

Counter-Hegemony And Judgment As A Strategic Device To Preserve Culture Through Regional Film: Analyzing *Chethuang* As A Case Study For Sustainable Education

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Abstract: Folktales have long served as foundational tools for cultural transmission, moral instruction, and social cohesion. The Tripuri folktale Chethuang, deeply rooted in regional, mythological, and ethical traditions, exemplifies how indigenous narratives convey communal values and enforce social judgement. This research explores how the theme of judgement operates within Chethuang across its oral, written, theatrical, and digital adaptations, with a focus on how it either reinforces traditional norms or enables critical reinterpretation. While oral versions emphasize performative storytelling—using tone, gesture, and communal engagement to frame moral decisions—its digital adaptations allow for greater audience interaction, multimedia elements, and multiple perspectives. This shift from fixed moral authority to participatory dialogue transforms the narrative into a site of ethical negotiation. The study adopts a qualitative, ethnographic content analysis, drawing on representation theory and cultural studies to assess the folktale's evolving performative dimensions and the audience's reception across different platforms. Particular attention is given to how Chethuang challenges patriarchal and hegemonic norms through strategic representation and digital hybridity. As a case study, the Tripura-based film adaptation of Chethuang highlights how regional cinema can function as an educational tool that promotes cultural awareness, inclusivity, and critical thinking. Aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Quality Education, this research argues that regional films like Chethuang can be integrated into educational curricula as sustainable means for preserving cultural heritage and promoting cross-cultural understanding. By examining its cultural, moral, and performative dimensions, the study demonstrates how Chethuang bridges traditional narratives and contemporary media practices, offering immersive learning experiences and fostering ethical consciousness in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: Performative, Sustainability, Adaptation, Judgement, SDG 4

INTRODUCTION

Judgement at its core is a social and cognitive process of judging actions, behaviors, or situations against pre-determined standards, values or expectations (Baier). In social context, it is a method of distinguishing between right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable. In the context of narrative- more specifically, in the case of folktales- it is likely to transcend individual judgement (Finnegan), becoming a social process that reinforces common values and sustains social cohesion. This concept is inextricably bound to justice, which in this instance is not only imagined as a legal construct but as a broad cultural and ethical system. Judgement, in this light, contributes significantly to the idea of quality education as defined under sustainable development goals which emphasize not just academic learning but also the development of ethical reasoning, cultural understanding, and social responsibility. Through storytelling and communal reflection, individuals are guided to understand the values and ethics needed to build peaceful and inclusive societies which are the key elements of sustainable education. In India, the term “judgement” has its historical root to *Dharmasatra*, an ancient legal text derived from Vedas that laid the foundation for the King’s duty to administer law and order to the commoners. However, the communities had their own law and order and were never bound by the King’s authorial rule. In Tripuri community, traditional oral narrative reflects the close connection between passing of judgement and communal ethical values. Justice is closely associated with morality, a decision-making process- implicit but strong rules that govern communal living. Folktales like Chethuang are

the vital vehicles for the transmission of these moral systems, where narratives defining right and wrong, good and evil are not merely treated as a mode of entertainment but used as critical tools for instructing the community to abide by desirable code of conduct and belief systems. These stories thus act as informal curricula teaching essential life skills and values that support the goal of sustainable and inclusive education. In this paradigm, morality depicted in folktales is not abstract; in response to which Briggs and Bauman said it is rather performative and prescriptive, firmly rooted in the day-to-day realities of the group. The moral content conveyed through judgement in such tales help create a collective consciousness and common identity among group members- all fundamental to quality education as outlined in global developmental frameworks. Such tales empower audiences particularly young people, with symbolic models of comprehension regarding their world, explicitly delineating virtues to be emulated and vices to be avoided which was discussed in a work by Carassi. These moral examples help individuals not only to reflect on their actions but also to grow with an awareness of communal ethics and responsibilities. This contributes directly to the broader goals of education which seeks to foster individuals capable of contributing positively to their stories through understanding, empathy and morally informed decision-making. Most importantly, the sense of community feeling generated by folktales prioritizes relational ethics over codified law and order. While traditional communities are likely to operate through communal sentiment where norms of society are maintained through the processes of contextual narrative, ritual, and collective memory; constitutional legal system of India attempts to balance codified rules with sensitivity to human relationships and cultural context. The Indian legal framework, rooted in constitutional principles, is also known for its flexibility in interpreting laws through the lens of social and cultural realities. While law and order emphasize fixed, institutionalized frameworks for justice, community feeling relies on participatory and emotionally resonant understandings of right and wrong. In this dynamic, judgement is not merely about punishment but about restoration, reaffirmation, and reinforcement of communal norms. This understanding of justice through moral education is aligned with the aspects of quality education which includes promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies ensuring all learners acquire the knowledge and values needed to live responsibly and harmoniously in a pluralistic world. Observing the highlighted aspect of language and performance within community practices often resistance or interpret official structures of law and governance (Gal and Irvine). This observation reinforces how judgement when embedded within narrative performance and storytelling traditions, becomes a powerful educational strategy- one that is local, ethical, emotionally engaging, and socially transformative. It not only reflects a community's moral fabric but also educates its members, particularly the younger generation, about how to live justly within their specific cultural context. Such a system of knowledge transmission underscores the enduring value of judgement as a form of quality education, contributing meaningfully to the sustainability of cultures, ethical frameworks and human-centered development.

A nuanced exploration of the connection among judgement, morality, and cultural narratives require a closer engagement with the concept of hegemony, particularly as articulated in Marxian and Gramscian frameworks. In classical Marxist theory, hegemony is the control by a social class over another not only economically, but also through the creation and domination of ideas, beliefs and social customs. Karl Marx and Fredrich Engles in *The German Ideology* (1846) argued that the ruling class not only controls material production but also the production of ideas, shaping ideologies to maintain dominance. Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony is fundamentally rooted in his critique of the capitalist mode of production and its socio-political ramifications. He contends that the ruling class maintains dominance not merely through coercion or direct force, but through the cultivation of consent among the subordinate classes. This consent is obtained by exercising ideological influence through those primary institutions of society like the media, schooling, and the legal system, thus disseminating and naturalizing the values of the ruling class as universal and advantageous for the commoners. Most importantly, he makes clear that hegemony is not a static force. It is a contested and dynamic process constantly defined by social struggles among different groups. Subordinate classes, for example, may resist hegemonic dominance by generating counter-culture that question and oppose prevailing ideologies. Central to Gramsci's theory is the notion of the "Organic Intellectual" (Varghese), a figure distinct

from traditional intellectuals who are often disconnected from the lived realities of the working class. Organic intellectuals emerge from within the subordinate classes and possess the capacity to articulate their community's experiences, interests, and aspirants. Through the cultivation of critical consciousness and active participation in political struggle, organic intellectuals play a pivotal role in challenging hegemonic norms and fostering alternative paradigms of thought and action, thus advancing the concept of Counter-Hegemony. It represents the creation and propagation of alternative narratives, values and visions that challenge the majoritarian cultural codes that is the dominant set of beliefs, practices and values promoted by the ruling or majority group to maintain social and ideological control. In the context of Tripuri folktales like *Chethuang*, counter-hegemony manifests when traditional narratives, while appearing to reinforce social norms, also create avenues for other interpretation especially as they evolve across different performative spaces including digital media. Performative representation is a mode that refers to taking stories, traditions, and cultural elements and embodying them through various modes of expression such as speech, gestures, actions or visual elements. This interactive nature of performative spaces creates a shared experience which is participatory in nature, allowing audiences to engage deeply with the narrative, thereby making it highly effective means of narrating cultural storytelling that helps in the process of preserving the communal traditions and heritage. At each stage of this evolution, it has further opened up ways through which cultural narratives are communicated, preserved, and experienced. Also, the notion of space is crucial in the understanding of performative representation, since it is deeply wedded to the medium through which the traditions and stories are expressed. Oral traditions center around a regional geographic space and communal areas, generally. This physical space gives shape to the performance and reception of the narrative as it directly connects the storyteller with the audience bringing about a feeling of immediacy and community. Whereas oral literature generates a different kind of space, that is inclusive of the imaginative space, and while a reader reads that same story that is adapted in the printed version, the modes and nature of story-telling changes drastically. Unlike oral traditions, where stories are performed live, written texts are dependent on the reader's interpretative engagement. Since there is no shared physical environment in this medium, the reader's imagination takes center stage because they create mental images and meanings based on the text. This imaginative space encourages deeper personal reflection and emotional involvement within the story; however, it lacks the communal interactions and performative elements that are fundamental to oral traditions.

The strategic representation of *Chethuang* between oral, written, and digital forms goes beyond mere cultural preservation. It also reflects a negotiation with hegemony, where traditional values are both reinforced and subtly questioned. Oral traditions may insist on strict adherence to communal morals in the folktale, but as the folktale enters digital forms- animated video, social media narrative, or interactive platforms- the folktale is exposed to diverse audiences and interpretive communities. These new media platforms tend to deconstruct the monolithic moralities that are traditionally embedded in folktales, developing a discursive space where hegemonic narratives can be challenged, reinterpreted or pluralized. Immanuel Kant's critique of Pure Reason (1781) discusses how knowledge is achieved by combining sensory experiences with inborn structures of understanding to provide the foundations for determinative judgment, whereby universal rules are to be applied to individual cases. Conversely, his Critique of Practical Reason (1788) put forward moral judgment based on autonomy (Bernard). Applied to folktales like *Chethuang*, these frameworks illustrate the way narratives operate as moral tools: determinative judgment enforces traditional, community-based justice, whereas practical reason enables ethical analysis that moves beyond cultural norms. In addition, in Critique of Judgement (1790), Kant presents reflective judgment as mentioned by Bremner, which looks for the universal in the particular, allowing audiences to extract progressive moral insights from concrete narrative settings. Therefore, Kantian judgment links universal moral reasoning with contextual communal morality and shows how folktales mediate cultural continuity and critical moral thought.

The digital reimagining of *Chethuang* fosters reflective judgement- a concept from philosopher Hannah Arendt in her book *Lecture on Kant's political philosophy* (1982) that involves critical evaluation of situations reading

the texts from multiple perspectives rather than accepting fixed moral conclusions. This process supports the goals of quality education by encouraging critical thinking and ethical reflection. Unlike traditional forms, digital storytelling encourages dialogue, reinterpretation and audience participation. This transforms audiences into active co-creators of meaning and reshapes the folktale's ethical framework. Such transformation aligns with the Gramsci's idea of cultural struggle, where counter-hegemonic voices challenge dominant norms through everyday acts of critique and cultural expression. Thus, in analyzing *Chethuang*, it becomes clear that folktales are not static relics but vibrant, performative spaces where morality, justice, and judgement are continuously negotiated. These reflective spaces promote inclusive and culturally responsive education. While traditional forms may emphasize the reinforcement of communal norms, newer digital platforms amplify voices that question, resist and reshape those norms. In this sense, the strategic representation of this Tripuri Folktale both preserves a cultural memory and propels it into a critical engagement of the viewers with broader socio-political forces. Through the evolving performance of judgement, folktales like *Chethuang* try to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing dialogues of identity, resistance, and cultural transformation, reinforcing the foundations of quality and sustainable education.

Plotline of the folktale *Chethuang*

DK Tyagi writes a detailed story on the narrative of chethuang as a folktale; in reference to which the plotline has been discussed as- in a small top village, a brother and sister lived with their family, working together in the jhum fields. One day, as they crossed a stream, the brother became captivated by his sister's beauty and developed an unsettling desire to marry her. Shocked, the family tried to dissuade him but eventually accepted his wish keeping the truth hidden from the sister. Later, the sister overheard her grandmother discussing wedding preparations, realizing the truth. Distraught, she dreamt of an elderly goddess who instructed her to find, nurture and worship a Chethuang tree to escape her fate. The next day she searched the field, found a Chethuang sapling, and planted it secretly. As she cared for the tree, it grew rapidly, thriving whenever she sang to it. Despite her parents' attempts to cut it down and force the marriage, the tree only grew taller, symbolizing her growing resistance. When the family pleaded with her to give up, she refused, and the tree eventually stretched beyond the clouds- carrying her away from the oppressive world.

The story symbolizes a young woman's resistance against patriarchal control and oppressive traditions. The brother's desire reflects male domination, where women are objectified and controlled. The family's reluctant acceptance shows how women's choices are often overridden by patriarchal norms prioritizing male desires. The Chethuang tree represents a sacred space of refuge and empowerment outside male authority. Its miraculous growth mirrors the girl's strength and resilience. The elderly goddess symbolizes a feminine divine force guiding her to liberation. The girl's ascension into the cloud's signifies freedom from oppressive societal norms, illustrating how women's refusal to conform can lead to transcendence beyond patriarchal constraints. The tale critiques societal complicity in women's oppression and celebrates female agency and resistance through symbolic anthropology.

Moral Authority and Community Regulation in Oral Traditions

Fundamental aspects such as moral authority and community regulation are embedded within the folktales, serving as the bedrock for social continuity and identity. In a rapidly evolving world, origin and tradition provide the sense of stability and familiarity. They act as custodians of cultural wisdom, holding onto the characteristics of myth and ritual. This continuity provides strength and honors to the heritage of our forebearers of the community. Though roots and traditions change with every new generation, they still bridge differences and bring people together in unity amidst diversity. The appreciation of diverse culture allows people to relate with their heritage, inspiring successive generations through this enduring continuity. The idea of folklore, which William Thoms in 1846 defined, includes the collective culture of a given group regardless of time and place. Its dynamic nature reflects the creativity and experiences of its practitioners, from rural to urban settings (Liberman). Beyond the academic study it operates the role of an effective means for tackling social concerns and finding innovative solutions, highlighting its relevance and adaptability in today's world. According to Bhatta, Oral narratives have a central role in the exercise of moral authority and

regulation of community. They serve as agents of social control, infusing ethical values and social norms in entertaining stories.

Judgement in Tripuri folktale *Chethuang* is socially and cosmologically enacted. In oral tradition, stories such as this one are public spaces where actions are measured against communal norms. These oral spaces serve not only as cultural repositories but also as informal educational platforms that promote quality education by fostering ethical reasoning, intergenerational knowledge transfer and social responsibility. The brother's moral deviance is not merely implicitly judged by family members but becomes the subject of narrative judgement, in which symbolic elements like the supernatural resistance of the *Chethuang* tree and the intervention of a divine feminine being, are treated as agents to pass moral judgments. It is less conveyed through formal legal authority and more through ritualized consequences embedded in nature and spiritual communication. This narrative format supports quality education by offering a culturally grounded mode of teaching that blends emotional engagement with moral clarity. The society, and eventually the natural world responds to the transgression by reinforcing the idea that moral wrongdoings carry inevitable repercussions, even if formal institutions remain complicit or silent. Incest, being the central theme represents a clear violation of cultural ethics- a moral boundary policed not only by family but by oral tradition itself. Likewise, in many indigenous societies, incest is not merely a personal transgression but disruption of the cosmic balance. For example, among the Mishmi (Nijhawan and Mihu) people of Arunachal Pradesh, violating taboo invites misfortune and spiritual retribution. Through such examples, oral storytelling fosters ethical awareness and critical judgement, which are essential to the development of lifelong learning skills, a core component of quality education. In oral tradition, the emotional and psychological turmoil caused by confronting truth contrasted with the family's hesitant participation in *Chethuang* highlights folk ethics grounded in purity, individual agency and divine justice. The sister's dream visitation by a goddess figure in the folktale *Chethuang* reinforces the idea that morality is a communal and cosmological expectation, and that individuals who uphold it even against societal pressures are spiritually rewarded. This promotes value-based education, where learners absorb moral insights and the importance of standing up for justice. Community regulation that is narrated within the oral tradition of *Chethuang* works by didactic storytelling, symbolism and intergenerational transmission- practices that align closely with holistic learning approaches central to quality education. The tale critiques the failure of elders to uphold moral order, showing how silence in the face of wrongdoing leads to communal collapse. At the same time, it highlights how acts of resistance and moral clarity especially by women can restore the community's foundational values. The tree itself acts as a regulative symbol- an agent that grows in power the more it is attacked, indicating that moral resistance to social evil is strengthened through ethical conviction and spiritual orientation. In oral versions, the *chethuang* tree attaches a ritualistic value and adds a symbolic sign, utilized by narrators to reaffirm social norms and govern future action, particularly in the areas of gender roles, consent, and familial obligation. All these elements of oral tradition reflect how folktales like *Chethuang* function as a dynamic tool of quality education, transmitting moral, cultural, and emotional knowledge in ways that are participatory, context-sensitive and rooted in lived experiences.

Overall, the oral form of *Chethuang* serves as a cultural tool for moral reinforcement and governance of community, instantiating Clifford Geertz's (1973) definition of culture as a system of symbol and reinforces William Bascom's (1990) model of folklore as a vehicle of moral teaching and social control. According to Nonglait, a story goes beyond individual characters to offer a lasting ethical script- a developing but authoritative voice that continues to influence Tripuri cultural identity and values.

Institutionalization and Semi-fixed Narratives in Written Form

When a folktale shifts from oral to written form, it goes through the process of institutionalization that naturally includes the author's interpretation, which can substantially affect how the audience interprets and internalizes the story. This process often leads to semi-fixed narratives (Whiteman and Philips) in which the adaptability and flexibility of oral telling marked by variations are exchanged for a dynamic text that better represents the author's cultural, ideological, and personal outlook. This transformation also reflects a mode

of education where knowledge transmission moves from communal and participatory forms to more formalized text-based systems of learning. In short, institutionalization is the process where a folktale becomes a fixed written text shaped by the author's interpretation, limiting its original fluidity; this creates semi-fixed narratives that balance stability with some flexibility, reflecting cultural and ideological influences on audience understanding. The recording of oral traditions can result in diverse perspectives of the narrative-meaning the story becomes dynamic and changing which may distort its communal context and meaning by detaching it from the performative aspect that gave it richness and relevance. Despite this, the written form serves as a resource for education preserving cultural content for wider dissemination, literacy development and academic study. This shift from oral tradition to written language is a critical turning point in the rich fabric of human storytelling. Stories have been spread through the ages, woven into the social fabric of communities, and carved through spoken tales into the collective consciousness since the beginning of civilization. As a result, both oral and written forms function as complementary educational tools, each offering pathways for learning, cultural continuity and critical engagement. John Miles Foley's edited volume *The Transmission of Oral Literature* examines the similar common themes in several cultures, talking about how oral traditions change and persists in written form. But what gives these stories a fresh performance and power, is the process of writing them down on the timeless medium of pen and paper. Because of their rich lore and enduring wisdom, Tripuri folktales have likewise enthralled audiences for generations. Once restricted to oral space, these tales gained vitality and significance when they were recorded in written words. Dinesh K. Tyagi's seminal work, *Tribal Folktales of Tripura* could be viewed as an example of how the written word may contribute to the preservation and broader dissemination of folklore. Furthermore, written records may also lend legitimacy and permanence to stories, allowing them to be studied, analyzed, and interpreted over time. The process of engaging with written folklore may encourage critical thinking, prompting readers to reflect on the cultural values embedded in these narratives. For the Tripuri folktale *Chethuang*, the written form can highlight themes depending on the focus of the author, thereby shaping the audience's interpretation such as resistance to an unacceptable "desire" considered by the society because the man was asked to marry his own sister and thereby also sticking onto the fact that he won't be getting married to someone else except her which relates to the dominant patriarchal value and power. Also, if the story highlights the female protagonist's resistance to a forced marriage, it acts as a counter-hegemonic discourse, which is in accordance with Scott's concept of "hidden transcripts"- the hidden means through which the subordinate groups critique the set power. Hence, in *Chethuang*, such resistance might often embed in symbolic actions or narrative choices. These stories offer a subtle but powerful way for marginalized voice to challenge dominant norms without open conflict, making written form a cultural space for expressing dissent and preserving perspectives.



Fig.1. Jora Ni Kok, YouTube, 2017.

The picture reflects the devotion of the sister towards the sacred tree that served as a guiding principle. Beyond its spiritual significance, the sacred tree also emerges as a powerful symbol of resistance- particularly against the forceful imposition of marriage upon the sister. The sister's act of devotion becomes a silent yet

profound protest, grounding his opposition within cultural and spiritual frameworks rather than open confrontation. This act of resistance, rooted in tradition, gradually transforms into a collective memory passed down through generations. For the younger members of the community, the tree thus acquires not only cultural significance but also becomes a site of learning-teaching how spiritual devotion and cultural practices can serve as subtle yet effective means to challenge oppressive norms. The sacred tree, therefore, stands both a marker of cultural continuity and a beacon of moral resistance, fostering an awareness of agency within deeply embedded social structures.

Reading the *Chethuang* tale through the lens of textualization theory is necessary in order to comprehend how processes of meaning-making, authority, and ethical interpretation change as stories evolve from oral to written forms. It is not merely the documentation of a story but an act of cultural encoding, shaped by the interpretive framework of the writer and conditioned by the ideological and academic paradigms of the time. This shift transforms fluid oral traditions where morality and judgement are context-dependent, responsive to performance, and negotiated between storyteller and audience into fixed texts that frame ethical norms within narrower interpretive boundaries. As Bauman and Briggs (1992) argue, textualization is not an objective act; it is a socially situated process that is embedded in power relations. What is considered worthy of transmission and what is silenced or distorted, reflects larger hegemonic structures. The moral lessons and acts of judgement are not unidirectional in the oral tradition of *Chethuang*; they are produced dialogically. The storyteller adjusts narrative emphasis based on audience reaction, social context, or contemporary relevance. Oral performance allows this ethical ambiguity and communal negotiation, making morality a plural and performative device. However, once *Chethuang* is textualized, the writer's interpretive agency becomes central to shaping the narrative's moral framework. The strategic choices- what to emphasize, what to omit- reshape the portrayal of moral norms and determine which judgements are legitimized, as explored in Brar's work. For example, the protagonist's wit and defiance used to challenge patriarchal or feudal authority can be read as a critique of established hierarchies. In oral contexts, this subversion is often emphasized through performative cues like tone or gesture, helping audiences grasp its moral stance. But in written forms, such cues are lost and the author's perspective becomes central. Depending on their ideological learnings, the tale may be framed to either highlight resistance or promote obedience, potentially diluting its counter-hegemonic message. Thus, textual versions not only reshape moral interpretation but strategically influence social judgement as well, offering insight into how written narratives function as tools of formal education- framing cultural knowledge, moral codes, and social critique in structured and analyzable forms.

Strategic Storytelling in Digital Spaces

The digital adaptation of the Tripuri folktale *Chethuang* exemplifies how indigenous narratives can be strategically reimagined to challenge hegemonic structures and offer nuanced interpretations of morality and judgement. Traditionally, *Chethuang* functioned within oral traditions as a medium for conveying communal values and social norms, with protagonist often portrayed as a subversive figure navigating complex and moral landscapes. The performative nature of oral storytelling interpreted by Shaheer allowed for dynamic interactions between the storyteller and the audience, facilitating a shared space for ethical reflection. In light to that, a key moment in the film occurs at timestamp 25:14 and 25:23, where the brother calls out to his sister, saying, "I am hungry. Come fast." The director's demarcation of the brother's male gaze towards the sister marks the point at which the brother begins to develop inappropriate feelings toward his sister—an act that sets the central conflict of the story into motion. This is projected through the screenshots of the two consecutive images given below. Beyond merely depicting a taboo subject, this moment also functions as an educative device reinforcing moral and societal principles. By making the audience witness the shift in the brother's gaze, the filmmaker initiates a subtle but powerful critique of incestuous desire, showing it as both morally unacceptable and socially prohibited. *Chethuang* thereby serves as a medium through which unspoken boundaries are emphasized what cannot be said or felt within the domain of familiar relationships especially those governed by cultural and ethical norms. the discomfort generated in the audience reflects not only the psychological conflict within the character but also acts as a mirror to societal codes that uphold kinship

purity. Through this, the director effectively transforms a controversial moment into a tool for reaffirming collective moral consciousness.



Fig. 2. Kok Tripura Exclusive, YouTube, 2016



Fig. 3. Kok Tripura Exclusive, YouTube, 2016

In transitioning to digital platforms, *Chethuang* undergoes a transformation that extends beyond mere preservation. Digital storytelling introduces multimedia elements such as visual animations, audio narrations, and interactive features that not only enhance narrative immersion but also broaden interpretive possibilities. The use of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of Cultural Capital to the digitally retold *Chethuang* illustrates how older narratives, mediated by contemporary digital technologies, gain new social and symbolic worth. In such a case, digital narration becomes a channel for the passing of indigenous culture in forms that not only become accessible but also culturally meaningful to younger generations. This aligns with the goals of sustainable education, which emphasizes inclusive, context-sensitive, and life-long learning processes that preserve cultural diversity while embracing innovation. Through the mediation of oral histories into multi media events these transmissions heighten the cultural authority of marginalized histories. This process produces a type of cultural capital that asserts communal identity, teaches wider audiences and undermines dominant cultural storytelling. By ensuring that such stories are preserved, adapted, and shared in accessible formats, digital storytelling becomes a sustainable educational practice supporting cultural continuity and intergenerational knowledge sharing. Simultaneously, Homi Bhabha's notion of cultural Hybridity becomes essential in understanding how the digital adaptation of *Chethuang* negotiates between inherited traditions and the aesthetics of contemporary media. This hybridity is not merely a blending of forms but a deliberate act of cultural resistance and identity formation. Through this hybrid expression, marginalized communities assert agency by reconfiguring dominant modes of storytelling to reflect indigenous values, experiences, and world views (Mambrol). These practices ensure sustainable aspects of education by integrating traditional knowledge with modern tools, encouraging learners to engage critically with their cultural heritage. The digital recontextualization of *Chethuang* thus becomes a space of performative negotiation, where cultural authenticity is not diluted but dynamically reimagined to contest counter-hegemonic representations and affirm indigenous presence in global digital discourse; thereby reinforcing sustainability through culturally grounded and technologically enabled education.

According to Doris and Jimia, “the strategic representation of the folktale in digital media also facilitates multiple interpretations of its moral and ethical dimensions”. For instance, the protagonist’s defiance against the brother’s incestuous desire can be reinterpreted as a symbolic resistance to authority and a critique of gender discrimination. Digital platforms enable diverse audiences to engage and interpret the narrative according to their own socio-cultural contexts, transforming *Chethuang* into a dialogic text- a narrative that invites multiple perspectives and interpretations rather than conveying a fixed meaning. Also, the digital realm enables participatory access, permitting the audience of various cultural backgrounds to inscribe their own values and struggles onto the narrative. This pluralistic interaction creates a dialogic space in which fixed meanings are de-centered and new meanings continually arises. Thus, *Chethuang* is no longer a passive story, it exists as an active cultural artifact that invites consideration of larger themes like gender disparity, power imbalance, and ethical responsibility. The digital platform, therefore, not merely democratizes access to the story but also finds greater relevance in allowing critical reinterpretations to ring out across time and space. This serves to uphold this continued relevance of the folktale in the contemporary times. Furthermore, the digital adaptation of *Chethuang* serves as a mode of cultural resistance, in line with Stuart hall’s theory of Cultural Representation, which emphasizes how meaning is constructed through cultural practices (Hall). By reclaiming their stories and choosing how to tell them, Tripuri storytellers disrupt dominant narrative frameworks that have historically marginalized indigenous voices. This approach aligns with decolonial theory interpreted in a research paper by Thambinathan and Kinsella, advocating for the dismantling of traditional knowledge systems and the centering on indigenous perspectives in global discourse.

The digital reinterpretation of *Chethuang* not only retains a fundamental cultural record but also recharges it as a potentially dynamic instrument for ethical consideration, cultural claim, and counter-hegemony. With online spaces continuing to expand, *Chethuang* increasingly becomes a space where changing social values and ethical issues are addressed and debated. Its transmission to digital media may provide opportunities for multiple meanings that capture changing cultural sensibilities and new political awareness. As it enters digital platforms, *Chethuang* also serves as a vehicle for the protecting of cultural heritage, preserving indigenous narratives in formats accessible to local and global audience. It promotes cross-cultural understanding by allowing diverse to engage with Tripura cinematic worldviews, values and ethical frameworks while also serving as a means for learning about local traditions and values embedded in the story’s moral structure. Future adaptations might further complicate the moral dimensions of the narrative, allowing audiences to engage with questions of power, gender, and justice in more nuanced ways. Moreover, the folktale may become a focal point for rethinking cultural identity, possibly fostering renewed interest in indigenous knowledge systems. Through interactive and participatory forms, *Chethuang* is likely to evolve as a dialogic text, offering a space where alternative worldviews and critical perspectives can be articulated. Rather than delivering fixed meanings, its digital retellings might encourage audiences to negotiate values, challenge dominant ideologies, and contribute to communal debates about tradition, authority and resistance.

CONCLUSION

The interaction between tradition and innovation has always remained a characteristic determinant of the development of cultural practices. In indigenous storytelling, this assumes a special and profound meaning. The Tripuri folktale *Chethuang*, read through the syncretic lenses of counter-hegemony, strategic representation and performative narrative, reveals the potential for cultural resistance and critical subversion of dominant moral and ideological structures in the narrative. Rather than operating solely as a static tale passed down through oral tradition, *Chethuang* enacts judgement and subverts dominant power structures by dramatizing ethical norms and social hierarchies in ways that provoke reflection. Its ongoing relevance particularly in digital spaces offer an ability to be actively reinterpreted as a form of cultural critique rather than cultural preservation. This cultural significance aligns with SDG 4, as the work underlines the importance of using regional films and narratives like *Chethuang* in educational curricula to enhance cultural awareness, critical thinking and inclusivity. As the folktale transitions from oral to digital performative space,

the mode of engagement shifts significantly. While oral storytelling was largely communal and guided by traditional codes, digital storytelling offers multivocal spaces where users interact critically with the narrative. Here, *Chethuang* may no longer merely affect cultural norms but invite critical distance from them. In such virtual spaces, strategic representation is not natural; it is an intentional act of positioning of cultural values, identities, and moral frameworks by indigenous storytellers. These spaces can be occupied by indigenous communities and writers not only to uphold but also subvert *Chethuang* in ways that challenge prevailing representations of morality, justice and identity. The criticality of this act lies in its refusal to accept normative narratives as fixed. Through interactivity, multimedia, and audience co-authorship, digital storytelling might open the narrative to offer multilayered readings- where moral judgement is neither absolute nor universal but subject to scrutiny. This allows *Chethuang* to function as a site of ethical reflexivity and cultural negotiation. This allows *Chethuang* to function as a site of ethical reflexivity and cultural negotiation. Additionally, the potential of the story to change across media suggests that performative storytelling can continue to evolve as an effective practice. Such new modes have the ability not only to subvert existing power structures but also to construct new interpretive communities devoted to ethical conversation. Therefore, the digital existence of the Tripuri folktale *Chethuang* can facilitate ongoing critical debate regarding the construction of morality, the legitimization of specific voices, and the manner in which hegemonic narrative is either assimilated or overturned. In this way, folktales like *Chethuang* can become not only signs of cultural continuity but act as an evolving tool for participating in critical conversations, creating new imaginings and subverting dominating ideological models of judgement that create a strategic representation of performative spaces for establishing counter-hegemonic spaces of storytelling tradition within the Tripuri community.

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