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**01**

# Oral Legacy: Indian Culture and Tradition through Folklore Journal

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**Abstract**

*The 'Folklore' Journal edited by Shankar Sen Gupta (1956- 1991) forms the primary historic source of this research paper. A variety of cultural traditions were highlighted by this Journal during post independent India using popular folksongs, riddles, songs and proverbs. Most of the items in folk literature have come down to us mainly through oral tradition. The folk literature crosses the boundaries of the different states. The focus of this article is recognizing the past as evinced by Folklore thus enriching our wisdom and channelizing the truly interdisciplinary experience of our rich human intangible resource. This resource in true sense is fertile for one who aspires to collect, edit and interpret it on sound basis. Proverbs in any language are the most interesting form of folk literature as they reflect the wisdom and culture of the people who speak that language. Proverbs indicate actual behavior through the ages and are regarded as the property of the masses. Proverbs, riddles and folk songs based on epics, society, education and on one's profession thus signify the deeply implanted relation between the people of that country and their culture. Attempt has been made to study the culture, history, psychology, ecological conditions, economy and our close association with nature through the Folk Literature.*

***Keywords**: Folklore, Intangible, Indian, Culture, Tradition*

## Introduction

Folklore Journal gives us an idea of culture, history, psychology, ecological conditions, economy and our close association with nature. It invariably connects us to the ceremonies, rites and rituals of people trying to create favorable situations for a bumper crop, praying for trouble free agriculture.

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An attempt has been made to portray information related to different cultural traditions highlighted by this Journal during post independent India using popular proverbs, folksongs, and riddles. These items of folk literature have come down to us mainly through oral tradition. The focus of this article is recognizing the past as evinced by Folklore thus enriching our wisdom and channelizing the truly interdisciplinary experience of our rich human intangible resource. A Proverb, a thread of folklore, is an orally transmitted expression of crystalized form of human experience. They are ready reckoner of wit and wisdom. Proverbs like other branches of folklore are regarded as the property of the mass.[1] Proverbs are the encyclopedia of social philosophy, social judgments, and the ways of livelihood of the people.

**The Origin and Tradition of Proverbs**:

Though it is difficult to say when and by whom the proverbs were created, yet certain folklorists believe that during Panini, a great grammarian era, these were created. Proverbs were created only after the creation of folk-songs and folk stories. The early men first expressed his idea through songs, then in sayings and then the idea of proverbs came into his mind. Generally, proverbs are very small or short in size, within one or two

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lines or four lines. One proverb concluded its whole idea.

*Karmar nangal bhut jute*
*Luck +Ploughshare= Spirit*

Which means the ploughshare of a lucky man is used in the field even by the spirit

Farmers depend on bullox or buffalos, so cattle should be purchased after careful search otherwise the purchaser will be cheated.

To identify a good cattle certain traits are found in the proverbs for example,

"*Jeve dekhbu Samarkana,*
*Hitei debu Kanar Suna,"*

Means the bull having the ears like Samar's (deer, which are strait and Sensitive) should be purchased without any greed, it should be purchased even in exchange of gold ornaments.

Also the time of purchasing cattle one should follow: -

*Balad(Bull) ghinba chhata tani*
*Phaudh ghinib pandhi-madi*

Means the bull should be purchased during rainy season or in winter.[2]

Proverbs in any language are the most interesting form of folk literature as they reflect the wisdom and culture of the people who speak that language Bacon says they are 'edged tools of speech' The Statement like; 'As the people so the proverb' and 'As the country so the Proverb' This signifies the deeply implanted relation between the people of that country and their culture

In T T Munger's words "Proverbs are the condensed wisdom of long experience, in brief epigrammatic form, easily remembered and always ready for use, they are alphabets of morals and are commonly prudential watch words, and warnings and so lean towards a selfish view of life."[3] Kannada proverbs are the clear expressions of the richness of Kannada language, culture and customs and beliefs of the Kannaris.

**Proverbs based on Epics**

*Ankeyillada Kapi Lanka Suttitu* means wanton monkey burnt Lanka (Example from Ramayana)

*Antu intu Kunti Makkalige rajyavilla* means Kunti's sons however gained no kingdom.

Bhishma pratigya[4] means one who sticks to vows

**Proverbs of Literary Value (Simile and refined language used)**

"*Honavillada Manusya rekke illada Pakshiyante"* (Pennyless man is like a wingless bird)

Comparison of a moneyless man to a wingless bird.

**Proverbs on Society, Education**

*Nayi adoru tayamma doddolu***"**(Great is the mother tough is she dog like)

"*Hennu illada balu balalla*
*Huva ilada totu totavalla*"

Life without a woman is barren:

Garden without a flower is useless.

To maintain friendship intact one should neither be a borrower or a lender.

"*Gontu Paya, Nantu Poya*"

Lost the wealth, lost the friendship

**Proverbs on Profession**

'*Akkasale akkana cinnadallu bida*' means Goldsmith does not spare even his sister's gold. Orissa Proverb "Thak Sunari Luhara Basi" also conveys that Goldsmith never misses an opportunity to hide some gold even from his mother. The Luhara (Black Smith) has the habit to keep the works pending unless somebody forces him to do things right in time.[5]

**Proverbs on Religion**

"*Namaz chudvane gae the roza gale pade*."

Popular proverb in Bengali[6] '*Baro Mase Tero Parban*', indicates numerous religious festivities which is a characteristic feature of Bengal. Proverbs are an ornament to any language and are echoes of experience[7] The Badagas[8] intersperse their conversation with many proverbs and quite a number of them are directed towards the womenfolk of the community. Murders in the history of Badagas are almost unknown and so are the cases of Matricide.

An insult to one's mother in the following proverb *'Avveya Koddama aru thinguvagille'*. Meaning one who commits matricide will be no more in 6 months. An old woman is a necessity at home, *Olegondu Kolli, manegondu muduki* means an old woman at home and fuel in the fire both are homely needs indeed. Thus, the respect and reverence with which a mother and an old woman are esteemed are, beyond doubt, too high.

Some proverbs are developed from the agricultural activities of the Keralites They deal with the peasant life example.,

*Akale Uzhuthu Pakale Poruka* means finish ploughing the distant field and return early

*Ari Vidhachaal nellaavilla* means no use of sowing rice instead of paddy

*Kondam Vittaalum Varambu Vilkarudhu* means you may dispose of the field but not its boundary[9]

This field of intangible resources is fertile for one who aspires to collect, edit and interpret it on sound basis. Proverbs also indicate actual behavior through the ages. Proverbs like other branches of folklore are regarded as the property of the masses. Kok-Borok (Tripuri) proverbs will also be covered example 'Firewood counts upon bamboo and similarly bamboo on firewood', Which means Humans live in a society so he or she has to depend on others.[10]

Though the word family planning is prevalent now- days the importance of it was felt by the Tribals long long ago: - *Milok sok-chi chapungia Milak sok chiban cha chagia* meaning one strong branch of gourd yields tenfold than ten weak branches. Sometimes interstate language impact seen on proverbs for example Bengali words, riddles, proverbs adapted by the Tripura people example *Sungnai Kwbang Ongkhlai naila Thogia* meaning the jute leaf could not be boiled if cooks are many'. This is synonym with too many cooks spoil the Brooth. When there is a lack of unity seen within the community the proverb used is *Jongla Palio Kai*, meaning frogs never stay in a weighing balance.

The people in olden times expressed themselves in the form of proverbs and sayings which through generations have come down to us. These proverbs and sayings have stood the test of time and connote truths of perennial nature. It also indicates actual experience and observation of human behavior through the ages, example the saying 'He that hires the horse must ride before' meaning Try before you Trust. Also, the saying the best horse needs breaking and the aptest child needs teaching. Corn him well, he'll work better.

**Folk Songs**

S. S Shashi, Folk Songs and Dances of the Gadd's[11] Brahmaur, a village of Chamba District in Himachal Pradesh, the abode of Gaddis, the girls here are deeply in love with the hills of chamba

Gori is deeply in love
With the hills of Chamba
In every home is a bindlu
In every home a tiklu
In every home are calm brides
Gori is deeply in love
With the hills of chamba……

In a Case study of Bauri Marriage[12]

Marriage of one Gopal so women sing

"*Khulo khulo, Jalme thakurun,*
*Kunchir Kapat kholo;*
*Gopaler ma esechhe*
*Tomar Puja Korte*

which means Oh goddess of water, please open up your door and give us water, Gopal's mother has come to propitiate you".

And then they recite "*Tuku Tuky jol da, O*
*Jalma-thakurun, Khano na bilabo*
*Ghoti vore jol dao*
*Chheler biyadebo* which means" Oh mother, do favour and supply us enough water as the marriage ceremony of Gopal will be held today.

Most of the Tamil Songs and ballads pertain to the day-to day activities of the common people. Some of the popular ballads are Nalla Thangal and Alli Arsani, providing entertainment for the rural folk, and they have been the theme of motion pictures also. Polygamous marriages were once allowed in Tamilnadu. This approved practice is discouraged by the folk saying

*Mudal Manaivi daram, yirandam manaivi*
*Barama, Munram Manaivi ghuram*
First wife is a partner, the second a burden
And the third a nuisance (ugly)

Noted regional folklorist of India N Vanamamalai[13] wrote women in Tamil Folklore.[14] The bulk of Tamil Folksongs especially the lullaby, Thalathu-song of the mother sung to send the child to sleep, the dirge and lovesongs are creations of women. T Gopal Singh writes in folk songs of Mysore[15] Farmer sings his innate love for the soil he lives on and his latent hope in it 'I lay faith in the soil and I live on the soil
O! brother soil shall be gold tomorrow
And the soil is priceless.'

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By virtue of a long coast-line with several anchorages, and by its proximity to the commercial and cultural routes to East Africa and different Asian countries, Gujarat has been exposed to the movements of peoples and had very extensive maritime activities. This has given us songs peculiar to sailors on Gujarat coast, known as "*Abavami*."[16]

The immense communication and dimension power in songs is seen below A Gujarati verse

*"ji re vadala tara sagadiyara pan Panere maro jaga mohiyo Jire bhamaro re bhamradi am bhane, Jire samadar peli ter maro viro to javo bhamara notare"* which means Bee (Bharamara) go quick to give invitation to my brother staying beyond the seas to attend the marriage ceremony of my son. This shows the invitation going beyond seas to a brother for a marriage in sister's family.

The Folk songs of Punjab are the pictures of living men. They knit the people of Punjab together. These songs are like Pebbles, which are rough stones at one stage. But the friction given by each generation made them smooth and simple in their shape. They can be easily understood. Though they are dressed in simple language, yet that have a deep philosophy behind them.

The folk songs of Punjab are like a tree in the jungle with its roots thrust deep into the past. But the tree is ever- green. Every time when one goes near the tree, one sees new branches, new leaves, new flowers and new fruits. Through the folk songs of Punjab, the Punjabis- the living people – speak.

Punjabi song based on the problems of daily life. Below shows the hardships of the life of peasants. "*Jarcha Teri Nu Buri Hal Chhatke Chari Nujana*." Means, I find not rest even after days hard toil in the field as I am to chop straws on my return in the evening.[17]

In the article 'Some Specimen of Ploughman Songs of Odisha[18] goes like this

Oh, Bullock! Move and move on do not worry
After some time, you would be free,
'Sitay Thakurani (Goddess Sita) would serve you, green grass and stream water

Political concepts are described in some Rajasthani folk songs. Content of the following song below is an idea of electing a representative in the Assembly Municipality or the kind body:

"Workers of Congress are without nose
We will wear black dupatta,
We will give our vote to Maharani."

This song reveals how feudal lords still hold an influential status in folk society.[19] G.L Mathur writes in 'Revolutionary Flavour in the Folksongs[20] folk songs breathes the very essence of the people's feelings. The bard of the masses goes ahead undaunted without any let or hindrance.

During the second world war, the English people, all of a sudden, involved India in the orbit of a hot war- so a folk song below indicates the mentality of the masses.

"*Angrez mat kar kagad kalo re*
*Raaj Karela Germanwala re."*

i.e. "Ye Englishmen do not blacken the papers. For, it is the Germans, who are destined to rule here.

Folk songs have severely reprimanded those black sheep who either compromised before the British forces for fear of death. Such cowards have been brought under heavy fire in these songs. The theme of Idleness and Flowers discussed in Bhojpuri folksongs by Dr. Satyadeva Ojha and Shri Ganesh Chubey.

K Subramaniam wrote on Women in the Folk sayings of Tamilnadu.[21] A woman as a mother is responsible for her children, in the course of Socialization the young consciously or unconsciously imitates its elders, naturally the young especially the daughters take to their mothers as their model. The attitude, ideas and habits of the daughter to a large extent reflect the mothers. Hence comes the saying that the daughter is like the mother even as the Sari is dependent on the quality of the Yarn.

Another saying *Tays Pol Pillai Nulaipol Selai* meaning as the mother is the daughter, as is the yarn so is the Sari. Songs of specific community, the Kallar or Vellalur (from Kallar Nadu[22] near Madurai District). The British steadily undermined Kallar Society, outlawing the collection of Kaval fees[23] which the Kaller got in exchange for watching over livestock and the village.Folk songs are dynamic and flexible in

their natural- They are willing to change along the way of travel according to the needs of creativeness of any particular singer or group.[24]

**Dissolving Boundaries**

The folk literature also crosses the boundaries of the state as depicted in this very popular Garba song "*Mendi to vavi malave ne ano rang gayo Gujarat re mendi rang lagyo*"- meaning a Mendi (Heena Plant) is planted and grown in Malve region while its colour reached Gujarat". So, these lines could be interpreted as the colour of Mendi or the colour of costumes, customs, manners or the colour of culture? Or it is the trade between Malva and Gujarat.

The story of Kannaki is most prevalent in Tamil Nadu but how it makes space in kerala is covered by Chummar Choondal, 'The Kannaki Legend in Kerala'[25] while describing the story of Kovalan and Kannavi from Cholanadu., Kannaki ran to the goldsmith in the end of the storyand entered Kerala and committed suicide in Western Ghats….and the proof is the song like *Mudippurai Thottam* (sung in Northern Kerala depict kannaki incident)

**Riddles**

Riddles have got universal existence. These are literary forms, the origin of which may be traced to Vedic literature. Aristotle indicated the origin of the riddles, these were prevalent in Greece, Arab and Persia.

Vatsayana described riddle as one fort of 64 arts, the below riddle is from Himachali Dialect from Mandiyali region[26]

"*Mao tedh- matedhi, putar Gol-matola* (answer is Pumpkin and its creeper) The creeper of Pumpkin is zig-zag and curved but its fruit pumpkin is ball like round.

*Lag Lag karo ta lagdeni mat mat*[27] *karo ta lag jahen* (means lips)

By uttering 'Lag Lag lips do not touch each other but while saying mat-mat they at once meet

Thus, the riddle teller explores the folk mind and their sense of pronunciation.

**Conclusion**

Folklore constitutes a significant segment of India's intangible cultural heritage, encapsulating the traditions, beliefs, and practices of communities across time. Through proverbs, riddles, folksongs, and ballads, the collective wisdom and lived experiences of people have been preserved and transmitted orally through generations. These expressions are not merely linguistic embellishments; they reflect social norms, moral values, and practical observations rooted in everyday life. Proverbs, often termed as "the condensed wisdom of ages," provide insight into human behaviour, occupational practices, and ethical frameworks, while riddles and songs demonstrate creativity and linguistic richness.

The diversity of Indian folklore illustrates the deep interconnection between culture and ecology, as seen in agricultural references, seasonal rituals, and nature-oriented symbolism. Folk expressions also embody the socio-economic realities of different periods, addressing themes such as marriage customs, gender roles, professional ethics, and political consciousness. For instance, proverbs on family and kinship highlight the role of women and the ideals of socialization, while folksongs narrate stories of love, struggle, and resistance.

Moreover, the dynamic nature of folklore allows it to evolve with time while retaining its traditional essence. Regional variations in language and style underscore India's linguistic diversity, yet the core themes of unity, morality, and survival resonate universally. Folklore serves as a bridge connecting the past with the present, offering an interdisciplinary field of study that integrates history, sociology, literature, and anthropology. In essence, folklore is not only a repository of cultural heritage but also a living tradition that continues to influence and inspire contemporary society. Preserving, documenting, and interpreting this vast reservoir of oral literature is imperative to safeguard the cultural continuity of future generations, ensuring that these invaluable expressions remain relevant and accessible in a rapidly changing world.

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