

Yadav (Ahir): Linguistically Enriched Indigenous Community in The Terai Culture

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to analyze the origin and expansion of the Yadav caste and dynasty, which is well known across Nepal. The Yadav dynasty encompasses the entire lineage of its history and geography. This family, with a long-standing presence in human civilization, traces its origins to the Indus River. Its history is deeply rooted in the broader narrative of human civilization. In Nepal, the Yadav community extends from Mechi to Mahakali, with the majority residing in the southern region of the country. The concentration of the Yadav population is particularly notable in Janakpur, the birthplace of King Janak, as well as in the Narayani Zone, the Sagarmatha Zone, and Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha. Beyond these four provinces, Yadavs have been migrating from one place to another. For instance, their migration has historically extended from the Terai (*Maddhesh*) to the Himalayas and Hills (*Pahad*). Despite the growth and spread of education in the modern era, the majority of the Yadav community remains illiterate, largely due to their reliance on ancestral property. The family roots and relations of the Yadavs are closely intertwined with the historical and cultural ties between Nepal and India. The Yadav dynasty has had an age-old connection with Nepal, and the cultural traditions of the Yadav families in both Nepal and India remain vibrant and commendable. The Yadavs recognize one another by their common title, yet they also have several sub-titles. Approximately 99% of Yadav families follow Hinduism. The oldest title of the Yadav caste is "Ahir," which also means "Yadu"—a noun derived from the adjective "Yadu-Banshi." Their linguistic heritage reflects the significance and beauty of the Ahir (Yadav) identity through numerous proverbs, which carry profound meanings across various sects and traditions. However, the reasons behind the societal neglect or disregard of the Yadav community, whether intentional or unintentional, remain unclear.

Keywords: dynasty, Yadav (Ahir), family, relations, culture, disregards.

1. Introduction to the Study

Broadly speaking, the Yadav community has a long history in Hindu mythology (*Puranas*). Lord Krishna, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, is known to define the lineage of the Yadav community. According to Hindu mythology, Hinduism is the oldest of all religions in the world. As described in the *Mahabharata*, war and fratricide have played significant roles in shaping human civilization. Human beings, particularly their caste and dynasty, are traditionally categorized into four groups. Their daily actions and responsibilities reflect their personal status and prestige. Based on their professional roles, they are further distinguished by caste and lineage. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explores the concept of human superiority. In the Hindu caste hierarchy, the four main castes—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra—are classified as follows:

Control of mind and senses, austerity, purity, patience, uprightness, knowledge, insight and belief are born of the proper being (*Suabhava*) of the Brahman. Prowess, energy, perseverance, capability, steadfastness in battle, gift-giving, and feelings of lordship are born of the proper being of the *ksatriya* (warrior). Agriculture, cattle-herding, and trade are born of the proper being of the *vaishya*. The proper being of the *sudra* generates work whose essence is to serve others. (Hindu View, p. 79)

The Yadav caste or dynasty can be measured in terms of its depth and influence, which are built upon its own moral laws and values. Their history can be traced through ancestral relations between neighboring countries—Nepal and India. Beyond these two nations, following Lord Krishna's reincarnation and his activities, the lineage of Pradyumna (i.e., the son of Lord Krishna) began its reign and continued for 56 generations in Sonitpur of the Sindh province. This lineage further extended from Bhanu to Bikramasen. The Yadavs also ruled over Kabul as a kingdom for 21 generations (Yogi Sudhananda, 2002). According to Yogi Sudhananda's analysis, the Yadav community exists across various sects and traditions both within the country and abroad. A distinctive feature of the Yadav community's nature and identity is reflected in numerous proverbs. Their original title, *Ahir* (Gwala), a caste in Hinduism, is widely recognized. The Ahir community is seen as a representative of humanity and is known for its love of independence. However, in the absence of proper knowledge, their greatest weakness may be their tendency to betray their own class. The teachings of Rajyoga Brahma Kumaris emphasize that "anger is the greatest enemy of human sovereignty" (Brahma Kumaris, n.d., p. 2). Perhaps, this sentiment aligns with their role in the *Mahabharata* War, where they are often portrayed as being driven by intense emotions. Their excellence is evident in the grand narrative of the *Mahabharata*.

2. The Study: Methodology

The research analyzes the ethics and moral values of the Yadav dynasty. Their way of living is portrayed through various literary shifts, including proverbs and myths from both the past and present. This study adopts the theories of both colonial and postcolonial evidence, exemplified in Rudyard Kipling's story "The Finest Story in the World." In the story, Kipling describes: "When next he came to me he was drunk—royally drunk on many poets for the first time revealed to him. His pupils were dilated, his words tumbled over each other, and he wrapped himself in quotations—as a beggar would enfold himself in the purple of emperors. Most of all was he drunk with Longfellow." (Kipling, 1899, p. 73)

3. The Study: Portrayal of Issues

Ahir or Gwala, belonging to the Yadu-Banshi dynasty (the origin of the Ahir), is also recognized as part of the Gopalbanshi lineage. They have maintained their own cultural identity and traditions, tracing their origins to the ancient Ahir heritage since the emergence of Nepal (Yadav Nepal Ko Adibaasi, n.d., p. 4). They are dedicated to their independent profession and, by their deeds and work, are happily engaged in cattle herding and agricultural trade. The Ahir profession has no historical connection to slavery, a distinction that marks the rise of the Yadav community during the Mahabharata era. The dynastic values and supremacy of the Yadavs have been extensively discussed by various thinkers, sages, and saints throughout history. It is widely acknowledged that moral laws and values cannot be "a wholesome illusion" (Spivak, 1999, p. 24). This reinforces the idea that moral laws and values exist without contradiction. The Yadav people are highly responsible in their profession and actions, adhering to ethical principles that are thoughtfully examined in *The Critique of Judgment* (Kant, 1790).

Several proverbs strongly illustrate the ethics of the Yadav (Ahir) community. These proverbs are of high quality in depicting the Ahir's cultural system and lineage. They also serve as relevant examples that highlight the prestige of other castes. However, researchers tend to interpret these proverbs based on their own judgment. These proverbs are widely recognized within the Yadav community, generating profound ideas and playing a crucial role in empowering the community. They encourage the adoption of new methods of teaching and learning for a purposeful life. Furthermore, these methods foster strong unity within the Yadav dynasty, which, in turn, extends to other communities. Despite their significance, people rarely acknowledge or apply the wisdom embedded in these proverbs. The style and essence of these proverbs can be compared to *kasturi* (musk), which remains hidden in the navel of a deer, unknown to the creature itself.

3.1 Price of Advice

Time and youth, once wasted, never return, no matter how much ghee and butter one consumes (*Gael Jawani Pher Na Loute Ketno Ghee Mahela Khaye*). This proverb encapsulates a traditionally upheld truth or piece of advice, based on experience and common sense. It further conveys the idea that "time and tide wait for no man" (St. Marher, 1225).

Similarly, the proverb *Gael Magh, Untish Baki* states that if one day of January (*Magh Mahina*) is missed, 29 days of the month still remain. This reinforces the notion that "no one is so powerful as to stop the march of time" (Marher, 1225). Both of these proverbs emphasize the importance of time. The Yadav community deeply values the significance of time throughout the seasons of the year, as their livelihood is entirely dependent on agriculture and cattle breeding.

The Yadav community acknowledges both right and wrong deeds. However, their time is often wasted due to delays in action from the judiciary, administrative, and legislative sectors of the nation. The issue of nationalism remains confined to judicial manuscripts rather than being actively implemented within the administrative sector. Lowry (2019), in his book *The Case for Nationalism*, illustrates how the dynamics of nations under colonial rule "thwarted the glory of nationalism and its people too" (p. 121). The need for nationalism to remain vigilant and active is both a social and political concern, yet its influence appears to be diminishing over time.

Nationalism holds significant importance—one's heart does not accept a loss when an opportunity or advantage is in their favor. However, people often regret when opportunities slip from their grasp (*Rahe Tab Mon Na Bhaye, Chal Jaye Tab Mon Pachatave*). This proverb highlights the sincerity of the Yadav community toward their duties, emphasizing their awareness and commitment to professional values. It serves as a reminder that if they disregard the importance of time, time will, in turn, disregard them, leading to lost opportunities.

Another proverb, "Buffalo sank in water" (*Doobgel Bhaisi Pani Mae*), also highlights the significance of time. It implies that the investment of money, labor, or time plays a crucial role in empowering individuals. If wasted, it negatively affects the investor, facilitator, and proprietor. This proverb further encourages individuals to take advantage of the present moment. Similarly, the importance of this proverb can be emphasized in another context, such as "Laziness spoils the farmer" (*Aaskat Nase Kisane*). In the same vein, the *Morning Murli* of Om Shanti BapDada Madhuvan (December 20, 2022) states, "If you feel lazy, then think or understand that it is not in your fortune" (p. 4). The Yadav community places high priority on time and seasons, as these elements are crucial to their livelihood. According to the Yadava dynasty, punctuality in relation to time and seasons is essential for leading a meaningful professional life. However, in recent times, the community has become less serious about the importance of their original dynastic values, particularly the fundamental quality of humanity. As Rabindranath Tagore discusses in *Nationalism*, identity and the essence of humanity are increasingly deteriorating.

You, the people of the west, who have manufactured this abnormality, can you imagine the desolating despair of this haunted world of suffering man possessed by the ghastly abstraction of the organizing man? Can you put yourself into the position of the people,

who seem to have been doomed to an eternal damnation of their own humanity, who not only must suffer continual curtailment of their manhood, but even raise their voices in paeans of praise for the benignity of a mechanical apparatus in its interminable parody of providence? (51)

Lord Rama had five sons, but none were capable of serving and caring for him (*Patch Beta Ram Ke Eko Na Kam Ke*). This proverb is similar to another that states, "Righteousness, patience, friends, and wife: these four are tested in times of crisis" (*Dhiraj, Dharma, Mita Auru Nari Aapat Kaal Parkhiya Esaba Chari; Ram Charit Manas*). Similarly, the above proverb emphasizes the importance of honesty, sincerity, punctuality, and the duty of siblings towards their elderly parents. The proverb further suggests that "honesty and sincerity are not market commodities." Siblings are often not obedient towards their old and weak parents, leading to the waste of time and money invested in them. As parents age, they require the support of their children, but only a few are truly obedient. The example of Shravan Kumar, the son of a blind couple (*Andha – Andhi*), who is praised for his selfless service to his elderly and blind parents, highlights the importance of such devotion. This Hindu myth underscores the value of selfless service to one's parents, offering a valuable lesson for both sons and daughters who serve their parents with honesty and obedience.

Weed strikes the plough of the wheat (*Gaja Mare Gehu ke Chas*). Drug eaters generally care very little for their household chores. They are useless because they pay attention more to drugs than the importance of their household chores. Actually, the proverb is applicable to the Yadav community. They are close to agriculture, where the farmer enjoys drugs like weed (*Bhaga, Dhatura and Gaja*).

3.2 Importance of Time

The proverb "The donkey spoils the farm, but the shepherd is blamed for this" (*Khet Chare Gadaha Aur Mare Khay Jolaha*) illustrates how some individuals, despite their professional skills, are unfairly blamed for issues they did not cause. This is related to the Nepali proverb, "A worker is Kalu, but the maize eater is a bear" (*Kam Garne Kalu, Makai Khane Bhalu*). Another saying, "Night wastes in sleeping and day in eating" (*Rat Bite Soot Ke Aur, Din Bite Kha Ke*), emphasizes how some people fail to recognize the importance of the right time, right work, and right person.

In a similar vein, the *Today Murli* in English preaches, "Sweet children, never be lazy about doing service" (p. 1). Despite their professional skills, the Yadav community is often considered lazy, as further expressed in the proverb, "Who teaches Yadav is a competent teacher" (*Ahir Bujhabe Se Marda*). They are also described as weak in their habits and nature, reluctant to adapt to changing circumstances. This is reflected in the proverb, "Every good or bad action of a person ends with his/her death" (*Lat Loot By Isab Marlay Par Jaai*). This proverb evaluates the activities of the Ahir based on whether they are good or bad, as reflected in their behavior, dealings, and relations within the community. I learned this from my father, Daroga Prasad Yadav, who shared a story about his elder son, Shambhu Prasad Yadav, who was blunt and rough in his nature and habits.

The farmer is required to look after agriculture every day and the cows on the eighth day (*Neet Utha Khetee, Athave Gaya, Na Dekhe Okar Jaya*). Each action needs to be supervised accordingly. Otherwise, the fruit of the action will go in vain. This theory is propounded by a sincere and honest farmer whose source of earning as per his own labour, was three bighas of land and five thousand cows rather than his buffalos and oxen. The owner of those land and cattle is familiar by the name of owner (*Malikar*) of his property. He was known by several names such as Bherkhi Bhagat, Bherkhi Raut, and Bherkhi Ray, Bherkhi Yadav. He used to ride a horse, his usual vehicle. In his daily living, he was vegetarian. He used to carry food like rice pudding, food composed of seven types of food grain flour (*Satu*) and salt during his long hours of journey. He tied these edible stuffs, round the knot of his *Gamchha* (cotton towel). He didn't prefer to take tea and food at tea stall or hotels in the market. Kurta, Dhoti, Gamchha, turban, and wooden slippers were the best choices for his dress. Shoes wearing system was popular in the indigenous elite group people. Their shoes were purely leather made, which was made of black leather, half size and pointed mouth without lace. It lasted for long years.

The majority of Ahir (Yadav) people are strict and rigid in their food and drinking habits. They maintain a simple lifestyle, whether it be in their food, drinking, or wedding ceremonial activities. Weddings traditionally occur within the Ahir caste, specifically among those of the same lineage. However, this practice of marrying within the same lineage is no longer observed in the Ahir caste. Today, weddings are arranged across all Yadav lineages. In the past, the farming lifestyle—such as rearing cattle (e.g., cows, buffalo, oxen) and cultivating crops like sugarcane, grams, Khesari, and millet—was highly popular within the Ahir community. The Ahir (Yadav) family was traditionally considered an elite community among the other castes, such as Kurmi (Patel), Kanu, Koiri, Kebat (the boatmen), Kumahar (soil potters), Harijan (Chamaar), Muslim, Washer Man and Kayastha (Patawari), which is an intelligent caste among the South Asian community.

"The buffalo sank in water" (*Doobgel bhaiasi pani mae*) provides us with marvelous and fantastic information. Its sense and meaning are full of discursive logic and philosophy. The proverb plays a meaningful role in strengthening our knowledge of life. Water is a dangerous element that can take life away in an instant; yet, it is also a forceful and powerful element, comparable to other natural disasters such as fire, earthquakes, and storms. These forces are powerful beyond imagination. However, the buffalo, by nature, prefers to sit in water. This behavior encourages people to become active and alert towards their profession, work, and other activities in life. A good proverb transcends powerful feelings and notions, and perfection is implicit in the proverb *Doobgel bhaiasi pani mae*. The exact meaning of this proverb is that it helps us build the foundation of creation. For example, people logically work to maintain the necessity and value of time, but it isn't certain whether the task will be fully completed. This proverb creates a solid basis for our destination and encourages us to adopt the "bull's-eye" focus (Arjuna's *drishti*) toward our goals and objectives.

Words like imagination and work (*Kam aur Kalpana*) are both judged separately. No one works without imagination. Any task, lesson, or work is completed through the exercise of imagination. Therefore, our imagination should be justifiable and practicable. Imagination plays a role in building ideas, art, and skills necessary to achieve the targeted goal successfully.

Mr. Pandalaray Yadav, a fervent farmer and committed devotee of the Hindu Vedas and scriptures in Pipariya, Rautahat district, recently renamed as Garuda municipality ward no. 7, usually chants the mantra of Saligram Bhagawan. The remarkable thing is that his wife has little knowledge of any alphabetical letters, easily understands the meaning of the slogans chanted by sages and saints at the Hindu abbot. Her knowledge demonstrates that people should have good company that revolves around the world. Devi, an ordinary wife of a simple farmer, is also aware of the message of the Gita and is well-versed in the Hindu religion. During the early prayer (*Estuti*) at the village abbot, people of Hindu origin chant the slogans meaningfully. Devi also states: "There is peace where prosperity exists; there is conflict or upheaval where poverty and misery prevail" (*Jaha Sumati Taha Sampati Nana, Jaha Kumati Taha Bipati Nithana*). To quote Edward Said, "the nexus of knowledge and power creating 'the oriental,' and in a sense obliterating him as a human being, is therefore not for me an exclusively academic matter. Yet it is an intellectual matter of some very obvious importance" (Said, 1978, p. 27).

3.3 Recollection of Time

Yadav people's dedication is also reflected in another proverb of the Yadav community: *The wastage of youth or time never comes back again, no matter how much ghee and butter someone eats* (*Gael Jawani Phir na loue Ketno Ghee Mahela Khaye*). This proverb strengthens their will and desire to maintain honesty and sincerity. Dairy products, such as ghee and butter, are not consumed properly once people reach old age. This is an interesting proverb that teaches people to eat timely and highlights the lesson of "Do It Yourself" (Meanings into Words, p. 75). The concept of "do it yourself" is necessary in one's life, as it makes people aware of the value of time and age. If time lapses or is wasted in vain, it will never return. This proverb is frequently used in the Yadav or Ahir community and is often recalled in one's old age. For instance, my own grandfather, the late Bherkhi Ray Bhagat, used to share his experience of time and its value when he was old. I could see the repentance in his eyes as he suffered from knee weakness in his old age. He lived for a century, and it is well-known that once time passes, nothing remains but regret. Elderly people often refer to this proverb within their friendly circles and society. They also use it to teach their youth and family members. Broadly speaking, the beauty of these proverbs is that they are applicable to all sectors of society, regardless of literacy levels. This reflects the original version of Eastern (oriental) culture and tradition (Said, 1978, p. 75). For example, ghee and butter are readily available in the Yadav (Gwala) family. However, there is an age-related restriction on when and how these products should be consumed. One possible interpretation is that eating butter and ghee is prohibited in old age, as it can severely harm older individuals, despite its usefulness.

The people who teach the Yadav caste (Ahir) are admired for heroism (*Ahir Bhoojhabe Se Mardha*). This proverb encapsulates its significance in a humorous tone. Regardless of the tone, it plays a heroic role similar to that of a warrior who continually faces problems and challenges until reaching their destination. This proverb also reminds us: "The destination itself invokes its hero" (*Banja Najik Itana Ki, Manjil Tujhe Pukare*). This saying brings to mind Dryden's satirical line, "Man is pampered with pride and affluence" (*Mac Flecknoe*, p. IV). Whatever the caste, Ahir implies a level similar to that of water. Dryden's tone is clearly evident in the following lines, which distinguish between the dull and the wise. The dull people are satirized in this way:

Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dullness from his tender years,
Who stands and confirms in full stupidity. (102)

The above satire is similar to the satire of the Yadav community: "The egg teaches the child" (*Aanda Sikhaye Bacha Ke*). What is its special significance in the Yadav community? This proverb highlights the meaning of a dullard or an insane person, someone who is rigid in his/her activities. The above lines from Dryden correspond with the Ahir proverb: "The flute is senseless in front of a chewing buffalo" (*Bhais Ke Aagae Bin Bajai, Bhais Baitha Pagurai*). However, from the Ahir's perspective, the proverb "Ahir Bujhabe So Marda" aims to sensitize people, particularly Ahirs, with a degree of seriousness. The proverb emphasizes the importance of people's deeds. Ahirs are known for their innocence and friendly nature. Sometimes, they fail to understand the witty expressions of other communities due to their simplicity. For instance, "A washerman is the secretary in the village of the witty and intelligent caste like Kayastha" (*Kayasta Ke Gawab Me Dhobi Patwari*). Paradoxically, this proverb suggests that the washerman is more intelligent than the Kayastha (an intellectual caste). While the Kayastha community was historically more intellectual than the washerman, today, the washerman excels in knowledge and intelligence. Both the washerman and the Kayastha castes are separately evaluated by the indigenous Yadav community, with the washerman caste paradoxically being more literate than the Kayastha caste (the intellectual caste of society).

3.4 Time

A similar paradox appears in another proverb: "Father is poor and sibling is rich and prosperous" (*Bap Goanaurra Poot Choupar*). How are the siblings richer and more prosperous than their parents? Similarly, "a washerman is secretary in the village of Kayastha (intelligent community)" (*Kayasta Ke Gawab Me Dhobi Patwari*). The proverb "Father is poor and sibling is prosperous" (*Bap Goanaurra Poot Choupar*) mirrors the paradox in the line "Child is father of the man" (Wordsworth, 1807, p. 47). Why does "the

washer-man become secretary in the village of Kayastha (the intellectual caste)? And why is "the father poor and the sibling rich and prosperous?" Both of these situations are the outcomes of time. In the same vein, W.B. Yeats personifies Time, affirming that "Time is all strong, not the people" (*Adami Balawan Hotu Nahi, Hotu Samya Balwan*). It is a universal truth that Time is the game changer.

Apart from these paradoxical statements, the researcher further explores the value of Time as depicted in the work of twentieth-century poet, sage, holy man, thinker, and scholar W.B. Yeats. In *The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner*, Yeats recalls his own present time as a story of repentance that marks his retired life. Yeats personifies Time, stating: "I spit into the face of Time that has transfigured me" (Yeats, 1928, p. 25). This quote summarizes the importance of Time, which plays a vital role in communities around the world. Though the Ahir community is now lagging behind in scientific education, a wise and sane person learns lessons after stumbling along in life (*Insaan Shikhate Hai Thokare Khane Ke Bathe, Rung Laati Hai Hinaa Pathar Par Ghiss Jane Ke Bade*). The *Hina* (leaves of Mehadi) shows its color only after it is ground on a stone. Its close meaning is that there is no knowledge without college.

Metaphorically, "no knowledge without college" teaches a lesson of reality, honesty, and sincerity in life. It further denotes accuracy and punctuality for the achievement of one's objectives. It also teaches us never to tell a lie to anyone; otherwise, the habit of lying spoils and degrades the speaker themselves. A thief of cucumber (*Khira*) becomes a thief of diamonds one day (*Khira Ka Chore So Hire Ka Chore* or *Kakha Ka Chore So Lakh Ka Chore*). This proverb advises people to deal with matters fairly and honestly.

4. Conclusion

The Yadav (Ahir) community, in the Terai culture, always keeps itself busy in fulfilling its community's aims and objectives. The community members often make it a point to teach their children, both at home and in school. They, both in mind and body, never like to stay indolent and aimless. They are well-defined by the proverb: "An empty mind is an evil mind" (*Khali Mon Saitan Ke*). They believe in good deeds and dealings which are the embodiment of honesty and sincerity. As fervent believers, they make the following statement: "God agrees with a real heart/soul" (*Sache Dil Par Saheb Raji*). However, the heart must be pure, clean, simple, smart, and stable (*Safai, Sachayi aur Sadagi*). The Yadav community, by their habit and nature, is proud of their position and dignity.

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