



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 7. Issue.2. 2020 (Apr-June)



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

A STUDY OF CULTURAL REFLECTIONS IN THE KOKNA FOLKTALES

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Article information

Received:04/06/2020

Accepted: 29/06/2020

Published online: 30/06/2020

doi: [10.33329/ijelr.7.2.309](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.7.2.309)

ABSTRACT

Folk literature occupies a sufficient score in the mainstream literature in most Indian language literatures. And to that extent, it is studied too. But as of the tribal folk literature is concerned, there is lot of scope as both being brought to the readership by its due publication for common readers as well as study in the universities. Major population of tribes ie *adivasi* inhabit in the northeast region of India, along with Jharkhand in the second place and rest in other parts of the country. Maharashtra too boasts of having some of major tribes along the borders of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Constitutionally they are known as scheduled tribes (ST). Each of the tribe, regardless of Maharashtra or elsewhere, is culturally exceptionally rich and most of them share many practices, traditions and customs that have continuously been passed from one generation to the next generations. Though civilization and industrialization has affected their lives too, they have positively preserved their culture in oral practice; folkdance, folksongs, folktales etc. To some extent, educated tribal individuals along with the other scholars have brought their oral folklores to the common people. This paper attempts to interpret the human relations and their affinity with environment of *Kokna* tribe folktales.

Key word: tribe (*adivasi*), *Kokna*, folktales, cultural practices, traditions, fate, environment.

Introduction

Regardless whether the tribal literature was disregarded for lack of its conventional and written form or not is not the question but the fact remains this that it continues to be in the oral form within their tribal communities. It might be threatening in the course of time unless they start preserving it and the normal people fail to bring in the due light. Education, though in general, is a big hurdle for their all-inclusive upliftment. In some of the regions like; the northeastern states, they are fairly educated and developed but the other regions need the attention of the governments and the non-government organizations (NGOs). To note here, the northeast region is the beneficiary of the British and missionary welfare practices while the same failed in the other parts of country. The development of tribal can cause both a setback to their rich culture and enrich them personally and socially. Since their development would cause to estrange them from their indigenous culture which survives only in the oral base and in the illiterate people. Human tendency would be to enhance and sophisticate our life so they would be and prove a setback to their culture. None

should be against their development so is the researcher too, but wish their indigenosity to survive in some or the other form. Even amongst themselves, their current generation or every coming generation would be apathetic to live up their indigenous culture in the wake of hovering advancement of science and technology in all of walk of life. However the tribal folk literature witnesses and recognizes a upright status and fame as it comes out to the non-tribal society; the credit goes to the western academics Veliar Elvin, JF Hevit, Christop Hamandarf, Stephen Fucks, RI Anthoven and Sarojini Babar, Durga Bhagwat, Prabhakar Mande, Nandapurkar, Bhau Mandavakar, Shaila Deogaonkar and Anil Sahastrabuddhe etc in the Indians and amongst the tribal Gangaram Janu Awari, Govind Gare, Vyankatesh Atram, Motiravan Kangali, Chatulal Rathwa, Veersing Padavi, Maheshwari Gavit, Subhash Pawara etc.

Kokna, for instance, is a notable exemplary of one such tribal culture in India inhabiting in the Satpura ranges of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh bordering expanses, and like other tribes, it is also equally rich in its culture. Tribal folk culture has not published in compilation. Vijaya Sonar's *Adivasi Koknanchya Katha* and *Koknanache Maukhik Vaangmay*, *Kokna-Kokni Itihas aani Jeevan* by BA Deshmukh, Gangaram Janu Awari's *Kokna Shabdakosh*, Suklal Gangaji Kokani's *Kokna-Kokni Adivasi Sanskriti* portray *Kokna* folklore in compiled forms and obviously all written in Marathi dialect. And the present study focuses on the *Kokna Janajatinchya Lokakatha* a collection of Laxman Tople dealing with the folktales of *Kokna* tribe residing in the Palghar District of western Maharashtra. The compiler of the book claims that the *Kokna* resembles Marathi still there are number indigenous terms and very difficult easily decode unless assisted by some *Kokna* interpreter.

Discussion

The *Kokna* folktales reflect their lifestyle, feelings, conventions, customs, fate, devotion to deities, festivals, and beliefs along with evolution of their tribe, their indigenous gods, their original male, origin of their dynasty etc. Their tales based on bravery, mysteries, laughter etc. *Kokna* or *Kokni* are the inhabitants of Thane, Palghar, Nashik, Nandurbar and Dhule districts of Maharashtra state and *Dang* district of Gujrat state. *Kokni* is their dialect. These folktales paint fate and endeavour vis-a-vis their belief in work in their tenacity, determination and conviction. The folksongs, folkdance and folktales exhibit their life and their affinity with the wildlife.

With the eleven folktales in the collection *Kokna Janjatinchya Lokakatha* Laxman Tople written and published in Marathi of which following *gothi* (stories) are considered for this study. As mentioned earlier modernity, migration, employment, education etc due to the industrialization and urbanization, the ethnic identity is being influenced in the form of their food, clothing, language and lifestyle. So is this dialect of Marathi as the compiler has used many standard words which are not their original *Kokna* language. For instance *baayko* (wife), *nirop* (message), *gadhav* (donkey), *divas* (days), *faral* (snacks), *shahar* (city), *kanyadan* (daughter offering in wedding), *sarpanch* (head of village council), *sabha* (meeting) etc. This is such big linguistic flaw for any similar study on any ethnic groups irrespective of any geographic regions or society.

Kulambi jela danyiv anayala (Farmer goes to fetch his fate) - It is a story of two married brothers exhibiting their belief in hard work, sincerity and commitment rather than fate. Normally family gets separated after the brothers' marriage and mostly and commonly wife is instrument for such separation as in- "*Tine apale navresla sangala apale vayala nighu*" (P16 - *Kokna Janjatinchya Lokakatha*) (She tells her husband to separate from the family.) Wife of younger brother repeatedly insists her husband on separation from his elder because of his wife's laziness and uncleanliness in work. That alarms him of separating from his elder at her resolve but dares not to tell to his brother. He endures it for himself quite for some time that results in deteriorating his health. This is a very common story in the Indian family set up.

But ironically, the elder brother ascribes his fate for the deplorable consequences and he goes out to fetch his fate back instead of working hard to create his own. Astonishingly, it reads like- *Vadil bhavani parat vicharala*, "*Mazan?*" *Danyawani sangala*, "*Tuzan ta tye devadaarakala!*" "*Mazan danyiv devadaarakala kahya jelan?*" *Danyawani* replies – "*Tuji baayakos byes naay?*" (P17 - *Kokna*) (Elder brother asks, "*Mine?*" *Fate* replies, "*Your fate is with god!*" He probes, "*My fate is with god?*" *fate* replies, "*Your wife isn't good!*") In this dialogue

between the elder brother and his fate, his fate is with the god and owing to his wife, he is suffering in his life. It is but natural unless one is loyal to work and life, nothing comes to help. Questioning and attributing others for the sufferance would barely help in regaining normalcy in life. Everyone has the same consequence unless sincere towards our work. Tribal people believe in the same approach; good results in good and bad in bad as destined.

In another similar situation, the fate reflects- Tyecha danyiv sangalyahache maagahun langadat langadat yet hota. Angavar ta mashahacha bhankara! Kotha kotha dambhel, kala dhon padel, khavanda padun kida ilailat. ^(P19 - Kokna) (Their fate of all came limping. Flies on body. Burns on body. In suffering.) Regardless whether animal or human being, all enjoy or suffer due to their actions. Each habit of *kulambi's* (farmer) wife represents different symbols of fates. They refuse accompanying back to his house with him since they are ill-treated in his house. Even the symbols with the god are depicted suffering severely because of their bad habits.

Though his wife is bad but not him except his laziness. God in his fate holds goodness for him and not to punish for his idleness. Hence the god showers on him in the following form- God said, "Ja! Tye iharitun yek baaraj nighil. Ti tuzich. Tila bayako kar." ^(P20 - Kokna) (Go! You'll get a woman in the well. She is yours. Take her as wife.) On the way towards the god, he meets the herd of cows, buffalos and goats, a horse, a mango tree and a well express their suffering. They all are represented as symbols along with human beings like the *kulambi* the farmer and the *kulambini* in the story. They all serve the human life positively; cows, buffaloes and goats serve in milk, curd and ghee, horse as hauler, mango as sweet fruit – if someone properly takes care of them and well for water if it is potable. In this case they are adversely represented as the bad fates. Hence god grants him a new wife from the well to substitute with by the fretful existing one.

Without being antifeminist, consequence of any person male or female, boy or girl, brother or sister, the families wish to get rid of any such bad people; idle, insincere, dishonest, un-familial etc. For same consequence, god punishes his wife as- Pahale bayakosale kulambeni buche gadhavavar basavala ana hakalun laanvala. Nave bayakobarobar kulambecha sansar sukhacha zala. ^(P21 - Kokna) (He held first wife's hair and sitting on donkey thrown off. With new wife he lived happily.) As soon as the *kulambi* returns to home, holding his wife's hair firmly, pulls her out and sends her on donkey. This situation was in practice in the rural parts and non-tribal communities too. This folktale talks about the social scenario of tribal life. Hard working man and woman always prosper in their lives and the culture of righteousness and respect for all household objects are dominantly experienced and felt – is the moral message of the tale. And only then one can live happy life. This happens obviously regardless whether in tribal or non-tribal societies.

The tale of *Yevadyashor* (Warrior) portrays the protagonist's bravery in tribal community with the motive to pave in like their ancestral heroes. The tale begins from a war between kings and ends up with *Yevadyashor's* winning couple of wars and hearts of his mother, potter uncle and aunt, his maternal uncle and aunt and his own step mother. *Yevadyashor* reflects some of the human aspects like conventional approach of woman towards husband, hierarchical discrimination, good and bad omen in birds and their feather, winning spirit in flying colourful flag, sending betel nut for message, taking snacks when going to relatives etc are some of prominent features.

Indian woman towards her husband or any woman, for that sake, happens to be in his relation though legal or illegal so is extremely rampant everywhere in the world. In one of the African fiction, a woman is ready to accept her husband's death against his relation with another woman. No woman in the world accepts any such relation. Here is such flawless exemplary- "Meli!" kanchi rand aali hye atha. Gothi karte tuzen shi." Tase rani sanghay lagali, "naay vaaaya! Halala mi aallun hye tumche ath. Mi sankhalivat rajechi bahanis na! bhavani maala jaaga naay dili. Tahan aalun haye." ^(P24 - Kokna) ("Bitch! Wherefrom the whore you are! Talking like this". On which the queen replies, "No sister. I've come to you myself. I'm the sister of the king of Sakhaliyat. He didn't give me space. Hence I've come to you.") Forsaken sister of Sakhaliyat king who seeks shelter in a potter's house, finding another woman at her house, potter's wife screams at her and abuses. Her brother's denial in his royal house being disclosed made her welcome her. Such hatred is blatantly discernible.

Tribal communities are unbiased in their approach towards their life and environment. A colossal racial, caste and hierarchical discrimination is too rampant in the non-tribal society but in an instance of *Yevadyashor*, this proves an exception. “E tuza madhan peta tuzaan. Mi motthechi suin. Ja tumchi suin paangulawadila rahate.”^(P24 - Kokna) (Hello! You go to hell. I’m nurse of royal people. Go to your nurse lives in Fangulawadila.) The potter requests a nurse to help in the delivery of queen, on which, the nurse screaming at her sends him to nurse of potter’s community. Furthermore it is difficult to interpret here caste segregation in the tribe since they are one unit as clan; casteless, race-less and classless. This should be the degeneration flaw of the tribe.

Danyiv rahalan kulabiniche dantal (Fate of farmer’s wife is in her tooth) – This folktale gives an account of the Goddess called Kansari and their strong faith in fate. The *Kokna* tribe believes that whatever happens in their life because of their fate. Though misfortune, they accept it and proceed their life unpretentious.

The folktale portrays a rural life through many instances. Their keenness and bonding with one another and with their animal too is clearly apparent. They are reciprocally dependent on one another. Their large heartedness is one such feature of the non-tribal rural society too. In one of the tribes in north Karnataka, they don’t accept anything from others unless they can give something to them in return too. And their giving isn’t calculable, they just give away limitless unbothered in whatever limit possible for them. This way, it is – “sukalachi bokadya tyantala yek bokud kaapla ta maaja kaay kami hul?” Bokud kaapla – raandhala, kulambinini pankti waadhalya.^(P33 - Kokna) (“Slaughtering one of many lambs would not fall short for me in anything?” He killed a lamb. In dinner, wife of farmer served the lamb to them in row.) On god’s request, the farmer cooked one of his lambs without unswervingly. He would have thought of great loss of one lamb that would draw him a good amount. Another key aspect of tribal and non-tribal rural life is that the food is served in big lunch and dinner rows which witnesses in their generosity in giving.

Poshya Pora (Girl and boy) – is a folktale of old man who wills to marry a young woman. On his second wife’s persuasion, he kills his daughter and son from his first wife. A human tendency of bigamy and polygamy, tribal and non-tribal societies both witness in ample. Tribes allow multiple marriages while for the non-tribal society, law forbids any such marriage but practice continues as illegitimate ones.

Sonulibay (protagonist - sister) - is a very legendary folktale in *Kokna* dialect. It is a sacred relationship tale of brother and sister. Nowadays everyone is aware of environment and the effects of global warming but does a little for the environment but the tribals actually take care of the environment from the ancient times in possible ways because they treat environment as the part of their life. A character Sonulibay, she not only thinks about environment but realizes in action too in keeping up it. She thinks her straying hair shall harm the birds and fish in the water. So she packs them properly in a leaf and throws in the water. Unfortunately her brother finds the hair by a riverside. He avows to marry the girl of the hair foiling his intention discovering them of his own sister. It culminates in a grave condition in which tribal judiciary is called for. Similar impasse, a protagonist in a Kannada fiction fails to marry her own husband though both willing to. People of both societies are put to trials due to customs and their rigidity.

In this folktale, tribal people prove to be the first keepers and protectors of the environment in spite of number of personal and social problems; literacy, poverty, malnutrition, starvation, employment etc. as against the non-tribal society that much aware of facts of global environmental imbalance, disregard the environment. Apart from this, the tribal people are the best keepers of their family relationships with mother, father, brother and sister etc.

Conclusion

Kokna Janjatichya Lokakatha compiled by Laxman Tople is one of the most appreciable works on *Kokna* tribe and its folktales. The folktales minutely outline their affinity amongst the human relations, their relations with animals and birds and the environment. Tribal belief in fate is very strong and common. Their respect for man or woman is very visible and laudable. Human bonding for one another too is equally strong against the non-tribal society. And since they treat the nature as part of their life, they nurture it in its

indigenous form. The *Kokna* folktales are one of the tribal illustrations of all the tribes though different from one another by their ethnicities and identities.

Though there are linguistic flaws in narrating the tales, the compiler has successfully tried to bring forth the core element of the *Kokna* tribe in the folktales. One more important factor to be noted here, the compiler has a confusion with the Marathi words '*jamaat*' (tribe) and '*janajaati*' (nomadic tribe). By mistake, he must have used '*janajaati*' instead of '*jamaat*' in the title of the book.

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