On Culture and Memories: Remarks on Some Cultural Narratives in Odia

Bibudhendra Narayan Patnaik
This paper is mainly about a part of Odia culture as embodied in some less studied cultural narratives in Odia language and by way of conclusion it deals in brief about the matter of the preservation of culture. It is organized in three parts. The first makes observations of an introductory nature about a cultural community’s perception about its culture and based on this, the paper suggests that culture can be conceptualized at two levels: the collective and the individual. The second is a study of the narratives selected for the purposes of this paper, and the third is concerned in a general way with the issue of endangerment of culture and its preservation.

I

It is a truism that a literate community with a history of some hundreds of years recalls its past through its epics, loka kathas (folktales), loka gitas (folk songs), riddles, proverbs, bacanas (wise-sayings), kinship terms, naming practices, tongue-twisters and the like, and also non-linguistic expressions such as painting, dance and music, and certain practices like partaking of mahaprasad (sacred food of Jagannath) sitting on the floor and then there are performances having both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. These are all carriers of world views, belief systems, ethical codes, modes of living, and many other kinds of knowledge systems in terms of which the ancestors of a community had made sense of the world they had lived in and negotiated with on a day-to-day basis. The thoughts, beliefs, rituals and other practices, the artistic creations and other artifacts, which have stood the test of time, are popularly viewed as constituting the cultural repertoire of that community. The members of the community often make sense of their world and assign meaning to their experiences in terms of these. In this sense the community re-lives its past, and this it does in several ways. When Odia parents, even today, hesitate to name their girl child “Ganga” or when one tries to comfort someone suffering for no fault of his, saying bhagya dose ramachandra gale banabasa (on account of destiny Ramachandra went to the forest on exile) or either fondly or otherwise calls an obese child Bhima, one re-lives one’s cultural past. Culture, it is well known, is not characterized by homogeneity; thus what some members of a given community might count as belonging to their culture, others the same community might not. For instance, not all would agree on whether a specific object, say, menstrual blood, is polluting or not. Members of a cultural community do not assign the same meaning or significance to each cultural entity that is part of the total cultural repertoire of a community. Such differences, however, are likely to be rather minimal in the case of small organizations, for instance, a corporate institution like Larson and Tubro or a cultural organization like Ramakrishna Mission. However, at the same time one has a notion
of belonging to a culture and one might make assertions in this regard. One’s claim to belong to a
certain culture, in some sense, constitutes part of one’s assertion about one’s membership of a larger
cultural group. In the light of the above, “culture” may be understood as a collective notion at one level
and as an individual notion at another, like language. A given sentence, say, a code-mixed sentence, may
be viewed as a sentence of his language by one, but not another. When one rejects a code-mixed
sentence as not belonging to his language, one is conceptualizing language at an individual level, but to
the extent that he relates the given sentence to his language, he is thinking of language as a collectivity.
Thus there is no contradiction when two speakers of Odia offer contradictory judgements about the
status of an Odia-English code mixed sentence but assert that they are the speakers of the same
language, namely, Odia, which is thus in some sense an abstraction. Similarly there is no contradiction
when two persons asserting their membership of the same cultural community, say, Odia (using the
same term for both the language and the culture), differ with respect to the pollution matter mentioned
above. Thus Odia culture is an abstract notion, and specific cultural ideas and their realizations in the
form of artifacts, observances and the like are particular concretizations of the abstract notion.

Odia culture, especially of the coastal belt, can be said to be a composite of at least the following
subcultures: Hindu, which constitutes the base, Jagannath, Islamic, Western and North Indian. The
underlying concept of Jagannath subculture is accommodation of various symbols and ritual practices of
the tribal, Shaiva, Shakti and Vaishnava worships, it integrates the Little and the Great traditions; it
rejects caste and upholds equality, but in actual day-to-day practice it doesn’t seem to go beyond a very
firm belief in, and a great emotional commitment to, Jagannath, who, incidentally, is very often fondly
called by His first name, that is, without any prefixes like “Lord”, “Bhagawan”, etc. Thus when a wedding
or some other happy event is to take place in the family, the first invitation goes to Him, by post when
necessary, and when one dies, one’s relatives, if they can afford, cremate the deceased at swarga dwara
(gate to heaven), in Puri. Interaction of Hinduism with Islam has resulted in the worship of piras by the
Hindus and the Muslims both, the worship of satya pira, and the creation of a body of katha literature
that describes his glory and the power. At a Satya Narayana pala, a performance reminiscent of
Harikatha, a satya pira story is ritually recounted. This interaction has also given rise to, among others, a
form of drama called mogala tamasa. The impact of the Western values and life style on the population
under reference has been pervasive; it is evident at the level of beliefs and attitudes and of daily life and
is too well known to detail here. In many domains of day-to-day life interaction between tradition and
westernization has created interesting hybrid beliefs and practices. It is these that probably constitute
the most interesting instances of western culture. For instance, not many Odias would remember the
Odia New Year, but on the first of January large numbers of people visit temples for an auspicious start
to their new year. Prasad (if not, mahaprasad, at least, still!)—food offered to the gods— is still
considered sacred food, but instead of partaking of it on the floor as provided for by tradition, educated
city dwellers prefer to have it on their dining table for reasons of hygiene. North Indian influence, which
is a recent phenomenon, has resulted in new practices, such as the burning of the effigy of Ravana,
Kumbhkarna and Indrajit on the day of Dussera. In that, one story of the destruction of the negative
forces is substituted by another story with the same theme. In Odisha this day is associated with the
destruction of evil in the form of the powerful demon Mahisasura by goddess Durga, not of Ravana by Rama. *Hanuman Chalisha* (couplets celebrating god Hanuman) is immensely popular as is *Tulsi Ramayan*, but people know almost nothing about the Odia Ramayana - *Dandi Ramayana*, also called *Jagamohana Ramayana* - composed by the sixteenth century poet Balarama Dasa. As new gods become popular, new places of worship and new *satsangas* (gatherings of devotees to deliberate on the doings of their favourite gods or sages) come into existence. With Santoshi mata in the nineteen eighties and more recently, Siridi Sai Baba, new narratives have arrived.

This paper is mainly about the people of Odisha recalling their cultural past, constructed, as suggested above, in any specific instance by individuals. For our present purposes we consider only two minor puranic texts, an oral narrative and very popular proverb. The puranic texts under reference are *Kartika Mahatmya*, an eighteenth century composition by Mahadeva Dasa, and *Lakshmi Purana*, a sixteenth century composition by Balarama Dasa. A *mahatmya* is a minor mythological composition that celebrates the sanctity of a place or a tree or depicts the power and the greatness of a god or goddess or a sage. Only one narrative from *Kartika Mahatmya*, namely, of Alakshmi, is chosen for the present discussion. Although entitled a *purana*, *Lakshmi Purana* is not a *purana*, lacking in the vast scope, the comprehensiveness and the depth of insight, which are characteristics of a *purana*. It is actually a *brata katha*. A *brata katha* is a story associated with a *brata* or an *osha*, which are ritual observances of the worship of a god or goddess, more often a goddess: Lakshmi, Mangala, Shasthi, etc. The story is always about one’s suffering when one, however mighty, deliberately or otherwise offends a certain goddess, Lakshmi or Mangala, and about how he becomes even more prosperous than he was before when he surrenders to the goddess and observes the *brata* associated with her. At the same time most of these narratives provide a list of what, more often than not, a woman must or must not do in order to live a virtuous life, thereby giving us a glimpse into the social and belief systems of those days.

II

The Alakshmi story is an important creation of Mahadeva Dasa. The concept of “Alakshmi” is the same here as in the tradition, which is very negative, but here there is an attempt to accommodate her in the scheme of things and not exclude her from life and discourse. There seems to be no narrative in the classical puranic literature devoted to her and this might have to do with the belief, still prevalent, that telling her story or listening to it might bring misfortune to the teller and the listener. Sage Narada is said to have observed that Alakshmi is beautiful when she leaves (and Lakshmi is beautiful when she arrives), which one might interpret to mean that it is best for a narrative to avoid even mention of her. Thus Alakshmi has been the great taboo in the classical puranic literature. Against this background when the story of Mahadeva Dasa is viewed, one must acknowledge the poet’s courage to break with the tradition in times unsympathetic to such efforts and choose the hitherto taboo for discourse. His narrative recognizes the negativities of the reality, accepts their existence and tries to find a means to accommodate the same in life - tamas has a place in life. *Lakshmi Purana* is viewed here as an attempt, on the one hand, to create a belief system in order to restrict the woman’s space in the society and to legitimize, on the other, her need for space in her own terms. As for the oral narrative, it is about a
ghost located in the temple town of Puri. This narrative, to the best of our knowledge, has not entered the domain of academic discourse so far. Its origin is unknown. These three are interpreted here as highlighting the accommodating, inclusive nature of Odia culture; these accommodate “the different other”. The proverb under reference, whose origins can be traced to the Mahabharata, is viewed here as not just a piece of practical wisdom with which to reconcile oneself to one’s loss, but also as an articulation of the inadequacy of that point of view. Thus each is a complex discourse in that each juxtaposes two contrastive perspectives and without rejecting either, it tries to find a way of accommodating them both. For some of us it is the acceptance of this “different other”, embodied in these discourses, that is the hallmark of Odia culture.

The main reason we choose to deal with two minor texts rather than any of the three major ones – Sarala Dasa’s Mahabharata, Jagannatha Dasa’s Bhagabata and Balarama Dasa’s Jagamohana Ramayana – of Odia puranic literature is that these texts generally tend to get neglected in serious discussions on Odia culture, although they deserve scholarly attention. These two narratives centre round two related divines: Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and Alakshmi, the very anti-thesis of her. These compositions are simple in structure, their content is unsophisticated, and they are limited in scope and vision. Their orientation, particularly of Lakshmi Purana, is rather didactic, spelling out what one should or should not do in order to live a virtuous life. These are more informative and even more representative of people’s culture than the celebrated puranas, which deal with a wide range of topics and issues of great complexity in a serious, reflective and sophisticated manner. Probably no puranic (including upapuranic, mahatmya, etc.) composition in Odia is as deeply rooted in Odia culture than some stories in the eighteenth century poet, Rama Dasa’s Dadhyata Bhakti or some bhajans (devotional songs) of Sala Bega. A mahatmya celebrates a place, a period of time (mostly a month), a tree or a plant, etc. by narrating legends associated with it; a place is sacred because it is said that Pandavas had visited it during their pilgrimage or a plant is sacred because of the grace of Bhagawan Vishnu, etc. A brata katha is a story associated with a brata or an osha, which are ritual observances of the worship of a god or goddess, more often a goddess: Lakshmi, Mangala, Shashthi, etc. The story is always about the miseries that one undergoes when one, however mighty, deliberately or otherwise offends a certain goddess, Lakshmi or Mangala, and how he becomes even more prosperous than he was before when he surrenders to the deity and observes the brata associated with her. Most of these stories provide a list of what, more often than not, a woman must or must not do in order to live a virtuous life, thereby giving us a glimpse into the social and belief systems of those days.

At least some would view the Alakshmi narrative in Madadeva Dasa’s composition as an exercise in the narrative of counter-culture; now both the dominant culture and the counter culture are part of the repertoire of Odia culture. This narrative about Alakshmi projects a perspective different from the dominant one on good and evil in puranic literature, which can be roughly summed up as follows: these two forces are at war with each other, in which evil may win initially but would eventually be annihilated through the intervention of the divine. In Swargarohana Parva in Sarala Mahabharata, when Arjuna is persuaded to surrender to god Agni his weapons to which he was deeply attached, the god told him that
he would return them to him when, in another yuga, another war would be fought between good and evil and Arjuna would be born again to destroy evil. In Srimad Bhagavat Gita Sri Krishna declares that he will descend to the mortal world whenever evil forces become powerful extremely powerful and upsetting the balance that sustains the creation and that he would protect the virtuous and annihilate the sinners. The Alakshmi story in Kartika Mahatmya is not part of this paradigm, which is an important reason why it deserves attention.

The story is this: pralaya, the great deluge, took place and the essence of things got assimilated into the Supreme god Narayana and the residue existed in the form of dirt and the mud. In due course calm returned and process of creation started again. Brahma first created dharma, so dirt and mud remained excluded from the creation. No one spared a thought for it. It was then born as Alakshmi, as the daughter of Varuna, the god of water. Then the great churning of the ocean took place, and Lakshmi, the beautiful goddess of prosperity, emerged from the ocean, and her father, Varuna, married her to Vishnu. The elder sister remained unmarried. No one would marry the ugly, quarrelsome, jealous Alakshmi. Later at Lakshmi’s entreats Vishnu got her married to a renowned sage but she found the atmosphere of the ashram extremely stifling. Holiness of the ashram pained her. Being the embodiment of the negatives, she could not live with whatever was holy and whoever was virtuous. The sage took her to the forest under a false pretext and abandoned her there. When she realized her situation, she cried aloud piteously and her cry reverberated in the entire creation. At Lakshmi's request Vishnu invited her to his abode, the ever blissful Vaikuntha, but she refused to go there saying that she would only suffer there, seeing the prosperity and the happiness of her younger sister Lakshmi. She requested Vishnu to find her a place congenial to her nature. The Supreme One told her to reside in places where there is quarrel, dishonesty, ugliness and unhappiness. He also said that once a week she would receive worship with him under the sacred peepal tree, where her sage-husband had abandoned her.

The importance of the Alakshmi narrative is that it does not eliminate Alakshmi but accommodates her. Vishnu found her request for a suitable place for her entirely reasonable and empathized with her on her rejection of Vaikuntha. He gave her legitimacy by sharing with her worship offered to him. All this amounts to acceptance of the negative aspect as part of the reality and working out a way of living with it. Alakshmi was there because of the great deluge, which is part of process of the creation of the universe. She could not be faulted for being what she was, namely, ugly and jealous and quarrelsome; she did not choose to be so. Created out of mud and dirt, negativity was part of her svabhava (essential nature). Jagannatha Dasa in his Bhagavata had made the same point about two hundred years before Kartika Mahatmya when his snake Kaliya told Krishna: sarpare jata kalu mote / swabhava chadibi kemante (you gave me birth as a snake; how can I give up my [snake-like] tendencies?). Dasa’s narrative emphasizes the point that the moral response to the negatives is finding a way of accommodating it, knowing full well that the consequence could be extremely unwelcome and even catastrophic in future.

Although for some of us, Alakshmi is no taboo at all but means the above, in the mainstream Odia culture, Alakshmi has the same fate as in the classical, pan-Indian culture expressed in Sanskrit, where,
as already mentioned, she is often referred to in the manner of an epithet such as “Lakshmi’s elder sister”, as though the utterance of the word that names her is capable of bringing unhappiness to a family. In Odia, alakshmi is bad language; one abuses a woman calling her alakshmi. The word semantically related to this word, and apparently derived from it, namely, alakshani, is far more frequently used in contexts of gossip, backbiting, quarrel and the like. It literally means “the one with negative attributes”, the superimposed meaning being “the one who brings bad luck”. In sum, it appears that Alakshmi lives today as an abusive term among the vast majority of the Odia cultural community.

Balarama Dasa’s Lakshmi Purana has often been regarded as a narrative of protest against caste-based discriminations. However what is sometimes missed out is that it articulates a protest against denial of space to the home maker. It defines what constitutes a moral life and outlines a code of conduct. This code is generally part of the Odia culture, but not the questioning of it, which is what, as mentioned above, this text is also about. Today this code would be rejected as sexist, but each code is only a reflection of the times in which it is created. The code under reference is more about what the woman must do than what the man must and more about the married woman than the unmarried girl. A married woman must do and must not do certain things on Thursdays, amavasyas and sankrantis, and both men and women must not do certain things, and not just on specific days. The code specifies the “don’ts” a good deal more than the “do’s”. But this need not be surprising; this is the most economical way of detailing the code since the list of constraints would always be shorter than that of the recommendations. For instance if someone has to stipulate about food to be had on a particular day, it would be more economical to say what foods to avoid than which ones to consume. Thus the food-related directive has to take essentially the following form: “eat everything except these.”

The directives are about physical and mental well being: about food and food related pollution, cleanliness, family duties, and respect for tradition. On Thursdays, which is goddess Lakshmi’s day, women must not take non-vegetarian food, meat cooked in bottle gourd, things roasted in fire, and left-over or burnt food. They must not fry raw rice to make lia. They must not beat children. Now, children have to be disciplined, raw rice has to be fried, and left-over and burnt food cannot always be thrown away, but such things must be done on other days. One - man or woman - must not eat rice with curd at night, and on Thursday, amavasya and sankranti nights one must not have food at all. One must not eat facing the south or the west, nor must one eat sitting on the floor without something to sit on. This emphasis on food is due to the traditional belief that food and the manner of consuming it are associated with states of mind; thus certain foods are believed to cause undesirable inclinations and passions. Incidentally, some vegetables and green leaves were believed to be like non-vegetarian food in this respect. The Odias no more observe quite a few of these restrictions but the tradition comes alive today when one does not eat a green leaf called poi on auspicious days. Or when in most Odia homes non-vegetarian food is still not cooked on Thursdays. The male members could eat out if they want to eat non-vegetarian food on a Thursday.

Not washing one’s face in the morning, not washing one’s face after eating food, not having a head bath on Thursday for a woman, having food without washing one’s feet, and applying oil to the body
after bath are among the forbidden. These obviously relate to personal hygiene. Not combing and tying hair in the evening is forbidden too, but surely not for reasons of cleanliness; it probably derives from the now forgotten but then prevalent belief system. Sleeping on a crumpled bed, making a clumsy bed to sleep on and sleeping naked are among the forbidden, and these have to do with being organized and being decent that have their roots in the tradition. Sexual discipline is an important part of the code; on certain days, sex is forbidden, some of these have to do with the notion of the pollution of the body; and then sex is forbidden outside of the wedlock. Women must treat the guest with respect and must light the sacred lamp in the evening, etc.; in short, they must respect tradition. And a woman who wants to live a virtuous life must not be quarrelsome, lazy, unpleasant and bold.

The most important part of the code concerns the way the woman must relate to her husband. For her nothing is more important than serving her husband. No matter what religious acts she performs – going on pilgrimage, observing bratas, performing tapas, worshiping gods and goddesses - she acquires no religious merit if her husband is displeased with her. Her husband’s joys and sorrows must be hers, and she must always obey her husband, and be pleasing in her dealings with him, and never get irritated with him.

In its assigning the pivotal place in the family to the home maker, in assigning too a great responsibility to her, but at the same time restricting her choices to a considerable extent, Lakshmi Purana expresses the Odia culture probably in the most explicit of terms. Besides, as a protest text, it legitimizes the woman’s protest even against her husband if she feels completely chocked in the family and is denied any personal space. Lakshmi Purana is generally (although wrongly, but that is a matter that needs to be discussed separately) believed to be the text that created a physical space in which caste distinctions have to be rejected as totally unholy, namely in the partaking of the mahaprasada.

Turning now to the proverb in Odia: karna male panch, arjuna male panch (five, if Karna dies, five if Arjuna dies). In Sarala Mahabharata, on the eve of the War, when his mother Kunti requested her eldest born, Karna, to at least spare his brothers who he would be fighting in the Kurukshetra War, if he was unable to fight on their behalf, he assured her that he would spare all except Arjuna. Kunti was known as the mother of five, although she was really the mother of six and biologically, of four. Again, such facts do not matter; the narrative facts do, where Kunti is established as the mother of five. She had realized that in that conclusive war, either Karna would die or would Arjuna, but in any case, she would remain the mother of five sons. That was all the assurance that Kunti could get from her son. In due course this idea got embodied in a popular proverb. Although the first articulation of it was Sarala’s, the phraseology, the epigrammatic, balanced style of it in its eminently memorable present form, are not his. Like any proverb, this one too has a thousand authors who in all probability did not belong to the same century and who will always remain unknown. The proverb means that no loss can be so great as to completely ruin the loser; every loss carries with it compensation in some way, although the loser might feel that it is adequate. The proverb is used in various contexts. For instance, it is used to persuade somebody to do something rather daring or console someone who has run into a loss. It is also used to say that one must not expect to have everything; one would have to make a choice or will have
to accept what he has been given, say, by destiny. A proverb embodies traditional wisdom; it is a cultural statement of a people. It is not a directive about progressing in the other world, but about thriving in the mortal world.

There are two “Babana bhutas (ghosts named “Babana”)” in traditional narratives in Odia; one occurs in Sarala Mahabharata and the other exists in the oral form. The Sarala Mahabharata episode, in which Babana bhuta is a powerful but malevolent ghost and ended up in being imprisoned by a tantric (practitioner of tantra), deals with the damning consequences of enjoying alone the property that belongs to others as well. The other Babana bhuta, with whom we are concerned here, occurs in a tale connected with Rath Yatra of Jagannath in Puri. In popular imagination he is a ghost who keeps watch over the Gundicha temple, where the Deities spend a week every year during Ratha Yatra, when the Deities are not there. When they are there, he perches himself at a corner of one of the compound ones in the temple. The devotees set aside a bit of mahaprasad (food that has been offered to the Deities) on a little piece leaf for him. Unlike ordinary ghosts he has no unfilled human desires, has no interest in the world of the humans and he does not interfere with them in any way. This story shows how Jagannath worship and Jagannath narrative are both is inclusive - gods, humans and other lower existences, all have a place there. And for some of us, this inclusiveness is part of Odia culture.

III

To bring the discussion to a close, one might ask a somewhat general question about culture, namely the following: what can one do to preserve one’s culture, when that cultural community feels that their culture is under threat? As we try to deal with this matter, we will give examples from Odia culture, although we do not believe that it is under threat, as some do. It needs no persuading to observe that as their world changes, the members of a cultural community change in order to negotiate successfully with the changed realities; in that process they accept new practices, new perspectives and new world views. Sometimes the old practices are drowned in the past. If a few continue to survive, they often do so merely in form and unaware of their meanings, in due course people tend to dismiss these as mere superstitions. For instance, dahukas (ritual charioteers) no more call upon devotees to pull the rathas (chariots) during Rath Yatra saying the traditional bolis (here, couplets). With their tantric meaning lost for long in Odisha, which was once an important seat of tantra, these bolis came to be considered as vulgar. Sometimes the local is lost in the global. Today, many urban Odias would not remember the Odia New Year’s day; for them the New Year’s Day is the international New Year’s Day. People no more engage in some linguistic activities; as a result, some traditional discourses are lost: kandana (the bride’s songs of sorrow as she leaves for her husband’s house), riddles, naming game and tongue twisters, among others. Palanquin bearers no more sing their songs as they carry the bride in the palanquin to her husband’s house and the grandmother or the mother does not sing lullabies any more to make the child sleep. There are no bridal songs or cradle songs any more. Existing bachanas, proverbs, etc. in the changed context have become unintelligible, not just for reasons of language, but for those of their
content as well. The younger generation in Odisha, especially those in their teens, no longer respond to the *bhajans* (devotional songs) of Sala Bega or are aware of the significance of Manika *gauduni* (Manika, the milk woman), Dasia Bauri or the expression “*saradha bali*”. In Odisha, at least in the coastal belt, the burning of the effigies of Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Meghanada is now part of the Dussera celebrations. It was never part of the tradition, in which Durga Puja was associated with the killing of the demon Mahisasura by goddess Durga; it was never associated with the killing of Ravana. Not *Dandi Ramayana*, but *Hanumana chalisa* and *Tulsi Ramayana* have become part of Odia cultural life; the first of these is hardly recited, the other two, very frequently. Similarly, *Satyanarayana Puja* is very popular in Odisha now, but the legend that is associated with this puja is not the same that is associated with the traditional *Satyanarayana Puja*. Norms of acceptable behavior, including linguistic behavior, in public are not the same as even some two or three decades ago. For example, addressing an elderly person by a much younger person in his first name is a common feature in Hindi or English language interviews in our country now. For this to happen in Odia language interviews is perhaps just a matter of time. This address behavior mimics contemporary American culture, which according to Robin Lakoff (2006), is changing from a culture of respect to one of camaraderie.

There are some interesting parallels between language and culture. Both change and more or less for the same reasons; for instance contact with other languages or cultures bring about changes in language and culture respectively. Both leave residues that persist for long. The notions of “endangerment”, “preservation” and “revitalization” apply to both. If the preservation of an endangered language is important, then preservation of culture, which in part is the knowledge system of a community, is even more so. Just as a language can be preserved through documentation, so can culture be. In fact, in some loose sense, the myths, *loka kathas*, proverbs, etc. are kinds of documentation of a culture. But in the changed intellectual milieu, these cannot be the preferred mode of recording; the forms of knowledge-literature have to be. It needs mention in this context that careful documentation of cultural entities would necessarily be unaesthetic and unappealing.

Culture can be preserved through other means as well, for instance, in the observance of cultural practices. In the public domain *pala* (a form of performance for the dissemination of puranic literature to the accompaniment of music), *daskathia* (a form of performance similar to *pala*), performances such as *rama lila*, etc. , all of which have to compete with television shows, need to be encouraged by the society in ways a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper. In the home domain certain observances must continue or be revived, as the case may be. For instance, traditionally, the birthday of a Hindu is determined in accordance with a certain constellation obtaining within a certain period of time. These days people observe their birthdays on their birth date according to the English calendar. As part of the celebration they blow off the candles on the birthday cake. Blowing off a candle in a celebration context is inauspicious according to tradition. The traditional practice will survive if it continues to be observed along with the borrowed item from a different culture. Celebrating one’s birthday twice might look odd, but the hugely compensating factor is that it contributes to the preservation of one’s culture. Similarly, cooking traditional food at home, especially on festival days
could also be a desirable step in this direction. On particular festival days specific foods are prepared. During the holy month of Kartik, a simple, special kind of vegetable-mixed dal is traditionally prepared, and the vegetables used are purely local. Preparing it at home even for one two days during the last five days of the holy month of Kartik, which are considered to be particularly holy, can introduce a bit of tradition to the younger generation. The home domain is the best place for the preservation of culture.

In sum, the paper suggests that culture is not a homogeneous concept and that it must be conceptualized at the collective level, where it is indeed an abstraction and at an individual level, where it is the specific manifestation of the same, which could be an idea or an artifact or an observance. On the basis of an analysis of four narratives, the paper maintains that inclusiveness is part of the Odia culture although there may not be general agreement on it. It suggests that there are certain similarities between language and culture and that endangerment and preservation as concepts make sense both for language and culture. Then it outlines certain initiatives for the preservation of a culture at the public and the home domains.

**Bibliography**


(2011a). “On Virtuous Living according to Lakshmi Puran. saralamahabharat.blogspot.com

