

Revisiting the Status of Odia Folktales through Eco-Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Folktales are a part of folklore literature, orally transferred in the shape of poems, songs, myths, dramas, rituals, proverbs and riddles of a particular place or people while folklore is considered as the amalgam of the customs, legends, traditions, old deities and timeless tales that preserved and passed from one generation to the other. One such richly endowed oral literature belongs to the state of Odisha, where grandchildren have grown up listening to stories from Mahabharata, Abolakara Kahani, Bagula-Baguli chronicles, The Legend of Taw-poi, The heroic feat of Dharmapada, Jataka Tales, and many other myths and legends that are popular among the people indigenous to this region. Fakir Mohan Senapati, Krishna Chandra Panigrahi and Chakradhar Mahapatra are pioneer in interweaving Odia folk elements into short stories. This paper will strive to critically appreciate the selected short fictions of Shri Raghabananda Dash and Ranjan Pradhan to explore the eco-critical elements from their works such as Kathalahari (1927) and Tales From Hill and Jungle (2009) respectively. It represents the very essence of rural Odia culture, nature and tribal communities and focuses on the

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images of the stereotyping psychology that constructs human relationships with the non-human world. The study will analyze the vernacular tongue, employment of supernatural elements and magic realism used by Dash and Pradhan which replicate a unique enchanting quality of Odia folktales. In stark contrast to these idiosyncratic embellishments many British writers like William Wordsworth, Thomas Hardy, Gilbert White, Stephen Moss, and Philip Hensler and American writers like H.D Thoreau, Richard Wright, W.C. Byrant, William Bartram, Oscar Wilde have regarded Nature as a symbol of transcendence and focused on the environment and our surroundings through their works. However, none of the works of the Western raconteurs have any similarity with the moral, educational and realistic repertoire that Odia folklore encompasses. Unfortunately, the advent of capitalism and globalism has scrambled us into a generation of self-conscious suppressors of our own illustrious past. Therefore, this paper will endeavour to re-voice fresh discourses about Odia folktales as an eminent and timeless component of the Indian literary tradition occupied with abundance of green studies by maintain a fine balance between 'Culture' and 'Nature'.

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Folklore is a literary genre which has been shared by a particular group of people encompasses the common tradition of a particular culture, subculture or group. Folktales which is a part of folklore literature includes oral traditions that has composed with proverbs, myths, riddles, animal tales, fables, fantasy and joke which ranges from material culture to customary lore. This particular genre has been started to distinguish itself as an autonomous discipline during the period of romantic nationalism in Europe. Johann Gottfried Von Herder is the first figure of 1770s who has presented oral traditions as an organic process grounded in locale. *The Kinder- Und Housemarchen* of the Brothers Grimm in 1812 is the best known and the only collection of verbal folklore of the European peasantry of that time.

By the turn into the 20th century the number and sophistication of folklore studies and folklorists have grown both in Europe and North America. Whereas European folklorists like Joseph Jackob, Lewis Carroll and Brother Grimms have focused on the oral folklore of the homogeneous peasant populations in their regions. *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland, English Fairy tale, Jupiter and Monkey, Fairy tales like Rapunzel and Snow White, Bewolf* are very famous in

European Folktales. At the same time American folklorists Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict have considered Native American cultures in their research by including the totality of their customs and beliefs as folklore through their work such as *Princess Scargo, Jack and Beanstalk and Maid of Mist* etc.

Like British and American Literature, India literature possesses a large body of heroic ballads and epic poetry preserved in oral tradition, both in Sanskrit and the various vernacular languages of India. The stories from Indian country side have a sylvan flavour and they are replete with myths, fables, adventurous tales of the warriors and fairy tales etc. We find a vast treasure of mythical legends, Puranic stories, fables from *Panchatantra* and *Hitapodesa, Jataka Tales* and *Bikram Betala* and so on. Indian folktales succinctly present a genuine picture of joy and sorrow, happiness and miseries of the common people, love and devotion in the families and their relationship with the nature and community.

Indian folk heroes like Rama, Krishna are well known to everyone. Like Indian National folk heroes, regional tribal heroes still alive in the collective memory of the people. For example, Beer Kherwal and Bidu Chandan are the cultural heroes of Santhals. Chital Singh Chhatti is one the famous folk heroes of Gonds and Lakha Banjara or Raja Isalu is well known in Banjara tribes.

After Independence, Indian folklorists like Devendra Satyarthi, Krishna Dev Upadhyaya, Prafulla Dutta Goswami, Kunja Bihari Dash, Ashutosh Bhattacharya and many more senior folklorists have contributed a lot into this the study. A.K. Ramanujan is the noted folklorist to analyse folklore from Indian context by using the theme of context-sensitivity. The texts like *Where Mirrors and the Windows (1989)* and *Three Hundred Ramayana's (1991)* reveals the intertextual nature of Indian Literature written and Oral.

Folklore has a rich heritage in India that has been used in practical life and also in sophisticated works of art and treatises. Odisha, a colourful region famous for its fine art, folk painting on walls, Patta Chitra, (painting on cloth), Koshli folk music and dance, pancha badya (ganda baja), Odishi music and dance, architecture, sculpture, Bandha kala (weaving design on cloth in west odisha) have justly been called Odisha the land of exquisite arts and shows its richness of traditional society, culture and lifestyle of Odia people .

English scholar like John Beams who is an administrator by taking his first interest in this field. He has attracted with the charms and superstitions among the people. His article on "*Folklore of*

Orissa" (1872) has been appeared in Indian Antiquary. He has been attributed the reasons of isolation of the land from outside world for a long period. The belief in witchcraft, utterance of 'mantra', coming across an empty vessel at the starting point of journey, touch of a broom stick and so on has recorded by him.

Fakir Mohan Senapati, the pioneer Odia novelist who has been drawn inspiration and made free use of folk materials, especially in proverbs in his works . Senapati's Galpa Swalpa (Part I and II), Chakradhar Mahapatra's *Gauli Geeta Chumbak* (1939), and Kunja Bihari Das's Odishara Lokokatha (Part I and II) reveals the interrelation between human lives and ecosystem. It highlights the relationship between man and animal, cultural and natural archetypes and how animals are able to understand human psychology and emotion.

The stories like Tale of Two Friends, Tale of Lotus in Motion, Tale of Bridal Mouse and Tale of Dhundu Monkey are notable work of Dr. Kunjbihari Das. Other folktales from Kalahandi, Boudh and Balangiri which have been written by Ramesh Patri shows how Nature is an integral part of tribal life.

The name of T.E. Revenshaw cannot be ignored in the field under whose patronage Pt. Kapileswar Bidya Bhusan Nanda Sharma has worked on the '*Popular Sayings of Odia people*' which has published in 1876. However the names of Nilamani Bidya Ratna, Chandra Sekhar Bahinipati, Raghabananda Nayak, Gopal Chandra Praharaj, the compiler of (Odia Bhasa Kosha) have contributed a lot into this genre and reflects the human relationship with the non human world through their texts.

When we open the pages of history we can obtain eco-critical elements from epics and kabyas that comes from an ancient Odia literature. The great epic Mahabharat of Sarala Das in odia (15th c) embodies folklore and termed itself as folk-epic. The best examples can be cited here by mentioning two enchanted kabyas "Shasisena" and "Kanchi Kaveri" (18th century) blended with folk tales and ballads prevailing then. The volume *Utkal Kahan* published by Praharaj at the close of 19th Century is still popular and has won appreciation from all quarters. But Laxminarayan Sahu, a member of Bharat Sevak Samaj, paid attention to tribal folklore. He collected songs from the Khond, Saura, Gonda, Gadaba, Santal, Paraja, Koya and other ethnic groups and published them under the title *Gandharbika Satadals* (1937).

He has been published a critical study on their religion, faith, rituals, songs, tales, etc. in *His Tribes of Jeypore* (1942).

We have a non-folklorist in Pt. Nilakantha Das, the veteran poet, philosopher and critic has discussed, in depth, the role of folklore in the development of Oriya literature and culture. He has also engrossed on the contribution of the tribal inhabitants to the Oriya language and culture in his *Odia Sahitya Krama Parinam* (1948-53) and in his other works. Verrier Elwin has contributed a lot to Orissa by staying many years among the tribals and brought out a monumental volume entitled *Tribal Myths of Orissa*(1954). Dr. Natabar Samantaray's *Odia Palli Sahitya* (1970) is a handy book lucidly written, introducing Oriya folk literature to general readers. Dr. K. C. Behera's *Mogal Tamsa* (1946) brings to light the history and salient features of a folk drama of the Bhadrak area which has on the wane. Some other significant publications of the period are *Odia Lok Natak* (1983) by Hemanta Kumar Das, *A Study of Oriya Folk-Ballads* (1988) and *Santal Lok Kahani* by Dr. Shyam Sundar Mohapatra and *Paschima Odisar Adivasi Lok Sanskruti*(1992), *kalahandira Lokasamskruti*(1996), *Visioning Folklore*(2002) and *Oral Epics of Kalahandi* (2008) are worth mentioning because they provide us the information about the connection between nature and human world.

This study has taken two selected tales from *Tales from Hill and Jungle* (2009) such as "The Flying Elephant" and "Tale of Sashisena" by Ranjan Pradhan and another two from Raghabananda Das's "Kacha khamba Katha" (Tale of Glass Pillar) and "Neula Bhai Katha" (Tale of Mongoose Brother) from the text *Kathalahari*.

These tales describe an interdependence quality between human and the non human world. It tells the story from the past and shows how nature is an inevitable part of human life by dealing with the present scenario of the environment. This work explores eco-psychological themes, by examining values and practices as it investigates contemporary idea of wilderness and bio-regionalism. It takes us towards the path of psychological reconnection with nature, without and within. Through the Flying Elephant and Tale of Sashisena, it seems clear about the unspoken words of the forest are manifested in the spoken words of the tribal. In the lap of nature, everyone irrespective of man and animal have equal status as they are the creation of this mother earth. As African proverbs says, "those who are uninitiated, cannot understand our songs" which means to the understand tribal life first we have to understand their culture and their life within forest.

This paper has applied the qualitative and empirical method of eco-criticism. Environment is a hot topic

of the day in view of some present ecological issues. The depletion of the earth is a much-talked matter of these days; it is the byproduct of human activities for a long time. William Rueckert has first made use of the term 'ecocriticism' in his critical prose-work "Literature and Ecology-An Experiment in Ecocriticism"(1978) to mean "the application of ecological concepts to the study of literature because ecology.....has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world..."(Rueckert 107). Eco-criticism as an academic discipline arose during the last decade of the 20th century when Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm Published a book named *The Eco-criticism Reader*(1996) an anthology of Critical Essays on Nature.

Mere science or technology is not enough for building up an eco-consciousness among the humans. Eco-criticism undoubtedly does this work of consciousness rising among the readers. It pleads for a symbiosis (living together) which suggests an ecological association between the man and environment. The Man has lived in close kinship with nature until there prevailed his hierarchic feeling being the only literal animal. His materialistic attitude has led him to look upon nature as a commodity.

As long as the humans will carry on this anthropocentric attitude, nature will be exploited leading towards the ultimate doomsday of the earth. Eco-criticism studies culture in relation to the geography of a place or landscape. Because culture is created by the people who have been living in particular place over the years. The impact of such kind of landscape on characters we find in Hardy's Wessex novels, Synge's writings on Aran Island, R. K. Narayan's Malgudi, Bibhutibhushan's Labtulia and in many works of Manoj Das, Ruskin Bond, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy and Ramachandra Guha. The harmonious relationship between human and the nonhuman will build an eco-wisdom among the readers and it helps them to find a path from ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness. In a sense, eco criticism is a process of self-realization of who we are, where we stand, how we should treat our habitat, how we should behave with the other organisms etc.

Eco-psychology which is a part of eco-criticism and it pursues the ambitious goal are steeped in the field's of counter-cultural beginnings. It has been emerged in the early 1960s just as the modern environmental movement gathering the strength, when Boston graduates have discussed it as the isolation and the malaise infecting the modern life.

Theodore Roszak, a professor of history, coined the term 'counterculture' and published a manifesto, *The Voice of the Earth* (1992) in which he criticizes

modern psychology for neglecting the primal bond between man and nature.

Representation of nature in literature is not a recent phenomenon. Since time immemorial great classics of literature have treatment of nature. From Beowulf to The Wasteland nature plays an important role in literature. But the writer's attitude to nature is not always the same. Sometimes nature appears as a background and sometimes as a character. The metaphysical poets look upon nature as a concept through which mankind conceives of its difference from the non-human world. The romantics took shelter in the open lap of nature being dissatisfied with the surrounding world. Nature plays a fateful role in Victorian writers like Hardy as we find in his novels. Eco criticism draws its bearing from the works of three great American writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau. Emerson enjoyed the impact of nature in his first reflect essay "Nature". Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes* (1843) encounters the American landscape at large. In *Walden* (1854), Thoreau has been built a hut on the shore of Walden Pond, a couple of miles away from his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts. It is, perhaps, the classic account of dropping out of modern life and seeking to renew the self by a "return to nature". (Barry)

Like other literature Indian regional literature has also filled with eco-critical elements. And Odishan folk literature is one of them. The selected Odia folktales are unique in composition which explores the mysteries of the Nature and presents a strong evidence on human and animals bonding.

In the story "The Flying Elephant" which is a tale of dongaria kandha from Rayagada district shows the interaction between the farmer and the elephant that has come from the paradise. It seems very clear from this line, "*Who are you Mr.man and Why are you hanging onto my tails like this?*" (p.42)

It also reflects that animals have the power to understand human psychology and they can feel human sentiments. Being a poor fellow, the farmer depends on his agriculture only. But when elephant has eaten all the crops of him and when he has nothing to survive for then he has gone to elephant and cried before him. So having been touched by appealing words of the farmer, the elephant has provided him some gold coins and wealth and said to him, "*Now you can manage your family comfortably with this wealth and there will be no wants for you.*" Like this elephant, the jungle Goddess is kind enough for all the creatures as "Tale of Sashisena" presents the mercy of jungle Goddess on Sasisena, who is a beautiful angle like girl but unable to get a suitable

bridegroom. So "*the jungle Goddess appeared soon before her and a big serpent stood there. By seeing the serpent sasisena was frightened and the Goddess said to her, "Dear child don't frightened that serpent is your real bridegroom"* (p.125). The aforementioned lines fetch us the idea about the conversations of animal and nature with human and their capacity to understand human feelings as well.

The tales indicates the stereotyping or taboo beliefs the traditional society, human behaviour and their involvement with nature. The opening line of "The Tale of Mongoose Brother" opens with a supernatural belief . By eating a mango which has once already half eaten by a mongoose, king's younger queen has given birth to a baby mongoose which seems quite funny and odd now a days.

In "The Tale of Mongoose Brother", the title itself shows that how one animal can be fit into a human character by being called as a brother and has the ability to perform all the duties better than his other six brothers. In many stories we have called tiger as uncle , a mongoose as brother, a jackal as 'Nana' which means elder brother. And they stand for the archetypes of different human behaviour and characters. Like Freud and Jung are looked to myths and symbols to provide metaphors for the psychological process and condition. In Jung's theory myths and folktales arise out of the same instinctual forms across cultures, issuing that it has come from our inherited nature, finding symbols in human habitat that yield knowledge of psyche and of human kinship with the rest of the life. The small creatures are witty and smart enough to win the strong creatures.

Story of the king and queen, prince and princess and demoness is the common paradigm in Indian folktales especially in Odisha. "Tale of the Glass Pillar" or ("Kacha Khamba Katha") has deployed with the characters of demoness, king, queen, prince and princess. The outline of the story tells about an old demoness and the seven daughters. When the seven daughters of Sadhaba have gone for a visit of the ending line of the moon there they have been caught by a demoness. By seeing the girls, "*the demoness said O' children come and sit with me and play*" (p.20). because her intention has to kill them.

Place and capital city are the models that influence several communities since palace and capital are the symbol of power. The importance of king's court or palace has been reflected through these two tales such as , "Tale of the Glass Pillar" (Kacha Khamba Katha) and "The Tale of Sasisena" which talks about the traditional laws and rules of the traditional Odisha province. Both the tales have represented the shifting

attitude of places which has been faced by Sasisena and her husband the young man and also by the younger daughter of Sadhaba when she has rescued herself from the demoness with help of nature.

Magic, supernaturalism, trantric cult or savari vidya and usage of vernacular language like riddles, proverbs, lullabies and cowboy musics are the major aspect of Odishan folk tales. "The Tale of Sasisena" brings the theme guise by transformation of the young man into the sheep and Sasisena into a young man. It creates more interest in the readers mind. As the line says, "In the midnight the florist woman came into their room and sprinkled some charmed water and the young man transformed into the sheep very soon." (p.127). The "Tale of Glass Pillar" introduces the same magical and supernatural elements when the Sadhaba's younger daughter has met a mango tree and asked it to open up so that she can enter into it and rescue herself from the demon children. As the line says, "O' Mango tree! If you belong to Satya yug then please be open and give me a shelter within you and rescue me from these demons. By listening this, immediately the tree opened up itself and give her a place." (p.21). It represents the scenario of the past that before men are able to talk with the trees, creepers, animals and birds and also depends on them. Environment has given us the opportunity to understand the world around us as well.

The short stories carry some moral lessons for the reader especially for the children which helps them to built their character. As Last line of the "The Flying Elephant" gives a moral message that "the farmer and the villagers reaped the consequences of being susceptible to too much of greed and finally they attained death."?(p.44)

This study emphasizes on the importance of Nature, the bond between human and non human world and puts an eye upon the gap between the past experiences of human life within nature and the present condition of our society with nature. Our own Odia folktales are the real evidences which shows the significance of ecology in human life. By looking at human consciousness from ancient spirituality to modern folklore elucidates some of the possible causes for our current struggle towards both ecological and cultural conservation, and it point towards possibilities for a sustainable future .Both man and animal need each other to survive in their life. These folktales are the medium to gain knowledge about a particular region's traditional, social and cultural mindset of the people and their lifestyles.

Now a days by being modern minded and with the effects of globalization people are forgetting to perform their duties towards mother Nature. Contemporary mindset, technology and architecture brings death and disease to the animals and harms the green earth in plenty. It causes many environmental issues like global warming, hole in ozone layer, acid rain and sudden climate changes by importing untimely death towards human life.

This paper will make people understand about the another realm of the culture and nature that has the truth and secrecy of maintaining cultural biodiversity. So we should be dutiful of our environment to preserve the natural resources. The things that we need to survive and thrive have been provided by the natural world itself. For instances food, water, medicine, materials for shelter, nutrients and most importantly it helps us to make a healthy psychology by reducing human stress hormones. So, Without Nature there is no life. "Save Nature , Save Life and Go green.

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