

Listening to the “Unheard Voices” with Special Reference to Folklore of Rajasthan

Manoj kumar

The marginalized people are generally not given a proper place in elite literature. As the name suggests, they could not become the part of mainstream society. It is also quite true that these people have been struggling for centuries to make their voice heard. But, the Folk literature of Rajasthan has not neglected them rather, has given them due credit.

Folklore of Rajasthan is replete with different forms of oral literature. Folklore comprises of songs, tales, ballads, myths, tongue-twisters, proverbs, sayings, alternative medicine, folk cookery, architecture etc. Folk songs are replete with man's tender feelings, hopes and heroic sentiments in a very spirited manner. It evokes different emotions among folk. These songs vary from region to region. In every walk of life, songs play a great role be it happiness, sadness, seclusion etc. Besides, the vibrancy of life is reflected in folk songs of Rajasthan.

Stories or tales are very popular among people of every age. Stories educate, entertain or amuse people. Stories may have some morals inherent in them. Everybody gets attracted towards these stories. These tales can be sub divided in different categories such as fairy tales, fables, legends, tall tales etc. Though, the main aim of these stories is to entertain people but they do teach cultural values and behavior pattern. Folk get inspired by these stories. Folk tales have a very important place in Rajasthan. Culture, social and economic, religious and moral ethos are reflected in folk tales. They not only entertain people but educate them too.

Generally, riddles are in question form. Riddles describe things in a very unusual but in an amusing way. A listener has to use his/her brain to get the answer. Riddles are good exercises for brain. To answer a riddle, a person has to think a lot. There are lot many riddles popular among folk of Rajasthan. Riddles are a good source of amusement among people. Women of Rajasthan consider it as a weapon. They bombard their son-in-laws with many riddles to take their test.

It is truly said by Lord Bacon that ‘the genius, wit and spirit of a nation are discovered in their proverbs’. A proverb teaches morals and paves a way to live a proper and balanced life. Proverbs are taken from real life experience.

Social folk custom consists of the rites, rituals, games and festivals etc. These are not an individual's activity rather performed by a group. There are many rites and rituals in different religions related to birth, marriage, death, buying of any property, and many more. Most of the rituals are performed for the sake of rain, good crops, and to avoid natural calamities such as flood, drought etc. These songs convey different messages. Like these rituals, there are many festivals like Holi, Diwali, Dasshera, Rakshabandhan etc. There are many festivals based on folk deities and semi-god. Most of these festivals are related to agricultural activity thus they follow a calendric cycle. Diwali is celebrated after the harvesting of kharif or monsoon crops whereas Lohri is celebrated as the Rabi crops are ripening. Some fairs are also organized in the honor of these deities.

Folklore has always attracted masses due to its varied characteristics. Folklore is part and parcel of the masses. People listen to stories; sing songs as to entertain themselves. It not only entertains them but also teaches morals to make their lives happy. It never allows them to drown in the sea of dismay. They follow the path of virtue. The folk stories of Rajasthan are rich in its subject and replenish people's life with vigor and enthusiasm. Women of Rajasthan have never felt the need of sources of entertainment other than folk stories and songs. Tongue-twisters and proverbs have been a source to test people's wisdom and entertainment too. Folk cookery teaches the habitants regarding the rituals performed while preparing and eating food. It is truly said that folklore is a whole way of life.

Like other sources of folklore, ballads of Rajasthan are never legged behind in terms of popularity among people. These ballads are sung on various occasions. The ballads are of various types such as heroic ballads, love ballads, renouncement ballads, thriller narrative, religious ballads and many more. The heroic ballads awaken the feeling of bravery among its listeners. The singers of religious ballads sing them to please their deity in order to fulfill their wishes.

There are many reasons behind the popularity of these ballads such as the popular themes of the ballad which make the reader feel attached to them as if they are listening to their own story. The story is woven around the lives of common men who have lived among the folk and sacrificed their lives for the welfare of human and living beings. These folk heroes have carved a niche in the hearts of masses due to their deeds. They have never distinguished people based on their caste, creed and rank. Due to it, people have considered them as demi-god and started worshipping. Whenever a person is in problem, he always remembers the folk deities.

The popular ballads of Rajasthan are many such as Tejaji, Vere Gogaji, Pabuji, Bagrawat, Dhola-Maru, Gelaleng, Nihalde-Sultan, Gopichand, Bharathari etc. The peasant-pastoral communities of Rajasthan have cherished the beauty of folklore. The protagonists of these ballads either belong to peasant-pastoral community or sacrifice their lives for these people.

Pabuji was a brave warrior who sacrificed his life for the welfare of the people. Pabuji belong to Rajput community which has a high status in the society. His father was a king of Kolu village. He had one elder brother named Buro and two sisters Pema and Sona. In medieval period, People used to have marriage relations with the same caste and status. When Pabuji talks to his elder brother about his daughter's marriage with Goga Chauhan, it is scoffed by Buro stating Gogo's low status in society. He says,

"Gogo is a low and base Rajput! O Chando

And the Rathors are the lords of fifty two forts!"

(71 The Epic of Pabuji)

The disliking of Buro about the low clan and status shows a clear picture of prevalent caste-system in the contemporary system. Pabuji chose his chieftains from Nayak community who were Chando, Dhembho, Salji Solanki, and Harmal. These people were not liked by high class people but Pabuji chose them to be in his army. These people have never let Pabuji down. They always supported and helped him whenever it was needed.

Dialogue: A Journal Devoted to Literary Appreciation

Vol XII No 1 June 2016

Due to it, the worshippers of Pabuji are mostly from Nayak community. The reflections of kindness towards these neglected people have awakened immense love towards these folk heroes among people. Pabuji has been given a status of demi-god. Pabuji sacrificed his life to protect Deval's cows. A lady who could not protect her cattle was provided help by him. There are many temples and shrines of Pabuji in villages. People take their ill-cows to Pabuji's temple to get cured.

The other folk hero in this category is Baba Ramdev who belongs to Rajput community. Ramdev was born in Marwar (Rajasthan). He gave equal importance to everybody but specially took care of downtrodden people. He is known as 'Messiah' of the downtrodden people. Ramdev did not discriminate people on account of their caste. He lived among dalit people and always helped them. There is a popular saying regarding baba that "*baba ne miliya wo rakhiya*" which means whoever sufferer came in the shelter of Ramdev was well taken care of. He used to be surrounded by dalit people. High caste people used to pass sarcastic remarks by saying that "*Bambhiyo re ghara babo tandura bajave*" (baba plays musical instruments and sings songs at dalit people's houses). But, he never left them.

According to Shri Ramesh Chandra Gunartha as quoted in *Rajasthan Ke Pramukh Lok Devta*, Ramdevji was the first one who divided the Bhangi community of Rajasthan in five sub-castes namely Belwan, Rahtore, Hada (Chauhan) and Sisodiya. (131. Dr Pushpa Bhati)

Among many devotees, Dalibai was a dalit woman who was an ardent devotee of Ramdev. According to a myth, she was found under a tree. Ramdev brought her up. He regarded her as real sister. He along with Dalibai fought against discrimination and made people aware about it. Earlier, dalit people were not allowed to enter in temple and worship gods. So, he used to go to their houses and sing songs. According to a myth, Rupade, queen of Raja Maldev (Jodhpur) also came in support of him and started worshipping. King Maldev put all his effort to stop his wife doing so but Rupade made him believe on her powers. King Maldev started worshipping his wife. It proves the victory of downtrodden people over rich and high class people.

The affection between Ramdev and Dalibai continued till their death. Both of them took *Samadhi* (final trance) and there are some stories behind it. Dr. H.S. Chandalia has quoted a scholar in his research paper who writes three different versions of Dali bai's Samadhi incident. According to one version,

...As she grew up Dali became devout disciple of Ram Dev, a Rajput warrior who had become a saint. She used to accompany Ram Dev to sing Bhajans. One day, Dali was looking after the cattle grazing in the fields; she heard some music and singing. On inquiry, she learnt that Ram Dev had decided to take Samadhi. She rushed to the spot and insisted on taking Samadhi before Ram Dev did. They argued a lot but could not come to a conclusion. Finally Dali said that let the pit be dug. If during digging, things used by women like combs, bangles etc. appeared she would take the Samadhi first and if things used by men like conch, Jhalar etc. appeared first, Ramdev ji will take the Samadhi first. While digging bangles and comb appeared and Dali Bai took the Samadhi first while Ram Devji kept singing hymns near her Samadhi for three days and finally took Samadhi himself. (Chandalia)

Suffice it to say, the immense love between the deity and the devotee has set an example to bridge the gap between upper caste and lower class people. Therefore, Lakhs of people visit Ramdevra to show their devotedness to their lovable deity.

The caste system was prevalent in medieval period. During that time, Islam religion has spread in Rajasthan and tried to convert many Hindus. The Rajputs belong to ruler class so they had a high status in the society. The rigidity regarding caste system was prevalent in the society. John D Smith writes that "Pabuji and his associates serve as projection screens for the frustrated aspirations of a certain class of Hindus". (12 John D Smith)

The advent of Muslim rulers had already begun. During this time, dalits were not allowed to enter in the temples. So, these worst-sufferers started looking for some other alternatives. Islamic influences on these people were inevitable. So, protagonists like Ramdev understood the gravity of the situation and tried to mingle up with these people and stopped people from converting into muslims. The same information was given to *pirs* in Mecca that Islam religion may not spread in the presence of Ramdev. According to a myth, Ramdev was grazing his blue mare named *Leelan*. Five *pirs* came from Mecca to see his miracles. Ramdev welcomed the *pirs* and requested to come to his home. To show miracle, the five *pirs* rooted a twig of a tree and later that turned into five trees of Peepal which are 12kms away from Ramdevra (they still exist). Later on during dinner time, *pirs* said that we take food in our utensils which are kept in Mecca so we will not be able to take dinner with you. Ramdev made their utensils available in no time by his miracle. The five *pirs* got mesmerized on his act and considered him greater than them. Besides, they also titled him 'pir'. "*Ramta Ramdev Runicha aaya, Parcha diya jad pir kahaya.*" (130 Dr. Puspha Bhati) (Ramdev comes to Runicha (presently known as Ramdevra near Pokran in Rajasthan) and due to his miracles, he is known as *pir* (Ramsa *pir*)).

The devotees visit Ramdevra to get benefits. The devotees hope that their sufferings will be mitigated by the blessing of the deity. As Mira R Benford states that Although it is an interior process, it has an exterior dimension too-for whether the pilgrims come to Ramdevra to give thanks or to appeal for Ramdev's interventions in present problems, his coming is a public declaration of his devotion. (141)

Even if their wishes are not fulfilled, they do not lose belief in the deity. As Mira R Benford goes on saying "Even if none of the miracles of this mela happened to them, they return to mundane life more deeply confirmed in the faith of Ramdev. ... The devotee may again sing: "Baba of Ranuja, remembrance of you comes to me....." (142)

All the above-cited instances substantiate that lore of Rajasthan has always tried to bring harmony in the society. The folk heroes have never differentiated people on account of their caste. These protagonists always protected women, cows, poor and whosoever came in their shelter. Some of them died while carrying out their duties. But due to their qualities, they cannot be erased from the memories of masses and they become immortal forever. Sultan says:

Re chela aacha kartab e duniya mein karo

*Tau jane kartab ra karyan e rupe nisan
Halayora e dharma ra nishan na hile
Tau jane kavi e kare jina ri opma (Charan 247)*

(You do well in this world but always follow the righteous path. It will lead to a good life)

Even, they have also given equal space to animals and birds. Pabuji, Tejaji and many more heroes fought for protecting cattle throughout their lives. There is an instance in Bagdawat ballad, when Nevaji is asleep for six months and his mother tells him, “O Son, it is three days since our cows took water.” (Sharma 54) On hearing this, Nevaji wakes up and gets them water. Suffice it to say, the folklore of Rajasthan is replete with many examples which establish a firm foundation of equality among people irrespective of their caste and creed.

Works Cited

- Bhati, Dr. Pushpa. *Rajasthan Ke Lok Devta Avm Lok Sahitya*. Rajasthan Sahitya Sansthan: Bikaner, 2013. Print.
- Binford, Mira. “Mixing in the color of Ram of Ranuja: a folk pilgrimage to the grave of a Rajput hero –saint”. In *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions*. Ed. Bardwell L. Smith. Leiden: E.J.Brill.1976. Web. 10 May 2016.
- Chandalia, H.S. “Dalit Literature of Rajasthan: A Voice Lost in Wilderness”. Weblog Post. *Society and Literature*. Shramjeevi Wordpress.Com. July 28, 2014.Web. 20 May, 2016.
- Charan, Dr. Sohan Dan. *Rajasthani Lok Sahitya ka Sedhantik Vivechan*. Jodhpur: Rajasthan Sahitya Mandir. 1980. Print.
- Sharma, Krishan Kumar. *Bagdawat Lokgatha (A Heroic Ballad of Rajasthan)*. Udaipur: Rajasthan Vidyapeeth, 1970. Print.
- Smith, John D Smith. *The Epic of Pabuji*. Delhi: Katha, 2005. Print.