

NIMBUS OF NATURE AND NAARI IN FOLK OF MITHILA

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The region of 'Mithila' owes its name from 'Maithili' the daughter of king Janak who is not only a source of inspiration for the region but also an epitome of feminine virtues, sanctity and qualities. The region associated with her birthplace is Sitamarhi (Bihar) and Janakpur (Nepal). In 1816, after the Sugauli agreement though the region got divided and half of the area went under the administration of Nepal but the regions still have close cultural affinity. The region is blessed with rivers and in the land of Mithila all the rivers bear significance of matriarchal values. The region enjoys immense greenery and the chief livelihood of the people living here is agriculture since ages. Sowing, irrigating, winnowing, husking and then comes 'labaan' i.e. getting the fruit of toil in the form of new crop. In such a region, there is a varied and vibrant culture of rich cultural heritage. As the grandeur of any cultural heritage is reflected in the life of community which is a collective expression of the mass living together for the development of the community. This expression of community is an incessant process of evolution, creation and experimentation found in most pure and natural form in folk songs and folk dramas.

Folk songs are often condensed and impersonal experience of communities expressed as songs of folks, sung through generations. In Maithili folk songs, too 'The Divine Mother-Father' 'Parvati-Shiv' as well as 'Ram Sita' couple pair has been cast in different light and tone. Here descriptions are entirely different from the traditional scripture details. In most of these folk songs even Sita and Parvati have been constructed and cast into experience of pain and potential a feminine body experiences. In many folk songs 'Parvati' has been depicted as daughter of mountainous region doing household courses, solving quarrels among her family members and in the meantime her husband comes, who is angry as she works whole day long to make her household happy and is left with no time for him. Feminine imagination is seen here penetrating into the deeper realms of functioning of household worries where husband may not be earning enough and the lady of the house has still to ensure that all the members of family are fed or not, including helpers. Here we get a glimpse of every Indian female heart where they are seen worrying and praying for well being and future of their loved ones irrespective of their disability, indolence or idleness. This is imparted to them by dint of their ideal 'Parvati', 'the divine mother'.

*Mahadev brought some rice from here and there,
Have spread it on tiger's hide, bull ate it as it was untied
Left water boiling, to fetch for some rice
What type of people are there of town,
Who can't yield even some rice
Put off the boiling water, feeling low in heart
When Mahadev will come in the evening,*

What will I provide him?

The land of Mithila boasts of getting ideal bridegroom in the form of 'Ram', the folk songs still celebrates every new bridegroom in his image. Still strong belief remains firm here that whatever fame and glory the king of Ayodhya enjoys on this planet is owing to the great virtue and sanctity of daughter of Janak 'Maithili'. The region where king Janak rule is being referred as maternal home of all human beings irrespective of their

caste and creed as Sita is said to be the daughter of Mother Earth, hence has glory of hosting 'Mother's Home' of whole humanity.

As the human unconscious is undeterminable, ungovernable and illimitable, the famous feminist critic Julia Kristeva suggests a stage where there is non-linguistic interaction in a language of tears, laughter, touch, flesh, blood and milk. A language that is incoherent, pluralistic and multi faceted and in this light we are able to view the significance of folk songs to a great extent which are more near to the labors, milk, blood, tears, flesh of female experience and hence we find them replete with more humanistic approach quite contrary to the established literary canon. In the epic *Ramayana* Sita is being brought to forest by her brother in law Laxman quite opposed to the prevalent folk songs view of Mithila. The instances and happenings are quite in different light as '*The Sita*' of folk songs comes to the forest on her feet and in the process, she undergoes labor pain. In the meantime, inhabitants of forest, various tribal women give their support and the birth of the child takes place. As Sita is supposed to be the daughter of *The Mother Earth*, so the whole earth abounds in greenery when she gives birth to her child. Suddenly many thoughts start crossing her mind even in such condition of childbirth. Though in her hearts of hearts she wants to enjoy the traditional celebration conferred to a new mother of sitting besides her husband in auspicious yellow attire carrying her child in her lap, where her mother in law would have been performing the traditional ritual named *Chumaun*; which is not getting to be fulfilled in spite of being an emperor's wife.

From so many days, the earth was like a desert but now greenery abounds her. As the daughter Sita bearing child in her womb came here filling hearts with pleasure

*Oh my child! Who is going to Ayodhya
To break this news to Ram?
Hanumaan may go there to make him know
Was my heart's desire to wear that yellow attire
And take my new born in lap
To sit besides Ram and Kaushalya queen
Would have done the Chumaun*

It is quite interesting to see the passive resistivity of Sita in the folk songs sung which is surely the voice of feminine masses since ages, which are nowhere seen in traditional scriptures. As when the barber of the forest goes to Ayodhya and takes the letter of Sita, he shows it to queen Kaushalya and brother in law Laxman but not to Ram. As there is heart touching description of Ram being sad and nostalgic after hearing this news and his gaze falls on the Ring (Mudrika) which he has given to Hanuman when he went in search for Sita. He becomes contemplative and asks her to come again to Ayodhya, forgetting his vices. But Sita on hearing all this is unable to forget her disgrace and dishonor and regrets the time when she thought of sending the letter.

*Saw ring of the hand smiling
Should come to Awadhpur forgetting everything
What ill-fated moment compelled me to write the letter?
How can I return to Awadhpur forgetting everything?*

Mostly since folk songs are created and sung by women in communities, so they have been drenched with feelings of feminine heart and experiences having extensive coverage and depth of feminine life. Such songs often surprise us by their variety and vivacity of exact experiences. There is an instance where there is mention of a feeling of a female undergoing spasms of child birth the very first time and says

*My body is trembling like a Gehuan (poisonous snake, Cobra)
My hair has been splashing the floor
All the eight organs of mine are speaking in pain
Waves have been rising from my waist.*

Manifestation of Divine is found in birth of a child and life of a female experiences this when she touches the pinnacle of motherhood. Such songs even touch such exquisite moments with simplicity of their experience. A thinly lady going through spasms of child birth is compelled to think that why on the earth her father has married her and sent her to other's house? If he had not, she would not have been going through such a deadly pain. Nevertheless, after she gets to feel her child in her lap, she feels indebted to her father for giving her opportunity to experience such moment.

*"Lady does not eat a fig
How is she going to bear the pain
Why did my father marry me and sent me to other's house?
It would have been better if I would have remained unmarried,
Would not have known the pain
Whole evening has passed, midnight passed and it's the early dawn
This sunrise brought my child and pleasure floats in hearts
Thanks to my father who has married and sent me to other's house
If would have been unmarried how could have got my child"*

In the traditional Indian culture for families, the ideal couples are the couple of 'Divine Mother Father' and 'Ram Sita'. They are not only perfect pair but also ideal lovers. In families, every bit of activity hovers around mother and she becomes centre of all activities. She is the embodiment of all virtues and sacrifices. Once she came as a newly wedded bride, going through unbearable pain gives birth to her children and then through uncountable sacrifices runs the family day and night incessantly. Even in her later days, she guides the family in the light of her experience.

Folk dramas are often said to contain the core mentality and consciousness of the masses. They are said to refract the reflection of the common people's lives and are generally far from opulence. They are too close to the common people and generally, give vent to the customs and daily life activities of the region. Generally folk dramas are organized on the occasion of marriage ceremonies, festivals and traditional ceremonies and thus provide an opportunity for the village folk of exploring their social structures. Also though their characters present some ancient legend or story but they reflect the present contemporary working scenario more often. They essentially contain elements of livelihood, thought-structures of the society, beliefs and superstitions, philosophy behind life and ideal of cultural lifestyle of the region, as folk dramas are region specific. As life is the strange mixture of happiness-sorrow, qualities-failings, attachment-detachment, experience-satisfaction...these folk dramas reinvigorate these potions of life from time to time. Though, contemporarily major types present are--*Bhaktibhavashrit Leelanatya*, i.e. dramas dealing with legendary century iconoclast personality generally spiritual gods who have incarnated themselves for the emancipation of mankind, Comedy Folk Drama called 'Biptak Acting' in local dialect where bodily gestures, costumes are borne by 'Falstaffian clown' to make the public fill with laughter and other category is the love legend and beauty songs which chiefly lies in songs of '*Jat-Jatin*'. In the dramas where dance and music is chief exponent are *Ramleela, Ramkheela, Krishnaleela, Vidapad, Rasleela*. In the dramas having religious and historical importance are *Raja Salhes, Dholakumar, Sati Bihula, Gopichand, Harilata, Ghughli Ghatma, Shankho Ojha, Shubhadra Haran, Rukmani Haran, Katika kumar* etc.

The region of Mithila has rich tradition of folk dramas which are performed only by female folk and whose audiences are strictly women too. It is prohibited in the society that men folk should derive entertainment by them. These folk dances are storehouse of feminine experiences, their heart's desire, happiness, sorrow, tears, pain and their spontaneous overflow. These are mostly performed without much opulence with simplicity in open fields, besides ponds and wells, behind temples, orchard, courtyard etc. Chief among them are *Jat-Jatin, Sama chakeba, Domkach, Naina jogin, Ghaskatti, Jhijhia, Jhumari*.

Jat-Jatin is only performed by womenfolk as well as watched by them on the moonlit night days of May-June and October-November. *Jat-Jatin* is verse drama in questionnaire form where actors are women, who convey the experiences of both male as well as female. Both parts have got their respective circles where they act their parts together with their companions. *Jat-Jatin* drama contains all the curious as well as frustrated expressions of a conjugal married life. Activities of domestic household together with the implacability on both sides, issues of discussion are represented with exquisite subtle details in very entertaining way. Even the issues of youth, aggressive behavior of male counterpart, headstrong attitudes, and psychological mindset of partners are presented in spontaneous ways. For the female folk it's not only drama since song, dance, and questionnaire verses are only incentives in the journey of life which is eternal symbol of skepticism of life together with its vigor and questions the various aspects of conjugal married life. Technically *Jat-Jatin* drama cannot be called a questionnaire format but a drama having episodic phases together with acting details. Without any theatrical equipment the *Jat Jatin* traditional play overcomes all requirements through the inherent organic form of the play which is reflected by the question answer form of the drama and unexpected outcomes and cycle of events emphasis lies on the emotive side and curious aspect lying beside form of the play. *Jat-Jatin* play begins with the prospective marriage of the two and soon the idealism begins to face the stark realities of life. As *Jat* being a male wants to see her female in the century old stereotype made by the society. He wants a traditional ideal woman figure depicted as ideal lover since ages but the *Jatin* wants to be treated as equal and in the house of her father she was used to a life having freedom inherent in it. However, here the conflict arises as the male counterpart begins to enter the role as an aggressor. Also as the age old system goes, marriage leads to increased expenses and so *Jat* has to move away for earning. There exists the tradition of ploughing by ladies for rain and good harvest and the drama concludes with the message of disciplined life, humble behavioral aspect between the partners.

Jhijhia is another important folk drama performed by women folk in which a woman dancing with pots having dias (lit earthen pots) on their heads are followed by a group of ladies during Navaratri (nine days worship of Mother Goddess). As the practice signifies the age-old superstition of witchcraft in which the womenfolk curses the witches but there is inherent goodness of wellbeing wish for the community and society.

Another very important drama which occupies an important place in social milieu of Mithila is *Sama-Chakeba*, which is performed by almost all the social strata present in the vast region of Mithila by the women folk with sanctity and faith. The roots of the drama can be traced within the agricultural society as sociologists are of the view that agricultural society developed through women and so the drama has its base in ancient times. In the month of November female folk of the region make clay-based symbols like *Sama*, *Chakeba*, *Jhajhi kukur*, *Van-teetar*, *Vrindavan* and go to the ploughed fields in dusk and perform acting of these figures by the medium of song and dance and consequently characterize these characters. The beginning of the roots of the tradition can be traced back to a story in *Skanda Purana* in which Shyama, the daughter of Krishna had been cursed by her father to become a bird, who was later made free by her brother Shamb. Therefore, we can find many heart touching songs reflecting on the selfless and pure love of brothers and sisters in these songs. The clay symbols of *Van-teetar* and *Khanjan-Chirai* draw our attention on the fact that the geographical locale of the region of Mithila is clad in greenery and in the month of November beside the swamps of river and in ploughed fields, the coming of migratory birds can be easily imagined that has given a vent to human feelings from ages. In this background female imagination in myth, legends and songs have personified them as their message carrier in the simple, rustic and rural background. The figure of *Satbhai* and *Chugla* can be embodied as personification of good and evil.

Another important drama form, which has a deep impact on the masses and is known for collating contemporary issues, is *Jhumhari*, which has wide spectrum and is a potential tool to address the importance of Folk drama. It is chiefly dance based. Its category consists of symbolic as well as emotive categorization. Folk artists wisely use this genre to address contemporary problems as scarcity of food, unmatched

marriages, entertainment, and emotions of feminine heart. The clowns of the region also get a source of livelihood by means of these songs.

The region of Mithila is also well known for Vidapad which is performed by dance, drama and song in open theatres. The genre still holds importance in Mithilanchal society due to unwavering faith of the people in their Dharma. It is filled with emotive appeal, effective versification, melodious verses and technically has an open theatre called Leela-sthali and has got a different green room and in the musical aspect are filled with various Ragas having classical origin and verses are said to be medieval in spirit which carry the drama forward.

Folk songs and folk dance together constitute and enrich the cultural heritage of a nation and it will not be an exaggeration to say that this rich folk literature of Mithila has been enriching the social and regional fields on one side as well as contributing in the field of arts and National literature on the other. They have been seen fulfilling the chords of hearts of simplistic village folk with all the Rasa (Veer, Shringar, Hasya) as mentioned by Bhartrihari since ages. Through these streams, the humanity has been deriving the spontaneous water of happiness of heart and soul together with vigor of life potion incessantly.

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