

## Paroemias Palimpsest of Plural India

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### Abstract

The article attempts to examine the nature of 'social order' with reference to the notion of "cultural pluralism" conceptualised in terms of "economic primacy" and "cultural tradition" in the context of India. Economic primacy-based pluralism is discussed with reference to secondary sources, while culture-based order is examined with reference to paroemias collected from oral and written sources. The article argues that autonomy, mutuality, and coexistence of cultures are characteristics of cultural pluralism in the social order of traditional India, in contrast to the one viewed and maintained through primacy given to economic forces. The article maintains that in the former, "familiarity" through personal contact plays a positive role in fashioning social order, while it is impersonal negotiation in the latter.

**Keywords:** Paroemeia, Cultural Pluralism, Economic Primacy, Oral and Written Traditions, Interdisciplinary Approach

### 1.0 Introduction

Contemporary academic engagement in "cultural pluralism" has been a debated topic since Furnival's formulation of the phrase in 1948 with reference to the then colonial Burma and other countries of the East to distinguish plural society as a separate form of society, consisting of sharply differentiated cultural groups living separately within the same political unit but bound together mainly by a common economic link, the market (Furnival 1948:304). The economic interpretation of pluralism thus emerged from the conditions created by colonialism, mainly in non-western countries. But this has subsequently been an academic tool to study "open society" in America, Canada, and post-colonial countries like India.

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This tool, however, is not free from shortcomings because of the primacy given to economics, and therefore, anthropology, sociology, and other disciplines interested in the subject have their distinct perspectives and interpretations (*see* Haug 1967, Smith 1957, and Braithwaite 1957). Understandably, the concept formulated by Furnival in the context of “open society” and which emerged during the colonial period suffers from limitations of reductionism as cultural pluralism is a complex phenomenon. The concept tries to explain already existing “cultural variations” as components of emerging social order under a political unity consequence upon integrating economic forces. Since the concept lacks rigidity, objectivity, and comprehensiveness, alternative concepts like multiculturalism (Mack 1994) and melting points (*see* Guha 1997) have been formulated to study the emerging “open society”. Yet, neither of the concepts provides a satisfactory, objective, and complete understanding of the “open society”. Each concept rather misrepresents pre-colonial plural societies like the one in India, (*see* Vatsyayan 2002-03 and also Embree 1972) which was not fashioned according to colonial ideology or the Western mind; rather, pluralism evolved as a complex process over centuries in “the vision of seers, the vigil of saints, the speculation of philosophers, and the imagination of poets and artists” (Hussain 1956:14, *also see* Vatsyayan *op cit.*:97-98), not through any stress or pressure, or any primacy to any distinct factor.

The primacy given to economic forces and the condition of a single political unit in the conceptualisation of pluralism raises questions about India as a pre-colonial pluralistic society. The question raised here was also the question of some Western scholars as mentioned by Embree (*ibid.*) with reference to John Strachey<sup>1</sup>. In fact, they could not think of the togetherness of different cultures beyond economic primacy and a single political unit; and what they could see were only “variations”, but not historical process of interactions, sharing, and co-existence. They could not even realise or recognise the transcendental cultural space across independent cultural boundaries.

In the spirit of fairness, it is argued that mere coexistence of distinct cultures is not enough to define a pluralistic society as pluralism connotes to a system of more than one social unit. And the very nomenclature of India given to a territorial unit along with different cultural groups living therein since historical times is indicative of India being a pre-colonial “pluralistic society”. Pre-colonial pluralism in India is not a “new social order” of colonial making, but a transcendental cultural space across individual cultures - “a network of honeycombed units, clear and distinct, but in a relationship of give and take” (Vatsyayan 2002-03:96, *also see* Guha 1994, Shukla 2001, and Hussain 1956 for pre-colonial pluralism in India). Arguably, “cultural pluralism” was the social order of pre-colonial India. And it is, therefore, natural that pluralism ubiquitously expresses in individual cultures and through cultural elements. Therefore, a critical engagement in culture and its elements is crucial to understand the pervasiveness of cultural pluralism of pre-colonial India.

Culture, following the comprehensive definition of Tylor (1871), is composed of different elements such as faiths and belief, language, economy, governance, religion, thought process, and several others. These are interconnected, and one reflects in and through other elements<sup>2</sup>. Theoretically, engagement in any one element or its sub-element reflects the other elements of culture. In view of this, paroemia (proverb) is selected as the point of enquiry in understanding the nature of cultural pluralism in pre-colonial India. In other words, how the perspective embedded in one paroemia has regional acceptance across communities and appears across distinct cultures is the primary objective of enquiry. The article argues that regional acceptance and a transcendental presence of the perspective across

the boundary of distinct cultures conceptualise cultural pluralism in pre-colonial India. Transcendental presence is examined by engaging in the interface between oral and written traditions and locating commonality across cultures.

### **1.1 Perspective approach: Objectives, methodology and justification**

Cultural pluralism in contemporary India presents an epistemological dilemma. We introspect the past which we have already lost in two stages of our history. First, we lost the pristine past tradition to the colonial agenda of social engineering built upon misinterpretation, intentionally and accidentally, and through selective appropriation and expropriation of it<sup>3</sup>. In the process of colonial social engineering the idea of nation-state emerged and captured the thinking of native intellectuals born out of it. Second, as a corollary, the intellectuals are engaged in privileging the emerging social order by “exploring the vitality of the indigenous epistemological tradition” and “assuring it in the context of the advances made by the West” (Panikkar 1995:vii). It is always emphasised that “The past had to be invoked if the present was to be changed, and the present could not be ignored in conceiving the future” (ibid.). But the adage loses true meaning as the “present” was a colonial formulation and the future was envisioned following colonial construction of the knowledge about the present. Understandably, it was not the “present” of the “pristine past” of the country through which the future was envisioned. The “pluralist culture” of colonial “present” advanced to privilege the nation-state has not been able to ensure a strong “future” as is evident from conflicts across “cultural variations”, such as identity assertion, demand for autonomy, demand for distinct religious code in census, language conflicts, and so on. The conflict is between distinct cultures<sup>4</sup>, such as present Meitei and Kuki tensions (since 03 May 2023) or with the nation-state, such as demand for caste based census, movements for community based reservation, or demand for separate religious code in census record. In both the cases, the thread links to the pre-colonial stage of “cultural pluralism” as it is invoked to rationalise conflicts and assertions. To put it in right perspective, dalit movements, indigenous identity movement, Dravidian assertions, etc., provide a sense of exclusiveness to respective categories, draw on pre-colonial epistemology which otherwise reflected autonomy, interaction and a sense of belonging to a transcendental cultural space<sup>5</sup>.

In view of this, an engagement with pre-colonial “cultural pluralism”, flourished without economic primacy and political centrality is academically crucial. The objective of such an engagement is to dispel the exclusiveness attached to cultural categories through the colonial construct of knowledge. A sense of mutuality that existed along cultural diversity is assumed to be recognised as a guide to the process of nation building and shaping mutual sharing in economic and political participations in the right perspective. A sense of belonging, in contrast to the demand for distinct identity that disrupts the nation building process, will evolve when members of different cultures understand their common bonding<sup>6</sup>. Needless to say, such an understanding is required to be approached from a cultural perspective in place of giving primacy to economic or political forces, as pre-colonial pluralistic India is definitely different from Furnival’s conception<sup>7</sup> or others of the like.

In this study, paroemias have been selected purposively because paremiology is emerging as a critical field of enquiry in philology, linguistics, and interdisciplinary studies. Besides, paroemias<sup>8</sup> possess the characteristic of mass appeal because a paroemia is “The Wisdom of many and the Wit of the One” (Taylor 1981 and also see Miede 2014)<sup>9</sup>. However, during the colonial period, several books on proverbs have been written mostly for documentation purpose (For example: Knowles 1885, Upreti 1894, and Kanoria & Agrawal

1936). In recent years, in view of cultural preservation drive, a few works on paroemias are available by native or outside scholars. (For example: Ete 1974, Pulu 2002, Bareh 2007, Tayeng & Megu 2014, and Hina 2013). Proverbs are also in the field of philology, linguistics and **interdisciplinary** studies. (For example: Freeman 1988, Malunga 2014, Hrisztova-Gotthardt & Varga 2015, Bagra 2020, and Mohanty 2022). Evidently, works are not available in which paroemias are used to explain or understand the nature of cultural pluralism in pre-colonial India. Hence, this engagement is crucial in this regard.

Admittedly, it was not possible to visit different communities personally without any sponsorship. So, I contacted and shared my idea with scholars of different communities from different states. It yielded appreciable result. But in this article, I have tried to understand the epistemological perspective of a few paroemias collected from a region and thereafter matched them with bits here and there in the Pan-Indian context. The region reveals commonality of the proverb across communities living in it. Scholars from different states helped understand Pan-Indian context by sharing prevalent paroemias with similar content. Paroemias normally belong to the oral tradition. But paroemias also enrich written tradition as *Sruti* to *Vedas* and orality to the emerging genre of indigenous literature (novels, folklores, poems, etc.). But there are also instances where written knowledge enriches orality among the common non-literate people<sup>10</sup>.

Students interested in paremiology would find that paroemias convey the philosophy of life, whether on death, birth, the effect of action, concept of supernatural being, ethics, or morality. Therefore, an attempt is made to link paroemias with scriptural knowledge. Understandably, an attempt is made to present cultural pluralism in a broader perspective in the Indian context. However, this is a preliminary attempt in the direction, and without any pretext, it can be said that further critical enquiries are awaited for investing in theoretical formulation.

The study assumes physical and social space marked by distinct regions, territories, and states, but denoted as India. A region is defined as a distinct geographical, political, or cultural area within a state. Both the region and state (or a larger region in it) are defined as territory for our purpose with the assumption that region or state is inhabited by different cultural groups. These distinct groups also define India's physical space, which alternatively called Pan-Indian. Transcendental cultural space has regional, territorial, and Pan-Indian dimensions, and thus, is a complex network of cultural patterns across physical and social spaces.

## 1.2 Beginning with a region

To begin with, Dr. Madan Meena, presently working as the Honorary Director of the Adivasi Academy-Tejgadh in Gujarat, shared 16 paroemias from the Jagrauti region, which he obtained from the personal collections of writer and poet Prabhat who lives in the region. For the present article, six paroemias have been selected purposively. Jagrauti, known as Eastern Rajasthan to the people of Rajasthan, is a multi-community territory, with communities belonging to both tribes and non-tribes, such as Meena, Gujjar, Dalit, and artisan communities. But they have a common speech language, and therefore, each community uses paroemias popular in the region. The use of the same paroemias by distinct community groups reflects a unison of mind to the idea embedded in them<sup>11</sup>. However, its inter-territorial existence in the state needs further investigation. Selected six paroemias are:

1. अर्जुन तेरा क्या बड़ा समय बड़ी बलवान।  
भीलने लूटी गोपिका बेइ अर्जुन बेइ बाण।  
(*Arjun tera kya bada, samaya badi balwan. Bhil ne luti Gopika bei Arjun bei baan.*)

Literarily, there is no greatness in Arjun; it is time that is powerful. When the Bhil people eloped Gopika, then also there Arjun and his arrows as well. Figuratively, “time is powerful over everything else”, and what is useful in good times may turn destructive in hard times.

2. समय बिगड़गई राजानलकी काठकी खूँटी हारनिगल्ली।  
(*Samay bingadigayi rah anal ki kathki khunti harnigalgi.*)

When hard times befell Nala, the Nishad King; the wooden pole/nail ate away the necklace/jewellery. It implies time may not always be the same; it may be good or bad; what is useful in good times may turn destructive in hard times.

3. पड्यौ फारसी बेचै तेल, देखोरे किस्मतके खेल।  
(*Padyo pharsi bechai tel, dekho re kismet ke khel.*)

Studied Farsi (Persian) but sell oil; see the game of destiny! The paroemia has a historical context. In Mughal period Farsi was an elite language used in King’s court.

4. आमन कै अरंड पैदा होगा? (*Aaman kei arand paida hoga?*)

*Arand* (castor seed/fruit) will not come out of a mango (seed).

5. चमार सु काकी खैदीतो चौकामई आगी (*Chamar su kaki khaidi to chukka maia agi.*)

If the wife of a dalit woman is addressed as aunt, she will enter the *verendah* of the house.

6. बान्यौ गड़ा भाटाकू उपाड़ै। (*banyo gada bhatakuupade.*)

Literal meaning is that a Baniya (a business caste) takes out a buried post.

### 1.3 Reflections in Oral and Written Traditions across Cultures

The first four paroemias mentioned above suggest the importance of time (*samaya*), destiny (*bhagya*)<sup>12</sup>, and fruitive activities (*karma*), and their consequences (cause-effect relationship)<sup>13</sup> in mundane life. The last two, the fifth and sixth ones, have caste implications reflecting social perception about different castes. The fifth one also reflects gender perception. It alludes to the social practice prevalent in India; even though in a dying form in modern consciousness. In a refined way, it speaks of giving due place to the deserving one; but the expression is negative, derogatory, and offensive due to its casteist and gendered remarks. The remark also points to the power dichotomy between the subject (the dominant) and the object (the dominated and targeted one).

The last one is about the cunningness of a person and his behaviour when he is uncomfortable to face a present situation. He shifts to the past, takes repose in it; and changes the topic. This behaviour is expressed in caste line and reflects social perception on an occupation or caste. This idea embedded in the paroemias of reference is not unique to Jagrauti; but it is an all India phenomenon. Parallels of such idea are present in other cultures. However, in this study, such parallels have not been collected, keeping the scope of investigation open for the future.

Paroemias on the idea of time, destiny, fruitive activities, and consequences (cause-effect relationship) from oral and written traditions and from different contexts have been collected and examined. Before formal analysis, an understanding of the above concepts and their interrelationship demands attention. Time and destiny are complementary while awarding for any fruitive activities; one is alternatively used for the other. In common perception, when one is fortunate in achieving something, it is also remarked that one's time is good; and destiny is determined, in Indian belief system by fruitive activities (*karma*). This understanding will be clear in subsequent discussion with reference to the paroemias.

The volition of destiny manifests through time either as fortune or misfortune. That is why, as we see in the first paroemia, Arjun could not save Gopikas from Bhils, for it is time that determines his fortune for success or failure. It is not Arjun or his weapon which is powerful, but it is time that is powerful. No doubt, in Hindi it is said: जीवनका सारा खेल तो समय रचता है, मनुष्यतो केवल अपना किरदार निभाता है। (*jivan ka sara khel to smayrachahei. manushyato kevalapnakirdarnibhatahei.*). It means: humans play their part only in the drama of life decided by time.

That time is powerful; and a person's greatness being time-determined, is exemplified with characters like Arjun (the famous archer) and Gopika (ladies of Gopa settlement) from the Mahabharat, the great epic of India, known throughout the length and breadth of the country. Bhil is a generic term for dominant tribal communities in Rajasthan and in adjacent states. Since the saying is from Bhil area, and elopement is a traditional form of marriage, Bhil's taking way Gopikas who are from non-Bhil community which Arjun belongs to is an example of helplessness of individual against time.

The orality in Jagraut reflects its connection with the popular written tradition of India and at the same time a tone of subaltern protest against dominant social articulation of a character. Though our focus is on the importance of time, the crucial point that could be deduced from it is that both views coexist and reveal the independence of cultural groups at the Pan-Indian level.

The second paroemia on King Nala, also mentioned in the Mahabharat, is about the time when lady luck turns her face away, i.e., when time is unfavourable for him. The destiny takes a negative turn at that time and so untoward and unimaginable things happen. In both the paroemias what is evident is that time is not always same or the destiny of a human being is not linear. It has ups and downs. This philosophy embedded in the paroemias collected from a region is explicit in an ancient Sanskrit saying, though written, but also common in oral tradition. It reads: चक्रवत्परिवर्तन्ते दुःखानि च सुखानि च। (*chakra vat paribartante duhkhani cha sukhani cha.*) (Pandit nd. Verse 176, p. 67). Meaning: sorrow and happiness rotates like a wheel (in human life).

Normally, the idea in a paroemia is simple and has its contextual meaning in space and time. But it also reflects deeper philosophy of life. The connection between *simple* and *deeper* philosophy presents a continuum of cultural understanding from oral tradition to written and institutionalised system, and across schools of thought; and thus gives an impression of a vast mosaic of a cultural carpet. The above verse also reflects the nature of impermanence, i.e., nothing is permanent, whether, as in our example, it is sorrow or happiness. In a binary logic, one appears in the absence of the other; one therefore stands opposite to the other. The idea of impermanence (*anitya* in Sanskrit) embodied in the above verse underlies Buddhist philosophy (*anicca* in Pali) (see Gombrich and Scherrer-Schaub 2008:209-210; also Harvey 2012:57 and *passim*), and, like *Gyanmarg* (the path of knowledge) of India's religious tradition, it is a means to achieve *nirvana* (salvation), which is the ultimate spiritual goal of an individual.

The philosophical underpinning of “bad/hard time” and “good time” has deep meaning in the India's tradition. As has been mentioned, time is also alternatively used for destiny, different from the meaning of luck (which has negative and positive connotation); the latter having inclination towards chance (it is often said try your luck!) and is not determined by the nature (ethical consideration) of human action. Besides, *Bhagya* (destiny) in Indian philosophy is a result of fruitive activities (deeds). It appears as reward or punishment depending on the nature and intention of activities undertaken in this or previous life. It is believed that the rebirth of a soul in a particular destination depends on the person's previous life's *karma* (see NSS 2001:288-289), which is also at the centre of Buddhist philosophy of cause and effect relationship. The effect, i.e. rebirth is the result of previous life's *karma* (see Harvey 2012: chapter-II).

In other words, the idea that is embodied in a paroemia of oral tradition of a region transcends boundaries of different schools of thought. In Hinduism also the idea of destiny exists in distinct branches of knowledge. The content of the saying: समुद्रमन्थने लेभे हरि लक्ष्मीं हरो विषम्। भाग्यं फलति सर्वत्र नविद्यानच पौरुषम् (Samudra manthane leve hari lakhming haro visham. *Bhygyam phalati sarbtra na vidya na cha paurusham.*) has a Pan-Indian reflection. It describes the events of appearance of Laxmi and poison from churning of the Ocean and Laxim's marriage with Vishnu and Shiva's drinking of poison. The importance is given to destiny, not to knowledge or manliness. The scholars with whom I discussed the source of the verse referred to the Mahabharata, the Vishnu Puran and some other texts. Unfortunately, I could not trace the verse. However, one Sanskrit scholar and astrologer claimed its origin in astrological tradition<sup>14</sup>, but not sure about the source. According to him, *bhagya*(destiny) is the position of planets and constellations in the ninth place of *the zodiac* diagram. Astrology and importance to *bhagya* has cross-cultural significance in India. Literal rendering of the verse in Odia is available in the *Indumati* poem of Gangadhar Meher, a 19<sup>th</sup> century poet in Odisa (Meher 1961:171). What is there in Sanskrit is popular in regional culture like Odia.

Apparently, the verse attaches primacy to *bhagya* not to knowledge or manliness (preconditions of undertaking *karma*). It means that when *bhagya* is determined, it cannot be changed, but the *bhagya* is the result of previous *karma* and implicitly a reminder of good deeds to earn good destiny. The point is that *bhagya* and *karma* are indispensable, and the idea has footing in oral and written traditions across the communities. Regional scholars spread this idea in their writings. Tulsidas has also written about it in Awadhi in his magnum opus, the *Ramcharita Manas*:

काहुन कोउ सुख दुख कर दाता। निज कृत करम भोग सबु भ्राता।<sup>15</sup>

(*kahuno kou such dukhkar data. Nij krit karam bhog sabu bhrata.*)

Meaning: No one gives sorrow or happiness; one enjoys (them) due to one's own *karma*.

जीव करम बस सुख दुख भागी<sup>16</sup>। (*Jiv karam bas sukha dukha bhagi*).

Meaning: Human shares of happiness or sorrow due to *karma*.

Understandably, above to sayings place *bhagya*, what is one's *bhogy* (what one enjoys) as one's *karma*. In Adhyatma Ramayana, Lakshman consoles Kaikei who was feeling remorse for being the cause of Sri Rama's banishment. Lakshman comforted her with the following words:

सुखस्य दुःखस्य न कोऽपिदाता  
परो ददाति इति कुबुद्धिरेषा।

'अहं करोमीति' वृथाभिमानः  
स्व कर्म सूत्र ग्रथितोहि लोकः॥<sup>17</sup>

(*Sukhasya dukhasya na ko apidata. Paro dadati iti kubuddhiresha.*  
*Aham karomiti bruthabhiman. Swo karma sutra grathito hi loka .*)

Meaning: No body causes sorrow and happiness, wicked mind accuses others as the cause (of sorrow), egoistic mind boasts (of happiness) as self-doing. People are tied to own deeds.

Patanjali Yoga Darshan has also described *karam* and consequence, in which present happenings may be the result of *prarabdha* (any earlier *karma*, may be in previous life).

सती मुले तद्विपाको जात्यायुर्भोगाः।<sup>18</sup> (*Sati mule tadbipako jatayayurbhogah .*)

Meaning: Rebirth, life and experience of sorrow and happiness continue occurring as long as root (*karma*) remains. In another place it is said:

ते ह्लाद परिताप फलाः पुण्यापुण्य हेतुत्वात्।<sup>19</sup> (*tehlad partiap phalaah punyaapunya hetutwat.*)

Meaning: Virtue and sin being the consequence of *karma* cause sorrow and happiness.

The importance given to *karma*, as we have seen, has regional and local acceptance. We have seen it in the context of Odia and Awadhi languages along with its prevalence in oral tradition. The concept of *karma* underlies scripted Hindu and Buddhist philosophies. Interestingly, its importance reflects across several communities in a state also, for a state is not socially and culturally homogeneous. A few versions, showing cause and effect relationship in the line "as you sow so shall you reap", popular in different languages and states are presented below:

Hindi: जैसा बोओगे वैसा काटोगे। (*jeisa bo oge waisa katoge.*)



In a different tone:

जैसी करनी वैसी भरनी।(jeisi karni wasi bharni.)

It makes direct reference to action responsible for a consequence.

- Marathi: तुम्ही जसे पेरता तसेकापणीक राल  
(Tumhījasēpēratātasēkāpaṇīkarāla)
- Odia: ଯମେତିବୁଣିବ, ଯମେତିକାଟିବ।  
(Jēmītī bunība sēmītī kātīb)
- Bengali: তুমি যেমন বপন করো তেমনি কাটও  
(Tumi yēmana bapana karō tēmani kāṭa'ō.)
- Telgu: మీరు ఏత్తేటప్పుడు మీరు కోయండి  
(Mīru vittēṭappuḍu mīru kōyaṇḍi)
- Punjabi: ਜਿਵੇਂ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਬੀਜਦੇ ਹੋ ਉਸੇ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਵੱਢਦੇ ਹੋ  
(Jivēm tusīm bījadē hō usē tar'hām tusīm vadhadē hō.)

Interestingly, the idea has a place in Kabir's Doha (the oral sayings of Sant Kabir) and has enriched written tradition like Ramcharita Manas and many literary works in Hindi. बोया पेड़ बबूलका आम कहाँसे होय (Boya ped babulka aam kahanse hoy) is a famous saying of Sant Kabir. Literarily it means *bablu*, a thorny shrub, does not bear mango. Figuratively, it implies that a good result does not come from bad deeds. Obviously, cause and effect, or *karma* and its corresponding result, are at the core of the paroemia.

The connection between action and its consequence, i.e., cause and effect, can be traced back to Buddhism and the Bhagavad Gita. However, the expression “as you sow, so shall you reap” also has its source in the Bible. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7, King James Version). In the context of Bible, the maxim indicates spiritual investment and reaps. In India, its use in different contexts figuratively points to actions and results both in both spiritual and social realms, and predates *Christianity*.

#### 1.4 Coda

Undeniably, human thinking has universal appeal, and when this appeal is expressed in a local context using words, similes, traditions, social practices, etc., it could be understood across cultures within a well-defined geographical territory of shared heritage in one way or the. Such understanding reflects identity both at individual and shared cultural space. The paroemias from Jagatai, anonymous individual inventions, find a space in collective consciousness across cultures and territories and reflect a Pan-Indian presence both in oral and written traditions. Pluralism evolved from such a trend is not economically determined through a unitary political unit. The discussion alludes to the autonomy of cultures, co-

existence with “give and take”, and recognition of a familiar transcendental cultural space in the Pan-Indian context.

Observing our present trend of conflicts, the sense of familiarity with co-existence and mutuality, which was present in pre-colonial pluralistic society, is lost on the altar of exclusivity in social categorisation and economic primacy in coming together. What is crucial is to revive the sense of cultural familiarity, intercepted by the primacy of only economic forces, to fashioning present pluralistic outlook and attitude. It is not out of context to argue that a right perspective shapes right action, essential to shed off exclusive thought and conflicts on the path of an inclusive development. The right perspective has its root in critical familiarity with the cultural understanding of pluralism.

## Notes

1. About western perspective on pre-colonial India (even the vision of a future India during colonial period) as plural society Embree (1972:45) cites John Strachey’s remark, “This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India... that there is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India...”.
2. The economy, for example, is not an exclusive domain of a particular activity in communities or cultures wherein human-nature-supernature relationships determine action and perception. An economic activity like agriculture or hunting is not carried on without rituals or social mode of appropriation of labour, or decision of the head of the community and so on. A ritual also reflects economic dimension in terms of material requirements, sacrifices and community/relatives’ presence, etc. Each element reflects and is reflected in other elements in a culture of human-nature and supernature relationships.
3. The British in India constructed India’s past to provide justification for “colonial social engineering” and to “legitimize the present” which was ‘substantially different from what the “natives” knew about themselves”. (Panikkar 1995:109).
4. The Khasi and Mazhabi (dalit) Sikhs conflicts in Shillong (see Gogoi 2023) are also a tension of economic primacy of togetherness of different communities. Exclusiveness attached to social categories during colonial period and its link with economic primacy and political gain for the category contradicts the logic of cultural pluralism as the base of post-colonial plural society in India. (see Embree 1972:46). The current sense of pluralism is competitive in nature, and denounces long coexistence and partnership in a mutual development process beyond any category consideration.
5. The cultural space is shaped with the common worldview - the human, nature, and supernature relationships – underlying distinct cultures. Besides, the attitude of recognition and respect to differences, even in individual or institutional efforts to propagate an ideology (Shukla 2001); and language investment in cultural ideologies (see Freeman1998) have contributed a lot in this regard. The human-nature-supernature complex gives primacy to ecocentric life-ways and underlies cultures or religions having no authorship in contrast to anthropocentric cultures. However, cultures or religions of Indian origin, even though have the signature of individual authors, and small scale tribal and rural communities irrespective of religious base are ecocentric at the core, for example like Buddhism. Small scale cultures like tribal or village communities of pre-colonial India were primarily ecocentric, meaning thereby adherence to human-nature-supernature relationships in their life. (cf. Vidyarthi 1963).
6. It is an empirical knowledge that familiarity under normal situation breeds understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and acceptance to differences. Categorisation coupled with exclusivity breeds fanaticism and promotes fundamentalism. Understanding of similarity in perspective across cultures normally develops a sense of familiarity. It is, therefore, argued that a sense of familiarity, assuming other factors constant, would minimize group conflicts, help appreciate each other’s problems as human issues, and

unite groups to work together to address problems; and when efforts are blend together to address problems, it becomes nation's interest.

7. In contemporary India, preservation of culture and language (culture not in the sense of holistic pre-colonial interconnectedness, but as a distinct domain of life), identity assertion, share in economy, and political participation are also interconnected within a centralised system of governance. This can be compared with the transcendental cultural space. However, the present interconnectedness has not emerged in the process of mutual give and take, respect to differences etc. like the condition during pre-colonial period as we see conflict between categories and each category with the centre to establish distinct identity. Besides, the central space has not evolved, but deliberately created.
8. For meaning, nature, scope, structure and types of paroemias see Arewa and Dundes (1964); Taylor (1981); and relevant chapters in Miede (2014); and Hrisztova-Gotthardt and Varga (2015).
9. Without any risk of sacrificing objectivity in generalisation, it can be argued that an individual in oral tradition concocts a paroemia, but surrenders ownership to collective users in and across cultures. The factors (bardic tradition, street play, *katha/satsang* (religious discourse) etc. are crucial channels) contributing to cross-cultural existence of an idea in oral society need further indepth study, but casual introspection and observation would reveal that idea travels faster in oral tradition than written one. In written tradition, travel of written idea is further circumscribed, due to non-literate population and it when is meant for specific audience or expounds a discipline or ideology.
10. In Odisha, the Srimad *Bhagabat* of Jagannath Dasa, a 16<sup>th</sup> century work, as can be notice by any casual observer, echoes in the minds of illiterate villagers. The poems of Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanj (a 17<sup>th</sup> century Odia poet), unparalleled in the use of *alankaras*, are popular among all sections of Odia populace. Gopabandhu Das, a freedom fighter, legislator, poet, and social worker praises the popularity of his poems in following words: "Your poem is recited by scholars in the assembly of intellectuals, a jolly traveller on his travels, a farmer in agricultural field, ladies inside the house, and courtesan in dancing floor".(Das 1959:20, *translation from Odia verse is mine*).
11. Such unison is also evident in cultural practices like taboos prevalent across different communities of a region of a state. (see Misra and Malik 2022).
12. *Bhagya* has connection with *bhog*(to enjoy), and thus is interpreted as something which one enjoys or is destined to go through.
13. Buddhists believe that an effect "arises from a cause ultimately identical with itself, part of the same underlying substance (as in the Hindu Samkhya school)", and sometimes from "a cause that is inherently "other"". (see Harvey 2012:122 ff.).
14. Information collected from Dr. Kali Prasanna Satpathy, a Sanskrit Scholar and Astrologer, Kendrapada, Odisha. Courtesy: Dr. Pravat Kumar Mallik. This *bhagya* appears as the result of previous birth's deeds, and it corroborates with Swami Nigamananda's saying about "particular destination" of the soul at the time of rebirth depending on previous *karma*. (NSS 2002:288-289).
15. Tulsidas, nd. Ayodhya Kand, doha 91, chaupahi 2:355.(**Kand** literarily means episode and is cognate with canto (section or division). **Doha** is rhyming couplet popular in Hindi poetry; **Chaupahi** is a quatrain verse).
16. Tulsidas, nd. Ayodhya Kand, doha 11, *chaupahi*2, :296.
17. Vyas, nd. *Ayodhya Kand*, Sarga (Chapter) 6, verse 6:.71.
18. Maharshi 1971, verse 13:147-148.
19. Ibid. verse14: 149.

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