



The Evolution of Storytelling and Facets of Motherhood

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Abstract

Communication is a basic feature of social life and storytelling is one of the earliest methods of communicating ideas. A desire to tell and hear stories is inherent in every human being. Everywhere and at all times, it is a powerful impulse in mankind. Motherhood is an innate experience of a woman and different images of mothers are exposed while tracing the evolution of storytelling.

Keywords: Storytelling, orality, writing, printing, Internet and motherhood

At every stage of human development, revolutionary changes have occurred in the art of storytelling. With the passing of time and progress in technology, dramatic changes have taken place in the nature of storytelling. The earliest manifestations of this creative expression are prehistoric paintings in caves. The oldest known cave painting is that of the Chauvet Cave in Southern France. The paintings that depict animals and pre-historic men's hunting and gathering activities have been discovered on the dark walls of caves around the world. The early cavemen communicated these stories of men and animals with sound, movements and gestures. The roots of our mythology can be traced back to these paintings. The different images of mother figures have been found out from these prehistoric paintings. These images denote the ideal representation of mothers during that time. A Mother not only creates life but also sustains it. She has great power over the society. The image of the Mother Goddess that represents fertility is discovered in the cave paintings of Bhimbetka in India. The figurines of the Mother Goddess are excavated from different parts of India. Dr. Choodamani Nandagopal in her article "Motherhood in art" cites:

There are good examples of women with or without children, lying on beds or in the state of pregnancy convey the idea of fecundity. Two figures of reclining woman with a child, one each from Harappa and Mohenjodaro is surprisingly without any kind of decoration shows the sense of propriety while nursing a babe. A striking example of a female figure with pot-belly suckling two babies from Harappa is moulded on the wheel. Some female figures are portrayed as doing household chores such as grinding the grain and kneading the dough from Harappa is hand modelled in baked clay.

With the evolution of the spoken word, orality becomes the vehicle for transmitting information from one generation to the next. In oral tradition, stories are passed from generation to generation as verbally transmitted folktales, sayings, proverbs, ballads, songs or chants. They are sung from village to village by wandering singers where a group of eager listeners assemble to be entertained. Stories which are developed from such social networks range from those of personal experiences, family- sagas, adventurous stories of local villagers, and tales about fairies, ghosts and other supernatural beings.

The oral tradition relies greatly on memory. Therefore, stories naturally undergo several changes during the processes of recalling and retelling. Walter J. Ong in *Orality and Literacy* quotes David Henige's comment that the oral tradition "allows for inconvenient parts of the past to be forgotten" because of "the exigencies of the continuing present" (49). Often, skilled oral narrators deliberately introduce new elements

in old stories in order to fit them in various new situations. Therefore, there may be many versions of the same story. In oral societies, a tale is told aloud to a group of listeners and they are bound to respond. Consequently, the oral tradition unites people in groups. The cultural elements of each society are also transmitted to the next generation through the verbally uttered stories.

Many of our classical pieces of literature are emerged from the tradition of oral storytelling. They are written and edited by scribes, poets, or scholars, only in later years. Our great epics such as *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and even certain books of *the Bible* have their roots in the oral tradition. Oral transmission is important in the history of *the Vedas* also. *The Vedas*, which are supposed to be compiled between 5000-1500 B. C., have developed through Guru- Shishya parambara. Indian mythology gives many examples of self-sacrificing images of mothers. They stand for pure love and people show great reverence for them. They are worshipped as living goddesses. Sita, Kunti, Gandhari, Yashoda and Kausalya are some of the mother figures who show exceptional character and are greatly respected by the entire society.

Gradually, the need to preserve knowledge over the barriers of time and place has led to the development of writing. Ong describes writing as a technology that must be laboriously learned. Writing helps to transform human thought from the world of sound to the world of sight. According to him, the technology of writing has transformed human consciousness. It not only represents words as signs, but it also gives a linear shape to thought and provides a critical framework to rational thinking.

Writing is a very late development in human history. The first known script cuneiform was developed by the Sumerians in Mesopotamia around 3500 B. C. and another early script the hieroglyphics was developed by the Egyptians around 3000 B. C. These systems of writing were gradually enhanced with pictographic writing. Pictograms, in turn, evolved into ideograms. With the discovery of papyrus, man began to use paper to tell stories and slowly, scribal culture was developed. During that period, manuscripts were hand- made by scribes. But it was very difficult to procure documents. The cost and time of copying led to the slow propagation of ideas. It was almost impossible to get exactly similar copies of the original manuscripts. Thus, a number of variant manuscripts were in circulation. The contents of these early manuscripts were largely religious. They often contained beautiful illustrations to attract people to read the texts. Due to the limited number of copies, they had to be guarded in public places. So, it was difficult to spread ideas among large groups of common people. During the Middle Ages, the production and circulation of manuscripts were confined to monasteries and other ecclesiastical centres.

Manuscript culture and the limitations inherent in the distribution of manuscripts over time and space prompted people to think about another technology. In the fifteenth century, Johannes Gutenberg invented printing press. This led to a transition from handwritten books to printed ones. The printing press paved the way for rapid propagation of knowledge and it made many ancient texts available to the readers. Within some years, the stories popular during the oral tradition were compiled and circulated in book forms. *The Gutenberg Bible* was very popular during this period. Printing was introduced in England in 1476 by William Caxton who was a writer, an editor and a good translator. He became instrumental in shaping English language and culture.

Printing resulted in the production of wide range of stories. Gradually all stories began to fall into three general categories- poetry, prose fiction and drama. Each of these genres again divides into several subcategories. The portrayal of mothers in early works are totally stereotyped and they are depicted as having no existence or identity apart from their children. The portrayal of self-sacrificing mothers who have the power to endure all adverse situations for the sake of their husband and children are glorified in literature. Anandamoyi in Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* (1910), Rukmini in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and Savitri in R. K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* (1938) stand as perfect examples of ideal Indian motherhood. Some writers also dared to throw light into the inner turmoil of a mother's personality. Mulk Raj Anand in his novel *The Old Woman and his Cow* (1960) presents Gauri who becomes independent from the bondages of patriarchal society after attaining financial security.

The emergence of electronic media clearly changed many aspects of human life. It also reformed the art of storytelling. During the twentieth century, a large number of technologies were invented and stories were restructured for films, radio and television. Many people feel that it is easier and more interesting to watch a story unfold on a screen than to read it in a book. Ong describes the changes in language and thought due to the emergence of electronic media such as telephone, radio, and television as 'secondary orality' (136).

A tremendous change has taken place in the art of storytelling with the advent of Internet. The Internet has brought transformation in many aspects of life. It has changed the world into a global village. It also heralded revolutionary changes in the production and diffusion of stories. Even the traditional way of selling books has changed with the popularity of the Internet.

The change from print to e-publishing has been happening with an enormous speed. The digital society is transforming us into an increasingly paperless society and the number of online publications, journals, magazines and newspapers are increasing regularly. It is very easy for readers to access these online versions. People can publish their stories on the web more easily than through the printed media. Blog is one such website which allows us to create our own web space in which we can post stories and thoughts to anyone else in the web, even without revealing our real identity. Many blogs function as personal online diaries in which people share their feelings, experiences, and their creative writings. They function as sites of women empowerment also. Some of them focus on a particular area of interest and provide documentary on that. Blogging has become a personal creative exercise for many people. The desire to tell and write stories is very strong in many people. But they may not get a proper platform to publish their stories. The blogosphere really provides a great arena for such people. A great number of mommy blogs are popular now. We can hear astonishing voices of ordinary people from all over the world through their blog writings.

Internet provides a wide range of social networking services. It introduces new forms of human interactions by connecting people from all over the world. Many women share their experiences as mothers through the personal pages of these websites. The digital revolution not only offers different platforms for publishing stories, but also makes several changes in the nature of stories itself. People are now trying to present stories in innovative styles and this results in the development of a number of new genres.

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