

## Representation of 'Folk' and 'Culture': A Selective Study of Vijay Dan Detha's *Baatanri Phulwari (Garden of Tales)*

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Vijaydan Detha (Bijji) has established a unique presence in the realm of fiction through his patience, writing style, and imaginative use of colours. Initially, he pursued writing in Hindi language, but eventually, he decided to return to his hometown and dedicate himself to compiling and creating works in 'Rajasthani'. In *Baatan Ri Phulwari*, he undertook the task of compiling and reimagining folk tales in the Rajasthani language. The initial stories were transcribed as they were heard, but as he delved further into the genre, his creative abilities became more polished and refined. Expressing his views on these stories of Bijji, Prabhakar Shrotriya says - "The biggest success of Vijaydan Detha is that he keeps the soul of the folk tale alive and recreates it in such a way that even the citizen or intellectual can enjoy it."

Bijji has established a unique presence in the realm of fiction through his patience, writing style, and imaginative use of colours. The literary themes and styles within these folk tales are diverse and expansive. The inclusion of sub-stories within longer narratives highlights the interconnectedness between stories. Characters from various societal backgrounds are depicted as the heroes of these folk tales. He possesses a colloquial language that is readily comprehensible to readers. In his stories, animals, plants, and even inanimate objects have been given human characteristics. Riddles hold a significant position in storytelling, serving as a highly enjoyable method to stimulate the logical reasoning of the audience. The narratives are infused with the customs, vibrancy, cuisine, and celebrations relevant to the area. Consequently, these stories, which were originally shared orally, have been given a voice through

the collective memory, traditions, and interests of the people, encompassing literary, social, and historical aspects. In the composition of the stories, coherence, continuity and sequence of events, incarnation of the character is often realistic and the integration of opposite elements, psychology in personal prestige has been their main concern.

As Detha rewrote the tales, he combined elements of oral folk tradition with modern written literary traditions to ensure that his audience could connect to narratives set in a different time. “While he included an invocation and a *chougou* and adopted a narrative voice that was more story tellerish than authorial, his descriptions and plots were much more elaborate and involved” (Merrill, *Riddles* 68) The *chauga*, a “signature of Rajasthani oral convention” (Merrill, *Are We the Folk* 24) was used by the author to transport the audience from the present space into a fictitious world of the story. It predominantly takes the form of couplets and poetic lines, serving the purpose of captivating the audience’s attention and piquing their curiosity before delving into the story. Many *chaugas* possess didactic qualities, imparting ethical life experiences, while others evoke sentimentality or depict social inequalities and some reflect a blend of supernaturalism and fantasy. (Reena 235)

Detha seems like a preacher in the *chauga* of the story titled “The Winds of Time” as he says:

No god like time.

No brother like time.

No journey like time.

No shadow like time.

No doer like time.

No under like time.

The drums of time.

The leela of time.

Tales of time. Change with time. (Detha 3-4)

The story depicts the change of the time with the farmer who found seven pots of gold mohurs while digging his land. As the land was not his own, he decided to give it to landlord. When landlord refused to take after logical arguments with the farmer, landlord ask to call for panchayat.

Panchayat's decision was in favour of the farmer. After disagreement with the panchayat's decision, farmer went to the king, and king also supported the decision made by panchayat. His honesty does not allow him to take money and he put it back to earth again. But the later generations of farmer and landlord fought for them and killed each other and the wealth was taken by the king. The story depicts the wind of change, from honesty to dishonesty, from loyalty to disloyalty, from truth to lie and from weak to strong.

The story 'Leaf and the Pebble' represents the bond of friendship, the desire of love and attachment of every human being. Everyone wants to be together. The pebble tries to save leaf from thunder and storm but both perishes in the journey. The journey presents a good example for humans to stay with each other even in difficult times. "The Dove and the Snake" ('KamediArSarp'), Dove protects her children by killing the snake with the help of a swallow and a crow. It explores the timeless struggle between the forces of power and innocence. In this tale, the dove represents both innocence and powerlessness, while the snake embodies evil and lethal strength. The dove endures constant torment from the snake, constantly seeking refuge but realizing that escaping evil is a futile endeavour. The snake relentlessly pursues the dove, regardless of where it seeks shelter. Eventually, the dove seeks the assistance of a mongoose to overcome the snake's threat. This narrative is rich in symbolism and carries elements of Marxist ideology (Balbir 758). It emphasizes the need for the powerless to unite, as demonstrated by the collaboration between the dove, the crow, and the mongoose in the story.

In the story 'Akal Ujagar Aek Meendka Ki', a frog saves his life from a crow with his cleverness. The tales of 'Hansi Rao Myanau', 'Akal SariraanUpaj Hai', 'SyalRi Akal Ar Singha Rao Bal', 'Syal Rau Nyav', 'Akal UjagarAekSusiyaRi', and others, depict instances where individuals cleverly and intelligently save themselves from perilous situations, thus evading death. These narratives of Bijji serve as a source of inspiration, encouraging us to confront challenges by employing wit and intellect, rather than succumbing to despair.

In *DK*, Detha uses Kabir's voice to express his opinions about society, religion, class based discrimination, and status acquired by wealth. (Mrinalini 12). The story depicts that without wisdom and knowledge is meaningless. Kabir recognizes that all these various genres of literature lack substance, suggesting that knowledge holds no value without wisdom. It is merely a disguise, a shield that individuals, be it religious leaders, rulers, or ordinary individuals, employ to safeguard their ignorance and arrogant beliefs. Blind adherence to customs and regulations that have been established for centuries is nothing but a charade. Detha skillfully alludes to the social divide, caste bias, and oppression of women through the portrayal of a weaver and a princess (Rajkumari).

"Duvidha" serves as a testament to a woman's yearnings and ambitions to secure a respected position in her life partner's life. The central character, the bride, exudes vitality, and her innocent desires are represented by the Ber or Daloo fruit (a small, round shrub fruit) in the narrative. However, her hopes are dashed when she discovers that her husband intends to leave her for business immediately after their wedding. In a conversation, the groom asserts that just as God never miscalculates the breaths of a living being, a businessman cannot fail in his calculations. "Bijji" highlights the disparities between the realms of men and women, subtly insinuating that God, too, is male and calculative. A woman's world transcends calculations, as her emotions reign supreme. She grapples with unanswered questions, and the ongoing "Dilemma" revolves around Gold versus Humanity, Money versus Life. Ghost symbolizes a woman's hidden identity, aspirations, and dreams, which society has not acknowledged (Shrivastava 21). The woman's position is depicted when the bride acknowledges to herself that she could discover a spot within her mother's womb, yet her father's courtyard could not retain her for an extended period.

In the story 'Bhiksha Rao Chukaraun', a Brahmin, after being cheated by his wife, lives the life of a saint and vows that he will never repeat the same betrayal to anyone else. Many women are fascinated by his appearance while he is begging. But he considers everyone like his sister and mother. When the merchant's daughter-in-law praises the

sadhu's eyes and calls them a hindrance in meeting God, then the next day the sadhu takes out his eyes and gives them away. The merchant's daughter-in-law regrets her actions and says, "You lost your eyes to open mine." The story begins naturally with the Brahmin making a living by begging, but due to the insistence of the situation, the story ends with the daughter-in-law praising the sage's eyes and considering them an obstacle in attaining God. A new problem enters existence, because of which the original plot automatically gets distorted. Finally, the story ends on a tragic note with the daughter-in-law's conversation.

In the story 'Beta RiSarbara', a tradesman sees a thief entering his house. Along with his wife, he thinks of a way to catch the thief. Sethani and Bania discuss among themselves the false story of the loss of their child 12 years ago. The thief comes posing as his son. After spending the whole night talking about his hospitality, they get the thief caught in the morning.

The narrative 'Ba Bemata Ra Lekh' commences by highlighting the esteemed reputation of a wealthy individual named Mayapati and his benevolence. Right from the outset, readers are provided with insights into Seth's character. Indra, feeling envious of Seth's renown, perceives his own position of power to be at risk. The child approaches his mother and offers prayers. The Brahmin, who recites the Bhagwat Katha on behalf of Seth, becomes aware of the significance of honouring the child's mother and documenting the destinies of Seth's offspring. Utilizing his foresight, the Brahmin imparts advice to the children, urging them not to succumb to their circumstances, ultimately leading to the erasure of the writings penned by the motherless woman. In this tale, the narrative unfolds from Seth's life brimming with prestige and affluence, progressing harmoniously. Suddenly, an incident transpires where the motherless woman inscribes the destinies of Seth's children. Simultaneously, the story diverges into two paths. Seth's family teeters on the brink of collapse while grappling with adverse circumstances, yet the tides turn favourably due to the counsel bestowed by the Brahmin. Consequently, the family is reunited.

In these stories of Bijji, there is a feeling of cheerfulness along with humanity, natural and simple vibration. He takes the story forward in a more straightforward path. The hero of the stories remains steadfast on his true path despite being surrounded by opposing forces. As a result, his truth wins. In this way, coherence, chronology, and inspiration of coincidental events in the structure of the plot of his stories, inclusion of real and contradictory elements in the incarnation of the character, psychology in personal prestige have been their main basis.

In the tale ‘Kaeilugaibanaitourowtaudhabun’, there existed an upright man who tragically lost his mother, father, and sister all within the same year. As he grieved, those around him attempted to console him by saying, “We are like your parents and sisters.” He would fall silent, unable to find solace in their words. However, when his beloved wife passed away, his tears flowed incessantly, and no amount of consolation could bring him any respite. It was then that everyone questioned why he had not cried as much when his parents and sister had died. What had changed? In response, he explained that when his parents had passed, everyone had claimed to take their place. Yet, when his wife died, no one uttered the words, “I am in the place of your wife.” Only if someone were to say this, would he weep and find solace in silence. In Bijji’s stories, his emotions are heightened and refined, influenced by both his own experiences and the circumstances of others. He skilfully weaves the fabric of sympathy, breathing life into the oral tradition of fiction by adorning it with captivating proverbs. These stories vividly and engagingly depict events, as well as the expression of emotions and thoughts, establishing a direct connection with the masses.

The tale ‘Veer ArthoonIthoon’ gained popularity among the masses due to its realistic, alluring, and enchanting depiction of girls joyfully swinging during the Teej festival. Prabhusha’s portrayal in the story beautifully exemplifies the deep affection humans have for festive celebrations. The narrative effectively captures the essence of these beliefs. Vijaydan Detha’s literary creations are renowned for their abundant incorporation of folk elements, encompassing mythical beings, indigenous traditions, superstitious practices, and age-old convictions. His narratives frequently

delve into a wide array of themes, including love, longing, purity, shrewdness, sagacity, foolishness, avarice, deception, integrity, bravery, and the deceptive nature of authority.

## Conclusion

The biggest specialty of Bijji's folk stories is that through them the reader reaches the vibrant world of the villages of Rajasthan and experiences various poignant scenes. They present a world in a coordinated manner with these scenes. The use of simple colloquial folk language and idioms is found in his speaking style. He uses simple, clear, pictorial language that is vibrant and full of form and colour. Readers are swept away by the strong flow of his language. His 'Baata Ri Phulvari' contains all the traditional (saying) elements and proves mental level, emotions, character all are important in folk tales. The idioms and chogas adds to their interestingness and uniqueness. By expanding the meaning of the stories, they prove their existence. There is a deep connection between work and conversation. The variety of rhythm and structure of the stories expresses the variety of psychological depth of the people. "The meaning is a traditional element of folk stories. The content of folk art is presented by the intended subject and a form is given to it by the subject" (137). He breathed life into the skeletons he received—fleshing out the frame with modifiers, idiomatic language, and a conversational tone; creating motives for action; infusing the characters with psychological motifs; and maintaining a rustic tone (Merrill, *Are We the Folk* 148).

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