

Exploring the Rich Tapestry of Indigenous Knowledge: Folktales of Dungari Garasiya Tribal Community of North Gujarat

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Adivasi, the tribal folks, as it is general to all the indigenous tribes across the globe, are the people who live in close communion with nature and natural resources. Their lifestyle gets moulded by the natural ways. Though not as rich as the formal languages in terms of written records, the stories, which form the very part of their lifestyle, remain most naturally expressive and replete with the symbols drawn from their natural surroundings. Not only this, but the close study of the folktales and songs allows us to have clear glimpses of their being located somewhere in the archetypal thematic frameworks. One can imagine, from these instances, that this shared sensibility and communion with nature are the real sources of inspiration and the very beginning point of human expression. The paper delves into the literary aesthetics of Dungari Garasiya folktales and tries to look into the various veneers of meaning and values associated with them.

The key point in the life of the indigenous people is their most natural and expressive life style and its expressions through the tales and songs, which form very much part of their life. Dance is another important form of celebration. Looking into the literary aesthetics of Dungari Garasiya folktales gives us a sound understanding and insight into the aesthetic preferences and narrative traditions of this community as we decipher the narrative structures, recurring motifs, and thematic patterns that construct them. The intricate world of folktales of these indigenous tribes of the northern part of Gujarat provides us with insights into their lives, and the cultural, social, and historical significance embedded in these narratives unravels the rich cultural heritage of these tribes and

the role of folktales in shaping their collective identity. Thus as Jo-ann Archibald and Q'um Q'um Xiiem put it in *Indegenous Story Telling*, "Indigenous storied memory is a form of Indigenous pedagogy."

In this line, the study employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining ethnographic research, linguistic analysis, and literary criticism to illuminate the nuances of the storytelling traditions of the Dungri Garasiya community. For the ethnography and fieldwork research, this paper takes the book of Maria Sress as the base. Through a thorough examination of the oral narratives, linguistic peculiarities, and narrative motifs of the collection, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural expressions of the tribe. The paper also elucidates the cultural significance of folktales by examining their role in preserving indigenous knowledge, transmitting cultural values, and fostering a sense of community identity. Through an exploration of narrative elements such as myths, legends, and moral tales, the research aims to uncover the cultural nuances encapsulated in these oral traditions.

The transformation of oral stories into written texts is one of the main issues in folklore studies (Naithani). Maria Sress has rendered a great service by compiling these stories from their original sources. She lived among them for more than two decades, and won their hearts and trust, especially of the woman folks of the Dungri Garasiya community. This book is the result of this affinity.

\In this book, a result of rigorous exercise, the editor has not only collected the stories but also tried to present them in a language very close to the originally spoken version of the tribes language. Some of them are part of songs as well. Almost all the stories have common grounds: natural surroundings, farming disciplines, food, and the conventions of their lives. The stories bear a natural tone of simplicity and plainness and display no trait of complexities; on the contrary they present the course of action as it occurs with natural trait of action and reaction. This serves the proof of the natural thought process, simplicity and these people's affinity with the nature and natural resources. In short, these folktales of Dungari Garasiya Adivasi community come to us as a vital thread weaving through the fabric of their identity.

If looked at from the demographical statistics, Gujarat state stands at the fourth rank in the percentage of tribal population. Among them, the Dungari Garasiya Community reside in the Aravalli mountain range in the Sabarkantha, Banaaskantha and Aravalli districts. The term 'Dungari Garasiya' bears two elements. 'Dungri' in Gujarati language means related to the Hilla or Mountains; whereas 'Garasiya' stands for the community rewarded a promised income by the King. Thus, as per the story in the oral tradition, these tribal people helped the King of Udaipur in some important warfare, and the pleased the King rewarded them with the Jungle Land of this area. Since this area is Hill area, these people started dwelling in this region. These people reside scattered on the hill tops, and not in the groups as in the ordinary villages. These people have their own way of life, culture, way of worship and customs and traditions. They love to celebrate their festivals with pomp and gong. They are somewhat superstitious and believe and nurture the fears of the ghosts. Their jovial and cheerful temperament nicely gets translated in their folktales and folksongs nicely sustained in their oral traditions. They love to dance in groups in the accompaniment of music on the special occasions like festivals of Holi (The festival of Colours) and also on the occasions like marriage or any other religious ceremonies. Since the folktales and songs are sustained in the oral traditions, it will not be any fallacy to look at them as being in the continuation from antiquity keeping the trace of age old customs, conventions and belief system.

The story titled '*Golden Age and Deluge*' bears thematic similarity to the stories of Indian mythology and the Christian world and hence serves as proof of the universality of the archetypal themes and the tribal traditions affinity to them. It relates the story of the golden age, when everything went in favours of the Dungri Garasiya community, and it resulted in the population burst. When the place got densely overpopulated, the resources started getting exhausted. It gave birth to famine and starvation. And lastly, the deluge devoured all the population. In this apocalypse, no one could survive except two virtuous souls, Kaavo and Kaavi. The words uttered to these two by one of the divine

white forms were: *“You and your ancestors, who had a sensibility towards nature and who took their liberty as their right to exploit nature and her resources. I could not tolerate it, and hence, their actions that damaged nature proved fatal to them. Since you two have been sensible and virtuous, you have been spared from the rage.”*

This concept of Golden Age represents a period of prosperity, harmony and abundance following a subsequent decline marked by human errors and environmental degradation is a recurring motif in many cultural and religious stories. In drawing parallels between the story and contemporary environmental issues, it reinforces the idea that these archetypal themes are universal and timeless. The narrative serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of human actions and their impact on the environment, encouraging reflection on the need for responsible and sustainable practices to ensure a more balanced and resilient future. The sparing of the two virtuous souls, Kaavo and Kaavi, underscores the importance of responsible stewardship of the environment. Their sensibility and virtuous actions distinguish them from their ancestors who exploited nature without regard for its limits.

The story rings an alarm bell for the modern world’s exploitative usage of natural resources. It highlights the root cause of the issues pertaining to global warming. This aspect of the story carries a message about the potential for redemption through mindful and sustainable practices, suggesting that humanity can avoid a similar fate by adopting a more harmonious relationship with the natural world.

The story *‘The Woman was the First Being’* relates the chronicle of the creation of the Human Race by God. The only contrast with the mainstream narratives of the world is that whereas the Indian Hindu stories and the Christian narratives project the creation of man first and then the woman was created as his companion. This story presents the creation of the Earth, and Nature God’s exercise to adorn her with all sorts of flora and fauna, oceans, rivers and streams, insects, bees and butterflies and lastly the creation of the perfect being ‘A Woman’ to inherit this beautiful garden. The Christian narratives present the serpent

as the evil spirit, this story presents it as the form of nature herself whose sweet embrace results in the pregnancy of the first woman 'Sati' who eventually mothers a son. The story can be read as the estimation and high place of woman in this tribal community. The ending assertion "One must not forget the initially the woman was the sovereign of the world."

The story '*How Kavi Got Deceived?*' is in continuation of the story of great Deluge. Kavi is the same one who survived the apocalypse along with Kavo. in this story too, Kavi is depicted to be of superior qualities than her male partner. She is aware of her superiority too. Like Atlanta and Melanion, Kavi and Kavo entered into the race. Just as Melanion used golden Apples to distract Atlanta from the track of the race, Kavo too uses several ornaments to keep Kavi from running fast and winning the race. This story along with being in tune with the universal motif, provides the glimpses of the people's insights into the human nature. Depiction of Kavi as a superior with innate wisdom is the instance of acceptance of woman's entity a not just equal but a superior contributor to life. It also answers the questions as why a woman has to follow her husband, and why a man has always to gift jewellery and ornaments to his lady.

The story '*The Snake's Reward and the Daughter of a Farmer*' again present the motif of jealousy among the women. Here, the stepmother does not treat the daughter properly, but she is rewarded by a serpent on account of her kind nature, ultimately this boon becomes instrument in winning the heart of the king. Again, when the king wants to marry her and comes with the marriage proposal to her father, the father asserts that it is the right of his daughter in taking this decision independently. Thus, whereas in several mainstream clans the girls haven't their voice in selecting their match, this story documents comparative freedom and acceptance of the woman's rights in this community.

In '*The Princess Fulwanti*' the young man Dhiro directly proposes a young lady to enter into the marital relationship, and in its reply, the lady too after examining the physical stature, strength and impressed by his

dare devil nature agrees to do so. The lady's name is Fuli who later on turns out to be the princess Fulwanti. Kali, a jealous lady, pushes Fuli into the well and takes her place. But Fuli comes to Dhiro in several forms like a flower, spinach and mango. In all the forms, Dhiro could not identify her but villainous Kali removes her from him. But lastly, Fuli unites with Dhiro, and Kali is punished for her baseness and deceitful acts. Like many mainstream folktales, here too the universal motif of initial pains and hardships to a virtuous soul at the hand of base and vicious persona, but ultimate victory of the virtuous soul against all odds finds artistic expression.

"The Princess Fulwanti" thus echoes the universal motif found in many folktales, where a virtuous soul undergoes initial trials and tribulations at the hands of a malevolent character. Despite the challenges, the virtuous soul emerges victorious, emphasizing the enduring theme of the triumph of good over evil and the rewarding nature of perseverance in the face of adversity. The narrative serves as an artistic expression of these timeless themes within the context of a captivating and fantastical tale.

'Karamabai: The Daughter of Sheshnag' is another story in the same line. Sheshnag is a serpent with a thousand heads in Hindu mythology; Here too the same motif of virtuous versus vicious runs. Karamabai is envied and despised by the other queens of her husband King. They succeed in convincing the king that Karamabai, being the daughter of the Serpent Sheshnag, uses her power to feed him with poison and thus wishes to kill him slowly. And in the end, she disappears to the abode of her father cursing the king for his untrusting nature.

'The Curse of The King Huda' relates the significance of rain and as it happens in many other Indian Myths, King's fate is associated with the possibilities of rain and the agriculture produce. *'Alki and Dhulki'* presents the history of the celebration of the festival of Holi. Holi is the most loved festival of this clan. This story explains the significance of dance and celebration on this festival.

The study of these stories recorded from the oral traditions elucidates the underlying cultural narratives. Through the employed Metaphors

we can understand how the socio cultural motifs have their parallels. Since storytelling is part of Indigenous methodology: “Stories hold within them knowledges while simultaneously signifying relationships. In oral tradition, stories can never be decontextualised from the teller” (Kovach 94). Hence, these stories become an important document to discern the traditions and conventional life of the Dungari garasiya community. Smith rightly observes: “stories, values, practices and ways of knowing continue to inform Indigenous pedagogies” (15).

In this sense these stories do not just remain stories, but inform us about their “Lived Experiences” and unravel the layers of cultural, linguistic and literary significance allowing us the glimpses of the rich tapestry of indigenous knowledge catered by the Dungri Garasiya community.

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