

The Iconographic Representations of Folklores: With Special References to Santhal Folktales and other Genres

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ABSTRACT: The practice of storytelling is as old as mankind, so are folktales. But currently it is seen that many of our societies are moving away from this particular tradition. But it is the tribal society which keeps practising this tradition and maintains their culture. It is said that folktales are the first teacher in the life of a child. Folktales play very important role in the society; imparting moral lesson is one of them. Folktales are the exact reflection of society and we know society has many dimensions as well as layers of thoughts. Everything has double layered meaning, a superficial meaning which can be understood normally by everyone, and the other linear meaning which can be understood only if one thinks about it in a very subtle way as well as things are interpreted with images or their symbolic meaning. So, is with folktale, because folktales are within a society, for the society. If someone views a tree (just an example), that particular individual might think it to be a living being who bears fruits and gives shades. But if we look into the symbolic or interpreted meaning one may see it as a sign of fertility. Folktales can be studied by their images; the content of a folktale can be interpreted with images. This particular paper will deal with the interpretation of Santhal folktales and material culture with symbolic images.

Keywords- Iconography, Santhal, Jharkhand, Material Culture, Folktales.

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I. INTRODUCTION

India is a country of living tradition of folklore; orality is its beauty and performance is its expression. India's multicultural and multilingual context has created a composite culture in maintaining its authority of tradition and adapting the modernity as a form of nationalist discourse. A rapid technological change is taking place in India which is a challenge to folklore studies as a cultural practice. The term 'folklore' generally refers to certain of the spoken (or non-written) activities of complex, literature cultures where only a minority can read and write and where the rest are unlettered, 'illiterate', a frequent situation of the peasantry in the post-Bronze Age cultures of Europe and Asia. While their activities have some links with parallel ones in purely oral cultures, they are inevitably influenced by the always-dominant literary modes, especially those related to the major (written) religions. The accounts in 'folklore' are largely confined to the realm of peripheral beliefs. But even the forms taken by genres such as the epic, characteristic of early cultures with writing, can influence folklore. It is clear that, in societies with writing, a great deal of communication-including communication that eventually takes on an artistic, literary form- is still done by word of mouth. Not only is this as aspect of all human intercourse, but it was inevitably the case in every sphere until near-universal literacy was achieved in Europe during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Until that time, literature had to be orally presented for the large part of population. That did not mean this literature was uninfluenced by the written word; indeed, some of the oral communication consisted in the repetition of written texts, as when lessons from the Bible were preached to an unlettered populace. A written epic, as was the case with the Hindu Vedas or with the works of Homer, might be learned by heart and recited rather than read to the population at large, by the rhapsodies in the latter case and by the Brahmins in the former. Of course a society with writing might inherit some genres, such as folktales, largely unchanged from an earlier, purely oral culture whereas other genres, such as epic would undergo a sea change. Part of the influence of the written word on speech consisted in the development and not oratory, which was already practised, but in its formal counterpart, rhetoric, with an explicit body of written rules. In purely oral cultures, those specialists in the spoken word could achieve fame and be rewarded for their appearance in presenting a case at a moor or at a court. More directly in the field of arts, specialist orators, especially of praise songs but also of other lengthy recitations, might be recompensed for their contributions, either as freelance performers or as professionals. So too with early written forms, such as epics.

Folklore cannot be described in one or two simple terms. It's both what folklorists study and the name of the discipline they work within. Folklore is folk songs, legends, jokes, letters, food, stories, weapons, utensils, institutions and many other things one may or may not believe. Folklore exists in cities, suburbs and rural villages, in families, work groups and dormitories. Folklore is present in many kinds of informal communication, whether verbal (oral and written texts), customary (behaviours, rituals) or material (physical objects). It involves values, traditions, ways of thinking and behaving. It's about art. It's about people and the way people learn. It helps us to learn who we are and how to make meaning in the world around us.

Etymologically the word folk is derived from the German word 'volk', meaning people. Folktales include stories about everyday life and the day-to-day life issues of humanity. It also involves supernatural elements, animals with realistic emotions flaws, and failings, completely behaving like humans. This is part of folktales so enduring and appealing, that listeners can relate to the characters in the story.

Folktales form to be one of the most important as well as interesting part in folklore. Folktales are oral narratives that do not have a singular, identifiable author. Expanded and shaped by the tongues of tellers over time, and passed down from one generation to the next, folktales often reflect the values and customs of the culture from which they come. The plots in folktales are generally concerned with life's universal themes; they also transcend their culture of origin to reveal the commonality of human experience. This ancient form of narrative communication, is for both education and entertainment, and offers a window into other cultures, along with being a revealing mirror of the comedy and pathos of our lives.

A folktale is a story which is passed down to new generations by their older generations in a very light mood. Although this statement is very much true, but one cannot deny even the truth that folktales are also for serious purposes, like it carries along with it a community's tradition, culture, law, identity, language, religion and many more valuable things which is believed that if not passed down from generation to generation may vanish in future. Now-a-days, gradually the practice of oral tradition is diminishing from our lives. People hardly recite folktales. And even more, with printing coming into scene, the oral practice itself has lost its importance. And when one talks about the folk prose narratives, they become rare. It is human nature to overpower the ones who are weak and cannot raise their voices against the wrongs done towards them, and tribals are one such group who has tolerated all the oppressions. Tribals have been neglected since ages, and so have been their religions, laws, languages, traditions and cultures. And in this process of negligence, mankind is losing something very big, which cannot be retained back once it is gone forever. The call for the hour is to safeguard whatever is left with the tribals. The tribals have rich tradition and culture, which includes music, dance, drama foods, folktales, social customs, folk medicines, folk arts, material culture. Among all the forms, it is the oral folklore which is in great danger of extinction, if not documented and kept for future generations. This form is in danger because now -a-days, people hardly narrate something to their younger generations, and there are many reasons for this. But it is generally observed that people commonly take folktales as entertainment and amusement, giving no importance to the aspects folktales involves with it. A folktale is not only a mere piece of entertainment, but along with entertainment it imparts moral values, social values, talks about the culture, tradition, law, talks about the taboos, identity, social responsibilities and many more important aspects of life and one's own culture. This paper is a study based on the layered meanings derived from folktales and folklores of a particular community, known as Santhal, of Jharkhand. This tribal community is found in Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, and Jharkhand as well as Nepal and Bangladesh. The paper will focus on how a folktale and other genres of folklores seem to be very simple when a listener hears it, but how meaningful and important it is for the society. A folktale is not very simple to understand as it seems to be, but has very deep and underlying meanings which is tough to understand. The things which one see's in and around, may just seem to be normal things, but may have very significant role to play in one's life. Jharkhand means a forest country. This region lies in the southern part of Bihar embracing the Santhal Parganas and Chotanagpur. The movement for a separate state of Jharkhand spread over a century which is traced back to the early 1900s when Jaipal Singh, an Indian hockey captain and Olympian, suggested the idea of a separate state consisting of the southern districts of Bihar. The idea did not become a reality however, until August 2nd 2000, when the Parliament of India passed the Bihar Reorganization Bill, to create the state of Jharkhand, carving eighteen districts out of Bihar to form the new state, Jharkhand, on 15th November 2000. Jharkhand is known for two main things, first its mineral resources and second its Tribal population. In general term, tribe denotes groups of people united by common name, common territory, and they have a notion that who do not share these names are outsiders to them, and also takes pride in their names. In Jharkhand one finds 32 tribes, and they are Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Asur, Ho, etc, to name few of them. The Santhals of Jharkhand are one the oldest tribes, not only in Jharkhand but India. They are mostly found in the districts of Santhal Parganas, which has been named after them. They mostly reside in the cities of Singhbhum, Hazaribagh, Dhanbad, Ranchi and Palamu. They speak their own tongue- Santali, which is allied to Mundari language. Racially and culturally Santhals are related to Mundari or Austric tribe of Chottanagpur. Their basic professions are agriculture and hunting. This tribal group is known for their music, dance and colourful attires. The aesthetic sense of Santhal women can be seen by their simple and artistic designs and patters which they draw on the walls of their huts. This tribal community also

has their own festivals and fairs that give glimpses of their social life. The Santhals have the institution of “Bithali”, which is a form of severe punishment including excommunication. Santhali did not have a written language until the 20th Century; this development is a recent innovation. In 1925, Pandit Raghunath Murmu creates Ol Chiki script for Santhali language. The Santhals are an agricultural tribe. They also domesticate cows, buffaloes and pigs. The Santhals are also well versed in the art of hunting. Santhals have taken up profession in every field.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present study is completely based on primary source that is field-work. The field-work area has been conducted at Damodarnagar, Dist- Dhanbad, Jharkhand. It was completely based on personal interview. Very few secondary data have been collected through available literatures in forms of books, journals and website. When we talk about a folktale, it may just be a story to us which we read or listen to whenever we are free, so indirectly the folktale stands for amusement, and we don't give importance to the aspects which are actually the main reasons for the existence of the folktale. When the researcher had a deep study in folktales of the Santhals, the researcher found that not only are the folktales entity for amusement but have very deep inner meanings and are very symbolic and is actually connected with the society. The researcher has selected few folktales and has studied them in the light of social and cultural context with their meanings. Iconography as a branch of art history studies the identification description and the interpretation of the content of images. The subjects depicted the particular compositions and details used to do so and other elements that are distinct from artistic style. The iconographic study is a kind of study where the actual meanings are interpreted with symbols as well as the underlying meaning is interpreted too. Folklores and folktales can be studied by their images; the content of a folktale can be interpreted with images. The things or the songs or a cultural practice may have a very different meaning along with the meaning which one understands ordinarily. The iconographic study of Santhal folklores has helped the researcher to bring out the important aspects of the folktales. In this paper the researcher has attempted to talk about the few particular folktales, some elements of material culture, and its underlying meanings. The story of how **Makarsankranti** started being celebrated is a story one must know because the fight between man and animal, on who is more powerful, lead for this kind of celebration. One fine day a man and a rabbit were roaming around in a forest, (it was that time when there was no differentiation between man and pet or domesticated animals) and were talking about life. All of a sudden there aroused a debate between the man and the rabbit on who is more powerful than the other. Then they decided that a fair game should decide the matter, so they decided that who so ever climb the tree, which was near to them at that moment, with a twig would win and be powerful over the other. So both, the man and the rabbit started climbing the tree as decided. All of a sudden the rabbit saw that the man was climbing more quickly, and then it thought that if the man wins then he will be declared more powerful and will eventually eat the rabbit. This scared the rabbit a lot, so it left the game at that very moment and ran into the forest. And by seeing this, the man felt very insulted, he came back to the village in angry mood and narrated the whole story to his fellowmen. So they decided that they will go to the forest and kill whichever animal they find and bring it to home and establish that the human race is more powerful than animal kingdom. But this is not only the thing. This hunting of animals maintains the ecological balance between man and animals, which is also very important. If the balance is disturbed, for example when the population of man increases more than animals in the forest it may be dangerous as well as vice versa or environment imbalance. In one of the Santhali story, **The Monkey Mother**, we see that a monkey steals a boy from the market place and starts nurturing him as his own son. The boy starts to grow, and meanwhile growing he keeps on demanding for things. The mother monkey steals whatever her son demands for, from the market area. Sometimes it also happened that the shopkeepers threw stones at the mother monkey, and she got hurt. But never did it ever happen that her son asked for something and she did not get it. The son kept growing and one fine day he asked for a wife. The mother monkey was tensed because nobody would give his daughter to such a family. After searching here and there, she finally managed to get her son a wife. She got her son married and even paid money to the girl's father. But the son after getting married started staying in his wife's house and almost forgot about his mother. And one fine day her mother went to meet her son, but the girl's family did not wanted the son to meet his mother. So they asked the mother to sit on a seat so that they can greet her nicely. She an innocent mother sat on a seat and her daughter-in-law poured hot boiling water on her, she died screaming out of pain. This story is not just a story about a monkey and a boy, but brings out the relationship of a mother and a child. In this story we see that the relationship of a mother and child is same as human beings. The mother does everything to make her son happy and give him a contend life. The human relationships are also the same; a mother can die for her child. The underlying meaning of the story is that the love and affection what a mother gives to her children are same, be it humans and animals. Even animals reciprocate the same love and affection to their children. In this story we see the mother monkey takes all the pains to fulfil her son's desires and demands.

Sarna Flag

The tribals of Jharkhand use the Sarna flag as a common symbol for Sarna religion, and it is also used by Santhals. Sarna Flag is just a normal flag or normal representation of their culture but depicts an inner layered story too. The colours are not normal colours or random colours but have representation with the normal lives and society. The red colour depicts the rebellion nature of the tribes, it is said that if one does no harm to them they will never be bad or harmful to them. But if one does anything to them they will fight back as will not spare them. So they red colour is a symbol of danger. The white colour in the flag depicts harmony and peace. It is said that the tribes are peace loving and harmonious in nature. They are very peace loving individuals. So these two colours says that if one disturbs them they will fight back, but normally they are harmonious and peace loving.

The tattoos

It is seen that the Santhals have tattoos on their bodies, these tattoos are not just for fun or fashion, but have relevance in their lives. The Santhal boys have three marks on their hands generally, or may be any other place too. The three marks depicts the life cycle of a man, his birth, the life and the death. These tattoos have a very prominent role in their lives and folktales. The stories which are narrated during the birth time, one may find the importance of these tattoos. It is believed that it is the only thing which one takes away with him, when he dies to know that he was born as a human. The women makes ornaments as tattoos on their bodies, there is the same reason for this too, to know that they were born humans. When commonly seen tattoos have no importance, it is just for decorating one's own body, but the symbolic meaning is very deep.

III. THE BOW AND ARROW

The image of bow and arrow is very important in the Santhal stories as well as the culture. The bow and arrow is so important in the Santhali culture that every household will have it, whether they use it or not. They take it along with them when they go for hunting or need some kind of protection. The image of bow and arrow not only signifies their weapon of protection, to kill someone, but also stands for life. When a child is born the umbilical cord is cut by the arrow which signifies birth too. So, this bow and arrow has symbolic meaning in the lives of Santhal. People simply think that it is used for killing, but contrary to that it signifies birth.

IV. CONCLUSION

As we see through the paper, we observe that the things which one sees around may have very deep meaning. It may not always be a random or entertaining thing. Observing and analysing things need time and concentration, and now a day due to the invasion of technologies everyone is completely dependent upon it. So one's own capacity of thinking and making observation is either diminishing or due to lack of time, one does not find it important to look into these issues. Also when we talk about especially the tribal community, nothing in their community is without meaning. Every culture trait of the Santhal society is associated with iconography. It is their ignorance to certain extent that drifts them off from their own culture and tradition. So, before the culture and tradition gets engulfed by modernization and ignorance, it is very important that we think about it, and do some serious work for the preservation of folklores.

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