



Enriching knowledge of folk tradition of India with special emphasis on Odisha

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At the outset I shall like to point out that one cannot enrich the folk tradition but on the other hand one can enrich oneself through the knowledge of folk tradition. If we will try to enrich the folk tradition through artificial means then it will be not in its pristine form and will cease to be "folk". But as the title rightly suggests the knowledge of folk tradition is to be enriched. Therefore, we focus here on the collection process and collation method to preserve and keep intact folk traditions in their purity. More we refine this process and systemize the methodology more can we "enrich" our knowledge of our folk traditions.

'Folk' can be defined as people in general leading a homogenous communitarian life. The folk community cautiously tries to conserve its customs, beliefs and art forms that make up a distinct culture. Their unwritten tradition moves from generation to generation through oral transmission. Folkways include the material as well as non-material culture of the folk beginning from their hunter-gatherer life through agrarian history and practices to their settlement patterns to dialectology of folk speech, folk architecture, folk cookery, folk costumes, the notion of time in folk society, folk religion, folk medicine, folk recreation, folk literature etc. Thus folkways means the total way of life of a folk community the breach of which is sometimes punished by the community. Folk culture is an outcome of folk ways. Folklore is part of folk culture. Folklore is artistic and aesthetic aspect of Folk culture. Folklore includes myths, tales, songs, proverbs, says and broadly speaking, other audio-visual arts of the folk.

Here a note of caution about oral transmission of folklore. All that is orally transmitted can not be called folk. Vedic mantras to performances in today's electronic media are orally transmitted literature. But they can not be called folk. Orality and not merely oral transmission is the characteristics of Folklore. The oral, colloquial structure of the folk speech is not always bound by the rigid grammatical structure of the written speech. The most important thing is folklore carries the historical legacy of a community and a region.

Erosion of Folk Culture : Folk society was by nature an insulated closed society. Adoption or sharing of ideas, traits or life style from communities outside one's own was a taboo or was very rare. With the advent of industrialization there was mass exodus from villages to cities. With the media-explosion these forts of impenetrable conservatism have been demolished. Folk culture has been admixed with elite culture and we have a hybrid culture called popular culture. Thus in the era of globalisation and highly sophisticated electronic media the folkways and especially folklore is a vanishing species.

It has been observed that many modern novelists, playwrights, poets and lyricists use folklore style and language adopt proverbs, riddles etc. from their folklore in their literary work. This kind of deliberate adoption of antiquated style is known as pastiche. Some urban based cultural association imitate folk songs and folk dances to be aired on radio and TV meant mainly for the consumption of urban audience. A misnomer such as *Palli Git* (village songs) is tagged to this genre. This can be rather called folklore.

This kind of 'refinement' actually destroys the soul and the ethos of folk medium. While collecting and collating folk materials care must be taken to strain the genuine from the fake and spurious. There may be songs composed in local dialects by the local folk lyricists reflecting genuine folk world- view continuing traditional folk style. If its core ethos remains in tact. It Should be accepted as folk.

The archival activities are taken up by state owned as well as privately owned archives and by radio and television channels. While collecting and collating folk materials care must be taken to strain the genuine from the fake and spurious. There may be songs composed in local dialects by the local lyricists based on folk model which differ little from those preserved by oral tradition. This should be accepted as folk. On the other hand, some urban based cultural associations may imitate folk songs and folk dances to be aired on radio and TV meant mainly for the consumption of urban audience. This kind of 'refinement' actually destroys the soul and the ethos of folk medium. On the other hand through this process many folk songs and dances come to the limelight from numerous folk traditions prevailing in various linguistic regions of India. The fabrication is permissible in folk medium only if the core of the folk style is kept in tact.

Enriching the knowledge of folk tradition

The colonisers revived and studied folklore either out of curiosity or to use them as instruments to perpetuate their hegemony. But today their revival, preservation, and popularisation is a national task.

This task of revival of folk traditions and enrichment of their knowledge started in the 19th century. Christian missionaries, British and French administrators and ethnographers did much of these pioneering works. Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal established in 1874 and the research journal, *Indian Antiquary* published from the same year took the lead in this regard. Today institutions like National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) based in Chennai or Centre for Folklore Studies in the University of Hyderabad are leading centres for research, education, training, networking, and publication.

As it happened in other places, Folklore study in Odisha was also initiated by the colonial bureaucrats. John Beams was the pioneer who had published a paper named *Folklore of Orissa* in *The Indian Antiquary* in 1872. In this article he discussed some folk beliefs and popular prejudices which he denounced as blindness with his colonial elite vision. After Beams, another bureaucrat T. E. Ravenshaw encouraged Kapileswar Vidyabhushan Nandasharma to collect and compile the traditional aboriginal knowledges, which he published in form of some songs and says in 1876.

Many a people had taken interest in collection and compilation of folklore and regional traditions during the colonial and post colonial period. This process is going on till now and the sphere of collection, search and research in the field have been widen.

In the colonial period many local people took keen interest in the collection of indigenous knowledge in the form of folklore. But the publication of *Utkal Kahani* in 1901 put a significant mark in Odia social life. *Utkal Kahani* was collected and compiled by Gopal Chandra praharaj. This book gives a direction to Odia prose language to be settled in the line of *Lokbhasa* or the language of common people. Previously the Odia prose language was still struggling to find a suitable way of expression and communication. It was loaded by a lot of *tatsam*, *tatbhav* and other words of foreign origin. However Praharaaj warned to omit some words, those seemed filthy to the then neo-elite Odia middle class and there begun the sanskritization or purification of Odia language in a neo-nationalistic line. This neo Odia nationalism was a language based nationalism of the middle class Odias which was still struggling to find a way to establish its identity in the national level.

In the colonial period a very good amount of folk tales, songs, says in its various forms like proverb, riddles etc. Have been collected and compiled. Besides the folklore of coastal heart line of Odisha, some significant works on tribes also came in this period. Sharat Chandra Roy's *The Hill Bhuyan of Orissa*, 1935 and Laxminarayan Sahoo's *Gandharbika Shatadala* 1937 and *The Hill Tribes of Jaypore*, 1942 contributed prolific knowledge about the tribal life style and folklore to the neo Odia nationalists, neo Odia thinkers in the colonial period.

In the colonial period The Satyabadi school of thinkers, who were leading Odia nationalism sometimes, collected many folk ballads and given it a relief or regeneration through modern ballads. These covers the story of Kalijai from Ganjam to the story of Abhiram singh, Arjun Singh from Saraikela-Kharsuwan. Besides Nilakantha Das has a significant contribution to the study of Odishan folklore as Parampara (the tradion and the past), Paristhiti (thesituation, the present) and Purodrusti (the future). Folklore and folk knowledge has widely been used towards the building of Odia nationalism in the colonial period.

In the post colonial period collection and study of folklore has already taken an academic direction as such studies were got encouraged by universities. Kunja Bihari Dash from the university Visva-Bharati pursued his Ph.D programme on Odia folklore and published the book *Odia Lokageeta o Kahani* in 1954. This is the first ever research thesis on Odia Folklore. Besides Dash has done voluminous work towards collecting and analysing folklore from different parts of Odisha. Dash work was a source of great inspiration towards the collection and analysis of folklore of Odisha.

In this period Verrier Elwin, Cecil Henry Bompas and W. G. Archer collected ethnography of Odisha. Elwin collection *Tribal myths of Orissa* is a much acclaimed work. Besides, Bhabagrahi Mishra, Laxman Kumar Mahapatra, Natabar Samantray, Prasanna Kumar Mishra, Manindra

Kumar Mohanty etc. Has a big contribution toward the folklore study of Odisha in post colonial period. In this period universities, institutions, NGOs and individuals have taken keen interest in folklore studies. Field of collection, field of elements and views and vision towards the study have widened. Both artefact and mentifacts got collected, analysed and even promoted as a market product.

In this period tendencies towards the collection of regional, tribal, Dalit and other caste-oriented folklore have been continuous. It indicates the unity in our diversified multi-cultured cultural heritage. In western Odisha the pioneer work comes from an enthusiastic youth Kumar Hassan as *Samalpuri Loksahitya* in 1982. In this book Hassan has introduced Dalkhai, Rasarkeli, Sajni, Humo-Bauli and other songs of the region with a convincing analysis. Then in the 80es Nimai Charan Panda academically took up the Ph.D work in Sambalpur university in 1980es. His work got published as a book *Paschima Odishara Lokasahitya Eka Adhyayana* in 1996. Besides, having a special paper of folklore in M.A. Odia course of Sambalpur university and having a compulsory fieldwork on it, a lot of students, for a long time, have been trained in field study and paper writing under the leadership of Kumud Ranjan Panigrahi and Nimai Charan Panda, which has in later time encouraged the folklore study among the students and college teachers of western Odisha.

Mahendra Kumar Mishra is a prominent scholar of folklore when western Odisha and Kalahandi is concerned. *Paschima Odishar Lokasanskruti* 1990, *Lokasanskrutibid Neelakantha*, 1990, *Kalahandira Lokasanskruti*, 1996 are his prominent works. His keen interest is in the study of ethnography through folklore.

Sudhir Kumar Sahu, *Paschima Odishara Sanskrutika Bikashdhara: Lokasahityara Eitihāsika Abhibyakti*, 2008, is another remarkable work on folklore study. This book tries to look at the social history of folk communities through their lores, myths, symbols, rituals and memoir of the people.

Sanjay Kumar Bag has his contribution to the folk games of western Odisha. Besides he has very good academic representation to the folklore theory being studied academically.

Folklore study has elaborated its field now a days. It covers the field of social, cultural, historical studies to day-to-day matters. It covers from the primitive past and its ritualistic symbols to present day market. Everything, folk dramas, folk ways, folk saying, folk attitudes being studied and exploited today. From government programme to corporate encouragement, everything is there for the use of folk elements for a bigger market.

Folk and traditional knowledge can be used every time and everywhere for the benefit of people and the market. But unless the basic folk ethics of survival is followed, the development may leads to a great disaster, towards the end of civilization. And in the name of enriching the knowledge of folk tradition we may be back to square one by recolonizing the folk, its heritage and it's knowledge.

Efforts made in Odisha :

It has been observed that many novelists ,playwrights, poets and lyricists use proverbs, riddles etc. from their folklore in their literary work. They are known as pastiche. They are preserved through radio, television, audio and video cassettes. There may be songs composed in local dialects by the local lyricists based on folk model which differ little from those preserved by oral

tradition. Likewise, some urban based cultural associations may compose folk songs to be sung on radio and television and folk dances to be shown on TV mainly for urban audience, for which training and practice are given for refinement. These songs and dances, performed before special urban audience and presented through radio, television etc. may be accepted by the people without much hesitation. The endeavour of recreation, refinement of folk songs and dances may be created by urban folk artists and create a professional artist through air-conditioned studios. On the other hand through this process many folk songs and dances come to the limelight from numerous folk traditions prevailing in various linguistic regions of India.

But the question is arising that can we tell this hybrid, fabricated, newly invented, songs can be truly called as folk music?

The fabrication is permissible in folk songs because the very nature oral tradition helps to modify the alter continuously folk elements, particularly songs in the process of transmission. This change is an unconsciously process. But the culture mafias are calculating money to sell the arts, songs with the help of modern technologies to reach wider sections of the society for immediate gain and fame. Our government also lunching many programs under the preserving and reviving schemes of folk art forms. Is it the way to preserve our folk heritage in its pristine forms? Merely in the sake of preservation, revival of folk culture we are moving out from our goal. In the modern time we are often using folk songs for commercial purposes. But the idea of folk songs, folk singers or composers are forgetting the deeper values, emotions and sentiments of the particular folk.

Special emphasis on odishan folk

In odisha the eastern coastal plains are characterized by non-tribal odia folklore, while the western plateau is said to possess the tribal folklore of a very rich variety. So, the universal and particular approaches to the study of a folk culture or tradition are not alike. Because the use of one does not rule out the use of the other. Both approaches should be different to study the particular folk tradition. To study of a particular tradition first one should identify what elements in that folk culture of a folk society are peculiar to that society one has to make a comparative analysis.

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