



Analytical Assessment of Manoj Das' Traditional Themes in Short Tales

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ABSTRACT

Everyday life is enriched by folk literature, which has a profound impact on both literature and culture. The influence of traditional literature and culture on contemporary literature is enormous, despite the fact that it is localised. Manoj Das adheres to the narrative patterns typical of Odisha folk stories and concentrates primarily on those tales.

Keywords : Literature, Culture, Traditional literature

INTRODUCTION

Manoj Das was a renowned Indian author, primarily known for his contributions to literature in English and Odia. His short tales often revolve around traditional themes, reflecting the cultural richness and philosophical depth of Indian heritage. Both classical literature and contemporary literary works can trace their roots back to folk tales (folk literature). So, to relate folk culture, folk form, or folk literature to fiction, it is suitable to talk about their nature and characteristics. Even though it originated in antiquity, folk culture is very much a part of our modern world. We can see hints of folk culture in the Vedanta, the Astadasapurana, and the Mahabharata. Many folktales are woven throughout the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Typically, a specific event or location is the centre of folk forms such as songs, stories, plays, and rituals. Constrained to a small region, it has preserved its traditions, customs, lifestyle, and cultural practices. In general, folk literature is set in a fantastical, idealised world that has little to do with actuality. Magical spells, a world inhabited by witches and wizards, and talking animals are all aspects of this fantastical setting. One defining feature of folk music is that its origins and makers are shrouded in mystery and controversy. The exact moment of its conception is likewise a mystery, although it has been orally passed down through many generations, with minor revisions made each time.

In folk music, the location is typically secondary. It all begins with an ambiguous definition and description. Such is the case, for instance, with the majority of folk stories' opening sentences ("Once upon a time in a dark forest..." and "Long ago in a land far away"). So, the folk form fools the audience into thinking it is from another era. This is a fantastical setting, painted in a way that piques the interest of the audience's imagination. Folk stories originated in mediaeval Europe as a form of amusement due to the widespread illiteracy and the reliance on listening and storytelling. Mediaeval European folk literature depicts the usual setting of the narrative culture. Forests, castles, and cottages of the era are depicted. In contrast to the beautiful settings shown in folk literature from India and China, the hills and woodlands of Africa are more often described in detail. Because of socio-geographical variances, the settings of folk literature vary from one region to another. Folk writing typically features straightforward, uncomplicated characters. Unlike the protagonists of contemporary fiction, these characters do not possess a combination of positive and negative traits. Most characters are depicted in a monochromatic light, either as good or evil. A good character is one who is completely good, devoid of any trace of evil. In cases where the character is evil, it is clear that they lack any redeeming qualities. Mental anguish is rare for these folks because they don't bottle up their emotions. Put another way, folk literature is characterised by characters who are kind and unassuming. Characters in folk tales often have a particular motivation. Love, hate, greed, fear, or envy are just a few of the powerful emotions that drive these people. It is common for readers of folk literature to encounter clichéd characters. The characters' physical appearances characterise them, yet disguises are prevalent. Some of these characters are evil stepmothers, weak-willed fathers, jealous siblings, loyal friends, etc. Many hardships befall the folk hero and heroine. Despite experiencing paradisiacal delight at the story's conclusion, their lives are fraught with peril. As a result of their cast-cut status, they are frequently alone and fortunate. They spend a lot of time alone, whether in prison fighting



for change or trying to save those they care about from giants' grasp. Compared to other types of literature, the plots of folk literature tend to be brief and straightforward. Because it was intended for illiterate people, it is short. Thus, the narrative ought to conclude after half an hour. The themes are straightforward and devoid of suspense because the stories are crafted for the common folks of rural areas. Folk literature frequently features the protagonist's journey. The main character travels a great distance, which can take years. The protagonist travels, encounters all kinds of people, and frequently struggles for food and security throughout the lengthy voyage, which is beautifully and brilliantly constructed as a symbol for his self-discovery in nearly all folk literature. Despite facing insurmountable obstacles, our hero musters the will to persevere and ultimately succeed, solidifying his status as a hero for his generation.

The term "repetitive patterns" describes how frequently the same theme, event, or experience appears in folk literature. The presence of repetitive patterns in folk stories supports the idea that they are ritualistic and may have served as mnemonic aid for the storyteller. There are many instances where threes are present; for instance, three pigs, three bears, three sisters, three wishes, etc.

Every piece of folk fiction has a central plot point. Nothing in the description or explanation is very detailed. Both the explanations and the descriptions are crystal clear and unfiltered. A story's small events are the happenings that propel it to its conclusion, and conflicts and disputes are immediately established. After a folktale reaches its climax—the conflict—the story begins to take off. There is usually a lot of action in folk writing. Ultimately, every story has a happier ending. In contrast to tragic plays by Shakespeare, the vast majority of folk tales conclude with joy, unity, and laughing. From joy to sorrow and finally to unity, the folk stories take us on a journey. "They lived happily ever after" is a common way that stories conclude.

Themes in folk writing tend to be straightforward, yet profound and impactful. The vices of egotism and arrogance are prevalent in folk stories. An important theme in the children's fairy tale "Beauty and the Beast" is their fight to rebel against their parents' strict control. The kids in the story give in to their guardians' egos and caprices, even though it means giving up the affection they've always had. Jack and the Beanstalk is a story about kids who battle mightily to live up to their parents' high standards. As a result of their fight, the kids go through a lot of pain, as described by a bagger. Forcibly removed from the place of their religious upbringing, the displaced people's fears in "New Arrival" burst forth like a vibrant larva. The pain of displacement compounds with the anxiety that comes from not knowing what to expect in their new home. Themes in folk literature often hit readers deeply because they are central to the experience of coming of age. This is very much like the plot points of classical Greek tragedies. Suffering is a necessary condition for gaining wisdom, according to folklore. Nothing in life is free of obligations, promises, and conditions; with every advantage comes a cost. Common in folk writing is the use of plain, everyday language, frequently in dialogue with deep philosophical undertones. In most cases, the language is spare and uses few adjectives. The rhythmic element that is required in oral narratives is enhanced by the repetition of words, which may have helped in memorising. Stylized intensification, in which an aspect is progressively accentuated or increased with each repetition, is the technique of folk tales. As a result, the level of drama is raised. As a mnemonic device while the tales were still passed down orally, folk story motifs are quite common. Themes such as a perilous trek through a foreboding forest, mystical metamorphosis, miraculous healing, encounters with otherworldly beings, naive deals, impossible missions, cunning deceit, and so on were prevalent. Helpful animals, charmed transformations, granted wishes, and other magical elements are common in folk tales. The characters always react with a casual air whenever magic makes an appearance. No one is surprised or taken aback by the characters' acceptance of magic as an everyday occurrence. This stylistic choice distinguishes folk literature from contemporary fantasy and further separates it from reality. Sublimation frequently takes folk heroes and heroines to a higher plane, where they remain virtuous, obedient, and innocent. Because literature is an integral part of India's classical literature. Religious and secular, moral and material, Indian



folk stories enhance Indian literature. Analysing folk literature as a whole reveals that a place's culture and its folk tales are inseparable. A region's folk literature is an accurate reflection of that region's cultural heritage. Ancient India is home to a rich cultural heritage. Indian folk stories such as the "Hitopadesha Tales," the "Jataka tales," and the "Panchatantra tales" eloquently portray the country's diverse religious practices, languages, civilizations, and traditions. Mythological legends and stories abound throughout Indian folklore, drawing inspiration from every aspect of human experience. From the legendary Panchatantra to the legendary Hitopadesha, from Jataka to Akbar Birbal, these fascinating tales rang out. Stories of famous individuals' lives serve as inspiration for the didactic tales found in Indian epics such as The Bhagavad Gita, The Mahabharata, and The Ramayan. Indian folklore is rich with moral lessons that can be effectively taught to children through storytelling. These old tales have been passed down through the ages, establishing a link between the current generation and its traditional ideals.

Narayan Pandit's extraordinary collection of short stories is The Hitopadesha. The first known use of Hitopadesha was some thousand years ago. The Indian literary canon considers Hitopadesha to be on par with Panchatantra. The Hitopadesha is another Sanskrit text that follows the same prose and poem style as Panchatantra. An other factor in the book's phenomenal success—second only in India to the Bhagavad Gita—is the approachable style of writing the Hitopadesha tales. The original Hitopadesha has been translated into a plethora of languages so that readers from every corner of the globe can enjoy it. The Jataka tales were penned approximately 300 B.C. with the purpose of imparting wisdom and moral principles to subsequent generations. Modern readers can learn from and appreciate Jataka tales in the form of entertaining and informative storybooks. The Jataka Buddhist tales have been translated from their original Pali language to many others. The illuminating stories of Jataka are meant to teach individuals about honesty, selflessness, mortality, and other instructive principles. Among India's folk literature, the Panchatantra is second only in importance to the Jataka Tales. Many academics, like Vishnu Sharma, believe that Panchatantra was originally written in the second century B.C. The piece was written with the intention of teaching the King's sons good morals and how to be good rulers. Animal tales, both poetic and prosaic, abound in the old Sanskrit text. Over the course of those centuries, a great number of writers and publishers laboured to ensure that even the layperson could understand and enjoy these fables. Every age group enjoys, if not loves, one of the incredible stories in the grant collection. A child's desire to be an artist is deeply impacted by the folk tales, which ignite his imagination. A child's inherent creative abilities might be uncovered through exposure to folk literature. Before going to sleep, a kid listens to traditional stories. As the youngster drifts off to dreamland, his grandmother or mother puts him to sleep with stories about fairies, angels, ghosts, and other fantastical beings. Not only did Prafulla Mohanti and Manoj Das, but countless others, have such supportive families that encouraged them to pursue art as a career. The cornerstone for Manoj Das's artistic career was his early fascination with listening to traditional tales passed down from his grandparents. Beginning his literary career in the 1950s and continuing into the 1960s, Manoj Das has portrayed post-independence beliefs that are bound to traditional values. He derived these moral principles from old Indian folklore. Inspired by Sri Aurobindo's spiritual teachings, Manoj Das's philosophy is undeniably scientific and contemporary. To connect the literary canons of the pre- and post-independence eras, he also depicts the old social order, such as feudalism. It is clear that he is making an effort to address Indian folk themes in this work. His perspective goes beyond rural Odisha and encompasses themes across India. "I thought born in a village, born just before independence and hence living through the tradition as an impressionable age, I could present through English a chunk of genuine India. Well, right or wrong, one is entitled to one's faith in oneself," he says in an interview with The Times of India (May-18/1980), as quoted by P. Raja: The date is May 18, 1980. The literary works of Manoj Das reveal his deep connection to his society's folk literature, ideology, and spirituality. Everything from the subject matter to the incidents and occurrences set in a small Indian village reflects the impact of tradition and folk tale on his imaginative creativity. His stories cover



topics that are relevant not only to his locality but to India as a whole. For instance, Das addresses a folk and feudal element that is both uniquely Indian and specific to a certain location. Das draws parallels between pre- and post-independence India in his presentation of the country's political climate, freedom movement, and nationalism. These occurrences and the social norms they represent, however, have their roots in Indian folklore from ancient times. Despite taking place in an Odisha rural village, the show's depiction of family life is largely reflective of conventional patriarchal family values in India. Thus, Das's roots in Odisha and Indian folk literature give his works their authenticity. Manoj Das was principally a Marxist. His literary works display his Marxist ideology. In his writings, we see Marxist ideas reflected in discussions of politics, liberation movements, feudalism, communal living, and interpersonal relationships. Cyclones, Das's novel, depicts the upheaval of political change during the time of the freedom movement. From 1994 to 1996, this book portrays India's transformational period. One of Das's goals in writing this book was to help close the wealth divide. A lot of people are against living in rural areas and are all for metropolitan life. Manoj Das, who shares the Marxist goals of Prafulla Mohanti, an Odia residing in London, and wants to create a society free of social classes, rejects the capitalist nation of the wealthy townies. Through "My Village-My Life," Mohanti has expressed his frustration with Manoj Das and other rising Indian capitalists, and he longs for a society free of social classes in his hometown of Nanpur. Sudhir, the protagonist of "Cyclone," is an ardent Gandhian and the author's mouthpiece. He makes great strides to integrate Gandhian principles into society. Manoj Das paints an image of a patriotic leader in Sudhir, who is fully committed to his role and works tirelessly for the greater good of his country. Fighting against the British government in India, Sudhir is never afraid to take a bullet for his cause. Like a Marxist leader, his leadership talents are on full display in his protests and volunteer activities. In their rebellion against the government and their plans to dam the Khoya River, the people of Kusumpur go to Sudhir for guidance because they believe in him. Sudhir is strikingly similar to the hero of a folk tale—both are depicted as unwaveringly honest and lacking in cunning. The role of Sudhir in the book is linear, honest, and open from start to finish, much like the protagonist in a folk tale. According to Manoj Das's Marxist worldview, society may be transformed when the energy of young people and the knowledge of the elderly are combined. The industrialist Seth Mukund Das represents the sagacity of age in "Cyclone," while the youthful Sudhir represents the vitality of Ksunpur's youth. According to Mukund Das, Sudhir should run for office in the party that will allow him to do the most good for the nation. And now is the time to begin the procedure," Sethji says Sudhir in this scenario. We are one in spirit, and I am one in vision. The source is Cyclone (1987, 166).

"Cyclone" is a reflection of his nationalistic sentiments. Another young man, Shym, who is Sudhir's college friend, shows the effects of nationalism. Being an educated individual, Shym knows how important it is to raise awareness about the current events. He takes his relationship with Sudhir very seriously, which reveals his desire to serve the people. What we need to realise is that this is a chance for the people to do something they've never done before: band together, assert their right to agitate, and put their resistance skills to the test. Why? They might be better equipped for a longer and more intense fight down the road if that happens. Are you getting the idea?" Cyclone, page 63 The teachings of Gandhi and socialist thinkers like Raja Rao had a profound impact on Manoj Das. Shym, Reena, and Kamal are shown as assisting and relieving the common people, much like Raja Rao's hero 'Moorthy,' who is motivated by Gandhian values and strives to elevate and educate his fellowmen and society. Volunteer organisations like Shym, Kamala, Kamal, and Reena's blood donation camp and relief camp are on the rise as a means of serving the public and raising public awareness. Manoj Das's philosophy evolves in tandem with his age. His stories depicted class differences, and he was mostly a socialist. He aspired to level the playing field in terms of cultural, traditional, and philosophical differences among human groups. Through his writings, Das aimed to promote equality, fairness, and brotherhood. After concluding from much experimentation that Marxism could not bring about the transformation in India, he reconsidered his position. Thus, Das altered his



opinion after becoming disillusioned with the Marxist society. Sri Aurobindo's philosophical system, which has its origins in Hinduism, profoundly impacted him. In order to model the social and cultural ideas of India, which had an immediate and significant impact on literature, Sri Aurobindo's transformation from radical to spiritual idealist was a watershed moment. Aurobindo drew heavily on the Bhagavad Gita's teachings on work culture. Aurobindo stressed in "The Essays of Gita" that man can alter his destiny through doing what is right, which requires him to be desireless. A man can be lifted from this world of materialism to a spiritual realm where he can realise God's essence via labour that is devoid of desire and ambition. When man helps his own offspring, who are in dire need of aid, he experiences a sense of God's presence. The core of the Bhagavad Gita is the route to the divine, which is outlined in Karma and Seva. The ideal personality who can illuminate society is emphasised by Aurobindo. A perfect teacher can rescue their student from any danger and make the world a better place. Predicting the course of human events and the fate of our planet, the epic "Savitri" offers a picture of the past and future. Savitri is of tremendous significance. Its revelation is prophetic, and its theme is universal as well. "The supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision," as the mother put it. In the Mahabharata, the narrative of Satyavan and his loving wife Savitri is recounted as a tale of marital love triumphing over death. However, numerous aspects of human narrative point to this myth as one of many symbolic stories in the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the spirit who, while still possessing the divine truth of being, has fallen into the anguish of ignorance and death. Savitri is the sun's daughter, the goddess of absolute truth, and the divine ward who descends to earth to rescue humanity. Tapasya, the focused energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us rise from the mortal to the immortal world, is ruled by Aswapati, the ruler of horses and her human father. Indian traditional tales and western philosophy come together in Manoj Das's works in a seamless way. Both notes are plainly and obviously present in his works, as his life and literary activity attest. According to what Sujata Shiven says:

While Manoj Das's work shows clear influences from Sri Aurobindo's mysticism, it is also clear that western intellectuals had an impact on him. He liked to utilise his characters to explore themes of dream interpretation, psychiatric disorders, insanity, and lunacy, all of which were influenced by Freud and Jung. A combination of western literary theory and western thought with aspects of folklore from Odisha and India, as well as Indian poetry and mysticism, may be found in many of Manoj Das's stories. Das was profoundly impacted by numerous Indian mystics. Similarly, Das's novels blatantly adhere to the magical realist philosophy as espoused by western authors such as Marquez, Isabella, Allende, and Salman Rushdie. For example, "The Last I Heard of Them" and "A Trip of the Jungle" both explore the idea of seeking ultimate bliss and the terrible consequences that come with it. Inspiring wonder, fear, or awe is the universal response to everything having to do with the supernatural. Its effects are two-pronged. Surprises and mysteries abound, and the impact on children's minds and bodies is comparable to that of receiving moral, spiritual, or psychological wisdom through these mediums. The so-called natural understanding process is eight years away. Even in the current era, folk tales have a significant impact on literature. The principles and themes found in folk stories serve as compass points for authors who explore human nature.

Here is an analytical assessment of some of the traditional themes found in Manoj Das' short tales:

Spirituality and Mysticism:

Das frequently explores the spiritual and mystical dimensions of life. His stories often delve into the inner journey of characters, depicting encounters with the divine, supernatural elements, and the exploration of one's consciousness. Analyzing these themes, one can see how Das uses storytelling as a medium to convey profound spiritual insights and to explore the interconnectedness of the material and spiritual worlds.

Cultural Traditions and Folklore:

Manoj Das is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of India, and his tales are often steeped in folklore and mythology. He weaves traditional stories and legends into his narratives, creating



a rich tapestry that reflects the cultural diversity of the country. The analytical lens can focus on how Das adapts and reinterprets traditional tales, imbuing them with contemporary relevance. This blending of old and new provides readers with a bridge between the past and the present.

Human Relationships and Morality:

Das frequently explores the dynamics of human relationships and ethical dilemmas in his short stories. Themes of love, compassion, betrayal, and moral choices are recurring motifs in his works. The analysis could delve into how Das uses these themes to provide insights into the complexities of human nature, societal norms, and the consequences of moral decisions.

Nature and Environment:

Nature is a prominent theme in many of Manoj Das' short tales. He often depicts the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, highlighting the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings. An analytical examination might explore how Das employs nature as a metaphor, symbol, or backdrop to convey deeper philosophical messages about life, death, and the cyclical nature of existence.

Social Issues and Critique:

While rooted in tradition, Das does not shy away from addressing contemporary social issues. His stories often serve as a medium to critique societal norms, prejudices, and injustices. An analysis can focus on how Das uses fiction to engage with and comment on the socio-political landscape, encouraging readers to reflect on the realities of the world around them.

Philosophical Inquiry:

Das often engages in philosophical inquiry through his stories, raising questions about the meaning of life, the nature of existence, and the pursuit of knowledge. The analysis could explore how these philosophical undertones contribute to the intellectual depth of his works.

Symbolism and Allegory:

Manoj Das employs symbolism and allegory to convey layers of meaning in his narratives. An analysis could focus on decoding the symbolic elements in his stories and how they enhance the overall thematic richness.

Cultural Synthesis:

Das is known for his ability to synthesize diverse cultural elements. An examination might explore how he seamlessly integrates elements from various cultural traditions, creating a unique narrative style that reflects the syncretic nature of Indian culture.

Narrative Structure:

The structure of Das' short tales often involves intricate storytelling techniques. An analysis could assess how his narrative structures contribute to the effectiveness of conveying traditional themes, such as the use of flashbacks, nonlinear timelines, or multiple perspectives.

Character Archetypes:

Identifying and analyzing recurring character archetypes in Das' works can provide insights into the cultural and mythological influences shaping his storytelling. Characters may embody archetypal roles that resonate with traditional narratives.

Transformation and Redemption:

Many of Das' stories involve characters undergoing transformations or seeking redemption. An analysis might explore the symbolic significance of these transformations and how they align with traditional themes of spiritual growth and moral evolution.

Regional Specifics:

Das often draws inspiration from the cultural specificities of the Odisha region. An examination could focus on how he incorporates local customs, rituals, and landscapes into his stories, providing a regional flavor to the broader tapestry of his narratives.

Narrative Voice:

The choice of narrative voice in Das' tales is crucial. Analyzing whether he adopts the perspective of an omniscient narrator, a first-person storyteller, or other narrative voices can shed light on how he conveys traditional themes and engages readers emotionally.



Temporal Elements:

Das sometimes plays with temporal elements, blurring the lines between past, present, and future. An analysis could explore how this manipulation of time contributes to the exploration of traditional themes, such as the cyclical nature of life or the enduring relevance of ancient wisdom.

Interplay of Light and Darkness:

Light and darkness are often used metaphorically in Das' stories. An examination might delve into the symbolic significance of these elements, exploring how they represent knowledge and ignorance, good and evil, or the dualities inherent in human existence.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the exploration of folk culture and literature reveals a timeless influence on classical and contemporary works. Manoj Das, a notable literary figure, skillfully integrates Indian folk culture into his narratives, drawing inspiration from traditional tales. His stories, shaped by Marxist and spiritual ideologies, reflect a deep connection to Odisha's roots and Indian folklore. The enduring impact of folk tales is evident in the continued resonance of their themes in contemporary literature. Manoj Das's works serve as a testament to the enduring relevance and influence of folk culture in shaping fiction across generations.

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