

## **MODERN MALADIES - THE FOLK REMEDIES**

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The present era is an age of darkness and loss of values; conflicts, differences, violence, anxiety, intolerance, discrimination and disillusionment have engulfed the hearts and minds of people across the globe. The modern way of life coupled with valueless education system has produced a chronically tired, absent minded and fatigued generation of neurotic youth lacking in vitality and sociability. Indeed, it is a ruthless herd of youth who are unduly egoistic, self-centered and who lack a sense of responsibility and whose actions are driven and controlled by cutthroat competitiveness. The citizens of the world seem to be in a state of utter confusion and mental paralysis; nothing seems to provide solace and shelter to the wanton souls of the modern waste landers. There has been a gradual drift from the path of values and righteousness that has caused the state of anarchy in the modern societies. People have failed to imbibe the spirit of negotiation, compromise and an insight that encourages them to co-exist in harmony with each other. Lost in the labyrinths of modernization they are unable to differentiate between the moral and immoral, ethical and unethical, right and wrong. Broken and defeated they are in search of a system that can provide them shelter and refuge from the tsunami of moral crisis. Consequently, many questions have cropped up regarding morals and ethics which need serious attention, otherwise the very existence of the most beautiful creation of God i.e. humans will be in peril of extinction.

The modern technology has deprived us of the joys of life such as outdoor recreation, company of nature, traditional games and practices, socializing and so on. We are at a risk of being lost, wrestling with self and in search of self. It is high time now that the life nourishing cultural practices and the time honoured customs, which form crux of the folklore be concretely explored and theorized into systematic educational programmes. The

pertinent question that bothers intellectuals worldwide is- ‘how to pass on to our children the acquired wisdom of ages that can teach them to live a truly humane life?’ John S. Ryan quotes Morita Yuzo from his work *Education in life-fundamental culture: Growing up with nature as teacher*- “Educators have been troubled by a rash of new and difficult problems –violence, juvenile delinquency, bullying, fear of leaving ‘the security of home, and other behavioral abnormalities verging on pathology’.” (Morita Yuzo, 1995, p. 1)

Morality and ethics have now become a topic of serious concern for people across the world; this has encouraged a retrospective study of the education system of the ancient times when such issues regarding inculcation of values and ethics in children had never troubled the society. The studies affirm that the ancient civilizations of the world had a clearly laid down standard code of conduct in one form or the other which was orally transmitted from one generation to another in the form of folklore in unperceived and unconscious manner in the process of growing up. Studies have proved that the folklore ingrained in people the lifestyle skills that strengthened the interpersonal relationships through dialogue.

Ironically in the process of getting civilized folklore has either been abandoned or consciously forgotten. The Indian way of life has always fostered certain life values such as satya, ahimsa, dharma, prema and shanti. Our philosophical texts and scriptures are replete with deep spiritual insight and moral values that can symphonize the soul, cleanse the mind and heal the heart. There is a dire need to revamp the education system as well as revive the ancient value system so as to accomplish the eternal endeavor of peace, harmony and happiness. This will help in creating the awareness for contemporary concerns such as human rights, democracy, spirit of compromise, sense of responsibility, cultural identity and environmental conservation; most importantly it will develop a vision of universal brotherhood in people as is contained in the philosophical dictum of *Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam* and certainly make the world a better place to live in. At this critical hour the ‘folklore’ can rescue the humanity by being panacea against the cancerous impacts of modernity which are consuming the strength and vitality of the minds and souls of modern folk.

The folk literature, rituals, myths, legends and many other aspects of folk life constitute folklore. Lenin defined folklore as “Folklore is material about hopes and yearnings of the people”. Alan Dundes observes, “Folklore includes myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses oaths, insults etc. It also includes folk costume, folk dance, folk drama and mimes, folk art, folk belief, folk medicine, folk instrumental music, folk similes and folk metaphors” (Dundes, 1965, p.3). Folklore provides aid in educating the young, promotes group solidarity, serves as an outlet to suppressed emotions and provides a means of escape from disappointments and frustration. Keeping in mind the above functions and the simple definition that any mechanism used for communicating message to masses is mass media, it can be asserted that folklore is an effective means of mass communication. As a mass media its objectives are to transmit information, to change the attitudes of the people, to impart moral and social education and so on. In nutshell it serves as a means to prepare people to discharge their roles effectively as disciplined citizens of the country. Folktales effectively deliver moral preaching, folksongs are effective means of outlet of mental tensions, and folk proverbs are good guides for socio-economic reforms and riddles are memory testing devices. Above all folk drama, which is an audio-visual form, has mass appeal both among literate and non-literate masses.

The major components of the folklore of Rajasthan consists of the diversity of literary genres such as *Lok Gatha* (Folk Ballads), *Lok Geet* (Folk Song), *Lok Katha* (Folk Tale), *Lok Natyas* (Folk plays), *Lok Subhashit* (Folk Sayings) etc. The primary aim of oral folklore was social interaction and entertainment therefore it addresses daily issues of society and provides a system of laws through which a code of conduct is laid down which helps in regulating the social behaviour and forming the character of the individuals which in turn forms the character of the society and the nation. It lays down a framework of political thoughts, moral code of conduct, economic rules, philosophical dictums and metaphysical principles that are required to guide, govern and control the society. The roots of the folk literature of Rajasthan can be traced in the ancient Sanskrit narratives and Jain *Apbransha Sahitya* from which it

also acquired the ethical and moral elements. It aims at inspiring people to elevate their living standard by infusing in their lives harmony, virtuousness, truthfulness, dutifulness and other important values. It contains the guiding principles of *lok-vyavhar* or the public behavior and may therefore be entitled as *Lok-Acharan Samhita*. Manohar Sharma, a renowned Rajasthani folklorist observes about this literature, "It aims at creating awareness, building character, providing ethical knowledge and entertaining public". The folk literature carries with it the collective wisdom of ages and teaches people to differentiate between good and evil, virtue and vice, ethical and unethical, moral and immoral. It has been ingraining in children all the universal human values like unity, peace, honesty, courage, hope, happiness, trust, co-operation, simplicity, freedom, love, respect for others, humility, compassion etc. in the process of their growing up in such a way that there never arose a need to provide them formal value education (Joshi and Shekhawat, 2018, p. 226-7).

The folk literature of Rajasthan features brave, courageous and virtuous men and women who inspire virtues in people through their thoughts and deeds. Eternal life values are nurtured and propagated through the lives and deeds of local heroes or *lok devtas* or folk-deities. The folk deities Pabuji, Gogaji, Ramdevji, Tejaji and Jambhoji sacrificed their lives for emancipation of poor and downtrodden and for restoration of religion and culture. Lok Gathas (the poetic tales) based on lives of such legendary heroes contain the fundamentals of public behaviour. The gathas based on lives of Pabuji, Gogaji, Tejaji and Ramdevji are truly inspiring. In folk songs gods and are invoked not for individual gains but for welfare of the whole community, nation and the world. Deities are invoked for public welfare, health and prosperity and the songs sung during fairs and festivals also express the joys and sorrows of masses and not individuals.

The various fairs and festivals such as Gangour, Teej, Rakhi, Goganavami, Holi, Akhateej, Sheetla Asthmi, Navratra etc. represent religio-cultural dimensions of Rajasthan. The songs and stories associated with these festivals not only multiply the joy of festivity many fold but also reflect the true spirit of these festivals i.e. to strengthen the society by nurturing the values

like unity, equality, love and comradeship between people of diverse social, economic and religious groups. This is how people acquired the feeling of harmonious co-existence, respect for other religions and culture and a spirit of tolerance. This literature projects the importance of values such as truth, generosity, benevolence, austerity, modesty, compassion, love, industriousness, self-reliance and so on. Mothers sing songs of chivalrous warriors and virtuous men and women while breast-feeding their infants to ingrain in them the values of bravery and courage. There are songs and stories which project the importance of self-esteem and patriotism. The scarcity of natural resources in Rajasthan is compensated with the bounty in human resources. The people of Rajasthan have always valued the family relations more than anything else because this lays the foundation of a strong community and nation. The stories and tales of love, mutual understanding and co-operation between family members are very inspiring as they convey the message that cordial domestic relationships add charm and joy to life. There are innumerable folk songs, which advocate the importance of unity in the family. There are folk songs, which preach the importance of patience, compromise, and sharing as these are fundamental qualities that sustain the joint family system. These songs have played important role in resolving domestic feuds and conflicts among members of the family and restoring the harmony in the family (Joshi and Shekhawat, 2018, p.228-9).

This literature not only guides the ‘folk’ to maintain warm and cordial interpersonal relationships but also highlights the importance of symbiotic relations between humans and animals, human beings and nature and amongst different animal species. The folk literature eulogizes the sacrifice of folk deities Pabuji, Tejaji, Vir Biggaji, and Panraiji who fell martyr while protecting cows. Each folk tale delivers an important message for life. There are stories replete with emotions of love, caring, sharing, concern, and compassion that help in strengthening interpersonal relations not only within but outside the family. The stories depicting man and nature reciprocating love for each other are the greatest gems of this literary treasure. A bulk of this literature addresses social issues like environmental conservation, woman-education, child-marriages, gender discrimination, superstitions,

untouchability, communal and religious harmony and so on. This literature exemplifies the practice of religious tolerance. In *Devji Bagdavat Gatha* Hindus are shown invoking *Pirs* and *Paigambars* (Muslim God) (Joshi and Shekhawat, 2018, p.230).

The folk dramatic form *khayal* of Rajasthan is quite well known for its excellent use of dialogues and the folk speech, so much so that several poets of the eighteenth century used it for philosophical purposes to preach ideas of immortality of the soul. The dramatic form directly penetrates into the psychology of the masses and hence is more effective. Therefore traditional folk theatre forms such as folk operas, drama, ballads are even today more popular than the modern media forms. Added to this its benefit is that its performance is very economical. The study of the origin and evolution of different forms of folk drama, their nature and content, and the purpose, for which they have been developed, clearly shows that there is a close relationship between the changes that have occurred in them and the transformations which society itself has undergone. Initially when moral, ethical and philosophical values held sway over the masses, the forms of drama that developed naturally revealed a predilection towards religious themes and sentiments. But later on when monetary and economic values asserted themselves with their concomitant consequences, the forms of drama had to adapt themselves to new situations, challenges and opportunities.

This literature has great appeal because here the values find expression in a very simple and unsophisticated manner. Even a child can grasp them easily. It has the power to guide people and direct them towards right path during the vicissitudes of life. The secret of its effectiveness lies in the fact that the folk are unaware of its subtle ways of functioning. In the guise of recreation and entertainment it actually guides them. A grandmother narrating a tale, a mother singing a lullaby or a woman observing a custom transmits the cultural wisdom from one generation to another. The folklore builds the character of the masses in unconscious, unseen and unperceived manner. Komal Kothari, the renowned folklorist of Rajasthan has called folk songs as the builders of our subconscious virtues. Swetha Prakash explicates “The purpose of storytelling is often to expound on morality or dharma, to help

audiences distinguish between righteous and un-righteous action" (Prakash, 2016, p. 21). She further states, "Stories take us to an enchanted land where we can let go of the mundaneness of human existence, of the many disappointments we face. Stories take us from the real to the enchanted. Folk stories allow for 'a replenishment of energies' wherein radical personal change and social change for the good is made possible" (Prakash, 2016, p.39). The folklore has been guiding the folks in every sphere of life; more particularly it has strengthened interpersonal relationships which are foundation of a strong societal structure. It has taught them how to behave with family members, neighbours, friends, elders, as well as young and it has guided them regarding their duties towards their nation. The folklore still has the power to shape character of the people. In nutshell it can be asserted that the folklore of Rajasthan is born out of universal human urge to find balance, harmony, and beauty in the world and it retains the culture and values to be passed on to succeeding generations.

In ancient times the transmission of folklore was aural between members of a folk group. It could be at family level or community level. With the advent of literate culture, the scholars undertook the herculean task of compilation of folk literature although it still continues to be transmitted orally. The greatest drawback of this effort was that it resulted in freezing of the otherwise dynamic oral literature because oral transmission had great scope of alteration, modification, interpolation and so many other forms of adaptation according to the cultural transformations. This answers the regional variations and different versions of the great Indian epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The popularization of television as a mass media tool brought a revolutionary change in the medium of transmission of folklore. It promoted trans-genre adaptation of epics, myths, legends and episodes from scriptures to cinema, serials, documentaries and other forms suitable for television broadcast. The folklore was popularized but in the process a great deal of values and ethics were lost or altered to suit the tastes of modern viewers. It is quite unfortunate that in the name of creativity, democratic outlook, unconventional thinking, modern perspective, iconoclastic ideas or modern retelling, the folklore was reinterpreted with the lens of modernity. Consequently, some of the adaptations have given heroic dimensions to the otherwise

villainous characters of the epics and other mythological tales. Nowadays themes of popular cinema and serials have undergone a drastic transformation; the folkloric content is completely replaced with vulgar dramas based on tragic, comic, action, emotional, mystery, and romantic themes. Consequently, it has lowered the moral standard of the masses. Further the media has digressed from its role of constructive means of communication and a tool for formation of public opinion by giving priority to featuring of controversial disputes over communal, religious or other less significant issues instead of focusing on debates on important issues of national and social concern. To increase their TRP the mass media has started serving all kinds of vulgar stuff and ironically the fourth pillars of democracy has started consuming the vitality of the society which it is supposed to strengthen. But the consolatory fact is that in recent years the media has shown positive signs for revival of folklore. There have been attempts by scholars and intellectuals to revisit the folklore and present it authentically and in unadulterated form. Although a drop in the ocean, Devdutt Patnaik's Epic Channel is an example of such endeavour. This has revived people's interest in folklore.

It is interesting to note that the rise of internet era marks a milestone in the area of mass communication. With the development of internet as a communication facilitator, the folklore has acquired the pivotal role on the internet domain. Internet provides a significant platform for dispersal of stories, legends, songs, traditions, rituals and other components of folklore. Netlore has emerged as a techno-modified form of folklore. The serious study of socio-cultural dimensions of internet and the 'netlore' available discloses the fact that the bulk of this folklore is penned by amateur folklorists and hence requires a vigorous sieving. The obvious reason is that folklore is a specialized discipline and is not the forte of newly emerged team of techno-literates, who have wrongly interpreted it through the lens of Social Science, communication, and literature. Richard Dorson's coinage 'fakelore' for internet based folklore has raised suspicion in the minds of people regarding its authenticity. Some scholars consider internet as unfit venue for dispersal of folklore for they opine that communication events which form an important constituent of folklore require face to face

interaction. Contrarily the famous folklorist Alan Dundes argues “technology isn’t stamping out folklore rather it is becoming a vital factor in the transmission of folklore as it is providing an exciting source of inspiration for the generation of new folklore” (Dundes, 1980, p.16-7). The latest advancement of internet i.e. emails, blogs, twitter, whatsapp, facebook etc have immensely contributed in revival of folklore. These changes have not made this folk medium weak. Instead, they have provided the dynamic potential of a folk genre, its organic capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and thus become more effective and relevant. The fact cannot be denied that internet and television has proved to be a panacea for folklore which was almost on deathbed gasping for last breath due to the intoxication caused by excessive modernization. The digital era has therefore witnessed the rejuvenation of a valuable legacy which has nurtured minds and hearts of the folk for centuries.

The folklore still possesses great potential as a successful mass media. The question is how best the folk media can be utilized for the betterment of our present society. Modern technology and fast means of communication have brought nations closer but the evils of modernization have created a deep crater in the hearts of people. Mankind is torn with conflict - conflict of alienation from the past and the dangers of uncertain future. History of mankind repeatedly reminds us that whenever a nation has attempted to sever connections with its past and tried to live on its present alone, it has plunged itself into a catastrophe. Thus folklore, the oldest vehicle of cultural transmission, can help in such situations and keep the past and the present of the nations connected. Folklore is an excellent tool to help us to strike this balance between the past and the present. In the present era of transition that is marked by cultural invasions and loss of values, the folklore can play a significant role in safeguarding the cultural values and guiding the younger generation. Presently there is an urgency to take up folklore study for the reason that in the process of growing up it instills in an individual a deep concern for the natural and social milieu and a deeper respect for the diversity at local and global level. This will transform him into a better human being who will not just appreciate the spirit of universal brotherhood but also feel the pleasure of being a part of one global family. This helps in betterment of human resources and can produce a

generation of extremely responsible citizens because embracing diversity enriches and deepens the range of human experience. The exposure to global diversity helps in developing a better public understanding which in turn helps to develop a sense of appreciation towards the distinctiveness of one's own culture. Awareness of the warmth and uniqueness of one's own culture helps a person to choose traditionalism over sensationalism transforming one into a more sensible, compassionate and understanding person and prepares him to deal with the pressures of life in a better way.

Creating an awareness of natural environment through flora, fauna, outdoor recreation and interaction with nature can bestow some of the fundamental life nourishing virtues and values such as fitness, courage, endurance, good judgment and self-assertiveness. The indigenous games which form an part of folklore enables the harmless release of hostility, competitiveness, as well as challenges of life through accepting defeat, choosing leaders, and taking risks. Creating an awareness of local history and traditions through fairs and festivals and by exploring the community can develop in people the eternal values like love, truth, compassion, peace, brotherhood, patience, courage etc. This is how the basic abilities to become mature citizens can be fostered. It will also help in making the lives of people richer with diverse cultural experiences and help them to attain their optimal potential through nurturing body as well as spirit. Folklore can draw the people into new social understanding and relationships transcending the conventional political, economic and cultural barriers.

Joshi quotes William Bascom from his essay Four Functions of Folklore published in *Journal of American Folklore*. Bascom articulated functional roles of folklore, " i.e. proverbs help settle legal decision, riddles sharpen wits, myths validate conduct, satirical songs release hostilities and in general folklore aid in the education of young, promote group solidarity provide socially sanctioned ways to act in a certain situation, serve as a vehicle of social protest and it offers enjoyable escape from reality." (Joshi, 1976, p.6) At the present critical juncture when the world seems to be in topsy-turvy of morality and the citizens of the world are facing identity crisis there is an urgency to rejuvenate the dying morality through revival of folkways.

This can altogether revolutionize the lives of youth and can prove to be a milestone in the journey of human race. To revitalize the dejected and confused modern man it has become essential to unpack, unfold, explore, revive and relive these traditions so that once again we can enliven the richness of the bygone days. This revival can help in curing the modern maladies and can reawaken the world from its slumber of intoxication caused due to the evils of modernization. It is noteworthy to quote an African proverb in this context, “The best way to fight an alien and oppressive culture is to embrace your own.”

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