



Narrative Techniques in the Selected Folk Stories of Vijaydan Detha

Mrs. Reena Kumari

Assistant Professor (English)
Govt. College Kota

India is one of the most diverse countries in the world, having its unique languages, cultures and traditions and a natural treasure of folk tales and folk literature as well. The diversity of India's culture ensures a wide range of literature, especially folk literature which is based on the traditional language and culture of different regions. That's why folk literature is considered a part and parcel of the language and culture of any society.

Both prose and verse narratives, poems, songs, ballads, myths, dramas, rituals, proverbs and riddles are the components of folk literature and folk stories are the most entertaining among them. These reflect people's desires, hopes, aspirations, sorrows and beliefs and act as mirrors of the people's lives and experiences. There are categories of folk writers such as international and regional, Vijaydan Detha is one of the regional writers who records people's emotions and thoughts. He has written typical folk stories in theme, characterization, motif, atmosphere and techniques. His folk stories have universal as well as regional qualities as his *Batan ri Phulwari* (A Garden of Stories) emerges with some specific narrative techniques and the paper throws light on those narrative strategies like motifs, symbols and fable elements. As well as he gives his folk stories a flavour of folk by using unique folk elements like *chauga*, *hunkara*, personification, fable elements, proverbs and riddles. The paper discusses the typical features related to a narration of a folk story.

Key Words : narrative techniques, *chauga*, *hunkara*, personification, fable elements, proverbs and riddles.

Introduction :

Vijaydan Detha, fondly known as Bijji, was born in 1926 Borunda, Jodhpur in Rajasthan, hailed from the Charan community which used to have close links with literature in royal courts in the princely states. He won Sahitya Academy award and founded Rupayan Sansthan, Jodhpur which documents the folklore, folk art and folk music of Rajasthan. His excellent literary work *Batan ri Phulwari* (Garden of Tales), is a fourteen-volume collection of folk stories that are based on folklore in the spoken dialects of Rajasthan. He heard all these stories from his grandmother and aunts in his childhood, from potters he met in tea stalls as well as from barbers, shepherds and farmers on visits to the villages around Borunda. He recreated these tales into stories. In these folk stories, we can see how Detha ridicules the feudal lords, the moneylenders, the merchants, the kings, and the patriarchs while the common men, peasants and even prostitutes are honoured in his folk stories.

Many of his folk stories have been translated into Hindi and English and have been adapted for stage and screen also.

Detha's narrative techniques -

The general themes in the folk stories are some universal truths, and moral values, concerned with the lives of people. Many authors have used various narrative skills in folk literature. These techniques are very popular and some of them are common in the most folk stories. The narrative technique is very important in a story as storytelling is an art itself. This art has been going on since the development of civilization. At that time people must have started telling stories in their language to convey their knowledge and experience. These experiences were narrated in an effective telling style; it is full of language, emotion, drama, mystery and exciting truths. The tradition of folk stories is oral, so in which the presence of both the speaker and listener is

essential. Due to the art of storytelling, these stories have remained on the necklace of man's throat for thousands of years. Oral forms of the stories are different from written forms, men and women tell the stories in various manners, but Bijji was able to preserve the orality and uniqueness of these stories as he accepts that, 'I am less of a story writer and more of a storyteller.' He has uniquely used certain narrative techniques in his stories like – Chouboli, Press the Sap Light the Lamp, the Dilemma, Second Kabir, Nagan May Your Line Prosper, The Winds of Time, The Farming of Pearls and many others.

The author of the folk tale is often unknown. The entire society takes part as a storyteller. Stories in Rajasthan have been told in different styles. It is common to see children sitting down to hear the stories at night from their mothers, grandmothers or the other elderly people in the Rajasthani villages. There it's a custom to start a storytelling session with the story of 'Tell and Don't Tell.' This is the story about a king who has two queens. One was named Tell and the other Don't Tell. From the mouth of Tell would pour flowers and pearls while the mouth of Don't Tell would shed embers and stones. At the end of this story the storyteller asks the children, 'so children tell me do you like Tell or Don't Tell?' and the children reply, 'We like Tell! We like Tell!' Indeed, it's a wonderful beginning of the storytelling session of a particular night. Vijaydan Detha uses a unique mode of presentation that is called the narration style in his folk stories. To identify the effective participation of listeners he uses the following folk elements.

Chauga:

Vijaydan Detha's aim as an author is to narrate the content of the folk tale and also sustain the oral nature of traditional Rajasthani storytelling. So, he uses a typical feature at the beginning of all storytelling performances and starts many stories with a chauga. It is a technique through which the audience can enter the fantastical world of the story.

The chauga, a "signature of Rajasthani oral convention" (Merrill, Riddles, 24) was used by the author to transport the audience from the present space into a fictitious world of the story. After the recitation of chauga, the storyteller quickly moves towards the prose portion of the story. Chaugas are mostly in the form of couplets and poetic lines and the purpose of using them is that before telling the story, *Baatpos* (a storyteller) can attract the attention of the audience and arouse curiosity among them. Many of the chaugas are didactic, containing ethical life experiences, some are sentimental, somewhere social inequalities are described and the mixture of supernaturalism and fantasy is seen in many others. Proverbs are also given a place in them and sometimes they are related to the subject matter of the story. The last line of chauga continues into the first line of the story. As we see in the story titled 'The Bankrupt Brahmin's Inheritance' the natural elements like the sun, the moon, clouds seeds are reflected in the chauga as follows:

"Ancient as the sun, radiant as rays.
Primeval as the moon, bright as moonlight.
Primordial as clouds, fresh as rain.
Prehistoric as seeds, transitory as trees.
Perennial as flowers, capricious as fruit.

Likewise, Detha seems like a preacher in the chauga of the story titled "The Winds of Time" as he says:
No god like time.
No brother like time.
No journey like time.
No shadow like time.
No doer like time.
No under like time.
The drums of time.
The leela of time.
Tales of time. Change with time.

In the chaugas somewhere we come to know about the subject matter of the story and the story titled 'A Straw Epic' is a fine example of it as the author begins:

'clashes spark in everyday affairs,
a little friction – fire flares,
from a tiny ember grows an endless blaze,
from a mustard seed, a mountain range.'

So as happens in the story when a bloody battle took place between the Banjaras and Rajputs due to a wisp of straw stuck to the gur i.e., jaggery. Thus, chaugas help the author sustain the orality of folk stories. Now

after the repetition of chauga the storyteller demands the audience to give the necessary hunkara. This is the next typical feature of storytelling used by Detha.

Hunkara :

It is a grunt and humms of approval. It is considered that hunkara turns storytelling into two-way communication and becomes a community event. The role of the storyteller is as important as that of the listeners. Storytelling is an art likewise giving hunkara is also a skill which is performed by a skilful hunkara giver who is called *hunkarchi* in the regional language.

In ancient times it is the custom in Rajasthan that professional storytellers were hired in the courts by kings, similarly, the hunkara givers were also deployed with the storytellers. Not only in the courts but this tradition is used to be seen in the typical Rajasthani villages also where the skilful storyteller is always present with a special hunkara giver. Similarly, Detha has used hunkara in his stories very much. As we can guess the curiosity and interest of the storyteller when he asks the listeners in the middle of the story to give hunkara. This typical feature is helpful to make the story dynamic, so the proverb is used for hunkara as, 'Baat mai hunkaro, fauj mai Nagaro' it means the way the drum is important for army similarly the hunkara gives liveliness to the art of storytelling.

Detha's folk story 'Chouboli' stands first as it reflects the art of storytelling and the importance of hunkara. The chauga of this story gracefully states the uniqueness of the storytelling and the importance of hunkara as follows:

"Armies march to the beat of drums,
Stories, to the rhythm of ohs and hmms,
Hunkaras are what makes storytelling fun
and the telling brings luck to everyone,
So long live storytelling!
and long live hunkaras!"

In this story, the Thikana manager Seth's niece is a storyteller to tell the cycle of stories to princess chauboli as she has an oath of silence. It is well known that without proper hunkara, a story has no flavour. So due to the silence of princess chouboli, Detha personified her pretty bed, glittering necklace, and even her veil and lamps as hunkara givers because the story without hunkara is like food without salt.

Personification :

Personification is a very important feature in Detha's folk stories. Animals, plants and even non-living things have been personified in his stories. In 'Batan ri Phulwari' volume 10, the first ten stories are related to the personification of snakes. These are like fables. In the story 'Juna Saanp' i.e., an old snake, a snake takes the shape of the human body and then is well looked after by Seth and Sethani as parents. He is married to a beautiful woman, but due to the obstinacy of his wife, he again turned himself into a serpent. She then realized and got a boon from God Indra to get Juna-Saanp back as her husband in the shape of a human.

In another story titled 'Press the Sap Light the Lamp,' a snake lived with a newly married woman in place of her husband in his absence because they fell in love each other. This is a love story when a woman prefers a snake love to her real husband who never cares about her desires as a newly married bride.

Similarly, the story 'Naagan May Your Line Prosper' reflects the technique of personification when a naagan i.e., female snake is seen as kind-hearted, mild-natured and understanding in the story. It is a heart-touching story about the sacrifice of a naagan when she forced her husband to put life into the groom who was merely a heap of flour dough and the snake put his own life into the doll of flour dough. After that, he lived with the bride as a son of Seth and Sethani. When naagan told the whole story to sethani, she welcomed her with the honour as an elder beendni and then naagan lived with all happily ever after. Here Detha beautifully personified naag and naagan and states that who could be scared of such naagan, in whose fangs flows such nectar instead of poison?

On the contrary in another story namely 'Nugrau Saanp' i.e., ungrateful snake, a Brahmin saved a snake from some snake charmers, but in place of being grateful to him he wanted to bite the Brahmin. Next comes the story 'The Dove and The Snake', in this story Detha relates the struggle between the powerful and powerless. In the story, the dove is shown as a symbol of innocence while the snake represents evil and powerfulness. In this way, the writer uses the personification of snakes and other animals to teach various moral lessons with the help of these creatures.

Hyperbole :

Hyperbole is generally found in all folk literatures as it makes the beliefs and situations more realistic and believable by appealing to the imagination. Detha also uses it in his folk stories. The story titled 'Eternal Hope' is a tale of immense hardship and sorrow where a stepmother forces her husband to leave the children at their native home alone and to go outside for earning. She thinks that they would finally die after some days due to starvation, but the children survive for a year without eating and drinking while waiting for their parent's return. This is the extremity of hyperbole as who would survive for a year without food and water? Likewise in the other story 'Chouboli' there is a Thakur who tortures his wife by having a hundred and eight arrows pass through her nose-ring daily. This is too hyperbolic.

Proverbs and Riddles :

Proverbs and Riddles are considered shorter forms of folk literature. Both forms are grounded in the familiar but in opposite ways. It is amazing that while proverbs contribute to re-familiar the familiar, riddles tend to de-familiar the familiar. Proverbs have human wisdom which is based on human observations. These are used for ethical instruction to expound philosophical ideas as well. Proverbs prevail all over the world as short popular sayings from an unknown and ancient source. It is common to see that every culture has a collection of wise sayings that offer moral values. Its function is to give advice and practical instructions on how we can live well.

Vijaydan Detha wrote proverbial stories to teach and educate the audience. He uses proverbs in the stories so that morals can be imparted and reinforced among the people. Proverbs are the ethical code of conduct of life. Detha wrote the book entitled 'Kahavati Kathaye: Rajasthan ki 332 Kahavati kathaye' with a texture of typical narrative feature of a folk story called proverb and one of the stories of this book is the story of a Seth, a tradesman belongs to 'Baniya' caste, who was on the way to market and a debt-stricken Asami (a poor villager) followed him. Seth's pen fell then he gave voice to sethji and said, "Sethji your knife fell." Seth looked in surprise and replied, "ke dofa aa tou kalam hai." It means Seth said that idiot it is a pen, but the debt-stricken Asami gestured softly and said that his pen was the only spin on my neck. Though the context of this story is short, it is very touching. Many meanings are embodied in this proverb, if even the best things come in bad deeds, then it is bad. Here Seth's pen is also like a tyrant's sword which went into debt-stricken Asami's throat. Detha presents a minute observation of the feudal system that how exploitation has its weapons and its methods and each method has its kind of cruelty.

Similarly in the other story of this book, he urges human wisdom by saying that it is not easy to get rid of being trapped in greed. Once two friends were roaming on the banks of the river in the moonlight. When a friend suddenly saw a blanket floating in the water, he could not be patient as greed was also something more than necessary. He jumped into the water and grabbed the blanket, but the very next moment he realized that the blanket was a bear. The other friend advised him to leave the blanket. Then he replied in despair using the proverb, "Mhe toh chodu pun kambal ni chode" it means he was ready to leave but the blanket was not leaving him. Here the bear in form of the blanket represents the greed of a person. Man has created all things on the earth as per the need but all his creations caught him like the blanket, even if he wants to leave, the blanket will not leave him.

Likewise, another proverb used by Detha is also suitable for mankind as he says, "Mhe he khelya arm he e dhaya" i.e., man is considered the controller of all development and he will be the sole cause of all destruction someday. Thus, proverbs are a collection of wise sayings that make a clear and distinct statement.

Riddles also play an important role in storytelling and it is the most entertaining way to enhance the logical thinking of the listeners. The purpose of the riddle is usually to deceive the listener about its meaning. In a riddle a description is given then the answer is demanded as to what has been meant. Riddle is like a statement or a question having a double meaning which is put forth as a puzzle to be solved. It functions as a source of entertainment as well as logical thinking practice. Vijaydan Detha skilfully follows the traditional Rajasthani riddling storytelling technique that is why he wrote the string of stories titled, "Chouboli". It is a series of seven stories that are enclosed in one frame-story. In this story its protagonist, a clever cross-dressed female puts forth a riddle at the end of each story to be solved by princess Chouboli. The storyteller tells four stories and asks riddles at the end of the story.

Likewise, the story titled, "Press the Sap Light the Lamp" offers a riddle as its whole story revolves around the riddle which lies in its title. In this story, Detha portrays the basic need of a woman for being loved when a woman prefers a snake love to her real husband who never minds satisfying her desires. Further, the snake-lover killed by her husband to take revenge she arranges a strange riddle to be solved by her husband, that

is: "Press the sap, and light the lamp, trunk below the bed. True love felled by one untrue, below the Champa bled."

Is it not a genuine expression of a woman's anguish depicted by the author in form of a riddle?

Similarly, the story entitled, "The Dilemma" essentially presents a riddle for a newly wedded bride to whom she chooses her husband, one is her real husband who selects to go to 'distant lands for trade' on the very first day of her wedding and the other is a ghost in her husband's disguise who loves the bride very much.

Use of Colloquial language:

Language is one of the very important features of a story. The folktales of Detha have a colloquial language which can be easily understood by readers. Sometimes some sentences are too short that the subject is missing them but readers can understand them well because of the simplicity of the language.

Conclusion

India is a land of cultural diversity. Every region of the country has its style of storytelling. Some people like to narrate the incidents while others use props such as puppets or instruments of music. Vijay Dan Detha's folk stories are fathomless in their content and morals. The narrative techniques which Detha uses in his folk stories include cultural, religious and historical aspects of the society like the superiority of men over women, and the talkative nature of women has been shown well by him. His beginning of the narration is also unique as he starts directly with the incidents and not with the introduction of the characters. So, in nutshell, his techniques to narrate stories are worn praising.

References :

1. Balveer, "Accents of Universality in Selected Short Stories of Vijayan Detha." JETIR, Vol. 6, no.3, 2019.
2. Dorson, R. M. Folklore And Folklife. University of Chicago Press, 1977.
3. Detha, Vijaydan ; Batan ri Phulwari Vol. 1- 14. Rajasthani Granthagar, 2007-2010.
4. Detha, Vijaydan ; The Dilemma and Other Stories. Trans. Mridul Bhasin, Kailash Kabir and Vandana R. Singh. Penguin Books, 2018.
5. Detha, Vijaydan ; Chouboli and Other Stories Vol. 1 Trans. Christi A. Merrill and Kailash Kabir. Katha, Fordham University Press 2010.
6. Detha, Vijaydan ; Timeless Tales From Marwar. Trans. Vishes Kothari. Puffin Books, 2020.
7. Watson, Mrinalini. " Chaogas: Detha's Reali-Fictitious Rabbit Hole To Rajasthani Folklore." University of Chicago, 2018.