



A STUDY OF INDIAN ORAL TRADITIONS

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It is a fact that India has great oral traditions and usually been identified with its classical traditions and culture. But there is another harmony, sometimes in counterpoint and sometimes autonomous, found in India's folk traditions. These folk traditions are to be found in the form of, rhymes, proverbs, myths, songs and rituals. These constitute of what is known as 'folklore'. Spoken language is notable for its "concreteness", for its personal quality and emphasis on people and actions, as well as for its use of parallelism, paralinguistic features, and the lack of complex grammatical constructions, such as relative clauses.

Keywords: Folklore, Oral Traditions, Religio Mythological, Fary Tales.



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 INDIAN FOLKLORE TRADITIONS

Folklore is applied to sayings, verbal compositions and social rituals that have been handed down solely by word of mouth. Folklore includes legends, songs riddles, spells and nursery rhythm. The elements of folklore have at all times entered into sophisticated written literature. One of the stalwarts in the study of Indian folklore was A. K. Ramanujan whose contribution to the study was to reconceptualise the debate about "Great and Little Traditions". According to him, folklore is one of several systems, several languages or registers that people use. These systems Sanskrit, classical literature, bhakti, folklore—comment on each other, and cannot be understood independently of each other. Apart from this religio-mythical body of knowledge, oral communication also reflected itself in folklore and associated media such as

ballads, proverbs, riddles, parables, superstitions and beliefs.

There are different types of oral traditions and folklore. In India, there is more attention on the conventional genres of folklore by Folklorists. Most of these are genres that occupy an important place in Indian folklore system because it interconnects high and popular religion and describes popular views about nature, places, local history, social heroes and saints. Depending on the purpose and origin of each genre, the folklores and traditions are typed into folktales, myths and legends.

Mythological stories that explain objects or events in the natural world as resulting from the action of a supernatural force or entity (a god). Legends are stories coming down from the past, often based on real events. These are also often regarded as historical. Sometimes they may have certain parts that are fantastic or unverifiable. Folk Tales are brief stories

passed by word of mouth from generation to generation. Tell Tales are also folk tales. They are often light hearted as well as humorous in tone. They contain highly exaggerated unrealistic elements. Fairly Tales are stories that deal with mischievous spirits and other supernatural occurrences, often in a medieval setting. Parables are very brief stories which are told with the purpose of teaching a moral lesson to the younger generation. Fables are brief stories which are often narrated with the main aim of imparting a moral lesson to others. The difference between parables and fables is that in parables, human characters are used to make story while in fables, animal characters are more often used to present the story. Spirituals: They are the religious songs which are a part of African- American traditions. Epics: An epic is a long story which is often told in verse. An epic includes heroes and gods. Epics have often been passed on orally from one generation to another. There are no known authors of these epics. These stories are penned down by anonymous authors. They are grand in length as well as in scope. An epic provides a portrait of legends, beliefs, laws, arts and ways of life of people. Proverbs: Proverbs are traditional sayings that do not simply have a surface level meaning but also a hidden meaning.

One thing that everybody can admit that story tellers have catered to the need for a “good story” since the beginning of the civilisation. These stories include respective legends, myths and folktales, which are old stories written for adults and children. They represent the distillation of the best of this remarkable tradition, toned over many centuries by the skill of the oriental storyteller. While myths, legends and folktales are hard to classify and they often overlap one another, the classifications render to their purpose of delivery and varied characteristics.

A folktale is a story or legend forming part of an oral tradition. Folktales are generally passed down from one generation to another and often take on the characteristics of the time and place in which they are told. These tales speak of universal and timeless themes, and help folks make sense of their existence or cope with the world in which they live.

Myth means anything uttered by word of mouth. In the present time, a myth symbolizes fiction but not that which carries psychological truth. Mythological implications and myths that travel around communities and generations are basically an attempt to explain mysteries, supernatural events and cultural traditions. This mythical principle states that the culture lies on the basic structure of myth or stories. Myth is also considered a fundamental structure of a society which was modelled by values. Even the ordinary conventions of a culture could have been derived from the myth. Hence, it is clearly understood

that the culture could have not evolved without the intervention of myth.

There are different types of stories ranging from family narratives to supernatural experiences of incidents, miracles, saints’ life stories and short narratives about local history. Legends are micro-stories unlike the mega-narratives of myths and epics. These legends travel through generations to form a local perspective depending on the very nature of the socio-cultural and religious nature of a community.

1.2 INDIAN FOLKTALES TRADITIONS

Folktale is strictly defined a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally. Many of tales eventually achieve written form. Folktales are found among peoples everywhere in the world. The very first true collection of Indian folktales, ‘Old Deccan Days by Mary Frere’, was published in London in 1868 but then translated into Gujarati and published in Bombay in the same year. Folktales are generally passed down from one generation to another and often take on the characteristics of the time and place in which they are told. By advancing toward the integration of written and oral traditions, Ramanujan, the humanist scholar-poet par excellence, also breaches the boundary between the humanities and the social sciences. He speaks and writes of distinctions of class and gender that emerge in the folktales of peasants and women, and he links these to the broader themes that make up an enduring cultural tradition. Until recently many studies of Indian civilization have been done on that principle: look for it under the light. The folktale suggests that one may say we are now moving inward, trying to bring lamps into the dark rooms of the house to look for our keys. As often happens, we may not find the keys and may have to make new ones, but we will find all sorts of things we never knew we had lost, or ever even had.

In South India, singers and tellers travel from place to place, their performances being engaged by families or organisations. Tellers of epochal stories from the Ramayana, The Mahabharata or the stories of gods from the Puranas and from Hindu mythologies highlight the spiritual dimension. In villages, there are Bardic troupes that perform epics about caste heroes or local gods and saints. This suggests how classical folklores and tales can attract people of all ages. The interesting stories range from the remarkable Panchatantra to the Hitopadesha and from Jataka to the tales of Akbar-Birbal. Not only this, the great Indian epics like The Ramayana and The Mahabharata, and works like The Bhagavad Gita are full of didactic stories inspired by the lives of great souls. While these stand to be an epoch of legends, it is safe to describe them as a mere compilation of folktales

that portray the very nature of Indian history and socio-cultural renderings.

1.3 INDIAN LEGENDS TRADITIONS

The geographical spread of India's numerous oral epics on the basis of area can be divided into three: the local, sub-regional and supra-regional. Another context in which legends become important is the fact that there are both direct and indirect relationships between these legends and the classical epic stories. The legend of Pabu himself is closely associated to that of Rama and hence has links with the Ramayana. Susan Wadley talks of a legends throughout northern India from the deserts of western Rajasthan eastward to the hills of Chattisgarh known as Dhola-maru. It is variously called as a love lyric, ballad, legend, romantic lay, a folk opera or an epic. In its simplest form, Dhola is a song of an absent lover sung to several distinct melodies and metrical forms. Also the way the Dhola-Maruru narrative is combined with the Nal-Damayanti story, it suggests that Folk legend is a compilation of loosely knit parts or episodes, rather than a single extended narrative. As in here, two distinct narratives found in the same regions of northern India, the text of the genre is enlarged and a legend is created.

A very important aspect of legends is the portrayal of people and their beliefs. Women, in all these legends and folktales, are a key aspect of analysis. Narayana Rao further situates these psychosexual dimensions of the folk-classical relationship within a sociological and historical framework. He identifies a correlation between type of caste, attitudes toward women and ethos of the epics patronized by those castes in the folk legends in Telugu. Also, because India's active cultural world includes large numbers of women, children, tribal people, the underprivileged classes and those at the margins, no understanding of the country's inner lives can be discerned without careful attention to oral traditions expressed in the dialects of everyday life Quissas of Punjab which referred to any of a series of epic length verse romances are another genre through which legends are constantly revisited. Of all Punjabi quisse, the tale of Heer-Ranjha, known to almost everyone, has perhaps enjoyed ultimate popularity. J. D. Smith talks of how Rajasthani legends diverge from literate norms by citing an example of the bhapos, performers of the Pabuji, both competent and pious.

2. CONCLUSION

Oral traditions continue to dominate the very structure of Indian history and society, it is necessary to interpret how communities within the nation indulge in a progression of varied oral traditions based on their individual cultures and beliefs. Oral traditions are used to describe the tradition in written civilizations in which certain genres of literature are

transmitted from one generation to another through word of mouth. Oral traditions serves to communicate ideas, emotions, beliefs and appreciation of life. Through various stories, the younger generation is familiarized with the customs, traditions and rituals of the past generation. Many mythological stories have a way for teaching morals, ethics and manners to the younger ones. Tales of adventure, bravery not simply entertain the younger generation but also familiarize them with various new challenges and difficulties of life and also teach them the ways through which these difficulties can be solved. Oral literature fosters a feeling of solidarity with others who have had similar experiences. Rise of literacy have given rise to new support systems to facilitate the memory of oral traditions in folklore which is why Komal Kothari says that folklore is always contemporary, even when it deals with cultures and communities who continue to live outside of modernity.

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