

## DIDACTIC WAYS OF INDIAN FOLKTALES (With special reference to Orissa)

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Orissa deserves a special share of credit on account of its variegated assortment of folk tales handed down from its long past. Standing in the eastern region of India with the Bay of Bengal as its marine border and the Eastern Ghats as mountainous terrain, this land had once been ruled by several royal families for centuries together. Orissan folk tales very often stand on the heels of narration about the whimsical mood of many such kings and emperors. Stupidity clouded their mental horizons in such a way that it marred their ways of thinking. The oral folk tradition of Orissa superbly preserves fossils of such stories even today. With the passage of time such everlasting memories have been buried deep in the listener's psyche. Before the advent of the common process of learning, the society had all along preserved such valuables through the memories of its tellers like oral documents. The society had no penchant for entering into the modern, scientific or technological ways of treasuring the same for posterity. Basing on the saga of memory, these stories shaped up the imaginative skill of its tellers those nestled reflectively in children's minds.

Very few places in the world could sustain such a long tradition of story telling. Although there have been several adaptations of narratives both in classical and contemporary literatures in different corners of the world, very few of them might match the length of such a story forming ethos bequeathed to the modern Indians in general and Oriyas in particular. Ranging from fantasy to the irrational, from whims to caprices such stories were often filled with allegories that ultimately became the mainstay in their artistic explorations.

Abiding by a timeless dimension the ears of the grand children became closer to the talkative mouths of their grandmas and their formative years started passing off favourably to the utmost pleasure of their attentive moods. The episodic structure of an Orissan narrator reminds us time and again the lines from *Abolkara*, the oral fictionalised tale with indigenous motifs. We may not weigh such tales through academic standard. The high quality intellectual pronouncement may not be a prerequisite to it but the lively designs of such tales are certainly a factor to captivate tender hearts of the children.

Now the story of a king comes to our mind. Once the king's daughter was having her bath in a river. One of the black crows was flying over her head. Suddenly it could discover the golden necklace around her neck. It picked out the same in its pointed beak

and flew into the distant sky. The princess' sense of grief was intense over the loss of a jewellery of unmatched craftsmanship. She ran the palace in tears to her father. The king couldn't relish the anguish of his only daughter. He called for his subordinates to retrieve it from the crow. They soon dispersed and chased after the bird. But how could they snatch it from a flying object ? The crow turned and flew again and again in greater speed when it saw them following. After hectic exercises and putting on an untiring front, the crow became twitchy and opened its beak. As a result the necklace fell into a snakehole. Suddenly the king's men arrived at the spot and started digging the hole. In the process, they found out a snake inside. Presuming the snake as the real culprit, they killed it thereupon and retrieved the necklace from the hole. The Grandma grinds out such stories to her grandchildren every night in order to strengthen moral preaching in them. The genesis of the tale is how a clever crow could escape the dragnet of a king whereas a snake, for no fault of it awarded with a death penalty. How a king because of his poor acted in a fallacious manner like asking courtiers to goad a flying bird and inflicted punishment on a snake quite mistakenly.

Another story can further enlarge the set pattern of didacticism. Suspecting the character of his wife i.e. maharani (the great queen), the king had to punish her physically. Unable to do so by himself, he asked one of his commanders to kill her in the forest. The commander couldn't carry out the order because he was convinced of the innocence of the queen. Instead, he killed a bird and carried its blood to show it as the blood of the queen. The king relied upon the action of the commander and took it granted as the blood of his queen. Prior to that the commander had already prevailed upon the queen to leave their kingdom lest the king would know about the incident and severely punish both of them. Such a story communicates a gospel message that an innocent shouldn't suffer. Moreover, it speaks of a king how he was a complete idiot even before his courtier. It is also a didactic explanation for the administrators in today's world.

One may go through a powerful legend connected with the construction of Konark Temple of Orissa etched in the annals of world architectural history. Narasingha Dev, the Gajapati king of Orissa constructed this gigantic temple through his chief architect Sibe Santara. Chandrabhaga, the picturesque river-mouth on the coastal boundary of the Bay of Bengal was chosen as the ideal site. The spot was so deep, the king had to stockpile hundreds cart-loads of boulders into it but the devastating waves could wash away the same within no time. Radhaba, a legendary sea-fish was supposedly behind the scene to devour them all. The operation was to be suspended for sometime in order to find alternative means of construction.

Once Sibe Santara was passing through a nearby village at night. An old woman invited her and served her a plate of hot porridge. Sibe dipped his fingers into the middle and got them burnt. The old lady looked at his eating behaviour with surprise and told him not to be like Sibe. By then, Sibe had not revealed his identity to her. Subjected

to query, she narrated the obvious shortcoming of his plan to build up a foundation at the centre of the sea instead of starting it from a corner. "In spite of his skilled mind in architecture, he is bound to suffer because of his lack of practical ideas", she repeated further. Sibeï could learn from his mistakes and tried afresh to succeed in his endeavour. Such a meeting could have been an eye opening for him at last. The moral design of this folk tale has not outlived its usefulness even today. Such a narrative may be attributed to the timeless dimension of a vibrant spirit. The modern minds can receive ample nutrition out of its root.

In animal stories, the characters are from the world of animals endowed with considerable humane qualities. They act like human beings minus their speaking ability. Quoting a poet "my true voice is in the unspoken words of my body" holds good in their context. Once a widow Brahmin wanted to leave the house for sometime preferably in search of her livelihood. Her little son was sleeping then. The pet mongoose beside her was told to keep a watch on the child till her return. Then she left for somewhere to thrash paddy. While guarding, the mongoose had an accidental nap. At this moment, a snake appeared and bite the child. Suddenly the mongoose woke up and saw him dead. At once, it killed the snake and threw the deadbody somewhere. Then, it rushed to the forest and brought some herbal medicine to restore the life of the child. On returning home, the old lady saw her child dead. Out of panicky, she fell upon her eyes all around and saw the animal bloodstained. Presuming it as the killer of her child, she clinched her fist on the animal killing him on the spot. Just then, a piece of root fell down from his mouth. The lady grinded it on a stone plate and administered the paste into the mouth of the dead son. It worked miraculous. The child got back to life instantly. The lady although burst out in joy started screaming in anguish. "Why did I kill the animal ? He brought life saving medicine for my son". She lamented too much on her misdeeds. Now the onus lies with the tale teller or his/her listener (s) to say who is at fault ? Whether the widow or the mongoose ?

Both the groups i.e. tellers and listeners could sustain the flow of such stories from generation to generation or else it would have been extinct. Both commonly share the feeling of compassion to vibrate emotionally with the characters of the tales. Being sympathetic at hearts they could nurture their childlike simplicity with a surge of emotions. Either they may weep or smile and can comment without reserve of the fault of any character. In a way, they can bolster up the moral outlook of the tale with significant application of the same into the mainstream of their life.

In Orissa, notwithstanding the onslaught of electronic media, the upcoming evenings are yet to look pale for the lively engagement of this core group. The countryside still bubbles with enthusiasm of grand children to welcome grandmas with their story baskets. With the twinkling of stars in the vast azure sky the latter start with the following.

Let me tell a tale

Let me tell a tale

Which tale ? of a frog,

Which frog ? A wood frog

Which wood ? An oil man's wood

Which oil man ? Who runs a pressing machine

Which pressing machine ? Of sugar-cane. [ contd..]

Until now the child listener may pick up any of his/her choicest topic like either a queen, a mongoose, a crow a giant or a witch and can comfortably sit for a precious relaxation hour to embrace the opportunity in course of escaping either the tutor or the parents. What could be a better taste in the mind than this?

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