

Rethinking Folk Media in Digital Era: A Study on *Bhaona* Performances of Assam, India

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Abstract

Folk media are embedded with symbolic acts which communicate the ethos (social, cultural, political, environmental and economical) of the society yielding it. Ubiquity of new media has precipitated epochal alterations in cultural expressions, socializing patterns and global economy of the “network society”. Recording, storing and retrieval of folk tradition due to new media are changing perspectives of folk culture, mainly the (re)presentation, conservation, consumption and communicative value of local heritage. Relocation of folk traditions in the new media implies appearance of newer meanings and altered functionality. Thus, representation of folk tradition in new media not only has an informative (communicative) and dispositive (conservative) function but also performative function.

The ethnographic study on *Bhaona* – the ritualistic theatrical performances of Assam seek to understand the evolution of the folk tradition within the contemporary cultural community that mediates digitally. The qualitative study seeks to find out how *Bhaona* manifests in the digital age and contributes to the understanding of vernacular expressions in ever changing technology driven world. The study highlights whether new media is capable of radically transforming *Bhaona* and its functionality?; what are the guiding intention of the users who publish the cultural expressions in the new media platform – whether it is archiving or patrimonialization of culture; how the digital natives are using the digital culture’s characteristics like interactivity, autonomy

and connectivity to proliferate the tradition; and how *Bhaona* has re-contextualized to address the altered meaning making process in the Digital Era.

Keywords: *Bhaona*, Digital Culture, Folk Media, Network Society

Introducing Folk Media in the context of Digital Era

“Society exists not only by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication” (Dewey, 1916)

Culture can be defined as a part of the communication process (Applegate and Sypher, 1988) where humans are the product of their own discourse. Reality is therefore considered to be a social product which comes into existence through construction, adaptation, and maintenance of symbols within a cultural group over a particular period. Since time immemorial fertile imaginations and dexterous articulating power of human minds gave birth to various medium of communication to convey the beliefs and experiences of any community, living in a particular geographical area in a particular period. Folk media is an example of such an embodiment of “learned conduct” through which cultural processes and cognitive insights in a particular society have been articulated in the forms of beliefs, values, myths, and legends.

Folk media can be defined as “living expressions of the lifestyle and the culture of people” (Ranganath, 1980) documenting the communicative purposes, socialization processes and the trajectory of evolution of the particular group or community. Folk media are embedded with pertinent symbolic acts which manifest and communicate the ethos (social, cultural, political, environmental and economical) of the society yielding it. The folk medium is therefore an effective means of communication in a particular cultural space because it is rooted and structured in the socio-cultural framework of the society, where it is being performed.

Owing to passage of time, the ubiquity of mass media being a “Magic Multiplier” (Schramm, 1964), and the proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Digital Era, precipitate changes of varying degrees in different spheres encompassing human lives. Discourses on globalization, digital revolution, technological determinism and social shaping of technology document the epochal alterations in socialization patterns, social structures, identity assertion and global economy as a whole.

Mass media and ICTs in Digital Age play crucial role in presentation and promotion of cultures through creative engagement of indigenous peoples in equitable partnerships with organization (both governmental and non-governmental) to document, mediate and reify their cultural expressions, and also patent them through Intellectual Property Rights. While on one hand, ICTs and technologies in Digital Age enhance the scope of learning, storing and dissemination of cultural information, on the other hand, the importance of time, space and social affiliation is gradually altering, constantly being re-defined and re-contextualized, and is partially losing its traditional meaning.

Digital Technologies have also altered the nature, scope and functions of folk media in Indian society, thereby challenging its privileged role as one of the most effective means of communication for the folks. The revolution in media landscape brought about by digital technologies not only altered the communication landscape for the ‘usual players’, but also opens the channels of mass communication to a wider range of ‘new players’ controlling the flow of information. Despite stern resistances to changes by various social institutions, there are instances of ‘sophisticated negotiations’ based on communal belief systems to accommodate technophiles and technophobes and re-align the medium in contemporary ‘rationalized’ communicative spaces. Thus, in the words of Wang and Dissanayake (1984), folk media can be

defined as, “a communication system embedded in the culture which existed much before the arrival of mass media, and which still exists as a vital mode of communication in many parts of the world presenting a certain degree of continuity, despite changes.”

Neo-Vaishnavism and *Bhaona* of Assam

During the 13th to 15th centuries, Assam – the present Northeastern state of India was reigned by several chieftains belonging to Ahom, Chutia, Kachari and Koch communities, who had diverse socio-politico and religious-cultural ethos (Patnaik, 2013). Ritual-centric orthodox Hinduism, idol worship, obeisance to several deities and sacrificial practices gained prominence in the religious sphere (Guha, 1991; Neog, 1965; Sarma, 1966). Conflicts amongst different tribes and communities, caste based social stratification and discrimination, and atrocities inflicted by feudalism disrupted the anticipated social cohesion.

Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449 AD – 1568 AD) – the social reformer of medieval period, undertook pragmatic approach to synthesize the stratified society by propagating the ideals of Bhakti tradition which highlights social harmony through fraternity (Barman, 2013). Neo-Vaishnavite period (also known as the Renaissance of Assam) started around the late 15th century and gained popularity during the 16th and 17th centuries (Datta, 2012). The movement not only brought changes in the religious sphere but also contributed to academic and social spheres (Sarma, 1976) and lead to the formation of composite Assamese identity (Gohain, 1987; Sarma, 2006).

Srimanta Sankaradeva encouraged establishment of community prayer halls known as *Namghar* and also created performing art forms like music, dance, drama, etc. to propagate the Vaishnava philosophy and congregate people belonging to different stratum of the existing

stratified society. Eventually, the dogma of polytheism was replaced with *Eka Sarana Naam Dharma* (complete submission to One Supreme Being through repeated chanting of His name), based on the teachings of the *Bhagavata Purana*, which beliefs Brahman (i.e., absolute reality) is monistic and Krishna is “the qualified form of the formless Brahman” (Saikia, 2013). Eventually, neo-Vaishnavism of Assam got institutionalized with the formation of *Sattras* - neo-Vaishnavite monasteries which also serve as residential institution of Vaishnavas disciples (known as *bhakats*). Although the first *Sattra* was established by Sankaradeva at Bordowa in 1494 AD, it was not conceived as a full-fledged structural institution. After Sankaradeva’s demise, *Sattra* developed as an institution under the guidance of his disciples like Sri Madhabdeva, Sri Damodardeva, Sri Harideva, Sri Gopaladeva, Sri Mathura Das, Purusottoma Thakur and other Vaishnava apostles.

During the 13th to 15th centuries, Assam already had folk traditions like *Dhulia*, *Deodhani*, *Ojapali* and *Putula Nach*. Enriched with experiences of such cultural expressions and also other dramatic presentations popular in other parts of India like *Ramlila*, *Yakshgana*, *Yatra*, etc., Sankaradeva could gauge the effectiveness of folk theatre to propagate the ideals of Vaishnavism amongst lay people in a stratified society. Eventually, during the late 15th century he developed a new form of dramatic performance through one act play called *China Yatra*. He further developed the pageant shows into theatrical forms by incorporating music, song, dance, dialogue, costume, masks, make up, etc. to evoke devotion towards Krishna and instill the egalitarian ideals of neo-Vaishnavism. The dramatic compositions are known as *Ankiya Natas* (as they are single act plays) and staging of the *Natas* are known as *Bhaona*. Srimanta Sankaradeva had written six *Ankiya Natas* namely, *Kali Damana*, *Patni Prasada*, *Keli Gopala*, *Rukmini Harana*, *Parijata Harana* and *Sri Rama Bijaya* in *Brajavali* language, depicting interpretative stories from the

Puranas like *Bhagavata Purana*, *Visnu Purana*, *Agni Purana*, *Harivamsa* and the epic like *Ramayana*. Traditionally, *Bhaona* performances that are held within the confines of *Sattras* for religious-ritualistic purposes (like *Sankaradeva* and *Mahadeva tithis*, *Janmashtami*, *Raas Purnima*, etc.) begin after dusk and continue until dawn, and are performed exclusively by male *bhakats* residing in *Sattras* and enthusiast male laities of nearby villages.

The present qualitative research explores the intersection of *Bhaona* (as a folk culture) with digital technologies and analyzes how the ritualistic tradition is thriving as a part of Digital Culture in Digital Era. Majuli district of Assam (also known as *Sattra-nagari* of Assam) was selected as the field of research where ethnographic data was collected through in-depth interviews of twenty respondents comprising both male and female, and also performers and audiences of the *Bhaona* tradition. The collected data has been analyzed under three themes – Interactivity, Autonomy and Connectivity which are also characteristics of Digital Culture.

Interactivity

Engagement of communication science with the term ‘interactivity’ started around late 1980s when ICTs revolutionized the transmission process that led to re-conceptualization of mediated contents. Interactivity can be defined as a dynamic communicative process which provides users with the ability to choose and control the exchanged messages. New media creates environments for user-to-user interactivity owing to the increasing inter-connected networks of users. Exchange of meaning between the sender and the receiver of messages play crucial role in analyzing interactivity as digital texts (like blogs, websites, Facebook pages, YouTube channels, etc.) have emerged as facilitator of folk process where the author of the text consciously crafts the uploaded message (like videos, photographs and/or written texts) the way she or he intends to in order to elicit anticipated feedback from the receiver, who again decodes

the content of the text based on his or her position – the dominant-hegemonic position or the negotiated position or the oppositional position, as elaborated by Stuart Hall in Encoding/Decoding model of communication (1973).

Digital Age has thereby brought about a paradigm shift in the traditional definition of 'performer', 'audience' and 'performance space' of folklore. In the evolved communicative context, an audience of a live *Bhaona* performance is no more a passive receiver but is also an active performer who is working towards documenting the lived experiences as showcased in traditional performance space, editing the documented videos to deliver the intended message and sharing the same to virtual community through various digital platforms. Eliciting the importance of digital technologies, one of the audience-respondents said, "As the directors of *Bhaona* decide which part of the narrative to highlight so as to put across the moral of the story effectively, as the actors know how to maneuver their bodies and modulate their voices, as the singers know which raga could elicit the desired emotion in audience, we also edit the documented footage as effectually as possible so as to promote our folk culture and facilitate interaction among receivers who will be keen to know more about the *Bhaona* tradition of Assam". The users (cultural insiders or cultural outsiders) who are at the receiving end of the mediated messages are again not passive audience as they also partake in online searching of the content, listening and/or watching it and also providing necessary feedback, as interactivity demands virtual audience to critique the performance rather than just 'believe in' the ritualistic tradition with devotional gaze. The Internet is therefore no less than a performance space for communicative actions; it is a site for routine representation of Vaishnava worldviews and the subsequent religious-cultural identity, in front of regional, national, and global audiences.

Autonomy

Laszlo Ropolyi describes the Internet as “technology according to its material, as communication according to its dynamics, as culture according to its form, and as an organism according to its objectives” (Ropolyi, 2003). Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of using rhizome which is “non-linear, anarchic and nomadic” (Carpentier et al., 2003) as a metaphor to “highlight the role of community media as the crossroads of organizations and movements linked with civil society” (p.61) could further be implemented as a framework to analyze the evolution of folk tradition in Digital Era, as Internet is a center-less, non-hierarchical form with countless links making multiplicity a possibility (Deleuze and Guattari, 2002).

Neo-Vaishnavism of Assam got institutionalized with the formation of *Sattras* that serve as the chief ‘custodian members’ responsible for propagation of religious-cultural expressions necessary for sustenance and proliferation of the Bhakti tradition. *Sattras* as ‘sphere of authority’ in Assamese society re-structured the course of knowledge system in which liturgical training on Sankari culture (including *Bhaona*) are provided by the ‘experts’ in *Sattras* through *Guru Sishya Parampara* (master-apprentice teaching-learning tradition). The ‘authorship of experts’ in *Sattras* retains authority through gatekeeping as they decide who has the right to learn and perform the ritualistic theatre tradition of *Bhaona*. Defying the egalitarian ethos of Srimanta Sankaradeva, the *Sattras* problematized caste and gender based on purity and pollution based on the ideals of post-Vedic Hinduism. As *Bhaona* - the religious-cultural expression became symbolic mode of articulation of Bhakti ideals by the adherents of neo-Vaishnavism, active participation of only male *bhakats*, absence of women’s participation as actors and the right of only Brahmins to enact

certain roles (like Krishna and Rama) became the norm in *Sattras* of Majuli like – Dakhinpat *Sattra*, Auniati *Sattra*, Natun Samaguri *Sattra*, Garmur *Sattra*, etc.

With the advancement of technology, inter-generational teaching-learning ecosystem perceived epochal alterations as Internet provides different modes of acquiring knowledge, and also multiplicity of different versions of knowledge which are being continually updated. New media empowers everyone to speak about tradition, and owing to the democratic character of such platforms, cultural elites and lay people can garner equal level of media representation (Szuts, 2013) and an enthusiast learner can consciously choose among the available modes of learning. Although *Bhaona* got incorporated into academic curriculum in Universities across Assam, only the experts from reputed *Sattras* are involved in the teaching process, but with the help of new media anybody having the required knowledge in *Bhaona* and mask-making can upload tutorials videos in social media platforms and earn the repute that is generally garnered by cultural elites.

New media platforms provide a democratic space to every enthusiast learner of *Bhaona* who might not be associated with *Sattras*, or might not get performance space within a *Sattra* (for belonging to certain caste and gender) to become a performer and proliferate the tradition. One of the performer-respondents from Mishing tribe said, “Although in village *Namghars* lay people of any caste can portray the role of Krishna, the *Sattras* only allow Brahmins. The number of audiences for performances in *Namghar* is small with limited reach and no repute. Though I am not a Brahmin, I always wanted to enact the role of Krishna in plays like *Rukmini Haran*, *Parijata Haran*, etc. I had circulated my performance videos through Facebook and WhatsApp. It garnered appreciation from hundreds of viewers. Nobody asks about my caste while watching me enacting Krishna on Facebook.” One of the women performer-respondents said, “Women are not at all

encouraged to learn *Bhaona* and a place like Majuli is more restrictive. After I watched a Guwahati based all women *Bhaona* rehearsal video in YouTube, my lost dream of performing in *Bhaona* revived. We formed a group and started encouraging women to learn *Bhaona* and mask making. We even circulate videos of our minuscule performances through social media hoping someday women performed *Bhaona* will not be frowned upon anymore.” New media platforms have provided autonomy over authority of *Sattrra* institution pertinent to *Bhaona* performances and brought back the participatory ethos once envisioned by Srimanta Sankaradeva. Such alternative performances are also getting archived as ‘Culture’ in the digital platforms, thereby enhancing the modalities of access to alternative performances and learning methods and dismantling the ‘authority’ of the *Sattrra* institution over Assamese society in general and *Bhaona* in particular.

New media also provides autonomy to the audience of *Bhaona* as videos available on such platforms could be retrieved according to the convenience of the audience, well beyond scheduled hours of live performance. It is not time and place bound. Moreover, during certain *Bhaona* performances like *Raas* festival (held in the month of November) in Auniati *Sattrra* of Majuli, women are not allowed to watch performance inside the *Sattrra* as such performances start after dusk and continue till dawn. Thus, a Facebook live or a recording of such performance when circulated through new media platforms not only provide scope to women audience to watch *Bhaona* (as a part of ritual of communion) but also encourage their agency as critical viewers.

Digital Culture has altered the functionality of *Bhaona* performances available in new media platforms. The role of such performances is not to maintain social order in a neo-Vaishnavite society functioning under the ‘authority’ of *Sattrra* institution but to provide an inclusive space to individuals to help them access and acquire the otherwise denied social and cultural capital.

Connectivity

Technology driven new media has not only altered the media landscape but also brought about epochal alterations in the way people perceive the world around them, comprehend realities and interact with every other individual. The “Network Society” of Manuel Castells in Marshall McLuhan’s “the Global Village” has curtailed physical distances by smudging of geographical boundaries, thereby influencing each other’s worldviews through connectivity.

Jose van Dijck (2013) in the book – Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of social media elaborates that the increased social media applications’ usage has been changed from the “participatory culture” to the “culture of connectivity” (as being connected to and through digital media is considered as an integral part of sociality in contemporary world), owing to the omnipresence of various digital platforms due to availability and affordability of such interfaces. “Communicative media” platforms (van Dijck, 2013) like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Blog, YouTube, etc. provide unprecedented opportunities for increased connection and belongingness through interaction amongst locally based communities as well as transnational diverse societies, thereby facilitating formation of social linkages in “synchronous” as well as “asynchronous” contexts (Siddique and Kagan, 2006; Wilding, 2012). Digital natives - the young generation even regard the online platforms as the most “natural” and “given” environs proliferating inter-linked social existence and social cohesion (van Dijck, 2013).

In Assam YouTube channels like - *broklend boy* (more than fifty thousand subscribers), *Heritage Assam* (more than thirty thousand subscribers), *All in All Assamese* (more than twenty thousand subscribers), *Uniqueidea Axom* (more than seventeen thousand subscribers), etc.; WhatsApp groups like - *Ankiya Bhaona*, *Bhaona Mur Gorbo*, *Mohila Bhaona*, *Matribhasa Bhaona*, *Bhaona Samaraha* (having more than two hundred participants in each group); Facebook pages

like - *Asomiya Vauna Sanskriti, Axom Bhaona Dol*, etc. (having more than fifty thousand followers), along with Facebook pages of different *Sattras* and cultural groups are some of the social media platforms solely dedicated towards sharing of videos and information pertaining to *Bhaona*. One of the performer-respondents said, “Through social media platforms we try to network and develop connections with people dedicated towards proliferation of *Bhaona* tradition, not only in Assam but also outside India. We constantly share information about different competitions and exhibitions where *Bhaona* could be performed, and masks related to *Bhaona* could be highlighted. We also share videos of praiseworthy *Bhaona* performances, especially if any group is trying to innovate aesthetically and/or linguistically.”

Folk culture has always been considered to have the local essence as the production process and functionality are embedded in the lives of the local community which yields it. Owing to proliferation of digital technologies and globalization, ‘Culture’ has become a distinct signifier for heterogeneous groups, having varied socio-politico-economic aspirations behind strategic performance of culture (Bourdieu, 1984; Hemmes et al. 2007; Brosius, 2010). Tangible and intangible culture serve as “usable pasts” (Merkel 2011) for identity formation in the ‘global imagery’ of communities, being the ‘vessels’ which store cultural values, ethos, and worldviews. Rituals are creatively constructed and exhibited as cultural property, thereby transforming rituals into heritage. Construction of heritage as an “intentional tradition” by communities not only has political intent but also harbors economic interests where the consumption of heritage is directed towards tourism industry. *Bhaona* tradition of Assam has become the ‘heritage’ of Assam and India after Ministry of Culture, Government of India enlisted the cultural expression as Intangible Cultural Heritage. Moreover, recognition of mask-making artist Dr. Hem Chandra Goswami with Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 2018 has brought the tradition into limelight with thousands of

national and international tourists now visiting Majuli and Natun Samaguri *Sattrra*, where Dr. Goswami practices the art form.

'Culture' is traded in a globalized world as a capital in the Bourdieuan sense. The spread of technology leads to redistribution of cultural goods from primary contexts and primary users to exhibition of the artifacts in a completely diverse context, thereby facilitating patrimonialization of culture (Keszeg, 2005). Technological advancement of the Internet provides impetus to preservation of tradition through folklorism – the concept first proposed in the year 1958 by the renowned sociologist Peter Heinz. Zoltan Biro elaborated that through folklorism “an element or group of elements of folk culture enters a context that is alien and different from its original one (...), changes its meaning in this alien context and becomes different from what is represented within the system of folk culture” (Biro, 1987). He had mentioned four types of folklorism, namely, everyday folklorism, scientific folklorism, representational folklorism and aesthetic folklorism. In the present study only three types of folklorism (scientific folklorism, representational folklorism and aesthetic folklorism) have been identified and elaborated accordingly. Biro defined scientific folklorism as the situation where folk culture thrives through scholarly interpretations. “Thus, when speaking about saving and safe keeping, we are in fact dealing with a process of folklorism and a meaning shift that is associated with it. Scientific approach means we are putting the elements of folk culture into an alien context” (Biro, 1987). Images, descriptions, and audio-visual materials of *Bhaona* and associated mask tradition presented on the homepages of ethnographic museums and Zonal Cultural Centers of national repute like – Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, National Museum, Northeast Zonal Cultural Centre, etc. can be interpreted as manifestation of scientific folklorism. Digital databases updated by Governmental (like Sahapedia) as well as civil society organizations (like Asomiya Vauna Sanskriti, Assamese Bhaona Assam, etc.) and digital

libraries containing documents regarding *Bhaona* and mask tradition of Assam also contribute to furthering the scientific folklorism and archival process of the indigenous knowledge.

Representational folklorism refers to the exhibition of folk culture in the form of artifacts as showpiece objects. It does not only have its craftsmen but also its ideologues (experts) who consciously select the elements of folk tradition that they exhibit in front the world and direct how to gaze on them. This is an example of consumption of culture (Biro, 1987). The associated mask tradition of *Bhaona* has become a cultural signifier of Assam and also India, and social media platforms are also being utilized to advertise masks for the purpose of selling them as cultural goods to national and global buyers. Dr. Hem Chandra Goswami said, “New media has become a medium for advertising our *Bhaona* culture, especially mask tradition in front of global audience. *Bhaona* masks are used as decorative items now-a-days. We only make masks according to the mythological stories on which *Bhaona* performances are based, therefore along with earning revenues in global market, we are able to let art enthusiast know about Assamese culture”. Aesthetic folklorism is considered by Biro as the most classic form of folklorism in which the folk culture is alleviated as ‘high culture’ (Biro, 1987) and the context of such performance of culture could be regional, national or global festivals aimed at creating spectacles. *Bhaona* tradition has also been showcased along with exhibition of *Bhaona* masks in several national and international museums and cultural festivals like – The British Museum (England), Ayodha Cultural Research Institute (Uttar Pradesh, India), Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (Madhya Pradesh, India), Republic Day Parade 2018 (New Delhi, India), , North East Ecotourism and Cultural Festival – 2019 (Assam, India), Kumbh Mela – 2019 (Uttar Pradesh, India), India Skill Competition 2018 (New Delhi, India), etc.

Conclusion

There exist several spaces in human lives like cultural space, religious space, social space, individual space, etc. Technology has created a new digital space. As the existing spaces are not independent of each other and entwined, the new digital space also got entwined and dictate the course of actions in human lives. All these spaces help in conceptualizing the communicative expressions of an individual, a community, a nation-state, etc. As the concept of spaces got evolved with the passage of time, the presentation of *Bhaona* also shifted across platforms; it first shifted from *Sattras* and *Namghars* to the courtyards of Ahom and Koch kings and then to stage and auditorium and eventually to new media platforms. Thus, the presentation of *Bhaona* shifted from 'sacred' space in *Sattras* or *Namghars* to a 'secular' democratic space in digital platforms. Owing to the altered meaning making process of the community that now-a-days mostly communicate digitally, it could be inferred that with the advent of technology there is a perceived evolution of the concept of 'performer,' 'audience' and 'performance space,' the performer-audience relationship, and the functionality of the performances. The devotional gaze of audience in traditional religion-cultural space is encouraged to change into the digital citizen's gaze as a connoisseur of art forms who can provide appropriate feedback for aesthetic development of the cultural expression.

In order to comprehend the evolution of communicative purposes and processes of any society, one has to delve into two broader streams namely culture and technology, which evolves on their own terms as well as are entwined in Digital Age. As the traditions of any society are not "cultural given" but are "cultural construct," they can neither be 'genuine' nor 'spurious. Moreover, cultural traditions ought to be symbolically reinvented in the ongoing present. The way individuals of a particular cultural group forge traditions, re-frame the structure of knowledge system and make meaning in everyday life is evolving, so should folk media as it is the platform that reflects

the ethos of the society yielding it. Folk media must trespass through a society down the ages and remain as a continuum documenting the evolution of communicative expressions. Dissemination of *Bhaona* through new media platforms has provided scope to the laities to dismantle the 'authority' of *Sattrra* institution in Assamese society and provide agency to every individual of any caste and gender to acquire the social and cultural capital which has been denied.

Although the exponential growth of Information Technology and computer-mediated-communication has challenged the traditional presentations and functionality of the folk-art forms, folk culture has also contextualized through adaptation. Although there is no perceived total replacement of existing cultural values, newer ideas are being adopted leading to evolution of the value system of society. There should be a harmonious coexistence between 'modern' beliefs and 'older' norms to propagate as a society while at the same time nurture the cultural roots.

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