

## A FOUCAULDIAN GENEALOGY OF SINGING RESISTANCE IN INDIA

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### **Abstract:**

This paper throws the light on Foucauldian Genealogy of Singing Resistance in India. Bhat narratives belong to the South Indian Province of Telangana; and these were considered major art forms for centuries, as evident in the fact of *Prithviraj Raso's existence*--that of this thirteenth century epic by Chand Bardai--belonging to the same tradition. The Bhats live with their continuous conceptualization of an identity that is theirs to define. The aim of this chapter is to explore how the Bhats maintain their autonomy in creating genealogy through their narratives, which provide evidence related to the lives and indigenous knowledge systems of Lambadas, a marginalized community in Telangana. In fact, Bhangya Bhukya, an important historian of the marginalized Adivasi community in the Docon region of India, has shown in his works that Lambadas have their own concept of spirituality and spiritual leaders. Lambada narratives have the background of historical incidents and are thus known as historical narratives. The narrative traces the movement of Lambadas across geographical and political borders, just as it gives an account of why the Lambadas left western India and migrated to the south. Bhat narratives also focus on what is not the economic exploitation of the colonial State alone, but on its violence bearing down on native people there. Through our analysis, we hope to have opened-up a new way of theorizing the predominance of martial narratives in the Bhat repertoire. As we have seen, this textual propensity was embedded in a more complex history of patronage networks, the reconstitution of castes in colonial modernity as well as within a textual play of abuse/caricature, the whole of which, taken together and apart, has sustained the Bhat genealogies as a cultural practice.

Keywords: Foucauldian, community, movement, Genealogy, Singing Resistance etc

### 1. Introduction

According to Alistair Thomson (50) "The theory and practice of oral history has changed profoundly since its post-World War II...and these changes have paralleled and influenced wider historiographical and methodological shifts" (50). Due to these shifts, the understanding of oral traditions also changed as Alistair Thomson (50) further suggests:

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“Although the points of genesis and patterns of development for oral history have varied from one country to another, particular social and intellectual forces have shaped contemporary approaches to oral history and have influenced oral historians around the world” (50).

The same phenomena repeated in India the literature and culture of the hegemonic castes, especially Brahmanism, started marginalizing the oral traditions of weaker sections both as scheduled castes and tribes. The intervention of technology in the field of art and literature that manifested itself in the form of Cinema, TV, and now Cyber Space has further marginalized the art forms of the weaker sections, because they did not have access to technology.

Bhat narratives belong to the South Indian Province of Telangana; and these were considered major art forms for centuries, as evident in the fact of *Prithviraj Raso's existence*--that of this thirteenth century epic by Chand Bardai--belonging to the same tradition. However, due to changes in a socio-political arena tied to technological advancements and their influence on art forms, marginalized Bhat oral literature can be said to be derived from this epic.

The Bhat community is a sub-sect of the Lambada community of Telangana. It narrates the history of the Lambada community through narratives that are an amalgam of history and fiction. In fact, the narratives of the Lambada Bhats include the centuries-long struggle that Lambadas have undergone since medieval times of Indian history. In addition, the only source of this cultural and historical memory for Lambadas is the narrative lore of the Bhats. This rich tradition of Bhat culture, however, has been, for the most part, marginalised in the discipline of history within modern academia's various departments compartmentalized in India. The histories, prevalent in oral form and performed as songs, are dismissed as lacking an objective perspective and a properly historical consciousness.

The Bhats live with their continuous conceptualization of an identity that is theirs to define. However, it is important to see the ways in which Bhats solicit their patrons by composing laudatory songs on them, songs with a feeling that these songs are the final and authentic source of their patron's history. The knowledge produced by the Bhats on the history of Lambadas is full of protest and challenges the mainstream history of their people written by others.

The aim of this chapter is to explore how the Bhats maintain their autonomy in creating genealogy through their narratives, which provide evidence related to the lives and indigenous knowledge systems of Lambadas, a marginalized community in Telangana. Indeed, Bhats themselves are very conscious of, and take great pride in, their narratives; and they warn their audiences not to take them for granted. Bhats have inherently beautiful narrative skills. Bhats have retained a set of musical traditions whose beauty is both subtle and immediately apparent to even the completely uninitiated listener. The rich, inherent and diverse culture of Bhats invites closer understanding of Lambada Bhat performers and their historical background.

Listening to the legendary narratives of Bhats provides the Lambada audiences an opportunity to reflect on ethical issues. These narratives help the audience to connect them with the good deeds and obligations in their daily life. One can also find traces of subtle social commentary in these short pieces. In the following account, I will illustrate how the narratives reflect the popular wisdom of Lambadas.

In this chapter, I argue that dominant historical conceptions of Bhat culture and history are a structural effect of the prevalent mode of imagination that is evidenced in dominant histories. Bhat genealogies, often disparaged as inadequate to the rigorous demands of disciplinary history, have come to be read as purely literary-cultural texts that express the “primitive” essence of the community in question. I argue that the Bhat narratives must be read not as primitive forms, but as prime examples of the genealogies of Lambadas, to put it in Foucauldian terms.

## 2. Problems in Writing Bhat Historiography

Mainstream history has tried to appropriate Lambada history. In doing so, in the service of various modern ideological projects, it has framed Lambadas as its perennial objects and thus denied them as the status of the subjects of their own historical discourse, which Hayden White accurately places in his book *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (57). Here, let us look at some aspects of the prevalent scholarly construction of Lambada culture and history and see how such construction have indeed contributed to the marginalization of a fundamentally intellectual imagination.

Major scholars from India who belong to upper castes such as M N Srinivas in his *Indian Social Structure* and G.S. Ghurye in his *Caste and Race in India*, try to appropriate all the tribes in India Adivasi scholars like Xaxa and Bhangya pointed out into the fold of the Hindu religion. However, we do not find any temples or images of gods in the Lambada thanadas because they have never been part of Lambada culture. Thus, understandably, Bhats seem to put a great deal of emphasis on humans and their values rather than Hindu gods or religious practices such as idol worship in their songs. For instance, in a personal interview with this author, Ramjhol Bhat, the celebrated Bhat narrative performer, asked, “What is the point in praying to these stone images? Why should we run after these images?” Further he wonders; “Why worship these idols? Living beings are important.

We have to turn to a person whose life itself becomes an example.” In fact, Bhangya Bhukya, an important historian of the marginalized Adivasi community in the Doccon region of India, has show in his works that lambadas have their own concept of spirituality and spiritual leaders. Seva Bhaya was a spiritual symbol of the Lambadas during...and was known for his spiritual reform movement in which he introduced a lot of reformist practices However, what is important is, the temple culture was absent among lambadas until he was alive. Since

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Lambadas live in close proximity to the Hindu villages, to a certain extent, they have assimilated Hindu religious practices into their own culture. However, in their songs and performances, resistance to the dominant Hindu religious practices is obvious. But, logically, their assertion appears in narrative form. However, their songs show their resistance to the dominant religion which may not be perceived or owned-up to by the community.

The next crucial issue is, that some scholars have tried to establish that Bhats constitute a caste. For instance, Rustom Bharucha (2003) and Jeffrey G. Snodgrass (2006) suggest that Bhats could be the members of the Barots caste. They argue that Barots were genealogists in pre-modern India and were associated with the Hindu rulers of their region, notably the Rajputs. Since the Bhats too, like Barots, narrate the genealogies of their community, these scholars conclude that that the term Bhats could be a mere variant of Barots. Also, a musical instrument called the *rawaj*, which the Barots play, is found to be similar to the *rabab*, an instrument of the Lambada Bhats. Thus, scholars like Gordon Thompson have concluded that, at least in the northern parts of India, the term Bhat is used as a synonym for the word Barot, supporting the claim that Bhats and Barots belong to the same caste. However, Shah, Sharoff and other historians suggest that, although both communities' main genealogies, difference between the Barots and the Bhats is that they sing for different religion.

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

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

What is interesting here is that we find references to these kings in the narratives of the Barots of northern Gujarat as well as the Bhats of southern India. There might be some variations in the narrative and plot; but the characters and themes are essentially the same. Thus, Ramjhol Bhat (a story teller from the community) (23 September 2013) claims that it was the Lambadas who ruled over the medieval period, who heroically fought against the imperialism of Mughals. Such a claim challenges the nationalist story that Hindu kings ruled the kingdoms that existed in medieval India and that they were plundered by Mughal invaders. Moreover, it not only exposes the deceptive strategies of the hegemonic nationalist narratives, which appropriate everything into their Hindu religious fold, but it also forces us to rethink how, in view of any modern Indian history, the figure of the Muslim is constructed as anti-Hindu.

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In his article “Articulating Self: Orality, Community, and Colonialism in South India” Bhangya Bhukya says “even if the lower communities claim the upper status, that would not change the mind sets of the upper caste” (334). It is not only the Indian upper caste that looked down upon the Lambadas, but also the colonial state, for some time, considered these people to be criminal tribes.

Although the Nizam managed to suppress the remnant traces of the dacoits the “criminal” stigma attached to the community not only hampered their social life, but also prevented them from earning a decent living. Their caste bore the very identity connotated of “crime” which followed them like their own shadows. Even after the declaration of six Lakh tribal people as “non-criminal” in the Hyderabad area, following India’s independence, these people were looked down upon. The Habitual Offenders Act of 1954 was enacted as a form of law to be implemented in order to monitor their advances, lifestyle, movements and other facets of daily life. Thus, in no proper terms were they considered to be free from this stigma.

The stigma of criminality haunted the Lambadas for a long time after independence; and Dr B.R Ambedkar, as first Law Minister of India, revoked the Criminal Tribes Act in 1952 (Venkatesh 161). The notified criminal communities were de-notified. It was replaced with the Habitual Offenders Act, which targeted individuals and not communities. However, the communities were de-notified; and the stigma in cultural and social life continues to this day. As an antithesis to this, the Lambadas began to rearticulate their own identity. To date, the identity of the Lambadas remains a major, unresolved issue in postcolonial India.

### 3. History and Genealogy as reflected in Lambada Songs

The concept of genealogy is used here in an historical sense the way history is constructed through the Bhat narratives. For the communities that rely heavily on oral storytelling traditions, this historical sense depends solely on the semi-fictional and semi-historical tales, as Shail Mayaram suggests in her book *Against History, Against State*:

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

In Bhat narratives, we find numerous references to historical events, historical persons, conflicts, and battles, which were appropriated by the prevailing modes of knowledge at that time. An example is how historians appropriated Prithviraj, a Lambada king, as a Hindu King

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and so on. He is referred to as a great “Indian” or “Hindu” king whereas Bhat narratives situate him as a Lambada king in the sweep of history.

Through their centuries-old narratives, Lambada Bhats try to associate themselves with the dominant communities such as the Rajasthan rulers. From their genealogy, we come to know the identities of the narrators as well as that of their ancestors, either a Muslim or an ancestor who became a Muslim, if not one who remained a Hindu, and so on. Since the Lambada Bhats in their narratives associate themselves with Prithviraj Chauhan, most scholars treat these narratives as merely fictional and dismiss them as having no real historical value.

Such claims deconstruct the prevalent modes of Indian national histories. According to Bhats, every Lambada song or narrative is composed of memories embedded in their histories. Given that they are unwritten, they existed and continue to exist orally. Most of the Bhat narratives are derived from *Prithviraj Raso*, a thirteenth century epic by Chand Bardai; however, the Bhat narratives differ from the source book. To the present, no one has collected and published Bhat narratives. Telugu University Warangal and a few other universities in Telangana made an attempt to video record them as they tried to digitize some of the stories from the above-said storytelling communities. Still, there is much more needed to be done in order to compile these stories. States, researchers, and universities should also encourage storytellers to safeguard the richness of the oral traditions. Why? The state must use information technology to record in audio and video forms so as to preserve the dying down oral traditions and make them available to all. (Why?)

Bhat genealogies, then, must be understood as subjugated knowledges that have been marginalized by the dominant conceptions of objective history, marginalized again and again as inadequate and ahistorical. They are embedded in a particular way of engaging with the present—of producing “histories of the present”. Far from being ahistorical, these genealogies are in fact radically historical, as they bring to light the continuities and discontinuities that constitute the present. They are, so to speak, “effective histories”. Bhat narratives are particularly important in two ways: First, they show how these genealogies become sites where experience is articulated as memory and identity; and, second, the specific performance and practice of these narratives become part of the techniques through which these subjugated knowledges are constructed and transmitted.

### 3.1 Experience, Memory, Identity

Contrary to that very widespread rejection of the historicity of the Bhat narratives, we have come across a genealogy of Lambadas in the Bhat narratives which take us back to 1434 A.D. In *Tropics of Discourse* Hayden White observes that “We do not live stories, but only recount our lived experience in the story” (13). In fact, the narratives of the Lambadas include the long struggle that they have undergone ever since medieval times of Indian history. Since Lambadas have no scribal culture, most of the information pertaining to their past can only be



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inferred from the oral compositions sung by the Bhats. The only source of cultural and historical memory for the Lambadas is the narrative lore of the Bhats.

In her article “Cultural Identity and Rewriting the Past” Monika Reif-Huelser says:

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

The Bhats' oral narratives are site where the cultural identity of the Lambadas comes to be produced and reproduced. These narratives are not just used for the purposes of providing an interval or respite from their daily life; but they are also cultural forms that are engaged in an imagining of the past. They also become a living source of moral guidance for the people of the community, calling on all to avoid illegal things and to be good to their fellow human beings within the *thanda* as well as outside it. The narratives connote the ethos of Lambada culture and their genealogy and are the agent of its continuity throughout generations. These narratives make an attempt to not only retrieve lost memories through narratives, but also to bring back 'lost tribes' through their stories of genealogical history.

Many songs based on (the works of?) Prithviraj Chauhan and Amar Singh Rathode, works, moreover narrated by the Bhats, present the Lambadas as having a glorious history as a ruling community. This is particularly significant because they challenge accounts that place Lambadas as a marginal community situated lower down in the social hierarchy. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that these genealogies do not claim to be objective histories. Rather, as interested interpretations of the past, they look to unmask the complicity of power/knowledge that have managed to have naturalized prevailing conceptions of the community. These narratives are the community's claim to having been members of the ruling class in the past. During the nineteenth century there was a tendency in these marginalized communities to have been brought to try to lay claim or imitate the Brahman and Kshatriya status and values.

Through this process the marginalized communities sought upward mobility in India. In the Indian social system, it is suggested that Sanskritisation is the process by which lower Hindu castes, Adivasi or other communities, change customs, rituals, ideologies and ways of life in the direction of higher castes. It is a fact that a number of communities began claiming high status during the colonial period. The colonial state gave high positions to those with a ruling past. These communities were thus forced to claim higher status. Through the discontinuities in their narratives, they have also brought to light the colonial modern reorganization of caste hierarchies that favored indigenous communities of those having laid claim to martial lineage. As such, they may also be read as complex strategic engagements arising out of this

historical moment.

Whether these above narratives have some historical basis or not, it could be argued that they were definitely molded by a certain spirit of self-esteem among the Lambada tribes. In his book *Event, Metaphor, Memory* the historian Shahid Amin observes that Gandhi disassociates himself from the Chauri Chaura event, since it turned violent against his principles of non-violence; but certain nationalist historians see it as a metaphor for resistance to colonial British rule. In the same way, tribal resistances are never seen as metaphors for resistances against colonial British rule.

### 3.2 History of Performance

In his book *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India* Stuart Blackburn claims, “Written texts are sometimes the written-down products of oral compositions” (33). Therefore, though the Lambada Bhat narratives were never written down as documents, and were completely ignored in many ways, they still hold—both within a deconstruction of their relevance within Bhat culture and out of it—to be viable reflections of their past. At the same time, this work of transforming fluid oral narratives into written texts has a profound effect on narratives themselves. This leads to a loss of many layers of cultural meaning that are embedded in a performative nature of these narratives. For example, Lambada Bhat’s narratives bring the long-neglected tradition of oral literature to the mainstream, just as they help to understand the neglected and marginalized communities whose voices have never been heard in modern literature. When they do not have any written literature, oral narratives of the Lambada Bhats are the only available, authentic resource at our disposition; and this lies in the collective memory of the Bhats. Rather than dismissing the question of orality, it represents a key aspect of the specific mode of knowledge embodied by Bhat genealogies.

Other communities may not understand the Lambada language in which these songs are sung. As a result of this, any cultural significance of Bhat narratives may not be intelligible to other communities. However, Lambadas spend hours listening to these narratives. Therefore, the role of Bhats seems to include both the maintenance of *Pada* (family name) and the performances of some sort of musical activity, the result of which produces a certain knowledge-consciousness among the Lambadas. The Bhats’ association with these two activities is important for both Bhats’ and Lambadas. To take one of these as an example, the Bhats’ style of narrative presentation would seem to alternate between stretches of speeches and songs. Sometimes, it sounds like speech suddenly inflected and, at other times, it seems like it is following clearly intoned pitches. Narratives that Bhats’ sing begin with a melody and end with heightened speech. While narrating, they generally play the *Rabab*; but sometimes it does not accompany. This is due to the fact that they want to make sure that the listeners are getting them right.



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However, a critical analysis of the Lambada Bhat narratives shows that they can write their own history and recount mythically the sagas of their origin. These would not be considered histories proper in any conventional sense; but they are complex negotiations with their past. Even today, for Lambadas, their past histories are alive; and this is because of how Lambada Bhats narrate them in various forms and genres.

What is significant to note here is that other scholars, such as Jeffrey G. Snodgrass, have studied Bhat narratives and focused analyses on topics such as the form of the compositions. Great attention has been paid to analyze the so-called “musicality” of their words. We can also note how scholars debate the “metalinguistic” aspects of Bhat narratives, i.e. the way their message is crafted and delivered, and so on. All these might be interesting issues for literary scholars; but what is obscured or totally erased in these discussions are the politics of Bhat narratives. In mainstream discussions, Bhat narratives appear as pure literary compositions or as innocent folk literature that is uncontaminated by contemporary politics.

The practice of genealogy cannot be separated from the “text” or “content” and performance of the songs themselves. Their public performance is one of the practices around which this mode of subjugated knowledge is created, developed, transmitted and critiqued by the members of a given community. In this sense, the production of this knowledge is shared and made accessible to the community at large. As with any community kept together by oral narratives of this type, the Lambada Bhats’ narratives provide their history and reflect their life style. Oral narratives provide a source which is quite similar in character to that of modern-day autobiography. However, they are much wider in scope and provide more impressionistic sensations and “reads”, even if often reliable as affective reconstructions of the past.

Most of these narratives, which were not a part of the scribal culture, have radical implications for the social message of their history as a whole. From the genealogical-archaeological perspective we can see that the Bhats are not merely oral historians but equally narrators who reconstructed history and for having thrown light on various kinds of changes that are affecting the life of their group. It should also be stressed how the narratives which reflect the life and history of the Lambada Bhats’ distinguish the Bhakti devotion-and-aesthetic-dominated knowledge from knowledge produced as a function of the experiences of harsh realities of discrimination and segregation.

#### 4 Lambada Bhat Narratives

These narratives have the background of historical incidents and are thus known as historical narratives. They narrate the origin of the Lambadas, together with important incidents of their struggle still embedded in their cultural articulations. There are many narratives which have

been composed by the Bhats with historical background; and they contain some historical events.

Below are two narratives that take up an important historical account of the Rajput Banjaras (a subset of the Lambadas) In reading these; one may raise the question—why do Bhats speak so incessantly of kings? In the past, their existence depended on rich patrons and kings. Even in contemporary times they are still immersed in a village organized according to a patron-client economy, one that is financially important to them. In this economy, termed *dharm*, kings and *thanda Nayaks* provide a model of generous patronage that serves as both a prototype and moral curator of an economy based upon name, fame and generosity. This is how Bhats protect their interests and families. For they use their autonomy very cleverly to exploit the kings and *thanda Nayaks* by posing as once glorious, if not more than twice declining royalty. In fact, the Bhats' cunning wordplay and deceptive histories provide an idiom through which Lambadas claim superiority over kings and other dominant contemporary communities, thereby maintaining their dignity as they advance socially in modern India. However, in this context, Bhats demonstrate their autonomy in treating others as functions of both “praise and abuse” as evidenced in their narratives.

In these narratives, the Bhats say that Amar Singh Rathod and Prithviraj Chauhan belong to the Lambada community, and that they were great rulers of the country.

#### 4.1 Prithviraj Chauhan and Chand Bardai

*Samal oh...oh...yaparmath mathi re Mahammada vedi vedi Prithviraj vedi vedi* Listen oh..oh...*yaparmath mathi re...*[This is the refrain] Muhammad Ghorī is angry, and Prithviraj too. Ghorī kept his horse on one side of a weighing machine and dragged it to the weighing machine *yaparmath mathi re..re*. Prithvi Raj filled the other side of the machine with his wealth; but the horse still weighs more. When it was Ghorī's turn to weigh the horse, the horse's side rose up into the air with just seven “annas” (equivalents?).... *yaparmath mathi re..re*. Prithviraj and Ghorī exchange fierce and angry looks at each other. Prithvi Raj understands that Muhammad has concocted a trick (pulled a fast one on him) to cheat him, then to have looted all his wealth. He angrily sets out to fight Ghorī... *re..re. bhiay*. *Yaparmath mathi re*. Muhammad Ghorī also stood for war. *yaparmath mathi re*.

The battle started *yaparmath mathi re*. Prithvi Raj has already become engaged for the second time; his people are sending him messages to attend his own marriage. *Yaparmath mathi re*. He is getting messages to be present for his marriage *yaparmath mathi re*. He then deliberates as to whether or not he should go to his marriage or to war against Ghorī. Prithviraj has a brother-in-law whose name is Kevash. [Ramjhol interrupts his singing here for a while and says]: “Stupid Ghorī has come crossing all the hills by blasting bombs and reached Prithviraj. He held him captive by shackling him and instead of killing him there

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

At this point, Ghori asks Chand Bardai, “Can you identify Prithviraj”? Then Chand Bardai replies, “definitely”. Ghori takes him to the place where Prithviraj is held captive. Prithviraj starts crying when he sees Chand Bardai who then says that there is no point in crying just then, indeed, they should escape from there by a clever ploy. He asks Prithviraj to ignore it if he comes to scold or rebuke him as part of this ploy. Chand Bardai then turns towards Ghori and says, self-assured, the man being held captive is not Prithviraj. He suggests that if he were to be Prithviraj, he should be tested for the skill of *Shabda ayudam* (the skill of shooting blindfolded at a target with an arrow, guided only by sound). Ghori does not know that Chand Bardai is playing a trick on him. Ghori hands over a bow and an arrow to Prithviraj and blinds his eyes. Chand Bardai tells Prithviraj that since Ghori does not know their language “Gor Boli”, he cannot therefore understand what is being said. However, he asks Prithviraj to listen to him very keenly not minding what his words mean. And Chand Bardai now turns to Ghori and says, “If he is Prithviraj he will understand what I say; but if he is somebody else, then he does not understand my words.” Ghori then asks him to utter something so that they can check if he understands “Gor Boli” or not. After whispering something into Prithviraj’s ears, he turns towards Ghori and says, “Till now he has not been able to identify my language”. But Ghori does not find this convincing, as he asks Chand Bardai to speak to Prithviraj again. Taking this opportunity, Chand Bardai starts giving instructions to Prithviraj as to who should be killed. He says “The people who are sitting under Ghori are his army, so do not kill them. Kill only Ghori.”

All of a sudden, Ghori shouts at Chand Bardai commanding him to speak loudly. The moment Prithviraj hears Ghori speak; he shoots him with an arrow. Ghori is killed instantly; and Chand Bardai’s companions kill part of Ghori’s army. After taking the shackled Prithviraj on a horse for some miles, they free him by removing his chains.

This narrative traces the movement of Lambadas across geographical and political borders, just as it gives an account of why the Lambadas left western India and migrated to the south. According to Ramjhol Bhat, it was because of the atrocities of “Mughal rulers” committed on the Lambadas that they were considered to have become *gwars* (Banjaras), thereby having

started living far from mainstream society. Wherever Lambadas saw Mughal rulers, they fled into forests to protect themselves. They even changed their style of dressing to camouflage themselves. But changing the attire did not help them much, in truth. As a result, they started calling themselves Lambadas when asked about their identity. The tone of Ramjhol's account suggests a mixture of a quasi-historical point of view and a deep understanding of Banjara lifestyle formed after their separation from a so-called "mainstream, civilized" society.

#### 4.2 The Legend of the Heroic Amar Singh Rathod

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

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

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

The next narrative sung by Ramjhol is on Amar Singh Rathod, a story summarized below. Amar Singh Rathod, the king of Jodhpur during the period of the Mughals, was a commander of one of Akbar's army troops. Akbar had an unruly horse. Only Amar Singh could tame that horse. He was a great warrior. Impressed by him, Akbar's queen wanted to have a relationship with him. But he denied the queen's desire saying that she was like his mother.

However, to avoid such a scandal, he decided to get married within his community, thereby getting permission to leave for a week in order to get married. Though Akbar told him to take his time—since Lambada marriages typically last for at least three months—Amar Singh felt challenged and replied to Akbar that he would be back within seven days. Besides, he also had a bet with Akbar and signed an agreement to pay him seven lakhs in case he would not return within a week.

But, as traveling in those days was not easy, he took seven days to reach Jodhpur; and stayed on there for seven months for his wedding. Then Akbar called Hari Singh, one of the younger brothers of Amar Singh, to recall him from his vacation. Amar Singh felt insulted. Agitated, he hastily left for Delhi in order to kill Akbar. On his way, he met Salavath Khan, Akbar's brother-in-law, whom he subsequently killed. Learning about this, Akbar arranged for Varjana, Amar Singh's maternal uncle, to slay him. And subsequently, he killed him

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treacherously. After being humiliated at the hands of Mughals, two brothers fought the entire army bravely and destroyed them. But the two were soon enough trapped and killed.

This narrative traces the role played by Lambadas who, according to their narratives, were powerful people, very close to Rajput rulers. These narratives claim to give an insider's account of the tense relations between the Rajputs and the Mughal empire in Delhi. They bring to light the ways in which the community resisted and struggled against the sustained attacks of the Mughals for a long time, before they were eventually forced to retreat into the forests.

##### 5. Lambada Bhats and Modernity: A Closer Listening and Reading

Snodgrass, who has studied the impact of globalization on the cultural practices of the Bhats, points out that, in the past thirty years, Bhats have migrated throughout India and that we can find them in all of India's major cities and towns (Snodgrass *Casting Kings* 612). He further notes that Bhats have been struggling to cope with the changes that globalization brought-out in their life-style. We know that it is a hereditary practice for Bhat children to adopt the narrative skills of their forefathers and learn to survive on them. However, since India's independence, and with modernization, old sources of patronage have dried-up.

Thus, Snodgrass observes that Bhats were forced to take-up professions such as puppetry, 'rag-picking,' etc., a technique they learned from those nomadic performers who happened to visit Bhat villages. Bhats are now reduced to mere "entertainers" for local and foreign tourists as well as in the eyes of government officials in five-star hotels and folk festivals (Snodgrass *Casting Kings* 14). Thus, as Ramjhol puts it, members of the Bhat caste (*jati*)—and most of them are poor—find their future uncertain, and he warns that there is the danger of forever losing Bhat knowledge and ingenuity.

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

Bhat narratives target modern institutions which have had an adverse effect on their lives. For instance, they satirize the state (both colonial and national), railways, banks, etc. Modern transports such as railways have often been criticized for the degraded status of Lambadas. For instance, Lambadas were aware that the Nizam government had collaborated with the British in modernizing the Hyderabad State, much as it was responsible for the introduction of railways in that region. Prior to this new presence of railways, Lambadas used to make a



living by transporting commodities such as salt to the Telangana region as it was unavailable there. Railways, which replaced all traditional transport systems, have indeed deprived them of an important source of income. Bhat narratives critically reflect on that harsh historical reality from the perspective of the Lambadas.

What is more, Bhat narratives also focus on what is not the economic exploitation of the colonial State alone, but on its violence bearing down on native people there. We know that the colonial State branded tribal people in India as criminals. In his book *The Art and Literature of Banjara Lambanis* D.B. Naik argues:

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

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

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

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

In thematic content, Bhat singers are able to connect their poetic compositions with the everyday exploitation that the Lambadas experience. In a mode of practice that blurs the distinction between the traditional and the modern, they are able to adapt their musical forms and compositions—learned in the traditional way within the community—to respond to the urgent demands of the present. They not only voice the exploitation they experience today, but also provide the vision of how one must successfully engage with the contemporary. They equip their Lambada audiences with the necessary tools to understand their reality, which in turn might help the Lambadas in contesting the hegemonic and exploitative forces, be it the modern State or civil society.

## 6. Conclusion

In this brief chapter, I have sought to bring to light a few ways in which the genealogical practices of the Bhat Lambadas raise questions that remain unresolvable within the



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conventionalized theoretical frameworks within History's discipline as such. Moreover, this analysis of Bhat narratives has been undertaken from a perspective that challenges the dominant construction of the Bhats and the Lambadas within nationalist and colonialist historiography as a "primitive" subject devoid of historical consciousness. Far from it, this new critical perspective makes-out the fixity of such historiography for what it is, namely a myth born of power and domination. Through Foucault's theorization of the genealogical method of historiography, we have been able to approach Bhat narratives as a mode of engaging with a past that may be situated within an autonomous system of knowledge as such. The "lack" of history amongst the Lambada Bhats became a problem in the epistemological foundation of modern historiography rather than a "problem" in the community as such. It was no longer a matter of how "backward" the Lambadas were, but rather of how shortsighted modern historiography is.

Through a number of Bhat narratives, we have been able to question the universal legitimacy claimed by Hindu nationalist historiography with regard to kings such as Prithviraj Chauhan. This analysis of Bhat genealogies thus forces into the mainstream the hitherto silenced question of the appropriation of medieval Lambada kings in the service of a Hindu nationalist cultural agenda.

Through our analysis, we hope to have opened-up a new way of theorizing the predominance of martial narratives in the Bhat repertoire. As we have seen, this textual propensity was embedded in a more complex history of patronage networks, the reconstitution of castes in colonial modernity as well as within a textual play of abuse/caricature, the whole of which, taken together and apart, has sustained the Bhat genealogies as a cultural practice.

Where disciplinary history would disqualify the historical veracity of Bhat narratives on the basis of their morality, we have sought to take this as a starting point towards the construction of the genealogies as part of a systematically non-subjugated form of knowledge. Far from being dead relics of a bygone tradition, Bhat genealogies are in a state of creative transformation, as they respond to the demands of giving meaning to many changes that the Bhat Lambada community is undergoing in the face of the onslaught of capitalist modernity.

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