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Folk prayers as lived faith: Women's religious songs in everyday life among the Buksa Tribe in Uttarakhand

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Abstract
This paper explores folk prayers as lived faith among the Buksa tribe of Uttarakhand, with a specific focus on women's religious songs, chants, and mantra-based practices embedded in everyday life. Moving beyond institutionalized religion, the study examines how Buksa women experience, perform, and transmit spirituality through oral traditions that address daily concerns such as health, protection, agricultural well-being, family harmony, and emotional distress. For Buksa women, faith is not limited to temples or formal rituals but is woven into ordinary moments of domestic work, caregiving, and community interaction.

Central to this lived religious world are Buksaon ki tantrik paramparayain, including dang, devsi, sadhna ke mantar, vashikaran ke mantar, and chants used to counter jadui hawa lagna. Rather than treating these practices as superstition, the paper conceptualizes them as indigenous systems of knowledge and hope through which women negotiate uncertainty, fear, and misfortune. These folk prayers function as mechanisms of healing, emotional reassurance, and moral regulation, allowing women to exercise spiritual agency within a largely patriarchal social structure.

Drawing on oral narratives, song texts, and ethnographic observations, the study highlights the intergenerational transmission of sacred knowledge from elder women to younger members of the community. Songs and prayers serve as informal pedagogical tools, teaching values of endurance, care, and collective responsibility. The paper argues that Buksa women emerge as custodians of living faith, sustaining cultural continuity through oral performance. By documenting women's everyday religious expressions, the study contributes to feminist anthropology and oral history scholarship, emphasizing the importance of recognizing folk prayers as vital cultural resources that sustain well-being, identity, and resilience in tribal life.

Keywords: Buksa Tribe, women's folk songs, lived faith, folk prayers, tantric oral traditions

Introduction

Religion is often woven into the fabric of everyday life in tribal societies, not restricted to formal institutions, sacred texts, or priestly authority. Contemporary scholarship is increasingly recognizing that religious meaning is created and sustained through everyday practices, emotions, and embodied experiences, an approach known as "lived religion" (Orsi, 2003; McGuire, 2008) [8, 10]. This approach is especially pertinent to the study of indigenous communities, where faith is expressed through oral tradition, ritual performances, and healing practices that are situated within local ecologies and social relations (Basso, 1996) [1]. In the Indian context, tribal religions have been marginalized in the discourses of academia and policy, and their practices are often classified as superstition or magic, rather than being recognized as coherent systems of knowledge (Dei, 2000) [15]. Such interpretations ignore the epistemological richness of indigenous spirituality and its role in addressing uncertainty, illness, and social vulnerability. In tribal communities, women are often the main practitioners of everyday religion, taking part in prayers, songs, and rituals that sustain both spiritual life and social cohesion (Sered, 1994; Narayanan, 2007) [9, 13].

The Buksa tribe of Uttarakhand provides a fascinating site for the discussion of lived religion from a gendered perspective. Buksa women engage in a range of oral religious practices, including folk prayers, ritual songs, and tantric chants such as dang, devsi, sadhna ke mantar, vashikaran ke mantar, and chants for countering jadui hawa lagna. These practices are intimately connected with everyday concerns such as health, the productivity of agriculture, fertility and protection against misfortune. Far from being exceptional or marginal, such rituals are embedded in women's domestic and communal responsibilities.

Feminist anthropological scholarship has shown that women's religious practices, especially those that are not located within institutional frames, often provide alternative sites of agency and authority (Ortner, 1974; Mahmood, 2005) [7]. Patriarchal structures may limit women's access to formal religious leadership, but everyday ritual practices allow women to exert moral power, offer care, and negotiate between the visible and invisible realms of social life (Scott, 1985) [12]. Buksa women's folk prayers are a good example of this dynamic, as they are used for healing, emotional comfort, and moral regulation in the community. Oral traditions are key to transmitting this kind of religious knowledge. As Vansina (1985) [14] and Finnegan (2012) [5] argue, oral narratives and ritual songs are important means of transmitting memory, values, and cosmologies across generations. In tribal societies women often serve as primary custodians of this knowledge, imparting it informally through participation and performance rather than textual instruction (Blackburn, 2005) [2]. In the Buksa community, elder women hold important roles as mentors to younger women, helping to ensure the continuity of religious practices and cultural identity.

While there is increasing interest in lived religion and feminist anthropology, there is a notable absence of scholarly work on the daily religious practices of women in

less researched tribes like the Buksa. Existing studies are mostly concerned with myths, festivals or male ritual specialists. Women's oral spirituality is under-studied. This paper aims to close this gap by exploring Buksa women's folk prayers as lived faith, at the crossroads of gender, indigenous knowledge, and oral tradition.

Review of Literature

Everyday Spirituality and Lived Religion

The idea of lived religion grew out of a desire to correct institutional and text-based approaches to religion focused on doctrine, clergy, and formalized rituals. Scholars such as Orsi (2003) [10] and McGuire (2008) [8] argue that religion is best understood through everyday practices, emotions, and embodied experience. Lived religion deals with how people negotiate faith within the constraints of everyday life, particularly in situations of uncertainty, illness, and socio-economic vulnerability.

In tribal and indigenous contexts, lived religion is often expressed through oral traditions, healing practices, and ritual performances embedded in domestic and communal spaces (Basso, 1996) [1]. Such practices challenge the sacred and secular dichotomy, as spiritual activities are closely related to subsistence activities such as farming, giving birth, and doing household chores. The framework is especially useful to interpret the folk prayers of Buksa women, which are not limited to ceremonial occasions but are performed as part of their everyday survival strategies.

Feminist Anthropology and Religion as Gendered Practice

Mainstream scholarship, feminist anthropologists have long argued, marginalizes women's religious practices (Mahmood, 2005; Ortner, 1974) [7]. Early anthropological studies often considered women's ritual activities as peripheral, domestic, or derivative of male-dominated religious systems. However, later feminist interventions re-positioned women's religious practices as sites of agency, negotiation and meaning-making.

Research by scholars such as Sered (1994) [13] and Narayanan (2007) [9] indicates that women frequently manage informal and non-institutional religious spaces, including healing rituals, devotional songs, and home worship. Such practices offer women alternative avenues of authority that may not directly challenge patriarchy but rather subtly alter power dynamics. In the Indian context, women's ritual labor has been found to sustain religious continuity but also facilitate emotional resilience and moral regulation (Chakravarti, 2018) [4].

The Buksa women's folk prayers and tantric chants fit this feminist idea of religion as a gendered practice, in which spiritual authority is wielded through care, transmission of knowledge, and ritual competence, not through formal leadership roles.

Oral Traditions, Memory and Cultural Transmission

Oral traditions are crucial for the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems, especially in non-literate and semi-literate societies. Vansina (1985) [14] insists that oral narratives, songs, and prayers are not just cultural expressions but repositories of historical memory, ethical values, and social norms. Women are often the main transmitters of oral culture, especially as regards rituals of health, fertility, and protection (Finnegan, 2012) [5].

Women's folk songs in South Asian tribal societies serve as a mnemonic device that encodes collective experiences of hardship, resilience, and hope (Blackburn, 2005) [2]. These songs are learned informally by participation and repetition, which ensure intergenerational continuity. This broader pattern of oral pedagogy in which knowledge is embodied rather than textualized is exemplified by the Buksa women's transmission of mantras and prayers through everyday performance.

Traditional Knowledge Systems and Healing Practices

Current scientific and policy discourses often dismiss indigenous healing practices as superstition or magic. But scholars of indigenous knowledge suggest that these practices are consistent epistemological systems embedded in ecological awareness, social relationships, and experiential learning (Dei, 2000) [15]. Kleinman (1980) [6] stresses that local healing systems address emotional distress and social disruption as well as biological illness. In tribal communities' women are often healers and ritual specialists, especially with regard to children, reproductive health, and spiritual afflictions (Samuel, 2008) [11]. Practices like chanting mantras or performing protective rituals have therapeutic functions, restoring a sense of order and control. Buksa women's chants against jadui hawa lagna can, therefore, be understood as culturally meaningful responses to illness and fear, rather than irrational beliefs.

Religion, patriarchy and Power

The intersection of religion and patriarchy has been widely discussed in sociological and feminist literature. Although institutional religions are often linked to the reproduction of male domination, everyday religious practices can be sites of negotiation and symbolic power for women (Bourdieu, 1991) [3]. Scott (1985) [12] notes that subordinated groups often pursue agency within oppressive structures through subtle, non-confrontational strategies.

Such strategies are women's folk prayers among the Buksa. Ritual performance allows women to gain moral authority and community recognition, especially in times of crisis. These practices create spaces for women to exercise influence without challenging patriarchal norms head on, preserving social harmony and expanding women's spiritual agency.

Gaps in the Literature

Although scholarship on lived religion and feminist anthropology is on the rise, there are few studies of the religious practices of women in less-studied tribes like the Buksa. Most of the existing studies of tribal religion have focused on myth, festival, or male ritual specialists and rarely on women's everyday spiritual labor. This paper fills this gap by focusing on Buksa women's folk prayers as legitimate forms of religious knowledge and cultural continuity.

Conceptual Framework: Indigenous Spirituality and Lived Religion

The conceptual framework of this work is based on the intersection of lived religion and indigenous spirituality in order to analyze women's folk prayers as everyday religious practices embedded in social, cultural, and material contexts. This framework goes beyond institutional, doctrinal, and text-based approaches to religion,

foregrounding experience, embodiment, and practice as central to an understanding of faith in tribal societies.

Religion in Everyday Life

The concept of lived religion challenges classical sociological models that focus on religion in terms of formal belief systems, ecclesiastical organizations, and canonical texts. Scholars such as Orsi (2003) [10] and McGuire (2008) [8] argue that religion is best understood through the ways in which people enact their faith daily, through routine actions, emotions, moral decisions, and embodied rituals. The concept of lived religion stresses that religion is dynamic, negotiated, and situational rather than fixed and institutionalized.

From this perspective religion is not a separate sphere of life but closely connected to the quotidian: health, livelihood, family, and emotional well-being. This approach is especially pertinent for Indigenous and tribal communities where spirituality is intertwined with subsistence activities, ecological knowledge, and kinship relations (Basso, 1996) [1]. For the Buksa, women's prayers, songs, and mantras are performed in domestic spaces, agricultural fields, and communal settings, illustrating the way faith is lived rather than merely believed.

Indigenous Spirituality as a System of Knowledge

"Indigenous spirituality is increasingly seen as a system of knowledge and not as a collection
of irrational beliefs or superstitions." Indigenous epistemologies scholars argue that spiritual practices are part of holistic worldviews that include environmental awareness, healing, ethics, and social relations (Dei, 2000; Smith, 2012) [15, 16]. These are experiential and relational knowledge systems transmitted orally, often in ritual performance and narrative.

It is in this context that healing chants, protective rituals, and tantric mantras are culturally meaningful ways to respond to uncertainty, illness, and misfortune (Kleinman, 1980) [6]. Indigenous spirituality does not compartmentalize the sacred and the secular; spiritual power is invoked in daily life to restore balance and harmony. Thus, the practices of Buksa women such as chanting to counter jadui hawa lagna or performing devsi rituals can be understood as therapeutic and moral interventions into indigenous knowledge systems.

Gendered Aspects of Lived Religion

Feminist anthropology offers valuable insights into the gendered dimensions of lived religion. Women often occupy religious spaces that are informal, domestic, and non-institutional and are often ignored in mainstream scholarship (Ortner, 1974; Sered, 1994) [13]. Patriarchal structures may constrain women's access to formal religious authority, but everyday religious practices provide alternative sites of power, agency, and moral legitimacy (Mahmood, 2005) [7]. Women's religious practices tend to be directed towards care, healing, and social continuity, thus reinforcing their centrality in maintaining community life (Narayanan, 2007) [9]. In Buksa, women's ownership of folk prayers and ritual knowledge gives them spiritual authority, especially in times of crisis. These practices allow women to assert religio-spiritual influence without directly confronting patriarchal norms, in line with Scott's (1985) [12] concept of everyday forms of agency.

Embodied Transmission and Oral Tradition

Oral tradition is a central element of lived religion and indigenous spirituality. Vansina (1985) [14] stresses that oral traditions are structured ways of keeping and transmitting knowledge, history, and values. Finnegan (2012) [5] further contends that oral religious expressions depend on memory, performance, and embodiment instead of textual fixation. In tribal communities, women are often the main carriers of oral religious knowledge, particularly from one generation to the next (Blackburn, 2005) [2]. Buksa women teach prayers and songs through observation, participation, and repetition, embedding spiritual knowledge in everyday socialization. This embodied mode of transmission guarantees cultural continuity while providing flexibility and adaptation to changing circumstances.

Putting the Framework Together

This conceptual framework combines lived religion, indigenous spirituality, feminist anthropology, and oral tradition that will allow a holistic understanding of the folk prayers of the Buksa women. It acknowledges these practices as important religious acts, knowledge systems, and expressions of gendered agency. This framework thus challenges reductive readings of tribal spirituality and foregrounds women's everyday religious practices as central to cultural continuity and social resilience.

Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative ethnographic research design to study women's folk prayers and lived religious practices in the Buksa tribe of Uttarakhand. The particular suitability of ethnography to the study of indigenous spirituality lies in its ability to offer an in-depth insight into social relations, practices, and meanings as they are lived and experienced in everyday contexts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) [18]. The methodological approach foregrounds women's voices, oral traditions, and embodied practices often marginalized in text-based or survey-driven research.

Study Site and Participants

The fieldwork was conducted in selected villages of Buksa in Uttarakhand, where the traditional religious practices still influence the day-to-day life of the people to a large extent. Women of different age groups, marital statuses, and socio-economic backgrounds took part in Buksa. Special attention was given to elder women, who were regarded in the community as the keepers of ritual knowledge, folk prayers, and healing practices. Younger women were included as well, to explore patterns of intergenerational transmission and change.

Semi-Structured Interview

In-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with Buksa women across generations. This approach enabled participants to recount their own stories of faith, fear, healing, and hope. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful in feminist and ethnographic research because they allow for flexibility but retain thematic consistency (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) [19]. The interviews concentrated on the everyday religious practice of women, the importance of folk prayers for women, and women's status in family and community life.

Observing Participant

Participant observation was key to the study. The researcher participated in and observed rituals, healing practices, domestic worship, and agricultural cycles in culturally appropriate ways. This approach allowed religion to be understood as lived practice rather than abstract belief (McGuire, 2008) [8]. Observations were recorded as thick field notes, detailing the spatial, emotional, and performative dimensions of women's religious activities.

Recording Oral Traditions

Women's folk songs, prayers, and mantras were recorded by oral narration and performance. Since there were no written scriptures, oral documentation was necessary to preserve these practices as part of indigenous knowledge. Oral traditions are accepted as valid historical and cultural sources, especially among tribal societies (Vansina, 1985) [14]. Cultural sensitivities were respected, particularly regarding sacred or restricted knowledge.

Narrative Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using narrative analysis, which is concerned with how people produce meaning through stories and lived experiences (Riessman, 2008) [20]. Recurring themes of spirituality, healing, emotional resilience, and moral responsibility were identified in women's narratives. This is in keeping with feminist methodologies that recognize storytelling as a potent form of expressing agency and social reality (Chase, 2011) [17].

Ethical Considerations

The research process was guided by a central concern for ethical sensitivity. All participants provided informed consent, and anonymity was preserved when requested. Sacred knowledge has been carefully documented, as some practices are specific to a context and are not intended to be shared with the public. The study is conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of respect, reciprocity, and cultural responsibility in Indigenous research (Smith, 2012) [16].

Folk Prayers and Everyday Concerns of Women

Women's folk prayers of the Buksa tribe are deeply tied to the rhythms of everyday life and are linked to practical matters rather than abstract theological notions. These prayers are drawn from the experience of living with uncertainty about health, livelihood, reproduction, and vulnerability to the environment. As scholars of lived religion argue, everyday religious practices are pragmatic responses to the challenges of life, providing emotional reassurance and moral stability (McGuire, 2008; Orsi, 2003) [8, 10].

Buksa women often pray at home, in the fields, and at times of crisis such as illness, crop failure, or family discord. An important part of women's ritual repertoire includes prayers for protection from disease, safe childbirth, fertility, and agricultural abundance. Such practices are what Kleinman (1980) [6] calls local health systems, where healing involves not only physical recovery but also emotional and social well-being. In this context folk prayers are therapeutic tools, helping women to cope with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Protection from evil forces is one major concern that is addressed through women's prayers. This is commonly articulated through beliefs surrounding jadui hawa lagna. Instead of being perceived as superstitious, anthropological scholarship highlights their symbolic and functional importance in indigenous cosmologies (Dei, 2000) [15]. These prayers help restore a sense of balance and control in situations when biomedical explanations are not available or culturally insufficient. Women's chanting and ritual performance reinforce community norms and support collective resilience.

Women's folk prayers are linked to the agricultural calendar, drawing attention to the unity of spirituality and subsistence in tribal life. Ritual songs during sowing, harvesting, or droughts ask for protection of crops and livestock, reflecting an ecological worldview where humans, nature, and spiritual forces are interconnected (Basso, 1996) [1]. Such practices emphasize women's role as intermediaries between the natural and spiritual worlds, especially in communities where agriculture is still a main source of livelihood.

When read through a gendered lens, these prayers reveal the ways in which women assert agency within patriarchal social structures. Although men have formal religious authority, it is women's management of daily rituals that gives them moral and spiritual legitimacy in the family and the community (Sered, 1994) [13]. Feminist scholars have argued that these practices are subtle forms of power that do not overtly challenge patriarchy but allow women to shape social and spiritual life (Mahmood, 2005; Scott, 1985) [7, 12]. Women's prayers also serve as a form of moral regulation and social cohesion. The ritual performance of women reinforces the values of care, responsibility, and communal harmony. These practices pass ethical norms to the younger generations, embedding spirituality in the everyday processes of socialization (Vansina, 1985; Finnegan, 2012) [5, 14].

Tantric Oral Traditions as Systems of Indigenous Knowledge

The Tantric oral traditions of the Buksa tribe form a complex and coherent system of indigenous knowledge that women use to interpret, negotiate, and respond to everyday challenges. The practices of dang, devsi, sādhana ke mantra, vashikaran ke mantra, and the chanting against jadui hawa lagna are not isolated ritual acts but are embedded in a broader cosmology that integrates spirituality, healing, ecology, and social ethics. From an anthropological perspective, these traditions illustrate indigenous epistemologies that privilege experience, embodiment, and oral transmission over textual authority (Dei, 2000; Smith, 2012) [15, 16].

Although classical or scriptural forms of Tantra are often associated with male ascetics or esoteric lineages, Buksa tantric practices are largely domestic, relational, and gendered. Women perform these rituals in household, field, and community spaces, locating spiritual power in the everyday rather than in secluded ritual arenas. This is consistent with the framework of lived religion, which focuses on religion as practiced and negotiated in everyday contexts rather than formal institutions (McGuire, 2008; Orsi, 2003) [8, 10].

Healing plays a major role in the Buksa tantric oral traditions. Women's chants and ritual actions target physical illness, emotional distress, and perceived spiritual afflictions, demonstrating what Kleinman (1980) [6] calls culturally embedded healing systems. Such practices are

holistic in that they treat illness not simply as a biological condition but as a disturbance of social, emotional, or spiritual balance. The efficacy of these rituals depends not just on their symbolic content but also on the collective belief, performative repetition, and emotional reassurance they offer.

These tantric practices are also ecological knowledge systems. Rituals related to agriculture, weather patterns, and the protection of crops indicate an intimate awareness of the relationship of human life to the natural environment. Indigenous spirituality scholars contend that such practices encode environmental ethics and sustainable worldviews and reinforce communal responsibility to land and livelihood (Basso, 1996; Berkes, 2012) [1, 21]. In the context of Buksa, women's ritual labor, spiritual harmony, and ecological continuity are mutually reinforcing. Tantric oral traditions as an important mode of spiritual agency for women from the perspective of feminist anthropology. While patriarchal norms may constrain women's access to formal religious authority, mastery of ritual knowledge provides women with moral legitimacy and social recognition (Sered, 1994) [13]. Women can thus be healers, protectors, and mediators between the visible and the invisible, changing power relations in subtle but important ways (Mahmood, 2005; Scott, 1985) [7, 12].

The oral nature of the Buksa tantric traditions is crucial to their resilience and adaptability. Oral knowledge systems are dynamic, and while they permit the knowledge to be modified in context, they maintain core meanings (Vansina, 1985; Finnegan, 2012) [5, 14]. Women pass on mantras and ritual techniques not by formal instruction but by watching, doing again, and doing in the body. Such transmission of knowledge ensures cultural continuity. At the same time, each generation has the opportunity to reinterpret practices in the light of changing social realities. Most importantly, to call these tantric traditions superstition is to obscure their role as culturally significant systems of knowledge that provide hope, healing, and social order. Postcolonial and decolonial scholars have warned of epistemic hierarchies that privilege Western rationality over indigenous ways of knowing (Dei, 2000; Smith, 2012) [15, 16]. Thus, the recognition of Buksa women's tantric oral traditions as indigenous knowledge systems is an epistemological intervention that validates marginalized spiritual practices and centers women's experiential authority.

Gender, Power and Spiritual Agency

In tribal societies, gender relations are typically structured along patriarchal lines, restricting women's access to formal authority, property rights, and institutional religious leadership. However, feminist and anthropological scholarship has shown that power does not only work through visible or formal structures but also through everyday practices, symbolic authority, and moral legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1991; Scott, 1985) [3, 12]. In this regard, women's religious activities are important sites of agency, especially in the non-institutional and domestic realms of religion.

Buksa women have a distinct type of spiritual agency, through their participation in folk prayers, ritual songs, and tantric oral traditions. While men may predominate in public and formal religious spaces, women exercise significant power through their control of everyday religious practices related to healing, protection, fertility, and the well-being of the household. Sered (1994) [13] notes that women-dominated religious realms are often invisible to mainstream scholarship as they lie outside institutionally defined hierarchies. The Buksa women's ritual practices are a good example of such alternative religious domains in which authority is based on experiential knowledge rather than on formal ordination.

In feminist scholarship the idea of agency has moved from notions of resistance or overt opposition to patriarchy. Mahmood (2005) [7] critiques liberal feminist assumptions that equate agency with autonomy or rebellion. He argues that agency must be understood within culturally specific moral frameworks. In this light, the ritual practices of Buksa women should not be seen as passive conformity but as meaningful acts through which women realize ethical responsibilities, spiritual competence, and social recognition. Their agency is expressed through care, healing, and mediation, not confrontation.

Everyday religious life practices are subtle power mechanisms too. Scott's (1985) [12] conception of everyday forms of resistance demonstrates how subordinate groups negotiate power by engaging in quotidian acts that do not explicitly challenge dominant structures. Buksa women's folk prayers and healing rituals empower them to sway household decisions, navigate crises, and command respect in moments of vulnerability. Through ritual performance women gain moral authority to influence social outcomes without directly challenging male dominance. Women's healing and their custodianship of sacred knowledge further enhance spiritual agency. Anthropology on indigenous healing systems states that women are often mediators between the social and spiritual realms, particularly with respect to illness and bad luck (Kleinman, 1980) [6]. In Buksa communities, women's ability to diagnose spiritual afflictions and to perform corrective rituals makes them key players in the moral economy of the community. The role boosts their social standing and reinforces their power in kinship networks. Power is exercised in the transmission of religious knowledge as well. Women's control over the management of oral traditions, songs, mantras, and prayers gives them the means to mold the moral and spiritual socialization of the younger generations (Vansina, 1985; Finnegan, 2012) [5, 14]. Teaching these practices to daughters and younger women, elder Buksa women reproduce cultural norms and ensure the continuity of women-centered spiritual authority. This intergenerational transmission reproduces gendered forms of power in the patriarchal structures that continue. From a Bourdieusian perspective, women's ritual competence can be understood as a kind of symbolic capital: recognized and valued in the cultural context of the community (Bourdieu, 1991) [3]. This capital may not translate into economic or political power, but it does give legitimacy, respect, and influence to women. This symbolic power is especially relevant in times of crisis when women's ritual knowledge is crucial for restoring social and spiritual balance.

Sacred Knowledge: Intergenerational Transmission

The transmission of sacred knowledge from one generation to the next is an important way in which tribal societies maintain the continuity of their religious beliefs, ritual practices, and moral values. In indigenous communities,

spirituality is largely oral and experiential, and knowledge is transmitted through participation, observation, and embodied practice rather than through formal instruction or written texts (Vansina, 1985; Finnegan, 2012) [5, 14]. In the Buksa tribe, women are the protagonists in this process as the main custodians and transmitters of folk prayers, ritual songs, and tantric oral traditions.

A special role in the transmission of sacred knowledge belongs to elder Buksa women. Women, known for their ritual competence and experiential wisdom, mentor younger women through ordinary interactions, not structured teaching. Prayers and mantras are learned as part of the domestic chores, agricultural work, healing rituals, and life-cycle events such as childbirth or illness. This form of learning is indicative of what Lave and Wenger (1991) [22] refer to as "situated learning," where knowledge is acquired through legitimate participation in social practice. Sacred knowledge is therefore embedded in, not abstracted from, daily life.

Sacred knowledge may retain its adaptability and flexibility through oral transmission. Oral traditions, however, differ from written religious traditions, where fixed texts and authoritative interpretations are emphasized and change with social and ecological contexts (Vansina, 1985) [14]. The Buksa women modify the prayers and ritual expressions to suit new circumstances but retain the underlying symbolic meanings. Such flexibility also ensures that spiritual practices remain relevant and continue across generations, even in the face of modernization and social change. Women's folk songs serve as powerful mnemonic and pedagogic tools in this act of transmission. Oral cultures benefit from rhythm and repetition and from emotional resonance, which helps memory and learning, as scholars have demonstrated (Finnegan, 2012) [5]. Buksa women transmit through song and chant not only ritual knowledge but also values of endurance, care, solidarity, and communal responsibility. These performances encode cultural ethics as well as spiritual beliefs and contribute to the moral socialization of the younger generations.

From a feminist anthropological point of view, passing sacred knowledge down through generations is an important form of women's agency and power. In the community, elder women control access to ritual knowledge, which allows them to hold spiritual authority and social recognition (Sered, 1994) [13]. This authority is not hierarchical but is acquired through experience, moral behavior, and effectiveness in healing and protection. The transmission process thus supports women-centered religious domains within a wider patriarchal social structure. Elder women, in sharing stories during ritual instruction, also serve as repositories of collective memory and lived experience. These narratives frame prayers in stories of past hardships, healing, and resilience, allowing younger women to internalize spiritual meanings together with historical consciousness (Riessman, 2008) [20]. In this way sacred knowledge is bound up with personal and community identity.

As postcolonial and decolonial scholars have noted, the validation of oral transmission as knowledge challenges dominant epistemologies that favor written texts and formal schooling (Dei, 2000; Smith, 2012) [15, 16].

Feminist Anthropology and Oral History Contribution

The study contributes significantly to feminist anthropology and oral history by highlighting the Buksa women's folk prayers and tantric oral traditions as valid forms of religious knowledge, cultural expression, and gendered agency. Mainstream anthropological scholarship has often privileged male-centered rituals, written texts, and institutional religious structures, rendering women's everyday spiritual practices marginal (Ortner, 1974; Sered, 1994) [13]. This research brings women's voices and lived experiences to the fore as a means of contesting androcentric and text-centric biases within the discipline.

Contribution to Feminist Anthropology

Feminists in anthropology have long stressed the need to question the intersections of gender with the production of knowledge, power relations, and cultural continuity (Moore, 1988) [23]. This study contributes to that project by showing how Buksa women exercise spiritual agency through folk prayers, healing chants, and ritual performances that are embedded in everyday life. The findings do not view women's religiosity as passive or derivative but rather align with Mahmood's (2005) [7] argument that agency needs to be understood within culturally specific moral and ethical frameworks.

In this study, by examining women's control of non-institutional religious domains, feminist discussions of power are extended beyond formal leadership and resistance. Buksa women's ritual practices are subtle but powerful modes of authority through which they negotiate crises, offer healing, and maintain moral order in the community. This is in accord with Scott's (1985) [12] notion of everyday modes of agency where power is negotiated through routine practices rather than explicit confrontation. In addition, this study contributes to feminist anthropology by drawing attention to the intersectionality of gender, indigeneity, and spirituality. The Buksa women's religious practices are shaped not only by their gender but also by their position in marginalized tribal communities. The acknowledgement of these overlapping identities enhances feminist analysis by situating women's agency within larger contexts of social exclusion and epistemic marginalization (Dei, 2000; Smith, 2012) [15, 16].

Oral History Contribution

The importance of recording the voices, memories and narratives that are missing from the written historical records has been highlighted by oral history scholarship (Portelli, 1991) [24]. In so doing, the study contributes to the field of oral history by documenting the prayers, songs, and ritual narratives of Buksa women as forms of historical memory and cultural transmission. These oral texts preserve collective experiences of struggle, healing, resilience, and faith, and offer insights into everyday life often missing from official histories.

This study approaches women's folk prayers as historical sources, not folkloric artifacts, disrupting hierarchies that privilege written documentation over oral knowledge (Vansina, 1985) [14]. Oral history is dynamic. Women's stories demonstrate how spiritual practices change with changing social and environmental circumstances. This is in line with Portelli's (1991) [24] argument that the value of oral history is not in factual accuracy but in meaning, interpretation, and emotional truth.

The study further underscores the importance of women as custodians of memory and tradition. Older Buksa women

transmit sacred knowledge and cultural identity from one generation to another. It adds to oral history by highlighting gendered processes of remembrance and preservation of knowledge, an area that has been relatively under-explored within mainstream historiography (Finnegan, 2012) [5].

Bridging Feminist Anthropology and Oral Histories

By combining feminist anthropology and oral history, the current study presents a methodological and theoretical intervention that validates women's quotidian religious practices as both anthropological data and historical evidence. It shows how oral traditions operate as spiritual practice, cultural pedagogy, and historical archives. Such an approach not only enriches feminist scholarship but also strengthens oral history methodologies through the incorporation of analyses of power, gender, and lived religion.

Conclusion

Women's folk prayers and tantric oral traditions among the Buksa tribe have been viewed as important expressions of lived faith embedded in everyday life. This study has also shown that, beyond institutional and textual understandings of religion, the religious practice of Buksa women is based on oral traditions, embodied rituals, and experiential knowledge, which are concerned with practical matters such as health, agriculture, protection, and emotional well-being. Seen through the lens of lived religion, these practices are understood as vibrant, adaptive, and meaningful, rather than residual or superstitious (McGuire, 2008; Orsi, 2003) [8, 10]. The paper locates the spirituality of the Buksa women in the domain of indigenous knowledge systems and foregrounds the epistemic importance of the tantric oral traditions. Healing chants, protective rituals, and ritual songs are holistic responses to uncertainty and crisis that blend spiritual belief with social ethics and ecological awareness (Dei, 2000; Kleinman, 1980) [6, 15]. These traditions show that the indigenous spirituality is a cohesive knowledge system that can sustain the moral order and resilience of the community.

The gendered analysis of religious practice in this study makes an important contribution. The findings reveal that Buksa women exercise spiritual agency through quotidian rituals that bestow moral authority, social recognition, and symbolic power. Patriarchal structures may restrict women's access to formal religious leadership, but women's command over domestic and communal religious practices permit them to maneuver power in subtle yet potent ways (Mahmood, 2005; Scott, 1985) [7, 12]. Folk prayers are therefore not only devotional acts but also tools of care, mediation, and social regulation.

The findings also highlight the significance of intergenerational transfer in maintaining religious and cultural continuity. Through oral narratives, songs, and embodied learning, elder Buksa women transmit sacred knowledge to younger generations, preserving continuity and adaptability of spiritual practices (Vansina, 1985; Finnegan, 2012) [5, 14]. This process creates women educators, memory keepers and cultural anchors in the community.

In this paper I aim to contribute to feminist anthropology and oral history by documenting and analyzing women's everyday religious practices. In so doing I challenge androcentric and text-based epistemologies. It validates women's oral spirituality as a valid source of anthropological understanding and historical knowledge. The focus is on the recognition of marginalized voices and indigenous ways of knowing (Ortner, 1974; Portelli, 1991) [24].

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