produced, the community's perspectives or views about their material could not be ignored, that is, the esoteric function of folk practices becomes understandable only with the help of folks' perspectives on their materials. Interestingly, from the esoteric function, the exoteric function of the folk practices for the non-members could be ascertained.

While going through the examples given here from the Santals of Odisha, it is clear that the folk practices reflect a complex system that is interconnected and interwoven with the elements within the same category of forms or forms that belong to other categories, and they also collectively contribute to the construction of the message. This interrelationship between forms becomes a condition that warrants that scholar must develop expertise on more than one folk practice and tools for understanding their conceptual interconnectedness – even within and outside the paradigm of folk practices. The examples demonstrate that the folk practices reflect the presence of verbal, non-verbal, linguistic, non-linguistic, and symbolic elements that are shared among the community members by which the esoteric meaning is realized. Further, these practices have standards for inclusion and exclusion of social and cultural elements that include tangible and intangible items. Another feature is that these practices and the associated narratives support each other in legitimizing their existence, for example, while archery competition is supported by the story of the childless King, the story finds its relevance from the archery competition. Further, these folk practices are not confined or restricted to the private realm, that is, they are available for public access as properties of the community than privately owned and it could be the reason that the community has

evolved a mechanism to “filter” what is appropriate and relevant for the community, and it is due to the involvement of the community in the process of “filtering”, some of the folk practices gradually become the identity of the community. That is the community allows few of the practices to pass through its sieves to become part of its cultural treasure in the lens of the community, that is, the community fosters the role as a binder between the people and folk practices, or a community has its own censorship to allow or not to allow any of the items as folklore by which the community implies its significant role in the creation and recreation of folk practices. As folk practices are repetitive, the community plays a constructive role in evaluating the necessity, validity, and relevance of them in accordance with the changes in the society. Following Dan Ben-Amos (1983) it can be stated that some of the folk practices that are having with universal appeal have not been put through the community’s sieve of framework, rather they are validated and appropriated beyond the cultural specificity and cultural uniqueness. The community filtration cannot be considered as a single event in the history of folk practices, because of the oral transmission from generation to generation there could be a constant change in the form and content of the folk practices due to loss of memorization, the addition of new elements, creative improvisation, etc. Thus, scholars have a larger role to play in exploring the contemporariness and validity of folk practices in the present context by focusing on, or, dismantling the preconceived attributions surround the folk practices, and it can also be done by ‘unloading the attributes of the past and to observe folklore freshly, as it exists in social reality.’

In continuation of the discussion on the functions of folk practices, the explanations of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski who had viewed from their respective scientific theories of culture Oring (1976). Radcliffe-Brown’s approach was founded on organismic model which drew an analogy between social life and organic life. This theory effectively employed metaphorical conceptualization in understanding society in terms of the organic body – so like human life, society functions as a structure with the coordinated function of parts. Oring mentions that “Function is thus the contribution which a partial activity makes to the total activity of which it is a part” (1976:68). In this background, any recurrent activity in society is seen as a ‘contribution to maintaining structural continuity’ Oring (1976). However, Malinowski’s theory of culture centred on the individual whose recurring needs create secondary or derived imperative and symbolic and integrative needs which culture must fulfil. For Malinowski ‘functions of various aspects of culture are the fulfilment of various biological needs’ (1976:68). The fear and anxiety over the biological needs could be symbolically expressed through cultural arrangements, and a ritual thus takes symbolic value in human life. There is a difference Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski in terms of orientation, that is, for the former ‘integrative functions are in the higher order than the psychological one’ but for the latter ‘psychological function is primary and integrative social functions are secondary’ Oring (1976). To follow these definitions, the nature of Karam festival, or of archery competition, for example, could be understood. From Malinowski perspective, the psychological fear and anxiety over the issue of fertility could be a primary driving force behind the elaborate arrangement of Karma festival and the psychological fear and anxiety over the loss of a woman partner due to an extramarital affair could be resulted in having archery competition. However, to follow Radcliffe-Brown, these events play an integrative role in bringing individuals as members of the community, that is, the social binding becomes inevitable, and it has a priority over the psychological drive. Further, a similar explanation can be given to the origin of the Santal community – the psychological fear and anxiety of disintegration and disunity could have resulted in

the creation of the origin myth which aims to assure and reassure the need for integration – could be the implication if we think in the former’s line. Whereas the origin myth integrates the members of all the clans towards the single solidarity of Santal identity for various reasons – it is derived with help of the latter’s perspective. Instead of preference over each other, employing both the sociological and psychological levels of analyses of folk practices could yield a meaning that is both universal and culturally unique. There are elements, conversely, that are considered either as ‘prohibited by culture’ or as ‘shocking’ in everyday life, and those elements and their functions need to be handled separately, in line with Robert A. Georges, it can be briefly stated that social functions of folk practices must be inferred in explaining the ‘meaning and significance of discernable correspondences and no correspondences’ that exists between any aspects of folk practices and any aspects of social structure [Georges \(1969\)](#), [Oring \(1976\)](#). Further, with the four functions as mentioned by William R. Bascom such as ‘escape, validate, education, and social control’ have a collective role of ‘maintaining the stability of culture’ (1969:297).

Discussion - II

The next level of the discussion focuses on the popular notion that folklore (synonymously treated here as folk practices) functions as a mirror of culture, and it gives glimpses of insights into theories of culture and fixes the place of folk practices or the relationship between them. This notion is reflected in the works of Alan Dundes who is with the conviction that ‘folklore is an essential way that cultural knowledge and wisdom is passed down from generation to generation and from peer to peer’ [Bronner \(2007\)](#). Contemporary value is given to folklore by Alan Dundes and who, according to Bronner, “advocated folklore as an adaptive strategy of modern life. He also expanded the scope of folk materials from oral to written and material items” [Bronner \(2007\)](#). His ideas that ‘folklore is constantly being created anew in contemporary life’ and ‘it is not a relic of the past, but an expression of present-day issues’ could be relevant in understanding contemporary folk practices that are vibrant. By seeing that “folklore is invaluable as a reflection of a particular culture’s conditions and values” he moved on to expand Franz Boas’s inquiry to claim that “the interpretation of symbols lodged within folkloric performances were a result of folklore serving the function of a socially sanctioned outlet for suppressed wishes and anxieties.” The usage of the term “mirror” could be carrying the reflection of a social group and seen as a ‘marker of a particularistic social identity.’ It is also be noted that folklore must be understood beyond its reflection of culture by looking at the psychological possibility of folklore distracting or inverting reality and also sometimes serving as a vehicle for an individual to do what he may not be permitted to do in everyday reality [Bronner \(2007\)](#) These points are valuable for rethinking the contemporary aspects of folk practices, for example, the Karam festival, which has two phases – a ritual phase occupying a private space by the participation of community members, it is prohibited for “others” and a public phase – having a colourful festival – serving identity as well as the maintenance of solidarity for the present generation.

Discussion - III

Part of the discussion clarifies some aspects of folk practices and their role in the cultural system. According to Raymond Williams “Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and an

amendment under the pressure of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. ...A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we see through them the nature of a culture: that it is always both traditional and creative; that it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings. We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life - the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning - the special processes of discovery and creative effort" (2007:83). He proposes three general categories of culture, viz. ideal ("in which culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values"), documentary ("in which culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, ...human thought and experience are variously recorded) and 'social' ("in which, culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour) (1998:48). This idea enhanced our perspective "to look for meanings and values, the record of creative human activity, not only in art and intellectual work, but also in institutions and forms of behaviours" Williams (1998), and also to look at the knowledge of many past societies as well as past stages of our own - on the body of intellectual and imaginative work (1998:51). The holistic nature of the cultural analysis is important since it can yield specific evidence about the whole organization within which it was expressed (1998:51). So, he refers to Fromm's 'social characters' as 'a valued system of behaviour and attitudes' taught formally and informally, and Benedict's 'pattern of culture' as a 'selection and configuration of interests and activities' - producing a 'way of life' (1998:52). The general perspectives reflected here subtly accommodate folk practices and other cultural expressions, referring to Roger M. Keeping's "Theories of Culture" (1974) can find a brief account of discussions on the perspectives such as 'culture as adaptive systems', 'culture as cognitive systems', 'culture as structural systems', and 'culture as symbolic systems.' The evolutionary perspective that tried to understand the role of cultural constructions on the biological foundations in particular ecological settings attempted to highlight the 'interweaving and relative importance of biological and cultural components of human behaviour. It claimed that culture is a system that serves to relate human communities to their ecological settings, though 'not under the direct genetic control' to 'adjust individuals and groups within their ecological communities' Binford (1968), Keesing (1974) thus 'cultural change is primarily seen as a process of adaptation and what amounts to natural selection' Keesing (1974) - 'this adaptation principally through the medium of culture' Keesing (1974), Meggers (1971) Further, it argued that the existence of 'technology, subsistence economy, and elements of the social organization directly tied to production' must be seen as the adaptive strategy given by culture. Finally, it explained the role of ideational components of cultural systems reflecting the adaptive tendencies for 'controlling population, contributing to subsistence, maintaining the ecosystem, etc.' Keesing (1974).

Other theories were grouped broadly under ideational theories of culture that were seen in opposition to the diverse adaptationist theories of culture. Culture as a cognitive system was seen in contrast to what is being projected by the adaptationists who treated culture as a 'pattern of life within a community-the regularly recurring activities and material and social arrangements' Goodenough et al. (1961), Keesing (1974). The convincing definition of Ward Goodenough is noteworthy: "A society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members. Culture is not a material

phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behaviour, or emotions. It is rather an organization of these things. It is the form of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them. [Keesing \(1974\)](#) It clarifies further that “Culture... consists of standards for deciding what is, ...for deciding what can be, ...for deciding what one feels about it... (“or deciding what to do about it, and ...for deciding how to go about doing it [Goodenough et al. \(1961\)](#), [Keesing \(1974\)](#)). Interestingly, it treated culture epistemologically in the same realm as a language with ideational codes is lying behind the realm of the observable event [Keesing \(1974\)](#), it became popular after the development of cognitive sciences.

Another theory within the stream of ideational theories of culture viewed cultures as symbolic systems that relied on shared symbols and meanings. Clifford Geertz is the major proponent of this theory and for him, the ethnographic particulars can be found in the richness of real people in real life and attention must be paid to humans engaging in symbolic action than the disembodied and decontextualized texts such as myths or customs [Keesing \(1974\)](#). He viewed culture as semiotic, that is, the culture must be seen as shared codes of meaning and or culture is nothing but an assemblage of “texts.” Similarly, Schneider also emphasized culture as a system of symbols and meanings. “It comprises categories or “units” or “rules” about relationships and modes of behaviour. The epistemological status of cultural units or “things” does not depend on their observability; both ghosts and dead people are cultural categories.” [Keesing \(1974\)](#) For him, culture concerns the stage, the stage setting, and the cast of characters; the normative system consists in the stage directions for the actors and how the actors should play their parts on the stage that is so set.” [Keesing \(1974\)](#). This discussion offers clarification on the existence of folklore as a resource for the access of individual as well community. It is further clarified by Goodenough that “People learn as individuals. Therefore, if culture is learned, its ultimate locus must be in individuals rather than in groups ... Cultural theory must explain in what sense we can speak of culture as being shared or as the property of groups ... and what the processes are by which such sharing arises ... We must ... try to explain how this analytically useful construct relates to ... the social and psychological processes that characterize men in groups [Keesing \(1974\)](#). With this perspective, culture can be systematically related the ‘cognitive worlds of individuals to the collective ideas and behaviour of populations’ (1971: 41-42, cf. 1974: 84), and also, the culture must be seen further as it transcends individual actors and even ethnic boundaries, thus, for Levis-Strauss, ‘the collective representations reflect and reveal the structures and processes of the individual minds of which they are cumulative creations’ [Keesing \(1974\)](#). It is noteworthy that “the structure of cultural systems is created, shaped, and constrained by individual minds and brains. What forms culture takes depends on what individual humans can think, imagine, and learn, as well as on what collective behaviours shape and sustain viable patterns of life in ecosystems. Cultures must be thinkable and learnable as well as livable” [Keesing \(1974\)](#). However, it has also been seen that “culture is best seen not as complexes of concrete behaviour patterns-customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters-... but as a set of control mechanisms-plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call 'programs')-for the governing of behaviour” [Keesing \(1974\)](#). Keesing ends the discussion by mentioning that “Conceiving culture as an ideational subsystem within a vastly complex system, biological, social, and symbolic, and grounding our abstract models in the concrete particularities of human social life, should make possible a continuing dialectic that yields deepening understanding. Whether in this quest the concept of culture is progressively refined, radically reinterpreted, or progressively extinguished will in

the long run scarcely matter if along the way it has led us to ask strategic questions and to see connections that would otherwise have been hidden” (1974:94).

In this (theoretical) background, both the Karam festival and archery competition are not static events, and there are improvisations and elaborations are being added to these events each and every year. Those who watch both of these events each year would have realized that so much aesthetics is being expressed by the community members by adding decorative items and it is one way of expressing their indigenous identity and solidarity with the people who don't belong to them. By displaying culture, the community implies its way of life and also defines and redefines its relationship with the members of other communities. The elaborate rituals of both the events are directed more towards the community, whereas the festivals expand their ritualistic private space into the public space to open up for the so-called 'others.' This shift from private space affairs to public space affairs tends to mean the accommodative nature of the culture and cultural life of the tribal communities. Interestingly, mediated through these events, the community engages and entertains its members in a way to reassure the need for their participation and involvement but in a light, humorous way like the simple format of the folktale that attracts children. But culture as a cognitive system emphasizes that folk practices are the ways by which cultural knowledge is being transferred to the next generation, and the form and content together and collectively function as a medium for this transmission. The cultural knowledge developed over a period of time as part of the community's cognitive encounter has been tested and retested by the community to identify its validity and logicity before they are frozen to be an item to be transferred to the forthcoming generations. So, the sustainability and stability of the community depend on the amount of knowledge, in the name of tradition, customs and rituals, medicinal systems, and oral traditions, either received from the previous generation or has to be handed over to the next generations. Further, in these folk practices, the community involves in the process of participatory learning by which the community members teach as well as learn everything the community needs for various purposes – thus, these practices exist for maintaining a harmonious and coexistent social and cultural life.

Discussion - IV

The folk epistemological approach augments the role folk practices in normative social cognition. Epistemology has its foundation in propositional knowledge or logic that covers a wide range of matters in our daily life, and it also explains the nature of knowable truths as well unknowable truths – a kind of meta-epistemology, knowing about the knowledge itself. Therefore, there is a broader assumption that the epistemological inquiry encompasses the concept of knowledge – non-empirical or a priori and empirical or a posteriori - and the role of experience in the formulation of all kinds of knowledge, and the analysis of knowledge proceeds to appropriate the available conditions that individually or collectively promise to determine whether someone knows something. Knowledge, being a mental state, is associated with belief for its formation – it takes a kind of a belief, that is, a knowing is understood as believing but with a caution that not all beliefs are knowledge. Both the occurrent beliefs and non-occurrent beliefs are playing significant a role in guiding and shaping the individuals' knowledge –thus making the difference between truth and justified. However, folk epistemology is understood as the ordinary and common-sense theory of knowledge that is available to the average person, and it is considered an “untutored” view of the nature of knowledge. But it has a great role in the everyday life of people who depend on orality for their

knowledge transmission. And, although folk knowledge is considered associated with adults, it is being taught to those who are in the middle of childhood and adolescence and culminating in its adult form. Here, some of the insights of [Kitchener \(2002\)](#) are referred to and appropriated in the way to understand the folk practice. Folk epistemology facilitates one to understand the mental states or mentalistic concepts of the folk, such as belief, memory, desire, intention, pretending, knowing, etc. However, both epistemological pursuits and folk epistemological underpinnings are having common epistemic states namely belief, memory, intuition, observation, perception, and knowledge. If belief is a way to get access to knowledge, then both adults and children are at one point time have to share the same platform in the case theory of mind or theory of knowledge. There are examples that reflect the commonality, for example, a dream is one such thing that the child has to believe in order to get knowledge, whereas the adults have to relate it to other things in order to have knowledge about it. That is, one could comfortably argue that folk practices and many genres of oral traditions reflect similar beliefs, similar to children's belief in dreams; adults have to believe in things to get knowledge about things that happen around them. Unlike children, individuals' conceptions of knowledge and knowing are guided by their personal epistemology which is also concerned with the "beliefs about the definition of knowledge, how knowledge is constructed, how knowledge is evaluated, where knowledge resides, and how knowing occurs" [Hofer and Pintrich \(2002\)](#) 4, quoted in [Kitchener \(2002\)](#). Though these "epistemic conditions", as Kitchener called them, are the reflection "on the limits of knowing, the certainty of knowing and criteria of knowing" [Kitchener \(1983\)](#) quoted in [Kitchener \(2002\)](#) Further, it can be called as cognition when it represents a belief about it, thus, individual epistemology qualifies to be called as epistemic cognition. More than that epistemic cognition involves epistemic evaluation which can be seen expressed in verbal language with the help of oral traditions or through other folk practices such as rituals, rites, performances, festivals, and celebrations. If cognitive evaluations are the results of epistemic cognition of individuals, then it can be said that the community facilitates them by providing individuals with cognitive capacities. The cognitive capacities (or folk epistemological capacities) mediate between epistemic norms and the psychological processes that are manifested in folk practices.

The examples from the Santals community substantiate the argument that by presenting a model of epistemic evaluations facilitated by the community's cognitive capacities, the folk practices are functioning as a normative framework for the community. While some folk forms are having a universal structure, they reflect their cultural variability in terms of contents, and it is the result of variation in the reflection of cognitive capacities by individuals. The availability of different genres implies a point that the cognitive evaluation which is an important aspect to constitute one's content of belief, happens in an individual's life at different stages which denotes a universal process that community learning is a continuous process from childhood until death and this learning is facilitated by folklore, folk practices, and other cultural arrangements. Generally, those who approach folk knowledge look for specific examples in the traditional life of the community members to locate the presence of it, but folk epistemology does not wait for any specific instances, like a rite, ritual, festival, or celebration, for its manifestation as it is an inevitable part in the everyday life of community members. Interestingly, when individuals utilize their folk epistemology one could find the intersections of a few processes like active memory, linguistic competency, cognitive control, or executive functions [Norman and Shallice \(1980\)](#), [Shallice \(1988\)](#), [Hardy-Vallee and Dubreuil \(2010\)](#). In the case of Santals, they have to accept the story of origin and to some extent, they must

utilize the narrative events to legitimize and substantiate their social behaviours. Some of the events that appear in the narrative need to be believed by individuals as community members without putting them into any rational evaluation. However, as far as the origin myth is concerned, it not only narrates the mythical origin of the community but also its current status of it. Moreover, the myth reflects the reasons that made their status what it is now. As part of the cognitive control, this myth or story makes them to accept the explanation given in the text but also help them to mask their rational thinking in questioning the reason for their disparity and disadvantaged position that they are now in the current scenario. By convincing the community members by giving a reason that cannot be questioned by the community members with the logic of Peirce's "irration of doubt" Peirce (1878), Hardy-Vallee and Dubreuil (2010) that force the community members to accept the unjustifiable and developing the 'feeling of conviction' Quine (1960), 60, Hardy-Vallee and Dubreuil (2010) over the reasons presented in the narratives, the narrative executes its cognitive control over the community members – by which a normalizing activity is seen carried out the text. Thus, by inducing a kind of "social dependency syndrome" Lhermitte (1986), Hardy-Vallee and Dubreuil (2010), the folk epistemology helps the community members to accept the critical matters with the conviction that is facilitated with the help of the text by repeatedly imposing conviction on the community members. Further, the community members are required to believe that they are part of a larger ecosystem in which they have to establish and re-establish their relationship with each of the participating elements, and they have to also behave that people who belong to other community members are as blood relatives so that an antagonist relationship can be avoided. However, historically perspective on the origin of the Santal community, as per the story, it had undergone different stages since its formation. From the cultural-historical perspective on the cognitive development of community members including children, youth and adults, both the archery competition and the Karam festival help them learn through the participatory mechanism about some of the aspects of their culture and social norms through which the knowledge about the necessity of stability of the community is re-established and but the paraphernalia associated with both the events are the forms or the arrangements of the community either to execute or mediate the communication between the Santal community and its members. Here, when they happen in public places and in front of community and non-community spectators, the esoteric and exoteric elements interchangeably play a significant role in making them great events with contemporary relevance for all with different implications. To put them together for understanding, both the events as well as the narrations of the origin myth/story are the representation of historical social and cultural practices that make use of different cognitive tools such as imagination, justification, warning, advice, etc., that are embedded form with the help of folk forms and folk practices with conceptual interconnectedness. Thus, stories, rites, rituals, worships, celebrations, festivals, etc. are to be understood as historical social and cultural arrangements by society that facilitate interaction, dialogue, negotiation, and reflection between community members, in some cases, with non-community members – for the stability and sustainability of human society.

6. CONCLUSION

By taking cue from the Santal community of Odisha – a narrative (Origin myth/story), a festival (Karam) and a game (Archery competition), this article reflects the dimensions of folk practices to accentuate the point that the folk

practices are reflecting the folk epistemology in guiding the community members not only in everyday life activities but also in specified events - to display its cognitive role for the stabilizing and sustaining efforts of the community. Further, the article also stresses the point that the vital role of folk practices cannot be understood either in isolation or in the decontextualized state, or in other words, there is no use in the ignorance of their interconnectedness with other folk practices.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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