

The World View and Folk Identity Reflected in 'Ivarkali Pattu' of the Pana Caste

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Abstract:

Folk ideas are the traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of humanity, of the world, and of life in the world. The worldview of a community is formed by the combination of many such folk ideas. The folkloristic today involves discovering such worldviews of particular community expressed through various folk forms and understanding the identity of the folk. This essay explores the worldview of the Pana caste of Kerala and their identities as expressed through their ritualistic performance Ivar kali.

KEYWORDS: World View, Folkloristics, Folk Ideas, Folk Identity, Pana Caste.

The world view is the way in which a person or group views the world; the complex interaction of culture, language, and mental constructs utilized to make sense of the world around. Dundes consider world view as "the way a people perceive the world and its place in it, "they are not likely to appear consistently in any 'fixed-phrase form.'" According to him folk ideas are the fundamental units to analyse the world view. Folk ideas are traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of humanity, of the world, and of life in the world. The major distinction he made between folk ideas and expressive was that the folk idea was not a genre, but rather was evident across genres.

Globally, the idea of world view has been described in relation to four sets of notions.

1. The model based on scientific materialism.
2. Philosophical preconceptions that determine the course of the quest for knowledge.
3. The system of religious faith without the control of scientific wisdom.
4. The personal belief system on the material and social world based on socio cultural perspectives.

Culture possesses an innate skill to interpret things and events. It generates the perspective on reality. They attempt to distinguish what is good, what is evil, what is real, what is sacred and so on.

There are six significant questions in relation to world view.

What is it?

Where does it come from?

Where is it headed to?

What is good? What is bad?

How do we have to act?

What is truth? What is falsehood?

Answers to these questions lead to six separate thought systems. They are problems related to world view. The answers provided to them by a community are elements of world view.

Caste Identity among Panas

Six elements are interwoven in the structure of their caste identity.

1. Elements related to their professional tradition as singers and artists.
2. The ethnic identity elements retained by them.
3. Elements that express their ability to cleanse the society of evils.
4. Elements that segregate them in the caste hierarchy.
5. Elements related to their social rights and status.
6. Elements that describe their relation with the other world.

They attempt to establish their divine right to sing in relation to the etymology of their caste name. It implies their inability to do any other work as well. They consider the aversion to do physical labor part of their caste identity. They give it an earthly dimension too in descriptions like the one who awakens the Ganga, the directions, the sea and so on.

They enlarged their identity into that of a folk community by extending their interest to related arts like Porattu, Ivarkali, Poothan, and Kurathikali and giving them a divine aura.

Nomadic folk identity also is a part of their caste identity. There are no longer any nomads among them. However, they retain reminiscences of the nomadic tradition of their ancestors. Their songs are mostly about these nomads. It leads to the feeling of their own homes being less important. The wanderings of the panas of our time are reduced to their geographical confines. However, the element of nomadism survives in their consciousness as a racial memory.

They believe they possess the power to extinguish the evil powers that affect the society. Thuyuilunarthu, Kurathikkali, pottakkali, and the like serve this purpose. Their critique of the caste system insisting that there are only two castes in the human kind in man and woman, in theory enforces the prevalent caste system. They argue that the prevalent caste hierarchy has the purpose of dealing with the mundane and it does not distance them from god. They consider caste and their caste duty as a blessing by the clan god. This belief is reflected in their attitude towards castes which have a higher status and a lower status to them. They seem to confer the responsibility of maintaining them on the society owing to their aversion to manual labor which they believe comes with their role as artists and protectors against social evil. Their songs incessantly remind the society of its responsibility to provide for them.

Belief in their relationship with the world of gods is another prominent element in their sense of identity. Their insistence on purity, rituals and their attempt to give spiritual interpretations to any kind of mundane events are part of it. They maintain pride in having the right to curse as well as awaken Shiva. Their pride in the might of their own god Unnimoorkan is another part of it. They claim that they are the favorites of Kali knowing that Kali happens to be the most popular deity of Kerala Hindus.

Folk Tales: the Premise of Identity Formation

Different cultural forms engage in the transmission, unification, and preservation of culture. Oral tradition has a significant place among them. A community treats it as the

most sacred of their heritage which is a narrative space to give expression to their racial greatness, sense of identity, and perspectives. In the case of panans two narrative forms are most important. They are Thuyilunarthpattu, and Ivarkalippatu. The chief purpose of Thuyilunarthpattu, which is performed in the public space, is the eradication of social evil. Ivarkali pattu, which is performed mostly in domestic surroundings serves the purpose of teaching mythology, a sense of tradition, ethnic pride, world view, and the experience of life.

Ivar kali is a traditional folk art form staged in different parts of Kerala especially in Thrissur and Palakkad districts. Ivar kali literally means the play of the five sets. According to mythology '**Ivar Kali**' was performed by **Pandavas**, with singing and dancing to gratify **Bhadrakali**. It is presumed, that is the reason it is also known as '**Pandavar Kali**'. Although the theme is the same, there are completely different types of Ivarkali in the narrative and presentation that exist in different castes. This is performed by members of Asari, Moosari, Karuvan, Thattan, Pana and Kallasari communities in these regions. This is played in a circle by a group of people in which the dancers with small sticks in their hands perform a vigorous and powerful dance. Bells were tied to sticks and the dancers shook the sticks while performing. **Ilathaalam** is also used as background instrument. Apart from stories of Kali, other pauranic narratives are also used as themes. The members in the team would repeat the lines sung by the leader of the team, while performing. The Ivar kali song that has been taken here for study is the song that exists among the Panas.

'Agniyum theliyichu pandavar

Aivar nadakam aaduvan

Aivarkum karatharilenthuvan

Anchundu punarayudham....

Kathi,chotta,kaduthila,vaalu

Villu pondthiyanchayudham...!

Aayudhangeduthu paandavar

Aivar nadakam aaduvan...!

Pandu paandavarod nootavar

Ettu thottu mudinjoothey,

Kalikoppamuzhuppal,nadakam

Aadenam eni vaykathey,

Kaalikomala nethrantey thiru-

Munpil nadakam aadumpol

Kaalimaraoru kkolikalodu,

Naarimarorou kolathrey...!'

The Ivarkali begins by praying to all the gods to bring good luck to the ritualistic performance, then explaining the preparations for the ritual and telling the story of the origin of the Ivarkali.

Ivarkali songs mythologica

Kali tasting defeat at the hands of Darikan, living in the forest in exile provides the background for Ivarkali. It is a popular story among different communities in Kerala. A group of four or five artists performs it. As mentioned earlier It has the name Pandavarkali too because it enacts the story of the pandavas. It has a song and dance pattern. The songs play a key role in Ivarkali for that reason. The performance might last a whole night since it is supposed to be performed at the behest of Krishna for alleviating Kali's wrath.

The songs do not pursue the tread of a single story. The contest between groups add thrill to the performance. There are instances of improvised narratives too. The arena of the performance bears the name 'Panthal'. The songs begin with an invocation to the master. The song consecrating the arena follows. Little Panthal story and great Panthal story come after it. The greatness of the panthal comes from its being constructed to the directions of Krishna after the defeat of the Kauravas. Couplets of greater length are there than in the little Panthal stories.

'Pandum kurunaadu.....

Kurunaatil kunthipettu

Makkalundayavar

Thambiyum,dharmajanum,

Bheeman,vijayanum..

Kelutta nakulanum

Enganey aivaru...

Kalpaka vriksham-

Thara thannil ninnu

Vattamothothu ninnitt

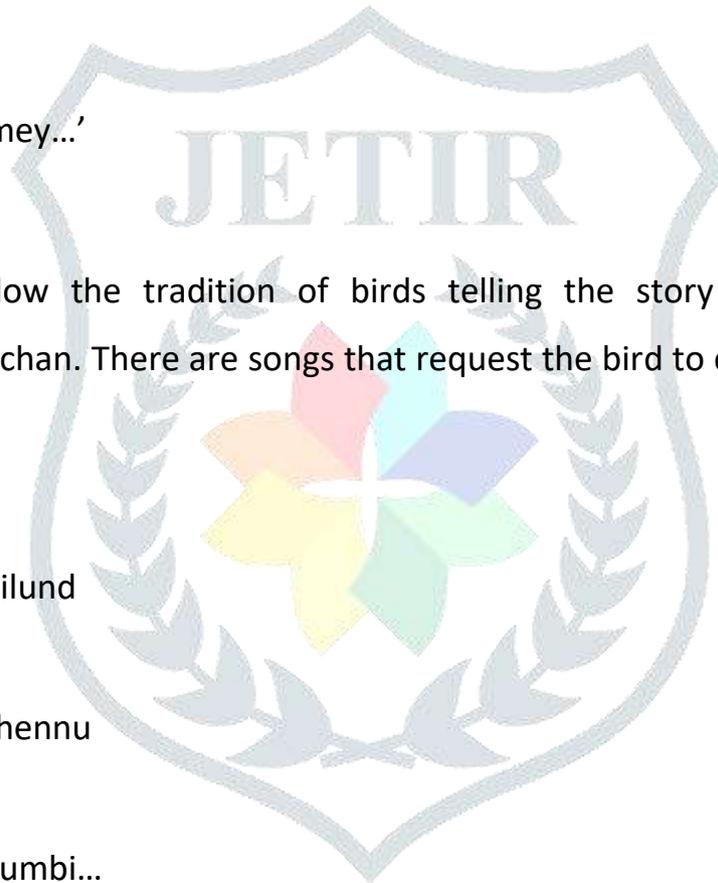
Aivarkalikkumbol.....

Kaliyku nercha

Kalikunnu pandavar

Kali kollammey....

Kandem kaali saranamey...'



The songs follow the tradition of birds telling the story which is mistakenly attributed to Ezhuthachan. There are songs that request the bird to come to the stage and sing.

'Thathaa they thaa....

Marichalentey manasilund

Thathaa they thaa....

Kilikoodintey arikey chennu

Thathaa they thaa....

Kilikunjungal chevikulumbi...

Thathaa they thaa....

Kilikoottili.....ariyerinju

Thathaa they thaa....

Kilikonjal...

Paatuu..pacholakilimakal thathammev varikedo

Enthoru visheshangal paravanundu thathey..

Njanippo varunathum lankapuriyil ninnum..

Aviduthey vrithantham cholleeduka thathammev..

Kozhikottangadiyum naalangadiyum kandu..

Naalum naduviloru aalthara kandu njanum..

Aalthara thanniloru deepakambavum kandu..

Ezhunilayulloru deepakambavum kandu..

Ezhilum naalnaazhi neyyum pakarnnu kondu

Pattusheela cheenthiyittu thirikalitu kandu

Anjanakarpoorathalagni koluthi vegam...,

Ezhunilayilum deepam thelinja neram..,

Sooryanudhikolam kathiyadaranu

Sooryanudhikolam kathiyamaaranu..'

It marks the entry into mythological stories. The description of real surroundings helps in connecting the audience to the mythological space. The appeasement of kali reaches the extend of offering blood to ease her thirst.

Panars have their faith, rituals and rites spread across Shaiva, Vaishnava, and mother god worship traditions. Four distinct facts can be identified from the examination of the narratives of mythology in Ivarkalippat.

1. Prominence is given to sub plots and lesser characters than the main plot and the main characters.
2. Most of the stories concentrate on jungle life.
3. The search and rescue of Seetha form the core of the stories with the monkey warriors given prominence. The deities with Shiva's presence gain upper hand than even Shiva.
4. They are localized narratives with local deities and their groves granted a decisive role. Attempts are made to relate other castes too to the narrative.

The Ethnic Space

Despite references to mythical Palazhy and Kailas the earth is seen to be the key space. The description of mythical spaces also is informed by the real Kerala landscape. The journeys of gods and goddesses are depicted within the human and earthly sphere

rather than the metaphysical plane. The stories come to the end with the transference from the great Panthal to the little panthal. They are not the bare recital of mythical stories. Instilling awareness in mythology and tradition, establishing a connection between their spiritual and material existence as a clan, and ensuring caste solidarity and continuity by instigating pride in their artistic tradition and cultural distinctiveness are among the functions performed by Ivarkali pattu.

It has been explained in the introductory part that Ivar kali songs exist with different narrative texts among different communities. A comparative analysis of the worldview expressed in these different songs and how it expresses the folk identity of that category is also relevant. As Dundes pointed out “It is perfectly conceivable that the identification of sets of folk ideas from different cultures will facilitate valuable comparative analyses. No doubt when two cultures come into contact, it is the conflict of folk ideas which causes the most difficulty. Yet in as much as these folk ideas are unconscious, unstated premises, it is almost impossible to place one’s finger on the specific details of the conflict. If folklorists can aid in the task of identifying folk ideas, they may be able to assume a key role in improving communications between peoples (and subcultures) and reducing the number of misunderstandings which might otherwise arise.”

Informants:

Balan, angadippuram.

Manikandhan, Narkottil, Chethallur.

Narayanan Palathole, Elamkulam.

Narayanan N P, chethallur.

Raman, Narkottil, Chethallur.

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