

CONTRIBUTION OF GUJARAT TO THE FIELD OF FOLKLORE

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I

Notwithstanding the view that Gujarat might have sprung up as an independent state much later in terms of historical chronology, there is no doubt that a specific cultural Gujarat has remained in existence for the last thousand years or so. Even when medieval literature flourished to a great extent, a tendency to preserve in written form the bulk of folklore that followed the oral tradition had already begun. There are very few states in India where one can come across such a wonderful storehouse of folklore, so neatly and meticulously preserved in written form.

James Forbes, who loved Gujarat and its literature, spent 15-16 years of his youth in Gujarat. His observations and experiences have been published from London in a book titled *Oriental Memories* running into four volumes. It is in the third volume that we find his critical approach to various tales and anecdotes - bedtime tales, or tales of valour and heroism, in addition to his commentary on the folk arts. Undertaken in 1812-13, the book has material dating back to the period before 1784. Therefore, it can be asserted that James Forbes was the first and foremost scholar to give serious thought to the importance of Indian folklore. It would be really worthwhile and timely if the third volume of his book could be re-published during the Birth Centenary Year of Zaverchand Meghani.

In a decade or so, starting 1846, Alexander Kinlock Forbes had prepared two parts of 'Rūsmūlū' after strenuous and devoted work. The publication of these volumes in 1856 carries its own significance. The term "folklore" was used first by William Thorns in 1846, and it was in that very year that Forbes began the compilation and editing work for his books.

The last ten chapters of the Second Part of his "Rūsmūlū" amply illustrate the prosperity and achievements of the then contemporary folklore of Gujarat. This volume is replete with different kinds of verses such as songs dealing with religious vows and worship of "gorma" or Mother Gauri, rites and rituals, dirges or funeral songs, verses on the peculiarities of various castes and tribes, customary superstitions, customs and conventions, concepts of good and ill omens, beliefs, and the like. R.U. Dave translated these English volumes into Gujarati; these Gujarati versions need to be republished.

In 1860, Kavi Dalpatram had published a few folk tales based on oral tradition, in "Buddhi-Prakash". Along with these tales, certain interesting notes have also been provided in connection with the cultural habits and peculiarities of the Gujarati population. Both these tales and those notes are quite remarkable, and apparently, this endeavour on the part of Kavi Dalpatram holds certain historical significance as well.

These is yet another example of this sort. A book called *Nagar Streeoman Gavatan Geet* (songs sung among Nagar women) was compiled by Kavi Narmad in 1870. It probably contains about 50 compositions that bear the name-stamp of 13-14 medieval poets. However, Kavi Narmad has provided an article in the beginning of his edition, that throws light on the rites and rituals associated with wedding ceremonies, besides talking about tone and modulation. Some of the wedding songs in this book are sung even today at marriage ceremonies. Since then, quite a few books have been published, which deal with editions of marriage songs.

The 25 volumes of *Indian Antiquary* constitute a valuable and splendid storehouse of Indian folk literature. In the first volume of 1872, there is an article by James Burgess dealing with the tradition of snake worship in Bhavnagar. There is also a wealth of material on folklore from a host of celebrated writers like Grier'son, Monier Williams, Tessitori, Dr. Bhooler, John W. Watson, Dalpatram, Pranjivan Khakhar, Sorabji Cowasji, and Smt. Pootlibai. The contribution of Pootlibai is especially important from the viewpoint of knowledge, information and evaluation. Likewise, Watson has discussed several topics about Gujarati folk-tales, legends, history, society, etc., from a comparative perspective.

Let us now look at the three parts of a monumental work *Gujarat Tatha Kathiawad Deshni Vartao* - by Faramji Behmanji Master, known for his abundant contribution to the field of literature and journalism under the brief signature of 'FB', in the 1870s. The second edition of these volumes was published in 1928, and has achieved tremendous prominence and popularity.

Master offered his services to the editorial department of 'Jame-Jamshed' in 1853, and then to that of 'Dost-e-Hind' and 'Gujarati Review' till 1870. He also started a weekly titled 'Indian Critic', and used to write in 'Rast Goftar'. He accumulated all his material by extensive fieldwork, and approached criticism from a comparative perspective. He took distinct note of colloquial features, gestures, movements and style of folk-tales.

Yet another Parsi scholar named Rustom Khurshed Irani of Bombay trained under 'FB'. It was 'FB' who assisted him in preparing his *Gopichandkatha* and to get it printed. Rustom Khurshed's oral tradition folk-

tales, titled *Lok-Katha* was published in 1885. In this volume, he provided ample information and particulars of the various sources as well as suppliers of such information in connection with these tales. In 1882, Harjivan Purshottam Shukla published *Bhadlivakya*, a grand collection of seasonal forecasts inherited traditionally and made popular by people everywhere. This volume is supposed to be highly useful to farmers and cattle-breeders.

Likewise, the contribution of the Kutchhi poet Jivram Ajramar Gor, editor of *Varta-Vinod - Pratham Darshan*, published in 1892, is highly important in the field of folklore. It is interesting to examine his historical material, Duhas, his ways and means of hoarding the bulk of folk literature, as well as his sense of critical evaluation.

As we can see, there has been rich contribution to Indian folklore history both from Parsi scholars and Hindu scholars.

II

In 1905, during the conference of Gujarati Sahitya Parishad held at Ahmedabad, Ranjitram Vavabhai and Rammohanram Jashvantram read their respective articles on "Folk Song" and "Folk Tale". During the session, they also suggested the need for consolidating folk literature and establish a sort of assembly or association for the purpose.

Ranjitram not only carried out a section-wise classification of the material on folk songs, but also made an attempt to explain its form. And, from a comparative approach, he presented a study of 'Gopichand Katha'. He was also the editor of a number of folk songs, published later as a book.

The same year saw a book by Kincaid published under the title *Outlaws of Kathiawad*. In one of its chapters, we come across a very good collection of a wealth of facts concerning outlaws, including popular legends, their Duhas and ballads, narrative poems, etc., besides reflecting on socio-economic and political conditions then prevalent in Kathiawad.

In 1911-1914, Khimaji Basanji Bhatt, popularly known as 'Bhatt KV' published a couple of books of Duhas, titled *Kathiawadi Jawahir* and *Panchamrut*. These volumes contain the oral tradition of Duhas and their meanings, correct interpretations, and critical evaluation. He accumulated such a splendid store of raw material that it would be sufficient for six collections of Duhas, but the rest were lost.

Other important volumes of Duhas include Part I and Part II of *Kathiawadi Sahitya* published in 1910 and 1923, respectively.

When Kalyansinh, a Kshatriya of Rajkot, was serving as Police Superintendent at Porbandar in 1885-1895, he collected innumerable Duhas. These collections were published by Kavi Kahanji Dharamsinh, which contain many popular love-stories such as 'Chud Vijogan', 'Sheni-Vijanand', etc., with meanings of the Duhas. This book also includes Duhas of Sorathiya. A similar publication is *Halaman Jethwo and Uplabdh Duha* (1912) by Acharya Girjashanker Vallabhaji, which is considered highly important in the same tradition.

Equally important is *Folklore Notes of Gujarat*, which was preserved in *Gazetteers of Bombay* by Campbelle in 1914. His monumental work *Folklore of Bombay* has been reprinted recently, the 'Folklore Notes of Gujarat' should also be reprinted during the birth-centenary year of Zaverchand Meghani.

One of the most important collections of verses is a volume titled *Bheelonan Geet* published in 1915 by Nagji Maheshwar Pathak. The editor had been guided by Keshav Harshad Dhruv, and the editing has been done quite scientifically, so the importance of the book is unique.

The man who will be remembered for his prolific and outstanding contribution to the oral tradition of literature is Gijubhai Badheka. He took great pains to collect folk tales for children, which had hitherto been preserved through oral tradition, and had them published in 1917. In 1923, he published a volume on 'Narratology' under the title *Vartanun Shastra*.

In 1922 and 1923, Hargovind Premshanker Trivedi published two volumes titled *Kathiawadni Juni Vartao*, in which he has closely examined and critically evaluated folk-tales on the basis of their moral values and their relation to life.

III

At this juncture, folk literature develops and expands as a subject and as a faculty, with a corresponding expansion of its impact and prowess. Meanwhile, it is also accompanied by petty debates and controversies, harmony and discord. I consider these positive and negative statements the Politics of Gujarati Folklore.

Seven decades ago, during the Thakker Vasanji Series of Lectures in 1930; Narsinhrao Divetia had raised the question of the literary element in folk literature. He had contended that races with a language, but no written literature, with, at best, a scanty oral tradition of literature, could not, in a real sense, be considered to have a literature. K.M. Munshi, who initially

agreed with him, had to change his opinion, though partially, at a later stage, which can easily be seen in 'Gujarat and Its Literature'.

At the same time, there were several Parsi and English scholars and students of Gujarati language and literature, who were analysing, examining and enjoying folk literature from the perspective of its literary elements. Manilal Nabhubhai, B.K. Thakore Saheb and Meghani all held the opinion that it was necessary to study, teach and research folk literature.

Meghani's prolific contribution in Gujarati has, in fact, started an independent chapter in the history of folk literature. And, similarly, his method of compilation of folklore, of editing and evaluation can be taken as a unique contribution from Gujarat to India.

IV

Next to Meghani, considerable work has been done by Dulerai Karani, Gokuldas Raichura, Manubhai Jodhani, and Manjulal Majmudar. They have collected folk-tales of various provinces of Gujarat, and have enriched Gujarati folk literature by writing learned articles about secular beliefs. In all 14 volumes of folksongs published by Lokaahitya Committee, established by the Government of Gujarat, much of Gujarat's oral tradition of literature has been encompassed. Likewise, quite a lot of material can be obtained from periodicals such as 'Sharda' and 'Streejivan'.

After Meghani, there has been quite a remarkable contribution in the field of folklore. Almost 25 editions of folk literature have been published, along with five important volumes and publications of a periodical 'Urmi-Navrachana', a strenuous task carried out by three friends Jaymall Parmar, Niranjana Varma and Ishwarlal Dave. It is recognised as a unique contribution in the field of folklore. More than 25 years ago, they founded organisations like 'Lokshaitya Pariwar' and 'Loknatya Parishad' to launch various folklore programmes, and have collected hundreds of cassettes. They have, thus, inspired and encouraged innumerable students as well.

Another valuable contribution during this time comes from Harivallabh Bhayani. He published Lokkathanan Mool and Kool, which is a purely technical discussion on folklore. He also published a booklet titled *Traditional Oral Songs*, and edited and evaluated Sant Literature and Oral Epics as well. His students include Hasu Yagnik and the present writer.

The work carried out by Pushkar Chandarvakar in the field of folklore is no less significant. He has edited many volumes of folktales and has authored a book of critical evaluation of folktales. He has published not less than 10 volumes on folktales, and 10 volumes on folksongs. Moreover,

he assisted A.K. Ramanujan in the editing of *Indian Folk Tales*. During this period, through the agency of the Gujarat Lok-Kala Parishad, Joravarsinh Jadhav and Khodidas Parmar did a remarkable job in highlighting the writing, drawings and publications of Chandarvakar. Equally noteworthy is the critical approach of Jethalal Trivedy and Jashvant Shekhoiwala on the topic of folk literature. Kanubhai Jani and Shantibhai Acharya have provided a tradition for cultivating a scientific outlook in the study of folklore through their critical writings. Their work is based on a vast reading of English volumes on folk literature and on articles written in the Gujarati context. They have published a history of the work done in the field of folklore and included it in the post-graduate syllabus. The services extended by Kanubhai Jani are invaluable, and the work titled *Lokvangmaya* is the most important publication on this subject.

Shantibhai Acharya is an esteemed scholar who has taken great pains to edit the texts of tales with their original tone of colloquial splendour. His editions are held in high esteem by virtue of his scientific approach to the subject.

In Saurashtra University, right from its inception, Dolarrai Mankad, its founder-vice-chancellor, made ample provision for the study and research of folk literature, as a result of which, in the last 25 years, about 50 research projects on folk literature and folk culture of Saurashtra have been done. Saurashtra possesses an abundant storehouse of material for folklore. It possesses a vast selection of at least 20,000 old manuscripts of Barot and Bardic literature. There is also a wealth of material on "achiyanna" barots and Sant literature.

So far as book publications, research publications and folklore conferences are concerned, the Folklore Committee of Gujarat Sahitya Akadami and its Registrar, Hasu Yajnik have made a rich and worthwhile contribution. Moreover, there have been several publications by writers like Ratudan Rohadiya in the field of Bardic Literature, Markand Dave in the field of Sant Literature, as well as Mohanpuri Goswami and Niranjan Rajyaguru. Bhagwandas Patel has published work in the area of nomadic tribes such as Vanvasi, Bhil etc., and the present writer has worked on the literature of Charan, Barot and that of converted communities, as well as Sant literature. These writers also possess a bulk of raw material obtained through extensive fieldwork. In addition to this, Mansukhbai Joshi and Naliniben Upadhyaya have recorded audio cassettes of folk songs used in folk theatre, such as 'Bhavai', the songs of fishermen and other folk artists.

Among present-day scholars, many people have done remarkable work. The following names may be included in this list: PR. Teraiya,

Narottam Palan, Hasu Yajnik, Nagji Bhatti, Himamshu Bhatt, Jayanand Joshi, Harendra Bhatt, R.P. Patel, Shankerbhai and Rekhaben Tadvi, Sudhaben Chinubhai Nayak, Saroop Dhruv, Jayantilal S. Dave, and Amrut Patel.

In Gujarat, there are some scholars who follow veterans like Jaymall Parmar. Another class of experts disagree with Western principles concerning folklore and attempt to establish fresh standards. There is a third class that is preeminently concerned with the study and analysis of folktales as ample material for the study of folk culture. Last, there is a tiny, insignificant group of scholars, who are engrossed in research work, editing, and evaluation of material in a technical manner.

A curious co-ordination or synthesis of all these methods is to be found in the singular personality of Zaverchand Meghani. We look forward to welcoming more such research scholars. A great many things are yet to be achieved. There should be a formal seat of learning for the study of folklore, and a comprehensive inventory of oral folk literature that is readily available for study. The entire material should be made available in the form of photocopies at least, and there should be a audio-video unit as well, with more efforts towards the task of conservation or preservation of folk material.

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