
Psycho-Analysis of Punjabi Folktales

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Abstract: The present work is based on the analysis of human psyche that is affected by caste, gender politics and other forms of discrimination prevalent in the society. Fears, aspirations, dreams and hopes are analysed in relation to their context with possible reasons for people's behaviours. Values, morals, teachings, lessons, hidden meanings are all universal and relevant in appeal and form even today as the basic characteristics of humans remain the same; despite the fact that they were created in symbolic period of time. The present research paves way for further explication of the elements of folktales inherent in other forms of literature, movies and multimedia to see the extent of dissemination and adaptation.

Keywords: Psyche, gender politics, fears aspirations, behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The most speculative, reflective and thoughtful body of current folklore theory belongs to the psychoanalytical school that memorializes Freud. This is also called the school of interpretation. Psychoanalytical readings interpret myths, fairy tales and folktales in terms of sexual symbolism and imagery. They penetrate deeply into unconscious and subconscious and unravel the hidden impulses, desires, sexual fantasies, repressed sexual wants and inadequacies of an individual. When this theory or approach is applied in analyzing folklore materials; apart from interpretation in terms of sexual symbolism, we also interpret different societal aspects through it. For example, a lower caste's person's desire to climb up the social ladder of success, a person's wish of marrying a beautiful or handsome mate, a poor person's wish of owning his own house, a rabbit's desire of becoming the ruler of the forest etc.

Freud's primary interest in folktales was a therapeutic one. He believed that by analyzing a tale that appeared in a patient's dream or a patient's favourite tale, something significant about the sources of that patient's mental problems could be discovered. The relationship between folklore and psychoanalysis was therefore understood to be mutually beneficial. This implies that folklore probably can genuinely assist in the practice of psychoanalysis and psychoanalysis too could be of possible value in elucidating the content of folklore. Therefore the task of the folklorists is to decipher the latent meanings in folk customs, beliefs, rituals and games.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Dundes [1], Freud also had a healthy intellectual interest in fairy tales. In Freud's words, "If we carefully observe from clear instances the way in which dreamers use fairy tales and the point at which they bring them in, we may perhaps also succeed in picking up hints which will help in interpreting the remaining obscurities in the fairy tales themselves." In a nutshell, the psychoanalytic study of folklore could help with the treatment of individual patients, and the clinical study of patients e.g., including their free associations to dream symbols, might illuminate the latent content of fairy tales. He leaned heavily on myths, fairytales, taboos and superstitions to support his explorations of the subconscious mind.

Dorson pours insight in his influential work *Folklore and Folklife* on how Erich Fromm has catalogued the Freudian symbols,

"wherein the male genital is symbolized by sticks, trees, umbrellas, knives, pencils, hammers, airplanes...the female genital is represented in the same manner by caves, bottles, boxes, doors, jewel cases, gardens, flowers. Dreams or fairytales about dancing, riding, climbing, and flying signify sexual enjoyment. Hair falling out symbolizes castration [2]."

It is true that both Freud and Carl Jung interpreted myths and fairytales by the method of symbolism. The only difference was that the Freudian pairs of opposites- male-female, phallus-vagina recur in Jung in metaphysical rather than nakedly sexual terms, namely, consciousness-unconsciousness, life-death, God-Satan. Both schemes of interpretation employ the key concept of the unconsciousness. As says Dorson, "By the 'collective unconscious' Jung had in mind a deeper layer behind the 'personal unconscious' recognized by Freud [2]." All men shared in the collective unconscious, whose contents Jung called Archetypes, which represented form rather than the content.

However [3] in his work, *The Pomegranate Princess and other Indian Folktales*; records and analyses Indian folktales in psychological depth using anthropological sharpness. According to him, “the savage instincts of men and women are controlled but never totally destroyed. Human beings seem to enjoy taking part in vicariously in passionate and violent activities. We don’t like to go too far, however, and so the folktale reassures us in the end that we are indeed a noble and civilised species.”

Therefore, every aspect of folktales directly or indirectly influences people as they are the microcosms of the larger social set up who influence society, its making and its functioning. One of the principles from psychoanalytic theory that may enable us to explicate this tale is projective inversion. According to Dundes [1],

‘I hate you’ becomes through projective inversion ‘You hate me.’ This allows an individual to project feelings to the object of those feelings. By this device, the individual is freed from guilt. It is not that I hate you, but rather you hate me. In sociological parlance, this has been termed ‘blaming the victim [1].’

Folktales depict and describe human emotions, feelings, desires, passions, personal experiences; social etiquette, joys and deprivation. We also see different folktales having animals, birds, trees and other inanimate objects as their protagonists. In these folktales, animal and other characters are used to surface human action and behaviour. They reflect human values, desires, aspirations, beliefs as well as human follies and mistakes. They have consciousness, passion, vices as well as virtues like humans. So the purpose of these folktales is correction of human behaviour which in turn leads to morals. This further shapes the overall laws, rules, regulations and code of conduct of the society.

The trees and snakes speak human language and voice up not only human emotions of love, care, and kindness but also the cruelties of mankind over them. As revenge they return evil for good in ‘The Bridegroom and the Serpent’ and ‘In Another Country’. These non human characters put a mirror for the readers to understand the inherent message and deep layered meaning.

Furthermore some folktales reflect the psychological underpinning of human desires and wanting by employing animal characters. This is evident in ‘The jackal who wanted to be a peacock’ in which a jackal though mistakenly drops into blue dye and gets coloured like a peacock. He likes this and starts pretending like one. On one aspect, folktale breaks the stereotypical image of a jackal; at another level this reflects an unsatisfied and incomplete life wherein one is ready to forgo his identity to adapt another, which is better and beautiful. He even concocts a plan that god has given him a boon, which only reflects his foolishness. He keeps on justifying himself and is not ready to become his real self; as he enjoys his fake self; until his dye gets washed off with water only to embarrass him. His mother’s stance that jackals can never become peacocks reflects that one cannot change one’s essential traits and characteristics whatsoever maybe. This may also point towards caste issue, wherein one is bound to live in the tribe/clan/caste one is born in. absolutely similar equation is found in the folktale ‘Friendship’, wherein Jackal tries his best to behave, dance sing like a peacock. But the jackal here revenges peacock by eating him up; as his patience are broken by mocks which peacock makes at him. These cases also reflect the eternal and natural differences between food habits, lifestyle etc. which are so much so engrained that are almost impossible to change.

Moreover, the inanimate objects act and speak, and alter the course of the story. It is their actions which creates and solves the problem so raised. The purpose of employing objects to speak is to surface the human emotions, latent desires and feelings. In the tale ‘The legs of the Myth and The legs of the Peacock’, Myna possessed ugly legs while the peacock was full of beauty. This made Myna feel inferior and she desired to get some parts of the peacock’s body. This reflects the power position which is also defined by physical appearances and appeal. This brings forth psychoanalytical concept penis-envy wherein the male parts hold superior position and are longed by the female; in order to attain position and power. And the exchange of feet between the peacock and the Myna, as the former was full of pride for his beauty; reflect the rupturing of the gender hierarchy wherein a woman is able to get on to a better position than male. Here, the divine plays the role of catalyst. Similarly the story ‘Friendship’ also portrays Peacock as a vain creature who is proud of his looks and beauty.

‘The king and She-Parrot’ story depicts such emotional bond between the king and the she-parrot. Despite being on topmost rank, the king longs for her company and talks. This reflects his loneliness and his craving for emotional gratification. Moreover, the tale doesn’t mention about his family, thereby making him completely inclined towards the parrot. This may be paralleled to a love affair or relationship, wherein matrimony doesn’t take place probably due to low status of the girl. Moreover, despite girls’ loyalty and faithfulness she is suspected upon by her lover and put to death, here by the king. This reflects lack of trust on part of the king. Had he allowed her to explain her story, the abrupt decision of killing her wouldn’t have happened. His consciousness got blurred and he killed her. But later on, he repented the most when he discovered her loyalty. Probably to lesson his guilt and convince himself that he repented, he built a

shrine in her remembrance; which turns into a pilgrimage he visited daily. This also reflects how human beings crave for emotional attachment and dependency, no matter how much material wealth they have accumulated.

Psychoanalysis also helps us to understand the psyche of women and those who are less superior in a male-centered world; wherein powerful males rule. The tale 'Bopoluchi' presents the fantasies of girls about marriage as well as their dreams and hopes. They expect to uplift their status post marriage, because the custom says so. Being affiliated with husband provides them with material gains as well as uplifted status in the society. The girl lies within her friends, that her uncle would bring dowry for her, despite being an orphan. This reflects the pressing concern on her conscious to be accepted by her social group. Her accumulation of all riches and wealth of his kidnapper at the end makes her happy of the fact that now her all dreams could become true; thus, portraying a girl's need to uplift her status, wherein money becomes the medium.

The tale 'Four Girls and a King' reflects inherent fears of the people; fear of social acceptance, fear of sending unmarried girls to king's palace, fear of the higher class which makes poor lie. Supreme importance is given to the society, its expectation and its acceptance. How human life is circumscribed by the society and how society plays multiple roles of being a critic, a judge, a commentator, one who appreciates, who questions and also who puts charges even.

The desire to uplift ones position by attaining riches is also reflected in 'The Peasant and the Moneylender', wherein the peasant being naïve goes on a pilgrimage to search god in order to receive a boon. In return he gets a magical conch shell which whenever blown shall reward him, condition being that its secret has to be maintained. But being naïve, he shares the secret with the moneylender who settles no less than receiving the double benefits compared to the peasant. This reflects that the upper class cannot accept the lower class excelling beyond them or even equaling them. The tale satirizes and ridicules the hypocrisy and selfishness of the society the peasant too accepts the status quo that he cannot exceed from the moneylender in his status. This reflects the ardent need and aspiration of the poor peasant to uplift him within the society. The tale contests this status hierarchy by punishing the money lender by blinding his both eyes and later making him lose his life by falling in the well. This way peasant -the oppressed revenged his oppressor and dismantled the supremacy of the later. This marked class difference is ruptured and tables are turned with a clear message at the end.

In the tale 'The Bear's Bargain' the old woodman and wife's desire of getting pears which grow in a rich man's garden, represent those luxuries of life which all are not blessed with. The pear becomes the symbol for it. They have always longed and yearned for the pears, but at the end the fate fulfils their wishes through a bear. This also reflects how the downtrodden are able to outwit their circumstances and even fate helps them in this. This also reflects that possessions are all matter of luck which should not be taken pride of.

We see stereotypical representation of king in 'Pomegranate Princess' in the words "Kings are as unpredictable as rivers" Bedi [4] this reflects the moodiness of the one in power who can act according to his will.

The tale 'Brothers' portray stereotyped step mother who is jealous of her husband's sons; treats them unkindly and gives them salt less bitter food to eat. Also, the step mother's advances towards the son when rejected, lead to her hatred towards them. The tale also confirms to the established characteristic of a stepmother, which forces the sons to leave the house. This points to the aspect that if the desires are hidden and suppressed for a long time, and are not shared with others; it may lead to mental suffocation and choking of mind. Revenge may here symbolize the retardation of mind, or memory lapse or sinking of a person into depression. It may also mean that suppression of these latent desires and emotions may result into their sudden eruption may be at wrong or undesired time, resulting into a disaster. This refers to Freud's famous theory about 'slip of tongue'; wherein he believes that whatever comes out of one's mouth is there in mind or sub-conscious mind. In his book *The Psychopathology of Everyday life* he deemed these slips notable in revealing the unconscious beliefs, wishes, thoughts and motives.

Much of what we read in Punjabi folk tales is echoed by strands that drift across the individual consciousness much as they do across the collective. The archetypal lost child, the hero, the abandoned beloved, the trickster, the mentor are all too familiar and serve only to reiterate the universality of folklore and the folktale.

Thus, we may conclude that the puzzling motifs of the Punjabi folktales cannot be completely understood and made sense of by referring to approaches other than psychoanalysis. And it is more precisely the psychoanalytic approach which allows the interpreter of folklore to make sense of apparent non-sense.

DISCUSSIONS

Folktales have an unmatched and indispensable importance in Punjabi Society. Their contribution in society, such as towards development of language, proverbs, idioms, sayings, slogans etc; importance for children; as source of entertainment; as value bearing and social critique; are continued and perpetuated through its dissemination into varied forms.

Moreover, the language used by the raconteur in oral recording and the selective colloquial words used in the collected versions brings out the difference within the spoken and written forms. Furthermore, when the translation of the recorded folktale is compared with the available written versions, it raises the question of faithfulness of recording and translating; as the available folktales seemed to have passed down the stages of editing, sophistication and alteration before being published. Thus, the natural ideas and the natural way of telling are lost in this and a gap is created. Though lack of technology of recording in earlier days can be considered a factor for refined language of folktales but the present modern day recorders cannot be forgiven for not abiding by it. But for the perpetuation of these tales and propagation of the morals, values and embedded teachings to future generations across the barriers of language, race, region etc; these tales need to be translated and spread across via different mediums and measures. This is important as in order to be transferred to future generations, read by the children today and in times to come and maintenance of their existence in today's society, folktales need to be translated. Translation is though done at the cost of the meaning inherent in them. The interesting and complicating aspect is that the varied kind of mediums available today, such as internet, recording, story books, audio books etc; both help in propagation, as well as become the cause of distortion of the authenticity of these tales. Thus we must accept that perpetuation survives at the cost of faithfulness.

Apart from these, folktales contribute towards development of language and they also reflect the values which Punjabi society erects on and gives importance to. One of the significant traits reflected is the significance given to the promises, commitments and word of mouth. Once promised the characters do any extreme thing to fulfil their words, reflects the importance given to one's words in Punjabi milieu.

Punjabi folktales focus on community and the people of that community. But the place of origin of these tales also holds a great deal of significance and relevance as the tales are originated, produced, developed and passed here. The place and space forms the atmosphere, ambience and the context of the folktales, such as the private and the public space of narration, like under the tree; besides fire; in the kitchen; near the well, in the farms etc. Also, some landmarks and trees are given special mention which actually relates the tale to that specific locale. The mention of Plum tree, Sisum tree, the stream and Pipal tree bring in the geographical location.

The animal characters so employed enable the readers to observe the situation from a distance and look out for those follies, shortcomings, negativities which may otherwise be ignored by human beings. The virtues which people and the society esteem; the follies they ridicule; the vices they condemn are all to be seen in the animal characters. The motive is more of psychological as human beings resist any advice; howsoever valuable it may be to them if given directly. But the indirect advice given through the medium of the tales doesn't affront their ego. This is how non-human characters have been put in the service of human beings to spread intellectual messages and morals. These non-human characters provide mirror to reflect ourselves. They surface human emotions, fears, aspirations, dreams and the like feelings to resemble human life as closely as possible. They are endowed with human qualities like consciousness, passion, vices and virtues. They know how to differentiate between right and wrong; they make judgments; and they have passionate feelings like love, hatred, jealousy etc like humans. The tool to convey all this is human speech.

Another significant trait is folktales are social dreams and the nature of these dreams is to partly reinforce the existent values and beliefs or to expose and resist them. Surfacing of human desires is part of social dream and social consciousness which are represented by specific dream symbols. Punjabi society portrays clear demarcations of caste and class difference. Hierarchies between rich and poor have always existed with contrasting lifestyles and possessions. They also reflect the stereotypical roles of women and men and their hierarchical relationship. Some tales may reflect the prevalent hierarchy while others portray women as the champion and a rational creature who saves the sanity of the situation. The social expectations are explicitly portrayed wherein it is expected from a husband to provide a comfortable life to his wife and earn enough to make a living. This reflects that even men undergo oppression and demarcation and have to suffer because of societal standards.

Thus, it can be said that Punjabi folktales reflect such societal setup wherein men are happy to be led by women as they can take the charge and command better. Women become the reason of success, survival and happiness as well as source of strength and protection of their male counterparts. They use their wit and presence of mind to save the sanity of the degraded and threatening situations. Though male protagonists hold important and superior positions, such as kings, suitors, prince, husbands, but the female characters (even of lower caste/class) are shown to equal them and even succeed them with their cleverness and intelligence. They in turn aid males to progress further in their endeavors towards success

and also save their lives from danger. Thus, tales challenge the stereotypical feminine roles for women and provides us with brave women characters that are mixture of beauty, strength and brains. Psychoanalysis helps us to understand the psyche of women and those who are less superior in a male-centered world; wherein powerful males rule. Being affiliated with the superior provides them with material gains as well as uplifted status in the society.

On top of that folktales are constituent of the literary as well as the cultural ancestry and tradition. Their nature is similar to the migrating birds that have no barriers in their flight. It is people's rootedness to their own geographical environment which is reflected in description of the varied native places the folktales. The tales not only represent the political, geographical and religious lineage, but the whole repertoire of a region. Being the narrative expression of the folk mind, a creative release of the unconscious folktales is a potent force in the development of a culture. Punjabi folktales reflect that journeying through different eras and structures by the blasts of the changing times; they have deepened their relationship with the society. Representing indigenous symbols and metaphors, traditional aspects, cultural patterns, geographical landmarks and motifs; they respond to the real life of Punjabi people. At some points they reflect the social norms, stereotypes, caste system, and gender hierarchy; while at other moments they contest and challenge them with diverse and replicating plots, characters, dialogues and incidents. Moreover, the fast paced narratives endowed with rich earthy humour is a distinctively Punjabi characteristic. Travelled from the past, these tales still hold indispensable importance of correcting, educating, moralizing and entertaining the society with imaginative tales yet so close to the reality. Of the many entertaining tales, some even make use of the classic technique 'story within story' technique.

At many a times, abstract concepts seldom feature in tales, where the characters as well as the plots are explicit to the point of being over simplistic. But behind this simplicity lie great many layers of interpretation. Thus social aspects are visible in its form and content in the folk tales. They are in fact index of our social changes. Man made values dominate in the Punjabi folktales, as folktales are also man's production. And social aspect of life dominates and shapes political and religious working of the society. The characters, dramatic presentations of plot, hidden, unconcealed and unrevealed motives, meanings and agendas; artistic propagation of same ideas for the enrichment of life experiences, economy of words make folktales storehouse of entertainment, wisdom and edification. Interestingly, it is on the stage of Punjabi folk tales that we find members of the lower class treated as heroes in addition to the traditional heroes belonging to the rich class. One thing is definite; the hero may belong to any class, but he should have extra ordinary virtues such as ability, bravery and adventurous spirit and these qualities he exhibits in a dramatic form and thus is able to win over sympathy and admiration.

CONCLUSION

Human beings crave for emotional attachment and dependency, no matter how much material wealth one has accumulated. These are reflected implicitly within the tales through different characters. 'The king and She-Parrot' story depicts such emotional bond between the king and the she-parrot. Despite being on topmost rank, the king longs for her company and talks. This reflects his loneliness and his craving for emotional gratification. Moreover, the tale doesn't mention about his family, thereby making him completely inclined towards the parrot. This may be paralleled to a love affair or relationship, wherein matrimony doesn't take place probably due to low status of the girl. Moreover, despite girls' loyalty and faithfulness she is suspected upon by her lover and put to death, here by the king. This reflects lack of trust on part of the king. Had he allowed her to explain her story, the abrupt decision of killing her wouldn't have happened. His consciousness got blurred and he killed her. But later on, he repented the most when he discovered her loyalty. Probably to lesson his guilt and convince himself that he repented, he built a shrine in her remembrance; which turns into a pilgrimage he visited daily. Folktales have contributed in diverse ways towards society. They have apart from transmitting knowledge, morals and values; have also provided primal matter for most of the eminent literature in present times; be it epic poetry, short stories or the novels. In fact, the narrative literature globally has been founded on folk stories. Their values, morals, teachings, lessons, hidden meanings are all universal and relevant in appeal and form even today as the basic characteristics of humans remain the same; despite the fact that they were created in symbolic period of time. The present research paves way for further explication of the elements of folktales inherent in other forms of literature, movies and multimedia to see the extent of dissemination and adaptation.

Though the true essence may remain the same, but how the demands of modern world have transformed their structure. Also, their journey from their origin, dissemination and perpetuation can be traced and analysed. The question of version can also be researched upon along with it.

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