

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND AUTONOMY: A GENEALOGY OF BHAT NARRATIVES IN TELANGANA

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Abstract:

Bhat community is a sub-sect of the Lambada community of Telangana. Indeed, Bhats themselves are very conscious of, and take great pride in, their narratives and far from taking their inherent beautiful narrative skills. Moreover, the narratives that the Lambadas Bhats narrate aim to show that these communities are not lower communities it has a history of ruling community. That is how they claim to be the ruling class. Listening to their own genealogies in the form of legendary narratives also gives them an occasion to reflect on ethical issues. In his article "Articulating Self Orality, Community, and Colonialism in South India" Bhangya Bhukya says "even if the lower communities claim the upper status that would not change the mind sets of the upper caste". During the Nineteenth century there was a kind of tendency in the marginalized communities that they are trying to lay claim or imitate the Brahmanical and Kshatriya status and values. Bhat narratives target modern institutions which have had an adverse effect on their lives. For instance, they satirize the state (both colonial and national), railways, banks, etc. We can also see scholars debating 'metalingual' character of Bhat narratives, i.e. the way the message is crafted and delivered, and so on. All these might be interesting issues for literary scholars, but what is obscured or totally erased in these discussions is the politics of Bhat narratives. It is also stressed that the narratives which reflect on the life and history of the Lambada Bhats' do distinguish between the Bhakti, devotion and aesthetic dominated knowledge and knowledge produced on the experiences of harsh realities of discrimination and segregation.

Keywords: Bhat community, knowledge, autonomy, genealogy, narratives etc

Bhat community is a sub-sect of the Lambada community of Telangana. They narrate the history of Lambada community, which is an amalgam of history and fiction. They live with their continuous conceptualisation of their identity. However, it is important to see the ways in which Bhats solicit their patrons by composing laudatory songs on them with a feeling that they are the final and authentic source of their patron's history. The knowledge produced by the Bhats on the history of Lambadas is full of protest and challenge the history written by

others. The main aim of this paper is to explore how the Bhats maintain their autonomy in creating genealogy through their narratives, which provide evidence concerning the lives and indigenous knowledge systems of Lambadas, a marginalised community in Telangana.

The genealogy articulated by the Bhats reminds us of Foucault's formulation of genealogy when we consider Lambada Bhats' social discursive formulations of "genealogy" as a tool of research methodology whereby the past is connected to the present. In this connection Foucault's concept of discourse is not seen as a perspective but a 'world view' from the perspective of how it happened but in terms of its relevance to the present. In Foucaultian formulation the question of power is interrelated and intertwined with knowledge. According to Foucault the genealogical analysis is broadly related to the archaeological construction of the past from the perspective of the present. Further he says:

It seems that from the empirical observability for us of an ensemble to its historical acceptability, to the very period of time in which it is actually observable, the analysis goes by way of the knowledge-power nexus, supporting it, recouping it at the point where it is accepted, moving toward what makes it acceptable, of course, not in general, but only where it is accepted. This is what can be characterized as recouping it in its positivity. Here, then, is a type of procedure, which, unconcerned with legitimizing and consequently excluding the fundamental point of view of the law, runs through the cycle of positivity by proceeding from the fact of acceptance to the system of acceptability analyzed through the knowledge-power interplay.¹

Indeed, Bhats themselves are very conscious of, and take great pride in, their narratives and far from taking their inherent beautiful narrative skills. Bhats have retained a set of musical traditions whose beauty is both subtle and immediately apparent to even the completely uninitiated listener. The rich, inherent and diverse culture of Bhats invites closer understanding of Lambada Bhat performers and their historical background.

In fact, the narratives of the Lambada Bhats include the centuries long struggle that Lambadas have undergone ever since medieval times of Indian history. In addition, the only source of this cultural and historical memory for Lambadas is the narrative lore of the Bhats. Other communities may not understand the language and the cultural significance of Bhat narratives may not be intelligible to other communities. However, Lambadas spend hours listening to these narratives. Therefore, the role of Bhats seems to include both the maintenance of '*Pada*' (family name) and the performances of some sort of musical activity which produce a certain knowledge consciousness among the

Lambadas. The Bhats' association with these two activities is important for both Bhats' and Lambadas.

Bhats' style of narrative presentation would seem to straddle between stretches of speeches and songs. Sometimes, it sounds like speech suddenly inflected and, at some other times it seems like following clearly intoned pitches. Narratives that Bhats' sing begin with a melody and end with a heightened speech. While narrating they generally play *Rabab*, but sometimes narration is not accompanied by it. It is because they want to make sure that the listeners are getting them right.

However, a critical analysis of the Lambada Bhat narratives shows that they can write their own history and recount mythically the sagas of their origin. They are not histories proper in a technical sense, but they are basically negotiations with their past. Even today, for Lambadas, their past histories are alive and it is because of how Lambada Bhats narrate them in various forms and genres. In his book *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India* Stuart Blackburn claims, "written texts are sometimes the written-down products of oral compositions."² Therefore, though the Lambada Bhat narratives were never written down as documents, and were completely ignored in many ways, they still hold to be viable reflections of their past. In her article "Cultural Identity and Rewriting the Past" Monika Reif-Huelser says that:

Forming personal and cultural identity is closely related to memory: what we remember, what other people remember about us and how we integrate these memories into the process of learning, repudiating. Cultural memory is related through narratives, passed on from generation to generation.

However, Bhats' oral narratives are characterized by a certain freedom of expression, association, and transformation. Therefore, these narratives are not just used for the purposes of providing an interval from their daily life or respite, but they also give a kind of enlightenment to Lambada community to avoid illegal things and to be good with their fellow human beings in the Thanda and others. Here the narratives connote the ethos of Lambada culture and their genealogy. These narratives make an attempt not only to retrieve lost memories through narratives, but also bring back 'lost tribes' through their stories of genealogical history.

Moreover, these narratives that the Lambadas Bhats narrate aim to show that these communities are not lower communities it has a history of ruling community. That is how they claim to be the ruling class. Thus, they could find their place in colonial establishment. It is a general phenomenon during the mediaeval period: all the Indian downtrodden communities of claim higher status; some communities assert their culture

² Stuart Blackburn (2003), p. 33

and status.

Lambada Bhat's narratives bring the long neglected tradition of oral literature to mainstream, and to understand the neglected and marginalised communities, whose voice has never been heard in developing modern literature. When they do not have any written literature, oral narratives of the Lambada Bhats is the only available authentic resource and this is there in the collective memory of the Bhats. This is a kind of traditional data available on Lambadas.

Productions, reflections, and influences: Sign of alive traditions (genealogy)

Listening to their own genealogies in the form of legendary narratives also gives them an occasion to reflect on ethical issues. These narratives help the audience to connect them with the good deeds and obligation in their quotidian life. One can also find traces of subtle social commentary in these short pieces. In the following account I will illustrate how the narratives reflects the popular wisdom of Lambadas. There have been attempts by the mainstream historians to appropriate Lambadas into the Hindu religion.

Bhats seem to put a great deal of emphasis on human rather than Hindu gods and Hindu religious practices. Absence of stone images and idols appear in their songs. There are no temples or images in the Lambada thandas because Lambada culture has not developed any stone images. Ramjhol Bhat, the celebrated Bhat narrator, asks what is the point in praying to these stone images. Why should we run after these images? Further he says; why worship these idols, living beings are important. We have to turn to a person whose life itself becomes an example, but not the persons who all the time dominate others. The emphasis here is on the avoidance of images of worship. Lambadas do not have any temple culture. Since they live in the fringe of the villages they keep talking about other Hindu gods. Therefore, assimilation of the dominant Hindu religious aspects is practised by the Lambadas. But their assertion appears in the narrative form. However, their songs show their resistance to the dominant religion which may not be perceived or owned up by the community.

There is also uncertainty regarding the issue of whether Bhats constitute a caste. Some scholars such as Rustum Bharucha and Jeffrey G. Snodgrass suggest that Bhats could be the members of the Barots caste. Barots, it is observed, were genealogists in pre-modern India and were associated with the Hindu rulers of their region, notably the Rajputs. Since the Bhats too, like Barots, narrate the genealogies of their community, it is suggested that the term Bhats could be just a variant of Barots. Also, the instrument called *Rawaj*, which the Barots play, is found to be similar to *Rabab* the instrument of the Lambada Bhats. Thus, scholars like Gordon Thompson have concluded that, at least in the northern parts of India, the term Bhat is used as a synonym for the word Barot, supporting the claim that Bhats and

Barots belong to the same caste. However, Shah, Sharoff and other historians suggest that the main difference between the Barots and the Bhats is that they keep the genealogies.

Among the Barots of Gujarat, there is also the tradition of keeping the genealogical and historical records, which have not been studied by scholars. Hence these people have no presence in the mainstream histories. Anthropological studies too tend to confirm such an absurdity. For instance, commenting on the Bhats, Shah and Sharoff declare that:

We have not yet come across a person who remembers his genealogy beyond the seventh generation, among the literate or non-literate, the landowning or non-landowning groups. Persons remembering a genealogy beyond the fifth generation are also rare (253).

Since Lambadas have no scribal culture, most of the information pertaining to their past can only be inferred from the oral compositions sung by the Bhats. Thus, contrary to what scholars believe, we do come across a genealogy of Lambadas in the Bhat narratives which take us back to A.D 1434. In *Tropics of Discourse* Hayden White observes that “we do not live stories but only recount our lived experience in the story (13). In fact, the narratives of the Lambadas include the long struggle that they have undergone ever since medieval times of Indian history. The only source of cultural and historical memory for the Lambadas is the narrative lore of the Bhats.

Through their centuries-old narratives, Lambada Bhats try to associate themselves with the dominant communities such as the Rajasthan rulers. From their genealogy, we come to know the identities of the narrators as well their ancestor- was a Muslim, which ancestor became a Muslim and which one remained a Hindu and so on. Since the Lambada Bhats in their narratives associate themselves with Pruthviraj Chauhan, most scholars treat these narratives as merely fictional and dismiss them as having no real historical value. In his book *Event Metaphor Memory..* (1995) the Historian Shahid Amin observes that Gandhi disassociates himself from Chauri Chaura event as it turned violent against his principles of non-violence but the Indian History see it as metaphor for resistance to colonial British rule. In the same way tribal resistances are never seen as metaphors for resistances against colonial British rule. From an archaeological analysis in Foucaultian sense those resistance embedded in oral narratives energises the spirit of confidence in modern Indian tribes.

In her book *Against History, Against State* Shail Mayaram says that:

By creating an alternative records of their past through songs and stories, the Meos community were able to successfully retain a degree of cultural sovereignty. But their quest for autonomy was stigmatized, even criminalized, while histories-written by the literate, ruling elite transformed ethnic prejudice into historical past.

In Bhat narratives, we find numerous references to historical events, historical persons, conflicts, battles, which are appropriated by the prevalent modes of knowledge. One example

is how historians appropriated Prithviraj a Lambada king as a Hindu King and so on. He is referred to as a great “Indian” or “Hindu” king whereas Bhat narratives situate him as a Lambada king in the history. Such claims deconstruct the prevalent modes of Indian national histories. According to Bhats every Lambada song or narrative is composed of memories embedded in their histories. Although they are unwritten they existed and continue to exist orally. In Bhat narratives we find Prithviraj as protagonists and the Mughal rulers, Nizam army, and the *Angrajis* (Britishers) as their antagonists. I argue, seen from this new perspective, nationalist historiography appears to be mythical.

Compositions on History, Myths, and Identity

These narratives have the background of historical incidents and are known as historical narratives. They narrate the origin of the Lambadas and important incidents of their struggle are still exist in their cultural articulations. There are many narratives which have been composed by the Bhats with historical background, they contain some historical events.

The Lambada Bhats say that Amar Singh Rathod and Prithvi Raj Chauhan belong to Lambada community and that they were great rulers of the country.

Samal oh...oh...yapermath mathi re Mahammada vedi vedi Prithviraj vedi vedi

Listen oh..oh...yapermath mathi re...[This is the refrain] Muhammad Ghori is angry, and Prithvi Raj is also angry. Ghori kept his horse on one side of a weighing machine and dragged it yapermath mathi re..re.. And Prithvi Raj filled the other side of the machine with his wealth, but the horse is still weighing more. When it was Ghori's turn to weigh the horse, the horse's side rose up into the air just for seven annas.

Mahammad Ghori kept one horse in the weighing machine and it got weighed just for seven annas.... yapermath mathi re..re..Prithvi Raj and Ghori exchange fierce and angry looks at each other. Prithvi Raj understands that Muhammad has hatched a ruse and cheated him, and looted all his wealth. He angrily sets out to fight against Ghori... re..re..bhiay.

Yaparmath mathi re... Muhammad Ghori also stood for war yaparmath mathi

The battle started yaparmath mathi re... Prithvi Raj has already got engaged for the second time and his people are sending messages to attend his own marriage. Yaparmath mathi re...He is getting messages to be present for his marriage yaparmath mathi re....

He is deliberating whether he should go to his marriage or to war against Ghori

Prithvi Raj has a brother in-law and his name is Kevash.

[Ramjhol interrupts his singing here for a while and says]: “Stupid Ghori has come crossing all the hills by blasting bombs and reached Prithvi Raj. He held him captive by shackling him

and instead of killing him there itself he carries him back to his fort. There he imprisons him in a dark room.” At the time when Prithvi Raj was held captive by Ghori, Chand Bardai Bhat goes to Prithvi Raj’s house with his sixty-member group to sing songs. Seeing them Prithvi Raj’s wife starts wailing over what happened to her. When Chand Bardai asks her the reason for her grief, she sobbingly replies, “Prithvi is not at home, Ghori took him as a captive”. Chanda Bardai promises her that until he comes back with Prithvi Raj he will not eat food. He immediately sets out Ghori’s fort. As he enters the fort, Ghori mockingly calls out to him and declares, “I chained your Prithvi Raj and he is in my custody now”. Then Chand Bardai says that it is not possible to capture him because he is also like you.

Then Ghori asks Chand Bardai, “Can you identify Prithvi Raj?” Then Chand Bardai replies, “definitely”. Ghori takes him to the place where Prithvi Raj’s is held captive. Prithvi Raj starts crying by looking at Chand Bardai. Chand Bardai says that there is no point in crying now, that they should escape from there by a clever ploy. He asks Prithvi Raj not to mind if he comes to scold or rebuke him as part of this ploy. Chand Bardai turns towards Ghori and says, assuringly, that he is not Prithvi Raj. He suggests that if he were to be Prithvi Raj, he should be tested for Shabda ayudam (the skill of shooting blindfolded at an aim with an arrow on the basis of the sound). Ghori does not know that Chand Bardai is playing a trick with him. Ghori hands over a bow and an arrow to Prithvi Raj and blinds his eyes. Chand Bardai tells Prithvi Raj that since Ghori does not know their language Gor Boli, he cannot understand what he says. However, he asks Prithvi Raj to listen to him very keenly not minding what his words mean. And Chand Bardai now turns to Ghori and says, “If he is Prithvi Raj he will understand what I say, but if he is somebody else then he does not understand my words.” Ghori then asks him to utter something so that they can check if he understands Gor Boli or not. After saying something in Prithvi Raj’s ears, he turns towards Ghori and says, “till now he did not identify my language”. But Ghori does not find this convincing and he asks Chand Bardai to speak to Prithvi Raj again. Taking this opportunity, Chand Bardai starts giving instructions to Prithvi Raj as to who should be killed. He says “the people who are sitting under Ghori are his army, so do not kill them. Kill only Ghori.” All of a sudden Ghori shouts at Chand Bardai commanding him to speak loudly. The moment Prithvi Raj hears Ghori speak, he shoots at him with an arrow. Ghori dies then and there itself and Chand Bardai’s companions kill part of Ghori’s army. After taking the shackled Prithvi Raj on a horse for some miles, they free him by removing his chains.

This narrative also gives an opinionated account of why the Lambadas left western India and migrated to the south. According to Ramjhol Bhat, it was because of the atrocities of “Mughal rulers” committed on the Lambadas they became Gwars (Banjaras) and started living far from the mainstream society. Wherever Lambadas saw Mughal rulers, they fled into forests to protect themselves. They changed their dress style also to camouflage

themselves. But changing the attire did not help them much. As a result, they started calling themselves Lambadas when asked about their identity. The tone of Ramjhol's account suggests a mixture of a quasi-historical point of view and a deep understanding of Banjara life style formed after their separation from the so called mainstream "civilized" society.

The Legend of Heroic Rathod

Yaparmath mathi re.. Amarsing Rathod lare Harising Rathod cha.. Baper kamain kuna Khva Amarsing bonduk marero irga sigo. Amarsing ne dekato akber chamakelogo. Ek dari vakaten Akaber re ro ghoden kun pentava katho...Rajputh pentava.. Rajputh kun cha.. Amarsing Rathod cha..pani ona kam kev nukatho seei chamkelag. Akber, divanen bala thani Rathoden kakan ko...

Amar sing kana jan ghodeper hath meldino cha ka jana ghodo puto vathailago. Amarsing re nasibe ma tara dado kuno dubacho oor nasibe maithi tara nikaltho ava. Ona kun dite..Bashar Begam diti..oo Begam kain keldi katho era sariko mar petama vatho achokan keldi..

Some selections of the oral text of Ramjhol's version of this narrative follow as under:

The next narrative sung by Ramjhol is on Amar Singh Rathod. Amar Singh Rathod, the king of Jodhpur, during the Mughals, was a of commander in one of the Akbar's army troupes. Akbar had a rude and unruly horse. Only Amar Singh could tame that horse. He was a great warrior. Impressed by him, the queen of Akbar wanted to have a relationship with him. But he denied the queen's desire saying that she is like his mother. However, to avoid the scandal he decided to get married within his community and took permission only for a week for his marriage. Though Akbar told him to take sufficient time, since Lambada marriages themselves last for at least three months, Amar Singh felt challenged and replied to Akbar that he would be back within seven days. Besides, he also had a bet with Akbar and signed an agreement for seven lakhs in case he doesn't return within a week.

But, as traveling in those days was not easy, he took seven days just to reach Jodhpur and stayed on for seven months there for his wedding. Then Akbar called Hari Singh, one of the younger brothers of Amarsingh, to recall him from his vacation. Amar Singh felt insulted. He agitatedly left for Delhi to kill Akbar. On his way he met Salavath Khan, the brother-in-law of Akbar and killed him. Knowing this, Akbar arranged Varjana, the maternal uncle of Amar Singh to slay him. And subsequently he killed him treacherously. After being humiliated at the hands of Mughals two brothers fought the entire army bravely and destroyed the whole army. But the two brothers were trapped and killed. The above two narratives are with historical theme of the Rajput Banjara.

However, this raises the central question that why do Bhats speak of so incenssantly of kings?

In past their existence depended on the patrons and the kings. Even in contemporary times they are still immersed in a village patron-client economy that is financially important to them. In this economy, termed *dharm*, kings and *thanda* nayaks provide a model of generous patronage that serves as a prototype givers, and thereby serving as moral curators of an economy based upon the name and fame and generosity, Bhats protect their interests and families. Bhats use their autonomy very cleverly to exploit the kings and thand nayak by posing as the once glorious, though now declining their royalty. In fact, the Bhats' cunning wordplay and deceptive histories provide an idiom through which Lambadas claim superiority over kings and other dominant contemporary communities and thus maintain their dignity and advance socially in modern India. However, in this context, Bhats demonstrate their autonomy to "praise/abuse" in their narratives.

Assumed identities vs Prescribed Labeling

During the Nineteenth century there was a kind of tendency in the marginalized communities that they are trying to lay claim or imitate the Brahmanical and Kshatriya status and values. Through this process the marginalized communities sought upward mobility in India. In the Indian social system, it is suggested that sanskritisation is the process by which a low Hindu caste, Adivasi or other communities changes customs, rituals, ideologies and ways of life in the direction of high caste. It is a fact that a number of communities began claiming high status during the colonial period. The colonial state gave high positions to those with a ruling past. So these communities were forced to claim higher status. Whether these above narratives have historical basis or not, they were definitely moulded by the spirit of self-esteem among the Lambada tribes.

In his article "Articulating Self Orality, Community, and Colonialism in South India" Bhangya Bhukya says "even if the lower communities claim the upper status that would not change the mind sets of the upper caste". It is not only the Indian upper caste who looked down upon the Lambadas but also the colonial state for some time, considered these people as criminal tribes. Although the Nizam managed to suppress the remnant traces of the dacoits, the "criminal" stigma attached to the community not only hampered their social life, but also prevented them from earning a decent living. Their caste bore the very identity of "crime" which followed them like their shadows. Even after the declaration of around six lakh tribal people as "non-criminal" in Hyderabad area, after India's independence, these people were looked down upon. The Habitual Offenders Act of 1954 was enacted which was implemented in order to monitor their advances, lifestyle, locomotion and other facets. Thus, in no proper term were they considered to be free from the stigma.

The stigma of being a criminal haunted the Lambadas for a long time after independence, Dr.B.R Ambedkar, as first Law Minister of India, revoked the Criminal Tribes Act in 1952 (Venkatesh 161). The notified criminal communities were de-notified. It was replaced with the Habitual Offenders Act, which targeted the individuals not the communities. Though, the

communities were de-notified the stigma still continues. As an antithesis to this, the Lambadas began to rearticulate their own identity. Till date, the identity of the Lambadas remains a major issue in postcolonial India.

Modes of Knowledge Production

What is interesting here is that we find references to these kings in the narratives of the Barots of northern Gujarat as well as the Bhats of the southern India. There might be some variations in the narration and plot, but the characters and themes are essentially the same. Thus, Ramjhol Bhat claims that it was the Lambadas, the rulers in the medieval period, who heroically fought against the imperialism of Mughals. Such a claim challenges the nationalist story that the kingdoms that existed in medieval India were ruled by Hindu kings and that they were plundered by Mughal invaders. Moreover, it not only exposes the deceptive strategies of the hegemonic nationalist narratives, which appropriate everything into their Hindu religious fold, but also forces us to rethink how, in modern Indian history the figure of the Muslim is constructed as anti-Hindu.

Lambada Bhats and Modernity

Snodgrass, who has studied the impact of globalization on Bhats, points out that, in the past thirty years, Bhats have migrated throughout India and that we can find them in all of India's major cities and towns (Snodgrass 612). He further notes that Bhats have been struggling to cope with the changes that globalization brought out in their life style. We know that it is a hereditary practice for the Bhat children to adopt the narrative skills of their forefathers and learn to survive on them. However, since India's independence, and with modernization, old sources of patronage have dried up. Thus, Snodgrass observes that Bhats were forced to take up professions such as puppetry, 'ragpiking,' etc.. a technique they learnt from the nomadic performers who happened to visit the Bhat villages. Bhats are now reduced to mere "entertainers" for the local and foreign tourists as well as government officials in five-star hotels and folklore festivals (Snodgrass 14). Thus, as Ramjhol puts it, members of the Bhat caste (*jati*), most of whom are poor find their future uncertain, and he warns that there is the danger of losing the knowledge of Bhats forever.

Lambada patronage has been on the decline as Lambadas themselves are living in a pathetic condition. Thus Bhats are doubly degraded in that they are economically dependent on an already defiled Lambada community. The plight of the Bhats becomes one of double dependence. Their patrons Lambadas have started depending on other communities for sustenance. Therefore, they are not in a position to invite the Bhats and give them patronage.

Bhat narratives target modern institutions which have had an adverse effect on their lives. For instance, they satirize the state (both colonial and national), railways, banks, etc. Modern transports such as railways have often been criticized for the degraded status of Lambadas. For instance, Lambadas were aware that the Nizam government had collaborated with the

British in modernizing the Hyderabad state and was responsible for the entry of railways in the region. Prior to the introduction of railways, Lambadas used to make a living by transporting commodities such as salt to the Telangana region as it was unavailable here. Railways, which replaced all traditional transport systems, have indeed deprived of from important source of income. Bhat narratives critically reflect on this historical reality from the perspective of the Lambadas.

Bhat narratives also focus not only on the economic exploitation of the colonial state but also its violence on the native people. We know that the colonial state branded tribal people in India as criminals. In his book *The Art and Literature of Banjara Lambanis* D.B. Naik argues that:

The downfall of the Moghal Empire caused some people to be benefited and some to incur loss. The introduction of railways in our country during 1860-65 had a severe impact on them. The railways badly affected the business and trade of the Lambanis. How can there be competition between the railways and the oxen? Gradually, their trades dwindle. As a result they were unable to look after their large number of cattle. They had to survive by selling them. The Lambanis became vindictive against the British government for marring their livelihood (4).

Thus repression of the colonial state becomes one of the themes in Bhat narratives.

Oh Raj Angreji! Without bullocks you run trains, what a surprise! You cut the forest,
You brought iron and made ways to run the trains on it.
And in every place where it stops you built stations and collected money,
You dig wells to drink water and in Jagathpur you built some poles to hang people
(Nayak 79).

As he sang, Ramjhol paused here and said, "You caused us very serious harm and because of you, we are in this miserable condition today."

In thematic content, what is interesting to observe here is that Bhats are able to connect their poetic compositions with the everyday exploitation that the Lambadas experience. They also provide their Lambada audiences with the necessary tools to understand their reality, which in turn might help the Lambadas in contesting the hegemonic and exploitative forces, be it the modern state or civil society.

What is significant to note here is that other scholars who have studied Bhat narratives have focused their analyses on topics such as the form of the compositions; or much attention has been paid to analyze the so-called musicality of words. We can also see scholars debating 'metalingual' character of Bhat narratives, i.e. the way the message is crafted and delivered, and so on. All these might be interesting issues for literary scholars, but what is obscured or

totally erased in these discussions is the politics of Bhat narratives. In the mainstream discussions, Bhat narratives appear as pure literary compositions or as innocent folk literature that is uncontaminated by contemporary politics.

Therefore, Bhat narratives possess all the complex features that many literary texts do. They can be considered literary discourses which combine the history of a group with its philosophy of life. One can also discuss these narratives as texts that document the cultural life of Lambadas. However, the mechanical application of these traditional and dominant modes of analyzing Bhat narratives is not only grossly inadequate but also dangerous as the political issues raised by these narratives are totally undermined in such analyses.

The Lambada Bhats' narratives provide their history and reflect their life style. They also tell us how they lived during the colonial period. Oral narratives provide a source, which is quite similar in character to the modern day autobiography. However, they are much wider in scope and provide more impressionistic, but often reliable, and affective reconstruction of the past. Most of these narratives, which were not a part of the scribal culture, have radical implications for the social message of their history as a whole. The social and political subtext of the narratives needs to be borne in mind. From the genealogical-archaeological perspective we can see that the Bhats are not merely oral historians but are narrators who reconstruct history and throw light on the various kinds of changes that are affecting the life of the group. It is also stressed that the narratives which reflect on the life and history of the Lambada Bhats' do distinguish between the Bhakti, devotion and aesthetic dominated knowledge and knowledge produced on the experiences of harsh realities of discrimination and segregation.

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