



Understanding Public Attitude to Persons with Disabilities in Indian Folk Literature: With Reference to Translation of Prevalent Popular Colloquial Hindi Folktales

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Abstract: First folktale depicts how liars, cheaters and conspirators play chicanery, prepare snares and set ups against disabled persons when they are constrained to serve under the administration and official position of a person with visual disability.

Second folktale teaches us to perceive the reality that the problem of physical deficit or deformity we expect in others may be within ourselves as well. Third folktale unravels the facts that the officials at the lower level don't try to understand disabled persons but those at the highest positions do if they are compassionate and educated in the true sense of the term.

The aforetold folktale also teaches us human compassion, nobility, human diversity, eventually emphasizing at the necessity of sensitivity and the need of sensitization for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities with a sense of human understanding of disabled persons as human beings with all the same desires, passions, and inclinations for happiness that a nondisabled person may have; but, the necessity is just to understand this reality without any rage of onus, with empathy and a very cool magnanimous human heart and positive mindset!

Key Words: Folk Literature, Colloquial, Traverse, Chicanery, Empathy, Rehabilitation.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Both disabilities as well as folktales are indeed, the indelible imprints of human history and human diversity in the society even much before abled and disabled human beings acquired the knowledge of language for expression and communication, and the both have evolved over ages and times retaining their own positions in their own unique ways.

Folktales are inseparable part of literature, history and culture and they help us to identify our own self and our society in which we exist inclusive of abled as well as disabled human beings.

They do not merely entertain and delight us, but, the folktales teach us about various, variegated, vivacious, vibrant and vital social and moral values of human life, always aiming at sensitization and humanization of our inner sanctum.

The folktales are not just the business of telling and listening, but they are the great repositories and the treasure-houses of endless ages-old knowledge, experience and wisdom; and hence, it enjoins upon our duties and responsibilities to retain and preserve them with us for the purpose of further reading, writing, translation and research studies.

Folk literature on the torrent of which are inclusively floating folktales, folksongs, folklores, folk-dances, folk-theatre, folk-plays or folkdramas, and folk-tradition Etc., is indeed, a vital instrument of human history for the educational and social empowerment as well as delight of human beings; which, in turn, no doubt, constitutes the philosophical, psychological, sociological and biological pillars on which the entire edifice of Indian culture and literature is erected.

The origin of folk literature is a vibrant means to comprehend the development process of primitive beings and tribal cultures, their naive ways of living and conducting life with liberty, lore and learning.

Folktales enable us to grasp how evolution process has so far occurred ever since the inception of the first phase of human life on the earth.

In the folk literature folktales are like the mirrors in reflections of which we can traverse far back into our past and comfortably visualize how our ancestors lived and evolved through ancient ages; what distress and discomfitures they might have faced with the passage of times and tides before advent of various civilisations, leaving behind for us rich cultural heritage and essential values with the desire to inculcate, imbue and ape those values with a socially and morally acceptable deportment and conduct.

After reading the folktales, we are constrained to ponder over how our ancestors or forefathers paved the paths which have so far led us through centuries of evolutions to the present age of modern information and communication technology, in fact better to call digital age, in which not only we ourselves try to think, but even make our best possible endeavours to teach others to think critically with a scientific temper.

Folk literature flows and floats on constantly in society like floating clouds, blowing winds and flowing waters in the rivulets, rivers and oceans.

The folk literature has powers and capacities to take humungous strides and cross the frontiers of nations and times, hitherto created and imposed by humankind; though, no doubt, the characters of folktales or folklores may keep changing their names and appearances in accordance with the climates, times, regions and nations all over the world according to the prevalent popular cultures and civilisations.

For instance, the character Beerbal one of the king Akbar's courtiers often appearing in the North Indian folktales becomes Tenaliram in the folktales prevalent in South India and even in Arabian countries, he becomes Mullah Nassar-uddeen, still assuming possibly some other names and fames in the western or other european nations.

Folk literature perhaps began with the carvings on cave-walls much before the acquisition of knowledge by the primitive man, traversed through the times of discovering and making of papers, with the advent of printing press making communication possible in accessible format of reading and writing for civilized and well cultured human beings;

and this folk literature which deals with various subject-matters, incidents, themes, characters and situations prevalent in Indian society has traversed through long ages and reached even to us in the digital age, still very lively, vivid, vital, and vibrant.

This article, along with this author's critiques on the reflections of human behavioral situations, includes some translated colloquial Hindi folktales highly prevalent and most popular in Central and Northern Indian villages which peasants and some little literate and illiterate masses narrate and share with each other while chatting for delight and arousing full throated laughter with mockery, derision and pejection; hardly any one caring, some of them taking moral lessons; but, most of them inadvertently casting aside just for fun; but, these tales have both disabled and nondisabled characters which unravel public attitude to the persons with disabilities, and the ways they are viewed, understood by the public or the masses in Indian society, and even underestimated, sometimes sympathized and sometimes empathized with, but, most of the times laughed, mocked and pecked at when claiming for rights-based full and equal participations in the mainstream of the nation and the society.

At the very outset, I sincerely acknowledge my highly indebtedness, gratitude and earnest courtesy to Dr. Shyam Sakha Shyam for translating from Hindi his three folktales Balwant Mirasi, Behrapan and Lehja from his book *Lok Sanskriti Aur Sahitya: Mahabharat Dhara Kee Lok Kathayen* before embarking upon my analysis and critiques on them. Although I had heard these folktales being narrated in Indian villages in some form or the other,, yet it has immensely delighted me to read them in written form by the author Dr. Shyam Sakha Shyam and my objective of translating these folktales is purely to publicise, promote and proliferate the author's name, fame and his views for the enrichment of Education, Indian literature and national culture and above all, exploration of the public attitude to Persons with disabilities as reflected in Indian folktales and folk literature.

2. TRANSLATION OF SOME POPULAR HINDI FOLKTALES REFLECTING PUBLIC ATTITUDE TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES:

2.1. Balwant The Clown

(Balwant Mirasi, Dr. Shyam Sakha Shyam, Lok Sanskriti Aur Sahitya: Mahabharat Dhara Kee Lok Kathayen, National Book Trust, India)

In Northern Indian folktales Balwant is called Mirasi (clown.)

Balwant the clown is a happy-go-lucky character, who is well known for his powerful laughter, cheerfulness and quick, witty repartee in popular Indian Hindi folktales.

It has been reiterated that the tales of his quick, witty repartee are carved on every tree and stone of the state of Panjab in India.

It is said that his tales of full-throated laughter, fun and cheerfulness go on endlessly as the endless flowing waters of five popular rivers of Panjab in India.

Several times, he was trapped in difficult circumstances, but, because of his quick witty repartee, he successfully overcame them all and emerged as untainted and victorious.

Balwant was also the favourite courtier of a low-vision / or one-eyed king, his majesty Ranjeet Singh.

Balwant the clown constantly admired and eulogized the monarch for his successful discharge of royal duties despite his visual disability.

His majesty, the king Ranjeet Singh also liked and loved Balwant Mirasi (the clown) more than any one of his other courtiers and hence, they all felt jealous of Balwant, deliberately pushing him and challenging into taking over of formidable tasks as well as a partially blind king under whose administration they were ruled and constrained to work, though they detested to do so.

Once, one of the courtiers who had prepared the set ups and carefully hatched the conspiracy, challenged Balwant to address the king Ranjeet Singh in the full courtroom as “Kaanaa” (Kaanaa / or Kaanee: one-eyed man / or woman, an expression of mockery, derision and insult used to laugh and humiliate a blind and low-vision person in Indian society.)

Indeed, calling the king “Kaanaa” was really a formidable task as one was supposed to be flogged and hurled out of services for daring to do so.

Therefore, Balwant clearly refused to take up the challenge.

Although a clown, Balwant was sensitive enough not to laugh at somebody’s disability or deformity by making undue use of any derisive and derogatory expressions.

Moreover, he was very well aware of his love and loyalty to the king whom he had always escorted, accompanied in wars and peace and tirelessly admired him for successful accomplishments of his royal duties despite his visual impairment.

Balwant Mirasy was in a state of dilemma as his foes criticized him for failure to take up the challenge and his friends persuaded him to accomplish the daring deed and prove himself and his comic wit with his clever repartee.

However, so far, balwant did not budge at their instigations.

Eventually, one of the enemy courtiers stood up and said that he would give balwant ten big gold coins every time, as many times as balwant would call the king “Kaanaa.”

Thereafter, ultimately, there seemed to be no wayout as such except consenting with the bet or the pact of challenge as opportunity.

His passion for money impelled him to muster courage and face the challenge of calling the king “Kaanaa.”

For the doing of necessary preparations, Balwant took leave from the king’s court for a week, saying that he was in need of visiting the home of his in-laws.

Balwant was the favourite courtier of his majesty the king Ranjeet Singh who had developed even some kind of peculiar affinity for him.

Both of them were of almost similar age.

It is said that both of them, the king Ranjeet Singh and Balwant Mirasi were born on one and the same date.

While granting him leave, the king Ranjeet Singh said, “Balwant, I would be missing you too much. Everything would be so full of boredom without your presence in the court. So try to come back as soon as possible.”

Balwant, the clown bent his head in reverence to the king, and said, “okay my Lord. As you wish my Lord. Your command is on my forehead.”

Saying thus, Balwant, the clown left engrossed in musings and contemplations.

That time of granted one week of leave passed, but, the clown balwant did not return as he had promised.

Nobody knew what had happened.

The king was really missing the clown.

The other jealous enemy courtiers felt happy and mimicking balwant’s friends, began to hurl all kinds of derisions and satires and their derogatory remarks.

They were happy and cheerful that they succeeded in their conspiracy.

But, nevertheless, Balwant, the comedian came back poking funs, although after three weeks had elapsed waiting for him.

The king became happy, but asked him with a sense of wonder and consternations as to what had happened that he got so late to come back.

When asked to explain the reasons why he got so late, the clown replied, “My Lord, I was freed from my In-laws on the fifth day itself, and began my journey, but, on the way back happened to be the homes of your in-laws; and so I thought why shouldn’t I just go to them and communicate yours and mine greetings to them and ask about the well being of your In-laws too. After all, their homes happened to be on the way I was travelling back, and it would look very unpleasant to pass by without exchange of any greetings and without asking their well beings.”

It made the king rather cheerful.

The king Ranjeet Singh, said, “very well! Well done,” and further asked Balwant whether he was received with warmth of hospitality.

The clown replied, “My Lord, I was rather served with warmth, but.....”

The king asked, “but means?”

The clown said, “My Lord, but.....”

The king was annoyed slightly and said, “What does it mean by your but? Explain quickly what is next to your but.”

Engrossed in ponderings, the clown said, “My Lord, how can I use the word and expression which I never liked and even hated and detested others for its use for you as your true and loyal servant?”

The king said, “use the word or expressions, and tell me all in virbatum literatum.”

The clown said, “no my Lord, your majesty will flog me, your majesty will kill me, I don’t want to lose my life in any way.”

The king said, “nothing will happen to you. Just go ahead and tell everything in virbatum literatum. Just Don’t worry at all. Nobody will say or do anything harmful to you, that is my assurance.”

Balwant said, “Everything is fine my Lord, but your sister-In-law is a very notorious lady. She used a word of ignominy which I never desire to bring at my tongue.”

“It just broke and rent my heart and made my eyes to trickle the tears of blood, but what could I have done for the dishonour of my Lord and dearest friend I mean your Lordship.”

The king said, “oh Balwant, doesn’t matter, just utter the word fearlessly. Nothing harmful will happen to you.”

The clown said, “your Lordship, that notorious lady used the word which broke and rent my heart.”

The king still asked, rather emphatically, “what was that word?”

The clown replied, “my Lord, she said, how is Kaanaa king? She said so and laughed; but, I protested saying, madam, please, you should never use such expression for my Lord who is even a friend to my bosom, but, she still laughed heartily, and went on saying, he is king to you, let him be king to you, he my brother-in-law, so I can call him anything, any way, I please, yes any way that pleases me; and so she went on calling you Kaanaa, not just once or twice, but hundred times, yes my Lord, saying Kaanaa one, Kaanaa two, Kaanaa three, Kaanaa four, Kaanaa five..... Kaanaa hundred times.”

Thus, the witty clown used the word “Kaanaa” for the king Ranjeet Singh in full courtroom hundred times, as he was challenged and consented with the bet or pact of courtiers.

However, the king did not take it offensively.

Later on, with the passage of time, the truth and conspiracy were unraveled, while the king in his own subtle manner discovered that the courtiers except Balwant were not happy to be ruled over by a low-vision king who was blinded by one eye in the war times.

The king Ranjeet Singh dismissed all the courtiers who had hatched conspiracy and appointed new ones on the recommendations of Balwant Mirasy (The clown) who not merely entertained the king Ranjeet Singh, but also assisted him in discharge of several deeds and royal duties in every best possible manner.

2.2. Hearing Impairment or Deafness

(Behrapan, Dr. Shyam Sakha Shyam, Lok Sanskriti Aur Sahitya: Mahabharat Dhara Kee Lok Kathayen, National Book Trust, India)

A farmer called Ramdev was very much troubled by His wife’s habit of not replying at first call.

He did not get reply from his wife Ramdevi whenever he asked something till he repeated twice or thrice.

She was habitual of replying too late till he repeated his question.

Therefore, the farmer Ramdev doubted whether his wife Ramdevi was hearing impaired or that she had gone deaf.

Ramdev many times tried to convince his wife to use hearing-aids, but she absolutely ignored and laughed it away.

Ramdev was in a dilemma whether to live with her or estrange from her.

Therefore, one day, Ramdev discussed this problem of his wife Ramdevi with a friend who was also a small doctor.

His friend or let's say the doctor suggested some domestic testing technique of his wife's hearing impairment or the deafness to Ramdev.

The doctor said, "You ask her something from a distance of 30 to 40 feet in such a way that you are standing close to her."

Next day, when Ramdev returned from his fields, he saw that his wife Ramdevi was making chapatis (breads) and the other meals ready in the courtyard of their home.

Her back was towards him.

In Indian villages, the rustic women generally make meals in the courtyard only.

Standing at a distance of 40 feet from his wife Ramdev asked, hey Ramdevi, "Ramdevi which vegetable have you made for the lunch today?"

As he got no reply, Ramdev went a few steps ahead and asked "Which vegetable have you made Ramdevi in lunch for today?"

Ramdev got no reply and hence, he repeated his question rather loudly, "I asked you Ramdevi what is the vegetable you have cooked for the lunch today?"

His woman Ramdevi turned to him rather in absolute irritation and said, though in somewhat controlled and dignified manner, "my dear hubby! I replied your question at least four times that I made Brinjals-veg in the lunch for you. Haven't you heard me saying so?

Go, wash your hands, come back and eat."

2.3. The Manners

(Lehja, Dr. Shyam Sakha Shyam, Lok Sanskriti Aur Sahitya: Mahabharat Dhara Kee Lok Kathayen, National Book Trust, India)

A rustic youth called Netrajyoti being blinded lost prospects of employment as the village folks considered him unemployable and worthless creature on the earth in all walks of life on the ground of his visual disability or impairment.

So he espoused Indian asceticism and was renamed as Nainsukh Das (one who enjoys the bliss of eyesight, here ironical, aiming at mockry and derision of a blind person.)

He learned from his religious teacher and practiced the art of Indian asceticism, constantly lost in prayers, meditations, wanderings and contemplations.

One day, while wandering with another young ascetic, Nainsukh Das, as he was called after being blinded somehow reached the city-state of Anand Nagar ruled by king Priyvardhan.

While walking on the way, he arrived in the mid of the royal road, squatted and was lost in his usual prayers and divine meditations.

The accompanying young ascetic entreated him not to squat in mid of the Royal Road, explain that the king's cavalcade was to pass by; but, Nainsukh Das was so engrossed in his prayers that he could not heed to the entreaty; and so the escorting ascetic ran away leaving the blind behind squatted in mid of the road there and then.

Just after that, as the king's cavalcade approached, a constable or let's say soldier of king's army came and shouted at the saint, "stupid blind ascetic, do you want to die? Get up from here and go away."

The visually impaired ascetic replied, "hey soldier, is it a way to talk to the ascetic? Is it the way you have learn in the king's army?"

The soldier wondered how blind ascetic could distinguish him as a soldier and that is too, belonging to king's army.

He thought that the visually disabled saint had some great divine power; and frightened of being damned because of the blind ascetic's curse, he went away.

Then came the Inspector and yelled, "hey you blind ass get up and go away or you want to be flogged?"

The blind monk asked, "hey man, the compassionate king Priyvardhan has made you Inspector, assigning duties and responsibilities in his Majesty's Royal Services; is it the manner to talk in, and that is too, to the monks and saints?"

The Inspector was struck with wonder and awe of the blind monk's curse and hence, he ran away from the site.

As the king's cavalcade approached, Diwan (high official of king's cabinet) came to the monk and requested him to get up from mid of the Royal Road; but, the ascetic as earlier insisted that the road was meant for all and not merely for one person irrespective of high or low in ranks and files.

Hence, Diwan also left musing on what to do to remove the monk from mid of the Royal Road.

While horse-riders of the cavalcade were engaged in exchange of gestural communications, his Majesty, the king Priyvardhan dismounted his chariot, came close to the visually impaired ascetic, bent his head in reverence to the monk and said, "Father, are you in some trouble? What can I do to relieve your discomfitures? Is there any way I can serve you father?"

The blind monk said, "no, no my Lord, I had just heard that your Majesty is very compassionate to the blind saints. So I just desired to have a mental glimpse and feel the magnanimous presence and hear the glorious and graceful voice of your Lordship."

The king Priyvardhan said, "I feel blessed by having a glimpse of you father. Just bless me, and I feel I have obtained everything in the world."

The blind monk placed his right hand on king's head and blessed him from the very core of his heart.

The exceedingly compassionate king Priyvardhan was so inspired that he pondered over doing some sort of rehabilitation work for such visually impaired monks.

So he got a hermitage made for the ascetic Nainsukh Das, and very earnestly implored the visually impaired monk to dwell at the hermitage made in his honour and impart spiritual education to the masses of India.

Thus, the wandering blind ascetic Nainsukh Das became a spiritual teacher and special educator of the masses who had someday mocked and pecked at him for his blindness as a curse of his previous birth; and, one day, while the visually challenged monk was imparting lectures, and when one of the disciples asked, "sir, please, kindly tell us how did you distinguish the soldier, the Inspector, Diwan and the king the other day when you sat squatting on the Royal Road?"

The visually impaired special educator or the blind ascetic replied, "well, I distinguished and recognized them all with their manners, expressions and the way of their demeanour and public attitude to the saints with visual disability. I did not have to make any efforts to delve deep into their human nature, they revealed themselves to me."

3. SUMMATION WITH CRITIQUES:

The first folktale depicts how liars, cheaters and conspirators play chicanery, prepare snares and set ups against disabled persons when they are constrained to serve under the administration and official position of a person with visual disability.

The second folktale teaches us to perceive the reality that the problem of physical deficit or deformity we expect in others may be with ourselves as well, as has been the case of Ramdev and Ramdevi.

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