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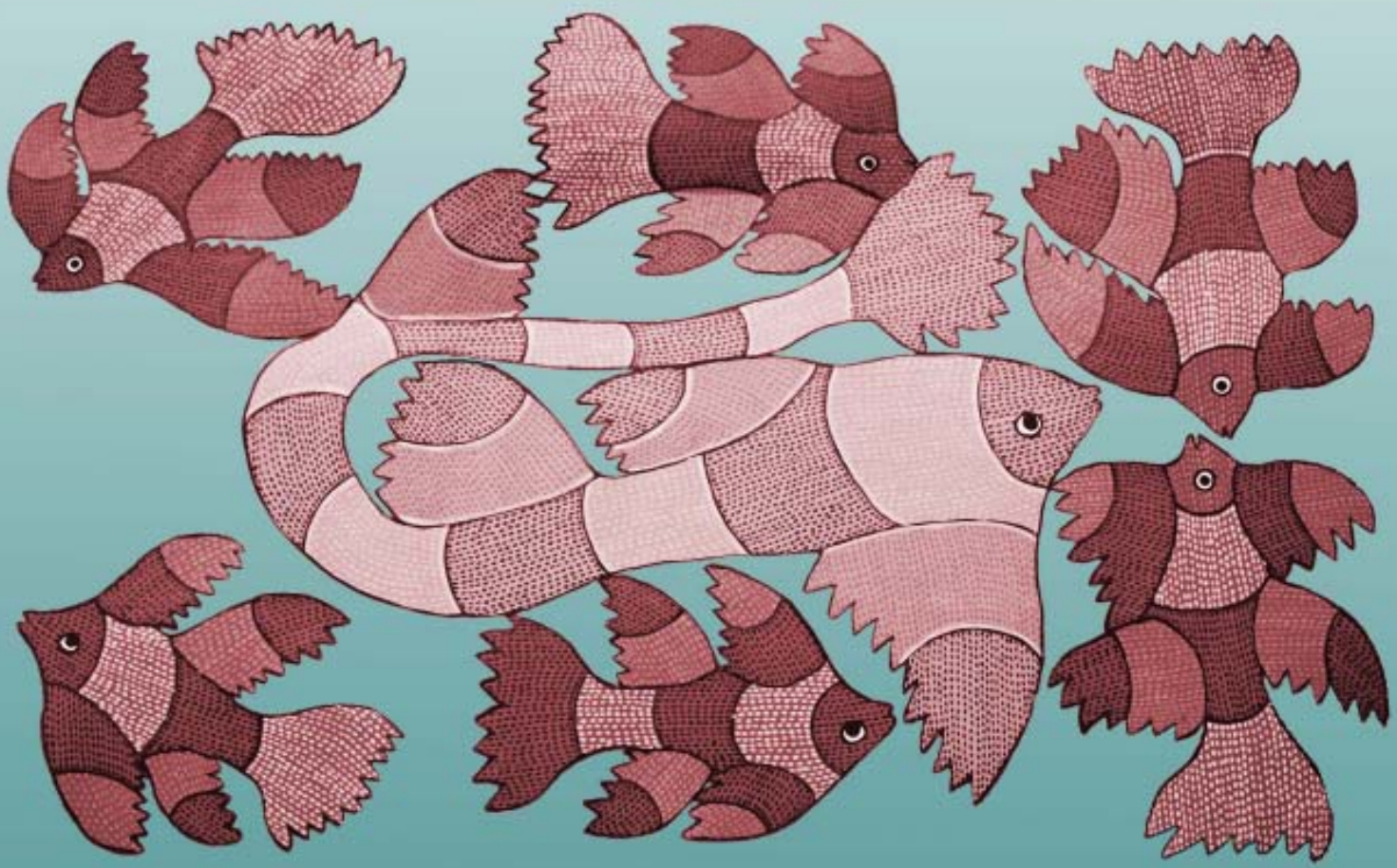

The Legend: Conceptual Issues and Pragmatics of Telling

Guest Editor: Kishore Bhattacharjee

National Folklore Support Centre

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All communications should be addressed to:

The Editor, *Indian Folklife*,
National Folklore Support Centre,
#508, V Floor, Kaveri Complex,
96, Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Nungambakkam, Chennai - 600 034 (India)
Tele/Fax: 91-44-28229192 / 42138410
info@indianfolklore.org, muthu@md2.vsnl.net.in

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The Legend: Conceptual Issues and Pragmatics of Telling

KISHORE BHATTACHARJEE

KISHORE BHATTACHARJEE, Folklore Research Department, Guwahati University, Assam, India Email: bhattkishore@yahoo.co.uk

Legends as a genre show extreme diversity. There are different types of stories ranging from family narratives to supernatural experiences or incidents, miracles, saints' life stories and short narratives about local history. Legends are micro stories and not mega narratives like myths or epics. Tangherlini's definition of the legend, which he has cited in the article published in this issue, is one of the standard definitions. In the international scene, the conversational context and short narrative composition of the genre and its attachment to belief and mythic knowledge have been noticed. It has been noted by Linda Dégh that legend collectors have not retrieved the conversations that encase legends and therefore indexes of meaning have been mutilated and that has made the task of interpretation further difficult.

Very little research has been done on Indian Legends. In Handoo's (1977) bibliography of Indian folk literature we find only a few entries on legends. R.C.Temple's work (1884-1900), Tod's study in Rajasthan, which incorporated legends of royal families along with other historical facts, and Elwin's (1943, 1944) studies are some of such rare works in the early stage of Indian folklore study. Folklorists in India have paid more attention to other genres of folklore. One of the reasons for that could be that legends served neither of the causes of colonial administration nor nationalists. Nevertheless, the legend is a genre that occupies an important place in Indian folklore system because it interconnects high and popular religion and describes popular views about nature, places, local history, social heroes and saints. Moreover, legends are closely connected with popular beliefs.

The expectation evoked by the genre among the Indian audience could be any story on the following themes: 1) black magic, 2) spirits of rivers, lakes and trees, 3) place names, 4) buried treasure, 5) origin of temples, 6) healers and wise folks 7) history seen by the people and 8) biographical anecdotes of saints' lives and 9) local heroes. There were some legends of poison robe related to the royal families where there was an anxiety about threat to life.

This classification is based on my fieldwork in Assam and Christensen's and Kvideland and Sehmsdorf's categories. However, I want to argue that two classes of European legends such as legends of 1) human soul, ghosts, and revenants and 2) supernatural spirits are not culturally regarded as legends in India. In the western conception of the legend the stories about these classes constitute a sizable part of the tradition. Christiansen presents 76 legend types and 43 types among them belong to these two classes. Kvideland and Sehmsdorf's half of the major divisions of the legend deal with such stories. In Assam, such stories are not specifically identified and they are considered as personal narratives or anecdotes, some of which are memorates. The elements of belief are present in such stories and fulfill the analytical criteria of the legend. A remarkable section of European legend corpus is connected with demonology, miracles and supernatural encounters. In India too, there are such stories; but, it is not certain whether in the ethnic genre systems of the country they are equivalent to the western concept of legend.

Christiansen thought that legends could hardly add to the knowledge of ancient gods communicated through mythology. However, temple legends in India can add immensely to the understanding of the interpretation of classical deities in popular religion and constitute a counter system (Bhattacharjee 2001). Crooke observes (1894) that, in Hindu popular religion, one notices the worship of godlings of nature, the heroic and village godlings of diseases, the sainted dead and also of the malevolent ghosts. However, he did not properly observe the interaction of popular religion with the practice of the high religion. Moreover, most of the place name legends are connected with myths and epics. Gods or heroes of epic–puranas appear in place name legends as major characters. The myths and religions in India are bestowed with different meanings, by the people in relation to their social and physical spaces, which are expressed in legends.

The study of legends by western scholars often confused legends with bardic traditions. They considered only the historical characteristics of the genre and neglected the length of the work. People too sometimes regard some stories containing historical information as legends, and some of them are sung. This is true in case of R.C. Temple's work in Punjab and later L.F.Rushbrook William's work in Kutch. Thus, there are certain differences among the scholars in India and the ones in the west. We have already observed that in the west, the legends are more involved with ghosts and spirits but, in India, it is supernatural incidents related to place, saints and kings that constitute majority of the legends.

In this issue authors have highlighted some major issues in contemporary legend research. Kirin Narayan shows that Indian family legends develop around the ancestors and they define family identity and shape course of action of the members in a latent way. She says that legend telling is also a type of performing kinship. Family legends also construct models for actions. These legends are couched in miraculous idioms. Timothy Tangherlini discusses the nature of the genre and various approaches of its interpretation. He distinguishes between historical content of legends and the external historical context of legend telling. Folklorists have paid attention to internal contents and neglected external performance contexts but for doing interpretative analysis, both are important.

Ülo Valk, in his paper says that it is difficult to collect legends because performance situations are not marked.

He says that legend is a particular way of perceiving the world. One of his interesting observations is that gods belong to the domain of myths and demons to the domain of legends. He also maintains that 'Genres are thus not mere literary or folkloric categories of classification but expressive forms of vernacular religion and of social life in its public and private forms'.

Similar to Kirin Narayan, Ulf Palmenfelt also focuses pragmatics of telling and its moral and social functions. He also deeply touches the narratological, communicative and existential issues connected with legends. He situates metamorphosis legend telling in the context of peasant lives and land conflicts.

Arunima Das discusses certain specimens of urban legends collected from a city of North-east India. Her research in Guwahati is probably first of this kind in India. It shows that at the global level, urban legends show similarity. Hari Saravanan, in his paper discusses about the subject of contemporary heroic legends. He also observes generic interactions. This shows that oral heroic legend as a genre can spill over to other artistic genres and create myths and graphic icons.

The study of Indian legends raises interesting points. The scholars who worked in India often identified legends based on their exaggerated/hyperbolic or miraculous historical content encased in the context of long bardic narrative. Those identifications were created by the colonial collectors. Secondly, there is no binary opposition between myths and legends as Ülo Valk has drawn in the case of the West. Finally, there are stories related to place, family, saints and local history which are identified by local words (which in many languages mean 'what is told or narrated', thus a neutral stand is taken about its believability) and they to a great extent conform to the western definition of the genre. Contents of epics or myths tickle down to Indian legends .On the other hand, legend as a genre also inspires resonance in other genres.

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Legends and Family Folklore

KIRIN NARAYAN

KIRIN NARAYAN, Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin—Madison

Kamlabai Ramji rarely spoke in plain sentences. She usually issued decrees. White sari pulled over her grey hair, eyes widened dramatically behind her black framed-glasses, hands gesturing in grand sweeps, Kamlabai commanded supreme family authority. When instructing her city-born grandchildren, she spoke a nasal mixture of Hindi and Gujarati tinged with the accent of her birth near Kathiawar forests. Since her marriage to a much older widower in 1925, she had lived in Nasik, Maharashtra. The legend that she most relished retelling, though, involved the desert region of Kutch and an ancestor from her husband's family.

"Khimji Bhagat was his father's only son," Kamlabai began. "His son too, Keshavji was an only son, with four sisters. Keshavji had three boys: Govindji-bappa, Devramji-bappa, and Ramji, your grandfather."

As Kamlabai pronounced these different numbers, she held up fingers: one, one four, three. Rows of dotted blue tattoos flashed from the back of her hands and the base of her wrists; a single blue tattoo marked the dimple in her chin. Slender gold bangles slid along her forearms.

"When Khimji Bhagat was young, his father sent him to guard the fields," Kamlabai recounted. "They grew millet—*javar* and *bajra*. He was supposed to keep cows away, but he called over the cowherds and the cows. He said, 'Let the cows eat today,' and the cows ate until the crop was all finished. His father was furious, but Khimji Bhagat said, 'You will get at least twice that amount of grain.'"

I leave Kamlabai's outstretched fingers frozen in motion and the story unfinished to step back and view such a story as a folklorist, anthropologist, and writer evaluating data. Family legends like this narrative of Khimji Bhagat are one of the key arenas in which most people first learn about their identity and roots. Family stories have been discussed and theorized by folklorists, historians, sociologists, and of course family therapists; they have also inspired uncountable memoirs and novels. Many ethnographies, oral histories and life histories contain family stories, whether through summarized allusions, unpacked portions of narrative, or just a few lines in a preface. As an unmarked category, though, such stories can sometimes seem hidden in plain sight: lodged in interstices, alluded to as background. Highlighting family stories in this special issue on legends, my hope is to bring these multi-facetted gems of personal and collective identity into closer focus.

By family story, I mean stories told by and about family members, though there is clearly a wide and culturally inflected range to whom is included in the family and the kinds of stories told. Family stories might include reminiscences of events that the speaker has personally observed; oral history and legends passed along through generations; and myths that index a family's relationship to supernatural or divine beings. Mody Boatright, a pioneer in the study of what he terms "the family saga" points out that such stories are "an important source of living folklore—a folklore that can be collected with relative ease. Each generation produces a few collectors or raconteurs of the family lore" (1958:19). Zeitlin, Kotkin and Baker write in their groundbreaking *A Celebration of American Family Folklore*, "A family generally believes its stories to be true, at least in part, for they are a rendering of history in which it has a definite stake" (1982:10). Elizabeth Stone summarizes some of the dimensions of family stories in her *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins: How Family Stories Shape Us*:

> They provide the family with esteem because they often show family members in an attractive light or define the family in a flattering way. They also give messages and instructions; they offer blueprints and ideals; they issue warnings and prohibitions. And when they no longer serve, they disappear (1986:5).

FAMILY LEGENDS AS MODELS OF IDENTITY AND CLAIMS TO STATUS

As a folklorist-in-training, while still a graduate student, I first encountered a family legend in the field when interviewing 'Swamiji,' the bemused, tobacco-chewing "*agaram-bagaram* Baba" who instructed his visitors through folk narratives. Swamiji was recalling his childhood, telling me how, after his mother died when he was a child, he was sent to live with his mother's relatives near Mysore. Beside this home was a *samadhi* shrine containing the clothes of a saintly ancestor:

> There was a man; my mother's mother's father's father [Swamiji counted these off on his fingers, then raised his hand.] Four generations. At the time of leaving his body he became invisible. I didn't *see* this, I just heard it. What happened is that he sat to perform worship [*puja*]. He was wearing ochre. It was the month of Dhanu—November, December—on a full moon day. And in the middle of doing his worship, he began to ascend. He rose up into the sky as the people were sitting and watching. Then the ochre clothes he was wearing fell down, but not his body. They made a *samadhi* with these clothes. There, in my mother's grandfather's house. The *samadhi* still stands today (Narayan 1989:185).

Many years later, that same winter full moon marked the morning when Swamiji recognized a Goddess in Maharashtra as having appeared to him in childhood, inspiring him to settle near her mountain temple. Commenting on this legend, I remarked, "Though Swamiji does not directly connect his *sannyas* to the saintly ancestor, this man is probably among the models that orient Swamiji's view of his role and life" (1989:185). I was beginning to understand how personal values and orientations towards the world are deeply inscribed through family repetitions of such legends.

Yet, as Komal Kothari has pointed out in his inspiring conversations with Rustom Bharucha, as family legends are passed along, the perspective on them may shift. His grandmother, for example, told a story about his great-grandfather, the Diwan of Ratlam state, who had assisted a younger Prince in taking over the throne: helping him plot to send the older brother away, to murder the King, and to bribe British officials as the case for succession steered through the courts. While Komal Kothari's grandmother told this story with great appreciation for the great-grandfather's intelligence and attention to details, the folklorist himself took the contrary view of this as a conspiracy (Bharucha 2003:27). The fixity of family models, then, might shift across generations.

Kothari also recollects that this same great-grandfather was later accused of embezzlement and jailed for 18 years; afterwards, he was compensated with Rs. 1 lakh for every year that he had been wrongfully imprisoned, "a fortune at the time" (2003:27). As Zeitlin, Kotkin and Baker have observed that families "hold on to episodes which mark the upheavals and sharp changes in their history" (1982: 15). Based on interviews with students, Stanley Brandes (1975) found that spectacular missed opportunities for great fortunes is a favorite theme in many American family stories, helping explain away class status as lower than hoped for; he called these "family misfortune stories" but observed that these were less prevalent among minority groups who did not see themselves as having access to the same opportunities. It would be interesting to undertake a comparative study with Indians of different backgrounds too learn how often, and in what manner, family legends recalled turning points in class or caste status.

FAMILY LEGENDS AS PERFORMING KINSHIP

Geneologies and kinship charts provide maps of relationships; family stories, however, infuse such connections with personal meaning. In the course of researching women's oral traditions in Kangra, the Northwest Himalayas, I found that while kinship is mostly reckoned patrilineally, many women told long narratives about the suffering of their female ancestors as part of their own life stories. Meena Rana, a woman in her late 30s with gapping front teeth and shouting good humor, for example, started telling of her own life with a long story about her Masi, or mother's sister. Meena spoke with her aunt-in-law Tayi, a young daughter, and me all listening in and interjecting questions and comments, Meena described how her Masi's difficulties began when Masi was just 16 and her husband's mother died.

> After his mother died, she used to appear everyday, pleading, "Come with me, come with me!" (*Tayi: A shadow appearing in a dream*). A shadow in a dream.
>
> Then one day, as though the dream was real, she actually appeared. She came and stood at the door. (*Kirin: Your Masi saw her too?)* Yes, my Masi too saw her Sas, her mother-in-law. She says that she had her head covered.
>
> In the past, there was no electricity, and people used kerosene lamps. So the mother-in-law came in, and it's said that also there was a metal pot of water

there. She came in and overturned the lamp as well as the metal pot full of water.

Then after that, in a few days, my Masadji [Masi's husband] died. (*Kirin: All of a sudden?)* All of a sudden. He vomited up blood and that was it. Finished. He had no illness and he just died.

Meena went on from this chilling supernatural episode to recount how, after this sudden death, the husband's older brother would not give the young widow food to eat, a place to live, or fields to farm. He even said that the real widow had run away and this woman was an impostor. But Meena's Masi persevered for her rights, bringing in her own father to speak on her behalf, and when that didn't work, going to court. As an Rajput widow, notions of female chastity and family honor set remarriage for her in a 1930s village out of the question. By her late 20s, she was eking out a living and decided to adopt a child. That child was two-year old Meena, one of three small girls who Meena's exhausted mother offered to her sister to choose from. "I called her 'Amma' mother," Meena recalled. "I didn't even know she was my aunt until much later."

Meena appeared to be holding up her aunt as an exemplar of integrity, endurance and ingenuity. In emphasizing this connection, she also reoriented her own self-worth from being a pesky "extra" daughter to becoming a cherished transmitter of such admirable female qualities. So, in telling her aunt's story rather than her mother's, Meena reformulated and imaginatively activated certain kinship ties over others. Such family legends, then, reveal more about how kinship is experienced than how it might be routinely reckoned.

FAMILY LEGENDS AS MORAL INSTRUCTION

Family legends can also be passed along outside a family to make a point that carries the authority of personal connection. For example, in 2002, I visited the same village and accompanied Meena on a condolence visit to a family whose 30-year old son had been tragically killed in a tractor accident, leaving a 24-year old widow and two small daughters . We met with the man's parents downstairs, and then we climbed the steep steps to the upper story where the young widow sat somberly hunched by the adobe hearth, preparing tea. Meena briskly squatted beside her.

"Don't cry, child!" she commanded in a comforting, take-charge voice. "You have children, you have a family: a mother-in-law, a father-in-law, a younger-brother-in-law." From there, Meena launched into a summary of her Masi's tale.

I had a Masi who was widowed when she was just 16 and she had no one. In those days, they married girls off so young. She didn't have any support, poor thing: *she* didn't have a husband or children, or a father-in-law or a mother-in-law. She had one older-brother-in-law who would not give her anything to eat. She raised a sheep and sold its wool, she farmed a bit of land and she made her living. She's the one who brought me up! It was she who arranged my marriage.

"Look at all that *you* have: a whole family, and your little girls," Meena concluded, taking the young woman's hand. She clearly intended the story as a form of comfort through contrast, showing how things could be worse. For me, overhearing a version of this previously taped tale was a reminder of how lives are transacted in many social contexts beyond the interviews privileged by microphone-brandishing fieldworkers.

But, as Kothari again reminds us, when family stories leave the defining family unit, they may be heard as carrying an altogether different message. He recounts how a low-caste Bhambhi boy in the village of Borunda talked with pride about how his great grandfather had served the *jagirdar* as a postman, walking all over the district for twenty years without payment. Kothari recalls being sympathetic on hearing of such exploitation, which angered the boy: "What are you talking about? Why don't you see that my great grandfather was capable of walking forty-two miles every day? Don't you see what strength he possessed? Why are you talking about money?" (2003:28).

FAMILY LEGENDS AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Family legends often carry the aura of particular places. I now return to Kamlabai Ramji's legend of her husband's ancestor, Khimji Bhagat, who had disobeyed his father's instructions to guard the fields in Kutch, instead encouraging cows to feast on the grain.

"The next year there was a drought," Kamlabai continued to her grandchildren. "Even then, the millet in our fields sprouted. It sprouted three times—people ate, animals ate, the birds ate and the insects ate. No one else in the village had a crop that year but because of our fields, they ate."

The motif of the holy person causing food to miraculously multiply is well known across religious traditions. Kamlabai, though, fixed this motif to a particular place, much as her husband and his brothers had in 1899 returned to their village with funds earned in Bombay to build a temple in their grandfather's honor: *Khimji Duvaro*, the Doors of Khimji, in Bhorara, Kutch.

Kamlabai concluded these surprising events with Khimji Bhagat now extracting himself from family responsibility to devote himself to singing God's name. "Then Khimji Bhagat said to his family, 'Take this, it's for all of you. Now let me go free, so I can sing to God.' He sang *bhajans* praising Ram. His Guru was Ramananda Swami, who lived in Kandagra, the place in Kutch where our *kul-devata*, our family deities live too."

Kamlabai had never lived in Kutch; her husband had moved to Bombay as a 12-year old seeking work and had not lived in Kutch since about 1876. Yet decades later, Kamlabai reinforced the family's association with Kutch and the family deities resident there by regularly invoking the living presence of this spiritually minded ancestor. With migration, places retain their imaginative salience for family members partly through such legends. I have found this to be true not just among families who have migrated across regions of India, but also for members of the South Asian diaspora (cf. Narayan 2003). Family legends then, are an important node in the lived experience of cultural geography.

FAMILY LEGENDS AND SCHOLARLY REFLEXIVITY

A final aspect of family legends I would like to address is: what about the stories in a scholar's own background? If including reflexive perspectives in scholarship has been dismissed as navel-gazing, attention to one's own family stories might well seem like a brandishing of umbilical cords. But to ignore the range of stories that we ourselves carry, as family members, is to miss a precious resource in a situation where we already have privileged insight and rapport. Further, we might gain understanding into the reasons we are drawn to particular topics rather than others.

How does it change a readers' understanding of the previous story to know that I was among Kamlabai's grandchildren who so often heard her tell the story of Khimji Bhagat. I draw here on words I wrote down in a notebook over 25 years ago, when I was a student. I knew Kamlabai as "Ba," a vibrant source of stories. Khimji Bhagat was present in a painted photograph in a gold frame among the deities in Ba's puja. A traveling photographer who came through the village in the 1880s had originally taken a photograph of Khimji Bhagat and his *bhajan mandali*, or group of singing companions. For the painted version, though, he was alone. He wore a white turban slanted from right to left over his forehead, a cloth over his left shoulder, a long-sleeved *kurta* tied in the front, a *dhoti* of fine white cotton wrapped around his legs. Three white Vaishnava *puja* marks slanted up his forehead, and a long *mala* of sandalwood beads hung down below the bulb of the one-stringed musical instrument or *ektara* which he played as he sang. He was so old that his cheeks hung slack and dented, his forehead was wrinkled, and his eyes looked out as though disoriented by the act of being photographed. Still, he carried a calm self-containment. Ba said that if you prayed to him, 'Oh Bappa, have compassion,' even now, he would grant boons.

Ba brought out this legend of Khimji Bhagat on many different occasions. I suspect that she drew on this legend as an assertion of privileged spiritual genealogy and a claim to status for upwardly mobile Gujarati immigrants to Maharashtra. The legend also performed kinship, demonstrating how an in-marrying wife might take on the identity of a patrilineage. Further, the legend was a form of moral instruction, reminding us that religious devotion made for a higher logic than worldly concerns. The legend also tied us to Kutch, regardless of whether we lived in Nasik, Bombay, or Madison, Wisconsin.

In retrospect, with a family model like Khimji Bhagat, was it any wonder that the central subject of my Ph.D dissertation was a delightfully eccentric holy man? For all scholars, it is worth reflecting on how the creative energy generated by the family legends we absorbed long before we learned interview methodologies might unconsciously direct our research choices and our writings.

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Rhetoric, Truth and Performance: Politics and the Interpretation of Legend

TIMOTHY R. TANGHERLINI

TIMOTHY R. TANGHERLINI, The Scandinavian Section and The Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, University of California, Los Angeles.

No single interpretive approach—performative, historical, textual—can be successful in elucidating the range of meanings produced for tradition participants by the performance of a legend.[1] Rather, an approach that fuses the advances made in the study of oral narrative over the past several decades, one that is based not only on a detailed consideration of the historical, ethnographic and performative contexts of a specific legend, but also on a rigorous examination of the text itself is most likely to lead us to a better understanding of the meanings created by the legend teller for himself and his original intended audiences and other, often later, unintentional audiences. I label such an approach to the interpretation of legend the "synthetic approach" (Tangherlini 1994).

Legends, whether in current circulation or conscribed to the dusty confines of the archive, reveal a great deal about the tradition participants and their relationship to each other and the world around them. In earlier work, I have proposed that legend be characterized as "a traditional, (mono) episodic, highly ecotypified, localized and historicized narrative of past events told as believable in a conversational mode" (Tangherlini 1994, 22; see also Dégh 2001, 23-97). In that work, I further suggested that legend reflects the collective values of the group to whose tradition it belongs, a suggestion which points directly at the deeply political nature of these folk narratives (Tangherlini 1994, 22).

For many years, scholars of legend were stuck on trying to define quite precisely the boundaries of the genre and its alleged subgenres (Dégh 2001). Significant scholarly ink has been spilled on delineating various subgenres of the legend and developing typologies for the genre (see, for example, Christiansen 1958 and Dahll 1972). This futile division of legend into ever smaller subcategories led to a theoretical overdetermination of the genre and obscured the more important considerations of why tradition participants tell, remember and retell these monoepisodic believable narratives (Dégh 2001, 97). To get around this endless hair-splitting, Linda Dégh proposes that "the legend is a legend once it entertains debate about belief" (2001, 97). The idea that legend is based on a dialectic tension, centering on what is believed in a community, is of paramount importance. Belief is intimately related to cultural ideology—the norms, values and expectations of a particular cultural group. But belief is hardly static; the requirement for legend is that it be believable; it does not need to be believed.

In any community, belief exists on a sliding scale—while narrators tend to perform legend as "true," they themselves might not be fully invested in the truth of the account. The "truth" of the account may reside more in its relationship to the ongoing negotiation of cultural ideology that informs the give and take of the performative context of the legend. The "believability" of the legend, on the other hand, offers the story a degree of rhetorical weight and sets it apart from many other folk narrative genres, most notably the overtly and deliberately fictional folktale, and imparts to it a considerable amount of cultural and, by extension, political importance in a tradition group (Dégh 20001; Dégh and Vázsonyi 1971; Holbek 1987; Grimm and Grimm 1816). Because of the rhetorical weight of legend, as an expression of something that "might well have happened," the stories can become a significant component of an individual's political behavior, informing his or her actions as they negotiate daily life in communities and organizations. Tradition participants also deploy legends to sway others' actions, often to align with the narrator's own goals. Often these goals have a strong economic or political component to them (Tangherlini 1998b). Neither the economic implications nor the political impact of legend should be underestimated. These stories are deployed incessantly in economically charged encounters, in local politics, in international politics and in everything in between; they can have a profound effect on the way in which people behave.

The performance of legend—be it in a face-to-face interaction or, in more recent times, in an electronically mediated performance forum such as email—offers an opportunity for a teller to probe and perhaps redefine the boundaries of the cultural ideology of the tradition group. The groups' ideology—however abstract and amorphous it may be—is presumably shared by the performer and his or her interlocutors, and legends are often told to confirm this shared ideology. In fact, it is the indeterminate and fluid nature of such ideology that requires group members to tell stories (and engage in other types of expressive behavior) to each other to confirm, define and shape it. This reshaping of ideology does not happen all at once—rather the repeated tellings of stories within the group, and the variation of strategies and the outcomes of those strategies across repeated tellings have a cumulative effect—cultural change is often slow and takes place over considerable time. At its best, this negotiation of the parameters of cultural ideology can bind members of a community together and affirm the group identity of the tradition participants. Such a negotiation of ideology can also serve to delimit clearly in-group and out-group membership. At its worst, then, this negotiation of ideology can lead to exclusiveness,

xenophobia and even genocide. As such, the telling of legend should be considered a deeply political act.

Legend telling is never solely a positive or negative force in a community. Although the telling and retelling of legends can provide a sense of shared identity, solidarity and a confidence that other group members would act the same way as the teller in a particular situation, these repeated tellings can also lead to serious divisions within and between groups. In the worst instances, they can lead to ruptures of profound historical proportions (to wit the role of storytelling in the recent genocide in Rwanda, where stories about Tutsi and Hutu tended to dehumanize the other group, and allowed for the wholesale slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people (Gourevitch 1999; see also Tangherlini 1995)). Not surprisingly, in-group membership and out-group threat are topics explored frequently in legend. One should not forget that individuals are always members of multiple communities, be those communities defined nationally, ethnically, locally, vocationally or avocationally, and each of these groups has their own ideologies—sometimes these align, and at other times these do not; as such an individual might also use their storytelling to reconcile some of the contradictions implicit in multiple group membership.

Not all tradition participants "hear" a legend the same way. And people from other tradition groups may "hear" the story a completely different way. Stanley Fish (1980), in his now classic essay, "Is there a text in this class," explores how different "interpretive communities" can understand an ambiguous utterance in myriad ways, yet still communicate successfully. The same types of ambiguities of meaning exist in our understanding of legend—different communities, different historical contexts, and different performative settings can all influence the manner in which a legend will be understood. Because of these complexities, the best we as folklorists can hope for, through our analysis of legend performances, is to delineate how and why tradition participants—both active and passive—decide to tell, remember and retell the stories that they do.

More often than not, studies of legend focus on a legend type (for example, stories of changelings ML5085) or a group of closely related legend types (for example, stories of ghosts ML4000-4050), usually limited to the stories from a single national or language group. In other cases, the stories are limited to those collected in a specific locality, or collected from a single individual (see for example Pentikaïnen's study on Marina Takalo's repertoire (1978)). Only on occasion is the main organizational principle stories collected by a single collector during a well-defined period in a well-defined area (see Palmenfelt 1993 and Tangherlini 1994). In almost all cases, legends are not treated as discrete performances, but rather in an agglomerative fashion reminiscent of Levi-Strauss's paradigmatic structuralism. The best case would examine legends as discrete performances but also as part of the broader folklore repertoires of multiple narrators from a diverse, yet linguistically and culturally related area, set against a thick understanding of the historical, political, social and economic forces that influence day to day life, and coupled to a clear understanding of the backgrounds and motivations of the collector or collectors. Of course, there are numerous significant barriers to the development of this ideal type of study.

Toward a synthetic approach to the interpretation of legend

The great diversity in the quality of the collections that are available for study poses one of the greatest challenges to the consistent interpretation of legend. Archival recordings made during the nineteenth century in Europe, despite being voluminous, were seen in the 1970s by many students of more recent folklore theory as highly suspect, given the often nationalistic motivations of the collectors, and the lack of any information about the storytellers or the performance contexts. By contrast, many more recent collections of legend, despite being wedded to significant micro-contextual information and despite being meticulously recorded and transcribed using audio and video tape recorders, suffer from their idiosyncratic nature. Even in the best cases, contemporary collections rarely include the performances of more than a few dozen storytellers.

This diversity in the quality of legend collections does not preclude interpretation—it simply means that one often has to supplement the initial collection with appropriate archival, historical, ethnographic or comparative material, and that one must also be careful to properly qualify conclusions. In the case of early archives, it is possible to situate the tellings in a appropriately rich historical and ethnographic context—while we may not be able to figure out how the story was performed, we might well be able to understand why the story had currency when it did. Similarly, in the case of more recent recordings, we may well be able to use certain performative clues to understand more fully the relationship of the story to the broader contours of its contemporaneous tradition. In either case, wedding an understanding of historical context, developing a rich ethnographic context, and reanimating the performative context all provide fertile intellectual ground for understanding how we should interpret the text itself.

The Importance of Historical contexts

The role of history in the study of legend has, since the inception of the scientific study of folklore, been a significant one. One need only consider the Grimms' differentiation of the legend and folktale, and their well known statement that the "legend is more historical" (Grimm and Grimm 1816). This early emphasis on the connection between legend and history led many scholars on a wild goose chase, with endless quests for the historical kernel that hypothetically animated each legend narrative. As it turns out, legend does not map onto historical fact. Nevertheless, situating legend historically is a crucial component of interpretation. Not only do legends refer to believable (albeit not necessarily factually true) past events and but they are also performed in historical time. As such, there are two dimensions to the historical context of legend. On the one hand, there is the historical context of the purported events (internal historical context). On the other hand, there is the historical context of the performance (external historical context). Interestingly, most studies of legend tend to privilege one of these contexts over the other. So, for

instance, many studies of contemporary legend explore aspects of recent historical phenomena and their relationship to the story. By contrast, studies of legends collected in the nineteenth century, for example, tend to focus more on the internal historical context, rather than the external performative context of the legends, even in cases where the internal historical context is significantly earlier than the external historical context. While part of this emphasis is attributable to the lack of significant performative information about the stories, there is in all cases adequate documentation of this external historical context. Accordingly, there is little reason for this external context to be ignored.

The internal historical context of legends can be somewhat more complex to pin down than the external historical context. In some cases, the historicization of the events in a legend is an expression of narrative choice. At times, this choice is quite deliberate, and often imbued with local political implications. Understanding those local political implications requires an understanding of the external historical context. This choice of historical setting can influence significantly audience reception of and understanding not only of the story itself, but the narrator's implicit commentary on aspects of the chosen historical period. So, for instance, a narrator can choose to situate a story about a threatening band of marauders from another ethnic group in the immediate past, thus stirring up among her audience an immediate fear of that group (and perhaps spurring them on to action), while another narrator may choose to situate a similar story about the same threatening group in the distant past, thus allowing the audience to perhaps muse on the much better relations that exist between the groups currently. Or, by contrast, such a choice can also serve to legitimate the "historical nature" of the conflict. One need only look at the recent conflicts in the Balkan states for examples of such a deployment of legend.

In certain cases, the narrator has no such latitude concerning the internal historical context. For instance, legends that tell of seventeenth century Danish witchcraft trials are wedded to that historical period, just as legends about the falsification of the Apollo moon landing are wedded to the late 1960s and early 1970s. These legends have a fixed historical referent—it would make little sense to propose that certain events happened at significantly different time, unless the one wanted to suggest a revision of otherwise well-known chronologies. Yet, there is a certain fluidity that creeps into these accounts, in which stories from one period are historicized to fit the parameters of another period. In any event, understanding the internal historical context and the implications of that context in light of the external historical context is an essential component of interpreting legend. Why, for example, would people in the 1890s tell stories about events that transpired in the 1660s? Or, why would people in 2004 tell stories about events that transpired (or didn't transpire, according to the stories) forty years earlier? We are remiss as folklorists if we ignore one historical context in favor of the other.

Ethnographic and Performance contexts

Clifford Geertz in a now classic essay explores the concept of thick description (Geertz 1973). Surprisingly, few studies of legend have attempted to situate the stories in an ethnographically thick description of the cultural environment in which the stories are told and heard. Legends have frequently been mined as a resource for ethnographic information, and are often used somewhat uncritically to describe not only folk belief but also folk practice. The interrelationship between legend and any number of other expressive forms in a particular culture is an equally important, although frequently overlooked, consideration.

The thick description of a cultural group can be a fairly daunting undertaking. Nevertheless, it is important to understand the role that legend plays in the day-to-day lives of the tradition participants. Is the telling of a legend an unusual occurrence, or is part of the constant banter between people? What other types of expressive forms exist within the group? What are the interrelationships not only between the different forms, but also the active and passive tradition participants for each of those forms?

Ethnographic context is also closely linked to performative contexts and it may be misleading to separate the two. I do it here in the more in the sense of macro context (ethnographic) and micro context (performative), rather than as a suggestion that the performance of legend is not an ethnographically significant event.

During the 1970s and 1980s, in large part due to the pioneering work of Dell Hymes (1975) and Richard Bauman (1977), among others, a great deal of attention was placed on the performance of folkloric expression. Inexplicably, this attention to performance led to a bifurcation in many American folklore programs between textual scholars and performance scholars. Such an overemphasis on one or another aspect of folkloric expression is counterproductive. Indeed, there would be no performance without the text, and without the performance there would be no text. That said, early collections of legend often erased nearly all vestiges of the performance and in so doing, made the task of understanding who told these stories to whom and when seemingly impossible. Despite this significant hurdle, it is in many cases possible to reanimate the archive and to develop a sense of the performance of the stories recorded there. By the same token, contemporary recordings are not necessarily any better than these earlier recordings—to wit the numerous student collections that have formed the basis of relatively recent studies of legend often had little or no information about the actual performance of the story (Brunvand 1981).

Aspects of performance context such as location and time of the event, the number, age and gender of the people present along with linguistic features of the telling such as intonation, volume and pacing are of considerable significance in our understanding of a legend. In addition, paralinguistic and kinesthetic features of the telling itself should also play a significant role in how we understand a particular legend text in context.

Text and Structure

The legend text itself is still the most important component of any legend performance. I have already established that the study of the text without a consideration of external and internal historical contexts, an appreciation of micro and macro ethnographic contexts, and a consideration of the performative event

is unlikely to help us understand why someone told a legend at a particular time to a particular person or group of people. At the same time, it is important to develop an approach to the study of the texts that allows for consistency across multiple variant texts and multiple legend types. There have been significant developments toward the study of legend text that offer the promise of reproducibility (in other words, others can approach the text with the same methodology and derive the same results), based primarily on the study of linguistic structure of the accounts. William Labov and Joshua Waletzky's approach to personal experience stories has been adapted successfully by numerous legend scholars, most notably William Nicolaisen (1987) and Lisa and Robert Christensen (Christensen and Christensen 2001; see also Tangherlini 2003). The six part scheme of abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda is not only applicable to legend, but also helps delineate areas of significant meaning-bearing import in the particular narrative. In the orientation, the narrator chooses the in-group for the story—usually people whose background is very similar to that of the tradition participants. The complicating action propose an out-group and a specific form of threat to the in-group. How the in-group member reacts to the threat can be seen as a representation of a strategy for dealing with this type of encounter. In legend, the encounters tend to be extreme, but can be extrapolated to less extreme examples that are common in everyday life. The resolution—positive, negative or neutral—reflects the narrator's attitude toward the chosen strategy. So, to cite an almost ridiculous example, if a person angrily confronts an alien in a legend, only to have his head torn off, the suggestion is rather clear that the narrator does not endorse that particular strategy for dealing with out-group members.

Textual ideology—storytelling strategies and the politics of legend

Michel de Certeau, in his work, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1985), suggests that storytelling represents repertoires of schemes of action. Through storytelling, individual tradition participants can explore how they would react—and try out different reactions—to various, hypothetical, often extreme, situations (Tangherlini 2000). The telling of stories among friends, colleagues, relatives, or other community members, allows for the negotiation of strategies to deal with the potential threats that any group perceives in their surroundings (Tangherlini 1998a and 2000). Understanding the historical basis for these threats and reactions, and situating the storytelling in a thick ethnographic context, allows folklorists to approach the interpretation of the actual text in a manner that is most likely to yield the best understanding of the range of possible meanings of the particular performance.

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Endnotes

[1] I refer to the people who participate in these performances as "tradition participants," a modification of von Sydow's well known concept of active and passive tradition bearers. Von Sydow's concept of tradition bearer proposes a static view of tradition, as something that can be carried. My refinement acknowledges the performative nature of tradition—tradition only exists because people tell, listen and retell the things they hear. As with von Sydow, I readily acknowledge that some people are more active than others in their participation in a particular aspect of traditional expressive culture. For a further discussion of this, see Tangherlini 1994, 30-33.

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Eyes of Legend: Thoughts about Genres of Belief

Ülo Valk

Ülo Valk, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore University of Tartu Estonia

Folklore genres are verbal channels and modes of communication that can be conceptualized from two perspectives: from the point of view of the community to whose traditions they belong and from that of the researchers whose analytical schemes provide us with different insights into oral performances and their recordings. Whereas it is easy to identify some genres, such as fairy tales and epical songs, as their performances are clearly marked, it is much more difficult to trace the spread and circulation of beliefs that tend to remain latent as ideas, images and attitudes. Beliefs form a collective mental resource that can take a variety of forms, if expressed - as rituals, customs, norms of behavior, visual symbols, works of art and verbal statements or narratives. Many people tell short stories about supernatural encounters and share their own experiences with others. Although they often lack a special vernacular term to denote such narratives, folklorists have identified them as legends. It seems that recognizing legends as a part of folklore needs a certain distance from the tradition group whose world perception and mode of thinking are shaped by the genre that mediates and confirms belief. Mikhail Bakhtin and Pavel Medvedev have written about the "eyes of genre" as a certain kind of world outlook and a way of conceptualizing social and physical reality (1991: 133). Seeing the world and representing it take place both in literary and oral genres.

Legends provide people with interpretation models of situations of uncertainty and danger. This genre is often activated by sudden disruptions of everyday life by unexpected events, such as accident, sickness, death or being lost in wilderness. Black magic, evil eye, witchcraft, and confrontation with demons or possession by them offer a variety of explanations of these traumas and tragedies. One of the topics, discussed in legends, is the existence of spiritual agents or demons, such as ghosts, spirits, fairies, *bhuts*, *prets* and thousands of others, known under different names in the religious traditions of the world. As beings of "low" mythology, demons are opposed to deities who take the powerful positions in religious hierarchies. Demons are also opposed to humans who tend to forget or ignore their needs and whose religious practices are instead focused on deities. Although bodiless creatures, demons still depend on the offerings and attention of humans, whose bodies can become targets of demonic attacks. Demonic possession is a complex phenomenon that has been explained by introducing psychological or medical discourse or through social paradigms - as a case, when a person who is generally suppressed, acquires a public voice and reveals truths that have been hidden. However, possession can also be explained with the help of generic paradigms by applying the folkloristic categories. Gods usually appear as characters of myths – sacred narratives about the origin of the world and of its present order. Demons, on the other hand, are supernatural agents, whose usual textual environment is the genre of legend. However, both gods and demons can leave their regular textual bodies (*corpus scriptorum*) and manifest themselves through physical reality – if such occasions are prepared by cultural traditions. In India, gods take multiple visual forms as they become publicly manifested in temple sculptures and religious art. Demons, generally, remain hidden in legends but sometimes they leave their ordinary environment and possess human beings, whose worldview is dominated by this genre. There are descriptions of such cases from many parts of India.

In the year 2000, I met the artist Mainul Barbhuiya and his family in Shillong. One night we were sitting at a bonfire in the backyard of his home and I asked him to tell about some beliefs and religious practices in North Eastern India. A short passage from the field recording follows: "In our area I witnessed some cases of possession by evil spirits. In most of the cases, these are patients of hysteria – people with psychic disorders. In villages, there are *oja*-priests, the village witch doctors. He usually calms the patient and starts beating her, he tortures the sick person. Then, after some time she comes to sense in front of the huge village gathering. The *oja*-priest repeatedly says: "Yes, you tell, whose spirit you are? Who are you?" After sometime she starts speaking, because she is scared. So, she makes up stories and then people think, may-be really there is some spirit. This practice is spread among the Muslims and Hindus."

As Christopher Fuller has shown, exorcism of malevolent spirits often happens through a confrontation between a deity and the demon (1992: 232). The tutelary deity can possess the exorcist but sometimes victims of possession are "taken to temples in hope that a vision of the powerful deities, present in their images will drive out the frightened spirits" (Fuller, ibid.). It is obvious that the demon, which represents the sphere of legend, is in conflict with the deity, who belongs to the textual realm of myths. So the confrontation of the exorcist and the possessed person can be understood as an expression of inter-generic tensions. In order to comprehend the nature of this conflict, let us delineate the main traits of the two genres. Myths tend to be polymorphic narratives that appear in public sphere: in writing and in print, in pictures and other forms of art; while myths are performed in rituals, theatre, songs and dances. These performances are elaborate, attract large crowds and can be broadcasted via mass media. Myths also set pilgrims and tourists to motion to visit sacred destinations far away. Mythical locations are famous, differently from the micro-geography of legends, whose plots are linked with the close neighborhood of the traditional community. Legends about demonic encounters are not performed on stage for the enjoyment of the audience but are normally told in a private sphere, if they are narrated at all. Many beliefs circulate in cultures as hints, symbols, customs and taboos. Legends can also be experiences in every-day life, when people find themselves in similar situations that they know from oral tradition.

The state of demonic possession can be interpreted as a case when the genre of legend takes an overwhelming control over the human consciousness. A narrative is transformed into psychological and social reality, witnessed by others. In short, demonic possession is a legend that is acted out if a supernatural character from belief narratives is incarnated in human body. If the malevolent spirit is exorcised in front of the village gathering, this increases the public pressure on the demon, because legend represents the private and hidden sphere. Deities establish their authority through the magic of mantras, used by the exorcist, and through the public knowledge about their power that is confirmed by myths and shared as a collective tradition. Demon is thus forced to disclose its identity and is expelled from the human body back to the textual body of legends and the mental body of beliefs.

Genres are thus not mere literary or folkloric categories of classification but expressive forms of vernacular religion and of social life in its public and private forms. Also, genres are cognitive tools for interpreting different kind of religious phenomena and life situations. Legend is one of the main genres of belief but it can also be used to express skepticism and doubt. Let us, again, return to the interview that I made with the skeptical narrator Mainul Barbhuiya. Here is one of his stories that shows how legends are oriented on real-life events and how dramatic experiences tend to be interpreted according to traditional narratives:

"At that time we used to stay in Silcher town, in the headquarters of Kachar district of Assam. In winter we used to get some school holidays - ten or fifteen days. It is the time of harvesting, when all the fields are clean and we used to go to the village. We had lots of fun. All the boys of my age used to say: "Don't go this way." Elders made all kind of stories: "If you go there, you find a saint like man with a long beard. He will just stand on your way like this." So all sorts of stories... One day my elderly uncle reached home, fell down and fainted. Then slowly-slowly, he came back to his sense and started telling: "When I was coming from the market, I saw a person who was just blocking the road and doing like this. He was such a tall man, I couldn't see. Sometimes his hand was like this..." All right, I listened to this story. After some time, maybe next year, I was walking with my father, who is a very religious person. Suddenly he stopped in that point. "Remember, last year your uncle witnessed this. He faced this problem, this person. See, he is there..." I was already quite big, a student of class nine. I had already joined student politics. "I don't know, what, papa?" I had a torch, but we were not using it in full moonlight. "No-no, don't put on this torchlight, otherwise he will follow us." Then I put it on. Before that, I had also seen a tall person. It was a banana tree in moonlight. The light and shades create a lot of illusion. Dry leaves, bunch of trees... and the young one just moved like this... So it creates illusion and you find a human figure like this. That I witnessed, that's why I am telling this."

We can see that legend as a traditional genre provides the narrator with a certain supernatural interpretation of his experience. The tall saint-like man could have been like *burâdangariâ of* Brahmaputra valley whom Benudhar Rajkhowa identifies as a tree-spirit who is religiously disposed (1973: 129). However, the narrator here rejects the interpretation, offered by the tradition, and gives another explanation that undermines the traditions of belief.

The oldest textual sources confirm that narratives about supernatural encounters were spread in India thousands of years ago. "Atharvaveda" is a compendium of rich and elaborate demonology. For example, it includes a charm (IV, 37), that has been used to ward off the demonic *apsaras* and *gandharvas*, who are described as seductive females and handsome young men, who live in rivers and trees. The need for such charm must certainly been derived from stories about personal encounters with these malevolent demons. The spread of vernacular demonological terminology in any language is a proof about the existence of legends that form the primary textual realm for these bodiless creatures. Beliefs have a great potential to be verbalized in conversation as religious discourse or as narratives – sometimes fluid, local and unique, but occasionally crystallized into recognizable types of migratory legends.

In January 2003, Professor Kishore Bhattacharjee organized a workshop at the University of Gauhati, "Syncretism, Belief, Genre: a Comparative Study of Estonian and Indian Legends". The papers, given at this workshop, drew attention to the need to interpret Indian legends from the perspective of ethnic genre systems of folklore. Legend as a generic category derives from the 19th century Europe and is shaped by the written and printed word of Western countries. It would be misleading to suggest that legend is a homogeneous genre

of global folklore. According to Linda Dégh, legend is rather "an overarching term", to denote different narratives that discuss belief in the supernatural (2001: 97). What kind of narratives, beliefs and modalities this term should cover in Indian folklore, past and present, is a vast topic of research and discussion. The category of "legend" has a remarkable potential to get filled with multiple meanings and be developed into a rich body of research. Just as beliefs are transformed into verbal genres in folklore, concepts and categories have the potential to become the multiform textual body of international folkloristics. Eyes of legend provide religious communities with a special outlook of the world and orientation in reality (Bakhtin, Medvedev 1991: 135). Legend also offers to folklorists certain insights into a vast realm of tradition, inhabited by demons and other agents of the dark textuality of the genres of belief.

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Some Thoughts about Form in Metamorphosis Legends

ULF PALMENFELT

ULF PALMENFELT, Gotland University, Visby, Sweden.

Since the Grimm brothers, folklorists have developed sophisticated methods for analyzing the forms of oral narrative and narrative performances. Paradoxically enough, however, this deep concern with form does not always seem to be a central part of the self-image of folklore scholars. Perhaps this apparent inconsistency can be explained simply by looking at the concepts preferred by folklorists. Many of us are educated to think in terms of morphology and motifs, not of form and content (see e.g. Propp 1958, Dundes 1980, Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1978). Even Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, one of the great pioneers of scientific taxonomies based on formal aspects, in his definition pointed out that it is the ethnographer, not the folklorist, that "must have a sense for form and color" (von Sydow 1919: 18). In spite of that, von Sydow (1934), Axel Olrik (1908), Gunnar Granberg (1935), Carl-Herman Tillhagen (1964), Bengt af Klintberg (1987), and Timothy R. Tangherlini (1994) along with others continued to refine the methods of folkloristic form analysis.

In this paper it is my purpose to focus upon some aspects of form when discussing the 106 metamorphosis legends in Per Arvid Säve's 19th century collection of Gotlandic legends (Gustavson/Nyman 1959-1961). I have chosen to name my material metamorphosis legends, because they all deal with some kind of *magical* transformation. I emphasize 'magical', since the dynamic core of all narrative is transformation, the pendulum change between different stages of equilibrium. A substantial part of Säve's entire legend collection (106 out of 812 numbers) responds to this selection criterion, which, of course, refers to the contents of the stories. My intention here, however, is to relate the concept of form to other factors than contents.

This is an example of how these legends might sound:

> Once a farm-maid went to fetch water from the well. As she pulled up the bucket it was full of ash leaves. She carefully took her hand and threw out all the leaves from the bucket, but a couple of them came to be left floating on the water. But when the farm-maid came into the cottage and put down the bucket by the fireplace, the leaves sank into the water and something was heard to resound from the bottom of the bucket. This surprised her and when she took a closer look, there were two silver spoons glistening there. (Gustavson/Nyman 1960, 328).

From the Swedish national encyclopedia I learn that the Swedish word "form" can have several meanings (and most of this applies to the English word "form" as well). The basic meaning is the concrete noun "form", "mold", implicating a container into which something is poured to congeal into the same shape as the container. As a verb, "form" both in English and Swedish means "to give shape or form to". The result of such a forming process, in a more figurative sense, can be referred to in terms of the outer shape of an object: cruciform, vermiform and liquid form. Even more abstractly, we speak of a form of punishment, a sonata form, and forms of living. Here we are approaching the meaning ethnologists and folklorists imply by concepts as "cultural forms", i. e., ideas or sets of values that have congealed into certain configurations (NE:s internettjänst 2003:11-18).

The encyclopedia also points out that, in material objects, form is identical to spatial shape or configuration. In non-material phenomena, form can only be considered to be a shape or configuration in an abstract or figurative sense and only concerning the logical or syntactical structure of the phenomenon in question.

My starting point here is to regard both form and content as analytical aspects of a coherent unit. Hence, form and

content as well as other aspects of the material (like function, mood, and aesthetics) are dependent on the purpose of the analysis, not on the quality of the object. On the analogy of Ferdinand de Saussure (1970,93—98), I am prepared to regard formal elements of legends as components of content, and motifs as constituents of form, but many other aspects of the narratives also have to be fit into the model.

In the metamorphosis legends, I have isolated two clearly distinct story patterns:

I. Simple or double reverse transformations

1. A human or supernatural being acquires or observes a
   a) worthless or disgusting object
   b) valuable object
   c) something familiar
2. The being performs an action – including neglect – directed towards the object)
3. The object is (has been) transformed into
   a) something valuable
   b) something worthless or disgusting
   c) something foreign or hostile
   d) or disappears
4. The object is (has been) transformed once more into something of reverse value)

II. Transformation as (religious) penalty

a. Past tense

1a. a human being performs a sinful or deceitful action

(2a. a holy time or place is involved)

3a. a magic transformation takes place

b. Present tense

1b. a human being under a spell appears

2b. the spell is explained by an earlier sinful or deceitful action

(3b. the ghost causes an optical or acoustic illusion)

(4b. the sinful/deceitful action is corrected

5b. the spell is broken)

Each pattern consists of a number of coherent motif chains, where the motifs are described at a generalized level. Another way of presenting the same information could be the one used by Stith Thompson (1955, 8) with the motif elements hierarchically ordered at (for instance) five different levels. For me it is satisfactory to be able to ascertain that these structures are recurrent in all the legends I have analyzed, and that we, without doubt can speak about stable formal configurations at several motif levels. As indicated in the tables above, however, alternative story lines are possible, and several of the motifs are interchangeable. Even so, reality as always rarely accepts to be caged in models constructed at the theoretician's desk. We find several exceptions from this model; there are lots of combinations and fragments.

Reproductive Forms

The word 'transform', of course, is of Latin origin, from 'trans-', meaning across, through, behind, and 'forma', meaning form. The transitive verb 'transform' thus implies giving something a radically different shape, belonging to a world across our normal mental landscapes or behind what we usually see. The idea of transformation itself is stimulating to the imagination. It suggests a playful attitude to the world around us: what if things are not what they appear to be? Consider this example:

> As Mikkel Rasmusson Båta on Fårö once was riding up to the vicarage with fish for the tithes, he found twelve herrings with bloody heads lying on a flat rock. He didn't pick them up at that time, since he didn't want to stop and get off the horse's back, but when he returned, they had disappeared! Then he understood that it had been dragon's goods and that he easily could have got hold of twelve silver spoons with golden bowls if only he had thrown something over them or made the sign of the cross. (Gustavson/ Nyman 1960, 199)

In this short story (and in seven other similar examples) no transformation actually takes place. The remaining ninety eight stories where transformations do occur have created a form for the type of situations where a magical transformation could be expected: When you come across a familiar or worthless object in an odd place, you could suspect that it in fact is something valuable in disguise. To support this idea the quoted story emphasizes the similarity between the silvery herrings with their blood red heads and a set of silver spoons with golden bowls. And we notice that there are twelve herrings, a common number for a set of spoons. Maybe the visit to the vicarage also could be of importance to our understanding of the incident. Before his meeting with the priest, Mikkel Rasmusson Båta was predisposed to have a supernatural experience, but after his visit to the sacred place everything was back to normal again.

To me this is an indication that existent metamorphosis forms are well known as culturally accepted ideas. The storyteller has certainly been aware of this and can even express his surprise (with an exclamation mark in the transcript) that the expected transformation does not take place. If we understand the story as a memorate, the main character, Mikkel Rasmusson Båta, too, was aware of and behaved in accordance with the template. Thus the metamorphosis form is reproductive as a narrative element and it is prescriptive in real everyday life as a pattern of behavior that you possibly might have to take into consideration.

The Legends' Relation to Belief Systems

To take a closer look at the forms of the magical transformations, there seems to be four dominant patterns. The most common one is where something valuable is transformed into something worthless or the other way around. In the other types, something beautiful is transformed into something ugly or disgusting, something familiar becomes something strange or foreign, and something that is visible or tangible simply disappears. Here is an example of a double transformation:

> A farm-maid, on her way to milk the cows, saw the water hole in the meadow filled with beautiful yellow skeins of yarn, and the fences as well were

> full of them. When she walked back home, she picked up one skein just for fun and put into the pocket hanging under her apron. After a while, when she took it out to look closer at her catch, it was all changed into –horseshit! The girl was ashamed and threw it all away. But when she arrived home and was about to clean the pocket, she found its inside all gold-plated and even some small gold nuggets lying in the corners. (Gustavson/ Nyman 1960, 330).

Here the beautiful yellow skeins of yarn are transformed into disgusting and worthless horse manure, which in its turn is transformed into valuable gold. But, even before the story begins, another magic transformation has already taken place: the water hole and the fence around the meadow have been decorated with skeins of yarn. The farm-maid finds something familiar situated in an odd place, which is usually a sign that you are entering a realm where magic transformations do occur. As a matter of fact, in the metamorphosis legends, horse dung (but never manure from other animals!) is one of the most common examples of worthless objects that can be changed into something valuable. Other frequent examples are oak or ash leaves and wood shavings. A single example with an elaborate imagery is a story where a poor boy finds a pair of blue gloves hanging from a juniper. When he comes back later the same evening, the gloves have been transformed into a pair of silver goblets. Many transformations include intestines and blood clots as examples of disgusting objects that can change into something beautiful or valuable.

Here is an example of how something familiar is transformed into something strange or foreign:

> An old woman was plowing a field with some other people at Fardume in Rute. She thought she heard some children weeping in the Husby pasture close by. As she went there, she could not see any children, but instead a big horse lying on the ground by a heap of twigs. When she came closer, it wasn't a horse either, but instead she now saw a terrible frog.
>
> These visions were all made up by an evil forest-Byse, the Husby man, who during his lifetime had got hold of his neighbors' land through perjury. As a punishment he had to walk in the pasture as a ghost till doomsday, always with some earth inside his clog heel. (Gustavson/Nyman 1959, 132f).

The familiar things that become foreign sometimes actually belong to the nuclear family, although the children in this example appear to be unknown to the old woman. The first part of the incident, where some invisible weeping children are replaced with a lying horse and a heap of twigs could be a normal ingredient in a memorate. The supernatural quality of such an experience lies in the mind of the observer. The next transformation, where the horse is transformed into a terrible frog, is more remarkable.

To this category of metamorphosis legends belong all the stories of how children are exchanged with the offspring of supernatural beings, whereby they literally become changelings. The last part of this story introduces the etiological motif that some kind of deceitful, criminal or sinful action lies behind and is the cause of the transformations. I will return to this a bit later.

> Once when some men were walking on the transparent ice of lake Aikaträsk, they saw some unusually fine-looking, big perch swim under the ice. After a while the fish disappeared among some big stones on the bottom of the lake. One of the men looked down there and saw what appeared to be a big vault and a door with big gilt letters above it. He took off his skates and put them on the ice to mark the place, but when he came back with his companions everything had disappeared. (Gustavson/Nyman 1959: 169)

In all metamorphosis legends, the experienced person's own senses can be said to be questioned or at least represented as unreliable. Maybe this idea is most evident in the group of stories where visible or tangible objects simply disappear. Other disappearing objects are human beings, icicles, an eagle, revenants and yellow skeins of yarn, as we have already seen.

The vague boundaries between the valuable and the worthless, between the beautiful and the disgusting are easy to relate to the widespread attitude of a self-sufficient farming society where practically nothing is worthless or unusable.

The metamorphoses of the legends certainly stand out as colorful and stimulating to the imagination. The transformations can be humorous and entertaining, but also worrying and frightening. They represent the world as evanescent, elusive and treacherous. Nothing can be trusted to be what it appears to be – for good or for worse.

However, these are not accounts of clever magicians' performances. The transformations never take place before the eyes of the observer. Instead, they follow this scheme: the persons in the legends focus their attention on a suspicious looking object. Then something interfering happens that takes the attention away from the object. Often some time passes and when the object comes back into focus, somebody or something has turned the coin to show the other side of it.

Only material objects are transformed, never values, social relations, or economy. The protagonists of the legends may obtain one or two valuable objects, just to realize that they could have acquired a fortune, if they had only behaved in the right way (cf. Lindow 1982). Even if the magical transformations *per se* might seem extraordinary, they seldom bring about deep and radical changes in the lives of the persons who experience them. Everything remains as usual, except for some coins, a pair of silver spoons, or a gold nugget, and the thrilling memory of the evanescent possibility of becoming very rich. Paradoxically enough, you could say that the knowledge that these legends about transformations truly convey is that, in spite of what it might look like, nothing at all really changes. This conclusion is strengthened by the observation that not everything in the material world can be affected by the changes. For instance, they never involve the church, the priest, the county counselor or

the king. Only the ordinary world of the ordinary people is concerned.

Etiological and Moral Functions

The stories belonging to the second pattern of motif chains – the ones that I call "Transformation as (religious) penalty" – all include some kind of explanation to why there has been a magic transformation at all. In these stories the transformation is always situated in the past and sometimes at a great distance from the place and moment of narration. Not only do the transformations in these stories take place without human spectators, in some cases they even occurred at the time when the mountains were soft, or when a certain lake still was a fir forest.

The element of punishment is central in these stories, making it natural to understand them as either warnings against unrightful behavior or as etiological stories, explaining the origin of some stone formation.

> One Christmas morning a greedy farmer at Nårs in Weskinde necessarily wanted to drive down to the mill in Lummelunda to grind; but on the road between the mill and Nårs both of his oxen were transformed into two large stone blocks. Even today people call them Nårs stone oxen and they stand to the east of the main road. (Gustavson/Nyman 1960: 343)

The offenses mentioned are directed either against other people or against religious norms. Most of the crimes against other people concern land ownership. In the Gotlandic farming society, family ties to the inherited land seem to have been strong. In the medieval code of laws, Gutalagen, the longest section is the one regulating land transactions. One of the laws stipulates that family land can never be sold, only inherited (Holmbäck/Wessén 1979:221). When Säve collected these legends in the 19th century, the land parceling process was running in many Gotlandic parishes. Farmers had to witness how the fields they had inherited from fathers and grandfathers, for maybe a thousand years, were handed over to neighbors, possibly enemies, by the land surveyor's pencil mark. Before the land parceling there were only few visible boundary-marks in the Gotlandic landscape (Lindquist 1991:183). Especially in forests and pastures, knowledge of the boundary-lines was maintained through oral tradition. The importance of family land and the uncertainty about the boundaries must have offered fertile conditions for all kinds of suspicions between neighbors. In the legends, greedy farmers committed all kinds of perjury and deceitful acts to get hold of each other's land. The normal punishment, still in the legends, was that the offender after death was transformed into a revenant, especially in the Gotlandic form, a byse.

The religious offenses usually consisted of desecrating holy days by working, hunting or even quarreling on, for instance, Christmas Day or Easter Sunday. The punishment was that the offender was transformed into stone. It is hard to believe that failure to remember the Sabbath-day, in the 19th century, could be considered such a strong crime as to deserve such cruel punishment. Consequently, the legends situate the transformations in some distant Old Testament or even pre-Christian past where such religious harshness would be more likely. Perhaps we should understand these stories not as examples of existing popular beliefs, but as games of imagination, inspired by the human-like shapes of certain limestone formations.

Distinctions of mood and mode

From a genre analytical point of view there can be little doubt that all the 106 texts I have chosen for this study fall within the boundaries of the legend genre. Stylistically, however, the stories show rather different attitudes to the fantastic content they report. In some of them the magical transformations are described in an uncomplicated, matter-of-fact style, reminding of how supernatural experiences typically are reported in memorates. Only one sense of the observer is activated: if you see something, there is no sound; if you hear something, nothing shows. Seldom the supernatural quality becomes evident only through the teller's interpretation of the experience. Here is an example:

> Once, when a farmer together with his folks was in a hurry to take his rye home, and he came with his horses and wagon on a road close to home, he, to his surprise, found all bushes in the pasture close by full of icicles, glistening in the warm sunshine.
>
> – Well, they were in a hurry and drove directly down into the rye field where they were to load. Meanwhile somebody said: -Aren't the kids crazy to hang the bushes full of icicles?
>
> - Yes, what a folly, said another, icicles in the rye season! But let's have a closer look when we return.
>
> But when they returned, all the icicles were gone from the bushes, because it was probably Bysen that had made up the whole scene! (Gustavson/Nyman 1959, 143).

What separates this story from a typical memorate is that the experience is collective. Aside from that, the event might very well fit into the memorate genre: it is seen from a distance and when the observers are in a hurry, it is never checked out calmly in a controlled situation, it affects only one of the senses, and we can think of several possible, "natural" explanations. Perhaps the most plausible one is what is also suggested in the text: that it is a practical joke, staged by some children. Compare that story with this almost fairytale-like example:

> A fisherman had his boat in Kappelshamn bay. Then he saw a fair maiden with three servants come sailing through the air and sink down upon the third reef towards Svarvudden. Two of her servants led her by each hand and the third followed after them with a chair. Then the maiden sat down on the chair, and the servants washed her and combed her hair, dressed her as a bride and put a crown on her head, thereafter the two who had led her finally kissed her. But at the same time a cloud appeared in the clear sky and the third servant pulled the chair away under her! And instantly the maiden was transformed into a huge eagle that flew away across the bay towards Hallshuk, where a bolt of thunder struck her once. No doubt, it was Torspjäsku! (Gustavson/Nyman 1959:161).

Here the human observer plays a peripheral and passive role. The only function of the fisherman in the story is to provide the teller with an explanation to why he is able to recount these strange happenings. In spite of the detailed geographical positioning it is obvious that the events of the story do not take place in the Kappelshamn bay of the ordinary world, but in some invented tale world.

My first example – the icicles hanging from the bushes – is characterized by simple, uncomplicated everyday language and simple, uncomplicated realistic narrative elements, while the second one – the maiden transformed into an eagle and hit by a thunderbolt – shows a more elevated language (which is more obvious in the Swedish original), and also has a composite series of unrealistic events performed by evidently fictitious actors. This seems to indicate that within the genre of legend, we are able to find different degrees of fictitiousness, perhaps best described as differences in distance between the ordinary world and the tale worlds of the stories. From the teller's point of view, the language can be simple, casual with individual traits and wordings – or stylized and formulaic. The tale itself can be an undramatic report of a trivial episode – or a refined composition of artfully interwoven narrative elements. The contents or events reported can appear as plausible and easy to accept as part of an everyday reality – or have the character of belonging to a fabulated otherworld. Borrowing a word from linguistics, I would suggest we call the differences modal, since they express a distinction of mood in the grammatical sense, such as that between actuality and possibility. Furthermore, I suggest that the term 'mood' be used to refer to the "grammar" of the narrative, the linguistic form and the narrative structure. The attitude or stance of the narrator as well as the atmosphere of the story and the emotions provoked in the listener could be indicated by the word "mode".

Conclusion

Experiencing natural transformations like humans', plants' and animals' ageing, seasonal changes, and technical alterations builds up a memory bank of accumulated experience in the individual and in society. The metamorphosis legends help people to organize these experiences in understandable categories. They direct people's minds towards the phenomenon of change in itself, and inspire their fantasy to speculate around what changes are possible. By emphasizing the natural quality of the transformations in everyday life, they contribute to uphold and make visible the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural. Furthermore, the legends confirm the understanding that everything can be, has been, and will be changed. Nothing can be trusted to be what it appears to be. Perhaps even our human senses of perception should be questioned. Why would the world otherwise appear so elusive and impossible to control? Or perhaps reality is uncontrollable only to the ordinary man? The legends seem to verify the suspicion that even the transformations are illusory, at least when a poor person seems to have the chance to become rich.

As the accounts of such experiences are poured into narrative forms, they congeal into stable, recurrent shapes that can be used both as building stones for new stories and as patterns of action. The legends are descriptive and prescriptive at the same time.

At another level of analysis, these recurrent shapes should of course also be regarded as cultural building stones. As such they could be ordered on a scale from a practical, concrete frame of mind to abstract, philosophical or religious attitudes, from the down to earth advice "Never throw anything away; everything can be used for something" to the ethereal "Plus ça change, plus ç'est la même chose".

Looking at metamorphosis legends from both a narratological and a communicative point of view, this span between the concrete and the abstract, the realistic and the fictitious, also comes out as influential. From a narratological point of view, the narrative building elements show distinct form criteria at several different levels, from single motifs or parts of motifs, to composite chains of motifs built up to complete episodes, all the way over to long, multi-episodic narratives. At all these levels forms can be influenced by more realistic or more fictitious modes that are expressed by different formal moods.

From a communicative point of view, we can observe how a teller transforms an event into a tale in front of an audience. This interplay, which activates cultural as well as narrative forms, also takes place in the power field between more concrete, realistic worldviews and more abstract and fictitious belief systems. The teller's or the listener's attitudes of belief, doubt, or disbelief, familiarity or distance, argument or entertainment generate formal differences at all levels.

One conclusion of this discussion is that form certainly can be related to content, but that to an equal extent it is mutually interrelated to, among other things, function, mood and aesthetics. Furthermore, behind these concepts it is possible to define several layers of specifications. At the level of contents, for instance, we could make a difference between on one hand ideological elements in the sense of values or mental hierarchies and on the other belief systems, meaning both religious and profane convictions. Here I have briefly discussed two aspects of function in the metamorphosis legends, both of which deal with upholding norms for people's relations to each other and to the church. Other functions are etiological, didactic, and entertaining. When talking about mood, I have noticed how different attitudes of closeness and distance are expressed. I could also have talked about how a narrator communicates his stance to hopes, dreams, fears, own and others' memories. Concerning aesthetics, I have given some examples of the colorful imagery of the metamorphosis legends.

Common to all narratives is their double quality of being at the same time descriptive and prescriptive. All cultural forms are both results of people's mental images and templates molding our minds.

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Urban Legends: A Study in Guwahati

ARUNIMA DAS

ARUNIMA DAS, Research Scholar, Folklore Research Department, Guwahati University

Urban legends connote some sensational occurrences in the cities and concerning people. Linda Dégh remarks that as, "Urban Legends—stories about sensational occurrences in cities and concerning people, places and structures known to the urban folk-have been noted and published since the mid-nineteenth century.... From Prague to Berlin, from Paris to Ljubljana, Basel and Vienna, European authors have celebrated old and new legends about revenants, curses and miracles as well as modern incidents of Witchcraft and UFOs in their cities"(Dégh, 2001:86=87).

Guwahati, the gateway of Northeast India, is a city inhabited by different communities with a population of about eight thousand and eight hundred. According to 2001 census, the geographical, social, economic characteristics of the city show that it has been experiencing both physical and population growth along with the expansion of trade, and commerce industries. Growth of urbanization is one of the main factors for this change.

Urban legend expresses fears of new kinds of life, threatening dangers, representing human struggles and hopes for survival. Urban legends appear as immediate response to the day today questions to the laymen and the elites of the present urban areas. Guwahati has continuously been facing the impact of rapid urbanization that has made the people talk on predicaments of the city. In this case, birth and growth of reasonable numbers of urban legend is certainly a possibility. This study is confined to thirty two informants from all over the city and covers almost all the age groups. Legend tellers, generally, are from different backgrounds with different ages: some are students, some are housewives, few include unemployed youths and whereas some are state officials. Some Assamese vernacular newspapers and periodicals which are at least 25 years old have been searched, for example: *Asom Bani, Dainik Asom and Bismoi.* Urban legends collected from Guwahati can be thematically classified into the following categories: 1) Student Life, 2) Sexual Desires and Wishes, 3) Family Stories, 4) Hospital Legends, 5) Miraculous Incidents, 6) Faith in Religion, 7) Inter-ethnic Relations, 8) Desire for Fortune and 9) Terrorism.

It is seen that the range of the themes shown above related to the problems of social life, individuation, aspirations, belief, sensitivity, fear, concern, and anxiety. Some examples from each of the categories except one are given below:

1. Students Life:

Miraculous Hand -

During a new session of Guwahati University, a fresh candidate was allotted a room in one of the hostels of Guwahati University, but his senior roommate had not returned from home after the vacation. Therefore, the new boarder was not aware of anything of his senior partner.

However, after a couple of days, when the new boarder came to the hostel in the evening hours, he found his room locked from inside. After knocking at the door, a boy opened the door and he went inside. The new boarder thought the boy to be his senior roommate. So he did not dare to ask anything, as it would be against the general rule of the hostel where only seniors ask questions. Henceforth, the new boarder went to his table and opened a book while the senior partner was lying on his bed.

After a few moments, a knock was heard from outside and the new boarder rose from his chair to open the door. But, to his utter astonishment and fear, he saw his senior partner, who was lying on his bed, extended his right hand from the bed and opened the door. As soon as the door was opened, the senior partner got up and ran outside and vanished in the dark.

After the initial hustle and bustle, the boarder made a thorough search in and around the hostel campus but of no avail. And lastly, the chowkider of the hostel recited what was thought to be a true tale. He said that the boy, who vanished in this air, was once a boarder in the hostel and had committed suicide due to excessive ragging of his seniors. And since that inauspicious day the boy uses to appear occasionally in the hostel but never harmed anyone.[1]

Anxiety is related with dislocation form of normal life. "Miraculous Hand", is a legend collected from two students staying in a hostel. The incident contains several anxiety triggers like "extending one's hand", "vanishing suddenly in the dark", and for this some unpleasant thought or fear may arise in the minds of the people. Appearance of the 'dead student' during the beginning of every academic year reflects the fear of the freshers regarding ragging. Investigation made by the other boarders connotes the idea of support among them.

Ragging in college as well as hostel is a widespread practice among college students in India. Under the guise of "getting to know" each other, the senior students harass the freshers. It is a fact that when the academic year begins, junior students succumb to ragging, and in anticipation of rough treatment by seniors some freshers cancel their admission. There are several instances of ragging having crossed all limits of decency and students ending their life. In a survey among students from medical, engineering and science colleges in Nagpur, regarding ragging, the sample comprised of 46 male and 23 female students. Most of them were local. Only 17 of these students were living in hostels. The finding of the survey proved that all the students admitted have been ragged. Among them,15% were ragged physically while 5% were sexually abused and 14% were subject to mental harassment. Moreover, 45% of the students were often tense and disturbed due to ragging and 25% occasionally wanted to commit suicide (Choudhury,2001: 4-5).

2. Sexual Desires and Wishes:

Wrapper Blues -

Once a boy and a girl were moving around the city in a motorcycle. The girl was riding on the pillion. She was wearing a T-shirt and Wrapper (a traditional dress of the tribes in the north-eastern region of India and worn on the lower part of the body.).

Later on, they stopped in front of a college for some work. In a few moments, they finished their work and were ready to resume their ride. But, what happened thereafter was really astonishing. The boy started the motorcycle thinking her to be on the pillion seat and started to move on. But to the utter disbelief of the girl, a part of her wrapper got stuck in the rear wheel of the motorcycle and her wrapping around her waist started to loosen up. The boy did not have the slightest of inkling of what was happening and he simply drove on taking the wrapping with him in the process. Now, the wrapper went off completely from her waist and she stood undressed in the middle of the road and in full view of the passers-by.

The girl stood on the very ground as if in a trance. She did not move an inch and looked around helplessly. Looking at her pitiable condition, a rickshaw puller standing nearby offered his towel to her. She quickly put the towel around her waist and went away in an auto-rickshaw.[2]

There are certain legends, which reflect sexual fantasy. In the "Wrapper Blues", the girl fantasises herself as naked and some man present there comes forward to protect her modesty. This is a complicated psychological narrative, which deserves more attention through the study of similar variants. The text resonates with Alan Dundes' analysis of legends about feminine sexuality. The co-incidence of the departure of the boy and simultaneous incident of becoming undressed is a dramatic moment, where the boy with motorcycle goes away and undressing occurs. Motorcycle being a phallic symbol speeding off unfolds the hesitation to enter into sexual life in spite of the fact that strong desire is articulated through the legends.

Legends of category three which are family stories mainly reflect concerns about the well being of offsprings.

4. Hospital Legends:

Needle Left Inside

One lady was to be operated for tumor in her stomach. Suffering from severe pain she went to the doctor in a reputed government hospital in the city. After a successful surgery, she was released and went back to the home.

After a few days from her release from the hospital she again felt the pain in her stomach. They thought it to be a part of the stitching that had been done during operation. But she was unable to come out of her pain at any rate. Ultimately, they went to the doctor. Doctor advised them to go through x-ray. Having no other option the family took the lady to x-ray house reluctantly and got an x-ray again.

However, it was the result that shocked the people a lot. A needle, which was left while stitching during the tumor operation was noticed. Since the health condition of the lady after the surgery was deteriorated, it was impossible to do another operation. Henceforth the doctor advised the lady to take some medicine in order to minimize her pain and wait for her betterment of health conditions so that after that the needle can be taken out by another surgery.

Days were going on. Gradually, she stopped taking medicines. She prepared herself for the next operation. But, what was amazing that she stopped feeling the pain even after stopping the medicines. She went to the doctor, and the doctor advised her again to go for an x-ray. She did everything accordingly but this time the needle was not found inside. Surprisingly that very moment, the pain also came to an abrupt end.

Henceforth, the doctor confirmed the absence of the needle inside the stomach. He confirmed that the needle was not inside the body, as the needle was supposed to have been eliminated from the body with stools, and so no more surgery was needed. The lady was full of joy and left the hospital happily.[4]

A story like "Needle Left Inside" is very common. Carelessness of the doctors in the Government hospitals shows their self-interest towards their private income. In this situation they are always a cause for trepidity in the society.

5. Miraculous Incidents:

Invisible Attacker

Once a developed area in the city Guwahati was passing by some shocking events. Throwing of bottles on the roof of a house made the people of the area disturbed and restless. Irrespective of daytime or nighttime, bottles were spontaneously throwing like the showering of water.

Neighbouring areas as well as the entire city was seemed to be frightened with this event. But no one was able to find out the source of this showering. Some believe it to be the power of supernatural where as others believe to be the nuisance done by some stupid. [5]

There are certain legends, which cause horror. They are either related to ghost stories or supposed to be created by men to create a state of anxiety like situation. The legend "Invisible Attacker" tells a story of an invisible attack. It is not conclusive about the attacker. The story expresses an unknown fear. This kind of supernatural activity has been increasing day by day. People from all walks of life have reported supernatural and unexplainable activities.

6. Faith In Religion:

Holy Apathy

During the year 2002, there was an eviction drive in the Guwahati city. Guwahati Municipality Corporation (GMC) had demolished a lot of small as well as huge buildings in various corners of the city.

Henceforth, an order was passed out to demolish a 'Mandir' (temple) located in Hengarabari area of the city. And, an elephant was brought in by the authorities to carry out the demolition work. But the elephant at first was reluctant to carry out the job. It was said that the elephant was not willing to destroy the holy place of worship. However, after much persuasion and being forced by the authorities, the elephant had no other option but to bring down the temple against his own willingness.[6]

In the legend "Holy Apathy", it is noticed that people encounter an experience, which re-inforce their religious belief. For example, in "Holy Apathy", an elephant refuses to co-operate a demolition of a temple. Elephant is regarded as a holy animal, which is the *bahana* of Viswakarma and is associated with Lord Ganesha. This legend thus, shows confrontation between state and religion. And, the popular verdict is ,as the legend expresses ,in favour of religion.

7. Inter-Ethnic Relation:

Mysterious Girl

During a journey in a night Super Bus, a young man developed friendship with a young Naga lady sitting next to him. During the whole journey, they gossiped on different topics. Slowly, their discussions went on to some intimate talks.

In the morning, when both of them reached their destination, the young lady invited the young man to stay with her in a hotel. And both of them went to a hotel. Once in the privacy of their room, they began physical relationship. Moreover, they also decided to stay for the night so to have more time to be in each other's company.

But, the next morning, when the man woke up, he saw that his partner was not in the bed. He got up from the bed and searched for her. But, he did not find her. Suddenly, his eyes fell on a piece of paper lying on the bed. He picked up the piece of paper, and was shocked with disbelief and fear after he read what was written on the paper. It was allegedly written in clear and bold letters as —,

"WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF AIDS." [7]

In our society, each and every community has some cultural prejudices. Presence of Naga (or Manipuri in another version) girl in "Mysterious Girl" represents some stereotypes. Night bus journey connotes the incidents that may occur during the dark. Again, the hotel may suggest a setting for intimacy. The deft revelation by the girl was shocking to the boy. All over the world, there are ethnic jokes, anecdotes and legends. There are stories about immigrants also. Moreover, there are stereotypes. Assam, being an inter-ethnic zone is of no exception. There are also plenty of inter-ethnic jokes in Assam (Bhattacharjee, 2000). There are different terms used for ethnic groups, which convey prejudice.

8. Desire For Fortune:

Insurance Complications

It has been an age-old practice for some of the insurance policy holders who make false claim for compensation for the sake of financial gain.

Henceforth, a person was alleged to have made a false claim in the district of Golaghat. The said person was working as an investigator in the Oriental Insurance Company Limited. Also he had opened an insurance

policy with accidental benefits after that he received serious injuries in an accident. He was admitted in a local nursing home and later was referred to Assam Medical College, Dibrugarh for further treatment by a physician who allegedly was his friend. On the other hand, the Oriental Insurance Company directed one of its officials to conduct a detailed enquiry. After investigation, the enquiry officer found that everything was fake. In reality, no accident has occurred and the doctor has given a false certificate of his treatment. Therefore, the said applicant withdrew his claim.

However, the said person did not stop his intrigue here. He again opened a policy with the National Insurance Company Limited. under personal accident claim benefit. He again claimed compensation against the said policy and cited as having received injuries in his bathroom as his claim for compensation. Here, too, the same doctor issued certificate of treatment. Interestingly, the National Insurance Company also requested the same officer who had earlier investigated the aforesaid false claim. After a through investigation, the officer found that the claim was again a false one. Therefore, the National Insurance Company too refused to justify his claim and refrained from paying the compensation.[8]

In cities like Guwahati, where a good livelihood becomes difficult to come by, people undertake different processes to acquire easy money, and among them 'insurance' too is a profitable sector. People still believe that many false claims are made.

9. Terrorism:

Save Me, Save Me

It is a story of a young boy with lots of expectations and dreams in his eyes. Only child of his family, he is very talented in all the fields. Suddenly, a storm comes in his life and washes away all his hopes. One day he was on his way to his school and all of a sudden, a four-wheeler comes and forcefully picks him up. Due to the effect of some drugs that was injected into his body, the young boy becomes unconscious.

After a while, he gets up from his sleep but finds himself locked inside a room. He tries to open the door and the windows but fails to do so. One man comes inside the room at regular intervals and offers him food. Several months and then years passes on.

Moreover, what is more astonishing and frightening for the young boy is that the room in which he is kept captive is full of letters written with blood. He sees the different handwritings written on the four walls of the room in letters like, ' Save me, save me'. To his surprise and fear, he finds that the letters are written with the blood of some person. At this sight, the boy faints.

After many days, once again some drugs are pushed into his body in order to make him unconscious. When he opens his eyes, he finds himself sleeping in the bed of a hotel in Guwahati.

At last, the boy finds his family after a long period of separation. But the important thing is that not a single scratch is found in his body even after a thorough extensive scanning of his body.[9]

"Save Me, Save Me" is a legend which reflects the growing insecurity among the people of Assam. This story depicts concerns about terrorism that has engulfed Assam for more than two decades. Moreover, writing in human blood indicates the fearful consequences of terrorists. This situation has given birth to innumerable legends.

Being a woman researcher, I have collected more from the female who constitute about 53% of the sample. My small sample of 32 legend-tellers can be further divided on the basis of age. Legend telling is not uniform and decreases after fifty years of age and it is more extensive in the middle ages. However, this kind of generalization needs revision in the light of more extensive study. Middle age in Indian society is the time when a person shoulders maximum tension. Therefore, it is not unnatural that most of the legend–tellers are from this age group. At the time of analysis, it has been noted that the texts of the legends contain different rhetorical features like metaphor, metonymy, irony, hyperbole and images. Those features are to be noted to get the full exegesis of the legends.

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Endnotes

[1] Rajiv Doley (28 yrs, M).

[2] Mrs. Namita Das (25 yrs., F)

[4] Mrs. Rekha Das (35 yrs., F)

[5] Mrs. Mira Das. (37 yrs., F)

[6] Mr. Munindra Moral (70 yrs., F)

[7] Dr. K.K. Bhattacharjee (45 yrs., M)

[8] Saroj Doley (26 yrs., M)

[9] Dhiraj Mohan das (50 yrs., M)

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Legend of a photograph—Ernesto 'Che' Guevara from Revolutionary to Pop Icon

V. Hari Saravanan

V. Hari Saravanan, Programme Officer (Public Programmes), National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai

David N. Lorenzen in modern folkloristic terms categorises legends as "stories set in real, historical time about important cultural and political heroes." He writes on how heroic legends in various cultural geographies are circulated and constantly changed and re-circulated orally, sometimes along with visual icons, to articulate religious, cultural and political beliefs and ideologies of a particular group of individuals. Legend of Che Guevara falls in the category of legends such as of King Authur, Robin Hood, William Tell and Wyatt Erap. Che stands out among other such legends; he has a spread across the globe, irrespective of cultural and linguistic variations.

My encounter with Che was through reading of Jorge Castañeda's English translation of Compañero during my college days. Coincidently, the third day after reading the book, while I was travelling by a Chennai sub-urban train I saw a teenager wearing a t-shirt with Che's image. Curiously I went to him, and asked him whose image it was; the boy said that he never had any idea. Next, I enquired why he was wearing an image of a man whom he never knew and the boy shot back 'I like his face!'. Che was assasinated in 1967 and I wondered how was he so popular in 1999 unlike other revolutionary leaders. Long after other historical icons have diminished in time, Che still survives through Frank Korda's photograph; giving immortality to a legend circulated around as a photograph.

Alberto Korda's original photo of Che

The famous image of a steely eyed Che was shot on March 5 , 1960 by Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez, better known as Alberto Korda, a fashion photographer by profession. A photo journalist by profession, Korda had to turn to the infant Cuban revolution's official newspaper 'Revolucion' to make ends meet. The event was a memorial funeral service for victims of the *La Coubre* (ship carrying Belgian arms shipment to Cuba) explosion. Photographs of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir on Korda's film roll were much more valuable for Cuban newspapers; hence Che's image was not published. Yet Korda made a personal cropped print.

The photo became famous only seven years later, after the death of Guevara in Bolivia. When Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli obtained the rights to publish Guevara's 'Bolivian Diary', he published the image as a large poster. The iconic value of Che's image increased out of proportion . The high contrast bust drawing that is based on the photo was made in 1968 in several variations—some in red and black, others in black and white and some in black and white with a red star, by Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick, an artist most known for his depictions of Irish mythology. Che's image first became familiar during the student revolts of May 1968 in Europe and the U.S.. In the 1970s, the same image was taken up by Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers. Since the 1980's every radical individual wore the image on a T-shirt, and is still going strong with various leftists, radical insurgent groups in south east Asia and Latin America swearing by Che's book 'Guerilla Warfare'.

High contrast bust drawing by Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick, 1968.

Jon Lee Anderson writes in 'Che Guevara: A revolutionary Life,' "finding Che in his lens, Korda was stunned by the expression on Che's face. It was one of absolute implacability. He snapped and the image soon went around the world, eventually becoming the famous poster that would adorn so many college bedrooms. In it, Che appeared as the ultimate revoultionary icon, his eyes staring boldly into the future, his expression wearing a virile embodiment of outrage against social injustice."The Maryland Institute College of Art called Korda's photo, "The most famous photograph in the world and a symbol of the 20th century." UCLA art history professor David Kunzle has opined that there is no other figure in the twentieth century history that had produced such a vast and compelling imagery as Che Guevara, from coffee mugs, t-shirts, lighters to a placard used for any protest against any thing on the planet.

It is interesting to note the direction of Che's gaze in the original photograph, as Jim Fitzpatrick's black and red version contains a small but significant modification. In the original, the eyes are focused on the area in front of Guevara, whilst in Jim Fitzpatrick's modification, the eyes are gazing towards the distant horizon. There is an epic, heroic significance in Che's pose; in the original image Che appears worried and tense, whilst in the interpretation his face is set in a pose of defiant pride: he appears to be looking towards the future. With a simple alteration the image of Che has come to overshadow the reality, and as such some criticise it as

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being nothing more than a mass-produced symbol. The painter who painted mythology made the image more heroic. The angle of the original photograph is crucial, like many other portraits of world leaders, this image was shot from a low angle against a light back ground, with the red star on the beret, long hair and shabby beard, a composition that gives Che a Christ-like quality. Equally important are the eyes, Che's cold gaze into the void, looking beyond the Camera; this vision, despite manipulations by various pop artists, retains its passion even on a t-shirt, beer mug or a cigarette lighter. But why any other photographs of smiling or cigar smoking Che never appears? Because a smiling revolutionary is a contradiction to the term 'revolutionary', or it could be that the society who consumes Che's image does not want to wear a smiling revolutionary, when the consumer is flinging a stone at the riot police. In 2000, Korda sued Lowe Lintas Ltd., an advertisement agency and Rex Features Ltd., a photo agency to the tune of $50,000/- for using Korda's photo to promote Smirnoff Vodka. Korda's lawsuit was not for financial reasons but, in his own words "...as a supporter of the ideals for which Che Guevara died, I am not averse to its reproduction by those who wish to propagate his memory and the cause of social justice throughout the world, but I am categorically against the exploitation of Che's image for the promotion of products such as alcohol, or for any purpose that denigrates the reputation of Che." British historian Robert Conquest, interprets the cult following of Che among the young (affluent or not) as "one of the unfortunate afflictions to which the human mind is prone to adolescent revolutionary romanticism." American journalist and writer Lawrence Osborne, opines that "the image of Che was just so right for the time, Che was the revolutionary with a rock star status. Korda, as a fashion photographer, sensed that instinctively, and caught it. Before then, the Nazis were the only political movement to understand the power of glamour and sexual charisma, and exploit it. The Communists never got it. Then you have the Cuban revolution and into this void come these macho guys with their straggly hair and beards and big-dick glamour, and suddenly Norman

Mailer and the entire radical chic crowd are creaming their jeans. Che had them in the palm of his hand, and he knew it. What he never knew, of course, was how much that image would define him." Even in India, Che and Mao are considered as the role models of the leftist Naxalite movement, spread across the tribal belts of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. Among the personal belongs of slained Naxalites, there is always a copy of 'Guerilla Warfare', mostly in native tongue, and occasionally in English. Che symbolises people who lived and died for their beliefs and ideology. Che is a legend, more in terms of Byron and Shelly than Marx and Lenin. Even Che's captors and executioners knew that Che Guevara's legend would not die with him. To leave the world in no doubt of his identity, his captors instructed some local nuns to wash his face and remove his bedraggled hair and beard, and then photographed his corpse. To their dismay, the image that was circulated throughout the world recalled countless Renaissance paintings of the crucified Christ taken down from the cross - and so Che attained iconic status for the second time. "The Christ-like image prevailed," writes Jorge Castañeda in Compañero "It's as if the dead Guevara looks on his killers and forgives them, and upon the world, proclaiming that he who dies for an idea is beyond suffering." This shows that oral heroic legend as a genre can spill over to other artistic genres and create myths. When Jean Paul Sartre commented, "Che was the most complete human being of our age", this phrase added fuel to the May 1968 student upraisings. The eyes of Che Guevara staring out of t-shirts, mugs, posters and other paraphernalia, is still burning with impatience against social injustice, around the world, upon oppressed societies, as reminder to the oppressor. Today Che is also a mere product, a commercially viable revolutionary chic, in this globalised world. The heroic legend of Che is like the stories of a saviour who has been idolised, and whose ideals are seldom practiced.

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