

Dalit Voices in Burrakatha (An Oral Narrative): A Case Study of Kannada and Telugu

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Abstract

India is the conglomeration of different ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups viz. Astro-Asiatic, Dravidian, Indo-Arya and Tibeto-Burman people. Each of these linguistic communities divide into many modern languages that constitute 122 languages of which 22 are scheduled and 100 are tribal languages (Ramakrishna Reddy 2013). Each language of the scheduled and non-scheduled languages developed a type of oral narratives, viz., Yaksagana in Karnatak, Burrakatha in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, Mohini Attam in Kerala and Kudi Attam in Tamilnadu, etc. These arts mainly cultivated by the lower sections of the community in order to gain their lively hood. In the course of time, the performers of these Indian folk arts made use of the Indian mythology, Socio-political conditions, the lives of the down trodden and the Dalits. In the Telangana State, Praja Natya Mandali used the art BURRAKATHA for the voices of Dalit and the down trodden people in the society. The main of the paper tries to attempt how multifarious discriminated Dalits have consciously used oral forms of literature to acknowledge themselves socially and culturally. Mainstream literature continuously denied the validity of Dalit literature and its thoughts. Folk arts which consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, beliefs, and customs that are the traditions of that culture, subculture, or groups tried to use the folk arts for their acknowledgment in the multifaceted society. It is also the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared. Throughout the ages of oppression, oral literature has held Dalit communities in difficulties of education.

Keywords: oral, folklore, culture, identity, expression, Burrakatha, Dalit

Introduction

Story telling is an important Oral tradition in India and there are several traditional ways of narrating a story. Study of Oral narratives has been assumed a special importance with the emergence of special academic department's viz. Folklore studies, Comparative literature and Translation studies etc. Earlier academicians used to look at some of the native oral arts of India at individual level, without giving the importance to these genres, that involved socio economic conditions of the society, contemporary issues of the people and cultural heritage of each art and the Dalit voices in them. In the current studies of Indian folk arts and the oral narrative involved in them are given importance in the Indian academia because they are the representation of the voices of the undermined people in the society. Each folk art of the Indian Sub-Continent has employed one the other of complex schemas to reach easily to the common people especially the rural people. These unforgettable folk arts of the Indian Sub-Continent have also undergone so many changes, according to the changes that are taking in the Indian society till the date and time to time. These changes are bound to impact the narrators of the arts to change according to the changes that are occurring in the societies that existed.

About Burrakatha

Burra Katha is the most popular art form of narrative source of entertainment in the state of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and the newly formed state of Telangana in India. The art form is very

close to the common people or laymen in the society. The art is performed more in rural areas rather than the urban areas. It is a stage-based art form in which a story teller who is a main reciter and two other partners are accompanied. The partners are accompanied either side of the main reciter. While depicting the story the main reciter uses all the senses like anger, humour, laughter etc. the term “BURRA” refers to a stringed musical instrument worn across his right shoulder. The term “KATHA” means a story.



Burrakatha performance

Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burra_katha

Main Performer

The main performer of the art is called as (‘KATHAKUDU’) who plays the ‘tambura’ as he dances rhythmically moving forwards and backwards on the stage while reciting a story. He plays a vital role in making the Katha successful. He also wears a metal ring called Gajjelu (round shaped with a whole in the middle) and carries a ring in his palm to add to the tempo while he sings. The co-performers play two-headed earthen drums ‘DAKKI’ (in Kannada) and (Dinki in Telugu) to accentuate the songs. All the three performers will be wearing anklets with tiny bells called ‘ANDELU’ or ‘GAJJELU’ which add to the music when they dance and perform. One of the drummer is referred to as the ‘RAJKIYA’ who comments on contemporary political and social issues even if the main story concerns historical or mythological events. The other drummer is known as ‘HASYAM’ and he cracks jokes and provides comic relief and constantly keeps the audience well entertained and keeps up their interest in the performance. The performers regularly address each other, and the co-performers often interrupt the main performer to ask doubts on behalf of the audience and they add emphasis to the main events in the story with short words and phrases like (tandana, tane tandanana).

The performers of in the coastal belt of Andhra Pradesh are called as Picci Kuntlollu.

Establishing the Place, Time and Historical Context

Generally, the performance would begin with a prayer song depending upon the people who called them for the performance. The main performer introduces the story by establishing the place, time and historical context of the action. The co-performers repeat the refrain of the narrative. The story begins with the statement, VINARA BHARATA VEERA KUMARA “listen victorious sons of Barata Maata”, VEERA GADHA VINARA “listen the victorious story” which means, hear, the young brave son of bharat (india), hear the story of the brave and the co-performers affirm the proceedings with the words” tandhana tane tandhana na “. After these introductions, the main plot begins in which

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all three performers take an active role assuming various characters in the incidents, as well as providing narrative bridges between incidents. Thus, dance, recitation, songs, dialogues and enactment of scenes provide variation within a strong narrative line of Burra Katha.

Burra Katha Stories

These Burra Katha stories could be mythological, historical and socio-political and patriotic. The art became the medium to enlighten the people about the political situation which played an effective role in conveying the message to people and awakening them during Indian Independence Movement too. Since the art attracted the many common people during the independence time, the British government had banned its performance in the Madras Presidency and, Nizam, the ruler of the princely State Hyderabad, prohibited these shows in Telangana region.

Burrakatha Performers in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh

Burrakatha is most popular in Karnataka as it is most popular in Andhra Pradesh. These artists are found in Karnataka in the communities of Nilagararu, Kamsaleyaru, Choudkyaru, Goravaru, Karapaladavaru, Burrakathegararu, Dombidasaru, Helavaru, Jogigalu, Tamburiyaru. In most of the cases, these people found to perform about their communities and the legendary characters in them. Among these communities Budagajangamma community which is a roaming community tell the oral narrative stories by using the combination of prose and poetry style. This type of involving Poetry and prose is known as Burrakatha, which is most popular art form in Andhra Pradesh. Similar foot prints can be found in the bordering area of Karnataka. The people of this community who migrated from Andhra Pradesh to Karnataka can be seen more in the bordering districts, such as Gulbarga (Kalaburgi), Bidar, Yadgiri, Raichur and Bellari. These people tell the Burrakatha stories in Kannada and Telugu at the border areas of Karnataka and Telangana (Andhra Pradesh). These artists never face the Telugu and Kannada language as their barrier for their performance, as the local language in Karnataka is Kannada. These artists give their performance in Kannada as they perform in Telugu land. In Karnataka also, this art form is in severe danger.



Burrakatha

Courtesy: <http://images-photos-drawings.blogspot.com/2014/10/telugu-jaanapada-kalaaropalu-images.html>

Methodology

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For the study two codes are selected viz. Kannada and Telugu. Burrakatha is depicted in the codes using the same story or narrative. Since the folk art is famous in both the states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka both the states are selected for the study. Southern parts of Karnataka and the United Andhra Pradesh are places for the Study. Shankarmma who is a bilingual and versatile in depicting the stories using the Burra Kath in both the languages is selected for the study. Kamboja Raja storey (family storey that deals with deceptive queens and an innocent queen), Aryavara katha (family storey which deals with the three brothers and their deceptive qualities) and Baligiri raja kath (family storey of barren queen) are taken for the study. The three stories were videoed in both the language for the analysis. After the videoing is done all the visual texts were translated using the ELAAN and PRAATH tools.

Analysis

By looking at the three translated texts which deal with the morality that precedes the deceptive qualities used by the side characters in the three stories. While depicting these stories the performers especially who belong to the downtrodden And Dalit sections have nativized the stories by using the Burrakatha schemas and explained their miseries and sufferings using these stories. Since some of the themes of the stories touch the hearts of the Dalits and the downtrodden they try to nativize and apply their personal experiences in the story which subsequently have become the Dalit voices. Theses voice cry for their food, equality, liberty, fraternity, place in the society and sometimes the entry to reach the god who is in the form of idols. Pallath (1995) defines, that considering the historical roots of the Dalits who have common cultural patronage viz. Low caste and the tribals as Dalit (Matriarchal) Culture (Dalit Culture) and that of the Non-Dalits (Patriarchal/Solar) Culture (Non-Dalit Culture) says performers always tries to implement some of the experiences in the folk arts. Though the two cultures of Karnataka and the Andhra Pradesh, are different, but the sufferings and the problems of the Dalits are equal. Since they are similar in their lives, the performers who are Dalits and the downtrodden themselves are able to express their feelings along with the main plot and nativise them inspite of linguistic barricades. These nativized stores were subsequently have become the Dalit voices. Samy (2001) also presented similar kind of the opinion in “Cultural Expressions of Dalits”. He shows that, though Dalits does not have their own folklore stories, they make use of the arts of the respective states to express their miseries by using these folk arts. As the time passed on these stories were nativised and regionalized as Dalits voices to express their contemporary problems. When these stories were nativized they were abundantly filled with the rich folklore of expressions that close to Dalits.

Conclusion

Thus, by using the stories that have similar texts that deal with the Dalit sufferings were nativised and ultimately made them as Dalit voices. For this nativization, Burrakatha has become a great advocator for the upliftment of their lives. By using these Dalit voices Dalits have kept themselves socially and culturally active. They showed their participation in politics, culture, and society through oral literature and oral narratives. Yet the Oppressors have always denied the agency of Dalits.

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