

From Oral Tradition to Written Form: A Narrative structural and Thematic Analysis of Chakma Folktales

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requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to introduce Chakma oral tradition through an analysis of their oral folktales, focusing on their structure and themes. This thesis highlights the contemporary condition of Chakma oral storytelling in Bangladesh. The Chakmas are an indigenous group in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. They have a rich literary background that has been passed on orally. The thesis examines fifteen Chakma folktales, with a focus on themes of love, sacrifice, and intellectual and spiritual correspondence between human beings and nature. It discusses how folktales are applied in the preservation of cultural heritage and provides an explanation of the Chakma worldview and social structure. Moreover, the thesis identifies key narrative structures of some selected Chakma folktales through following the equilibrium model by Tzvetan Todorov. The thesis further highlights the strategies of preserving and revitalising Chakma folktales as a community practice, systematic recording, and integrating oral traditions into education.

Key words: *Chakma Folktales, Todorov's equilibrium model, cultural identity, structure, themes, preservation.*

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother, Babita Chakma, who has always supported me throughout my life, especially during my journey at BRAC University. She has tried to keep me mentally strong in any difficult situation. Her constant encouragement has greatly influenced my experience in preparing this paper. Without her unconditional love and care, I would not have been able to complete this work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The folklore and oral stories are the focus of the cultural imagination of indigenous populations as they sustain the collective memory, ethical teachings and the local world perceptions. In the Chakma community, the folktales were traditionally passed on through oral performance wherein storytelling relied on voice, setting, interaction with the audience and the common community. These stories have also served as a source of entertainment as well as informal education on identity, morality and the relationship between man and nature. Modern social developments like formal education, migration, mass media consumption and the intergenerational space in telling these stories have, however, continued to interfere with the oral storytelling of these stories. The performance aspect of the Chakma folktales has come to be documented rather than spoken, and the younger generations seem to be getting involved less in traditional storytelling. Consequently, Chakma folktales are currently at risk of decline, transformation, or partial loss, and for this reason, it is important to explore their folklore and the existing situation of their circulation and preservation.

The Chakma community is the largest indigenous group living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of the Chittagong Division in southeastern Bangladesh, bordering India and Myanmar (Burma) to the east. Including the Chakma, many indigenous communities exist in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). They include Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Chak, Pankho, Mru, Baom, Lushai, Kiang and Khumi. The culture, language, writing, music and folklore of Chakma have questionable origins. Chakma society is based on patriarchy. They are classified into categories termed “Gozas” and a genus designated “Gutthi”. Polygamy is the traditional marital arrangement among the Chakmas; however, it is currently in decline. The Chakma women mostly use Bein, which are traditional, light handlooms, to make their traditional clothes. Their customary clothes

are known as Pinon-Hadi. This is also a language used by this group of people termed as Changma Vaj or Changma Kodha that is related to Tibeto-Burman dialects. Their writing is referred to as 'Ojapat'. The Chakmas value festivals, particularly Bizhu and Buddha Purnima.

The Chakmas practice Buddhism but sometimes worship other deities and supernatural entities in accordance with many Pujo Bijoks, a practice that is now hardly observed among them. Still, few Chakma attribute their wealth, disease, suffering, and misfortunes to supernatural forces and deities. According to Bijak, many Chakma kings were fervent adherents of Hinduism. They engaged in animal sacrifices and various forms of worship directed toward deities. They consistently invoked Gozen/Gonghei (the Supreme Deity) and Lokkhi (the goddess of prosperity) in their daily life and historical records. Their culture, traditions, societal standards, and religious beliefs are portrayed in many Chakma folktales and documented in literature in their language.

The origin and history of the Chakmas varied according to various scholarly perspectives. The absence of recorded material on Chakma history makes it challenging to identify their origins. The Chakmas traditionally claim that they come from the sun race and Khattias. They also claim that they belong to the Sakya Clan, according to their connection with Gautama Buddha. Their traditional viewpoint has been passed down from one person to another. "The Chakmas also have their traditional ethnic chronicle named "Bijak" written in the Chakma language. There it was mentioned that the Chakmas departed India in ancient times and entered Burma, Myanmar, and lived there for long years" (Majumder 36). It is believed that the Bijak originated from the region ruled by the Chakma ruler Bijoygiri. He is claimed to have departed India and established a new state in Burma. There is a debate by some historians about the time when this new state was founded. It has been argued that it started in the tenth century, but some argue it happened during the seventh century.

In Bijak and the ballad of the Geingkhulees, the ancestors of the Chakmas are located in Champaknagar. There are also many unknowns about how the name Chakma came about. The Chakma people and some experts also think that the name “Chakma” comes from the word “Sakya”, though the pronunciation and spelling have changed over time. It is also believed that the Chakma kings used to be crowned while riding an elephant. Thereafter, they were called Changmang, and the people who lived with them were called Changma or Changmha. Later, British writers use the word “Chakma” to refer to a group of people who live in CHT.

Before British dominance in the Indian subcontinent, the Chakmas had an independent kingdom in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). “The Chakmas had to pay business tax in the form of eleven mounds of cotton annually to the Moghul as per the business treaty signed in 1715. Though the East India Company took over the administrative powers of the Moghul, the business treaty also transferred to them” (Chakma 2). “In 1866, Capt. Tom Herbert Lewin was transferred to Chittagong Hill Tracts. From the year of his transfer, the powers and boundaries of the Chakma kingdom started to decrease day by day” (2). Then, after many years, the government agreed to divide the Chittagong Hill Tracts into three circles, appointing rulers as chiefs.¹

In 1947, during India's Independence, the Chakmas wanted to stay with India, as they felt insecure under Islamic rule due to the separation being predicated on religious differences (2). However, the Chairman of the Bengal Boundary Commission announced that CHT had been taken by the Islamic Sovereign of Pakistan. So, the Chakmas are among the first South Asian communities to be displaced by development. After the Kaptai reservoir in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), a large number of Chakma people were forced to leave their homes because of

¹ The Chakma Circle, the Bohmong Circle, and the Mong Circle.

environmental concerns. Moreover, in Bangladesh, the CHT community got involved in a civil war, which ended in 1997 with a peace accord between the government of Bangladesh and the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti after two decades of conflict. However, despite the peace deal, criminal activities continued in the CHT.

The literature of the Chakmas is as rich and diverse as other literature in the world (Ibrahim 1). They have an extensive literary tradition and two different branches. There are two forms of literature: written and oral. Among Chakma oral literature, folktales are very popular. According to Niranjana Chakma, folktales were probably first brought from India to the Middle Eastern countries by Arab and Persian traders in ancient and mediaeval times. Later, it gradually spread to various European countries (1).² Moreover, he states that Dr Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay noticed a surprising similarity between many stories and ancient Indian stories, especially the folktales prevalent in the villages of Bengal, from which he inferred that the aforementioned similar stories may have had the same origin in the past (3).³

Folktales have common features, despite the varying nations, languages, and societies. This is especially similar in the case of the animal fables and folklore related to popular education. Some of the folktales were produced by British officers and Christian missionaries during the British time. They had gathered mostly readily available facts about the past history and socio-economic facts of the indigenous communities that are now present in India and Bangladesh. In folktales of the Chakmas, various types and motifs appear to reflect Chakma society. Their folktales portray narratives of world creation, romantic tales, heroic exploits, magical occurrences, and human-animal interactions. Some stories also portray the features of ghosts. Moreover, the

² Translations are by the author of the thesis

³ Translations are by the author of the thesis

Chakmas' relationship with nature is beautifully represented in their oral folktales. The narrative structure and aesthetics of certain Chakma folktales are remarkably creative characterised by simplicity. The Chakma folktales have extensive symbolic elements. For example, in “Radhamohan-Dhanpudi”, the flower name “Naksha” is a symbol of their love.

In Chakma folktales, some common themes are love, sacrifice, intellectual and spiritual correspondence between human beings and nature. Many Ubogeets (ballets) have been transformed into oral folktales, and later inspired by them, many stage plays, art, poetry, and Chakma films have also been produced. Additionally, “modern Chakma literature began with the composition of ‘Chandobi Baro Mas’ by Dharma Dhan at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Chakma 263). Binita Roy met with Rabindra Nath Tagore to discuss publishing Chittagong Hill Tracts hill people's writings. Rabindra Nath suggested “Gairika” for the magazine. At that time, in “Gairika”, several writers wrote songs, poems, and articles regularly (263).

This thesis is about the study of the structure and themes of Chakma folktales, which transfer from oral to written. The thesis analyses Chakma folktales to find how they are reflected in Chakma culture and beliefs. The Chakmas are recognised as having an extensive literary tradition among the ethnic groups living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, but their literary works have received little attention among mainstream scholars. Although the study of Bangladeshi folklore is extensive, it is mostly limited to the folk culture of the Bengali people, which has led to the underestimation of the uniqueness and power of indigenous storytelling. Some popular Chakma folktales have been analysed, but their narrative style and themes contained within them have not yet been analysed in depth. So, in this thesis, I explored Chakma oral tradition through the lens of

some 15 selected folktales ⁴ focusing on the narrative structure and themes of the Chakma folktales with their origin, oral literature, and the contemporary condition of their oral tradition in Bangladesh. This paper will explore a few questions; they are: Who is the Chakma? Why are Chakma folktales important for knowing about the Chakmas' aesthetics, oral literature, cultural belief system, and moral values? What is the contemporary condition of Chakma oral tradition and its preservation strategies?

Methodology

The thesis adopts a qualitative research design, which involves textual narrative analysis and ethnographic investigation to analyse the narrative patterns and cultural relevance of Chakma folktales. A qualitative study is suitable since the study aims to derive meaning, belief systems, identity formation, and moral constructs and order as incorporated in traditional storytelling instead of quantifying measurable variables. The thesis works under the interpretivist paradigm where folktales are understood as social constructs and cultural texts representing a collective memory, worldview, and experience. The combination of literary analysis and community points of view helps the thesis place Chakma folktales not as written versions but as cultural living forms.

The primary texts are an oral form of folktales that were told orally and recorded in written sources (15 Chakma folktales). These tales were chosen at random, as known collections, to have

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- ⁴ “Radhamon/Radhamohan-Dhanpudi”, “Chadigang Chara pala”, “Tanyabi Firti”, “বনবিলাস (Banbilash)”, “ধবি আর কবি (Dhobi and Hobi)”, “কুমলেনি (Kumboleni)”, “Dulu kumari”, “Buroburi ar badorer dol (An old man and women and a group of monkeys)”, “Lokki Pala (mention God Gojen and how world created)”, “Why the thread of a spider does not end?”, “A Toad and Tailor bird”, “শেয়ালের নেকামি (The Fox)”, “The Tiger and a Turtle”, “অমগদ চাকমা”, “Why the ghosts are frightening to the dog?”.

various content and to provide a clear structure. The chosen readings were discussed in terms of the Tzvetan Todorov theory of equilibrium that describes the development of the narrative in terms of balance, disruption, recognition, effort to restore balance, and new balance. All folktales were analysed to find out structural patterns, roles of characters, symbolism, and common cultural themes.

To augment textual analysis, three interviews with the members of the Chakma community are also included in the thesis. They are Neeti Chakma, Ananya Chakma and Asalota Dewan. The sample used was purposely chosen by considering the knowledge of the participants on storytelling traditions. Individual memory, the attitude toward the cultural meaning, and the changes that occur in the transmission of folktales in modern times were examined in the interviews. Ethical issues such as informed consent and cultural sensitivity were observed to the letter. Although the small sample size of interviews and use of written texts might limit the breadth of the representation, the methodology design guarantees a culturally based analytical study of the Chakma folktales.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the book, *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms*, Quinn Edward said that “A story handed down orally from generation to generation that becomes part of the tradition of a group of people. Oral transmission allows for continuing development and alteration of the story. Once a folktale assumes a written form, it remains a folktale, but its form becomes fixed. A folktale may include a wide range of types, including fables, fairy tales, legends, and myths” (169).

Folktales have received many interpretations from various scholars with diverse perspectives. In the article titled “Oral tradition as alternative literature: An examination of techniques and narrative features in Tangle Folktales”, Maikano A. Lamela and Maryam S. Dangabar argue that folktales have served as a significant oral art form for educating and entertaining members of a particular society (144). According to them, a folktale is an imaginative narrative which is defined by F.B.O. Akporobaro and M.H. Abrams. “According to F.B.O. Akporobaro, a folktale is an imaginative narrative (story) in prose form. The story that constitutes a folktale may have a basis in real life, but generally the story is an imaginative recreation of a memorable experience that is intended essentially to entertain rather than to record history or social experience” (Lamela and Dangabar 145).

In the book, *The Types of the Folktale*, Aarne states that folktales are commonly classified into the following three principal types: animal tales, ordinary folktales, and jokes or humorous anecdotes (12). Moreover, in “Folktales: A Moral Message from the Past to the Future Generation”, Dahal and Bhatta state that folktales are indigenous tales influenced by social settings and laden with moral messages. They have the goal to promote moral discourse and highlight ethical distinctions for the youth (33). Additionally, in the article titled “Beyond Boundaries: A

Study of Folktales”, Jagjeet Kour portrays the importance of folktales. According to Jagjeet Kour, folktales transcend the barriers of disciplines such as history, psychology, medicine, oral traditions, and literature. It often blurs the distinctions between the actual and the imaginary world (65). “Folktales can play an important role in curing racism and maintaining ecological balance and they can create better sensibility in using natural resources” (Kour 68). Folktales can serve as a valuable tool for developing global citizens that value diversity and respect human rights. It also contributes to increasing awareness of ecological balance and sustainable development. Dahal and Bhatta believe that audiences of folktales, particularly children, quickly learn that animals and plants possess life, they are living beings, and they deserve love and respect (69).

In one of the most famous books, *The Folktale*, Stith Thompson talks about the historical concept of folktales. He claims that folktales' themes, storytelling conditions, and goals may vary by region and century. Thompson mentions that “The excellent written collections of stories characteristic of India, the Near East, the classical world, and mediaeval Europe are almost entirely traditional; they copy and recopy” (4). Thompson believed that the folktale stories of India were translated into Persian and Arabic, and occasionally the works themselves, or only the contents, were scattered quickly among the Islamites in Asia, Africa, and Europe, as well as throughout the Christian Occident due to their frequent contact with Christians. Buddhist literature was the main medium for these creations. Moreover, according to Thompson, this Buddhist literature spread through China without interruption from the first century after Christ, as long as China maintained close contact with Buddhist India, culminating in the stunning discovery of Stan (376-377).

Additionally, in the book, *Chakma Pocchan*, Niranjana Chakma states that folktales were invented in ancient times in India, whereby certain collections like the Jataka, Panchatantra, Kathasaritsagar, and Beta Panchavinshati were being developed and subsequently paralleled other

European folktales such as Aesop Fables (1). Arab and Persian traders carried Indian folktales to the Middle East in ancient and mediaeval times. Eventually, it spread over Europe. Later in the early 19th century, liberal Christian clergy, European enlightened administrators, and anthropologists explored Africa, the Americas, and remote and inaccessible corners of the world, collecting indigenous folktales.

The Chakmas often referred to as the *Changma*, are a community living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, the northeastern Indian states of Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura, as well as the Rakhine State of Myanmar (Ibrahim 2). Pannalal Majumdar stated in his book, *The Chakmas of Tripura*, that the real history of the term 'Chakma' remains unknown. Chakma historians and researchers argue that the generic term 'Chakma' is derived from the word 'Sakya' (23). The Chakmas consider themselves ancestors of the exiled Sakya clan from the Himalayan mountains of northern India. The Burmese referred to them as THEK or THET, while the Chakmas recognised them as SAK or CHANG. In the following phase of MA, the term MANUCH (MAN) was combined with CHANG, resulting in the emergence of the new generic term CHANGMA. The British made a minor alteration and spelt the word as 'Chakma'. According to Chakma history, the Chakmas resided for five centuries in the region between Burma and Arakan. However, in the early part of the fourteenth century, they arrived in the vicinity of Chittagong (Majumdar 24).

Moreover, Majumdar argues that the Chakmas had Mughal origins in the field of anthropology. This is the opinion of scholars who believe that in earlier years, before the Aryans had reached northwestern India many years before, the region between southwestern China and northeastern India was occupied by several ethnic groups of Mongoloids, known as the Indo-Mongols. The Aryan civilisation of India had a great influence on them (36). Majumder also

mentions that the Chakma were greatly influenced by the Indian Aryan cultures (37). Furthermore, Satish Chandra, in the book *Chakma Jati (Jatia Chitra o Itibritta)*, mentions that the Chakmas believe that their original kingdom was situated at a place known as Champaknagar or Champinagar. The Shakrajas, their former historical king, ruled them at Champaknagar. A Shakya ruler had two sons. The elder Vijayagiri began a campaign of capturing the kingdom. Leaving Champaknagar, he moved southwards and overthrew the kingdoms of Bripur, Araran, and Kuki. Upon his coming back to Champaknagar, he was informed of the death of his father and that his younger brother Udayagiri had assumed the throne. Vijayagiri chose not to go home after getting this news. He instituted a new rule in his conquered kingdom. He and his followers marry the local women. The Vijayagiri king created an alliance with the Arkan king to unify his rule, then founded his capital at the Naf River banks and built his new kingdom. But the Chakma people of Vijayagiri were unable to settle down permanently. Then, they relocated to the mountainous country of Chittagong and established their towns on the shores of the Matamuhuri and Karnaphuli rivers (11-12).

In “Chakmas of Southeast Asia (Anthropological, Social, and Cultural Study)”, Lakshmi Bhusan Chakma claims that the Chakma people have their own distinct history. The majority of Chakmas held a kingdom in the Chittagong Hill Tracts before British domination. Another fact is that the East India Company needed more cotton when they assumed the Mughal administration. Their relations get worse after the Chakma ruler declines to pay more cotton. The ruler and the region of the Chakma kingdom started to collapse (2). Then in 1947, India achieved independence, and the Chakma area, CHT, became part of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. CHT indigenous people and the government had several challenges after Bangladesh achieved independence from West Pakistan in 1971. “The Responsibility to Protect Indigenous Peoples? In “An Analysis of

R2P's Potential Application in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh", Halliwell said that the CHT Indigenous political party Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) formed an armed wing called the Shanti Bahini. The Shanti Bahini began a "low-intensity guerilla war" with the Bangladeshi government (135). After nearly a year of meetings, the National Committee and PCJSS signed a peace treaty on December 2, 1997 (137).

In "A Curious Look into Chakma Literature", Sabidin Ibrahim states that, like other literatures, Chakma literature started as an oral form where it evolved into folktales, proverbs, lullabies and folk songs like the Ubhagit (1). He also notes that "Proverbs and traditional sayings are a unique feature of the Chakma literature. These sayings mainly center on farming, animals and birds, nature, society, religion, and the mystery of the human body" (3). The Chakmas speak a language called 'Changma Vaj', which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. The writer also says Tongchangya is a Chakma branch. The Chakmas practice polygamy; however, it is decreasing (4). He also said that women sing "Tanabee/Tanyabi" to put their children to sleep. According to him, "Radhamohan and Dhanapati" has similarity with Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" in terms of how a love relationship is rejected by parents (3).

However, in "Chakma Folktales: A Study of the Subalterns", Flaviamariya Sunil & Christy Sheelan P. discuss the folktales from a subaltern perspective. They also highlight Chakma folktale features that Rupak Debnath mentions in the preface to his book, *Chakma Folk Tales*. Debnath says Chakma traditional tales are simple and straightforward. Characters interact with humans and superhumans, and animals talk and act like humans. According to Sunil and Sheelan, the Chakma folktales become the voice of the lower strata of the tribal society broadly termed "subaltern" (Sunil and Sheelan 18). Chakmas are simple, like subaltern characters. They stressed dreams,

vision, magic, and superhuman interaction to escape feudalism's harsh and oppressive social order (19).

Partha Sarathi Gupta additionally portrays Bongcher and Chakma folktales in “Art, Ecology and Affective Encounters: An Ecosophical Study of Folk Tales from Tripura.” It focuses on stories where humans and animals change into each other. These stories show a close relationship between humans, animals, and nature. Humans and animals trust and conflict in folk stories, sometimes violently. “The tales are replete with motifs of transversality between humans, animals, birds, and microorganisms. In them, the representation of kinship between different species, like man and beast or man and bird, is often built on the pillars of trust, accommodation, and acceptance, and sometimes on malice, enmity, and connivance, leading to gory violence” (Gupta 2).

In “Representation of Nature-born Chakma Folk Culture: An Ecocritical Study of Radhamohan-Dhanpudi”, Susanta Kumar Bardhan addresses the “Radhamohan Dhanpudi” oral discourse and its reflection of the Chakmas' multidimensional, intimately integrated relationship with nature. According to Bardhan, the current folktales reflect the inherent connection of man and nature that determines the life of the Chakmas with all its elements and stages. So, at the onset of the discussion, the life and culture, i.e., the way of living carried by generations upon generations by the Chakma people across the board, are completely nature-centric (213-214). In this article, Bardhan also points to the overall observations of Chandalia in his 2017 book, *Tribal Literature, Culture, and Knowledge System*. After this book, Gupta says that the oral literature of the indigenous people is replete with such description and depiction. Chakmas need a strong relatedness to nature and everything that comprises it, such as air, water, vegetation, wildlife and land. The consciousness is reflected in the literature that is currently found in the form of songs,

tales, idioms and dance-drama that has been diversified due to the close association that exists between the people and nature (216).

Bardhan in the article also mention Chandra and Das believe, “Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affected by it” (212).

Although there is already research on the subject of Chakma literature and folktales, there are still considerable gaps in it. This is because the majority of scholarly publications concentrate primarily on Chakma history, culture, and general literary traditions. The topic of folktales is only touched on briefly, and there is a noticeable absence of an in-depth investigation of the themes and narrative structures that are associated with them. To add to the knowledge of the indigenous oral traditions, the purpose of the thesis is to develop an analysis of Chakma folktales regarding their aesthetic structure and themes, which are nature-centric. The readers are also able to learn about the indigenous histories, society, culture, beliefs, and practices through this thesis. Meanwhile, they show the achievements as well as the hardships of indigenous people that show how communities have bargained over loss, perseverance, adjustment, and social transformation.

Chapter 3: The Chakmas and Their Oral Storytelling Tradition

The Chakma community is considered the largest indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. They also established themselves in the northeastern India and Myanmar regions. Being such a famous community, they offer a unique culture, celebrations, customs, and literature. There are many debates about Chakma's origins. The Chakma historians and the scholars take it to consider that the generic term *Chakma* has derived from the word “Sakya”. In ancient times, a clan named Sakya lived in the Himalayan regions on the frontier of Nepal. In pursuance of Chakma history, the Chakmas lived for five hundred years in the middle of Burma and Arakan. Some believe that Chakmas are of Mongoloid origin. After colonial rule, many kings and, through the Mughal alliances, British colonial restructuring, the Kaptai Dam displacement, and political struggles after 1971 and centuries, the Chakma have been moved, changed, and given and taken away the territory, leadership, and autonomy. They have both oral and written literature. Among oral literature, Chakma folktales play important roles in preserving language, social traditions, values and historical consciousness, and they adapt to new conditions and places.

3.1 The origin and Historical Background of the Chakma.

The origin of the Chakmas is mysterious due to the absence of any authentic documentation. A Chakma researcher and historian, S. P. Talukder, concludes that the Chakmas started migrating out of Arakan (Burma) to the neighbouring areas of Bengal as early as 1052 A.D., extending to present-day Chittagong (7). Majumder says that the Burmese call the Chakmas Tsak or Thek, the Kukis Tui-thek, and the Mogs Saak, but that the Chakmas indeed call themselves by the proper general name Changma. The British call the name Changma as Chakma. The Changma, which is known as Chakmas in written records, has become universally recognised (35-

36). The Chakmas anthropologically are Mongoloid. Dr Dulal Choudhury says that the Chakmas belong to Southeast Asia. They belong to Mongoloid races. Previously, they lived in the Manchuria region. They were nomadic, and four or five hundred years ago they lived in Chiengmai, Thailand. After this, in line with the geographical changes and in search of a stable place to live, they moved to Burma and Arakan. Later, during the pre-British era in India, they spread across the Hill Tracts of Chittagong, Assam, Arakan, and Tripura” (Majumdar 37).

On the other hand, the Chakmas’ history, known as Bijak, claims that they are successors of the Sakya dynasty. They claim that their history is linked to the mountain empire of "KALAP" Nagar in the Himalayan Mountain range, which is now part of present-day Nepal. Lakshmi Bhusan Chakma states that the ancestral Sakyo homeland was located in Kalap Nagar, along the banks of the Rohini River (31). A long time ago, King Shyamala of Kalap Nagar went on a journey to the east, founding a new kingdom named Champa, with its capital named Champaknagar, in honour of his son Champak Kali. Then King Bimbasur, a descendant of Shyamala, went on an expedition southward, traversing the Kapila and Lohita rivers, and established the newly gained land as Kalabagha, in honour of his commander Kalabagha. The capital also became known as Champaknagar, in memory of the former capital. Kalabagha was appointed as the Governor of Kalabagha. After Kalabagha's death, Vijoygiri, the eldest son of King Udaygiri of Champa, was appointed Governor of Kalabagha. After becoming the governor of Kalabagha, he declared the horrible conduct of the Maghs (Arakanese and Burmese) unacceptable in the southern area of the kingdom. He prepared a battle with Magh (31). In the south, he overpowered Bripur, Araran and Kuki.

One day Vijaygiri received news about his father's death, and his younger brother, Udayagiri, had ascended to the throne. Vijoygiri decided not to return to Champa and established

residence in the newly created kingdoms. His followers married local women. The Vijayagiri emperor made an arrangement with the Arkan king, established his capital on the Naf River, and expanded his kingdom to strengthen his dominance (33). However, Vijayagiri Chakma residents did not settle there. After Vijoygiri died, his prime minister, Srittoma Sak, became king, forcing young subjects to join the military and conquering other kingdoms. During Manichgiri's rule, the Chakma empire weakened significantly, while the Maghs became increasingly brutal. Then Manichgiri relocated his capital to a new site and named it Manichgir. Then after some years, the Magh king Minthi defeated a Chakma king, Arunjug, in 1333 with Portuguese support (38). Later the cruelty of the Magh rulers led to a massive migration of Chakma people, and the Chakmas moved to Chittagong.⁵

According to Majumdar, after arriving in Chittagong in the seventeenth century, the Mughals and Chakmas became stronger. As friends with the Mughals, the Chakma rulers took the name KHAN. The Chakma rulers added “KHAN” to their names but remained Buddhist (45–46). A 1715 treaty required the Chakmas to pay the Mughals a small cotton tax. Then after the Battle of Plassey, the English gained authority, and Nawab Mir Qasim gave Chittagong to them in 1760, starting the British-Chakmas conflict (46). British economic strategies included barring Chakmas from rural markets, destroying their economy. Janbux Khan, the Chakma king, surrendered to pressure and paid a fixed yearly tribute instead of a cotton tax (46-47). Lakshmi Bhusan Chakma states that after Raja Dharam Bux Khan died in 1832, the British appointed Kalindi Rani as administrator of the Chakma kingdom until her grandson Harish Chandra aged (45). He says, “Kalindi was a shrewd ruler” (45). She ruled with strong control within herself but in increasing

⁵ This is summarized from the book *Chakmas of Southeast Asia (Anthropological, Social And Cultural Study)* written by Lakshmi Bhusan Chakma. <https://archive.org/details/chakmas-of-southeast-asia-anthropological-social-and-cultural-study/page/34/mode/2up?q=bijak> (pp. 33-36).

disagreement with British authority, especially after Captain T. H. Lewin arrived. Thus, British measures reduced Chakma power. The majority of the Chakma kingdom disappeared. The title of 'Raja' was replaced with 'Chief'. Their kingdom became a colonial administrative subdivision under the Chittagong Hill Tracts district (Chakma 46).

Lakshmi Bhusan Chakma also claims a king, Harish Chandra, moved the Chakma capital to Rangamati (47). Bhuban Mohan Roy, Nalinakshya Roy, and Tridib Roy ruled under diminished colonial authority. Pakistan constructed the Kaptai Dam to generate electricity across the Karnafuli River in 1960 under King Tridib Roy. Dam history is full of terrible displacement and outright disdain for Indigenous populations. A dam evicted 100,000 individuals from their homes of childhood (Chakma et al. 14). Tridib Roy rebuilt the Chakma palace (Rajbari) when the dam flooded it. After Bangladesh got independence in 1971, he stayed in Pakistan. After colonisation, Raja Debashish Roy became Chief of the Chakma Circle in 1977 and continues to promote traditional law, administration, and autonomy for indigenous peoples. After Bangladesh gained independence in 1971, CHT indigenous people and the government of Bangladesh faced many challenges. Shanti Bahini was the armed branch of the CHT Indigenous political group Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS). The Shanti Bahini started a guerrilla war against the Bangladesh government. After close to one year of negotiations, the National Committee and PCJSS signed a peace treaty on December 2, 1997 (Halliwell 137). The agreement brought hope to both sides of the deal, but the Bangladesh Constitution did not follow it.

3.2 History of The Chakmas' oral storytelling

The Chakma people have an oral storytelling tradition that is essential in their social, cultural, and historical life. Prior to the advent of written literature, storytelling served as an essential tool through which the Chakma community maintained collective memory, transmitted

cultural information, and expressed moral and societal principles. Hou argues that storytelling started with the earliest forms of social interaction through oral traditions. These early stories were essential for preserving cultural information and for transmitting values and beliefs throughout generations (2). In Chakma society, oral narratives served as both a source of entertainment and an essential means of knowledge, facilitating cultural transmission and identity building.

The Chakmas have an extensive literary tradition with two different branches: written and oral literature. In written literature there are the Agar Taras (the written religious scripture), Talliks (medical formulas), Afandars (magical chants), Pujo Bijaks (methods of a Puja), poems, Barha Mfhach (compositions on unsuccessful love stories), Lamhas (hymns), Jabin Parichay (description of vital points of a body), Afogham Parichay (description of haunted places), Nari Kalpa (description of pulses and nerves), Phughiri Kalam (the art of meditation and yoga), Sinan (mantras for chanting water for bath), Ang, Dhamasik, Tabit, and others. In the oral literature, there are Palhas (traditional stories), Ubho geet (folk love songs), Pachjhan (folktales), rhymes, Olee (lullabies), Banha (riddles), Dagha Kadha (proverbs), Thenga Bhangageet (folk songs), and so on. (Chakma 80)

In the Chakma community, Gengkhuli ballads are very popular. The Chakmas used to enjoy storytelling through the melodies of Ganguli songs. Majumdar states that Gengkhuli were transmitted from the "guru" to the disciple only through oral transmission (232). Therefore, the ballads sometimes experienced linguistic alterations throughout social evolution. Subsequently, these ballads were documented in the written form of the Chakma language. The most popular Chakma Gengkhuli palas include "Radhamohan–Dhanpudi Pala", "Chadigang Chhara Pala", and "Lakkhi Pala". "Radhamohan–Dhanpudi Pala" is based on the romantic story of Radhamohan and Dhanpudi. "Chadigang Chhara Pala" highlights the following part of this story, extending the

emotional love story of Radhamohan and Dhanpudi within a wider socio-political context. It portrays Radhamohan's loyalty to the Chakma king and his involvement in military operations. Due to the song's references to identifiable social customs, political frameworks, and historical contexts. The widespread use of these palas shows the role of oral storytelling as a historical record in Chakma society.

Another well-known Pala is the "Lokki Pala," which describes the universe's creation. This is an example where we can say that Hindu religious beliefs impacted Chakma oral traditions. In Bijak, it is claimed that many Chakma kings were devout followers of Hinduism (Chakma 94). Folk ballads like Gengkhuli and other oral compositions such as "Gojhen/Gozen Lamha", "Srichti Potthom", and "Barhamhaches" include their belief in Hindu deities. The composer of Buddha Lamha viewed Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu and included prayers to Hindu deities (94–95). As these stories of palas were progressively transmitted through generations, many palas narratives evolved into folktales. Moreover, the Jataka is also famous among the Chakma. Jataka is about Gautama Buddha's past lives. The Jataka, as fabled stories, established moral ideals. The "Jataka kathas" were delivered orally through "Jataka Bhankas" and subsequently transcribed into texts and placed at significant Buddhist locations to spread Buddhist principles (Sawaithul 1).

In Chakma society, most stories were heard from grandparents. They are the primary storytellers. The stories were mostly delivered for the entertainment of children. Some stories also addressed ghosts, witches, and supernatural beings. Some stories also focus on birds and animal characters. Gupta argues that these stories are full of unique transformations between humans and animals, including birds. This subject of transformation positions Chakma folktales within a structure that examines the complex connection between humans and nature (1). Moreover, in Chakma folktales, the surrounding environment, such as hills, forests, and rivers, holds an essential

position. This concept highlights the deep connection between the Chakma people and the natural world. In the book *Chakma Pocchan*, Niranjan Chakma describes the origins and transmission of folktales. According to him, ancient India is the primary source of folktales. He states:

In the mountainous area of the Indian eastern periphery, where Mongolian tribes are the majority group, the integration of social and cultural groups has been taking place since prehistoric times. Proto-Australopithecines came in approximately 2000-2500 BC, with another migration of Mongolians coming in 1500 BC. Settling in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD were the Aryan-speaking groups. In history Buddhism and Hinduism have expanded over the East. Also, one of the arms of the ancient Silk Road went through, and it led to the cultural export and import of the Aryan, Mongolian, and Austro-Hungarian influences (6).⁶

Niranjan Chakma believes that through this process, a culture of storytelling enters the Chakma community. Then during the British era, many Chakma folktales were written through British officials and Christian investigations. The release of the monthly *Gairika* (1935–1952) from Rangamati, under the editorship of Binita Roy, is considered a pivotal event that promoted an increase in modern Chakma literature (Majumdar 263). Subsequent initiatives, such as *Parbattva Vani*, *Jubhaprad*, and the *Jhum Aesthetic Council*, significantly contributed to the publication of poetry, songs, folklore, linguistic studies, and the documentation of oral traditions in written form (264). Moreover, in a study, Hou claims that the advent of radio, television, and the Internet in the twentieth century revolutionised the form of storytelling (2). The change is also seen in Chakma storytelling, where oral narratives like “Radhamohan-Dhanpudi”, “Tannebi or Tanyabi”, and

⁶ Translations and summary are by the author of the thesis

“Hobi-Dobi” transitioned from oral tradition to written texts and then to stage performances and film adaptations.

3.3 Role of Oral Folktales in Preserving Chakma Culture

According to Edward, culture is a source of identity. Culture involves various elements, including religion, language, traditional costume, art, music, social order, festivals, and history (13). The Chakmas are unique and diverse from the majority Bengali population of Bangladesh regarding background, language, culture, origins, and belief. The Chakmas historically claim that they belong to the Sakya Clan, renowned for their association with Gautama Buddha. Many scholars and researchers identify a relationship between their origins with the Burmese, Arakanese, and Mongolian peoples. Philologists find out their language has a connection with the Indo-Aryan language group. The Chakmas practice Buddhism, but Hinduism is also notable in their culture, especially in their traditional stories. The social organisation in Chakma is patrilineal. According to Lakshmi Bhusan Chakma, the Chakma family is led by the eldest male member (7). Following the norms of the Chakma Society, marriage is allowed solely between “Khellya Kudum”, representing unions within the same or alternate generation (9).

The Chakma communities are typically situated along riverbanks or on hillside slopes where a stream or water source is present. From the ancient to the contemporary era, the Chakma community has engaged in Jhum (slash and burn) farming. Chakma women represent a distinct identity through their traditional attire. Women wrap themselves in home-woven textile garments referred to as pinon-hadi. They possess distinctive traditional silver adornments. Games and sports are intended for the recreation and delight of rural inhabitants. One of the most renowned games is “Ghila Khara”. Bizhu is the most renowned and vibrant traditional festival celebrated by the

Chakmas. It is celebrated at the end and start of a year to say goodbye to the previous year and to embrace the New Year with renewed hope and aspirations.

In Chakma communities, oral traditions have been essential for maintaining cultural knowledge, cultivating social values, conveying historical events, and entertaining audiences of all ages. Oral folklore has been passed down among the Chakmas for generations, from which they have learned about their old social order, history, legends, the thoughts of past people, and various cultures. Moreover, their folktales portray moral teachings, romantic plots, and supernatural aspects. The Chakmas possess many oral folktales, some of which have been lost and some of them recorded in writing. Although several folktales are documented in written form, they are classified as oral folktales. Several renowned folktales vividly depict the Chakma culture. For example, “Radhamohan Dhanpudi”, which is regarded as the oldest and most renowned oral ballad that describes the family genealogy, culture and history of the Chakmas, alongside the mythical romance of Radhamohan and Dhanpudi.

The “Radhamohan-Dhanpudi” folktale refers to the Champaknagar kingdom of the Chakmas, from which this city has created a lot of curiosity among the Chakma community. This story mentions the “Machang” house of the Chakmas, which is now seen in many hilly areas. Moreover, there is talk of “Olidagani”, which highlights how children are raised with care in the Chakma society. Moreover, this folktale mentions much bamboo furniture, musical instruments (flutes), various types of cooking utensils, especially a type of rice bread known as “Pidhe”, weaving clothes for personal and family use (Pinon-Hadi), jhum cultivation and harvesting, traditional medicine, tree worship, agricultural ceremonies, marriage rituals, Biju, and so on. From this, it can be said that these folktales provide a lot of knowledge about Chakma society, which has been representing Chakma culture for ages.

On the other hand, “Chadigang Chhara pala” is based on the ancient events of the Chakma kingdom. It identifies many different countries and their respective ecological circumstances. It recalls the tale of the successful battle of the brave Chakma king Vijayagiri, who defeated the Magh king. In this battle, Radhamohan served as commander.

“মগ রাজা কন্তে চাকমা রাজাকে কাৰিব” (Barua 75).

Meaning: The Magh King said he would kill the Chakma king

“বরশি বেইন্যায় আধারে

বেয়াং রাজা নিজে লারেই ন গৰে, লারেই গৰে পাত্ৰে” (76).

Meaning: The Magh King sent a general instead of going to war himself.

“মগে গন্তন হাহাকার,

মগের রাজ্যে গন্তন চাকমায় অনাচার” (76).

Meaning: The Chakma were oppressing the Magh Kingdom and the Maghs began to cry out.

“কহে মগ রাজা রাধামনে,

রাজ্য গজেই দ্যং তোমাৰে” (76).⁷

Meaning: The Magh king said to Radhamohan, “I am handing over the Kingdom to you”.

⁷ This folktale is taken from this book –

পার্বত্য চট্টগ্রামের সাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতি by Biprodip Borua. Pp. 74-77

This is a part of the story of King Vijayagiri's defeat of the Magh kingdom with Radhamohon. This story brings out the history of the Chakma. This folktale works as a source of knowledge about the Chakmas' past, which has a long-lasting effect on their historical belief.

On the other hand, there is another folktale called “Tanyabi Firti”. The folktale describes the geography and history of a village through blending together a cultural narrative with the natural environment (the lake, the river Chengi, and the settlement of Bandarghop village). In the past, family elders held significant influence over marriage decisions, with the younger generation expected to follow their lead. This folktale keeps alive the memories of the Chakma social system and its dependence on family. “Old Man and Old Woman and the Monkeys”, “Banbilash”, “Dhobi and Hob”, “Amogoto Chakma”, “Kumboleni”, “Dulu Kumari”, and “The Fox” are some of the folktales that reflect customary values, social rituals, cooking with pitha, and Jhum cultivation. Overall, it can be said that these stories show how important Chakma folktales are for keeping Chakma traditions alive and for the Chakma people to feel a sense of belonging.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Chakma Folktales: Narrative Structure, Symbol and Themes

Chakma folktales are a fertile source of indigenous knowledge, cultural values as well as collective memory that have been transmitted across generations. The Aarne–Thompson classification is useful in correlating the diversity of the selected fifteen narratives with folktale typology, encompassing animal tales, traditional folktales (including wonder or magic tales and religious or spiritual tales), and humorous stories (Aarne and Thompson 12-14). In the Chakma folktales collection, animal tales (e.g., “A Toad and Tailor Bird”, “The Fox”, and “Tiger and Tortoise”), ordinary social or wonder tales (“Bonbilash”, “Dhobi and Hobi”, “Kumboleni”, and “Dulu Kumari”), and mythic-religious or etiological tales (“Lokki Pala”, “Why the Thread of a Spider Does Not End?”, “Why the Ghosts Are Frightening to the Dog?”, and “Amagad Chakma”) are notable. These folktales also feature the narrative patterns that indicate the strong relationship to the oral performance wherein voice, gesture, and rhythm are very important in narrating a story. These folktales portray the ways in which order, disruption, and harmony determine the life of humankind through recognisable plot patterns. Their plot pattern has similarity with Todorov's equilibrium theory (equilibrium → disruption → repair → new equilibrium).⁸ It can be the perfect match because Chakma oral folktales have a beginning, middle, and perfect end that transition from a stable existence into crisis and later achieve resolution.

The settings of rivers, forests, animals, and supernatural beings are used as the means of transmitting the moral and spiritual meanings. The major characters are the family members and community, animals, and supernatural beings. Moreover, nature, labour, and material culture

⁸ <https://media-studies.com/todorov/>

symbolism emphasise the fact that the Chakma people are very close to the surroundings. Meanwhile, the stories express some of the key themes of love, sacrifice, wisdom, gender roles, and social norms. Combining the narrative structure, symbolism and themes provides the understanding of the Chakma worldview and cultural identity. In this chapter, storytelling is portrayed as a medium of cultural preservation. It examines how the Chakma folktale mirrors social realities and passes on values of morality.

4.1: Narrative Structure in Chakma folktales

Narrative structure is the framework that combines a story through plot, character, and setting (Qu 7). Barthes claims that many tales begin with “Once upon a time” or “A long time ago”, which is an essential narrative sign among the oral folktales (264). Many Chakma folktales also follow the structure; especially grandparents often begin Chakma oral stories this way. Chakma oral storytelling is a performative art that uses the storyteller's voice and movement to bring the story to life. Good storytellers employ gestures, facial expressions, and body language to portray emotions, actions, and character dynamics. The storyteller may lean forward, raise their voice, or pause to generate suspense during tension or climax. Storytellers use animal sounds or characters' behaviours. This dynamic voice and these movements keep the audience interested, bringing the story to life and improving the emotional experience. These elements also hold the audience's attention and match the narrative's rhythm.⁹ Nowadays Chakma oral storytelling is not practised, but there are now some books in Chakma, Bengali and English that deal with some oral

⁹ The number of people narrating stories has greatly decreased. It is becoming challenging to locate people capable of presenting compelling stories. When my grandmother Sukhi Chakma was alive, she used to tell folk stories with beautiful expressions, using her hands and face gestures. I remember hearing the "Amagada Chakma" folk story from her. In this story, she used to show how the protagonist, the old man, cut off the ghost's hand. Moreover, according to the characters, she would also change her voice.

folktales passed down through the people of the past. These books are written in a somewhat more descriptive way than the oral tales, but they are based on the original story.

Todorov's equilibrium theory and Chakma folktales have similarities. According to Todorov, narrative needs to start with a stable condition, which is subsequently disrupted by a force that introduces a state of imbalance. Then the characters try to repair the situation. At the end of the story, the characters recognise the need to establish a new equilibrium. The plot of "Radhamohan-Dhanpudi" begins in a social context where Radhamohan and Dhanpudi grow within Chakma culture, participating in activities such as climbing mountains, games (Gilla Hara), and exploring Jhum. The story's beginning suggests a stable setting, which indicates the balance or equilibrium of Todorov's theory. Then, according to his theory, the disruption or conflict arises when Dhanpudi's parents plan her marriage somewhere. Then start the stages of recognition of disruption. Dhanpudi ultimately understands that if she cares about society, then she cannot meet Radhamohan. Therefore, instead of going home to fetch water, she goes straight to Radhamohan's house. The story here highlights how Dhanpudi breaks societal norms to resolve her problem. This is the repair stage of the story, where characters try to solve the problem. In the end, Dhanpudi and Radhamohan get married. A new chapter begins in their lives, which indicates a new equilibrium in the story.

On the other hand, "Charigang Chara Pala" begins with the introduction of Champaknagar and the characters Radhamohan and the king Vijaygiri. In the middle of the story, Radhamohan is involved in an adventure of battle and dedication, and at the end of the story, he wins the battle. This folktale also has similarities with Todorov's equilibrium theory. Both start with a stable or balanced condition, then turn into disruption with conflict. This disruption was caused by the greed

for new land power and kingdom acquisition, and ultimately a new balance or equilibrium was established through Radhamohan's victory in the war and his return to the country.

The folktale “Tanyabi Firti” plot begins with highlighting the beauty of the Tanyabi, along with the lake, river, and community. This indicates the balance setting of the story. Tanyabi’s family pushes her to wed an elderly man, and from here the disruption of the story starts. She understands that it is difficult for her to escape from the situation. At one point, she weds the elderly man. The beginning of her separation and sorrowful suffering ends in deep grief. She sacrifices her life for love in the river, and it is named after her, “Tanyabi Firti”. In this story, Tanyabi waits for her lover but does not try to escape like Dhanpudi, who managed to escape for her love in the story “Radhamohan Dhanpudi”. Dhanpudi goes against her family and society and solves her problems on her own. On the other hand, Tanyabi is portrayed as a silent woman of society who fails to escape the norms of society. Here the story has a stable beginning, a middle, and a disruption but does not fully follow Todorov's equilibrium theory.

Moreover, in “An old man and woman and a group of monkeys”, the beginning represents the normal existence of the human household next to the forest, disruption reflects the monkeys’ damaging attack, repair indicates the clever trap created and carried out by the humans, and the new equilibrium is created through the removal of the threat, which ends with a causal conclusion explaining the reason for the continued existence of the monkeys. Partha Sarathi Gupta states that some Chakma folktales portray the violence between humans and animals (2). This violence is observed in “An Old Man and Woman and a Group of Monkeys”. Here, the monkeys and the old man and woman are seen repeatedly physically attacking each other through various techniques.

Further, animal fables express the same reasoning in simple moral actions. For example, “The Tiger and the Tortoise”, which begins with the introduction of a tiger and a tortoise residing

in the jungle. This indicates Todorov's beginning balance setting of a story. Then disruption represents the hunger-driven aggression of the tiger in its struggle for food. The tortoise recognises the reason behind the disruption is Tiger's hunger. Then the tortoise's resistance and strategic moves to save itself from the tiger which is repairing stage of the story that Todorov names "repair". The ending provides a teaching lesson on not underestimating the small by the tortoise's ability to regain its new life through its intelligence. Here, the turtle's new life, having survived the wolf's attack, follows Todorov's new equilibrium rules.

In the plot of "Lokki or Lakshmi Pala", the earth starts with fertility, which is its equilibrium or balance stage of the story. The disruption begins with a famine. Various attempts are made to bring Lakshmi back to Earth to get rid of this problem, which indicates Todorov's repair stage. Then the climax occurs when Lakshmi returns to restore fertility, and the end shows how the world is filled with abundance as before with the arrival of "Lokki" which indicates Todorov's New Equilibrium stage.

Moreover, "Why does not the thread of a spider end?" starts with introducing Gojen (God) who created the earth, Keduga¹⁰ and Kedugi¹¹. In the beginning of the story the earth is full of flowers and fruits, which indicates the equilibrium or balance stage of the story. Then disruption occurred with scarcity of food. Then the repair stage is when BIYATRA, the son of the Ganges, went to Lakshmi to solve the scarcity of food, and a spider took the responsibility to bring Lakshmi. Lakshmi blesses the spider's thread with an endless end, and Lakshmi comes to earth with the spider thread passing the milk sea. This begins a new form of the spider whose thread has no end, which follows Todorov's New Equilibrium stage.

¹⁰ KEDUGA was the first man of the world.

¹¹ The first woman named KEDUGI from the filth of his body.

Additionally, the story “Amagad Chakma” begins with a description of a jungle environment where the Chakmas were few but ferocious animals, and the fear of ghosts was prevalent among the people. Since it is a ghost story, the beginning also starts quite seriously. Then the description of the ghost is given. Then when the ghost threatens the safety of a family, disruption begins. The story progresses by formulating a plan to drive away the ghost, and a plan to solve the problem is devised, which follows the Todorov repair stage. Then the story ends with the ghost being driven away and the family starting to live in peace as before, which indicates the stage of Todorov's New Equilibrium.

On the other hand, the story “Why are ghosts afraid of dogs?” begins in a stable context. In the middle, the ghost's chaotic behaviour is revealed, which indicates Todorov's Disruption Stage. Since the ghost has given a condition that if he (the man) fails to give him the task, he will kill him. Therefore, in an attempt to solve this problem and in a planned manner, the man assigns the ghost the difficult task of straightening the dog's tail. This follows Todorov's Refair Stage. Using this strategy, the man reaches a solution and removes the ghost from his life and begins a new life of peace, which follows Todorov's New Equilibrium Stage.

Moreover, “Bonbilash”, “Dhobi and Hobi”, “Kumboleni”, “Dulu Kumari” stories begin with the introduction of characters living a simple, stable life in a family. The disruption usually begins in the domestic or matrimonial unit where there are perpetually antagonistic stepmothers and stepsisters. In these folktales all protagonists try to escape from their difficult situation in their own way. The end of these folktales, either through the punishment of the stepmother and the villains and the hero-heroine returning home or living happily in the family, follows the stage of Todorov's New Equilibrium. Overall, it can be said that some Chakma folktales highlight a connection with Todorov's narrative theory, as they typically begin in a stable beginning, progress

through a conflict, sometimes achieve resolution, and ultimately return to stability or introduce a new journey.

Characters are the most important part of a story. Most of the characters in the 15 Chakma folktales are members of the family and community: parents, stepmothers, step-siblings, spouses, and, most specifically, young female heroes who face hardship (“Bonbilash”, “Dhobi and Hobi”, “Kumboleni”, “Dulu Kumari”). Authority figures such as kings, queens, princes, elders and judges also appear frequently in many stories, as they represent social order and often bring resolution by recognition, justice or judgement. Other notable characters are non-human characters. Foxes, tigers, tortoises, toads, monkeys, birds, dogs, and spiders are often used to symbolise human traits like duplicity, greed, imitation, strength, patience, and cunning. There are the supernatural creatures, ghosts, rakshasas, and divine forces like Lokki and Gozen, which appear to deliver the message of fear, protection, scarcity, and survival. Moreover, hill villages, jhum fields, forests, and rivers are the most repeated settings that are discussed in Chakma oral folktales. Through the folktales' setting, jhum, bamboo, forest paths, “Mono ghor”, and rivers are the manifestations of everyday Chakma life.

4.2: Symbolism in Chakma folktales

The folktales have been used to derive symbolism that is based on the daily life of the Chakma, such as jhum farming, bamboo products, forests, rivers, birds, cooking and village traditions. A bamboo tool is not just a tool, but rather it is an expression of skills, gendered labour, and cultural identity. Moreover, a river is the mark of separation, reunion, life, and death. Chakma oral folktales often project some moral and cultural ideas using nature and material culture. Jhum, land and forest are used as symbols of identity, survival and love in the Chakma oral folktales. The jhum cultivation and mountains represent the Chakma identity, environmental care and social

sustainability. The mountain climbing, or rather going to “Jhum” and “Hattong” in the folktale “Radhamohan-Dhanpudi”, is a symbol of labour, discipline and seasonal rhythms, which are significant in the Chakma folktales.

Bamboo items (suchcheng, taglog, ba-kadi, and kheggarong) are used as the representatives of material culture in the “Radhamohan-Dhanpudi”. The look of an elderly woman walking in the Jhum with a flower called “Rochang” in the dream of Radhamohan is symbolic of the time Chakmas believed in dreams extremely, which indicates that once upon a time they connected their normal life with something invisible. In “Radhamohon Dhanpudi”, the “Naksha” flower is a symbol of love. The flower that Radhamohan is ready to sacrifice his life to obtain to give it to Dhanpudi, as he promises her to do that. Moreover, Jhum cultivation, flowers, and rivers indicate that human life is linked to the mountainous ecosystem. Additionally, there are oral folktales, which mention rivers and lakes. The lake in the story of “Tanyabir Firti” is the symbol of life and death that is associated with emotional conflict and tragic love. The river “Chengi” is the symbol of Tanyabir’s sorrow and death. In the story, “Kumbalini” has a daughter and six sons whom the king’s other queens throw away into the river due to jealousy, but Mother Ganga revives them. In “Kumbalini”, this river is a symbol of life or the spiritual awakening of the seven brothers. The riverbank is also a symbol of social gatherings in “Radhamohon-Dhanpudi”, where they meet, give each other advice, and make decisions.

Animal figures also play an important role in Chakma folktales. They are symbols of social and moral behaviour in society. In the folktale “Toad and the Tailor Bird”, the lie of the toad leads to a series of events by a large number of creatures. The allegory of the story is that one lie can disturb the entire ecological-social system. The animal chain is also used as a symbol of dependency with each creature. In addition, the frog has far-reaching implications for falsehood

that teach the moral lesson that the consequences of lying can be terrible. In “The Fox” tales, the fox is a symbol of imitation and a lazy attitude. In “The Tiger and the Tortoise,” the tiger symbolises aggression. On the other hand, the tortoise is a symbol of calmness, patience and cleverness. Moreover, in the folktale “Old Man and Woman and Monkeys”, the monkeys are symbolic of disruptive greed, and the old couple is the symbol of human wisdom.

Chakma folktales represent creation, protection, and fear using supernatural and divine symbols. Chakma folktales are represented through supernatural and divine symbols that depict the creation, protection, and fear. In “Lokki or Lakshmi Pala” Gozen is the symbol of the creator of the earth. Lakshmi is a symbol of the revival of famine. Moreover, in “Amagad Chakma” the ghost is a symbol of fear and danger. In the folktales, “Mayan herb”¹² symbolises a ghostly protector, which is a cultural belief among the Chakma ancestors. In the story, “Why the ghosts are frightened of the dog”, the black dog is a symbol of what the ghosts are frightened about since the ghost has not straightened the tail of the dog, and the ghost is a symbol of the supernatural power. In this tale, “The Mantra” also portrays the knowledge of protection passed on by the elders.

Overall, these folktales are the stories that represent the Chakma worldview, according to which human existence is linked to forests, rivers, mountains, animals, and supernatural forces. The jhum fields, bamboo tools, flowers, rivers and animals are more than merely physical objects; they also signify identity, survival, morality and feeling. The constant reoccurrence of religious icons such as Lakshmi or Gozen, ghosts, and mantras used as protective symbols indicates the way in which religious beliefs are integrated into the lives of ordinary people and the natural environment. Nature is not a passive object; it is an active part of human fates, which more or less

¹² A vegetable, and the Chakmas believe that ghosts are afraid of it.

predetermines love, loss, prosperity, and suffering. In most of the stories, rivers are seen as a place of tragic sacrifice, mountains as a place of trial of devotion, forests as a source of danger and defence and animals as the moral agent who seems to mirror the human good and evil.

These symbolic representations in Chakma folktales build a cultural universe in which there is a harmonious co-existence of material culture, religious imagination and environmental consciousness. The oral tradition retains the ancestral information on the agricultural methods, social behaviour, gender relations, and ethical behaviour, and they also strengthen the respect for the natural universe. Therefore, the symbolism in the Chakma folktales shows that culture, spirituality, and ecology are not separate but rather form parts of the whole indigenous identity.

4.3: Major themes in Chakma Folktales

Love and sacrifice

The element of love and sacrifice is common in most of the Chakma folktales, and this is the most notable in “Radhamohan-Dhanpudi”. In the folktale, Radhamohan bears all the hardships, including climbing to the mountains and doing difficult tasks, just to fulfil his commitments to Dhanpudi. This feeling of love is also mutual. Dhanpudi also shows sacrifice in offering Radhamohan food, feeding their bond and anxiously awaiting his return. The love of Dhanpudi was not able to make her quit marrying Radhamohan, disregarding the social barriers. Moreover, “Radhamohan and Dhanpudi” is thematically similar to "Romeo and Juliet" by Shakespeare. The conflict between Radhamohan and Dhanpudi’s family over the love affair corresponds to that between Romeo and Juliet’s families.

On the other hand, in “Tanyabi Firti”, Tanyabi is pressured by society and family to marry an older man. She loves Punangchan. She has to give up her love for society. Tanyabi has a

sorrowful life, as she is always crying about her unfulfilled love and ends her life. The angle of love is shown in both folktales. “Radhamohan – Dhanpudi” gets the fulfilment of love; on the other hand, Tanyabi does not get the fulfilment of love. His love surpasses society. On the other hand, Tanyabi is forced to take her own life without getting fulfilment from love. In it, the image of women's silence under the pressure of society emerges where love is forced to give up.

Wisdom and intelligence

Chakma folktales portray the themes of wisdom and intelligence. In the folktale “The Tiger and a Tortoise”, the Tortoise avoids the powerful Tiger not through the use of strength, but through intelligence. In the story, the tortoise requested the tiger to transport him to a pool where the water would soften him, allowing the tiger to consume him. The tiger felt pleased, and the tortoise's remarks appeared reasonable to him. The tiger grabbed it by the mouth, carried it to a pool, and released it into the water. The tortoise quickly swam out from the grasp of the tiger and saved his life. From here, it can be said how any problem can be solved by using wisdom and intelligence at the right time, not by strength.

Moreover, the story of “Amagad Chakma” also portrays intelligent human beings who can succeed in defeating supernatural beings, indicating that mental power is even stronger than magic. In “Why Ghosts Fear a Dog?”, a householder defeats a mighty ghost by delegating him an impossible logical task, which is straightening the tail of a dog. This caused the ghost to run away frightened. Lastly, another folktale, “An old man and women and a group of monkeys”, reveals how the human defeat monkeys using their wisdom and intelligence. In these folktales, it is notable how the stories value human intelligence more than any supernatural power or animals. Overall, many Chakma folktales reveal that wit, creativity and reasoning are the real sources of power, so intelligence is the key to survival.

Spiritual and supernatural intervention

The theme of spiritual and supernatural intervention can also be described as the characteristic feature of Chakma oral folktales. In “Amagad Chakma”, the spiritual world is also present besides being operative, where ghosts are free and they imitate human voices besides haunting the spaces of humans at night. A spiritual intervention mediation of the story, “Why the Ghosts are Frightened of a Dog,” is formed through ritual knowledge, in which a mantra is invoked to attract a ghost and make him take some superhuman actions. In addition to that, there is also the spiritual and supernatural intervention in the recovery of prosperity in the form of Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity in “Lokki Pala”, whose supernatural power reinstates prosperity and order to the community and proves the active roles of the divine forces in the life of people.

Nature-human relationship

The relationship between nature and humans is also a major theme in most of the stories. One of the best examples is the story of “Radhamohan and Dhanpudi”, where nature, mountains, and forests are the settings of their love and life. The experience that the characters go through in their landscapes portrays how close humans are to nature. Susanta Kumar Bardhan claims that “Radhamohan-Dhanpudi” is a nature-centric folktale (213). This folktale is the description of day-to-day life, like food items, culinary items, cuisine, the preparation of different types of bread known as 'pidhe' made of rice by Dhanpudi, folk games (Gila Khara, Nadeng Khara), weaving of clothes to be used personally (Pinon-Hadi), house structure (Mono Ghor), Jhum cultivation and harvest, celebration of sociocultural and religious festivals and rituals (worship of trees), agriculture-related rituals, marriage, Biju, and so on. These all have been described pictorially in the course of the description of the main story about the birth, growth, arousal of love, marriage, separation, and reunion of Radhamohan and Dhanpudi. All the pastoral features of lifestyle and

food habits still exist in a village of Chakma, and the oral speech replete with modern allusions and use of rhetoric becomes appealing to the people of the locality since they can effortlessly succumb to the reality-imaging synthetic discursiveness. Similarly, the creation myth in Creation implies a mutual relationship between the human beings and nature whereby animals, plants and people need each other to survive.

Gender Roles

The gender roles and social norms can be seen in the Chakma folktales in the way women are depicted in such stories as “Radhamohan-Dhanpudi” and the tragic story of “Tanyabir Firti”. Women such as Dhanpudi are usually regarded as objects of desire, and their marriage is not based on the feelings of the women, but rather it is dictated by the family interests. The opposition of Dhanpudi to her arranged marriage is suppressed by the societal pressure, which represents the lack of autonomy of women in patriarchal standards. Moreover, in Chakma folktales, it is interesting to note that women are supposed to perform domestic chores, cook and bring water, whereas men perform more adventurous and action-driven ones (Hattong, Jhum cultivation, fighting with ghosts and joining battles), which indicates the gendered division of labour.

Moreover, the love between Tanyabi and Pungchan in “Tanyabir Firti” is spoilt because of the social norms, and her unfortunate destiny emphasises the idea about women being oppressed by the social norms. These stories focus on the opposition between personal wants and social requirements, which demonstrates the fact that the lives of women are usually controlled by strict traditional rules that give more importance to family and communal position rather than individual liberty. These folktales are a manifestation of the gender norms that were more restrictive in the Chakma community in the past.

Furthermore, the folktales “Banbilash”, “Dhobi and Hobi”, “Amagad Chakma”, “Kumboleni”, and “Dulu Kumari” highlight the patriarchal society of the Chakmas. In “Banbilash”, Banbilash always has to come forward to protect his wife (the old man’s daughter) from the equipment of his mother. In the folktales of “Amagad Chakma”, “Kumboleni”, and “Dulu Kumari”, In the folktales of “Amagad Chakma”, “Kumboleni”, and “Dulu Kumari”, it is mentioned that men go to the jhum and go to the city for business, but the women stay at home. However, in some stories, it is mentioned that the women are forced to go to the forest alone to cultivate the fields due to pressure from their stepmothers and because they do not have sons. For example, in the stories of “Banbilash” and “Dhobi o Hobi”, the women have to go to the forest to cultivate the fields due to pressure from their stepmothers. Chakma folktales portray women as more jealous and scheming and engaging in more immoral activities than men. Such as women being enemies of women (torture from stepmothers and stepsisters), trying to kill other people’s children out of jealousy (queens seen involved in killing Kumboleni’s children), harming their own sister-in-law out of jealousy in “Dulu Kumari”, and so on. Overall, Chakma folktales portray women as jealous, scheming, weak, burdensome, and dependent on men, and men are portrayed as being masculine.

To sum up, Chakma oral folktales are depicted to possess the coherent mode of narration which starts with stability and moves to conflict and resolution, as in line with classical narrative theories. Their symbolic representations that are founded on nature, animals, and material culture are very vivid illustrations of Chakma identity, beliefs, and their daily lives. The themes of love, sacrifice, wisdom and intelligence, and spiritual intervention give the ethical context of the society. The other area of the gender roles and social norms which shaped the traditional Chakma society may also be traced in these stories. The teachings on ethics are delivered in readily convenient and

easy-to-recall formats in the form of animal fables and tales of supernatural occurrences. These stories revolve around the proximity between nature and human beings as the main aspect. Generally speaking, the Chakma folktales may be used as cultural archives, where values, beliefs, and historical experiences are stored.

Chapter 5: The Contemporary Condition, Challenges, and Strategies for Preserving Chakma Oral Folktales

Chakma oral folktales were traditionally valuable cultural documents and means of intergenerational transmission of collective memory, ethics and indigenous wisdom. These stories were founded on oral performance that served to bring a sense of social togetherness and culture among the Chakma people. However, the concept of modernisation, literacy and technological advancement has significantly altered the way people used to narrate a story. As the oral traditions are being gradually moved to the written form, it is threatened to be lost along with their performative and communal elements. The fact that the tradition of telling stories has faded through the generations has also undermined the folklore in the life of the Chakmas. At the same time, the efforts to maintain the culture are being expressed through selective adaptation through books, songs and films. The chapter dwells on the contemporary position of the Chakma oral folktales, the issues that present a threat to the survival, and possible preservation strategies.

5.1 The Contemporary Condition of Chakma Oral Folktales in Modern Communities

Oral storytelling has long been a cornerstone to knowledge transmission, cultural continuity and social unity throughout the Chakma people over centuries. The folktales used to be perennial, as they were used to transmit the values, cultural beliefs, history and life lessons that are orally taught across generations. Nevertheless, with the arrival of literacy, modernisation and the digital world, the presentation and spread of oral literature has undergone a transformed method of presentation and spread (Muchiri 78). The Chakma folktales fall under oral literature, but most of the folktales are currently in written form. Without any formal education centres, the most

common way through which knowledge was transmitted was the storytelling tradition. The main characters in the narration of stories that informed the children about their history, cultural identity, and moral standards were the elders, especially grandparents and trusted members of the society. These stories were commonly recounted in social events, matters of seasons and family ceremonies; hence, they formed a good oral connection between the generations. The role of oral folktales in everyday life today, however, has reduced drastically. One of the interviewees, Neeti Chakma states:

When my grandmother was alive, I heard folktales in the Chakma language from her, but now I have not seen anyone listening to or telling any folktales. Not everyone has the skills to organise and tell folk tales well. Usually, before social media, children used to listen to stories. Now in the media and technology era, the tradition of listening and telling stories is not seen. Moreover, in the past, some folk tales were adapted in written form and through film production, but now I do not see such adaptations anymore.

I agree with her since I grew up in the Chakma community. I believe that due to the emergence of media and digital technology, the young people of the Chakma are getting increasingly exposed to contemporary entertainment and communication. The younger generation are also becoming less attached to the traditional folktales, and they now favour the new media, which consists of television shows, movies and internet materials that are more inclined to appeal to world tastes. Muchiri also discusses such issues and states that storytelling sessions were substituted by television, movies, computer games, and other digital media (81).

On the other hand, one cannot deny the fact that, as modern technology continues to spread, at least some of the Chakma oral traditions have been adapted into the modern forms like books and films. Some of the Chakma folktales that were traditionally told orally have been preserved in

written form and can now be found in books. A few folktales have been translated into the Chakma language, and some have been translated into Bengali and English versions. Ananya Chakma is another interviewee who feels that in the process of preserving and spreading oral folktales, the publication of Chakma oral folktales in many other languages, including Bengali and English, is increasingly becoming significant in the learning about Chakma oral folktales. Although these are compromising the quality of authentic Chakma oral folktales, it remains one of the efforts to preserve the folktales.

Books are not the only media through which Chakma folktales are distributed among the youths; films have also come into play in the modern world. In preserving and adapting oral traditions, the Chakma film industry, though rather small, had its niche in transforming the traditional folktales into the form of the film. Such movies usually use famous Chakma stories, including the mythical tales of “Radhamohan-Dhanpudi” and “Dhobi and Hobi”, to turn them into movie scripts and thus put the old stories in action with the help of the onscreen narration. Song is another outstanding oral folktale transmission medium used in a modern context. Though the central plot of the Chakma oral folktale is not clearly followed in their songs, it is based on their characters, themes, and plots.

“মুই ওম তোৰ ৰাধামন তুই তবে মোৰ ধানপুদি ।

মুই ওম তৰ পুঞ্জধন তুই অবে মৰ পুঞ্জবি

গপ দিবং দিজনে সং সমাৰে হাই বুজি ”

I will be your Radhamohan, you will be my Dhanpudi

I will be your Punjadhan, you will be my Punjabi.

We will talk, sitting close together.

It is a love song to the Chakmas and has a reference to the characters of Radhamohan and Dhanpudi. Another popular song that is quite close to the story about Vijayagiri King that is found in the "Chadigang Chara Pala" folktale is “এন্তে এল এক রাজা বিজয়গিরি তার নাঙ”. Some of the lines of the song are:

এন্তে এল এক রাজা বিজয়গিরি তার নাঙ

সাত সমু সমু সৈন্য লই ছ রেদে

পার অলহ তে এক বর গাঙ

There was a king named Vijaygiri

With seven soldiers at night,

he crossed a great sea.¹³

5.2 Challenges in Preserving Chakma Oral Literature

According to Turin, oral literature is a disputed term that can be generally interpreted to refer to ritual literature, heroic poetry, folk narrative, creation myths, songs, mythology, magic, legends, proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters, recitations, and historical tales (174). Chakma oral folktales have complicated cultural, lingual, social, and technological problems in the modern period to preserve them. Even though these stories form an important part of a cultural heritage, including indigenous knowledge, moral and ethical principles, cosmological worldviews and

¹³ Translations are by the author of the thesis

social memory, their existence is now at risk. The challenges are a decline in traditional storytelling spaces and practices,

The decline in traditional storytelling spaces and practices is one of the major challenges. Chakma oral folktales have been spread in informal social gatherings in communal areas like household areas, jhum cultivation fields, village gatherings, and seasonal festivals historically. Storytelling served as a consumerist activity as well as a source of intergenerational connection and a vehicle by which to teach. But urbanisation, education and work migration, and the replacement of extended by nuclear families have broken such communal settings. An interviewee, Asalota Dewan, said that she was occupied with her work and her grandchildren were distant from her neighbourhood. Chakma's folktales were not told even during her interaction with her grandchildren. Her grandchildren are now young enough that they spend more time on their phones and studying. Moreover, Muchiri states that in modern society, storytelling sessions barely occur due to the stringent educational system of the student that is full of homework and due to the busy work schedules of the family members (79). The contemporary patterns of life that are characterised by the dominance of formal education, waged working and lack of time limit the possibilities of storytelling in leisure. Consequently, the young generations have not been exposed to folktales that were traditionally passed through natural and daily social interactions.

Turin states that the development of literacy in the major languages of the world through well-designed and significant national education programs can have the side effect of disenfranchising local cultures and weakening regional languages. Even nowadays, the government suppresses local languages and cultural traditions in the name of national unity as a measure of controlling the indigenous population and consolidating power in the center (175). In my view, the indigenous people of Bangladesh are trapped in a web that has no escape. Language

is not a medium of meaning but a necessary component of the meaning-making process. Nevertheless, younger speakers of Chakma are becoming more dependent on dominant languages because education systems favour these languages. According to Neeti Chakma (interviewee), “Chakmas study in Bengali and English in Bangladesh. As a result, most of us Chakmas cannot write with our alphabet, and many Chakma language words remain unfamiliar to many of us. This phenomenon causes us to lose curiosity in the books of Chakma. It is difficult to strengthen literature where there are weak areas in the language.”

Another challenge is lack of documentation, transcription and systematic archival programmes. The Chakma oral folktales are mostly orally passed down, depending on the recollection of the old folks and communal storytellers. Although the mode of transmission has been oral, it is prone to failure once the successive transmission is compromised. Chakma folktales have few institutional systems to document, archive, and translate them into written form. There are a few collections by community-based cultural institutions, but there are not that many collections available.

The influence of media and digital entertainment also creates significant obstacles. The last two decades have seen a revolution in the way stories are consumed by children and adolescents due to television, smartphones, social media sites and online games. Oral storytelling involves a social presence and participatory form of listening, whereas digital entertainment is about solitary passive consumption. Such popular global media as cartoons, animated movies, and YouTube content tend to drown out the indigenous story, redefining the imagination and moral systems of children. While there is potential for digital media to play a role in preservation based on good use, in reality, it replaces rather than nurtures local oral traditions where there will be no interest in learning or narrating Chakma folklore.

Directly connected to these problems is the overall process of cultural homogenisation. These aspects of nationalised education, mass communication, and mainstream cultural production tend to give preference to the dominant cultural discourse and marginalise the minority linguistic and cultural discourses. The Chakma folktales capture the indigenous worldviews, mythology, ethical norms and the connection with nature. Nevertheless, indigenous knowledge in the dominant cultural discourses tends to be depicted as secondary, backward and irrelevant to modern life. This puts some form of pressure on younger Chakma people to shed their cultural heritage in a bid to join the social and economic mainstream. As a result, the social prestige associated with folktales declines, making them less appealing to younger generations. Overall, the issues of Chakma oral folktale preservation are complex, which include the sociocultural transformation, changes in the language, alterations in technologies, and political marginality. Therefore, with community efforts, institutional encouragement, and government initiatives, Chakma folk literature can be saved from complete extinction.

5.3 Strategies for Preserving and Revitalising Oral Traditions

Oral traditions that include folktales, myths, songs, proverbs, and storytelling practices are the expressions of the collective memory, the world view, and the indigenous knowledge of the Chakma community. Nevertheless, their survival has been endangered by the speed of social change, modernisation, and changes in languages. Thus, the sustainable preservation strategies should involve the community-based efforts with the scholarly and technological frameworks to make sure that these traditions would have a sense and be available to younger generations. The views of my interviewed members towards the strategy are similar enough. Their view is that the Chakmas have to either make some initiatives by altering some of the policies based on the

government or go on to make some initiatives among themselves to help in preserving and revitalising their oral traditions. In general, I believe that the strategies that are to be followed are:

Strengthening the Chakma language

Preservation of language is closely connected to preservation of culture. Thus, it is also an important course of action to enhance the Chakma language. Oral traditions have a cultural meaning that is expressed in language-specific terms. Efforts on language can involve educating about the Chakma script and writing children's books and poems in the Chakma language. Oral traditions and literature naturally become alive when a language obtains a social value.

Oral tradition to be integrated into the formal and informal education

The next strategy can be the incorporation of oral traditions into formal and informal education. Schools could be instrumental towards change in cultural transmission by incorporating Chakma folktales and songs in school curricula, textbooks or other learning resources. In the article, “Preserving Traditional Ghanaian Folklore through Storytelling”, Felicia Asamoah-Poku provides the idea that workshops and seminars might be conducted to teach the educators about successful storytelling methods, i.e., voice modulation, gesture and pacing, to make sure that the storytelling sessions in the classroom are effective and productive. Because of this, teachers who were prepared through indigenous pedagogy are able to include storytelling, dramatisation, or reading sessions, which emphasise cultural values (310). In addition, the oral genres can also be taught to the children through informal learning environments, e.g., the weekend language classes, youth clubs, cultural camps, and so on. Such training does not only enhance the linguistic competence but also creates a cultural pride and intergenerational continuity.

Systematic documentation, archiving and institutional cooperation

Documentation is defined as audio-video recordings of the storytellers and transcription of the narratives in Chakma script, as well as translation of the narratives into other languages like Bangla and English. Archiving refers to the provision of easy-to-access repositories, be they physical or digital, where long-term storage is to take place. The community-based cultural centers, universities, and NGOs may coordinate to gather materials and create some digital libraries. The online archives are making it more available, and Chakma people outside the Chittagong Hill Tracts would be able to reclaim their culture. In addition, bilingual transcription assists not only the Chakma-speaking children but also the non-Chakma researchers to interact with the tradition.

Another relevant strategy is institutional cooperation. Inter-university, inter-researcher, inter-museum, inter-non-governmental organization, and cultural activist collaborations can offer documentation, exhibition, publication, and research resources. The recognition and opportunity can be offered by international cultural heritage programmes like the Intangible Cultural Heritage programme of UNESCO. The methodological rigour is also guaranteed by the collaboration of the academics, allowing the conducting of comparative studies, linguistic analysis, and folklore research that enhances the cultural legitimacy.

Revitalising storytelling as a community practice

The plan is to revive the practice of storytelling as a social activity. By the fact that oral traditions are based on performance and participation, they need to be sustained by socially significant circumstances to be preserved. Traditional settings where narrative exchange can be recreated can be achieved by cultural festivals, village gatherings and storytelling competitions. Storytellers also gain recognition by these events, which helps them in improving their social status. In addition, for performing in recording or language classes, storytellers can be hired and

paid to motivate them to continue with their work. Moreover, youth-orientated programmes, campfire storytelling nights, oral history circles, and many similar activities can be used to reintroduce oral traditions as fun community activities, as opposed to old traditions.

Utilising modern media and technology

Although the use of modern media and technology has reduced people's interest in old written or oral folktales, smart use of media and technology can help preserve Chakma oral tradition. For example, the Chakma folktales can be told differently by using social media platforms, YouTube channels, podcasts, animation, and mobile applications to change the way youth interact with them. Folktales may be transformed into stories, short films, audiobooks or animated series. In general, the preservation and renewal of Chakma oral traditions requires a multidisciplinary and holistic approach that would entail the concepts of documentation, education, community engagement, technological development, institutionalisation, and language restoration.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Chakmas are the largest ethnic group of Bangladesh with a rich cultural history, such as their own language, writing, social structure and religious practices in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Chakma people have an uncertain history of origin and multiple accounts which relate them to the ancient clan of Sakya. Their association with Buddhism is central to their culture, and their oral writing usually reflects such religious beliefs. Their folktales are closely related to the traditional practices, festivals and culture of the Chakma people, such as weaving, farming, and their family system of rule, which makes it important to preserve these aspects of culture. In the paper, the deep-rooted cultural and literary traditions of the Chakma people were given attention, especially the oral folktales of the Chakma people. This paper seeks to address the structures, the themes and the issues relating to the preservation and revitalisation of these tales. It has portrayed how such stories are carrying the social and moral context of the Chakma people. The oral folktales of the Chakmas, which are passed on through generations, are used as moral teaching tools, as a way of socialisation and passing on of cultural knowledge. Another aspect of oral storytelling that was analysed included the performance aspect, which involves the use of gestures, voice modulation, and body movements that supplement the story. This changing manner of narration of the stories does not only preserve the contents of the stories but also lets them develop with each of their adaptations of the time, changing with the cultural and social environment.

The paper highlighted the importance of storytellers, more so the elders who are the custodians of the oral culture of a given community, and they impress the audience with their emotive methods of narrating stories. This paper argues that Chakma folktales adapt to a consistent narrative structure, corresponding with Aristotle's framework of beginning, middle, and end, as well as Todorov's equilibrium model. This two-fold idea of analysis of narratives provides a

valuable insight into comprehending the framework of these folk tales. The model of equilibrium by Todorov will fit well into the cyclical pattern of the Chakma folktales, where an equilibrium is followed by disruption, undergoes a restoration process, and then followed by a new equilibrium. This structure is evident in many analysed folktales, such as “Radhamohan-Dhanpudi” and “Chadigang Chhara Pala”, where the narrative transitions from harmony to conflict and then reverts to a restored state of equilibrium.

The 15 folktales that are discussed in this paper give a wide view of various themes and motifs that characterise Chakma oral literature. The themes in these stories are varied and include love, sacrifice, wisdom and intelligence, human-environment and gender role relationships. “Radhamohan-Dhanpudi” is a love affair that portrays the self-sacrifice concept, as the love of Radhamohan for Dhanpudi is revealed through his action. In the folktale “Dhobi and Hobi”, The tales praise individuals who use their wit to conquer problems, therefore highlighting the importance of intelligence in Chakma society. Furthermore, the supernatural is also addressed by other folktales such as “Amagad Chakma” and “Why the Ghosts Are Frightened of a Dog?”, as ghosts and spirits are recurring themes therein. These narratives reveal the Chakma attitude, as the divine characters can be considered both the means of protection and the potential danger to be addressed in terms of ritualistic approaches and cultural expertise.

The concept of people changing into animals or other supernatural creatures is notable in various folktales. Animal characters like the Toad, the Tiger and the Tortoise are used in fables to provide moral lessons, such as that lying is bad, patience, and how to survive in difficult situations. The exploitation of nature as a setting and symbol, i.e., rivers, forests, and mountains, is a crucial motif of Chakma folktales. All of these natural elements have a symbolic meaning and reflect a border of life and death, security and danger, as well as the relationship between the human and

natural worlds. However, there are many difficulties in preserving these folktales. The advancement of modernisation, migration, and the degradation of the oral storytelling tradition are also destroying the tradition of culture. The young generation, which is becoming more technologically inclined and urbanised, is not that interested in learning and practising traditional storytelling. In addition, the Chakma language is also at risk since the young generation are embracing the use of the Bengali or English language. The fact that some of the folktales are not recorded in writing increases the likelihood of the stories being forgotten or lost.

The thesis provides alternative strategies that can be used to preserve and reawaken the Chakma oral tradition to address them. Documentation of folktales has taken a critical role in ensuring that the folktales are preserved to be used by the coming generations. Secondly, incorporation of folktales in the curriculum of schools at the community and national levels can be advisory to the younger generation about their culture. Third, contemporary media, such as film, television, and social media platforms, could be helpful in reaching a wider audience and keeping these stories useful in contemporary society. Lastly, encouraging the recitation of the folktales at the community meetings, festivals, and cultural gatherings can also help in the preservation and survival of the tradition. The Chakma oral folktales are relevant to the heritage of culture in the community. The folktales give extensive insights about the Chakma worldview and the values that define their civilisation, as well as their closeness to the natural and spiritual world. These stories need to be preserved to maintain the culture of the Chakma people and to pass the knowledge they carry to future generations. With the great pressure on preservation, the solutions provided in this paper present a means of reviving and protecting the oral traditions that are significant in the cultural survival of the Chakma community.

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