

Death to Deification: Reading the Many Tales of Goddess Tusu

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Abstract

The month long Tusu festival begins on *Agrahayan Sankranti*, the last day of *Agrahayan Mas* and ends on *Poush* or *Makar Sankranti*, the last day of *Poush Mas*, the eighth and ninth months of the Bengali solar calendar. According to the English calendar, the festival begins in mid-December and continues till mid-January. Goddess Tusu seems to have originated as a fertility/harvest deity of certain tribal communities, namely the Santhal, the Munda, the Kharia and the Ho. The festival is celebrated with great gusto in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha and Assam. However, the Goddess seems to have been gradually appropriated by the Hindu Kudmi agricultural community and today the Tusu festival is mainly celebrated by this community. Even in contemporary times, Tusu is offered the first harvest crop and her blessings are sought for the forthcoming planting season. However, there seems to be a vast gap between the traditional rituals associated with the Harvest Goddess and the many tales surrounding her.

This article explores fourteen *lok kathas* or community stories, (collected from English, Hindi and Bengali sources) surrounding the Goddess Tusu in an attempt to unravel a trajectory of deeply patriarchal, socio-cultural hegemonic constructs supporting both the deification of Tusu and her subsequent inclusion in the Hindu pantheon. These *lok kathas* revolve around a strangely passive woman and her death, whether voluntary or coerced, seems to be the only prerequisite for her deification and resultant worship. In the unexpectedly grim narrative world of the Tusu *lok kathas*, the living woman/Tusu seems not only dispensable but also easily replaceable in the form of her own idol/Goddess Tusu.

Keywords: Tusu, goddess, *lok katha*, *sati*, suicide, death, deification.

Introduction

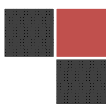
The Tusu festival begins on *Agrahayan Sankranti* or the last day of the *Aghan Mas* (colloquial) or *Agrahayan Mas*, the eighth month of the Bengali solar calendar. The festival continues till *Poush Sankranti* or the last day of *Poush Mas*, the ninth month of the Bengali calendar. According to the English calendar, the festival begins in mid-December and continues till mid-January. The word *Tusu* may have been derived from the word *tush* in Bengali, meaning paddy rind. According to Dr. Sukumar Sen, the festival of *Tusu* or *Toushla* is linked to the movement of the *Tissy* star (Delta cancri from the cancer constellation. It can be seen very clearly in the winter months, and is associated with *Uttarayana* or winter solstice. It can occult with Jupiter) (Karan199). Thus, the name may have been derived from the *Tissy* star, as the festival is celebrated under the auspices of this star in the calendar year. One view connects Tusu to *Poush-Lakshmi* (Tusu is worshiped in *Poush Mas* as Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of food, wealth and prosperity in the Hindu pantheon). Another view locates Tusu as a symbol of field fertility.

Tusu is an important festival of Panchpargana (the erstwhile Singhbhum, Manbhum and Dhalbhum area of the Chotanagpur plateau) which at present includes the south eastern part of Ranchi district, some parts of West Singhbhum and Seraikela-Kharsawan districts of Jharkhand and the bordering western districts of West Bengal, mainly Purulia and Bankura. This festival is also celebrated in northern Orissa, especially in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Sundargarh. This festival is also popular among the tea tribes of Assam and the Dooars area of West Bengal.

Goddess Tusu seems to have originated as a fertility deity of certain tribal communities located in different parts of present day Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha, namely the Santhal, the Munda, the Kharia and the Ho. However, the Tusu festival today is mainly celebrated by the Kudmi community.¹ Largely rural agricultural community, it had a tribal status prior to 1931 in the erstwhile British India. The community seems to have slowly metamorphosed into a fringe caste of the Hindu world. In contemporary India, it is delineated in the OBC/SEBC category. As expected, the festivals of this agrarian community are closely associated with the cycle of agricultural activities from sowing to harvesting. The community believes that their deities protect them and ensure a good harvest. Their festivals follow the solar calendar. The Tusu festival ends on *Makar* or *Poush Sankranti* or the last day of the *Poush* month which is also the last day in the Kudmi solar calendar. *Akhan Yatra*, the first day of *Magh Mas* (the tenth month in the Bengali Calendar) is the beginning of their New Year.

The Tusu festival is celebrated in the harvest season. This is the season when the farmers wind up their agricultural activities and are ready to celebrate and relax. There is no concept of fasting and no specific worship *mantras*² in this festival. Tusu is the goddess of grains, but she is not always considered to be a goddess. Tusu has a close relationship with the community and with women in particular. Sometimes she is treated as a mother, sometimes a bride and sometimes a wife or a companion by her worshipers. Hence, Tusu is an intimate member of society.

There are certain interesting traditions associated with Tusu. Tusu songs, infinite in number, form an important part of this festival. The lyrics, though brief, are very vibrant and energetic. Each year, the societal situation demands that new songs with new meanings be improvised during the festival and be added to the vast repertoire. Tusu



songs very often convey the wishes of women, their dreams, their happiness and also their sorrow.

This research focuses on the *lok kathas* or community stories surrounding Tusu. A close reading of the Tusu *lok kathas*, a remarkably interesting trajectory, reveals the process of appropriation of a tribal Harvest Goddess by the Hindu echelon, namely the fringe Hindu Kudmi agricultural community. The Tusu *lok kathas*, if carefully deconstructed, can lay bare the deeply patriarchal, socio-cultural hegemonic constructs that supported the deification of Tusu and her subsequent inclusion in the Hindu pantheon. These *lok kathas* revolve around a strangely passive woman and her death, whether voluntary or coerced, seems to be the only prerequisite for her deification and resultant worship. In the unexpectedly grim narrative world of the Tusu *lok kathas*, the living woman/Tusu seems not only dispensable but also easily replaceable in the form of her own idol/Goddess Tusu.

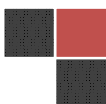
Rituals

In the winter harvest season, each farmer leaves the last clump of rice plants in the field during the final round of harvesting. This clump is not harvested, it is uprooted and planted in the courtyard of the house and worshipped by the women of the household. This clump is called *Dini Budhi*, *Dini Giran* or *Thakrain* and is regarded as a Goddess. Interestingly, the soil around this clump is scattered in the fields before new seeds are sown in the next planting season. This marks the beginning of the festival.

The formal Tusu worship is usually in four steps, invitation and installation, care and nurture, awakening and finally immersion. In the first step, Goddess Tusu is invited home and her idol is installed on *Aghan Sankranti*. In the second step, the Goddess is cared for and nurtured at home by the family of worshippers for a whole month. The third step, awakening, includes the worship of the Goddess each dusk from *Aghan Sankranti* to the day before *Poush Sankranti*. The final step, immersion, is on the day of *Makar* or *Poush Sankranti*, when the Goddess is immersed in a river.

On the last day of *Aghan*, an idol of Tusu, usually made of mud and straw, is set up in the houses. In some households, a ball of cow dung and a ball of rice flour, with three vermilion marks drawn on each, symbolize the newly erected Tusu. The Goddess is offered *atapchal* or *arwa chawal* (rice that has been husked without parboiling) and flowers, especially marigold flowers daily. She is also offered jaggery (unrefined cane sugar), puffed rice, milk, *ghee* and water. *Diyas* or earthen lamps and incense sticks are lit each dusk for her worship. She is also awakened each morning by an earthen lamp being lit. Each night women gather to sing the Tusu songs. It is believed that Tusu falls asleep listening to these songs.

Tusu arrives in *Poush Mas*, the post-harvest season when food is in plenty in every household. Housewives wait for the arrival of Tusu just as they wait for their married daughters to come home. Sometimes the wishes of a daughter remain unfulfilled at the home of the husband but every wish is fulfilled at the mother's house. Thus, Tusu is offered different varieties of food. The last five days, *Aundi*, *Chaundi*, *Baundi*, *Makar* and *Akhan Yatra*, are the most important days of the Tusu festival. On *Aundi*, rice is washed and soaked in water. On *Chaundi*, rice flour is prepared. On *Baundi*, *pithas* (a type of rice cake) such as *gudpitha*, *undhhi pitha* etc. are prepared. They are offered to Tusu on that day and *Makar*, the next day. The night of *Baundi* is a night of *jagran* (everyone keeps awake and celebrates the night by singing the Tusu songs). On *Makar*,



Tusu is finally immersed in water. Special offerings are made to the Goddess on the dawn of *Makar*. The Goddess is offered eight types of grain. *Akhan Yatra*, the first day of *Magh Mas* is considered an auspicious day by farmers. Cow dung is sprinkled on the fields and there is ceremonial ploughing of the fields to mark the beginning of the planting season.

Tusu fairs are held on the banks of rivers on *Makar Sankranti*. Some popular Tusu fairs are held on the banks of Damodar, Kangsabati, Subarnarekha, Kharkai, Kanchi, Ajay and other tributaries of these rivers.



Figure 1: Colourful *Chordal*, Makar Mela, Subarnarekha River, Muri-Tulin, Jharkhand-West Bengal Border. Photo Credit: Hare Krishna Kuiry, 15 January, 2020.

In some areas, an idol of Tusu and in certain others, a symbolic representation of the Goddess Tusu called *chordal* (chariot or temple like wooden structure with four legs) is immersed on *Makar Sankranti*. A *chordal* is usually made of strips of bamboo and decorated with flowers, colourful paper and peacock feathers. Some *chordals* can go up to ten feet high. Chaste, unmarried girls begin preparing the colourful *chordals* almost a week before *Makar Sankranti*.

The colourful *chordals* are taken in a procession from the village to the river. Women sing Tusu songs the entire time. Initially the songs are sung with great gaiety. Gradually as the time for immersion draws near, the songs become sad. Kudmi parents customarily search for suitable matches for their eligible children in the Tusu fairs. The girls sing and dance at the fairs. Many contests are organised, an example being the *chordal* competition. The month long Tusu festival ends with a grand finale on *Makar Sankranti*.

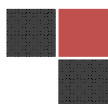




Figure 2. *Tusu-Chordal* immersion, Makar Mela, Subarnarekha River, Muri-Tulin, Jharkhand-West Bengal Border. Photo Credit: Srishti Basu, 15 January, 2020.

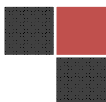
Lok Kathas of Tusu

Goddess Tusu, who is ritually offered the new crop of the harvest and whose blessings are sought for the forthcoming sowing season even in contemporary times, has a remarkable tangled trajectory of *lok kathas* surrounding her. Very interesting, also, is the vast gap between the traditional rituals associated with the worship of Tusu as Harvest Goddess and the many *lok kathas* surrounding her. A careful unravelling of these tales, as attempted in this research, shows how a tribal Goddess is gradually appropriated by the fringe Hindu Kudmi agricultural community. These *lok kathas* show how Tusu in being deified (death becomes the essential criterion for her metamorphosis into a Hindu Goddess) is covertly subsumed by the Hindu pantheon.

Narrative 1³

There was a King. He had a beautiful daughter, named, Tusu. He loved his daughter very much. Tusu died when she was only fourteen. The King became depressed. Looking at the sorry state of the King, his ministers found a way out. They commissioned a sculptor to make a fine statue of Tusu. The ministers told the King that he could see his daughter, however, he could not talk to her. On *Makar Sankranti*, they showed Tusu's statue to the King from a distance. On seeing the statue of his daughter, the King recovered. Till the King remained alive, each year the statue was shown to him on that particular day. Ever since the custom of celebrating the Tusu festival continues (Singh 56).

This is a narrative of a father-daughter relationship, the King and his beautiful daughter, Tusu. Tusu does not seem to have any agency, her defining factor is her beauty. The story revolves around her early death and the subsequent sculpting of her idol to help the King recover from depression and by implication save the kingdom and the people. The religion, tribe or caste of the King is not mentioned, neither is the story located in any particular geographical area.



Narrative 2⁴

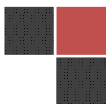
Once there lived a King. He fell in love with Tussu Mani, the lovely daughter of a Potter. However, she died before the King could marry her. The King was unable to accept *Tussu's* death and got disoriented. The governance of the kingdom was disturbed. All around there was chaos. The people of the kingdom conceived a plan. They erected a statue of Tussu Mani and brought it to the King on a *palki* or palanquin. The King experienced a huge sense of relief and he slowly began to regain his senses. The people of the kingdom rejoiced. That day began to be celebrated as the day of Tussu festival. Every year Tussu's idol began to be erected. To this day she is solemnly worshipped and then her idol is submerged in a water body. Tussu's beauty continues to cast its spell in the whole Panchpargana area. Her beauty is worshipped at this Tussu or Makar Sankranti festival (Kumar "Tussu Festival").

This story has the makings of a fairy tale romance. There is a Potter, his lovely daughter Tusu Mani and the King, who according to formula, falls in love with the beautiful Tusu Mani. Tusu, as in the previous story, does not show any individual trait, she is just the beautiful woman. Her death renders the King inconsolable. His subjects sculpt an idol of Tusu, the King regains his senses, the kingdom and the people are saved. Again, there is no mention of the religion, tribe or caste of either the King or Tusu and her father. The narrative is probably located in the Panchpargana area.

Narrative 3

A Potter lived in a village of Panchpargana. Tussu Mani was his beautiful daughter. One day Tussu went to the forest to collect leaves and herbs. The Prince had also come to hunt in that forest on that day. His eyes fell on the lovely maiden Tussu, engrossed in plucking fresh leaves and herbs. Their eyes met and they fell in love. It was love at first sight. The Prince visited the Potter's house and asked for the hand of his daughter in marriage. The Potter, conscious of his own status in society, was reluctant. The Prince, however, was not willing to give up easily. He begged the Potter so much that finally he agreed. Tussu Mani was married to the Prince and they left for the palace. They were very happy together but that happiness did not last very long. The sudden death of the Prince shattered Tussu. Tussu did not know how she would spend her life after the death of her beloved husband. So she decked herself up beautifully and climbed onto her husband's funeral pyre. These twin deaths drove the people of Panchpargana into the depths of despair. It was difficult for them to believe that they would no longer see the happy couple. The people then erected a statue of Tussu and decorated it in her memory. They also began to worship her. From that day the Tussu festival is celebrated each year in the memory of the lovely Tussu Mani who willingly departed to her heavenly abode with her dead husband. (Kumar "Tussu Festival").

This narrative is located in a village and the surrounding dense forests of Panchpargana. Another typical fairy tale romance, the Prince and Tusu, the beautiful daughter of the Potter, fall in love. The defining factor of Tusu remains her beauty. Her class conscious Father-Potter initially reluctant, finally agrees to the marriage. And then the Prince dies. An inconsolable Tusu manifests a singularly negative suicidal trait by burning herself to death on the funeral pyre of her Husband-Prince. (In the previous narrative, Tusu dies, the King grieves but doesn't show any suicidal instinct.) To mark her supreme sacrifice, the people sculpt her idol and begin to worship her. Again, there is no mention of the religion, tribe or caste of either the King or Tusu and her father.



However, there is a clear subsuming of Tusu by the powerful Hindu *Sati* narrative.⁵ Tusu has become a *Sati* and so deserving of worship.

Narrative 4

A potter had a gorgeous daughter named Tussu Mani. Stories of her beauty had spread far and wide in Panchpargana. People were stunned by her beauty. One day a Mughal Emperor chanced to see her. Smitten by her beauty, he resolved to marry her. However, the Mughal Emperor was a cruel dictator. He had made life very difficult for his subjects.

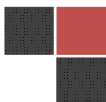
Tussu's father could not even dream of giving his daughter's hand in marriage to the cruel ruler. The Emperor, however, was adamant. If the potter did not yield to his demand, the Emperor was even ready to kill him. The Emperor began sending messengers to the potter every day to harass him. The poor potter was in doldrums, not knowing what to do. Tussu Mani also suffered; she could not bear to see her father's pain. The growing barbarity of the dictator and the angst of her father moved her. She ran up to the river Kanchi and drowned herself. She knew that if she sacrificed her life, the Emperor would depart and her community would be able to resume its peaceful life. She sacrificed her life for the welfare of the people. The inhabitants were very proud of the sacrifice of Tussu Mani. Therefore, they began to celebrate the Tussu festival in the memory of their beloved Tussu (Kumar "Tussu Festival").

This story is also located in Panchpargana. Here too, Tusu is the beautiful daughter of a Potter and her defining factor is her beauty. However, here a nameless yet cruel and dictatorial Mughal Emperor makes an appearance. There is a clash of twin patriarchal structures, heavily compromised by class and perhaps religion, as the Father-Potter refuses to marry his daughter to the equally adamant Mughal Emperor. Unable to withstand this patriarchal tug-of-war, Tusu exerts a negative will and commits suicide by drowning herself in the river Kanchi.⁶ Very proud of her supreme sacrifice that saves the community from the clutches of the Mughal Emperor, the community begins to worship her. There is no mention of the religion, tribe or caste of Tusu and her father. However, the King-Prince of the previous two narratives has transformed into a Mughal Emperor here. Though his religion is defined, it seems that it is his cruelty and barbaric attitude rather than his religion that makes the prospect of the marriage unpalatable to both Tusu and her father and finally compels Tusu to drown herself.

Narrative 5

A Kurmi girl named Tusu hid the stick of a *Sanyasi*⁷ in the river. The *Sanyasi* searched for his stick everywhere but could not find it. He went to the King and said if his stick was not found, there would be drought in the kingdom. The fear of being cursed made Tusu admit that she had hidden the stick. She dived into the waters of the river to find the stick but could not find it. Instead, a big rock was seen in the middle of the river. People believe that Tusu was metamorphosed into a rock. To commemorate this event the Tusu festival is celebrated. Over time, Tusu has been established as a *Devi*⁸ (Singh 56).

This narrative is not located in any particular geographical area. However, Tusu is delineated to the Kudmi caste while the *Sanyasi*, though nameless, brings in clear connotations of being a practitioner of the Hindu religion. The nameless King plays a peripheral role and his religion, tribe and caste remain undefined. The defining



characteristic of Tusu in this story is her playfulness. Her childish prank results in her metamorphosis into a rock, by default her death, and her subsequent deification into a *Devi*. In all five narratives, the death of the woman makes her worthy of worship.

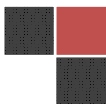
Narrative 6

Tusu was the very beautiful daughter of a Kurmi King. One day, a *Sadhu*⁹ visited the King's *darbar*¹⁰. Tusu, in a display of childishness, hid the *Sadhu*'s stick as a joke. When the *Sadhu* could not find his stick, he went into a rage and threatened the King that if his stick was not found he would curse the kingdom with famine. The threat uttered by the *Sadhu* really scared Tusu. She returned the stick to the *Sadhu*. However, to save the kingdom from famine, she sacrificed her life by drowning herself in the river. To commemorate Tusu on a permanent basis, the King began to organize a fair on the last day of the *Poush* month on the bank of the same river. The tradition of holding a Tusu fair on the bank of a river continues till today (Singh 58).

This narrative is not located in any particular geographical area. The main characters are Tusu and a nameless *Sadhu*. The *Sadhu*, as the *Sanyasi* in the previous narrative, brings in a definite Hindu element into the story. The King is Tusu's father as in Narrative 1. Though he plays a peripheral role, his caste is now defined as Kudmi. Both, the beauty and the playfulness of Tusu are evident in this narrative. However her childish prank takes a tragic turn as she sacrifices her life by drowning in the river in a bid to save the kingdom from famine.

Narrative 7¹¹

Tusu was the pet name of Rukmini, the beautiful daughter of a Kudmi family who resembled Goddess Lakshmi in her beauty and virtues. Her marriage had been fixed with a young Kudmi man. Tusu and the young man had long been in love and loved each other deeply. Each member of the community, young or old, was waiting eagerly for the marriage. On the day of the marriage, before the rituals could be completed, the Muslims arrived. They plundered and looted the village and took the couple back with them as hostages. Later, the Muslims came to know that the couple eat meat considered taboo by Muslims. Considering them to be untouchables, the Muslims released them. When the couple returned to the village, certain well-wishers, the kith and kin of the young man, declared that Tusu could no longer be married to her beloved. Tusu, they said, had been touched by Muslims, and thus no one could marry her. Though the marriage of Tusu and the young man was cancelled, their mutual love continued unabated. Unable to change the decision, the young man became a monk and left for the forest. Tusu, on the other hand, starved herself, did not sleep at nights, and remained engrossed in thoughts of union with her beloved. One day, everyone heard that Tusu had left her home. The news spread like wild fire. ... In each home, people discussed Tusu. Her act in bidding farewell to her home to search for her lost love became the talk of the young unmarried girls of that village. Tusu had become their role model. After a long time, everyone heard that Tusu had found her husband on the banks of the Subarnarekha river. The ultimate wish of Tusu had been fulfilled. Everyone ran to see Tusu. On a Subarnarekha *ghat*¹², they saw Tusu with her monk-lover. The joy of the people held no bounds but such joy, alas, could not last long. Starvation and insomnia had taken its toll on the health of Tusu. After meeting her beloved, she died there on the spot at the *ghat*. The sacrifice of Tusu for her beloved is regarded with deep respect by the young women of the Kudmi-Mahato society. In Satighat, under Ichagarh Thana (presently in Singhbhum district), there is a



huge gathering on the occasion of Tusu festival, celebrated in memory of Tusu (Karan *Simanta Banglar Lokeyan* 209).

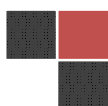
In this narrative, Tusu is also called Rukmini.¹³ In virtues and beauty, Tusu is likened to the Hindu Goddess Lakshmi. The caste affiliations seem to have become stronger; Tusu is the beautiful daughter of a Kudmi family, deeply in love with a Kudmi youth with whom her marriage has also been fixed. However, on the wedding day, the Muslims, clearly the “other”, take the couple hostage. The Muslims, too, consider the couple to be untouchables as they eat meat considered taboo, presumably pork, and release them. Tusu, however, has lost the right to marry her beloved or any other young man. Her community considers her to be impure as she has been touched by Muslims. The body of the woman seems to double as the sanctum sanctorum of religio-cultural purity as also its most porous frontier. This double positioning of woman exposes sexuality to be a means for both maintenance and erosion of religious difference, thereby revealing the instability of religion as a culturally constructed category.

Her lover becomes a monk and leaves for the forest. Tusu, after excruciating self-deprivation, finally exerts her will and runs away from home in search of her lost love. Almost overnight, the same ostracized Tusu becomes the role model for the young unmarried girls of the community. When news of Tusu’s reunion with her Monk-Lover at Satighat,¹⁴ on the banks of the river Subarnarekha¹⁵ reaches the community, people rush to witness this grand event. A joyous community (earlier instrumental in separating and ostracizing the couple) witnesses not just the reunion but also Tusu’s death on the spot. It is her death, the ultimate sacrifice of Tusu for her beloved, which earns her the respect of the young women of the Kudmi-Mahato society. That Tusu has been suitably Hinduized to fit in with the parameters of the self-sacrificing ideal Hindu woman is very evident in this narrative. However, unlike typical Hindu patriarchal narratives, this story portrays a very sensitive young man and his pain and suffering, perhaps a residual tribal manifestation.

Narrative 8

About seven hundred years ago, Raja Ratan Singh ruled Chhitor. His son Birbal had a very beautiful girl named ‘Tushmuni’. The extremely greedy eye of the Mughal ruler Allahuddin Khiliji got focused on Tushmuni and he wanted to marry her. He tried to capture her. When Birbal came to know of this, he immediately went to the Paresnath hills along with Tushmuni and Sitaram Mohanta to conceal themselves from the army commander. The Muslim soldiers followed and attacked them. Birbal and the group could not escape. When Tushmuni came to know that she would not be able to escape from the Muslims, she jumped into the deep water of the river and committed suicide to protect her chastity. It was the day of *Makar Sankranti*. After the death of Tushmuni, the people of the Mohanta community tried to protect the life of Birbal and his family and he tried to maintain that relationship for which he chose a bride for his son from that community. The Mohanta people of that region consider Tushmuni as a great woman as well as an ideal of their community for the life sacrifice to protect her chastity and purity. To commemorate the sacrifice, since that day, the Kudumi people of northern Orissa in particular and eastern India in general celebrate ‘Tushmuni’ (*Tusu*) festival (Mohanta).

In this narrative Tushmuni or Tusu is the beautiful daughter of Birbal and granddaughter of Raja Ratan Singh of Chhitor.¹⁶ Raja Ratan Singh (historical), Birbal



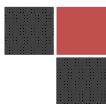
and Tushmuni (non-historical) are Rajputs from Rajasthan. As in the previous narrative, Muslims in general and Alauddin Khalji, in particular, are clearly the religious “other”. Also, Alauddin Khalji is mistakenly depicted as a Mughal ruler (Mughals ruled India from 1526 to 1857). Sitaram Mohanta, Birbal’s close aide and faithful, who offers Birbal and Tusu refuge belongs to the Kudmi-Mohanta community of the hilly area of Paresnath¹⁷. Tusu, whose defining factor continues to be her beauty, seems to have internalized the tenets of patriarchy. She feels that her body, the sanctum sanctorum of religio-cultural purity, cannot be allowed to become a porous frontier. She, thus, commits suicide rather than be desecrated by Muslims. Expectedly, she becomes the role model of the Kudmi-Mohanta community. The formation of a Rajput-Kudmi-Mohanta alliance is evident in this narrative. That Rajput Birbal and Tusu seek refuge in the Kudmi-Mohanta community might be seen as an attempt by the fringe Kudmi-Mohanta caste to climb up the Hindu caste hierarchy. The marriage of Birbal’s son to a Kudmi-Mohanta girl might indicate an attempt on the part of the higher caste Rajputs to be more inclusive in their effort to combat the common cultural enemy, the Muslims. Whether it be Muslim, Rajput or Kudmi-Mohanta, the ethos is clearly patriarchal and the woman always dispensable, in this case Tusu willingly commits suicide.

Narrative 9

... in India there was a history of disgraced Sultan rulers of Mughal period. A number of pitiful incidents happened with Hindu women during this period. The story of *Tusu* is related to the beauty of queen Padmini of Chittor. ...

The entire country was in alarm when Badshah Allahuddin Khiliji ruled Delhi. At that time Birbal Singh - a Kurmi king ruled Kashi state. He had a very beautiful daughter named ‘*Tusu*’. Allahuddin was very much attracted to the beauty of queen Padmini of Chittor and to get her he attacked Chittor. But before she could be captured, she committed suicide by taking poison. Anti-Hindu activities and misbehaviour had left the girls and women feeling very unsafe. Malik Kaffur, the army chief of Allahuddin Khiliji, targeted Tusu. To save the lives of family and followers, Birbal Singh left his palace along with his queen, daughter and followers. They reached Paresnath hill and stayed in the house of a Santal family. Kaffur came to know about their location ... followed them ... and attacked them. Tusu did not want to surrender herself before a Muslim army chief and therefore jumped into the river Kansawati and committed suicide. This painful incident occurred on the day of *Makar Sankranti*. Since that time Tusu became an ideal of the Kudumi people who started worshipping her as a goddess. Since then, *Makar Sankranti* is celebrated as a festival (Mohanta).

In this narrative, Alauddin Khalji is again mistakenly depicted as a Mughal ruler. As in Sufi poet and *pir* (saint), Malik Muhammad Jayasi’s (1477-1542) epic poem *Padmavat* (1540), Alauddin attacks Chittorgarh to obtain Raja Ratan Singh’s beautiful wife Rani Padmini (non-historical, legendary queen of Mewar in the 13-14th century). In Jayasi’s poem, Rani Padmini commits *jauhar*¹⁸ to protect her honour, in this narrative she consumes poison. Then comes the depiction of unsafe condition of women during the reign of Muslim rulers. In the previous narrative, Birbal was the son and Tushmani (both non-historical) the granddaughter, of Raja Ratan Singh (historical) of Chittor, and thus, Rajputs. Here Birbal Singh (non-historical) is the Kudmi King of Kashi state¹⁹, presumably Kashipur in present West Bengal. As in the previous narrative, Muslims in general and Alauddin Khalji and his eunuch slave-general Malik Kafur in particular, are clearly the religious “other”. Birbal Singh seeks refuge in the



house of an unnamed Santhal family at Parasnath hill to save Tusu (as in the previous narrative the geographical location remains Parasnath hill, but the family is Santhal). Perhaps this episode hints at an older Santhal-Kudmi bond, indicative of a time when Santhals and Kudmis shared not just a physical but also a socio-cultural proximity. Tusu, as in previous narratives, demonstrates a marked suicidal will. Choosing to retain the religio-cultural sanctity of her community rather than be captured by the Muslim army chief, Malik Kafur, she jumps into the river Kangsabati²⁰ and commits suicide. As expected, she is elevated to the status of a Goddess by the Kudmi community.

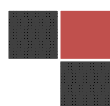
Narrative 10

... Sultan Allahuiddin Khiliji was ruling Delhi from 1296 to 1316 AD. At that time, Padmini - the queen of Rana Singh of Mewar's beauty was much talked about. Allahuiddin tried very hard to see for himself how beautiful she was but Rana Singh did not allow him. Allahuiddin got one chance to see the beauty of Padmini in a mirror and since that day he tried to get her. He attacked Chittor fort to get Padmini but was not successful in his mission. Padmini came to know about it and rather than getting captured, she committed suicide. Allahuiddin was very disappointed. At that time Amar Singh Rathor, the son of Ratna Singh had a daughter named "Tusmin" who was equally beautiful as queen Padmini. When Allahuiddin came to know about the beauty of Tusmin, he targeted her and made several plans to get her. Amar Singh came to know and hid his daughter in the house of Sitaram Mohanta - a faithful who resided at Parasnath hill to protect her. Allahuiddin's spy traced out Tusmin and the house of Sitaram was attacked. Tusmin came to know about it and left that place to save her chastity. She could not escape from the Muslims who came along with Allahuiddin. Finally, she jumped into the river Damodar and lost her life on the day of *Makar Sankranti*. Since that day the young girls started worshipping *Tusu* (Mohanta).

This narrative begins with Malik Muhammad Jayasi's version of the Alauddin Khalji-Padmini story. The narrative, then, twists to talk about Amar Singh Rathor²¹, the son of Ratna Singh (presumably Raja Ratan Singh of Mewar, Rani Padmini's husband) and his daughter "Tusmin", supposedly as beautiful as queen Padmini. Amar Singh Rathor and Tusmin are Rajputs. As in the previous narratives, Muslims in general and Alauddin Khalji, in particular, are clearly the religious "other". Amar Singh hides his daughter at the house of Sitaram Mohanta, a Kudmi faithful, who resides at Parasnath hill (as in Narrative 8). Tusmin preserves the cultural sanctity of her community by escaping Muslim hands to jump into the river Damodar²² to commit suicide. The formation of a Rajput-Kudmi alliance against the common cultural enemy, the Muslim, as discussed in detail in Narrative 8, is evident here. The dispensable woman in a patriarchal ethos is shown to commit suicide willingly. In all ten narratives, the death of the woman makes her worthy of worship.

Narrative 11

... Tusu Devi is a folk goddess of the tea tribes. ... According to ... folk legend, Tusu was the daughter of the Kurmi king of Gujarat. The Mughal emperor of that time forced him to run away and he took shelter with Punjab's king. During those days Tusu and son of king of Punjab fell in love. The Mughal emperor became an obstacle in their love. So, Gujarat's king again ran away with Tusu and the Prince of Punjab. They met the Assam tea tribes who helped them marry. After a few days, when the prince died, Tusu also killed herself by jumping into his funeral pyre. Her love story is celebrated by tea tribes



even today as Tusu Puja. The tribes began to worship Tusu as a pure soul (“North East Now News”)

There seems to have been a steady migration of Tusu worshipping communities to Assam, who later conglomerated to form a chunk of the tea tribes. Goddess Tusu must have travelled in the cultural repository of these people and later she went on to acquire a local significance. Thus, though the essence of the narrative remains the same, the geographical locale shifts partly to Assam.

Tusu is the daughter of the Kudmi King of Gujarat. The nameless Mughal emperor continues to be the religio-cultural enemy, compelling Tusu’s father, the King of Gujarat to first seek refuge with the King of Punjab and then flee to Assam with Tusu and her lover, the Prince of Punjab. It is in Assam that she marries her lover, with the help of the tea tribes and it is in Assam that she commits *Sati* by burning herself on the funeral pyre of her husband, when he dies shortly after the marriage. The tea tribes continue to celebrate her love story and worship her as a pure soul. This narrative seems to highlight both the latent tribal origin of the Goddess and her later appropriation by the Kudmi community.

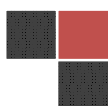
Narrative 12

Some Muslim soldiers came to Mayurbhanj in the 18th century AD during the rule of a Nabab in Bengal. They tried to kidnap a beautiful Kudumi girl *Tusu* from Jharkhand. It was collectively opposed by the Kudumis and Santals of the region and the matter was placed in the *darbar*... of the Nabab. The Nabab was very unhappy about the matter. He punished the soldiers and returned *Tusu* to her parents. But, the then superstitious society did not accept her. Therefore, *Tusu* was forced to commit suicide. She jumped into the river Damodor and lost her life. This pathetic story of *Tusu* led to much reaction among the people of the Kudumi community. The female members of the society specially felt very desolate and had sympathy for *Tusu*. (Mohanta)

In this narrative, Muslim soldiers of the Nawab of Bengal come to Mayurbhanj (presently a district in Odisha) and kidnap Tusu, a beautiful Kudmi girl. The Kudmis and the Santhals collectively oppose this act, showing a tribal solidarity and hinting at the tribal root of the Kudmi community. Unlike in the previous narratives, the Nawab, though a Muslim and therefore the cultural other, punishes the soldiers and returns *Tusu* to her parents. However, Tusu is rejected by her society, reinforcing the patriarchal argument that the body of the woman acts as the symbolic sanctum-sanctorum as also the most porous frontier of the community. Tusu, therefore, is forced to commit suicide and she jumps into the river Damodar.

Narrative 13²³

Uday Pratap Singh was the Maharaja of Kashipur in Bengal. Tusu Mani was the only daughter of Maharaja Uday Pratap. The kingdom of Hensla was under the domain of the Maharaja of Kashipur. The Hensla kingdom was very close to the Subarnarekha river and Barendra village. The Maharaja of Kashipur used to come to see the work of his kingdom and sometimes he stayed the night with the King of Hensla. At that time Tusu also used to come with her father to Barendaghat in Barendra village. Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan was the Nawab of Bengal at that time. The stories of Tusu’s beauty had reached the Nawab. The soldiers of the Nawab wanted to kidnap her and gradually the Nawab began to create pressure upon the Maharaja of Kashipur. Therefore, he sent



Tusu to Hensla. The soldiers reached there and one day Tusu faced the soldiers of Nawab. She ran up to the Subarnarekha river and drowned herself. From that day the place came to be known as Satighat. Hearing this sad news, the Maharaja of Kashipur became depressed and ill. So the people of his kingdom devised a plan. They installed and brought to the king a statue of Tusu. The sculpture was mounted on a *palki*. A sense of relief overwhelmed the Maharaja. Gradually he recovered his health. Then the kingdom rejoiced and began to celebrate the Tusu festival each year in the memory of their beloved Tusu (Edutricks 3401:45-03:57).

In this narrative, Tusu Mani is the only daughter of Maharaja Uday Pratap Singh (non-historical) of Kashipur. Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan (historical), who ruled from 1727 to 1739, is the Nawab of Bengal. The Nawab, living up to the image of the cultural enemy, desires Tusu. Keeping the safety of Tusu in mind, Maharaja Uday Pratap Singh sends Tusu to his nameless friend's Kingdom, Hensla²⁴. However, the Nawab's soldiers track Tusu down to Hensla. Left with no other option to save her chastity and thereby the religio-cultural purity of her community, she drowns herself in the Subarnarekha. That place, near Barendra village, as in Narrative 7, comes to be known as Satighat. As in Narrative 1, to help the inconsolable Maharaja of Kashipur, the people of his kingdom show him a statue of Tusu mounted on a *palki*. The Maharaja recovers his health, the kingdom is saved and the people begin to celebrate the Tusu festival each year in the memory of their beloved Tusu. Thus, sacrifice of one's life becomes the essential precondition for deification.

Narrative 14

According to a folktale prevalent in Jharkhand, Tusu Mani was born in a Kudmi family. She was a resident of present day Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, very close to the border of Jharkhand. The stories of Tusu's beauty had spread far and wide. The soldiers of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah became crazy on hearing the stories of her beauty. One day the Nawab's soldiers kidnapped her. The news came to the Nawab. He expressed his extreme displeasure about the incident. He punished his soldiers and sent Tusu back to her home with due honour. However, her conservative society raised questions about her purity and did not accept her back. Deeply saddened by this incident, Tusu Mani sacrificed her life by jumping into the Damodar River. The day Tusu Mani gave her life was *Makar Sankranti*. This incident stirred up the entire Kudmi society, especially the women and girls. Since then the Kudmi society has been celebrating the Tusu festival in memory of their daughter's sacrifice. Today along, with the tribals of Jharkhand, other people of the region also celebrate this festival ("Tusu Parab").

As in Narrative 12, Muslim soldiers of the Nawab of Bengal come to Mayurbhanj in the 18th century. The Nawab of Bengal is clearly identified in this narrative as the iconic Nawab Sirajud-Daulah, who ruled for just one year from 1756 to 1757. As in Narrative 12, Nawab Sirajud-Daulah, though a Muslim and thereby the cultural other, is very displeased with his soldiers when they kidnap the beautiful Kudmi girl, Tusu. He sends Tusu home with due honour. But her society rejects a religio-culturally defiled Tusu. Tusu, therefore, commits suicide by jumping into the river Damodar. The Kudmi society goes on to celebrate the sacrifice of their daughter Tusu. In a classic instance of community religio-cultural camouflage, suicide is celebrated as sacrifice. As in all the previous narratives, the death of the woman paves the way for her deification.

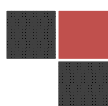
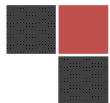
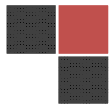


Table 1: Salient Features of all the Narratives.

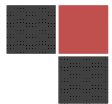
Narrative	Tusu's tribe/caste/community	Tusu's Defining Characteristics	Tusu's Admirers-Suitors	Historic Characters	Non Historic Characters	"Other"	Location	Mode of Tusu's death	Reason for Festival
1	Unknown	Beauty	No Admirer or Suitor	None	Unnamed King, Tusu's father		Unspecified	Natural at 14 years	Tusu's statue made to console her Father-King
2	Unknown; Potter's daughter	Loveliness/Beauty	Unnamed King Acceptable	None	Unnamed King, falls in love with Tusu		Probably Panchpargana	Natural before the King could marry her	Tusu's statue made and brought in a <i>Palki</i> and shown to her Lover-King
3	Unknown; Potter's daughter	Beauty	Unnamed Prince Acceptable	None	Unnamed Prince who falls in love and marries Tusu		Panchpargana	<i>Sati</i> or self-immolation on her Prince-Husband's funeral pyre	Villagers erect her statue and worship it on a particular day every year
4	Unknown; Potter's daughter	Beauty	Unnamed Mughal Emperor Unacceptable	None	Unnamed Mughal Emperor who covets Tusu		Panchpargana	Jumps into river Kanchi to escape the Emperor and save the community	Villagers, proud of her sacrifice, start worshipping her



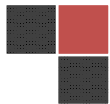
5	Kudmi	Playfulness	No Admirer or Suitor	None	<i>Sanyasi</i> , whose stick is hidden in the river by Tusu. He threatens drought in the land if stick not found		Unspecified	Dives into the river to get the stick. Cannot find it and metamorphoses into a rock	To commemorate this metamorphosis.
6	Kudmi princess	Beauty and Playfulness	No Admirer or Suitor	None	Tusu hides a <i>Sadhu</i> 's stick. <i>Sadhu</i> threatens famine if stick not found.		Unspecified	Jumps into river to save kingdom from famine after returning stick	Started by her father the King to commemorate her sacrifice.
7	Kudmi	Beauty	Kudmi Lover (Admirer) Acceptable	None	Kudmi Lover	Muslim attackers kidnap Tusu and her Lover during marriage	Probably Barendra village, near river Subarnarekha	Self-deprivation, meets her Monk-Lover and dies on the spot	To commemorate the sacrifice
8	Rajput Princess from Rajasthan	Beauty	Alauddin Khalji Unacceptable	Raja Ratan Singh and Alauddin	Birbal, Tusu's father; Birbal's trusted man Sitaram	Alauddin Khalji, depicted as a Mughal	Parasnath hills	Suicide by jumping into river	To commemorate her sacrifice



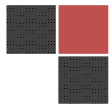
9	Kudmi Princess	Beauty	Malik Kafur Unacceptable	Khalji Alauddin Khalji and his army chief Malik Kafur	Mohanta Birbal, King of Kashi/Kashipur, Tusu's father	ruler Alauddin Khalji, depicted as a Mughal ruler and his army chief Malik Kafur	Kashipur and Parasnath Hills	Suicide by jumping into Kangsawati river	To commemorate her sacrifice
10	Rajput Princess	Beauty	Alauddin Khalji Unacceptable	Ratna/Rana Singh, King of Mewar, Alauddin Khalji and Amar Singh Rathor (gap of three centuries between the life	Sitaram Mohanta, trusted man	Alauddin Khalji	Parasnath Hills	Suicide by jumping into Damodar river	To commemorate her sacrifice



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11	Kudmi Princess from Gujarat		Prince of Punjab Acceptable Nameless Mughal Emperor Unacceptable		Kudmi King of Gujarat, Tusu's Father and King and Prince of Punjab	Nameless Mughal Emperor	Assam tea gardens	Self-immolation or <i>Sation</i> her husband's funeral pyre	To commemorate her love story
12	Kudmi	Beauty	Nawab of Bengal's soldiers Unacceptable	Unnamed Nawab of Bengal	Kudumis and Santals oppose the kidnapping of Tusu	Nawab's soldiers	Mayurbhanj, Odisha	Suicide by jumping into Damodar river	Tusu's death creates furore among Kudmis. Women begin to worship her.
13	Princess, otherwise unspecified	Beauty	Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan Unacceptable	Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan, Nawab of Bengal	Maharaja Uday Pratap Singh of Kashipur, Tusu's father	Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan, Nawab of Bengal	Kashipur, West Bengal	Suicide by jumping into Subarnarekha	To commemorate her sacrifice



14	Kudmi	Beauty	Nawab of Bengal's soldiers Unacceptable	Nawab Sirajud-Daulah, Nawab of Bengal		Nawab Sirajud-Daulah, and the Nawab's soldiers	Mayurbhanj , Odisha	Suicide by jumping into Damodar river	To commemorate her sacrifice
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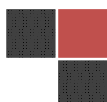


Conclusion

There is a marked chasm, almost a Derridean gap between the rituals performed to placate the Harvest Goddess Tusu and the tales revolving around the Goddess. The tales form a wide spectrum from relatively simple to very complex narratives and the meaning seems to lie not only in what is told but more often than not in the chasm, the unsaid, the untold. In narratives 1, 2, 3 and 4 the caste/community as also the religion of Tusu remain unspecified, hinting at the tribal origin of the Harvest Goddess. In narratives 5, 7, 12 and 14, Tusu is depicted as a Kudmi girl, indicating the gradual appropriation of the erstwhile tribal Harvest Goddess by the fringe Hindu Kudmi caste/community. In narratives 6 and 9, Tusu is a Kudmi princess, while in narrative 11, she is depicted as a Kudmi princess from Gujarat, perhaps indicating the gradual movement of the Kudmi community up the socio-economic hierarchy. In narratives 8 and 10, Tusu is a Rajput princess. On the one hand, it might indicate the community ambition of the Kudmi to move up the Hindu caste hierarchy. On the other hand, it might also be read as a move of the Hindu caste hierarchy to be more inclusive in order to combat a common religio-cultural enemy, the Muslim. In narrative 13, Tusu is the princess of Kashipur, denoting perhaps her appropriation by the higher echelons of society.

The patriarchal delineation of woman as a mere object of beauty to be possessed by men is very evident. Narratives 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 14 portray physical beauty to be the defining factor of Tusu. Narrative 6 stresses both, her beauty and playfulness, while narrative 5, hints only at her playful nature. It is primarily her physical beauty that seems to draw her admirer-suitors. A few admirer-suitors are acceptable to her family and community at large, such as the unnamed King in narrative 2, the unnamed Prince in narrative 3, the Kudmi youth-lover in narrative 7 and the Prince of Punjab in narrative 11. Her physical beauty also draws several admirer-suitors from the ranks of the cultural other, namely the Muslims, singularly unacceptable to her community, such as the unnamed Mughal Emperor in narrative 4, Allaudin Khalji, the Sultan of Delhi, in narratives 8 and 10, Malik Kafur, Allaudin Khalji's army general, in narrative 9, the soldiers of the Nawab of Bengal in narrative 12, Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, in narrative 13 and the soldiers of the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj ud-Daulah, in narrative 14.

Having neatly internalized the patriarchal norms of her society, Tusu seems to possess only a negative will. Her only decisive act is strangely an act of suicide. In narratives 4, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 13, Tusu commits suicide by jumping into a river to save her chastity and by implication the cultural purity of her community, from the religio-cultural other, the Muslims. In narratives 12 and 14, a supposedly impure Tusu is rejected by her own community for she has been desecrated by Muslims (in both narratives, Tusu is treated respectfully by the Nawab of Bengal and sent home with due honour) and thus compelled to commit suicide by jumping into the river. In narrative 7, both Tusu and her Kurmi lover are taken hostage and later released by the Muslims. As in narratives 12 and 14, a supposedly impure Tusu is rejected by her own community. Her lover, though not rejected by society, becomes a monk. Tusu leaves home in search of her monk-lover (the only instance of positive choice exerted by her in the fourteen narratives studied) and after a momentary reunion dies due to self-deprivation. In narrative 5, she jumps into a river to save the kingdom from drought and metamorphoses into a rock, while in narrative 6 she jumps into a river and commits suicide to save the kingdom from famine. In narratives 3



and 11, she self-immolates on her husband's funeral pyre. Only in narratives 1 and 2, possibly older tales, does she die a natural death.

The stories read from a contemporary 21st century perspective, no doubt, appear rather depressing. In the Tusu *lok kathas* beautiful women seem to matter more than less pretty ones. However, beautiful women remain, at the same time, terribly at risk of capture, and their only mode of "escape" or way of preserving their honour and by default the cultural purity of their community solely hinged upon the bodyscape of the woman, is by committing suicide. In a perverse case of cultural camouflage, the suicide of Tusu in each narrative is interpreted as self-sacrifice, thereby foregrounding the deep-rooted patriarchal, hegemonic, societal structures. The ideology of patriarchy permeates the tales; the living daughter/princess/wife/queen post death, seems quite replaceable by a statue/idol. Denied individuality while alive, the death of the woman/Tusu becomes the essential condition for her deification into a *Devi* and her subsequent acceptance in the Hindu pantheon. The *lok kathas* glorify the woman/Tusu as the archetypical sacrificial creature, and young women hearing the tales are subtly conditioned by present day latent patriarchal structures to be always ready to offer up their lives to save community honour.

Notes:

¹"They are also known as Kurmi Mahto/Mahato or Kudumi Mohanta/Mahanta" (Wiki nd)

²Sacred utterances in Sanskrit believed to have spiritual powers.

³Narratives 1, 5, 6 and 14 originally in Hindi, have been translated into English by the authors of this article.

⁴In the interest of greater academic clarity, Narratives 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 have been nominally corrected grammatically and syntactically.

⁵The term *Sati* is derived from the name of Goddess Sati, who self-immolates unable to bear her father Daksha's humiliation of her and her husband Shiva. The term *Sati* or *Satidaha*, denotes a historical religio-cultural practice among Hindus, wherein a widow was expected to sacrifice herself by burning herself on her deceased husband's funeral pyre, in other words, the patriarchal practice of burning the widow alive. This rite is also known as *sahagamana* (going with) or *sahamarana* (dying with) or *anvarohana* ("ascension" to the pyre). The term *Satimata* denotes a venerated widow who committed *sati*. The word *Sati* also denotes a "chaste woman" or "good wife" (Wiki nd).

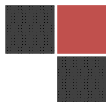
⁶The Kanchi river is a tributary of the Subarnarekha river. It is one of the main rivers flowing through Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand. The river forms an enchanting waterfall, Dassam waterfall, in Taimara village, 40 kms from Ranchi.

⁷Hindu mendicant who has renounced worldly life.

⁸Hindu Goddess.

⁹Hindu religious ascetic who has renounced worldly life.

¹⁰Royal court or hall of audience.



¹¹Narrative 7 originally in Bengali, has been translated into English by the authors of this article.

¹²Flight of stairs leading down to a river.

¹³In Hindu mythology, Rukmini or Rukmani, the princess of Vidharba, is the principal wife of Lord Krishna, the King of Dwaraka.

¹⁴Satighat is a religious place at Barendra village in Sonahatu tehsil of Ranchi district in Jharkhand. It is situated 15 kms from sub-district headquarter Sonahatu and 65 kms from district headquarter Ranchi. It is located on the bank of the Subarnarekha river and famous for its Tusu Mela. There is no Satighat under the jurisdiction of Ichagarh thana, Singhbhum district, at present Seraikela-Kharsawan district, as mentioned in the source.

¹⁵The Subarnarekha or Swarnarekha river rises in Piska village near Ranchi. It flows through Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha. As per tradition, gold was mined near the origin of the river therefore it is named Subarnarekha, meaning streak of gold.

¹⁶Ratnasimha or Ratna-Simha, in Rajasthani legends Rajputruler Ratan Singh, was the last ruler of the Rawal branch of the Guhila dynasty, who ruled over Medapata (Mewar) in present-day Rajasthan, from Chitrakuta (modern Chittorgarh) fort from 1302 –1303 CE. He was defeated in 1303 CE by Alauddin Khalji (reign 1296–1316), the second and most powerful sultan of the Khalji dynasty that ruled the Delhi Sultanate from 1290 to 1320 CE.

¹⁷Parasnath is a mountain peak in the Parasnath Range, at the eastern end of the Chotanagpur plateau in the Giridih district of Jharkhand.

¹⁸The act of mass self-immolation by women in parts of the Indian subcontinent, to avoid capture, enslavement and rape by foreign, particularly Muslim invaders, when the kingdom faced certain defeat during a war.

¹⁹Maharajadhiraj Sri Damodar Sekhar Deo established the Panchkot royal dynasty in 80 CE, possibly in Jhalda. The capital shifted to Garh Panchkot in 940 CE. Garh Panchkot was abandoned in the 1750s, due to Maratha-Bargi raids and internecine wars. At this point, the royal family moved 31 kms south, to Kashipur, on the banks of the Dwarakeswar river. Raja Bhubaneswari Prasad Singh Deo, the last ruler of this dynasty, was on the throne from 1956 to 1972. This royal family still lives at the Kashipur Rajbari, in the Raghunathpur subdivision of Purulia district of West Bengal. The Kashipur Rajbari has been declared a heritage site of West Bengal.

²⁰The Kangsabati or Kasai river originates at Jabor Pahar near Jhalda in the Chotanagpur plateau of West Bengal and flows through Purulia, Bankura and Paschim Medinipur districts of West Bengal before draining into the Bay of Bengal, it does not flow close to the Parasnath hill.

²¹Historically, Amar Singh Rathore (11 December 1613 - 25 July 1644) was a Rajput nobleman affiliated to the royal house of Marwar, and a courtier of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in seventeenth-century India. There is a difference of almost three centuries between the times of Alauddin Khalji and Amar Singh Rathore.



²²The Damodar river rises in the Palamu hills of Chotanagpur. It follows a generally eastward course for 592 kms through West Bengal to join the Hooghly river, southwest of Kolkata.

²³Narrative 13 is a transliteration of a Hindi audio story by the authors of this article.

²⁴Around a thousand years ago, Digvijaya Pratap Singh Deo from Jodhpur in Rajasthan came to Iloo, 14 kms from Jhalda and set up his kingdom there. After an invasion, the royalty shifted to Hensla village, 8kms from Iloo, presently under Jhalda Block1, Purulia district, West Bengal, Sangbad Pratidin, October 7, 2019, reported by Sucheta Sengupta.

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