

FOLKLORE ELEMENTS IN THE WORKS OF VIJAYDAN DETHA

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ABSTRACT

Folklore elements in the stories of Vijaydan Detha.

My paper is an attempt to study some of the representative stories of renowned Hindi and Rajasthani author Vijaydan Detha . Detha's stories represent a unique phenomenon in the contemporary Hindi writings . Detha while compiling multivolume collection of Rajasthani folktales realized the need to contemporarize the aesthetic and ideological content of the old folk tales. To a lay reader Detha's stories appear to be like folktales where as folk elements in the stories of Detha serve just an important aspect of the form only. Relying on the experience of the russian scholars of folklore, I have tried to apply such concepts as folklorism, folklore as oral literature and the term “literature” as written literature forming two independent artistic systems, the notion of development stages of written literature, the early stage being a continuation of the tradition of oral literature.

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Before going straight to the topic I think some of the terms need to be given concrete content and significance. First of all let us take the term “literature” into the consideration. In this paper the use of the term “literature” will be confined to the written form of verbal art, i.e. written form of the literature.

The term folklore will be used to denote oral forms of verbal art, i.e. oral literature. In today’s developed world we have several developed languages and corresponding sets and forms of literature. Literature came into existence only after the invention of the coded symbols called scripts. But prior to the emergence of the scripts there was an immensely rich and extensive kingdom of folklore. In the contemporary world of verbal arts, folklore and literature are the two powerful systems of aesthetic expressions in their own right. But there was a long period of time when there existed only one system of aesthetic expression and it was folklore. The nature of dependence and interdependence, parallels and overlapping realms, all have been extensively studied by the Russian theoreticians. In this paper we will present the views of the Russian scholars of these two aesthetic systems and the conclusive addition by a leading folklorist U.B. Dalgat in his celebrated book “ Литература и фолклор”

One of the main characteristics of folklore happens to be its collectiveness in which, in the words of Gorky "personal experience immediately pours into the storehouse of the collective, the whole collective experience becomes the property of each member of the group."(Dalgat:33)

As far as the treatment of the material being narrated and its interpretation are concerned, folklore and literature differ markedly. In folklore the treatment is not individual. Since there is no individual creator of folklore as is the case so often in literature, where we have good reasons to talk about the author's treatment and the interpretation of the material being narrated. Essential distinction lies, according to P.G Bogatyryev and R.O.Yakobson" in the fact that the first one is characterized by its orientation on the <<langue>> and for the second one, i.e literature is characterized by orientation of "parole".

Interaction between folklore and literature has been different at different stages of literature. In the early stages of emergence and development of literature (this stage is also called the stage of young written literature, in Russian as (Младописьменные литературы) the folklore elements remain their original meaning. Typical or rather stereotypical poetic means remain untransformed in the works of young literature.

It is but natural that these works were in direct dependence on archaic poetics of folklore. In the second stage of development of literature, the co relation between the collective creativity and individual creativity undergoes a great change in favour of the individual style and the role of folklore elements in the composition of literary works.

Images of folklore undergo a process of individual and stylization. The conscious use of folklore elements is being termed as Folklorism. The types of folklorism could be different depending on the literary manner and method adopted by this or other writer.

Now let us see ,how these concepts, as evolved in the Russian theory of folklore could be applied in studying the works of Rajasthani writer Vijaydan Detha, whose writings have been creating a sort of confusion when it comes to define his literary method.

A few words about the author

Vijaydan Detha also known as Bijji to his close friends, associates and his fans, was born in 1926 in the village of Borunda in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan. He belongs to the Charan caste which has traditionally had close links with literature and royal courts. His grandfather Jugatidan detha was a renowned poet of his time. His father Sabaldan Detha was not a professional poet but like his father he was also a connoisseur in the art of conversation ,and therefore both of them held in high esteem in the village.

It was this creative legacy that prompted him to become a writer at an early age After spending a few years in Jodhpur, eventually he took writing as a career.

His well known works include Batan-ri- Phulwari(Garden of tales), a fourteen volume collection of short stories “Bapu ke teen hatyare” a book which criticizes the works of Harivanshrai Bachhan , Sumitranandan Pant and Narendra Sharma for publishing books on Gandhi two months after his death. “I wrote that Nathuram Godse may have killed Gandhi physically, but these three writers killed his soul,” Detha says.(Tehelka:Jan21,2006)

Besides ,he has written a couple of novels, numerous poems and hundreds of articles.

In 1974, the Sahitya Akademi officially recognized Rajasthani language and awarded him for his contribution . He was also given the prestigious Padam Shri and has been among the nominees to win the Nobel prize for literature for the year 2011. He died on 10th November 2013 in Rajasthan.

Formation of aesthetic views of Detha

When Bijji was merely four years old, his father died in a feud with thakurs. The sudden death of father has left an indelible mark on the young mind of Detha.

Perhaps this is the most important reason why, when his writing in early stage appear as a criticism against the existing system. He despised all the institutions of power, whether it bureaucracy, patriarchy, religion, or caste. All his life his writing was inspired by these ideas. My main themes are against god, religion and dhan,"(Teelka:Jan21,2006) says the writer acknowledging his values based on Marxism.

Early in his life he understood that "Pen is indeed mightier than sword" that is why in spite of being provoked by his friends to revenge father's death, he stepped backward blaming the system not the individual for the loss. For vengeance, he took writing. Family conditions, ongoing political turmoil and freedom movement of the country laid the foundation for his writing career.

As a young reader Detha started reading with "Satyarth Prakash"(The light of truth) of Maharshi Dayanand. At that time he was so much influenced by the work that he could not think beyond it, but soon he got disenchanted with the "Light" and "Truth" also, he realized that it is the mask instead of light behind which lies the disgusting face of age-old darkness. That was time he got acquainted with the idea of communism and he fell in love with that. He read almost all the major books which which appealed his marxist ideology. He read Maxim Gorky's Mother, Howard Fast's Spartacus. This became his passion. He devoured all the world's classics available in hindi or english. No one has been able to take the short story forward from where he

left remarks Detha , talking about his one of favorite writers Anton Chekhov.(Tehelka:Jan21,2006)

In 1959 Detha returned to Borunda and was inspired to “garland the age-old Rajasthani folklore with story writing skills”. But it is worth mentioning here that before coming to this resolution he had already penned down two novels, more than fifty short-stories, hundreds of poems, a few books on criticism and numerous articles and columns in Hindi.

Hence, the determination to write in Rajasthani, a language which did not own any literary heritage as far as prose-writing is concerned was a unusual step. Whatever the case may be, but Detha was going to raise the curtain of Rajasthani prose-writing tradition. The challenges were awaiting Detha.. The biggest obstacle was the Rajasthani language, Rajasthani was never taught in his school. But soon he overcame by learning it directly from the local people as he called the biggest university. “When I returned to the village, I realized language is made not by professors of linguistics but by the illiterate rustic folk. I learned the art of language from them.

There he started compiling folktales, songs, and proverbs.. as quoted by kailash kabir in the preface of Vijaydan Detha, Rachana sanchayan(Kabir:Preface) “शुरू शुरू में उन्होंने अपने को एक संग्रहकर्ता की भूमिका तक ही सीमिति रखा । लेकिन बातां री फुलवाडी के तीनएक खण्डोंके बाद उनके अजाने ही उनका सर्जकलोककथाओं को सजाने-सँवारने लगा। उन्हेंतराशाने लगा उनमे कुछ जोडने घटाने लगा ।

फुलवाडी के छठे भाग आते-आते उनकी आंतरिक सर्जनात्मकसृजाखुलकर खेलने लगा।

वे लोक कथाओं में नये चरित्रा, नये प्रसंगजोडने लगे. नायक को खलनायक , और खलनायक को नायक के रूप में पेश करने लगे।

फुलवाडी के दसवें भाग तक तो लोक-कथाओं की शैली और उनके मोटीफ ही रहे गये। बाकी सब कुछ बदल गया कलेवर, मैसेज , प्रभाव बंदशि, संवाद इत्यादिकालके साँचे में परिष्कृत होते रहे।”

An illustration of his this ability can be seen in the tenth volume of the 'Batan-ri-Phulwari , 'in the story “Duvidha, The Dilemma” The idea of the short story has been taken from a folktale which was earlier used to narrate to cure a kind of fever called 'Ikantara',in the northern Rajasthan.

And possibly, this tradition continues till date.

The story goes like that . A ghost disguises himself to be the husband of a newly-wed bride and deceitfully lives with her. When after a few years the real human husband returns the ghost is badly punished and buried under the sand . Now look at the Detha's version of this 'The dilemma' ,where the motif of disguisement by the ghost as the real husband has been used but other elements have been changed completely..

Let us look at some of these alterations.

*The ghost has been assigned with positive qualities, ideal husband and a true lover.

*The bride,from a non- existent character becomes the most important character of the short story.

*The moral message of the story is also reversed as the original folktale convey the message of victory of good over bad, triumph of humans over ghosts.

In the Bijji's version of “The Dilemma” the relationship between man and woman has been subtly scrutinized through poignant depiction of an incapacitated woman in the patriarchal society. In the original folktale ,ghost deceitfully take advantage of the woman where as in the story of Detha the bride herself willingly surrenders to the ghost.

The Dilemma

A pair of newly-wed couples are seen returning to the village. They stop to rest beneath a tree, where a ghost resides. The ghost is so taken by the woman's beauty that he falls in love with her.

Strangely though, the husband, who should be experiencing something similar for his wife, is so caught up in the mercantile mindset of his community that he can think only of trade and profit. The very next morning, a, he sets out on a journey for five years because it is an auspicious time for business.

The ghost takes advantage of the moment and disguises himself as the husband. But he is so much in love with the woman that he cannot bring himself to be duplicitous with her, he confesses everything.

In turn, the woman, who has always been without desires of her own, cannot bring herself to reject this most extra-ordinary love. The ghost and his beloved live as man and wife for four years, until suddenly the real husband appears.

“All the wealth in the world cannot bring back time past” writes Detha and his story come forward to side with those people who value time and human relationships over material values.

Folklorism in his works

In the very first book of phulwadi, with absolutely clean intensions and my senses whole, I called it: Rajasthani ri kadeeme lok kathawan (The ancient folktales of Rajasthan) This title went on till the tenth book. I never felt the need to give it a second thought. Apart from a few writers in Rajasthani “I have not read or seen anyone asking – what kind of a writer is Bijji. He knows it himself that the folktales of Rajasthan have been written times without number and have been vanished without trace. He thinks the one line he 's written in Phulwadi is the greatest and

irrefutable proof of his prowess]”To date I have not made any answer to these people's illogic, envy,heartburn, and small mindedness. expresses Detha (MEG-14:ch5)

Writer Vijaymohan Singh in the preface of his collection says,

"वजियदान देथा के पास आदमि सी प्रतीत्तकथाओं का ज़खीरा है और उनकी अधकिंश कहानियाँ उन्हीं में से छनकर आती हैं. इसी छाने जाने की प्रक्रियेँ उनका कायाकल्प होजाता है हालांकिनि उनका लहज़ा बदलता है और न ही शब्दावली" 12

The biggest irony as he said was that many writers in Rajasthan did not consider him as a writer at all. For them, he was just a compiler, who was recording folktales in written form.

In 'Roonkh' he states this fact with immense pain “*no writer can ever have suffered such savage attacks on his work by his own state , by the people of his own language.*”(Kabir:Preface)

Some critics do not consider this exercise of re-writing folktales particularly fruitful. The re-writing,they think, has neither led to the survival of the folktale in its original form, nor can it be counted as an original piece of writing

Detha himself is of the opinion that his writing follows the style of folktales and that the resulting product is his own, not conditioned by the folk content.

Conclusion

In view of the above, it becomes easy to apply the concepts of interaction of folklore and literature in Detha's works

Detha is a typical example of a writer rather one of the first writers who starts his creative journey as a collector of Rajasthani folktales, gives written form to the oral folktales . Very soon he finds that he can not give expression to his aesthetic views by just reproducing folktales . He starts giving individual treatment to the characters and events as narrated in the folktales.

What is surprising is the transition from the collective aesthetic in the stories of Detha. Through the next volumes we find the domination of individual aesthetic treatment of different elements of folktales which have been termed as Folklorism by the Russian folklorists

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