

Research Article

Everyday Future of Yore: Alternative Masculinity in the Lepcha Folktales of Darjeeling

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Abstract

Gender in the contemporary everyday life of the Darjeeling men is a ritual of reiterating the colonial hypermasculinity that ultimately reinforces the stereotyped notion that the Gorkha men are muscular men whose hegemonic masculinity makes them merely worthy of wars. This toxic masculinity is the major object of criticism by the ecofeminists who have shown how detrimental this hypermasculinity is for both women and ecology. This article, by revisiting the alternative textuality of everydayness as manifested in the select Lepcha folktales of the Hills, aims at uncovering an endogenous eco (alternative)masculinity that may act as a genderqueer model based on which the Gorkha men may learn to replace their colonial internalized 'ethic of daring' with the 'ethic of caring' in their everyday future. As an interpretation of the folktales by a 'non-indigenous ally,' a hybrid methodology has been used by combining various perspectives from the theories related to gender and sexuality, ethno-poetics, folkloristics, etc. The article begins by arguing that the scope of studying everyday life has to be expanded from merely focusing on the micro and the oblivious towards accommodating the hidden 'non-everyday' inclusive alternatives that are embedded in the everyday textuality of the folktales. Thereafter, it tries to assert how the politicization of the possible everyday based on an understanding of the history of mentality as revealed through the folktales, can initially, allow the Darjeeling men to recall 'the not yet-real,' but plausible, genderqueer male identities of yore. This might eventually-encourage them to turn the everyday,contemporary space of a martial, Gorkha-hypermasculinity into a multivocal everydayness of alternatives in the near future,with the 'gentlemen warrior' evolving into eco-men who, along with aposthuman intimacy, arecompetent in nurturing the feminine and the ecology.

Keywords

Martial Gorkha-hypermasculinity; multivocal everydayness; Lepcha folktales; eco (alternative) masculinity; genderqueer

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Introduction

Darjeeling is famous predominantly for the tea garden scenic beauty and the political scene, where the Gorkha¹ men with *khukuri*² in their hands continue to personify valor in war and agitation. The popular 'Bir Gorkhali'³ song of the Mantra Band with the refrain 'Bir Bir Bir Gorkhali,' begins with "I am the son of Gorkhali, Gorkhay is my name/I ensure that all enemies who advance all go lame" - mentions only once about the musical and the cultural heritage - and primarily celebrates the Gorkha muscularity: "Through hardships, pain, sun and rain, I stand strong/My history is a repertoire of the heroic song" (translation mine). Even though acknowledgements are made that "It is very imperative at this point for the parents of the next generation to be open to all possibilities" other than battling, yet as Haffner (2015) reiterates in *The Khukri Braves: The Illustrated History of the Gorkhas*: "As for myself I like being called a Gorkha soldier. What an honour!"

The famous war cry of the Gorkhas, 'Jai Maha Kali, Ayo ayo Gorkhali!' (Hail Maha Kali the goddess, there come the Gorkhas), moreover, adds to the formidable image of the Gorkhas by associating their masculinity with the goddess Maha Kali who, in everyday imagination, "is usually shown on the battlefield, where she is a furious combatant who gets drunk on the hot blood of her victims, or in a cremation ground, where she sits on a corpse surrounded by jackals and goblins" (Kinsley 2003: 23). Since Maha Kali might also be perceived as the "dark half of the black-and-white cosmic egg...that manifest[s] the black, abysmal side of life and the human psyche" (Neumann 1983: 149), the Gorkha masculinity being equated with the goddess can easily get the Gorkha men bracketed with havoc and horrendousness, mainly by the people of other communities.⁴ The possibility of a nonconformist masculinity getting facilitated by the genderqueer association of Gorkha masculinity with a female goddess has completely remained a 'non-everyday' in the contemporary everyday life of the Darjeeling hills that seems to be dominated by a hegemonic masculinity.

Eco-feminism, in its intersectional lens, studies how women, the non-human species, and the earth get victimized, interchangeably, by the exploitative mechanisms of the hegemonic masculinity through a schematic obliteration of the feminine principle. Eco-feminism exposes how violence against women is interconnected

with the cruelty against all other elements of nature, which are seen as the inferior/weak, and thereby feminine, 'other' of the dominant/powerful patriarchal masculinity. Eco-feminism has tried to provide resistance against the "hierarchy in which men have power over women, (feminised) men, and (feminised) animals" (Adams 1995: 80) along with all other (feminized) elements of the environment. The contemporary everydayness in Darjeeling that is dominated by the proliferation of Gorkha hypermasculinity, in its denigrating the 'feminine,'⁵ is problematic both in terms of ecological and gender fluid sustainability. Having recognized that everyday "experience is present past" (Koselleck 2004: 259), where the "probability of a forecasted future" has to be "derived from the given conditions of the past" (ibid: 262) based on "hope and memory...expectation and experience" (ibid: 258), the world of alternatives available in the folktales needs to be revisited in search of the 'futures past.'

The everyday folk life of alternatives as reflected in the Lepcha⁶ folktales with an eco (alternative) masculinity that is "male-affirmative" allows men in de-centering patriarchal ideologies. This can be achieved by not abandoning their masculinity, but altering it with "a progressive male standpoint,"⁷ that can eventually assist in replacing "traditional male authority or behaviours" with actions that affirm "in some sense the actual or potential humanity and humaneness of persons of the male sex" (Brod 1998: 198). However, before entering into the folktales and the everyday life of a non-hypermasculine hero, there is a need, firstly, to expand the scope and components of the study of everyday life, and secondly, to accommodate folklore/folktale and imagination within the gambit of everydayness.

Everyday, Embeddedness, and the Coloniality of the Visible

In contemporary times where identities and experiences are recognized as fragmented and in a state of flux, Clifford Geertz has recommended to "descend into detail" (Geertz 1973: 53), with the conviction that "Seeing heaven in a grain of sand is not a trick only poets can accomplish" (ibid: 44). Everydayness by its microscopic engagement with the flow of life, one the one hand, helps to reveal the 'non-everyday' which often goes unnoticed amidst the ordinary, while on the other hand, allows the fragments to be "reconstituted as everyday life" (Ferguson

2009: 160) in such a way that one may perceive through the ‘grain’ of the singularity of the everyday events, a total picture of socio-psychic desires of the community or even that of the nation and the larger world (Lefebvre 1991: 57). Moving beyond the supposed ‘small scale’ engagement in the form of “an endless series of singular ‘everydays’” (Highmore 2002a: 25), everyday life as a macrosocio-cultural “emporium of experiences” (Jacobsen 2008: 14) has eventually emerged as “*the name for the desire of totality in postmodern times*” (Highmore 2002a: 25, italics in original). As a “residual category into which can be jettisoned all the irritating bits and pieces” (Featherstone 1995: 55), everyday life as the ‘paramount reality’⁸ helps in consolidating a totality of life that is lived, suppressed, sustained, transformed, and recreated, by encompassing “the most universal and the most unique condition, the most social and the most individuated, the most obvious and the best hidden” (Lefebvre 1987: 9). The desire for totality cannot be achieved by solely focusing on the everydayness of ‘now’ - that is immediate, accessible, and familiar - but through the rediscovery of the everyday life that is suppressed, forgotten, or concealed: “something that can be accumulated, reflected upon, critically evaluated and communicated” (Jacobsen 2008: 15). Driven by ‘the desire of totality,’ rescuing the everyday from getting trapped only by the visible is possible by moving beyond the contemporary dominant traits of everydayness: “everyday life is not simply the name given to a reality readily available for scrutiny; it is also the name for aspects of life that lie hidden” (Highmore 2002b: 1). In order “to make the invisible visible” (ibid: 2) fresh and inclusive accounts of the everyday social totality has to be generated. One of the ways of opening up “previously unsuspected possibilities of living one’s [everyday] life with other with more self-awareness, more comprehension of our surroundings in terms of greater self and social knowledge” (Bauman and May 2019: 9) is to reconnect with the textuality of the everyday life that is now in oblivion but preserved in the folktales.

Whatever has been orally transmitted by the people who have imagined themselves as a ‘folk’ or a group based on their sharing of at least one common aspect like language, occupation, religion, etc. along with a tradition of their own can be referred to as folklore. Folktale is one of the components of folklore. Penetrating deep into the apparent absurd or imaginary folklore narratives, scholars who literally

interpret folklore, argue that what “appears to be irrationality is simply rationality distorted or history misremembered. According to the literal interpretation, folklore is more fact than fiction.” (Dundes 1965: 55). A symbolic approach to folklore focuses on the elements of fantasy and psychological reality. Combining the literal and symbolic approaches to the study of folklore it can be stated that folklore, by revealing the objective reality as the people’s history of the lived experiences from the past along with history of the mentality and desire of the people - how the people in the past not only lived but also what they aspired and desired for themselves - becomes an important domain for understanding the everyday culture of a particular community. Folktales have been transmitted orally from one generation to another only because of the fact that the people wanted to listen and retell about what they felt was important to be remembered and retold for themselves. As “stories, in particular, infuse the incipient drama of [everyday] experience” (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997: 41), folktales of a community is “in a real sense, their ethnography which... gives a penetrating picture of their [everyday] way of life” (Herskovits 1948: 418). As a rejoinder to Maurice Blanchot’s anxiety that “the everyday has this essential trait: it allows no hold. It escapes” (Blanchot 1987: 14), it can be argued that folktales hold the traces of the lived experiences that are often seem to have escaped or muted. If the ‘everyday turn’ to our existence is aimed at a total view of “human agency, ideological opposition to existing power structures, the negotiability and contestation of dominant discourses of identity and exclusion, reflexivity, everyday life and its historical embeddedness” (Karner 2007: 169), then one needs to critically engage with the folktales in order to provide testimony to the historical embeddedness of all the unsanctioned and invisible desires that are censored by the coloniality of power in the present times.

Foucault has well illustrated how the governmentality in its production of docile bodies censor differently normal attributes and desires and end up structuring a normative standard in comparison to which all other nonconformities get labeled as abnormal (Foucault 1979: 138). Hence, the everyday norm needs to be scrutinized in a way that the ‘other’ of the ‘mainstream’ majoritarian is not simply rejected as an aberration of the everydayness. The counter-normative everyday life of the folktale is an effective means of rescuing those who are otherized in the present everyday exchanges and intimacies

due to the internalization of the governmentality by the mass. The select folktales of the Lepchas of Darjeeling might be revisited to counter the hegemonic masculinity that has been installed by the British colonizers (Krishnaswamy 1998) and thereafter, reinforced by the neocoloniality of the postcolonial state.⁹ The alternative everydayness that is manifested, often obliquely, in the Lepcha folktales cannot be considered as irrelevant and outdated in the context of the contemporary everyday life of Darjeeling because whatever is:

...communicated from one generation to the next is not only what is explicitly stated or what is set forth by precept and example, but also what is unconsciously communicated. Unless we pay attention to these unconscious dynamics of transmission, we will never understand the receptivity (and resistance) to a living tradition. What is repressed in the memory of a people is never 'totally' repressed in the sense of being hermetically sealed off from their conscious lives; there are always unconscious memory-traces of what has been repressed. This is why there can be a 'return of the repressed', a return that can break out with great psychic force in an individual or in the history of a people (Bernstein 1998: 59).

Politicization, 'the Not-Yet Real,' and Polyphonic Everyday

The possibility of the 'return of the repressed' also allows us to be hopeful of turning 'the not-yet real' into the reality of contemporary everydayness through exploring the polyphonic everyday desires as illustrated in the Lepcha folktales. What Sartre has called 'the not-yet real' is the empowering imagination about the possible world of everydayness that Sartre felt is essential to transform the world. Mary Warnock summarizes Sartre's concern in the following way:

If man could not, first, describe a present given situation both as it is and as it is not; and if he could not, secondly and consequentially, envisage a given situation as possibly being otherwise than how it is, then he would have no power to intervene in the world to change...[Without this] he would have neither motive nor capacity for remedying his situation....the power to see things in different ways and to form images about a so far non-existent future,

is identical with the power of imagination (Warnock 1972: xvii).

Everyday can be easily understood to be intimately related to 'the not-yet real' once we accept the fact that our reality

is always narratively constructed...How one perceives the present, that is, what is 'really there', is always and inevitably bound up with a construction of the past, with one eye to the future... Our imaginations, which reflect our own situatedness, play a significant role in which pieces of past experiences we bring together, how we assemble them to make sense of our present condition, and what we reach towards in the future (Andrews 2014: 108).

In the everyday life of Darjeeling, masculinity is always cherished in terms of 'warriorhood' (Upreti 2011). The 'martial' tag popularly attached with the physicality of the Gorkha men of Darjeeling Hills is a lopsided trend of stereotyping that overshadows the creative and caring aspects of the Gorkha masculinity. Gorkha men's identity as 'warrior gentlemen' framed on martiality alone is a mere misrepresentation by the colonial regimes (Caplan 1995) that has been unfortunately internalized by the Darjeeling youth and the rhetoric of 'Bir' (virile) Gorkha is used frequently in everyday life, ensuing the global discourse regarding the Gorkhas as natural 'warrior'/'hired hand.' The historical knowledge construction about the Gorkha hypermasculinity has been guided, initially by the colonial anthropologists' 'sexualization of the race' due to which, except the male members of a few communities like the Sikh or the Gorkhas, Indian masculinity was confined within "the colonial stereotype of Indian effeminacy" (Krishnaswamy 1998: 8), and thereafter, by a 'race comparative paradigm' (largely comparisons with the 'cerebral' Bengali *bhadralok*)¹⁰ where the people of the Hills have been otherized as mere accomplishers of tasks that are perceived as substandard - works involving brawn sans brain and heart. This everyday monolithic discourse centered round the hypermasculine Gorkha men based on a 'solitarist' identity has ultimately resulted in the 'miniaturization' of the community.

Paul Pule has considered about a possible 'ecological masculinism,' aimed at contributing to "a shift away from hegemonic masculinities and towards a long-term ecological

sustainability” (Gaard 2014: 232) by substituting a macho ‘ethic of daring’ that celebrates violence, power, domination, consumption, and competition with a concerned ‘ethic of caring’ the surrounding, through inculcating the ethos of compassion, love, empathy, support, and the like which are conventionally projected as non-masculine. As opposed to the androcentric ‘mainstream’ masculinity, an alternative eco-friendly masculinity, that takes care and is concerned about the issues related to gender equity, societal power equations, and the ecology, can be induced on the basis of a performative androgyny by “simply flowing between the opposites” (Singer 1977: 332) of the compartmentalized gender categories. Positioning as a ‘non-indigenous ally’¹¹ my revisiting these select Lepcha folktales¹² is aimed at illustrating how, through their intimacies with the human and non-human elements of nature, along with a preference for caring and nurturing, the heroes of some of the tribal folktales help to formulate a non-‘mainstream’ eco (alternative) masculinity, where the indigenous male protagonists appear to borrow the markers of feminization¹³ as a counter-normative mode of resisting the patriarchal toxic masculinity that seems to dominate the everyday gender discourse related to Darjeeling men. Counter-linking of the eco (alternative) masculinity as manifested in the folktales as counter-textualities of everydayness is distinct from the conventional eco-feminism that, in its associating of ecology exclusively with the feminine, as a detour leads the onus of environmental care as a sole added responsibility on the struggles of the women. Banerjee and Bell aptly argue that, “women as [sole] environmental mediators homogenizes women’s experience and unnecessarily excludes men as potential mediators” (2007: 7). Illustration of indigenous non-hypermasculinity in the everyday life of the hero of the folktale is important in order to move beyond the “*politics of the everyday*, which is ‘merely’ lived” (Karner 2007: 119, original emphasis) and is seemingly self-evident towards “the *politicization of everyday life*...[that] aims to bring the cultural complexities and ambivalences of the quotidian to the forefront of public consciousness and debate” (ibid: 125, original emphasis). The eco-man who has been real in the everydayness of the folktale texts but is turned into the ‘non-everyday’ of contemporary Darjeeling due to the dominance of the colonially constructed hypermasculinity, is ‘the not-yet real’ that needs to be ushered from the “waiting room of history” (Chakrabarty 2000: 8) through

a critical imagination. Study of the folktales requires imagination and the “consideration of the role of imagination in everyday life is intricately bound to questions of our relationship to the world, to history, and to our ability to reflect upon our lives and to choose our actions” (Andrews 2014: 109). Even if this study appears to be focused on the narrative imagination of the folktales, it is a significant endeavor because in “creating novel meanings” this critical study of imagination is capable of “extending the symbolic space which a culture unfolds at a certain point in history, breaking through the limits of the materially given and transcending the horizon of physical causality” (Brockmeier 2009: 227). Moreover, this uncovering of the alternative gendered everydayness of Darjeeling, as opposed to the non-reflexive, macho identity that dominates the ‘politics of everyday,’ will pave way towards a polyphonic ‘politicization of everyday life’ of the Hills.

Story I: The Orphan and the River Nymph

Once upon a time there lived an orphan boy by the side of river Teesta. He was very poor and managed to gather his food by fishing in the river that was always full of fish all over the year. There was no one to help him and he used to live a lonely and sad life. He was also not capable of doing any work other than fishing. One day he caught a very big fish. He was happy to think that he could eat the fish for several days and at last he could find some rest. The moment he attempted to cut the fish, it pleaded, “Please do not kill me. My parents will be miserable if their only daughter is killed. Why don’t you come with me and meet them inside the river?” The boy who was very astonished said, “How can I go inside the river?” The fish replied, “You just need to hold my tail tightly and follow me into the river.” The boy did the same and to his amazement soon entered into a palace where the father fish was sitting on the golden throne with the mother fish sitting on a silver throne next to him. The fish said, “Today this orphan boy has saved my life.” “Thank you, boy, for saving our daughter’s life,” said the father, “Tell me what you want and I will be happy to give it to you.” The boy looked around the expensive palace and found a puppy sitting next to the father on the throne. He asked that as his gift. The father was initially sad, but he gave the puppy to the orphan boy who carried the puppy with him back to his hut. Next day he left the puppy in his hut and went for fishing. Returning back, he was

baffled to find that his hut was clean and there was cooked food prepared for him. The next day he returned back quite early and found that a beautiful girl was taking care of his household. But, soon the girl turned herself into the puppy. The next day when the girl was cooking, the boy came back from fishing and tore the skin into pieces. The fur that he had scattered all over the floor soon got turned into golden flowers. "Who are you?", The boy asked. "I am the river nymph who had taken you to the river gods," she replied. That day onwards they started living as husband and wife. The news about the beautiful nymph wife of the orphan boy got spread by the villagers and it reached the king. The king came to see the nymph and wanted to take her with him: "Tomorrow there will be a rooster fight and the winner shall get the nymph," he announced. The poor boy began to cry because he could not afford to buy a rooster. "Go to my parents and they will give you a rooster," said his wife. The boy followed her instruction and returned with a medium size rooster. Next day at sunrise the king arrived with his powerful rooster, but to his utter dismay his rooster got killed by the boy's medium size rooster. "Tomorrow let us have a bull fight and the one who wins shall get the nymph," announced the king. The boy returned home and began to weep bitterly, "Where can I get a bull!" "Meet my parents and they will give you," suggested his wife. The next day the king arrived with his huge bull but again, to utter disappointment, his bull was killed by the medium size bull that the boy had brought from the river gods. "Let us now fight with armies," the king angrily gave the order. The orphan boy cried even more and louder this time since there was no way to resist the king's soldiers. "O my dear, please visit my parents and for the last time request them to give you a medium size box," advised the beautiful girl. Next day at sunrise, when the boy saw that the king was marching towards his hut accompanied by his big army, he, according to the nymph's instruction, opened the box that he got from the river gods. Lightning flashed out of the box, killing all the king's men along with the wicked king. The orphan boy then became the king who ruled with great compassion and lived happily ever after with his nymph wife.

Genderqueer and Everydayness

Genderqueer is the term that is used to refer to "individuals who see their gender as fluid or hybrid, or reject the binary between male and female" (Helman and Ratele 2018: 1-2). Genderqueer as 'transgressive' gender

expression that challenges gender conformist order is necessary for promoting "more egalitarian masculinities [that] has been recognized as central to disrupting practices of violence" (ibid: 2). Genderqueer as a non-binary construct of gender performances calls "for an ever deeper structural change in the ways we organize, produce, and reproduce knowledge" (Iantaffi 2017: 290) in everyday life. At the very beginning of the folktale what strikes the reader is that fact that the Lepcha hero of the tale is unable to practice any 'manly' skills like woodcutting or hunting that are supposed to be vigorously laborious and thereby masculine, but is capable of fishing alone, which is presently treated as a hobby for the leisure time of men in the everyday life of Darjeeling.

The king of this tribal tale, who seems to be performing the categorical masculinity by opting for fights and battle, is ultimately mocked by the portrayal of his defeat in the hand of the orphan boy who, from the standardized Gorkha masculinity can be easily seen as an effeminate-unmanly-man, completely dependent on the woman for his survival and prosperity. The king's multiple attempts to defeat the unproductive orphan who has no income or asset but mere survival based on eating the fish, also insists we ponder how the colonizers have installed the capitalist notion of counting worth on the basis of value judgement. Destructing what Shively calls "sexual socialism," capitalism seems to have forced the ethnic men to achieve standardized masculinity and capital which ultimately prohibits not only non-hypermasculinity but intimacy in total (Shively 1991: 258). The orphan boy's dependence on women in the form of nymph both for his corporeal and emotional sustenance, yet again, makes him appear as a degraded male devoid of manhood from the standpoint of the warrior men. However, this Lepcha boy displays the tribal nonconforming attitude that does not consider manliness as to be played in an oppositional relation to femininity. The non-'mainstream' calibers, like that of fishing and his complete following of the 'feminine' guidance based on which the orphan progresses into a prosperous man, brings out this folktale's motif of privileging the boy's gender-fluidity over the macho king. Opposing the popular, macho doctrine of building one's own fortune through hard work, this Lepcha tale, asserting the success of a passive man, indicates that "good fortune can only come if it is not sought" (Dundes 1962: 173). The poor and non-muscular male who succeeds in meeting the

conditions of becoming hero of the tale, shows how the image of the genderqueer male fills the vacuum often created by the “antimale feminist critiques of masculinity” (hooks 2004: 166) which fails to encourage anything possibly positive in male. Opposing the tenets of patriarchal masculinity, the genderqueer orphan accomplishes ‘feminist masculinity’ that, replacing the old perception of physical strength and hypermasculinity as ‘power’, “defines strength as one’s capacity to be responsible for self and others” (ibid: 117).

Story II: Apyong’s Dog

An old man had three sons: Apyong, Atyok, and Apyok. He called his sons and decided to divide among his sons his property with which his sons could find wealthy and beautiful wives for themselves. Apyong, the eldest, refused to take his share of inheritance and opted only for the pet dog. The two other sons divided the old man’s property among themselves. Wearing expensive clothes, Atyok and Apyok started walking on the road in search of rich and attractive girls who would prefer to marry them. They did not want to be accompanied by Apyong, who was dressed in shabby clothes. Walking all through the day, all alone, Apyong found himself standing in front of a house on the hilltop at nightfall. He thought of pleading with the inhabitants of the house to allow him to spend the night in their house since he had no money and food. He knocked on the door but only a beautiful cat came out of the house. He asked the cat to call the owner. The cat introduced herself as the housekeeper. The pretty little cat further told him that she happened to be a princess who was turned into a cat by a witch who had also killed her parents, siblings, and all the other family members. She requested Apyong, “Please stay here for three days and three nights. If you are able to resist everyone from entering into the house, I can restore myself as a princess and I will become your wife.” Apyong decided to stay in the house for three days and nights with his dog. Having their dinner, he sat with his dog near the entrance. Throughout the night everyone, right from an ant to an elephant, tried to enter the house. But, Apyong’s dog scared them away. In the morning, after moving inside the house, he was surprised to see that the cat had turned herself into a small baby, too good to be true as a human being. He ate and rested all-round the day. At night he lit up a lamp outside the house and waited with his dog for the trespassers. He killed each and every one who tried to enter the

house. In the morning, the moment he entered the house, he found that the baby had grown up into the prettiest girl he had ever met. He spent the third night along with his dog, driving everything away from the house. The next morning, he found that the girl had already turned into a beautiful woman. Both of them married and stayed together for some days in the house. Thereafter, Apyong, his wife, and dog started traveling towards his father’s place in a horse-driven carriage filled with costly items. Reaching the house, Apyong took off his expensive clothes and dressed himself again in shabby attire, leaving his wife and the wealth outside the father’s house. The two brothers and their wives didn’t welcome him and the dog because of his pitiable look. Annoyed by the misconduct of his brothers, he went out of the house and came back with his riches and the most beautiful wife. Neither were the wives of Atyok and Apyok as beautiful as Apyong’s, nor were they rich enough to compete with her. Apyong thus became the luckiest among the three brothers.

Posthuman Intimacy in Everyday Life

Apyong’s accountability, relationality, and a sense of togetherness with non-human - first his dog and then the cat - in the everyday life of the folktale brings out the essence of posthumanism where the radical posthuman subjectivity is understood (as opposed to anthropocentrism that generates compartmentalized association among the species) on the basis of an intersectional ethics of plurality. Resisting the narcissistic phallic masculinity, the nomadic subjectivity of Apyong has rejected stark individualism for the sake of establishing multiple belongings with multiple others, including non-human entities. The fact that Apyong has been able to turn the cat into his beautiful wife, that too with the help of his dog, reveals the post-anthropocentric advent of ‘the politics of life itself’ (Rose 2007), where

‘Life’, far from being codified as the exclusive property or the unalienable right of one species, the human, over all others or of being sacralised as a pre-established given, is posited as process, interactive and open-ended. This vitalist approach to living matter displaces the boundary between the portion of life - both organic and discursive - that has traditionally been reserved for *anthropos*, that is to say *bios*, and the wider scope of animal and non-human life, also known as *zoe* (Braidotti 2013: 60).

The emergence of the woman from the cat further rejects the nature/culture binary which has so long been detrimental to the rise of a green man. The fact that Apyong by his caring of his pet dog eventually ends up by transposing the cat into a woman, reveals the eco (alternative) masculinity where the love for natural objects (naturalized Other) facilitates a man to learn how to take care of women (sexualized/gendered Other). Apyong's prosperous ending further helps in negating the 'mainstream' myth of equating the man who is close to nature as primitive/savage as compared to the one who is removed from his natural environment and seen in contemporary everyday life of Darjeeling as cultured/civilized only by enacting the gallant with a *khukuri* in hand and fire in his head. Apyong's 'becoming-animal' by his trans-species camaraderie with his dog is the first step towards 'becoming-earth,' where the planetary correlation finds genuine expression through the inter-linking of the cat and the woman. Apyong's posthuman intimacy that forms the base of his affluence, is the tribal ideal that needs to be inculcated in the everyday life of the contemporary Gorkha men in order to become an eco-man, with the realization that the prerequisite of becoming a thriving man, is to replace "well established dualisms with the recognition of deep *zoe*-egalitarianism between humans and animals" (Braidotti 2013: 71) towards a non-hierarchical intimacy with one's bionetwork and environment. Finally, through the folk hero's performing of the political tactic of de-familiarization (Gilroy 2005), which is rather a move for dis-identification from everyday and normative hypermasculine principles, Apyong accomplishes the "collective imaginings" (Gatens and Lloyd 1999) of 'becoming-earth' which "implies the open-ended, inter-relational, multi-sexed and trans-species flows of becoming through interaction with multiple others" (Braidotti 2013: 89).

Story III: Khocheelepa and his Bird-sisters

Once upon a time, an old childless couple had adopted three children, of which two daughters were birds. Dhanese (a Hornbill) and Halaeso (a Wood Pigeon), were the daughters and Khocheelepa (the Little One) was the name of the son. One day, when the old couple died all of a sudden, Dhanese found it very difficult to stay in the same place, haunted by the memories of her parents. So, she asked Halaeso and Khocheelepa to come with her to a distant place. The sister and the brother got all their belongings packed

and were prepared to follow their sister. Before leaving the old house, Dhanase buried the dead bodies of the old couple and also built a Kaapoor (memorial), which she carried on her head. The two sisters carried the little boy and were soon in a new place. The birds used to go early in the morning in search of grains and would come back to feed the brother. The little boy, Khocheelepa, started growing up into a strong youth. After a few years, the place was struck by famine. There was hardly any food anywhere. The sisters began to fly far and wide to collect some food for the brother, but could not manage to get any. Khocheelepa started weeping out of hunger. Feeling pity for the brother, the two sisters again started flying afar in search of food. After a thorough search finally they managed to get some. The sisters, after putting the grain into a small pot, gathered dried up branches. With their wings they fanned the fire. Khocheelepa was very happy to see the sisters cooking for him. Out of excitement, he came too close to the pot and the moment he touched the pot, the pot fell down breaking into pieces and the entire food got spoilt since it got mixed up with the ashes. Khocheelepa started to cry louder and the sisters assured him to come back with some food. Desperately they flew again and after a long time they gathered some food. When they came back they found that Khocheelepa was lying on the ground. Actually, the boy became unconscious out of starvation. But, the birds thought that he was dead. They wept and mourned for a while. After that, covering his body with leaves, they flew away to another remote place. After a long time, the brother regained his consciousness only to find himself all alone. He called out to his two sisters but there was no one to reply him back. He started to walk out of sadness and frustration. Soon he entered into a forest. He was happy to find some fruits hanging on the trees. He ate as many fruits as he could and fell asleep. The next day, a woodcutter found the boy and took him to his house. Many years passed and Khocheelepa soon grew up into a strong young man. The villagers started sending marriage proposals to the woodcutter. Eventually, he gave his consent to marry one of the daughters of a neighboring elderly villager. But, before getting married he wished to look for his sisters. He asked the pig to check if the sisters could be traced somewhere in the nearby places. The pig, after a long search, finally managed to locate the sisters. He told them, "Your brother Khocheelepa is getting married. He wants you two to attend his wedding ceremony." Dhanase thought that the

pig was making fun. She rebuked the pig, “Our brother is long dead. We still cry for his death.” The pig came back to Khocheelepa and informed him about the reaction of his sister. Then, Khocheelepa sent a rooster who got also chased away by his sisters. Then, Khocheelepa told the Cicada how he got detached from his sisters during the time of the famine and the Cicada started to sing about it in front of his sisters. The sisters, after listening to the song, began to follow the Cicada. Soon the sisters found that their brother Khocheelepa was standing below on the ground. He was all prepared to get married. He pleaded with his sisters to come down and join the wedding feast. But, the birds were ashamed of their foolishness to have thought that the brother was dead. Khocheelepa then asked his friends to bring a long bamboo pole. Placing some fruits on it he raised the pole up above his head. The two sisters ate the fruits from the pole and said, “Thank you dear brother for inviting us. We have taken part in your wedding feast. May you now live happily with your wife.” Saying this, the two sisters flew away to a distant land.

Masculinity of Longing and Intimacy in Everyday

Khocheelepa’s intimacy with the bird-sisters as well as with the pig, rooster, and cicada, contradicts the accusations often made by the feminists that as opposed to a woman’s interconnected notion of the self, a man’s sensing of self is more detached (Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982). Although detachment might assure a fair and just reasoning but “detachment also connotes the absence of connection and has the potential to create the conditions for carelessness or violation, for violence toward others or toward oneself.” (Gilligan et al. 1988: xxviii). The element of detachment that one finds in the martial identity popular in the everydayness of the Gorkha men, thus is confined within integrity’s agreement to rules, as opposed to a genderqueer intimacy that calls for a spontaneous response to the immediate situation out of closeness and concern. As per the integrity orientation, ethics becomes primarily a standardized principle. But, in the course of intimacy, ethics is nurtured by a morality of love. Integrity’s moral request is to be merely rational to the other, whereas, intimacy’s mandate is to be affectively responsive along with the other (Kasulis 2002).

The brother, just before getting married with a woman - the moment which demands an

intimate sense of belonging that he needs to establish with the feminine - wishes to meet the bird sisters. His eagerness to reunify himself with the intimate belonging that he used to cherish with the sisters just before his longing to get married is significant. It seems that Khocheelepa, by his eagerness to restore his non-human belonging is suggesting that in order to be intimate with the woman, the conventional masculinity needs to be surpassed by the man with an eco (alternative) masculinity that would empower the man to move beyond the man/woman dichotomy towards the creation of a ‘thirdness.’ Love, born out of intimacy, then assists in the politics of belonging in the form of a ‘thirdness’ that sanctions one with the capability of listening to the multivocal others, inviting for a collaborative, intersubjective intimacy. This thirdness, as “not to be understood primarily as the intervention of an other, rather, requires the ‘one in the third,’ the attunement and empathy that make it possible to bridge difference with identification, to infuse observation with compassion” (Benjamin 2002:50) is also helpful in overcoming the binary between the ‘doer’ and the ‘done to.’ The birds’ nurturing of Khocheelepa which the brother remembers despite the years of separation represents what Antanas Mockus has called, ‘an amphibian intersectionality.’ (cited in Chakraborty 2017: 36). The family of Khocheelepa comprising of the Dhanese and the Halaeso embodies, “the borderzone between identity-as-essence and identity-as-conjuncture” (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996: 13) that a Gorkha eco-man has to seek in his everyday life for the sake of acquiring ‘soft boundaries’ through which the ‘amphibian borders’ of the diverse identities would criss-cross and, as observes Mockus, “obey partially divergent systems of rules without a loss of intellectual and moral integrity” (Chakraborty 2017: 36).

Coda

The Lepcha folktales by the portrayal of intimate belonging of male protagonists with non-human animals and dependence on the women characters depict for the transformation of patriarchal masculinity by an organic intimacy with all the elements of nature that would ultimately allow to break the traditional “rules of time, place, of human reproduction and personal uniqueness” (Warner 1994: 27) and perceive metamorphosis as “an organic process of life itself” (ibid: 18). The folk imagination of everydayness as revealed through the folktales seems to have anticipated

the “genetic imagination” which permits us to “blur the boundaries between human and [non-human] animal...express[ing] the fluid nature of identity” in order to “carry us into the future” by disrupting human-centric hierarchies and paving way for “transgenics, the actual moving of genes across species” (Scala 2012: 1). The contemporary everyday life of the hypermasculine Gorkha men who are mainly concerned with “inequality or even uniformity foisted on them by other humans or human-made systems” (Chakrabarty 2009: 208), need to come in touch with the alternative perspectives of tribal notion of planetary justice and equivalence, through indigenous eco (alternative) masculinity as one of the means of posthuman understanding that “true/untrue” or “self-reference/external reference” need not always be differentiated, but “are located at right angles to each other. They have no mutually unbalancing effects” (Luhmann 2002: 65). Echoing R. L. Rutsky’s observation that a “posthuman subject position would...acknowledge the otherness that is part of us” (Rutsky 1999: 21), the Lepcha male protagonists of the above folktales seem to advise that the everyday life of the macho men of the Darjeeling Hills need to be attuned with multiple ecologies of belonging that would enable them to avoid “parting ‘us’ from ‘ourselves’” (Badmington 2004: 155) and promote further assemblage with all the non-human presences. This ecological/planetary intimacy of belonging with non-human beings as initiated by the folktale male ‘becoming-posthuman’ protagonists is essential for the Gorkha men to embrace in their everydayness so that they are able to overcome the long-established image of being too tough for both woman and the environment.

Imagination is “both individual and collective, self- as well as other-directed, a necessary condition as well as the product of the dialogical process involved in the construction of knowledge.” (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002: 316). The above interpretation of the folktales in indeed a subjective attempt to imagine differently, since the ability to find meaning differently is “a possibility of action” (Brockmeier 2009: 217). Moreover, this attempt is made out of the conviction that “to be in the subjunctive mode is...to be trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties” (Bruner 1986: 26). From the standpoint of Hindu transcendental philosophy, the goddess Maha Kali, with whom even the Gorkha men identify themselves, “is also imagined as the loving and love-giving mother” (Marsman 2019: 185) who as “a symbol

of transformation” (ibid: 185) teaches us “to devote our whole being, intellectually and passionately, to the source of that change and its process and not to the content itself” (ibid: 191). This realization might help in transforming the hypermasculine everyday space of Darjeeling men into a gender fluid one. The everydayness of the folktale heroes revealing an eco (alternative) masculinity as illustrated through the Lepcha folktales, can serve as endogenous guides for reviving the genderqueer everyday life in this multivocal space of an alternative modernity of traditions. Treating history as manifested in the folktales as possibilities, “more precisely past possibilities and prospects, past conceptions of the future: futures past” (Carr 1987: 198) as formulated by Koselleck, this paper has aimed at a plausible transformation of the everyday life of the Darjeeling Gorkha men from a contested “Space of Experience” to that of a “Horizon of Expectation” (Koselleck 2004: 255). Decolonizing the ethos of hypermasculinity, fortified by the colonial and neocolonial subjugators, by cultivating the ‘ethos of care’ as represented by the goddess Maha Kali of ‘female masculinity’ (Halberstam 1998) and the ‘male femininity’ of the Lepcha eco-men of the folktales, the Gorkha men in the Darjeeling Hills can rejuvenate an everyday life of holistic heroism that is not merely martial but brave enough to nourish the feminine and nurture the ecology.

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Endnotes

1. Gorkha (or Gurkha) is the umbrella term that the different communities of Darjeeling Hills (like Lepcha, Limbu, Tamang, Sherpa, Bhutia, Dukpa, Rai, Gurung, Mangar, Newar, Thami, Kami, Damai, Sarki, Sunwar, Yakhha, Dhimal, Yolmo, and Bhujel) have chosen for themselves to form a 'multitude' in order to "challenge the contemporary political regression and neo-colonisation of Darjeeling" (Chettri 2013:293). In recent times the Lepchas have occasionally spoken about their differences with some of diktats by the leaders of the Gorkhaland Movement. They have asserted their rights to wear their own ethnic dress, and not the Nepali attire, during the Gorkha revivalist movement, initiated by Bimal Gurung, in Darjeeling Hills. They have also revealed a different mode of negotiation with the government of West Bengal. However, since formations of identities always remain in an unending process of production (Hal, 1990: 222), these differences underscore the critical engagement of Lepcha people with the politics of Gorkha identity formation. The Lepcha ethnicity is positioned as 'being-singular-plural' vis-à-vis the Gorkha identity - for the Lepchas, the Gorkha identity "assembles" them insofar as it spaces them; they are 'linked' insofar as they are not unified" (Nancy 2000: 37).
2. The Gorkha knife with a distinctive curve.
3. 'Bir Gorkhali' by Mantra Band was released in 2003. See 'Live in Pokhara.': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_qgf-NbXE8. I am thankful to Mouna Lama, Assistant Professor in English, Netaji Subhas Mahavidyalaya, Haldibari, for helping me in the translation.
4. For example, the observation made by B.K. Roy: "whenever there is an act of high-handedness that is to be done...in India, the Gurkha is employed, and he acts like a veritable fanatic in his attacks on men, women, and children...the educated man of India...is not trusted. A Bengali can never enter the Army as a soldier" (1915: 106).
5. Srivastava has argued that "with the emergence of the colonial stereotypes such as inscrutable Oriental...Various descriptive terms came to be attached with 'womanhood' as mysterious threatening (to malehood..)," and in the process "while some natives were feminized, others were represented as 'martial' races (the Gurkhas...)," who were "worthy of some respect, though not equals of the colonizers since they did not possess sufficient intellectual powers" (2014: 10). Internalization of this colonial hypermasculinity that is structured on a compulsive non-effeminism has continued engendering the Gorkha 'martial' men - supposed to be 'worthy of some respect' on account of resembling the British hypermasculinity - to anxiously distance from their manliness whatever is tagged as feminine.
6. The report by the early British administrators like Caption Lloyd and J.W. Grant stated that Darjeeling was only inhabited by a few Lepcha households during the time of their arrival (Pinn 1986: 14). The Lepcha community has been recognised as an indigenous tribe.
7. According to Larry May, "A progressive male standpoint is an egalitarian theoretical and practical position from which men can critically assess male experience and traditional male role" (May 1998: 337).
8. 'Paramount reality' is the reality in everyday life which is impossible to ignore: "Among the multiple realities there is one that presents itself as the reality *par excellence*. This is the reality of everyday life. Its privileged position entitles it to the designation of paramount reality." (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 35, original emphasis).
9. To claim that folktales allow men to decenter, and even transgress patriarchal ideologies, which this paper does, might appear as putting too much premium on the discursive worth of folktales. However, there are critics who believe that folktales need to be considered as subversive literature: "In the folktale the temporal-corporeal arrangement reflects whether there are perceived to be new possibilities for participation in the social order or whether there must be a confrontation when possibilities for change do not exist. This is why, in each new stage of civilization, in each new historical epoch, the symbols and configurations of the tales were endowed with new meaning, transformed, or eliminated in reaction to the needs and conflicts of the people within the social order" (Zipes 2006: 6).
10. "A socially privileged and consciously superior group...keeping its distance from the masses by its...command of education; sharing a pride in its language, its literate culture and its history; and...ready to adapt and augment to extend its social power and political opportunities" (Broomfield 1968: 5-6).
11. Srinivas has observed that people who cohabit in the 'same cultural universe' are more capable of understanding and studying one an-

other because unlike someone from the foreign geo-cultural space, it is 'self-in-the-other' that is operational and not the 'non-self' or 'non-other' position (Srinivas 1996: 656). Sarukkai has also suggested that, "For a person steeped in this tradition, this does make a qualitative difference in constructing the other" (Sarukkai 1997: 1408). Hence, having continued to live in Darjeeling for more than fourteen years and been located in North Bengal, I can derive my agency as a 'non-indigenous ally' and am permitted to understand an-other culture of people who live in the 'same cultural universe.'

12. Lepcha folktales have been collected and translated as a part of the project sanctioned to me by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi. However, in this article I have selected only those tales from my project that were similar to the tales previously documented (e.g., Doma 2010; Tamsang 2008; Kotturan 1976) in order to bypass the controversy that often emerges out of the concern for differentiating the 'fake-tales' from the folktales. The study of folklore can aim at the collection/identification of the items or the interpretation of the folklore items previously collected and identified. Methodologies of collection/identification are not provided here since this study is solely about the interpretation of the folktales. I have adopted a 'hybrid' methodology (Bazeley 2018: 235) taking insights from theories related to gender and sexuality, folkloristics, ethno-poetics (for elucidating the literary devices, like magic realism, that even the non-literary societies use in their tales), and psychoanalytic analysis (for deconstructing the elements of fantasy and symbolic-metaphorical expressions) while interpreting the Lepcha folktales.

13. Feminization, here, has been used to refer to the androgynous consciousness of femininity as a part of one's masculinity.

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