

# **Social Relevance of Indian Folk Theatre-A study on the concerning issues/character of society portrayed by Indian Folk theatre**

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## **Abstract**

When I started teaching Folklore to MA in Culture & Media Students, I went through a deep study about folklore and folk-life. At this stage I am in the position to give this statement that 'Folk is not only our culture but the originator of our cultural life.' There are number of songs, dances, theatres and other arts belong to classical arts of different state or community in context to India, like Odishi dance, Bhangra Dance, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Bharat-Natyam etc. these come under classical arts; but as per my study and opinion these are nothing but the advanced and polished forms of folk arts. As soon as we develop and come into the main stream society or civilized society we restructure and polish our folkArt-form, and make it worthy to present before civilized group. Since thousands of years we kept on doing this and the result is Classical Arts and other cultured forms of art.

By elaborating this concept regarding folk I definitely not wanting to explain about the refined forms of Indian folk-arts, I just wanted to explain the folk on the basis of my studies and own opinion. This concept intended to explain about the importance and values of folk in our culture. In this paper I am going to discuss about few famous folk theatres of India and their relevance to our society. I have chosen two famous folk-theatre, Charan Das Chor and Amar Singh Rathore Nautanki Theatre form of Rajasthan. This paper will try to find out the Epistemological and political approach of folk narration in folk theatre by discussing Charan Das Chor and Amar Singh Rathore.

**Key words:** Folk Theatre, Charan Das Chor, Nautanki, Folklore.

## **Problem definitions of this study:**

This study started with raising few questions about the folk theatre of India, these are, whether folk theatre narrates societal issue or represent societal characters genuinely or it is based on hypothetical narration? And if they present societal issue, whether they exaggerate problem of society?

### **Folk Theatre: An Overview**

Folk is defined as a common people in general. Folk means people in general. The people who are not related to a modern society but traditionally they are very rich. They know and value their rituals, cultural rites, traditional way of enjoying festivals and changing seasons.

And Theatre is a form of drama with dialogue, sound effect and music. Folk theatre is a platform where a team of artists act on a folk-tale. A tale that has no historic date and time, even not place.

A Folk theatre is a platform where folk tales are played on different themes. Themes like epic, anecdote, heroic character etc. folk theatre based on more narration and dialogues to establish the scene.

### **Bandit Narration in Folk theatre/Folk Play and Charan Das Chor**

In banditry narrations the bandits are portrayed as the hero of the society because they never loot poor people or harm them they generally steal things from rich people, who dominate poor people of the society; and bandit also help poor people of society so why they are worshiped by peasant society. Bandits are heroic characters among peasants. They also symbolise as struggle for justice (*Shail Mayaram, Kings versus Bandits, 2003*). After reviewing Shail Mayaram's King verses Bandit: Anti-colonialism in a Bandit Narrative I found many examples about bandits and their heroic act's narrations. He quoted Richards and Rao's analysis about papadu, and Telegu Folk story about a bandit who used to kidnap women from elite class. I observed the references in Shail Mayarams research; researcher reviewed extremely related literature on bandit narration as of Habsbawm, Sarad Chandra Mitra, Anand A. Yang, John F. Richerds and Velcheru Narayan Rao, M. S. S. Pandian, Ranjit Guha etc. I am quoting few of his lines from the literature:

Pandian describes 'heroic ballad' prevalent among the subaltern classes such as the story of Muthupattam about a rebellious bandit. Ranjit Guha refers to Sultana, Indian's Robin Hood who having known what it was to be poor never robbed from a poor man and never refused

an appeal for charity. He also mentioned the Bhil community of western India and about the few communities of bandits from Rajasthan's Shekhawati area. And also about the Habib Tanvir's contemporary theatrical rendering of a story from the Chhattisgarh region called 'CHARAN DAS CHOR' who is again described as the thief or robber who robs the rich but help the poor people.

Here I would like to discuss about few scenes of the play, as when Charan Das was saved by the Guru from the Halwaldaar, then Guru asks him to make a vow but Charan Das offers to make four vows instead of one, the vows are, never to eat in a gold plate, never to lead a procession on an elephant that is in his honour, never to become a king and never to marry a princess, after his vows made by him he the Guru laughs on him by saying you are dreaming with open eyes, but Charan Das said that you never know about your destination it is just a chance, after listening Charan Das point of views Guru tell him to make one more vow that never lie in life, means now Charan Das is going to speak only truth in any situations and at any cost. But willing he promises to his Guru to follow all vows made by him.

In later scene it is shown that fortunately but for Charan Das, unfortunately on the other day he faces all those things which he promised to do in life. Lastly he was killed on queen's order and finally he lost his life by only one vow he made, which was offered by Guru that never tell lie. In the last scene when queen offers Charan Das to marry her then thief denied and then queen said not to reveal this matter in public, then thief replied I promised to my Guru to never tell lie...! Then queen orders him for slaughter.

### **Amar Singh Rathore: A great warrior and patriot**

Amar Rathore is a folk theatre of Rajasthan, as Amar Singh Rathore hails from Rajasthan state, he is known as a great warrior and patriot during the Mughal period of Shah Jahan. He was associated with Delhi Sultanate of Shah Jahan. In this theatre it is shown that Amar Singh Rathore asks leave for some personal reasons (Marriage purpose); but the Salabat Khan, the brother-in-law (Brother of shah Jahan's Wife) of Shah Jahan was against this request and tried making understand Shah Jahan not to grant leave to Amar Singh Rahtore, as Salabat Khan is shown for his disliking towards Amar Singh Rathore because Shah Jahan trust him more than Salabat Khan. So on the very first day Salabat Khan not liking Amar Singh and always try to search his loop hole or weaknesses so that he could complaint Badshah about Amar Singh. On the other day he got chance to punish Amar Singh because

he could not reach on time after availing leave granted by Shah Jahan. Before permitting for leave Shah Jahan told to Amar Singh very clearly that he will have to resume his duties after seven days immediately otherwise one lakh per day penalty will be made for him. Now on eight day Salbat Khan reminds Shah Jahan for his penalty but king said who will have the courage to take penalty from Amar Singh Rathore then Slabat Khan said that he will take the charge to take penalty from Amar Singh. After few days Amar Singh was called in the court and king decided that there will be a sword fight between Salabat Khan and the Amar Singh Rathore. But Salabat Khan repented for various causes and was not ready to fight, Amar Singh Rathore killed him. Then king announced that who so ever kill Amar Singh Rathore will be awarded by the 'Jagir' (land). After listening this announcement his brother-in-law (brother of his wife), killed Amar Singh Rahtore. But after his death king was so said and discloses publically his love and respect about Amar Singh Rathore.

In this theatre form Nautanki in the last this lesson is taught that we should always respect and appreciate the honesty, bravery and devotion of people whether they belong to Hindu or from Muslim community.

After reviewing literatures related to Charan Das Chor and watching the play of Habib Tanvir, and Amar Singh Rathore, I reached to this point that honest and genuine people have to lose their lives and people realise them after their death. Even in real society people are like same mind set and they realize honesty, equinity and goodness of people after their death. At this point of view these two plays are very near to our society's mind set.

But it is interesting and surprising to see a thief's commitment and his death due to his commitment. But in real society did we ever find a thief like Charan Das? If a person is so honest and genuine, why he chooses a profession of thief? A thief is negative character in our society and people do not except this character in main stream society; but Habib Tanveer portrayed a thief's honesty and his commitment in this play which is difficult to accept. But if we thing in other view then it could be said that a person can change his or her thought or habit at any stage of his/her life. A thief may become a teacher.

Amar Singh Rathore was a great warrior and patriot, and known for his great honesty towards his king and state. But in this Nautanki when king ordered that after seven days Amar Singh has to give one lakh per day as a penalty, then why king denied to take penalty and said who

has courage to ask penalty to Amar Singh? In that scene it was quite confusing because order was public and very clear; if so, then why there was sword fight?

We say that folk is a real mirror of our society. But why we forget that folk is fantasy only. It is only word of mouth and people transfer these culture generation to generation. There is nothing wrong in portraying and presenting character like Amar Singh Rathore and Charan Das Chor, but to relate these stories in our society by saying them truth just because they portrayed as folk stories is not justified.

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