

The Folk Tale: An Exploration of Chandrashekar Kambar's *Jokumaraswami*

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Abstract

The folktale is one of the idiosyncratic features of Chandrashekar Kambar's dramatic text. Accordingly, some of his plays such as *Rishyashringa* (1970), *Jokumaraswami* (1972), *Kaadu Kudure* (1979), *Siri Sampige* (1991), introspect on the core aspects of folktale in the form of performative art. His plays are very subtly depicted folklore aspects which are very relevant to contemporary society. The paper explores the folk culture and its aspects in *Jokumaraswami*. The folk theatre is a fusion of many elements, however, this paper traces out the crux of folk theatre –local identity which is representations of the native culture and social values. It is an amalgamation of tradition and modern social aspects. This play adds a new dimension to Kannada plays.

Keywords: Folktale; social values, local identity; native culture; *Jokumaraswami*; Kannada plays

Introduction

Though Kannada dramaturgy has its roots in mythology and folklore, it is gradually influenced by many other aspects belonging to that particular period such as political, social, cultural, and so on. Placed in this context, the paper revisits the folklore of Karnataka through the analysis of Chandrashekar Kambar's *Jokumaraswami* (1972). Chandrashekar Kambar is one of the seminal writers of Karnataka, who has produced a vast body of literature inclusive of *Janapadgeete* (folk

songs), novels, plays, etc. However, his major contribution to the literary domain is in the form of plays. He is accolade with many well-known awards of India. In the context of the modern and postmodern world, it is very apt to study the past through contemporary views. Before going to analyze the play from the basic perspectives of the folk theatre, social values and local identity which are representations of the native culture, we will have a birds-eye view of the plot of the play.

The Storyline of *Jokumaraswami*

The entire story of the play revolves around two episodes: first, Gowda's, the village head, lust for property and money, and second Gowdathi's ardent desire for a child. Gowda lends money to poor people not just to earn more money or help the poor people but because oppressively grab their property. His greed for the property is endless and he has no shame for this. Despite knowing that he is impotent; yet, he constantly tries to earn money and property by deceiving innocent village folk, and even he murders people for the sake of property. On the other hand, Gowdathi yearns for a child, but it is impossible because Gowda is impotent. This desire is going to be fulfilled only by Basanna. The crux of the play is Jokumaraswami – a phallic god and he is worshipped even today in the villages of North Karnataka. In the play, Shari, the whore, wants to worship Jokumaraswami to have more clients whereas Gowdathi also wishes to worship to have a child.

Local identity: Representations of the Native Culture

The paper espouses the local identity which is the representation of the native culture through the local mythological narration of Jokumaraswami. The story revolves around the local deity – Jokumaraswami. There are many mythological narrations of Jokumaraswami. He is a phallic god and he is worshipped even today in villages of North Karnataka. He is considered the god of fertility. The worship is performed in the month of August-September on the day of the full moon the festival is named after the god *Jokumaraswami Hunnive*(full moon night). The women,

who belong to the fisherman, lime maker, and washerman community, start celebrating the festival on the auspicious day of the full moon. They prepare phallus-shaped idols of Jokumaraswami by applying butter on them and place these idols in the basket by covering neem leaves and they start visiting houses after houses begging. They used to get alms in the form of salt, chilies, tamarind, etc. Even the god Jokumaraswami is associated with rain. The myth goes like this Jokumaraswami is the son of Shiva and takes birth on the earth as the son of Ditnadevi. From the second day of the day, he starts seducing the women of the village till the sixth day. However, on the seventh day, the cuckold of the village with anger kills him. Whenever his blood falls on the earth, it turns green and fertile. Therefore, he is the god of fertility – the fertility for women as well as for the earth.

The play relates this local narrative to spotlight contemporary issues. The play opens with Sutradhara's salutation and differentiating the other gods from Jokumaraswami. Sutradhara says that the other gods are flattered by them, "but if you hold him in your arms after worship, he fills your laps with children. Indeed, the theme of this evening's play is the story of this unusual god" (Kambar 6). The Sutradhara and Himmela, the two characters of the play, are praising the god and kept the idol, in the form of a snake-gourd, in a vegetable basket. They are waiting that someone will come and take away the god, "On this auspicious occasion, if barren women offer worship to this god, and afterward make a curry out of him to feed their husbands, dozens of children will be born in a jiffy" (Kambar 7). Meantime, the whore and untouchable Shari comes to take the god thinking that the god gives blessing to the barren woman as well as the rain to the barren land, and then he definitely blesses her, "I waited to see if some barren woman would come to carry away our god. None came. At least let me take him. As I get older, I get fewer clients. I could at least hold the few I have if I feed them with a curry made of god" (Kambar 12). Shari takes away the god Jokumaraswami.

However, Gowdathi is very much tensed that the *Jokumaraswami Hunnive* is approaching and she wanted to worship the god and prepare the curry and feed her husband by which she will get a child. She is worried that ten years elapsed for her marriage; yet, she is not blessed by a child,

so she requests her husband “You have a field as big as the forest, a house as big as the village, but there is no child in the house.... Tonight is Jokumaraswami’s full moon night. I believe that if we worship Jokumaraswami and then cook and eat him, we will have children. So please come home for dinner.” (Kambar 24). Her thinking to get a child by Jokumaraswami is utterly failed because her husband was impotent. Though she knew this fact, she is not ready to accept it. Her visit to Shari’s home is an eye-opener. She explained that how Gowda used to visit her; but, he used to just snore the entire night which marks his impotency. Moreover, she said that Basanna, the villager, is a person to whom the entire village girls attract.

Here, the myth of Jokumaraswami is twisted and suited accordingly. We can consider that Basanna is a Jokumaraswami of the play and who is ready to fulfill the desire of Gowdathi. The tale is very beautifully carried out. Kambar weaves the play very brilliantly: Gowdathi brings the idol of *Jokumaraswami* from Shari to worship it and later cook and serve to Gowda. She worshipped and cooked. But unfortunately, Gowda doesn’t turn up in such a case she decides to go to the field and serve it to Gowda. However, Gowda was not there she unknowingly served Basanna. When we study the play closely, we can understand that Gowda was impotent and *Jokumaraswami*’s blessing may not come true. Therefore, there is shrewd deviation and she feeds Basanna by which Gowdathi’s desire for a child and talking parrot is fulfilled.

The Representation of Social Value

Literature is a mirror of society. This play is no exception to this stance; it puts forth certain vibrant problems of that particular social era. The paper explores certain social values and problems. Gowda, a village head, wants to grab the land of the poor people. This aspect throws light on the plight of peasants which is a realistic portrayal of the economic condition of the Indian farmers. The plays portray the power of landowners on the landless people through lending money and when they are not able to return it in turn they have to sacrifice their livelihood a piece of land. This concept of feudalism is showcased with variegated issues. Basanna, one of the central characters of the play, is a revolutionary character fighting back to

the emperor not only for his personal motive but also for the entire poor farmers' welfare who churn under the oppression of Gowda. Basanna loses his father for the sake of 200 rupees. His father borrows money from Gowda for which he used to give half of his produce every year that is for twenty years. But Gowda considers that he has not repaid the loan and murders him to take his land. During the payment process of the loan to Basanna's father, Gowda registered the land in his name. However, Basanna doesn't accept it and says that he will plough the land. In that case, Gowda threatens him, "I don't understand what you say. Say all that to my gun" (Kambar 17).

The second victim of Gowda is Guraya one who is illiterate and not able to recall that when is his land leased and how much money his father has borrowed from Gowda. Such an innocent person is a scapegoat of Gowda. He has given his five acres of land just for 300 rupees. He calculate the principle amount and interest and snatches the poor farmers' land, in the context of Guraya, Gowda shouts, "Bastard! I've let you keep on working for me only because I pity you. Isn't there any value for a Gowda who rules the earth? If I so wish, I can make not only you but even Basanna eat dirt, understand?" (19)

Gowda is not only voracious of money and land but also an adulterer and a symbol of hypocrisy. Though he is impotent, he goes to whores. We may have a question: Why did he go? If we contemplate on his visits to many whores, it espouses his political agenda, in a way, a body politics to hide his impotency. Placed in this milieu, it is very apt to brood over Shari's dialogue with Gowdathi, "Do you know why he did what he did? Whether he laid with them or not, the children of all the whores whose seals he was supposed to have broken would be counted as his children. So Gowda addresses anybody in the village as 'song of mine... Can such a Gowda give you children?" (32). Gowda's impotency is not physical impotency but it is impotency of rich people's richness. He margins his wife's desire and hides everything from her; blindly, she is waiting for a bright day to be a mother. This play legitimizes many contemporary problems such as dominating patriarchal ideologies, exploitation of women such as Shari, Ningi, Gowdathi, etc., power over powerless, and many more. Ananda Lal in the introduction of the play explicates, "*Jokumaraswami* incipiently preaches revolution, but stops short by concluding as a ritualistic

tragedy upholding the faith. Yet, within the religion, Kambar remains consciously anti-traditional.” (x). The play gives us a kaleidoscopic view of the society in which Kambar dwells and also he draws threads from his personal self – an autobiographical touch.

Conclusion

The substance of the play is drawn from the myth to sketch the picture of contemporary society. It is a scathing attack on the upper class, rich and powerful people who are considered as a part of mainstream culture and society. It narrates the regional tradition in the form of worshipping the phallus god – *Jokumaraswami*. Shari and Gowdathi both want to worship, cook and serve it to respective persons from whom their desires are going to be fulfilled. Kambar’s objective is not just to introduce the native tale but how the traditional tales are molded according to the demands of society. On the other hand, he highlights the burning problems of the village may be caste, class, gender, and many more.

References

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