Folk Tales as the Foundation Literature: A Critical Study

Ambika Tripathy
Lecturer in English in B.S. College, Nuahat, Jajpur, Odisha

Abstract: Folk tales are the backbone of modern literature. The modern era again goes back to the antiquity past to relook at the enriched folk tradition because it used to serve the reader not only by entertaining but also by providing moral lessons.

Keywords: Folk Tales, Foundation Literature

Folk tales render a foundation to literature. This is a universal phenomenon. Now a lot of scholars are perusing their research on folk literature and its impact on the modern literature which helps to the readers to go back their own culture and literature that are based on folk tales.

Manoj Das writings help the Odias to aware of their fertile folk tradition. Das calls his stories Kahani, which signifies tales, very much corresponding to folk narratives. His stories are akin to folk narratives. Hence it is appropriate here to discuss the nature and feature of folk culture, folk form or folk literature to connect them to Manoj Das’s stories. Folk culture belongs to the antiquity past but is alive in the present. When we go through the work of Vedanta, Astadasapurana and Mahabharata we find elements of folk culture amply. The Mahabharata and Ramayana are the combination of a lot of folk tales. Folk forms like folk songs, tales, theatre, rituals are generally focused on a particular event of a particular place. It is confined to a limited area taking its cultures, traditions, customs and ways of life. Folk literature is generally a literature of an imaginary world which is far from reality. It is concerned about a time and space where animals talk, witches and wizards ream and magic spells are common. The most important characteristic of the folk form is that its creation and creator is debatable and unknown. The time of its creation is also unknown but it passes from generation to generation verbally sometimes being little bit edited from one generation to another generation.

The setting of folk form is usually unimportant. It starts with a vague description and vague term. For example most of the folk tales starts with the sentence like that, (“Long ago in a land far away ....”and “Once upon a time in a dark forest....”). In this way the folk form deludes the time and place. The place is an imaginary land which is colored to stimulate the imagination of the listeners. Medieval Europe amply created folk tales because most of the people were illiterate and storytelling and listening were the only way of entertainment. The folk literature of Medieval Europe describes the typical landscape of the story culture .Its describe forests, castles and cottage of that time. The African folk literature mainly delineates the hills and forests where in India and China folk literature portray splendid places. The setting of folk literature differs from place to place due to the socio-geographical differences.

The characters in the folk literature are usually simple, flat and straight-forward. These character are not a mixture of good and bad qualities like the character of modern literature. Almost all characters are painted only in one color either god or bad. If a character is good he is entirely good without having even a slightest evil in him or her. In case of evil the character is evil staring from beginning to end without even a slightest goodness in him or her. These characters don’t internalize their feelings and seldom are plagued by mental torment. In other words, the characters of folk literature are very simple and open-hearted.

The motivation in folk tale characters tends to be singular. These characters are motivated by one overriding desire such as love, hatred, greed, fear and jealousy. When a reader goes through folk literature he usually finds stereotypical characters. These characters are wicked step mothers, weak-will father, jealous sibling, faithful friends’ etc physical appearance directly defines the characters but disguises are common.

In folk literature hero and heroine suffer a lot. Their paths of life are full of thorn though they enjoy heavenly bliss at the end of the story. They are often isolated andfortuned and are usually cast-cut into the open world. Often they are friendless and pass hard-time either in prison or in struggle for improvement or to nearest and dearest from the clutches of giants.

The plots of folk literature are generally short and simple than other genres of literature. It is short because it was meant for illiterate people. So, within an hour the story should be finished. As the stories were made for the simple people of the rural
The journey of the displaced people is erupting just as the anxiety about displacement and a fear of uncertainty is triggered from the birth place to which they are attached in religious masses/areas the plots are very simple and direct without having any suspense. The journey of the protagonist is common in folk literature. The protagonist travels long distance which takes even years. The long journey is very much symbolic which is cleverly and artistically devised for his self-discovery in almost all folk literature the protagonist travel, come in contact with various types of people and often struggle for food and protection. In the course of his struggle the protagonist gathers courage and strength against all the odds of life and after that he achieves the fruit of success which proves him as the hero of his time.

Folk literature often repeats the same theme and event and same incidents for which it is called repetitious patterns. Repetitious patterns are found suggesting the ritual nature of folk tales and perhaps to aid the story teller in memorization. Examples can be cited that events often occur in sets of three for example-three pigs, three bears, three sisters, three wishes etc.

In folk literature action is always concentrated. There is no lengthy explanation or description. The explanations are open and direct and the descriptions are precise. Conflict and disputes are quickly established, for minor events are incidents which move swiftly story to their conclusion. Conflict is the climax of the folk literature after that the story starts becoming interesting. The action in folk literature seldom slows down. The end of the story is always happier. Almost all the folk tales end in union, laughter and happiness unlike Shakespearean tragedy. The folk tales begin with happiness and moves with tragedy and ends in union. The story ends with the sentence like, “they lived happily ever after.”

Themes in folk literature are usually simple, but serious and powerful. Folk tales themes espouse the vice of selfishness and excessive pride. In the folk tales of ‘Beauty and the Beast’ there is a struggle of young children to break away from the iron rules of the parents. The story describes how the children bend down before the whims and egos of the guardians and suffer sacrificing their loves. In ‘Fack and the Beanstalk’ the children fight heart and soul to meet the expectations of their parents. In the course of their struggle the children suffer a lot which is a bigger’s description. In the ‘New Arrival’ the anxiety of the displaced people is erupting just like a lively larva for being displaced from their birth place to which they are attached in religious sense. These people suffer from the pang of displacement and a fear of uncertainty is triggered the anxiety about the new land of their dwelling.

Generally, the themes of folk literature are very heart-touching and they are at the very heart of growing up. These are similar to the themes of Greek tragedy. The folk literature bears the message that wisdom comes through suffering. For every benefit there is a condition, nothing in life comes without strings attached to responsibilities to be met and bargains to be kept.

Folk literature is designed in simple and colloquial language, often in dialogue that bears a lot of philosophical significance. The language is typically economical with minimum amount of descriptions. Repetition of phrases is common which provides a rhythmical quality that is desirable in oral tales and perhaps aided in memorization the stories. The technique of folk tale is in stylized intensification, which occurs when, with each repetition, an element is further exaggerated or intensified. This has the effect of increasing the drama. Folk tale motifs are quiet prevalent, they may have served as mnemonic device when the tales were still passed orally. Example of common motifs included journey through dark forest, enchanted transformation, magical cures another spells, encounter with other animals or mysterious creatures, foolish bargains, impossible tasks, clever deception and so on. Many folk tale motives are example of magic: helpful animals, enchanted transformation, granted wishes etc. The magic when it appears is always greeted by characters with matter-of-factness. Characters acknowledge magic as a normal part of life without surprise or disbelief. This stylistic feature distances the folk literature from reality and it provides an important distinction between folk literature and modern fantasy.

The hero and the heroine of the folk literature are often lifted to higher and more refined level where they remain dutiful, noble and pure through the process of sublimation.

For literature is a major component of the ancient literature of India. Indian literature is supplemented and complemented by its enriched folk tales which are religious and secular, moral and material.

When we analyze folk literature in general, it is noticed that folk tales and culture of a place are the two sides of the same coin. Folk literature is the replica of the culture of a particular area. India has a fertile culture from the unknown past. It has with different languages, cultures, traditions and diversified religious which are vividly reflected through the Indian folk tales like, ‘Hitopadesh Tales’, Jataka tales and Panchatantra tales. Indian folk lore has a wide range of stories and Mythological Legends which emerge from all works of life. These interesting stories rang and from the remarkable Panchatantra to Hitopadesha from Jataka to Akbar Birbal. Indian epics like The Ramayan, The mMahabharata and The Bhagabat Gita are full of didactic stories inspired from the lives of great souls. Being full of moralistic value, Indian folk lore makes perfect stories for children who are required to be instilled with right values. All these ancient stories have been passed from generation to generation creating bondage of traditional values with present day generation.
The *Hitopadesha* is a remarkable compilation of short stories composed by Narayan Pandit. *Hitopadesha* had its origin around a thousand years ago. In Indian literature *Hitopadesha* is regarded as more or less similar to *Panchatantra*. In the vein of *Panchatantra*, the *Hitopadesha* was also written in Sanskrit following the pattern of prose and verse. The *Hitopadesha* tales are written in reader-friendly way which also contributed to the success of this best seller after the *Bhagbad Gita* in India. *Hitopadesha* has been translated in to numerous languages to benefit the readers all over the world since its origin.

In 300 B.C. *Jataka* tales were written for the mankind to gain knowledge morality ever since. *Jataka* tales have become story books that are both knowledgeable and enjoyable. Originally written in Pali language, *Jataka* Buddhist tales have been translated in different languages around the world. The luminous fables of *Jataka* are intended to impart values of self-sacrifice, mortality, honesty and other informative values to the people.

After *Jataka* tales the *Panchatantra* occupies a central place among the folk literature in India. Originally composed in the second century B.C, *Panchatantra* is believed to be composed by Vishnu Sharma along with many other scholars. The purpose behind the composition was to implant moral values and governing skills in the young sons of the King. The ancient Sanskrit text boasts various animal stories in verse and prose. During these centuries many authors and publishers worked hard to make these fables accessible and readable by a layman. The grant assortment has extraordinary tales that are liked perhaps even loved by the people of every age group.

The folk tales fire the imagination of a child and exert a profound influence on him to be an artist. Folk literature renders circumstance to a child to explore his artistic talents lying within him. A child listens folk tales when he goes to bed. The grandmother or mother lulls him to sleep by telling the tales of witches, angels, ghosts and about other supernatural elements which help the child to fly through the wings of imagination. Such circumstance in home laid the foundation of child to be an artist in future which happened not only in the case of Prafulla Mohanti and Monoj Das but also in case of many others.

Really folk tales are the basic foundation of world literature. The modern literature is directly linked to the ancient folk literature in many contexts. Fantasy and fact are the two pillars on which the folk literature rests. Though society has advanced a lot scientifically and technologically, people still love to wander in the fairy land which folk literature provides.

References.

