

Experiment with Folk Elements: A study in Modern Odia Drama

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Introduction

The comprehensive aspects related to human life bears resemblance to folk elements, viz. folk religion, folk belief, folk literature, folk medicine, folk art etc. Even acclaimed mainstream literature cannot claim that it is free from influence of folk elements. The stalwart creators of literature consciously or unconsciously have used elements of folk in their creations. The cultural heritage is thus reflected in the academic works of an author through the use of folk elements. This particular 'reflection' forms the basis of significance of the created literature. Despite of several disparities, the relationship between folk elements & modern Odia drama, specially in recent times have gained a strong bondage starting from folk ballad , folk tale and folk songs, proverbs & folk-sayings, folk language, folk customs & beliefs have been assimilated in theatre.

Odia Drama: An Anthropological Study

Many plays have been written based on regional & colloquial languages and also on the basis of partial usage of regional languages. Aswinikumar Ghosh's '*Samaleswari*' (1925); Jointly written by Shibaprasad Mishra, Krushnaprasad Mishra & Murariprasad Mishra's '*Pranayaballari Kabya Nataka*'(1954-un published)& '*Akbar Ray*'(1955-un published); Kali Charan Patnaik's '*Hirakhanda*'(1960) contains use of 'Sambalpuri' or regional language of western Orissa. Dhaneswar Patnaik's '*Adivasi*' contains a fusion of tribal language with Sambalpuri language. Sankar Tripathy's '*Shuniba Heu E Kahani*', there are characters like *Saragu, Shanta, Chandu, Chari* etc . who vibrate language of western Odisha similarly Gopal Chottaray's '*Ghataka*'(1961), Pramod Tripathy's '*Honu Upadraba Sambad*', Sadananda Agrawal's '*Rakat*' etc. have used Sambalpuri /Koshali or the colloquial language of Western Odisha.

Among these plays, Sambalpuri and Koshli are the two frequently used regional language. The other colloquial languages have not been used in writing of plays. So ,the first two languages mentioned find, place in these plays – ‘*Gountia Babu*’(1957) is the first property written play in sambalpuri language based on submerged valley of Hirakud dam area. It was first time played at Sambalpur by Chitrotpala Kala Parisada. The play was jointly written & enacted by Murari Prasad Mishra, Shiba prasad Mishra and Krishna prasad Misra; Later this trend was followed to write many were plays like – Manglu Charan Biswal’s ‘*Lura*’ , ‘*Bhukha*’, ‘*Barua*’, ‘*Ulgulan*’, ‘*Ma Samlei*’ , ‘*Bhutiari Hothiar*’, ‘*Udla Patar Budla Danga*’, ‘*Haran Paap*’, ‘*Surendra Sai*’, ‘*Chhaeli*’ etc. Sadanand Agarwal’s ‘*Rokat*’ centres around communal harmony is a famous play. Shradhakar Supakar’s , ‘*Kasturi Mruga*’ , Sankar Prasad Mishra’s ‘*Ukia*’ , Satyaranjan Behera’s ‘*Hejla Phagun*’ , ‘*Kiria*’, Panchanan Mishra’s ‘*Entabi Hesi*’, Mitrabhanu Gountiar’s ‘*Bhai Juntia*’, Dilip kumar Behera’s , ‘*Bharatbasi ki Jai*’, Dhanaputi Mahapatra’s ‘*Dalkhai*’, Binod kumar Pasayat’s , ‘*Ukhi*’, ‘*Muin Nai Maren*’ , Ashok kumar Baral’s ‘*Anchal*’, Jagadananda Churia’s ‘*E Jugar Gandhi*’, ‘*Raja Praja*’, ‘*Neta Janata*’, ‘*Thaka Mana Chala Jeeba*’, Atuly Pujari’s ‘*Karamu*’ , Atal Bihari Panda’s ‘*Lenjhatara*’, ‘*Dandua*’, Ashok Kumar Bohidar’s ‘*Pushpuni*’ etc. Some of the plays in the above Sambalpuri & Koshli segment have been telecasted and played.

Odia Drama in post colonial period

In post independence period, if we study the drama scenario, following remarks may be observed regarding the use of folk elements:

- 1) Forming plots from folk ballads
- 2) Use of plots from folk tales
- 3) Direct use of folk songs in drama
- 4) Use of rhythm & style of folk songs in drama
- 5) Use of folk sayings like proverb, idioms, riddles etc.
- 6) The experiment of style of folk theatre
- 7) Assimilation of characters from folk drama
- 8) Use of stage craft of folk drama
- 9) Use of folk language & dialect
- 10) Drama based on tribal groups & tribal life

So many modern drams are based on the folk tales, folk legends and folk ballads. The use of folk element in modern drama can be categorized into following four types:

- a) Complete symbolic representation of drama
- b) General conventional story telling
- c) Partial symbolic representation
- d) Free & open visualization

In this context ,the following texts may be discussed-playwright Aswinikumar Ghosh's *Kalapahada*(1920), *Konark*(1927), Adwaita Chandra Mohanty's *Sadhaba Jhia*(1947) & *Chakhi Khuntia* , Purna Chandra Kanungo's *Kala Pahada*(1974), Rajat kumar Kar's *Chakhi Khuntia* (1952), Purna Chandra Mohanty's *Byaghra Ebam Kankana lobhi Pathika Manankara Kahani* (1982), Jadunath Das Mohapatro's *Surjya Mandir*(1962), Ratiranjana Mishra's *Chanchalyakar* (1984),Monaranjan Das's *Kathaghoda* (1973) & *Nandika Kesari*(1985), Bijay Mishra's *Jane Raja Thile* (1982) , Niladri Bhusan Harichandan's *Kaluribenta* (1998),Bijaya Satapathy's *Sonita Swakshra*(2000) etc.

Mohanty's *Sadhaba Jhia* is a melancholy tragic adaptation of a folk tale focusing an *Tapoi*. In *Sonita Swakshra* the legendary mythical character 'Khulanasundari' reflect in new prospect. We see plots revolving around revolutionaries in *Chakhi Khutia* and *Chandan Hazoori*. There are also socially established mainstream folk characters in modern Odia drama like *Toapoi* , *Chandan Hazoori* , *Kala Pahada* and *Gobinda Chandra*. In Purnachandra's *Kala Pahad* & Rati Mishra's *Chanchalyakar* ,we can see the transformation of the historical character 'Kala Pahada' . The play *Kala Pahada* raises voice against castism albeit in a symbolic manner. Although Manoranjan Das' *Nandika Kesari* was written 58 years after Aswini Kumar Ghosh's *Kesari Gang*(1927), the latter has consciously infused folk elements in the character of *Nandika* to present it in a new form. The new applications of folk are found in plays like *Konark* and *Surjya Mandir*.

In plays like 'Kalluri Benta', 'Jane Raja Thile' , ' Byaghra Ebam Kankana lobhi Pathika Mananka Kahani'(1982)& Rati Ranjan Mishra's 'Sita'(1983) we can see use of excerpts from folk tales. In some of their plays the playwright intends to spell out new concepts & ideas through superficial use of folk idioms. Excepting Rati Mishra's 'Sita' this trend prevails

in all the other plays. A complete segment of 'Sita' is actually made based on the idiom of Fairy Tales or 'Pari Kahini'.

In many cases the playwrights improvise the titles of the plays in a symbolic manner reminiscent of folk element. Aswinikumar Ghosh's 'Maluni', Manoranjan Das 'Kathoghoda', Prafulla Rath's 'Saata Tala Pani' (1978); Pranbandhu Kar's 'Dur Pahada'; Byomkesh Tripathi's 'Suna Pharuva'; Narsingha Mohapatra's 'Baunsha Rani' (1969); Ananda Shankar Das's 'Chaka Bhunri'; Ramesh Prasad Panigrahi's 'Paka Kambala Pota Chhata'; and 'Hati ku Homeopathy', Niladri Bhusan Harichandan's 'Manhisira Pasa Na Jaa Danai'(1985), 'Maharaja Bije Hebe'(1984), Ratiranjan Mishra's 'Kuachori'(1977); Shankar Tripathy 'Rabanachhya'(2002), 'Bagha Bakri Khela'(2003), Ranajit Pattanaik's 'Gunia Jhadelo Dahani'(1992); Hrusikesh Panda's 'Bramha Rakshya' (1997), Dilliswara Moharana's 'Chake Gale Bara Hata'(2001); Panchanana Patra's 'Ghodamunha' etc. are prime instances. In this phase, the folk elements have been aptly assimilated in plays 'Sadhaha Jhia' and 'Chakhi Khuntia'. In context to *Kalapahada* the theme is woven in a symbolic manner in 'Jane Raja Thile', 'Kalluri Benta'. The folk persists partially. The playwrights have given a unique fiction touch to the existing folk psychology.

Experiments in application of folk elements in modern theatre

The folk drama has influenced modern drama in various ways. Recently importance of modern drama is on a decline which has led the playwrights to revert to folk theatre. Not only in terms of content but the form of folk theatre is also very important.

1. The experiment on the 'style' and 'form' of folk theatre.
2. Assimilation of Characters of folk drama in modern theatre.
3. Craft of folk stages in modern drama.

In case of assimilating folk elements into theatre; we see that there are mainly three trends. The stage preparation has relied heavily on the Director's thoughts. Ghoda Naacha in Kartik Rath's 'Choiti Ghoda', Daskathia in Subodh Patnaik's 'Ethu Onte' and Ramesh Panigrahi's 'Mahanatak', Pala in Bijay Satpathi's 'Ei Je Surjya Uen', Koraput desia Naacha in Manoranjan Das's 'Nandika Keshari', Daskathia, Pala & Keertan in Niladri Bhusan Hari Chandan's 'Bhimo Bhoinka Sandhanare', (1988), etc. have been added with a novelty

.Similarly Manoranjan Das's '*Kathghoda*', Ratiranjan Mishra's '*Sita*', Bijay Satpathy's '*Ei Je Surjya Uen*' have been directed with an idiom of '*Jatra*' or traditional musical drama. Ramesh Panigri's '*Dhrutarastrara Akhi*' has '*Kandhei Naacha*' (Traditional Puppet Play).The form is used in a completely new pattern.

Ratnakar Choini's '*Mukha*'(1979), '*Asthira Upatyaka*'(1984),Manoranjan Das's '*Shabdali*'(1976),Bijay Mishra's '*Jane Raja Thile*' (1982) etc. has the use of "*Mukha*" or Mask. The mask of a Bull in '*Asthira Upatyaka*'; the mask of a camel in '*Jane Raja Thile*', the sutradhara's mask in '*Mukha*' and also use of '*Chhou*' dance and '*Ram leela*' had masks which reflected the folk elements. Off late the playwrights, under the influence of expressionism wanted to show the moral degradation of human character through these masks.

The characters of folk culture have appeared in modern drama basically in three ways:

1. Mythological character of traditional folk Theatre.
2. Traditional characters of social folk drama
3. Characters influenced by Sanskrit Drama.

Ganesh ,Shiv- Parvati,Narad , Kali,Durga. Debi etc. have found important roles in modern drama . The folk idioms like Danda,Desia have also found application here;example is appearance of Ganesh in '*Nandika Keshari*'.

'Bhalo Lokia' , 'Mousa' , 'Thentel'(Danda), 'Niyati', 'Dwari', 'Grahaka','Sutradhara', 'Bondi', 'Nachnia','Gauni' etc. are mediating character of folk theatre ; who have newly been placed in modern drama. As a result the paradigm has shifted towards common people .Although ,Sutradhar,Nata-nati,Gayak etc. are elements of Sanskrit drama.But when character like 'Niyati' & 'Bibek' have appeared they have come as unique character. Influence of 'Mogal Tamsa'a verymuch peopular folk theatre of Bhadrakh; the character of 'Visti' appears in Odia drama.

Hindi playwright Sarbeswar Dayal Saxena's '*Bakri*' when translated to Odia;shows the character of '*Visti*'. Independence Odia drama, similar character of Hadi-Hadiani can also be

seen. The mediating character appear in a chorus like Greek Theatre . Many modern playwrights bring these characters and also the stage and they solve many problems. Manoranjan Das's 'Katha Ghoda' director himself appears as 'Sutradhar' in midst of the play. The sutradhar of 'shabdaliipi', 'Banhiman' in beginning of every act the sutradhar enters. The story starts with a song , In 'smruti, Santwana o sunyata', Tapaswini and in 'Mu Dunhe' (1978), the Trutiya Purush; Ratuakar choini's ' Mukha's' sutradhar 'Kalankita Surjya' (1975); sutradhar, 'chanchalyakar'(1984) by Ratiranjan Mishra used two journalist ' Indradhanu' & 'Bijuli' ; in 'Sita' play Ghoshak 's announcements; Himanshu Bhusan sabat's 'sandhani's sutradhar, Niladri Bhusan's 'kaluri benta's journalist , Bijay satpathy's 'Aei je surjya Uen's 'Shripalia' and 'Gayak'(Daskathia) ; Manoranjan Das's 'Nandika keshari's Sutradhar; Sandhi, Gayak are few examples of such character; these character relate the stage with the audience. They break stage illusion and impart velocity to the story .These characters blend entertainment with social commitment and make the drama pro- people.

The theatre is performed in open air with minimal settings and costumes .The lighting is often ignored .These forms have been accepted in modern theatre .Many plays are being experimented in 'Mukta Mancha' or open space theatre. The costumes are sometimes very colorful and at times very plaintive. It is being observed that the delivery of various colours of light and the stage is going out of practice. Zone light or full light or Halogens are being used more and more .The efforts to make illusions or obscurity on stage have died down .The need for screen and stage settings are diminishing. Off late street plays have rejuvenated new life onto this new philosophy of theatre many plays are being performed impromptu without rehearsals similar to folk theatre. It seems that these philosophies are in sync with Brecht's concept of '*Epic Theatre*' and Badal Sircar's '*Third Theatre*'.

The anthropological life of tribal have been portrayed in Dhaneswar patnaik's 'Adivasi'(1961) Balram Mishra's 'Dumba'(1962) ,Mangalu Charan Biswal's 'Bhukha' .The main essence of these plays has been dwelling into the daily lives of the tribal people. Plays which partially dwell on similar issues are Dhaneswar Patnaik's 'Utha Pacheri' (1959), Akshay Mohanty's 'sambit' (1969).Niladri Bhusan Hari Chandan's . 'Munda Upare Chhata' , Banabihari Panda's 'Gotie Jhara Phulara Kahani'(1984) , Kartik Chandra rath's 'Manshara Phula'(1975);Ratiranjan Mishra's 'Maachha Kandanara Swara'(1996) and more than 30 plays written by Dramatist Subodh Pattanayak for the 'Natya Chetana'(A Theatre group of Odisha); like 'Katha'(1992), 'Bishabazar'(1997), 'Kalapani'(1998), 'Bali'(2001),

'Dhuan'(2005), 'Dhalasuna'(2006), 'Bana'(2009), 'Phula'(2010)etc. and Khetrabasi Manseth's 'Baja Mahuria Baja'(2009), etc.

In the plays '*Adibasi*' the context of *Suakati* village (Keonjhar) and its boy *Parashu*'s life story comes through dialogues written in Tribal dialect. The angst, fears, anger, honesty, simplicity and diversity of life style is reflected in the play. In '*Dumba*' play, the malnutrition and poverty tragedy of a *Kondha* boy called *Dasuru* and his wife Sambhari and also his sister Mushi's situation was well explained. The play '*Bhukha*' is written centered around western Odisha's '*Dom*' or '*Bajaniya*' community . The play was later turned into a film which got critical overseas acclaim. It is a story of an ancient community getting obscure into poverty struggling with modernity. In some plays the tribal historical characters came to the theatre with their tribal anthropological values, like '*Maachha Kandanara Swara*'. In this play the *Bhuiyan* tribal protagonist character *Dharanidhar* and his '*Bhuiyan-Meli*' of Kendujhar is reflected with a social value.

In play '*Kaathha*', the present changing scenario was well explained. *Kaathha* (fuel-wood) is a basic need for a tribal people, but the play depicts about the present changing scenario about a tribal woman who is not able to gather some wood for the cremation of her husband. In the play '*Bisha Bazar*', losing all things due to addiction through market available foreign liquor; the socio-cultural problem and conflict regarding stream water and forest land- in the play '*Kalapani*', the panic starvation death in *Gutipada* village and collective opposition of a tribals against government ; in the play '*Bali*', likewise the problem of displacement and oustees among tribals of Sunabeda and Koraput due to industrialization and modernization; in the play '*Dhuan*', the grave suicide cases of cotton farmers of Kalahandi district ; in '*Dhalasuna*', and the picture of communal violence and religion conversion of tribal people of Kandhamal ; in the play '*Baja Mahuria Baja*', narrations were quite sensational. Likewise the religious and communal problem was pictured in the play '*Bana*'.

Plays like '*Sambit*', '*Mansharaphula*' , '*Gotie Jhara Phulara Kahani*' , '*Utha Pacheri*' , '*Munda Upare Chhata*' highlight tribal characters but is not essentially about the holistic tribal community .But ,it can't be denied that these plays are based on elements of folk.

Conclusion

Some observation regarding the experiment of folk elements in Theatre – The question which is frequently raised is why do modern dramatists adopt folk elements? Debate continues. The most logical reply to this is that the Playwright makes a conscious effect to bring back the people into the theatre auditorium. But it can't be denied that all the playwrights are not very adopt and committed in adopting folk elements and they end up with artificial masking their plays beneath a false getup of folk elements. It is also a fact that many modern playwrights, due to their limitations, actually shy away from folk. In order to strip intellectualism from the disgust of modern daily life and out of frustration, the playwrights are searching for a new path. Thus folk elements aided by 'mood' and 'motif' have created a new bridge of communication. The bridge has filled the cultural gap to some extent. This is not total escapism but may be hailed as a successful effort to understand and reflect human values.

The soul and mood of folk, changes very rapidly, for example in '*Dandanata*', where the character is not static but dynamic. No previous preparation is there as people accept '*Danda*' psychologically and vouch on it. It is not defined who will enact which part – one who vows '*Danda*' starts the enactment. It is really a question whether efforts to rehearsal '*Danda*' and present it on modern stage will be successful or not? Questions are being raised that there is not direct correction between the qualities of play with the share of folk elements used in it. So, folk theme and modern theatre should exist as separate entities. There is no harm in inter-relating them but modern theatre should come to common people in its unique form rather than in folk form. Tradition may be colorful but it has to be infused scientifically & artistically in modern creation otherwise the purpose will be defeated. In this context, it may be commented that application of folk should emerge as a social commitment than a mere creative luxury. To wind up, it may be inferred that in recent times, '*Epic Theatre*' or '*Third Theatre*' or '*Total Theatre*', all the ideas have reflected a healthy blend of tradition with modernity. A playwright with his hearty dedication, determination and experimentation – these three things if powerful than any element of theatre will not go waste.

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