



11. Interrogating Chaupals & Kebangs as Alternative Sites of Power: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Chaupals and Kebangs have historically served as community forums for socio-cultural discourses over the years. These traditional spaces have exercised immense power at different points in time serving very often as sites where multiple discursive narratives jostle for power. In kebangs and chaupals, individuals come together to discuss and make decisions on issues that affect their communities. Both these institutions welcome social, political, and economic debate. While these institutions predate modern day establishments by thousands of years, their significance in spite of the judico-constitutional framework that guides our socio-cultural life have not diminished. It is interesting to note how Chaupals and Kebangs despite being separated in terms of geographic spaces function in symmetrical modes of working in public sphere. This paper is an attempt to theorize on how Chaupals and Kebangs work as what Jurgen Habermas calls public sphere to deliver on and shape public discourses on a host of issues in socio-cultural domain. In doing so it will take into account such theoretical framework as power, ideology, discourse as it manifests in the works of Foucault and Althusser amongst others. Chaupals and Kebangs have consistently redefined it in the face of the changing times and have emerged as dynamic centres of power albeit with varying degrees of controversy. As alternative sites of power that communicates strongly on conflict and compromises, these traditional institutions have become an important subject of study.

Keywords: Chaupal, Kebang, North-east India, Mising or Mishing community, communication.



Introduction

Humans are social animal because society is very basic and essential need for humans. A common human always use his consciousness. Human uses his consciousness with discussion, observation. After observing he tries to learn new things. Human always learns from his past it can be in form of verbal and non-verbal forms. So, human has developed a place in society where people used to share his own experience, opinion, idea thinks and thought. It is very common practice where human live. These gathering have different names sometimes it is called formal structure or informal structure of society. Indian democracy is divided mainly in three layers Central, State level and panchayati raj system. This panchayati raj has given a political power to common people of India. Chaupal is also a place where people gather at one place. Chaupals are very old because these are mentioned in Vedic society. Chaupal also exist in post modern time. Delhi is a single state which follows popular culture. Delhi is capital of India and famous metro city. In spite of these Delhi has more than two hundred villages. All villages have chaupals. Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh & Rajsthan etc. state have chaupal. Earlier chuapls were used for health camp, place for entertainment, shelter for vendors they came to sell things from far away, place for entertainment, senior citizen also share their own experience and to their new generations, villages common place also preserve folklore. Folklore is very broad terminology that includes song, music, dance, drama etc. Chaupal and Kebang both are common place of village, so here people can express their own feelings, expressions and opinion. Both have judicial power with certain limitations. In both palaces leaders of society take initiates to make compromise if any two parties have any problem. It's not mandatory that they will also solve the case but most of the time they do, if any party is agree for compromise. Indian judiciaries have lot of pressure of cases and reports say that there is proportion rate in not good between judge and people. In these courts both parties will have to hire lawyer they will put our matter before judge but in chaupal or Kebang here people can put his or her own part. In both institutions it's not mandatory with any degree and qualification people can say or put his own opinion. this process is also save money of common people. Chaupal and Kebang both are directly connected with communities. Communication is very important for any society in the world. Chaupal and Kebang in both systems their people share idea so, they have opinion on any topic that is related to the society. Opinion leader is also a very important in these systems.



Literature Review

Singh, A., Kumar Pandey, A., & Singh, U. (2020) stated in this research paper that soil testing was organized in Bihar. Expert says that Soil testing is essential for higher production. Soil testing awareness program has been organized through Chaupal and seminars. Chaupal was more successful compared to other methods like seminars because Chaupals are a very essential part of the rural area of India. Malik, K., & Pavarala, V., (2020) mentioned in community radio in South Asia. The writer mentions the case study from Bundelkhand. Chaupal is a common meeting place or gathering place. Chaupal is a place where people of different ages, caste, and faith sit together. Chaupal is the center of all formal and informal activities in the village. In various villages, Chaupals are differentiated based on caste. Chaupal is considered a center of power. Chaupal is also a communication center of the village. Women are not allowed to sit in Chaupal. During any meeting or need, women will present on chaupal. Only educated women have the right to sit on chaupal. Married women can't use chaupal it is not good according to local social norms. Siwach, P., (2020) stated that Chaupal is public extension of Baithak. Men usually sit in chaupal there playing cards, discussions, and decisions are made here. Mostly chaupals are located at the center of the village. It's common every evening people gather in the chaupal. Women are allowed to use chaupal because chaupal is only for males. Women visit chaupal for cleaning and maintenance or call during any meeting or occasion.

Chandhoke & S. K. (April 1977) mentioned in this research paper, the researcher discussed that Chaupal is the traditional center of the village. Chaupals are useful in villages because there are no hotels or rest houses in the villages where any outsiders can stay. Chaupal has been considered a common and neutral place for the entire village in this paper. The meetings of the elected body of villagers have been used to occur on Chaupal. The government officials go to Chaupals when they visit villages for official work like pension distribution or any other government-related work health checkups. In this research paper, the researcher also mentioned a case Chhatera village in western UP where when new teachers were appointed in government school all teachers used to live in Chaupal. Mishra, K. K. (October 2002) mentioned In this research paper, the author mentioned that Chaupal is not only a constructed building, but it can



also be a semi-constructed building, an open space of a village where everyone can gather, and also a place where people gather under the shadow of tree-like Peepal or Banyan tree. He also mentioned that no individual or family can claim the ownership of Chaupal it's the property of the entire village. It is a place where peoples of all categories, castes, and ages sit together and discuss various issues. In Chaupal elders and Panches sit together to sort out disputes and take collective decisions. He also mentioned that Chaupal is not a new concept for India because its roots are from the Vedic period. He also added that Gandhi Ji who was working for gram panchayat, the term gram panchayat also comes from Chaupal. His imagination of self-governments roots was in Self Government. Mr. Mishra also mentioned that the true or real disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave started an agitation of BhoodanAndolan (Gift of Land) he also takes the help of Chaupal to convey his message. He also discussed that Munshi Prem Chand, Faneshwarnath and baba Nagarjuna also mention panchayat in their stories and the Panches were also called the God or Panch Parmeshwar. Both parties used to come to them for great hope. All India Radio has completed many radio programs under the name of Chaupal. Chaupal is also very frequently used in Indian cinema. The author also mentioned the use of Chaupal in the Indian judiciary system: Lok Adalat root is from traditional Chaupals. He also mentioned that the villages of Delhi have more than fifty Chaupals. Dangi, N., & Singh, H. (2001) mentioned in this research paper that Chaupal means the meeting place for villagers where people meet with each other. Chaupal is commonplace, so traders and vendors also visit, and they sell or buy products based on Chaupal they are supposing to develop e-Chaupal. It's a virtual Chaupal where people will visit, and they will buy and sell the products. E-Chaupal has various benefits, but the root of this concept is traditional Chaupal. Modi, I. (2012) stated that Chaupals are the center of villages and people use Chaupal for leisure time along with serious discussions. He also mentioned that Hukka culture is also a part of Chaupal. Most people come to Chaupal for smoking Hukka. Jain, R.K. (2001) stated that people used to sit in Chaupal during social gatherings. People used to sit on Khatiyas (Coat) on Chaupal mostly people crossed their legs while other villagers were also a part of that social gathering. Yadav, A. (2007) stated at that time there were two types of teachers used to teach. The first teacher used to give personal or home tuition and the second type of teacher used to teach in Chaupal. Chaupal is a public place or center point of the village, so Chaupal was used for group study.



The study found that the media has more freedom than other countries. Chaupal is an important part of rural democracy. Mahatma Gandhi used to say that India lives in villages; Mahatma Gandhi has been a strong supporter of village self-reliance. He believed that communication is very important for the development of villages. For communication in villages, emphasis has to be laid on rural communication. Most of the production companies are based on the primary production of the villages. Agriculture is a very important element in national income and GDP. Indian villages lack infrastructure, and infrastructure is the backbone of the economy, so it is very important in rural development. Rural development is very important in third world countries. Jain, M., Shukla, A., & Tiwari, M. A (2019) it was found in study that television is a very effective medium for rural communication. Old age people like to listen to the radio because it is economical and portable. It is also not necessary to be literate to listen to the radio. It is necessary to be literate to read the newspaper, otherwise, the reader is read by an educated person, and the person who is illiterate listens to the news of his choice. The educated people in the rural market try to read the newspaper as the newspaper provides detailed and follow-up information. It was also found that media changes public opinion and at the same time media also controls consumer behavior. Media also works to change or influence the opinion of the common people. People in rural areas are avoiding going to fairs or haats. Sinha, S. (2018) in his article 'Gender digital divide in India: Impacting women's participation in the labor market' found that mobile penetration is increasing daily, and digital transactions are spreading wide. In 2016 wireless telephone subscribers crossed the 1 billion mark. Smartphone users in India are estimated to reach 530 million. When the economy and the labor market are going digital, women's participation is not increasing in good numbers. Researcher suggests that policies must be amended so that women become part of and gain from the smart labor market. Connectivity and access are increasing but data shows that more than half of the world's population is offline. Digital India Initiative is one of the biggest reforms by this scheme public services reach the citizens. Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) is also a very good initiative by which the role of the mediator is minimized. In 2016 village-level governing body in Basauli village in UP has announced a ban on the use of mobile phones by unmarried girls, and many villages in Gujrat, Bihar, and Haryana banned women and girls from using mobile phones. Khan, F. (2018). The Concept of Folklore stated that storytelling is part of folklore communication. In ancient times people only tell stories but now a day's storyteller tries to connect



with real stories. It's very difficult to track any oral stories' origin period. Stories are available in both formats written and oral but most of the ancient stories are in oral form. Folklore is a new field of learning and it started in the nineteenth century. In research, aspect folklore has various theories like Historical-geographic, Ideological, Functional, Psychoanalytical, structural, Cross-cultural, Contextual, etc. Korotkevich, E.R. & Tsurkan, M.V., (2019) stated that the ancient world has been the birthplace of modern European humanity. Demonopolization of truth lays the roots of modern society, it leads us to the Hellenistic era. The beginning of postmodern era starts in the 60s and continues till now. The postmodern era was the reaction to the identity crisis that led to technological advances, including computers. The shifting of social life from real life to virtual life is a huge challenge. All this is part of virtual society but it affects us in real life as well. It is written that postmodern society is a that society is based on truth without truth. The postmodern society is the extension of the society based on science and it has been called the global information society. Christian fuches (2018) stated in the book that the public sphere is the interface of society that mediates among different spheres. when citizens are engaged in politics as part of movements, non-government organizations, movements, and practices, and when they discuss topics related to these in public, that time they are part of the public sphere. Habermas says that the public is a sphere that is 'open to all. he says events & occasions are public when they are open to all, public sphere needs a communication system. Jurgen Habermas advocated that the public sphere is not just a sphere of public political communication, but also a sphere free from state censorship and private ownership. During the lok sabha proceedings, Shri M.K. Raghavan raised the question in the house under unstarred question number 893, question was WI-fi facility in panchayat and municipal areas. Minister Manoj Sinha replied that under the BharatNet project all Gram Panchayats will connect with high-speed internet broadband and WI-FI. Internet is the very basic need for digital government. internet is also a tool for transparent government and to remove or minimize the role of mediator in democracy.

Commonness in Kebang and Chaupal

Chuapal is not only a common place of village. Chaupal is also a center of serious discussion. Sometime after the conflict people take the help of chaupal to solve the issue. Then Panchayat



organized in chaupal to solve the issue. Chaupal doesn't have formal operational working hours as courts. Chaupals are conducted according to time of most of the people of village and Opinion leader. They do long discussion on various aspects of the issues. Any people more than eighteen years can take the part in discussion. If, any decision is taken under the constitution and both parties are agree then court also accept the decision. Panchayats are divided in two types first formal panchayat means where election conducted to elect a Pradhan or Sarpanch etc. they have proper budget and panels of people. Second form of Panchayats is informal. In Indian democratic style political structure changed according to population. Informal panchayt there is no election for panchayat. But panchayat system existed. As Delhi there are more than two hundred villages. all villages have panchayat and according to administration or election most of these villages come under municipal corporation of Delhi. Kebang is also a system of self control. Kebang have also various rights. Kebang can take decisions during the civil and criminal cases. These decisions are valid by the Indian judicial system. Kebang and Chaupal both solve civil and criminal cases.

Common Place of village

Chaupal and Kebang both have right to solve the issue related with civil and criminal. It's not means that both social institutions are only for serious discussion. Both places also use for regular discussions and general talks of village. In both places senior shares his or her own experiences with next generation children. Both social institutions also use for spending time in village. In both places senior people will chair the formal program and all people respects him, if any person have any issue they can counter the opinion.

Control of common place

Both institutions Kebang and Chaupal senior citizens of village or community they take the decision of any panchayat. They chaired the formal meetings of society they have great respect of their in society. these senior citizens are also very experienced person and they have in-depth knowledge of society.

Economic Power

Both of the institutions can't generate regular revenue but during the discussion on any



issue. The panchayat or Kebang impose fine on one party if they found corrupt or responsible.

Social control

Sometime Chuupal or Kebang they also make law to protect their society or nature. In Kebang they have made various laws related with jungle because they protect these jungle as their own property. Jungle is both for them first it provide food and various medicinal plants and its also gives protection to them. As well as in Delhi-NCR, NCR-National Capital Region. Various village chaupals have made laws like barat will not allow entering in village if they play loud music in marriage. Various villages they don't allow to play Disc Jockey, DJ after 9 PM.

Cultural Program

In Chaupal and Kebang people perform their cultural song and dance during any social gathering or marriage. These cultural programs also perform on any festivals. In chaupal there people perform Khoriya a Haryanvi dance and sometimes people sing ragini in chorus. Ragini is a Haryanvi traditional song it's common in Delhi-NCR.

Conclusion

Kebang and Chaupal both are very traditional social institution of Indian society. these institution are very important because they are as relevant in post modern era as they were important in traditional time. Both institutions also helpful in giving judgment in their village. These both institutions are preserving culture. These institutions strengthen the belief on people in democracy. These institutions also solve the cases at their door steps. In this process most of the people know what is right or wrong and most of the people are connected with their sentiments. There is no any qualification for debating on any issue. Government must support this type of institution.

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