

TRIBAL FOLKLORE OF INDIA – IMPORTANCE AND INFLUENCE

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Abstract

This research paper mainly delve into the tradition of tribal folklore of India, the rich tapestry of oral narratives deriving from various parts of the country, exploring their cultural significance with a historical significance in contemporary world. Our ancient country India which is home to a diverse range of tribal communities, each with its unique set of tales, myths, and oral traditions with fascinating narrative. This research paper explores enduring influence on the diverse social fabric of the country mainly focusing upon various forms of tribal folklore, including myths, legends, oral traditions, rituals, and art forms, and examines their role in shaping the identity of tribal communities. Additionally, it states the contribution of India's folklorists in the genre of tribal folklore explaining how their important works have played a role in emancipation of this art form which was marginalised in colonial and post-independence era. Furthermore, the study analyses how these folk narratives have infused into mainstream Indian culture, influencing literature, art, and societal norms. This paper aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the importance and influence of tribal folklore in India, with a focus on understanding its role in preserving cultural identity and contributing to the broader Indian cultural mosaic.

Keywords: Tribal folklore, folkloristic, cultural identity, oral traditions, mainstream culture, preservation efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Folklore is like an art form which is passed on from one generation to the other. Unlike written literature, folklore is mostly in oral form. There are both prose and verse narratives in traditional literature. Whereas in folklore you find drama, myths, rituals, legends, tales, fairy tales, mythological tales, songs etc. India is home to a myriad of tribal communities, each with its unique cultural heritage. Any culture will have its exquisite folklore. Central to this cultural wealth is the repository of tribal folklore that encompasses myths, legends, rituals, folk epics and other oral traditions. The folklore of various tribal communities such as Bhil from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra; Gond from Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh; Santal from West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar and Assam; Mina from Rajasthan; Munda from Jharkhand; Naga from Nagaland; Khasi from Meghalaya along with many others depict peculiarities of their traditions and culture in an exclusive way. All folklores encompass and convey the natural world narrative. They are the prominent bearer of customs, ethics and in a general way-the whole society. We can preserve our oral narrative tradition by documenting it in a book form or doing research upon it whereas reducing the threat of losing an entire culture in the hands of time. Westernization and urbanization can be considered as main reasons due to which the folklore is slowly being forgotten. Folklore is as much relevant and important as the mainstream literature but it needs to be documented and printed in order to reach to the wider sections of readers and audience.

In propagation and transmission of tribal folklore of India the Indian literature has played a pivotal role. Various scholars, saints, folklorists, writers have preserved the oral traditions by writing down in many genres. Tribal folklore contains epics of India such as Ramayana and Mahabharata in its own unique style and form making a signature statement for a tribe. The famous Jataka tales, Panchtantra and Hitopadesha, Katha Saritsagara along with songs of Baulare exquisitely Indian folklore. These works are published in almost all languages in India. Speaking of tribal folklore of India, it incorporates myths, tales, songs, legends, folk street plays, proverbs- various oral narratives in the particular tribal language as well as translated into the vernacular language of the state. Genre of folklore has also contributed in binding massively differing traditions of rural areas. Even among simple communities of farmers, artisans or skilled workers we find that their culture is interwoven with metaphors of folklore and its towering thoughts describes the importance and influence of folklore.

A huge role of folklore in national assimilation, unifying and merging our multicultural and multilingual literary landscape is not surely unseen the way it preserves and adopts and documents colourful tales and several songs and dramas embellished with regional proverbs and sayings. The tribal folklore of India as well as the pre historic epics delve into traditions of the folktales of various tribal communities of India. Folklore is surely having historic ethical background along with holding exclusive relevance to the contemporary world. *Chakyarkooth* is an ancient performing art of Kerala where *Kooth* is traditionally performed by members of the *Chakyar* community. It is primarily a type of deeply elegant speech. The performer narrates episodes from Hindu epics (such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata) also the Puranas stories. Veedhi Natakam is also a popular folk theatre forms of the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, where the tradition of rural folk theatre can be traced as far back as

the 16th century. Literally signifying street drama, Veedhi Natakam is referred to as Bayalata* in the Rayalaseema* region and Veedhi Bhagavatham throughout the rest of Andhra. (Bayalata* is an open air theatre and is a popular folk theatre of Karnataka. Bayalata refers to nearly all forms of traditional Kannada theatre. Rayalaseema* is a Dance and Festival is celebrated in Andhra Pradesh in the month of October. The festival gives a platform for the presentation of art and cuisine in a grand manner.)

CONTRIBUTION OF THE FOLKLORISTS

In order to overcome the difficult situation on how to promote the tribal folklore and make it accessible from a small group of communities to the mass reach, it has to be documented in a printed form. The efforts of famous Indian folklorists in tribal literature such as Bhagvandas Patel, Vijay Detha, G. N. Devy, Dahyabhai Vadhu, Sadhana Naithani, Komal Kothari, Raghavan Payanad for writing and publishing anthologies, poems, plays and folktales, lyrics, legends and epics is noteworthy. As we can see among the three stages of folklorists of India in which the first stage is the British officers who gathered the indigenous folklore for the ruling purpose. The second stage contains the missionaries for the purpose of religious persuasion, thus by recreation of the oral narratives of the people. The third stage addresses post-colonial India in which folklore studies taken as an academic field in various colleges, universities and institutes, where the students acquire the tribal culture and folklore in totality to determine thenation-wide character. Post-independence academicians such as Jhaverchand Meghani, Ram Gharib Chaube, Kunjabihari Das, Chitrasen Pasayat and many more were analytically inclined towards the folklore than that of the literary. With the arrival of 80s the organized application of folklore begun by Central Institute of Indian Languages and the American Institute of Indian Studies. Various foreign scholars and researchers collaborated with us showing special interest in Indian folklore as a discipline. It is interesting to note here that the modern folklorists are devoted to analyse the folklore with Indian perspective rather than to acquire the western designand tools. Many favour the folklore experts and veteran folk artists who are the creators and patrons of folklore. Since they can explore and deliver folklore in its totality, it naturally becomes a rich expression of culture. There are also other scholars and folklorists who see folklore from their academic angle believing that folklorist should study the community people as these people would provide the unique significance of folklore to the folklorist as to mark a magnificent progress for both the folklorist and the folklore to discover a novel historical- cultural sphere.

Shri Bhagvandas Patel (born 19 November 1943) is renowned folklorist from Gujarat who pioneered research into Gujarat's tribal literature and brought the state's oral literature known to the literary community. In 1995, he compiled the first published tribal version of the tribal

version of Ramayana, Bhili Lokakhyan: Rom Sitma ni Varata, the Ramakatha of the Bhil people. Dr. Raghavan Payyanad contributed massively in enhancing the range of tribal folkloristics and contributed to folklore research, techniques and concepts. He is considered a renowned figure internationally for folkloristics in English and Malayalam. Being the famous folklore researcher from Kerala and the founder of Folklore Study Center and its first chairman. He is the founder and activist of many institutions among folklore. Dr. Raghavan Payyanad is one of the founder members of Folklore Fellows of Malabar (Trust) and Fossils (Folklore Society of South Indian Languages). He has won the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy Award. Another prominent figure in the academic world of tribal folklore is Ganesh

N. Devy (1 August 1950-) a thinker, cultural activist and an institution builder best known for the People's Linguistic Survey of India. He writes in three languages—Marathi, Gujarati and English. His first full length book in English 'After Amnesia' (1992) was hailed immediately upon its publication as a classic in literary theory. Since its publication, he has written and edited close to ninety influential books in areas as diverse as Literary Criticism, Anthropology, Education, Linguistics and Philosophy. He was Professor of English at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (1980-96). In 1996, he gave up his academic career in order to initiate work with the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNT) and Adivasis. During this work, he created the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre at Baroda, the Adivasis Academy at Tejgadh, the DNT-Rights Action Group and several other initiatives. Later he initiated the largest-ever survey of languages in history, carried out with the help of nearly 3000 volunteers and published in 50 multilingual volumes.

In order to connect the community and the academic spheres we must recognise the efforts of the National Folklore Support Center situated in Chennai to encourage the Indian folklore. Our folklore is now not restricted to research and academic analysis only and have gained importance and acclaim from the masses both nationally and internationally. The Sahitya Akademi is also a renowned institution to support, conserve and preserve tribal folklore.

TRIBAL FOLKLORE OF INDIA – A VIVID PICTURE

A fundamental aspect of the tribal folklore has been a historical narrative of Indian tribes. The medium through which the collective memory of these communities is preserved and served, recounting tales of migration, struggles, and their triumphs. The investigation will further explore how these narratives have been transmitted

through generations and fostered a sense of continuity and unity among tribal populations. G. N. Devy narrated that how a systematic consideration of tribal folklore will enhance our literature and art. He further says that our literature is laden from past two centuries by the 'Perspective imagination' of the Western origin. Because our systems of knowledge is changed through Western systems, the tribal is now the only Indian unaffected by the colonial consciousness.

The Santhal song of cosmology is Binti which is recited by a group of three or more singers at marriage ceremonies as a part of important oral tradition. The singers have learnt the song by heart from their forefathers. Tribal folklore is gift of memory, yet the tribal past makes it impossible to distinguish between historical past and mythical past, making myth governs the tribal expressions organic. Unsurprisingly, in Indian tribal folklore *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* with its immense presence which had its origin in several oral traditions with many versions had been tempted to claim they are primarily of tribal origin. However, the historical arguments are far too complicated to delve into the authenticity and originality statements. The rendering of these epics in tribal community is a sacred ritual which has performance, narration, dance, story, music and song. The performance goes for several evenings, lasting through the night till dawn. Similarly the legends in the Indian tribal folklore are deeply rooted and fused with the historical past, geographical and mythology. Because their value lies in the ability to instruct and entertain, how rich they are in depicting bravery, wisdom and emotion. To name few legends 'Tejan Bal' from the Pawra Bhils in north-western Maharashtra, 'Mansinha and Salvan' from Kunkana tribe of southern Gujarat, 'Takalong' legend from Khasi community, 'Chhura' legend of Mizo. They all display battles and destruction, political authority and survival of the family. With rich style of music and rhetoric, they are distinguished by their poetic grace, their profound understanding of suffering and intense connection with nature as means of spiritual solace. The book 'Painted Words' depicts 'Songs have a place of special importance in tribal imaginative transactions, as they relate to every aspect of life. Portraying a lover's address to his beloved, a daughter's to her parents or a man's to his ancestors. Their complexities lies in their allusive quality and their wonderfully earthy metaphors.' (Devy, 2002, p.151)

CONCLUSION

In Indian literature the birth of a new voice of innocence in shape of medieval Bhakti literature, a movement spread in all languages and touched upon all aspects of social life with entire range of metaphysics, aesthetics and ethics underwent an overwhelming transformation. This need arises to return to the life and language of ordinary people when the literature loses the vitality due to its alienation from the life as it is lived because the source of vitality has always been the simple things in the life of the ordinary people. Tribal folklore serves this very expression of meaningful and yet simplified purpose of life through the various mediums of songs, myths, legends and epics. To sum up, this research paper emphasises the enduring importance and influence of tribal folklore in India. It highlights the need for continued research, documentation, and appreciation of these rich cultural expressions to ensure the preservation of India's diverse cultural heritage.

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