A Few Tricky Issues Connected with Some Recent Folk-literary Research

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Honourable President, Honourable Vicechencellor, Distinguished Delegates and Friends.

To start with I heartily thank the Folklore Congress of India, its Executive Committee and its Hon. Secretary for accepting Saurashtra University's invitation to hold the Fifteenth Conference in Gujarat. We considenr it as a worthy tribute to the memory of our late illustrious litterateur and pioneer, incomparable folklorist Jhanverchand Maghani, whose birth Centenary is being celebrated during the current year. I consider it a great and unique honour for me to have been invited to deliver the inaugural address to the Conference. The Indian Folklore Congress is quite well-known as an august institution with a long glorious history, A large number of devoted scholars have made many valuable contributions to its deliberations over years. In view of my questionable worthiness for this honour, I was hesitant when Dr. Balvant Jani met me with the proposal, but finally I succumbed to the temptation persuading myself that this will afford me a coveted opportunity to meet personally some leading Indian Folklorists and thereby gain from their views and experiences.

The working field being immeasurably vast and the number of devoted and knowledgable workers being quite incommensurate to the huge tasks

that remain to be urgently undertaken, many areas of Indian Folklore have remained virgin regions unvisited and unexplored so far. To cite one instance from Gujarat : next-to-nothing was known, inside and outside, about the rich tradition of tribal oral epics and narratives which is only quite recently being brought to light. Little serious work has been done in Gujarati folklore after the brilliant pioneering work of Meghani whose centenary we are celebrating more as a sort of popular ceremonial rather than using the occasion to set up a few sound research projects for recording and studying the neglected areas of our folk literature and folk-culture which now faces the danger of extinction under the all-devouring invasion of modern Western consumeristic culture. Training a band of workers is a very urgent need. During the last decade, the Gujarat Sahitya Akademi did some work of recording and indexing of folk-songs and systematizling some already published collections. Shantibhai Acharya, Bhagvandas Patel and a few others too contributed their share. But until sufficient resources are made available, there is little hope for saving our fast disappearing cultural heritage. We earnestly hope that the presence of eminent folklorists here on this occasion and their work, deliberations and discussions would inspire Gujaratis to set up a folklore institution of Gujarat.

That the study of Indian folk-literature, apart from its innumerable other aspects has vast-potentialities to expand and enrich some aspects of the folk-literary theory has been shown for example by J. D. Smith's recent studies of the Rajasthani oral epic Pābūjī, which along anth the study of several other Indian oral epics has necessitated revision of the earlier theory about the mode of presentation of these epics. It is now definitely established that oral epics are presented through improvisation as well as memorization depending upon their varied religio-cultural functions.

Folkloristics being one of the oldest modern world sciencies, it is but natural that it provides fertile ground for the cropping up of new issues relating to its various aspects. Basic theoretical approaches have been changing (as in the areas of other humanistic studies), the emphasis shifting from historical \ geographical, literary, descriptive, structural, sociological, psychoanalytical to phenomenological (see for example Dorson's early convenient survey).

The classification scheme of folk-tales put forth by Heda Jesson, in her recent work, taking into consideration the poetic and other functions also of the tale seem to be a real advance on earlier classfications. But mixing up of the orally preserved texts and their modern written retellings, renderings

or literary use as the source-material poses complex problems : it considerably disturbs and blurs the significant categorization into the oral folk tradition and the literate. Please permit me to clearify this point a bit. During the earlier period, due to the dominance of ethnocentric or Eurocentric attitude, the traditional non-Western cultures were pushed to the area of anthropology (to counteract which fortunately a rapidly growing tendeney has gathered momentum in recent times). One of the fall-outs was the blurring or confusion regarding the perception of the borderlands between the traditional Indian oral songs and narratives primarily secular, and those of the Santa-bhaktas (preserved through oral as well as written transmission), which were traditionally assigned to definite authorship or were anonymous. In the Indian situation this has got an unbroken continuity from the medieval to the modern period. But the stituation becomes complicated when we have on one hand folk-tale texts that have been recorded without any modification, and on the other their modern retellings, versions or use as plots for newly composed fictions and songs. The latter harbour a modern view of life and culture. They connot be passed as recent folk-versions. The purpose, class of audience and the socio-cultural parameters are considerably different in the two cases.

It appears to me that much more attention

should be devoted to the different socio-cultural contexts within which different versions of a folk tale type or motif arose : How the tale was understood and interpreted by the community at a particular period, what was perceived as its significance, point or purport - this consideration should be of vital concern with the student of the folk-tale (or mutatis mutandis with the students of other domain of folk-literature and folk-lore). All the caution and circumspection is requisite to guard against anachronistic or modernistic interpretations.

Again when a novel approach is felt to be promising fresh theoretical insights, it also usully involves the risk of misinterpreting the tale, which cannot be understood properly in disregard of its tradition, time and space contexts and its related functions. I would like to refer in this regard to a typical instance which I think pointedly shows how some modern approaches involve the risk of misinterpretation.

We know that the late Professor A. R. Ramanujan, besides being an illustrious poet, and perceptive translator of devotional poems, was an eminent folkorist. Now under the impact of the psychoanalytical approach, which accepted Freud's view that the Oedipus Complex is universal (experiencing incestuous feeling for the mother and am-

bivalent relation with the father) and that those elemental urges find indirect expression through folk liturature and folk-art, many folklorists discovered Oedipus Complex as underlying many a primitive tales. But Jung, Fromm and a few other psychologists had serious reservations about the Freudian interpretation. They saw power and not sex as motivating jealousy between the father and the son and several folklorists found support for this point of view in numerous primitive tales.

Ramanujan, however, had contributed a paper entitled 'The Indian Oedipus', to the collection, 'Oedipus - a Folk-lore case took', which was based on a story he had heard years ago from a half-blind Kannada woman. The same story he has given in the sequel to him Introduction to 'Folk-Tales of India' (1989), and Indra Nath Chowdhuri, the Secretary to the Delhi Sahitya Akademi, alluded to it in his welcome address to the 'Seminar on oral tradition, written word and communication systems' held in 1992 at Delhi, the keynote address to which was delivered by Ramanujan. Chowdhury has given a very brief indication of the plot of the stoty :

A girl is borne with a curse on her head that she would marry her own son and beget a son by him... Then she hangs herself from a rafter with her sari used as a rope'. His conclusion is that 'literate tradition has more scope to hold orality in very low

esteem. In fact this is done on the Western analogy of great/little traditon. In Indian context the deśī-mārgī contrast in fact represents two different expressions of the same tradition. To give an example, if the story of King Oedipus by Aschylus is a representation of Great Tradition, then what will one say about this story from Indian Oral Tradition heard by Prof. Ramanujan.... If this is Little Tradition who cares for Great Traditions ?'.

In the story as given by Ramanujan in his Introduction referred to above, the mother, who has later on become a nun, swinging the child begot on her by her son-husband sings the following lullaby, 'Sleep, O Son, O grandson, O brother to my husband, sleep O sleep, sleep well.'

Now that story is quite well-known in Jain literary tradition in numerous versions onwards from about the sixth century A.D. In the Jain tradition of Gujarat it is current even today as the instructive tale of eighteen-fold kinship relations (aḍhār nātarānī vārtā). A brief note on the early works which contain versions of this story is attached herewith. In most of the versions the instructive song (or lullaby) sung while rocking the cradle persists typically. In the earliest known Prakrit version we have it in prose form which is quite obviously secondary (to suit the accepted medium). In Hemacandra's ver-

sion the relationships mentioned in the lullaby are also explained. In a 17th centuary Old Gujarati version the same set of 18 relationships is reproduced. Throughout its long history the illustrative Dharmakathā of the Jain tradition up to the present-day is understood to have as its significance and spirit the fact that the worldly family relationship is in fact likely to be morally reprehensible and the story has been always used by preachers to demonstrate this with a view to inculcate the spirit of renunciation. Reading in it implications of Oedipus or Electra Complex is clearly an extraneous modernistic interpretion and a basic distortion. Hence also it cannot be used as an instance of Little Tradition. Had Ramanujan known about the history of this story, he possibly would have not imterpreted it as an illustration of Oedipus Complex.

Over years I have been working in the area of Classical Indian narrative literature in all its aspects. It is linked up with the folk-tale studies in the comparative/historical approach. The greater part of my published work in the subject relates to noting early Indian versions of widely reported tales, primarily from Prakrit and Early NIA literatures, in the light of the Type and Motif approach in the Aarne-Thompson tradition. Understandably, the vast amount of data to be handled leaves no choice but to be selective and leave untouched the 'function' aspects

of the tales (emotional, stylistic, narratival, aesthetic - in short 'phenomenological'). Excepting three articles, the rest of my work in this subject is in Gujarati.

Dundes has discussed the alrernative interpretation of the Oedipus Complex on the basis of Lessa's materials and other evidence ('The Study of Folklore', 1965). In Kluckhorn's study, the power conflict between father and son emerges as an equally prevalent motivation. A story known from the Buddhist (Pali) Jātaka literature (Jātaka No. 58) and attested also is several versions in the early Jain literary tradition clearly shows this motivation. In most of its versions its moral points to the jealousy based on power conflict between the father and the son. I have treated it at length in a paper entitled 'Some Ancient Versions of Oedipus' that was published in 1994. Hence I will not tire you by its presentation here. I hope that these somewhat random observations you will not find without some significance and relevance, and that the three days' deliberations and discussions of the Conference will be quite fruitfull. Thank you.

A brief reference list for the Jain story Kuberadatta -Kuberadattā.

1. Vasudevahiṁḍī of Sañghadāsa (Prathama Khaṇḍa), ed. Chaturvijaya and Puṇyavijaya, 1989 reprint. Gujarat Sahitya Akademi, Gandhinagar.

   c. 6th cent, A. D. Language Archaic Prakrit. Kuberadattā-Kuberadattā (as an illustrative story is emboxed in the biography of Jambusvamin (p. 10-12).

2. English Transalation of the Story Version I : The Vasudevahiṇḍī. Jagadischandra Jain, L. D. Series 59, 1977. L. D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad.

   (pp. 564-566 : parallels from the Pariśiṣṭaparvan, Kattigeyānupekkhā and Tibetan Tales (English Transalation, Ralston, London, 1882. The tale of Utpalavarṇā) are noted on p. 566).

3. Gujarati Trasalation of Version I :

   Vasudeva-hiṁḍī (Gujarati Transalation by B. J. Sandesara, Gujarat Sahitya Akademi, Gandhinagar, 382017; 1988 Reprint).

4. Jambūcariya of Guṇapāla. Ed. Jivavijaya Muni. Singhi Jain Series, 44, 1959.

   c. 8th cent. A. D. Language Prakrit. pp. 87-81. Expanded retelling in the almost same words of the No. 1 Version.

5. Pariśiṣṭaparvan or Sthavirāvalicarita of Hemachandra

   Ed. H. Jacobi. Asiatic Society, Calcutta. 11th cent. A. D. Language Sanskrit. Emboxed story in the biography of Jambū (canto II).

   English Summary and Parallels to the story given in the introuduction.

6. German transalation of the Version in No. 5 :

   Ausgewahlte Erzahlungen aus H. 's Pariśiṣṭaparvan by Johannes Hertel, Leipzig, 1908. Parallels noted.

7. A short version in 'Jain' Sanskrit reproducing the key verses form No. 4 Version we find in the Prabodha-pañcaśatī pf Śubhaśīla. ed. Mrugendra Muni. Surat, 1968. It is in late vernacularized Sanskrit (pp. 134-135).

More than a hundred works on Jambū's biography, in verse, prose or their mixture, in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhraṁśa, Old Gujarati and Old Hindi, published or as yet only in Old Mss., are noted in the Jambūsāmicariu of Vīra, ed. V. P. Jain, Bharatiya Jañānapīṭha, Delhi-411406, 1944, Introduction, 43-47.

This list does not include Jain works in Dravidian languages. Many of these probably contain a version of the Kuberadatta-Kuberadattā.

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Ramanujan's paper referred to in the Welcome Address by Indra Nath Chowdhuri to the Delhi Sahitya Akademi International Seminar on Oral Tradition, Written Word and Communication Systems, 1992 (Cyclostyled, pp. 6-8).

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