

Folk Lore and Oral Literature in Odisha

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ABSTRACT : Folklore is a medium through which the soul of a people expresses itself colorfully, and in such creation they find an artistic fulfillment and entertainment. This is no less true of Odisha and her people. Folklore is conceived variously by various scholars and by different disciplines. To the anthropologists, folklore is a part of culture, but not the whole of culture. It includes myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles, the text of ballads and other songs. Folk music, folk dance, fairs festivals, folk entertainment, folk religion and magic as also folk customs and traditions have been considered as part of the study of folklore.

KEYWORDS: Culture, Folk lore, legends, , proverbs, riddles,

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I. INTRODUCTION

ORISSA HAS BEEN TRULY A STATE OF THOROUGHLY AGRARIAN VILLAGES WITH THEIR INNATE CHARM OF FOLK MUSIC, DANCE, SONGS AND OTHER ARTS BELONGING TO FOLK TRADITION. FOLKLORE OF ODISHA HAS BEEN MOST LIBERAL AND EXQUISITELY ARTISTIC IN ITS FORM AND CONTENT.

Folklore flourished since the dawn of civilization though it waited, for centuries, for the so-called folklorists to appear and treat it as a special branch of learning. It had a rich heritage in India and was used not only in practical life but also in sophisticated works of art and treatises. This position continued till the English came and started collecting and study of folklore materials, which was soon followed up by native scholars. During the British period both English and Indian scholars, taken together, have laid a sound foundation of the study of the subject.

In the post-independence period, however, the activities have been intensified with general awareness of its importance and support from the Government. In recent years, the study is becoming more and more sophisticated with introduction of modern equipments and methodologies. During Pre – Independence Period : Like other parts of India, Odisha is rich in folklore. It is found that folklore has been incorporated in abundance in the epics and kavyas of ancient Odia literature. The great epic Mahabharat by Sarala Das (15th C.) embodies folklore to such an extent that it can, very well, be termed as a folk-epic. It will not be improper if Sarala Das, the author, is accepted as the first Collector of Odisha folklore. Folk-elements found a prominent place in the medieval kavyas as well. Dramatis personae and themes were very frequently drawn from the folk-world. Some kavyas such as Sasisena and Kanchikaveri (18th C.) were completely designed after folktales and ballads prevailing then. During the period of renaissance, on Western impact, too, poets had tendency to make use of folk-elements in their poems and depict rural life. Some poets worth mentioning are Radhanath Ray, Gangadhar Meher and Nandakishore Bal. The novels of Fakirmohan are also replete with folk-elements.

Similarly, 'Oral tradition', 'oral culture' and 'oral lore' are cultural material and traditions transmitted orally from one generation to another. The messages or testimony are verbally transmitted in speech or song and may take the form, for example, of folktales, sayings, ballads, songs, or chants. In this way, it is possible for a society to transmit oral history, oral literature, oral law and other forms of knowledge across generations without a having writing system. It has been there in different cultures throughout the ages.

Oral tradition is basically transferred to us by the elderly people in the various forms of stories, songs and sayings which distinct it as a mark of tradition in our society irrespective of cultures. We learn a lot of things through this system of knowledge transmission, such as our age-old customs, beliefs, rituals, etc., which are given to us in the childhood so that we can carry them to future. By oral tradition one can also know about the society very closely. It also gives us the information about the past. Various factors such as how the people lived, what they did and what they performed are much reflected in the oral cultural tradition. Oral tradition also shows glimpses of history when we don't have any sufficient relevant information documented. In such cases, we examine Oral history which is also a part of oral tradition and it helps us know facts about a tradition. Therefore, oral history is an integral part of any culture that we seek in explore in the present generation.

Oral tradition is a tradition which is still followed however modern we are and they preach basic human ethic values in our life. Though this is the age of modernization, one can understand the impact of modernity on everyone but still one cannot forget the past. Where it is seen that we are losing our tradition and following westernization which is not good to full extent but till some it is good in some cases. But we should not forget our own culture, tradition, values which are given to us by the parents. If we don't have basic norms then at time the society comes and blames us that we are going towards modernity and a parent have not imparted the basic values of life but if we look when one is following the tradition and modernity both then there is praise of them by everyone.

If we look people in the villages where they follow each and every parcel of tradition but still we tell this people are backward and they don't know anything. Which it shows the face of the society in real sense but in fact this people are living a happier life than the others who live in urban area and there is concept of tradition where there is careens of own people where old parents are thrown away from their own house and they stay in old age home or ashram then is it tradition or modernity and if we look then the village people are far better and there living a life with full of happiness and joy .So we can see it the loss of tradition or the advent of modernism which we copy cat from the western culture which we take to develop our self or towards the own downfall which still remains a question mark for all of us.

Their importance is that it gives us a source of historicity. It gives us an understanding of past lives and about our cultures and civilization. They are source of entertainment. They educate us as the stories have different morals which one can learn. It also tell us the situation in which they live the harder condition spent by them 11 during the night where they sang songs and chants to past their night. They also show the enlightenment of joy during different season sang at different seasons. It tells us about the cultural past and values. They are the main sources of knowledge acquiring from the past and it also so the value of past and how it was and how the people act on them. They also shows the various rituals which have been still practice in the modern society and which it shows the linkage of passage from generation to generation. Some stories are told only during certain seasons, at a particular time of day, or in specific places. In the same vein, some stories are meant to be heard only by specific people. Such stories often teach important lessons about a given society's culture, the land, and the ways in which members are expected to interact with each other and their environment.

ii. Discussion:

The passing on of these stories from generation to generation keeps the social order intact. As such, oral histories must be told carefully and accurately, often by a designated person who is recognized as holding this knowledge. This person is responsible for keeping the knowledge and eventually passing it on in order to preserve the historical record. In contrast, written history does not present a dialogue so much as a static record of an authority's singular recounting of a series of events. As readers, we may interpret these writings, but the writing itself remains the same. Oral narratives, on the other hand, do not have to be told exactly the same way—what is fundamental is whether or not they carry the same message. Oral tradition is, therefore, a collective enterprise. A narrator does not generally hold singular authority over a story. The evident in distinct versions of a specific history represent a broader understanding of the events and the various ways people have internalized them. Often, oral histories must be validated by the group. This stems from the principle that no one person can lay claim to an entire oral history. Narrators will also “document” the histories they tell by citing the source of their knowledge, such as a great grandparent or an elder. This is sometimes referred to as “oral footnoting”. Such collective responsibility and input maintains the accuracy of the historical record. Nonetheless, discussions of oral history have occasionally been framed in over simplistic oppositional binaries: oral/writing, uncivilized/civilized, subjective/objective. Critics wary of oral history tend to frame oral history as subjective and biased, in comparison to writing's presumed rationality and objectivity.

The English scholar and administrator who first took interest in Odisha folklore was John Beams. He was the then Collector of Balasore. The folk-materials which attracted him most were the superstitions and charms prevailing among the peasants. His article 'Folklore of Orissa' appeared in Indian Antiquary in the year 1872. The author, at the outset, records his impressions on the life and behaviour of Odisha peasants. To him, they were full of superstitions and 'shy of imparting these ideas to strangers'. He attributed the reason to the 'isolation' of the land from outside world for a long period. John Beams was preoccupied with the belief in witchcraft. He devotes a few paragraphs to record the habits and habitation of the so-called witches, the symptoms of the person possessed by them and also the 'mantras' that are uttered to counteract their spell. He also had recorded some traditions and taboo relating to construction of houses, effects of coming across an empty vessel while going out on a suspicious work, touch of a broomstick and so on. Beams did not attempt at classifying, coordinating or analyzing the folklore that he collected. He made his intention clear in the essay itself that he did not wish 'to complicate his simple remarks' but to 'string them together' as he heard them 'nothing here and there curious parallelism' between them and those of the English peasantry.

He wanted to collect folk-materials because it was necessary for his administration. He believed that 'human nonsense, like human sense is very much the same everywhere and it is only because in ruling men one

must take their nonsense into consideration quite earnestly as their sense that those scraps of folklore are worth recording at all'. Though Beams laid the foundation of collection and study of Odisha folklore, his contribution is limited only on one article on the subject. However, he inspired some native scholars who developed an interest in the subject. Fakirmohan, the pioneer Oriya novelist, was one of his companions at Balasore. Beams discussed matter relating to folklore with him. Fakirmohan drew inspiration from him and made free use of such materials especially proverbs, in his novels.

Another English administrator who took interest in the subject was T. E. Revenshaw, the then Commissioner of Orissa. Pt. Kapileswar Bidya Bhusan Nanda Sharma collected some sayings and published them in book form in 1876 under his patronage. In the early part of 20th Century – a number of local scholars engaged themselves in collecting folklore materials. The tendency was to collect folk-songs and sayings. While Nilamani Vidyaratna, Seikh Abdul Mazid, Chandrasekhar Bahinipati, and Pt. Raghabananda Nayak collected only those related to agriculture. Shri Apanna Panda published three volumes of sayings in 1905. One of them was 'Dhagamalika Tatwabodhini' with annotations. It was actually Gopal Chandra Praharaj the compiler of Oriya encyclopedic dictionary and an eminent writer who planned collection and study of Oriya folklore on a large scale. He felt the need of such collection to give a comprehensive shape to his dictionary. He divided his collection of sayings into 5 volumes out of which only 2 were published. He collected folktales too. The volume 'Utkal Kahani' published by him at the close of 19th Century is still popular and has won appreciation from all quarters. Contribution of Praharaj to the field of Odisha folklore is immense. It is for the first time that he opened the eyes of Odisha scholars to the vast store of their folklore. He was also quite aware of the methods of field study. He laid particular emphasis on the points that the language of the folk in songs and tales should strictly be maintained, men and women belonging to a particular locality are the fittest persons to collect folklore from that locality and so on. Thus with Praharaj the folklore-methodology was emphasized, which is the basis of any scientific study.

The eminent Indian folklorist Devendra Satyathi, visited Orissa in 1931. He made an extensive tour in different parts of the State and collected a good deal of materials out of which only a few songs were published in English and Hindi journals like *Modern Review*, *The Asia* and *Viswamitra*. His venture, however, was an inspiration to the Orissan youth. Shri Chakradhar Mahapatra who came under his influence made a laudable collection of folk-songs from the princely States of Orissa. His first collection 'Gaunli Gita Chumbak' (1939) presents samples of Oriya folk-songs along with their Hindi transcriptions and translations in English. His outstanding collection of folk-songs 'Utkal Gaunli Gita' appeared 20 years later. So far the emphasis was laid on collection of Oriya folk-songs. But Laxminarayan Sahu, a member of Bharat Sevak Samaj, paid attention to tribal folklore. He collected songs from the Khond, Saura, Gonda, Gadaba, Santal, Paraja, Koya and other ethnic groups and published them under the title 'Gandharbika Satadals' (1937). He published a critical study on their religion, faith, rituals, songs, tales, etc., in "His Tribes of Jeypore" (1942). His work on 'Danda Nata', a dance drama of Orissa (1947), is also of worth mentioning. Post – Independence Period :

The years following the independence saw the appearance of at least three major scholars in the field of Orissan folklore, namely, Verrier Elwin, Chakradhar Mahapatra and Kunjabihari Das though it had nothing to do with independence. All the three had started their work much earlier. But their major works appeared only in the fifties. Besides, we have a non-folklorist in Pt. Nilakantha Das who had much to do with folklore and perhaps deserves to be mentioned first. Pt. Nilakantha Das the veteran poet, philosopher and critic has discussed, in depth, the role of folklore in the development of Oriya literature and culture. He has also stressed on the contribution of the tribal inhabitants to the Oriya language and culture in his 'Odia Sahitya Krama Parinam' (1948-53) and in his other works. The contribution of Verrier Elwin to Orissa, folklore deserves special mention. He spent years among the tribals and brought out a monumental volume entitled *Tribal Myths of Orissa* (1954). What is striking about his collection is his field method. He almost settled down among the people, lived with them, shared life as an outsider could and did several works together. This means that he did not depend merely on asking questions but knowledge of the people gradually sank in until it was a part of him. In fact, his works were the fruits of participant observation.

The *Utkal Gaunli Gita* (1959) of Chakradhar Mahapatra, referred to earlier, is not only a magnificent collection of about 800 pages but also is valuable for containing a long introduction bringing out salient features of the materials. Dr. Kunjabihari Das has made his mark among Indian folklorists both for the corpus of materials he has collected and comparative as well as analytical study of the same. With him the folklore studies in Orissa attained a height which could very well be compared with that in other parts of the country at least in the fifties. He did his Ph. D. degree on Orissan folklore from *Viswa-Bharati* in 1954. The thesis 'Odia Lokgita O Kahani' was the first thesis on Orissan folklore. It comprises of a general survey of Oriya folk-songs and tales and also critical studies on the special features. 'A Study of Orissan folklore' (1953) written in English made his own laurels from abroad. In the N.B.T.'s folklore publication series he wrote 'Folklore of Orissa' (1979) in cooaberation with Professor L. K. Mahapatra. He has several papers in English and Oriya on Orissan folklore to his credit. Dr. Das has made an enormous collection of folk-songs and tales. Those folk-songs had been

published in several volumes under the title “Palli Giti Samachayan” and out of six volumes of folk-sayings under the title “Lok Bani Samachayan” four have been published till now. He has published two volumes of folktales too. The “Lok Galpa Sanchayan” contains over 200 tales classified into 16 types. Such collection was possible on the part of Dr. Das as he was dedicated to his subject, he carried on his work for long three decades and also he used both the open and closed systems of field methods. He made extensive tour in Orissa and also had collected folk literature through Government agencies, especially with the help of school teachers; Through Government circulars. While adopting the open system he had to depend upon many untrained collectors. As he himself admits, there was a lot of unwanted rubbish with genuine folklore pouring on and he had to depend upon his long experience in the subject, to sort them out. Dr. Das has done the best that was possible on his part in the circumstances prevailing then. Even in his thesis he had devoted a chapter to the ‘motifs’ of Odishan folktales. This was the prevailing tendency in the study of folklore in his time. He paid visits to the States and had contact with leading folklorists like Stith Thompson and Richard M. Dorson. This made him up-to-date in his field. After Dr. Das, folklore studies in Odisha came to ebb. The study was not encouraged by the Universities. No scholar appears to have taken up folklore studies for a career. Folklore studies became everybody’s business and of none.

II. CONCLUSION

Dr. Natabar Samanta Ray, Dr. Krushna Charan Behera, Dr. Gopal Chandra Mishra, Dr. Narendranath Mishra and Dr. Gagendranath Das occasionally wrote on folklore of Orissa. Dr. Samantaray’s ‘Odia Palli Sahitya’ (1970) is a handy book lucidly written, introducing Oriya folk literature to general readers. Dr. K. C. Behera’s ‘Mogal Tamsa’ (1946) brings to light the history and salient features of a folk drama of the Bhadrak area which was on the wane. The work is useful from the point of view of research on the subject. Dr. C. N. Das’s *Janasruti : Kanchikaveri* (1979) are commendable works, which try to give historical interpretation to myths woven around the temple of Lord Jagannath. Dr. Bhabagrahi Mishra did his Ph. D. thesis on Verrier Elwin from Indiana University under the guidance of the distinguished American folklorist Richard M. Dorson. The work had been published by the Asia publishing House, New York. Besides, he had published several papers on the subject. Some other significant publications of the period are ‘Purva Bharatar Lok Myth : Orissa’ (1981), the Ph. D. thesis of Dr. Prasanna Kumar Mishra, ‘The Osa Brata Katha’ (1982) by Aurobinda Pattanaik, ‘Odia Lok Natak’ (1983) by Hemanta Kumar Das, ‘A Study of Oriya Folk-Ballads’ (1988) and ‘Santal Lok Kahani’ (1990) by Dr. Shyam Sundar Mohapatra and ‘Lok Sahitya Charcha’ (1989) a collection of papers on folklore by Dr. Kailash Pattanaik. Besides, Dr. Prahlad Charan Mohanty’s ‘Oriya Yatra O Lok Natak’ (1984) and Dr. Mahendra Kuma Mishra’s ‘Lok Sanskrutibit Nilakantha’ (1990) and ‘Paschima Odisar Adivasi Lok Sanskruti’ (1992), Kalahandira Lokasamskruti (1996) *Visioning Folklore* (2002) and *Oral Epics of Kalahandi* (2008) are worth mentioning. It is heartening to note that there is a growing interest in the study of folklore in the State. Folklore is being taught as a special paper in M. A. Oriya curriculum.

Materials are being collected through field study. Summarizes of 23 theses in the form of self-contained papers edited by Dr. S. S. Mohapatra and Dr. M. K. Sahoo was published in 1999 under caption ‘Lok Sahitya Gabesana’ and another such volume is in press. The Department of Oriya, Viswa Bharati, has been the centre of studying Orissan folklore since Dr. Kunjabihari Das worked here. The tradition has been continued through the works of Dr. Bhabagrahi Mishra, who later joined the Indiana University, Dr. Prasanna Kumar Mishra who joined the Deptt. of Education, Govt. of Orissa, Dr. Shyam Sundar Mohapatra and others. Here Odia folk literature has been included as compulsory paper in M. A. curriculum, it is taught as a special paper and research works are being conducted leading to Ph. D. degree. Project works on folklore are also being carried out.

Both the Government and scholars in the field of folklore are paying more and more attention to tribal literature and culture of Orissa. The Academy of Tribal Dialect and Culture, Bhubaneswar with Dr. Khageswar Mohapatra as its Director has done commendable work in collection, study and publication of works on tribal folklore. Sitakanta Mohapatra, the noted poet and bureaucrat also has made worthwhile contribution to this field. Different organizations of folklore-fellows of Orissa are gradually coming forward to serve the cause of folklore. Some of such organizations are the Cultural Forum and the Folklore Academy of Bhubaneswar and the Orissa Lok Sanskruti Parisad of Mayurbhanj. They are rendering yeoman service to folklore in organizing seminars, symposia and publication of books and papers. Besides the scholars already mentioned, there are quite a number of others engaged in the study of folklore. We have, of course, to be contended, here, only with an enumeration of some of the names. A special mention, however, may be made of Dr. Prasanna Kumar Pradhan, who has done substantial work in the Oriya speaking areas of the adjoining State, Bihar. Among other, noteworthy, are Dr. Kumuda Ranjan Panigrahi, Dr. Adikanda Mahanta, Dr. Dologobinda Bisi, Dr. Niladri Bhusan Harichandan, Braja Mohan Mohanty, Dhiren Pattanaik, Dr. Kunjaban Prusti, Dr. Mihir Kumar Sahoo, Dr. Anjali Padhi, Hussain Rabi Gandhi and Dr. Nagendranath Mahapatra. Thus, though folklore research has been invigorating in Orissa, it is quite inadequate in consideration of the vast field and materials. Even some

basic needs of folklore research such as publication of a journal, establishment of a folklore museum and an institute of folklore are yet to be achieved. However, there are good signs to affirm that tomorrow will be better.

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