

## **Psycho-Cultural Construction of Gender in Community Expression in Odisha**

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### **Abstract**

Gender is a popular area of engagement in social sciences. Socio-cultural knowledge influences the individual psyche and shapes the psychic personality. The process is complex, and both male and female play their respective role to develop an inclusive consciousness. Oral tradition and folk rituals represent such gender consciousness inbuilt in the contested narration and ritual symbols. Cultural psychology includes an interpretative approach to examine gender discourse through people's cultural expression. Here, an attempt has been made to examine the cultural expression of Odisha folklore and myths to explore the elements of gender equity against the inequalities. An attempt has been made to show how the womenfolk of Odisha represent the gender consciousness through their cultural expressions and religious practices in everyday life.

**Keywords:** gender, folklore, cultural psychology, stereotypes.

## Introduction

Gender-culture interaction gives rise to vast differences at psycho-social functioning of the individuals and the groups. Gender identities signify the role distribution of male and female in a given society. From a psychological perspective, it is recognized that an individual's concrete behaviour is mostly consequent upon gender identity through socio-cultural rules and practices.

At present, a paradigm shift has been made in the study of cultural psychology. Taking the ideas of Parsons, Quinn writes,

"Human society is constituted by the interaction between and within the *cultural system*, *social system*, *personality system*, and *biological system* that make up society. The *cultural system* consists of symbols' interrelations, while the *social system* consists of persons' relations in roles and collectives. The *personality system* consists of a system of motivations and values, while the *biological system* consists of the interaction within the actual physical body" (Quinn24).

Relating gender to culture Magnusson and Marecek write, *culture* in the sense of a historical causal process of the transmission of ideas, norms, values, and institutions has enormous power; it has brought us most of what we do and have. Culture must be seen as an inseparable part of people's psychological functioning, not something that can be added onto an individual" (Magnusson and Marecek31).

In India, the caste, religion and power contribute to gender disparities through its culture. Women's opportunities are constrained because mechanisms and institutions exclude them for the female role as child-bearer staying in the domestic domain and deprived them of the social domain. This structure of role segregation is a severe handicap to women education (Sen, 2009). Distribution of space between males and females regarding family, society, governance, market, and institutions determines the nature of equality, which is detrimental to women's freedom.

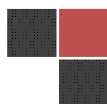
According to Rajkumar, a noted Dalit critic, in the ideological sphere, women are worshipped as Goddess and given high status; in reality, women are subjugated, and even tortured. He calls it inherent duality in Hinduism. He writes,

Many of the folk tales, Puranic stories and other forms of literature support this duality where the woman is painted in black and white. Although the specific situation of a particular woman is determined by her exact location in history, her economic situation, her marital status, etc., the fact that women have to suffer unequal treatment is, by and large, true of all classes and castes of our society. The caste system operates alongside gender oppression (Rajkumar, 02).

The narratives of gender discrimination are expressed in the women folk's oral tradition in their everyday lives. Over time, it has become a part of their socio-culturally accepted behaviour. This oral tradition contains their collective consciousness of gender discrimination, gender role and gender situation in a given space.

## Argument

The songs and tales as part of the rich oral tradition, and the written narratives of Odisha represent the woman's social consciousness against the oppressions and injustice inflicted against them. Their emotional feelings have released in their songs, representing the agony, trauma and mental health status. Across the world, gender issues permeate



individuals, couples, families, and organizations' rituals and habits. One way to detect the subtle impact of gender impact is to see how it manifests in the content of culture-specific proverbs. Such proverbs still prevail in these societies as conventional wisdom. (Sabdar and Berezecka 8)

### Methodology

The interpretive cultural psychology method has been widely used for folklore and literary studies, linguistics, including Gender, ethnic studies and narrative therapy. Since this study is based on the oral tradition of the non-literate women folk of Kalahandi, the questionnaire method would not be suitable to the context. Instead, interviews through informal dialogue and interpersonal discussion are best for the women to express their minds. Psychology researchers have adopted interpretative approaches and specifically address psychological questions analyzing participants' narrative to identify meaning-making and make these patterns comprehensible (Magnusson and Marecek 45-47).

To understand the gender stereotypes and gender parity in traditional culture, I conducted a field study in some villages and collected data from the female informants and documented oral tales and songs. I interviewed them to elicit the narratives, meanings, worldviews, and presuppositions that participants use to make sense of the world. People's stories about their experiences serve as an entree into how they interpret their relationships and situations.

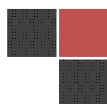
I have taken two women's fasting rituals observed for the longevity of male persons. The ritual is known as Vrata. The first one is Bhai Jiuntia Vrata, a ritual followed by the sister for the longevity of their brothers, and another ritual is Puro – Jiuntia Vrata observed by the mothers for the longevity of their sons.

The secondary data I have taken from the written text, *Lakshmi Purana*, written by poet Balaram Das, a popular myth of Goddess *Lakshmi* in the folk ritual of Odisha observed by the womenfolk over five centuries. Besides, the poems of Saint Bhima Bhoi (18th century) have been adopted to analyze how the saint tradition was protested the male hegemony and fought for gender equity in society. Both the poets are male and are from lower strata of the caste system. When Balarama Das was a *Gauda* from cowherd caste, had access to literacy, Bhima Bhoi belonged to the tribal Kondh of western Odisha was non-literate. Balarama Das was in Puri, the religious center of power and knowledge, along with his inmates Jagannath Das and three other saints, Bhima Bhoi was in *khaliapali* – a tribal village of western Odisha.

### Observation

Cultural practices and customs are perpetuated in the oral tradition, religious rites and rituals. The women are worshipped in the temple as a mother goddess in an ideal religious context. On the contrary, a woman is also tortured and burnt for dowry and many socio-economic reasons. Incidentally, fire and women have a close affinity in life. Women start her morning with fire in the kitchen and end her night in a similar way.

The proverbs and songs found in traditional society reveal how the women are looked down in a traditional society. Some proverbs run as follows -



1. *Gaankania Singhaninaki*

The meaning is a girl of one's own village's nose is always dirty. A girl from the village is beautiful, but she is still not appreciated like a prophet is not honoured in his land.

2. *Nimbatiana, jhiamarana, pachhakuguna.*

The *Neem* curry: the death of a daughter is useful for the future.

The social mind imagined the death of a girl is useful for future hasa cultural meaning. In a patriarchal society, a girl's marriage is difficult for dowry, and the bride's parents have to sacrifice their property for a daughter's wedding. The parents never wish their girl child to die, but the dowry's consequence leading to people's miseries has created such a proverb that illustrates their helplessness. However, such negative proverbs are also prevalent in the society which must be discarded. The intention of describing such proverbs here is to show how culture retains such a negative message through their oral expression.

3. *Jhia -ghia.*

Both the girl and butter should not be detained for long in the house; if held, they are spoiled. A girl if not given in marriage on appropriate time is a problem for the parents and the *ghee* stored for long without use is likely to get spoiled.

4. *Jhijanama, para gharaku*  
*Jhijanamachulimundaku.*

It means a girl is born to go to another's house; also, a girl is born to fire others' oven. A girl's fate is to serve in the kitchen of another's home. So, investing in her education is of no use.

*Dela Nari, helapari*

A girl is given that marriage is considered to be got rid of the burden. It is the cultural attitude of males.

*Debajahintahinanbabhala*

You get a perfect bride for your son, but you give your daughter anywhere you like. The selfish attitude of the patriarchal society is portrayed in this proverb.

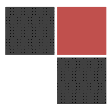
*Maa pose khudkuna, arubaap pose sunadhena*

The mother brings up the child with the leftover of rice, but father nourishes the child with a golden spoon.

The oral songs and narratives in the traditional society of Kalahandi and Nuapadadistrict in Odisha bear gender discrimination in the family. The oral songs discussed below contain their miserable life in family and society.

Some specimens of the songs are as follows.

1. *Sajani, kashibaunsharadhuna*  
*Munushakhauchhesikara tuna*  
*Maijhichatuchhenuna.*



Translation:

O Companion,

The bow is made of tender bamboo.  
Husband in the home enjoys meat with his meal.  
Wife is licking the pinch of salt with rice.

2. *Sajani, Pila Paruarahada,  
Kete Khauthibi Ghaitamada  
Neidiabapaghara*

Translation:

The tender bone of a pigeon  
Why suffer my husband's beating  
Please take me back to my parents.

Child marriage in rural Odisha is found in the following song.

3. *Sajani, Amapatrakaanlia,  
Pilabelenani, mukitabiha,  
Tanka gala Mahalia.*

Translation:

Tender is the mango leaf,  
Crown marriage by the lass, in tender age,  
Lost money for nothing.

The marriage of elder girls of sixteen with the boys of twelve years of age was found in the rural and tribal belt of Odisha, which is a legal crime. However, the practice was found in some places in the recent past. The married woman with her tender husband lamented on her frustration in her conjugal life. The song is as follows.

4. *Sajani, Bahalapatarachaki,  
Kanigadudharijauchhesukhi  
BalutaBarakedekhi.*

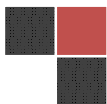
Translation:

Round is the bahal leaf,  
I am slimming  
It is a burden, my bowl and panties,  
To hold for my husband, unripe.

5. *Sajani, Chatiasamila Pole,  
Pranakantaku mu dharilikole,  
Nida marinelabhole.*

Translation:

The sparrow entered the hollow,  
While holding my life's lord, in my lap,  
He entered into a deep slumber, unmindfully.



6. *Sajani, Pikapatrarekareka,  
Tor buakhaichhechhakoditanka  
Kanara phasia Dekha.*

Translation:

Tobacco leaf is striated,  
Your father swallowed a hundred twenty rupees.  
Show me your earrings.

7. *Sajani  
Nalenale gala pani,  
Maagharemuidukhanaijani  
Sasughara tana tani.*

Translation:

Water ran, down the channel,  
Never knew a woe at my mother's house,  
I get tension in my father-in-law's house.

### Discussion

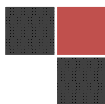
These songs portray the individual self-awareness nurtured in the singers' collective memory. These songs are the emotional outburst of the woman's mental agony, trauma ill mental health, and maladjustment in a family suppressed in their psyche. The songs and proverbs help them release their voices in a stress-free social group and feel safe expressing their agony. The group singing and group behaviour make the women folk secure to express their social realities in a social group where listening to the song's men cannot dissent. When the same theme is universally sung or performed, generally people accept it and never react to it. While the individual expression is supposed to violate family values, singing or expressing in a social gathering is the generalization of a particular condition, which everybody usually accepts.

The inequality of consuming food by a male and a female was the symbol of gender disparity when she sang, that her husband is eating the meat curry whereas she is licking the pinch of salt with rice. The anxiety and displeasure of a matured young girl with her tender husband, torturing husband are some of the narratives that speak the fate of the rural woman in Odisha. All these expressions constitute the individual, social, and cultural construction of Gender in the traditional society of Odisha.

These songs are the heartfelt feelings of the womenfolk of rural and tribal women of Kalahandi. (Mishra 2008). The silenced voices of the girls and womenfolk have symbolically represented in these songs. The meaning of these songs is highly context-sensitive. The visual metaphors are drawn from the environment revealing the life-world of the womenfolk.

Based on the above social learning system, it is necessary to understand the contributing factors that sustain gender parity or disparity. Oral tradition is a means of cultural evidence of learning and teaching of community knowledge.

It is essential to know how the womenfolk of Odisha have understood their cultural capital and how they present themselves in their expressive tradition. To validate



the hypothesis, we may observe some songs and proverbs and elicit how a woman has been described in these culture items.

The Oral discourse of women as they see and understand themselves is a matter of concern that has not been discussed so far. As the creator of culture, women have many voices through songs and proverbs expressing their everyday lives. These expressions are the silent protest they share in their creative songs and dances.

The songs and proverbs discussed above explore women's social status in society in one hand and reveal the self's life-world on the other. The non-literate woman and girls have their intellectual ability to analyse the events and situations they face in their family life. They find their fortune fixed in some social rules and practices that they understand but cannot resolve in reality. Therefore, the songs and the proverbs are used for a release of agony and mental tension.

### **Woman as a Self in Their Cultural Context: Community Psychology**

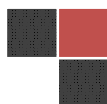
Culture cannot exist without human beings and human beings cannot exist without culture. Culture at its very heart is something intrinsically human, and humans are intrinsically cultural beings. (Magnusson and Marecek 20)

Folklore constitutes the essence of culture in oral traditions. Using the creation myth and folktales, the psychiatrists have widely used a day's narrative therapy to heal the traumatic conditions of the people living with psychosis. Social and cultural scientists had become sharply aware of the determining effects of the structure and value of regional, social and cultural forces on the personalities of individual members of the society.

The women I came across the field have a wonderful sense of gender awareness expressed in the oral songs and proverbs. The older man and woman describe their experience of gender disparity in these songs, which reveals the variables of cultural expressions across the age, space and time in a socio-cultural context. Folklorists bent upon anthropological enquiry of community knowledge than its psychological counterpart, but in psychology, the individual self-image and mental health are more relevant to maintaining social harmony.

The community constructions of gender differ from culture to culture. For instance, the sun and moon are two male gods in Hindu myth, but in Saora myth, they are two sisters (Mishra 2016). Eva writes "Every culture offers an array of self-presentations or identities that are recognizable to its members. When a cultural group member adopts a self-presentation from this array, this always occurs within a local context, such as a conversation. Therefore, a self-presentation is culturally anchored and yet also moulded to local demands and expectations." (Magnusson and Marecek 83). The self-presentation of the Saoras in imagining the sun and moon is culturally accepted. The myth of the sun and moon in Saora tribes and some tribes of North East India signifies the gender self-representation of the community.

The Kutia Kondh creation myth narrated by the community elder describes a primal mother, and from her womb, the earth, human and animals, birds and animals and fruits and flowers have emerged. When the Kondhs were close to the kings, their myth became patriarchal, and supreme male god replaces the primal mother. The gradual transformation of the Kondhs from a forest culture to agriculture has changed the self-presentation of the Kondhs symbolizing the worship of mother goddess to male father



god (Jena, Pathy, Patnaik and Sealand 103). However, in later part, the female myth has been changed into male myth after they were adapted into royal administration and Hindi ritual system.

There are some songs in the tribal society that articulate human equality. A Kondh girl, *Kirpi Melaka*<sup>1</sup> In *Khambesi* village of Niyamgiri sings '*Tuimunusha, muimunusha, kainkaruetedarana*' (you are a human being, I am a human being, why do you threaten me?) A tribal woman has protested the advent of the multinationals to save the *Niyamgiri* ecological zone through her group consciousness, although they are illiterate. This validates the hypotheses that irrespective of literate or non-literate status, people understand the process of oppression and protest for themselves and society.

### Status of Women in Socio-Religious Domain

The two *Vratas*-rituals observed by women in Odisha bear the symbol of subordination to the males. These rituals legitimize women's subjugation through religious systems. The males do not observe any fasting for the well being for their mother, wife or sister, but the female observe the rituals for their son, husband or brother is a marker of gender role indicating the discriminatory socio-cultural system to dominate women. These two rituals are discussed below:

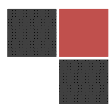
#### ***Bhai juintia Vrata***<sup>2</sup> - A ritual for brother's long life

*Bhai juintia Vrata* It is a ritual observance among the Hindu unmarried girls in western Odisha. It is called *Dutibahana Vrata* (ritual) in coastal Odisha. Dwija Gaurachandra has written the *Vrata Katha* (Patnaik 107). This ritual is exclusively performed by the sisters for the longevity of their brothers. This ritual falls in September – October. On this day, both married and unmarried sisters pray for their brothers' long life and well-being by fasting the whole day without water. A group of sisters, dressed up in new attire, gather at an open space decorated with mango leaves, wild plants and flowers in their localities and worship Goddess Durga. Earlier in the day, bunches of *duba*-grass (108 strands of green grass) wrapped up with freshly plucked *sal* leaf are prepared for each brother and the Goddess. Each bundle consists of 108 unbroken grains of rice also and tied up with a colourful *juintia* (sacred thread). Then they offer all the bundles along with *prasad* like *Jugar* (made of puffed rice), *Puri* (made of flour) and *tikhri* (made of moong dal) and varieties of fruits to the goddess. Next day, i.e., *Nabami*, the sisters take a holy dip in a nearby tank or river and perform ritual near the water body by offering slices of cucumbers and chopped *Kathi* (short *sal* sticks used for brushing teeth).

Back home, sisters break their fast after touching their brother with the *duba* bunch from head to toe and presenting him *prasad* and gifts. Their brothers invite them to their parent's house to celebrate *Bhai Juintia* and *Dussehra* for married sisters. It is a festival that celebrates the bond of affection between brothers and sisters and sisters and prays for their brothers' prosperity.

#### ***Puo-Jiuntia Vrata*** - A ritual for son's long life

This ritual is known as *Prathamastami* in the coastal belt of Odisha, and it is well known as *Puo – Jiuntia Osha* in western Odisha. In this ritual, mothers celebrate fasting and remain in strict austerity to perform the rituals for their sons' longevity.





Nevertheless, no males observe any ritual for the well-being of their mother, daughters and sisters. Similarly, *Savitri Vrata* is observed by a married woman for her husband's longevity in *Savitri Amavasya* in Odisha. The story of *Savitri* and *Yama* episode is narrated by the *Purana Panda* which the most educated women also celebrate with austerity. In Hindi speaking belt this ritual is popularly known as *Chhat Puja*.

From these rituals, the traditional society legitimizes a custom exclusively to engage the women for males' well-being through rituals, austerity, and fasting. Even the unmarried girls are prepared for the rituals and are also a symbol of legitimizing males' power through the ritual system. In contrast, there are no such customs for the male to observe fasting or rituals to safeguard women's well-being. The male-biased customs haveal ways wished the woman to be the part of the domestic domain, and they regulated the lifestyle of the woman in a manner that they will be abiding by the socio-religious practices. The surface of the rituals does not exhibit a disparity in a family or a society. Instead, it shows how females' sacrifice for the male in a family is glorified in the community. It symbolizes the male supremacy to protect women's socio-economic security so that the women's self is to observe the ritual to gratify the males. The deep meaning of such a ritual has a lot to question, besides its observation part. It questions the authenticity of the rituals imposed only to women imposed through religious compulsion.

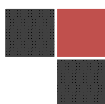
### **Lakshmi Purana, a Contested Myth of Women's Freedom**

Coming to the written literature on gender equality, I will discuss *Lakshmi Purana* written by poet Balarama Das of 16<sup>th</sup> century (Das Chittaranjan, 1982) - particularly the episode of Goddess Lakshmi as the symbol of empowerment in the context of male hegemony. The characters are linked to the Jagannath temple. The story of Lakshmi is now available in digital form ([www.odia.org](http://www.odia.org)) in printed and in video form and the devotees watch the episode on TV and YouTube on the day of observing *Lakshmi puja* in five Thursdays in the month of Margashira (December).

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Balaram Das, a saint-poet of Puri wrote *Lakshmi Purana* - a small poem on goddess Lakshmi which still influences the socio-religious life of Odisha. The story is connected to Lord Jagannath and his elder brother Balarama. The story goes like this:

Goddess Lakshmi was the consort of Lord Jagannath and was freely accepting the worship made to her by the untouchable woman *Shriya*. Balarama, knowing this instigated Jagannath to discard *Lakshmi* from *Srimandira* and Goddess *Lakshmi* protested it pleading that she had not done anything wrong by accepting the *puja* from the untouchable woman. However, Balarama did not accept it. As an obedient brother, Jagannath asked Lakshmi to leave *Srimandira*. Lakshmi out of anguish and anger left the palace and constructed a castle near the seashore.

Meanwhile, these two brothers faced many problems and became poor because of Goddess Lakshmi's absence. They loitered as beggars for twelve years and ultimately, came to Goddess Lakshmi's palace as beggars. Taking pity on these two brothers, Goddess Lakshmi decided to offer them hospitality. Lakshmi herself cooked food for these brothers. While taking food Jagannath and Balarama could guess that the taste of the food cooked was prepared nobody other than Lakshmi. Then she appeared before them.



Lakshmi questioned them about their wretched life and told them how their life has been miserable without her. Both realized the reality and requested Lakshmi to forgive them and come to *Srimandira*. Lakshmi made a condition that her freedom should not be violated and there should not be any caste and gender disparity in *Srimandira* and society. She also defined some social rules that foster equality of man and woman, eliminating the caste system and gender discrimination by providing an equal status of all the persons in *Srimandira*. The two brothers agreed to her conditions, and from that day *Srimandira* is accepted to be the abode of eliminating caste system where the untouchables and Brahmin eat together. (Das 1982)

The small booklet *Lakshmi Purana* is a symbol of a protest against social discrimination during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. As a sacred center, Puri had the authority of power and knowledge exercised by the kings and the priests. Contrary to it, the social class was aware of this oppression. Saint poet Balaram Das was a milkman and had a low caste status, but his revolutionary poem ignited the society of Odisha. Balaram Das, to protest the inequality, adopted state deity Jagannath and Balaram as the protagonist and placed Goddess Lakshmi for the gender and caste inequality. Had this story been written with human protagonists, the story's gravity would not have been accepted by the mass. When the divine characters realize the social evils and transform themselves, it is natural in the part of the society to accept it as an ideal model. Till now, Lakshmi Puja's ritual is observed in all the families of Odisha commemorating the protest of Lakshmi.

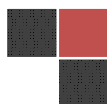
Interpreting *Lakshmi Purana*, Mohanty writes that the political and economic development discourse with the cultural component is incomplete. He writes:

We have seen in many countries that political representation and economic opportunities which are indeed absolutely necessary for women's empowerment have still proved to be inadequate in accomplishing women's liberation in modern times. In this work, it has been argued that culture has to be an integral component in the composite perspective along with political and economic measures to bring about women's liberation. In fact, all political and economic strategies of transformation which do not have a cultural component are necessarily inadequate in their capacity to achieve freedom and equality in society. That is the message from Lakshmi, the rebel. ((Mohanty 162-163)

In *Lakshmi Purana* the advice of Lakshmi has been the model in the family and social life of Odisha where womenfolk are regarded as the saviour of the family and without her good conduct and authority in-home, no male can develop. The family's well-being is bestowed with a responsible woman who can lead the family to prosperity and progeny.

### ***Stuti Chintamani* - a poem on Gender and Caste Equity**

The Saint tradition in Odisha has a consciousness of protest caste, and gender inequalities over five centuries. Following the tradition, in 19<sup>th</sup> century poet Bhima Bhoi emerged as a great revolutionary saint protesting the idol worship. Being a tribal poet from the marginalized community, he voiced against the conservative and dominant religious practices, and he disseminated the message of equality of human being irrespective of caste and Gender. His *Stuti Chintamani* (SC) is a seminal epic poem in which he has proclaimed his ideals with courage against the power and religious establishment in Odisha. (Bhoi 1950)



He proclaimed in *Stuti Chintamani* (SC) that-

*Jada kipanditahebeyanabanta ,angebasichakrapani,  
Satipanepatisebaniyojibestirihoibrahmagyani. (16/10, SC)*

"With the grace of God, the fool can be a pundit, and similarly a woman can have *brahmagyane* - knower of the self after she lives a dedicated chaste wife with her husband."(16/10, SC) Even after she performs her daily duties, she can have the liberty of being a person with self-knowledge.

In another stanza, Bhima Bhoi proclaimed,

*Nindagarbamananarahiba tana, karuthibaekabhaba,  
purushankustirigyanabujhaile, leutiba Satya yuga. (18/24, SC)*

"People will not put to blame on each other, will not be arrogant, and all will be united with equity. When the female teaches the male the self-knowledge, then the era of truth and virtue – *Satya-yuga* will appear."

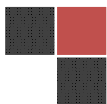
In another stanza, he proclaimed that those who eulogies the god will perform their duties sharing their equal responsibilities.

*Bhajibe jejanarahibesemane, satyadaigruhakarmaka,  
StirichariPadma,punshachari Padma, thikaathapadmaloka. (19/24.SC)*

Male and female humans are made of an equal share- female with four *Padmas* and male with four *Padmas* (here the *Padma* means an Indian mathematical number system.) The realization of god is imagined as the abode of eight lotuses. Equal participation of male and female in running a family with virtue to sustain a human society is distributed to four *Padmas* each to male and female.

These great lines are narrated by Bhima Bhoi which has been scribed by his disciples since he was a blind poet. It can be imagined that a non-literate poet from a tribal community has envisioned the gender equity in a conservative society where the authority of power was subjugated and silenced the people through their orthodox religious strictures. Bhima Bhoi was not a powerful man, but he was a visionary saint-poet who proclaimed for self-knowledge by realizing the god in one's conscience *Brahmagyana*. His concepts of *Brahmagyana* are based on the elimination of hunger and poverty, elimination of arrogance, and abolish of orthodoxy and establish gender equity through self-knowledge. The self-knowledge comes from within and not in the shape of stone or wooden images of god.

Both Balarama Das, the author of *Lakshmi Purana* and Bhima Bhoi, the narrator of *Stuti Chintamani* were males. They had the self-consciousness of an equal society of male and female where the sex is absent, and the social construction of Gender is firmly established, not just by poems but by adopting a practice of protest against the injustices of the authority of power. They saw the woman as a complete embodiment of personhood with a socio-psychological human being with self-knowledge capacity. In *Lakshmi Purana*, the oppressive and prejudiced attitudes of two male god Lord Jagannath and Balarama against Goddess Lakshmi were all about the gender injustice of a divine family. Had this been a family story of an ordinary husband and wife, people would not have listened to it as they are accustomed to it. When the myth was attributed to the divine protagonists, it became an ideal model for both the sexes to respect the myth's message and observed the rules and customs propagated by goddess Lakshmi.



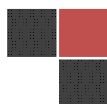
Lakshmi has asserted her freedom of accepting worship from the untouchables, and the two gods had to submit to the victory of a woman over male domination. Bhima Bhoi proclaimed that the woman would achieve self-knowledge at par with the male and observe dharma. Besides, the proclamation emphasized the woman's responsibility to guide the male with self-knowledge. In this case, the female has the family responsibility to practise self-knowledge and right action, eliminating inequality. Needless to say, these two poets have proved that gender equality is a shared responsibility of women and men with an equal share, equal self-realization, and equal opportunity in family and social ecosystems.

### **Inference**

The findings of the study are recorded in the following points:

1. Non-literate women as victims of gender discrimination have a self-consciousness of being oppressed, which they express in their oral songs and proverbs to express their heartfelt grief. Though they do not protest in a social domain, they express their feelings in the public sphere as a marker of social protest.
2. Oral songs and proverbs represent the individual and social history and reveal the social conditions, reflecting women's self-awareness expressed in their narratives.
3. The rituals observed by the females have a vast social role as a part of their moral obligation to the male society, in turn; the male does not have any ritual to safeguard a woman's interest. Though this is a question of gender disparity, the female does not have any gender self-consciousness to claim that the males should also observe rituals. They observe it as a part of their role specified by society.
4. Authority of power may use the cultural symbols to maintain their supremacy over the people. Still, women have also the strength of protest the establishment through an alternative knowledge system in the form of practice for social mobility and social ethics.
5. Gender is a socio-cultural phenomenon. Since gender is socially constructed; irrespective of male and female anyone can propagate for gender equity, and it is not just limited to woman's intervention. Gender as social consciousness, foster an optimistic psychological and social development in human activities.
6. Any new concept or idea substantiated with culture is supposed to be accepted by the community. Therefore, a culture's positive values are a better context for creating a new idea to learn from the past and plan for the future.

The modern concept of gender equity and human rights must be appropriated from society's cultural lens through interpretation by examining different ideas and opinions to arrive at a consensus suitable to contemporary time. In the post-modern era, the modernity has been questioned, and the most marginalized discourse has also got a place in post-modern cultural discussion.



### Acknowledgements

I am thankful to the informants of *Khambesi* Village of Rayagada district, Mrs *Sinde Wadaka*, *Kirpi Melaka* and her companions for *Dongria Kondh* songs. I am thankful to *Malti*, *Chheda*, and *Tola Dei* and her groups of Kapsi village of *Sinapali* Block of Nuapada district for providing me with the folk songs and proverbs. I am thankful to Sri *Mahadev Kar*, the village priest of *Sinapali* to provide me with the details of Vrata and rituals related to *Lakshmi Purana* and other *Vrata* mentioned here.

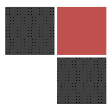
### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>I met Kirpi Melaka on April 02, 2018, in her village Khambesi of Rayagada district when I had to conduct a field study on women education among the Dongria Kondh. She was an illiterate young girl who with three other girls sang the song. This line is narrated as a part of that long song.

<sup>2</sup>In Sinapali village of Nuapada district, the village girls used to observe this ritual which I had the opportunity to attend during October 2016.

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