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## Cultural Echo In Ancient Utterances : A Study Of Selected Translated Tales Of Tripura.

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### Abstract

Oral tradition of story telling has been an ancient precursor to literature. The primitive societies propagated knowledge from one generation to other through these oral tales. This practice of sharing wisdom, became a cultural heritage. The Royal State of Tripura traces it's heritage to the ancient time of *Mahabharata* where it was referred as 'Land of Kirats'. This small state of Tripura contains a mass collection of folk literatures. These tales gradually became legends and myths and established certain cultural symbols for the community. This paper aims to study these mythical eco-symbols by using Saussure's Semiotic Model . It will also apply Carl Jung's concept of 'Collective Unconscious' to decipher the recurring symbols and how they become a cultural identity for the tribes. These tales are not just mere reflections of tribal life, but have now become a great part of their tradition which this paper aims to discuss.

**Key words :** Tripura, Folk Literature, Saussure, Semiotics, Myths, Collective Unconscious.

### I . Introduction

The tribes of Tripura are one of the ancient communities who are practicing the tradition of Oral story telling. These oral tales are a source of amusement, a medium to pass on their wisdom and knowledge. They encompass in them diverse elements ranging from nature, animism, to mythology. Over the years this tradition has become heritage having a symbolic implication on their conscience. To study those, modern theories needs to be applied and these narratives needs to be relooked and interpreted so that the culture preserved in those ancient tales both as a symbol and conscience can be deciphered.

### II. Objective of the Study

The tribal societies of Tripura are a rich source of ancient narratives. Their tales blend fiction with realism and thus appears very life like to the peoples. These ancient narratives have become objects of great fascination in literary studies. They established symbols that have been integrated into their cultural life and have created collective consciousness of belief system. These paper aims to study these phenomenon by applying modern literary theories and interpret how the culture got embedded in those tales.

### III. Methodology

The present study uses both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include in depth reading of the translated texts done by various translators. The secondary sources include study of the research articles , research papers and critical interpretations of various scholars and critics. This study would apply Ferdinand De Saussure's Semiotic Theory to understand the symbolic implications. It will also use Carl Jung's theory of Collective Unconscious to interpret the mythical aspects of these texts.

#### IV. Tripura and it's Folktales

The state of Tripura, is an ancient kingdom which traces it's origin to the days of *Mahabharata* where it was referred as 'Land of Kirats'. It is said that king of Tripura, King Tripur fought with Kauravas in the "Kurukshetra" battle. These mythical references indicate the ancient origin of Tripura's civilization. Geographically it is located in the North-Eastern part of India. It was considered as a land of inaccessible hills, turbulent rivers, dark forests and turbulent rivers which contained poisonous reptiles, wild animals. In the ancient times, it was a tribal inhabited area, where there was a microcosm of distinct cultures shared by different tribes. Being a land of the primitive tribal life, tribes of Tripura have a vast collection of folktales which are derived mostly from the oral story telling traditions. Most of the folktales were narrated in the 'Kokborok' language, which is the major language spoken by eight indigenous inhabitants of Tripura. They reflect feelings, emotions, customs and beliefs of the multifaceted tribal life. For years, this rich heritage of folktales remained unrecognized due to its language barrier. In recent times, these folktales were translated into English by various translators which now made them accessible to the global community.. These stories range from life of Kings and Queens to the ordinary peasants. Apparently they are didactic with a moral undertone of life. Impulsively, they also vent out desires, frustrations, deprivations, failures, dreams and emotional aspects of life. These folktales are a spectacle of the tribal life in Tripura. Within their stories, they weave an intricate pattern of myths, mysticism, fantasy, supernaturalism and symbolism, Their tales establish certain eco-symbols which appear relevant even today. They establish myths to which people still have their faith.

#### V. Eco-Symbols in the Tales

The tales of Tripura are derived from the daily life of the peoples. They talked about ordinary aspects of life by blending it with supernaturalism, mysticism, naturalism. In the ancient time they were oral narratives which were circulated through the practice of storytelling. With efforts from scholars and academicians, they are now being documented and translated in English language. Introspecting on these texts, one can locate certain eco-symbols that has entered into the cultural aspects of their life. Eco-symbols are those elements found in the nature that contains implication of being something more than an ordinary natural object. They have in them cultural implication. There is a vice versa process where they imply culture and the culture implies them as well. Such symbolic aspect can be studied using Ferdinand De Saussure's Semiotic Theory.

According to Saussure, Language is a structured system consisting of the Sign, which is a combination of signifier and signified. Signifier is the physical construct of the sign and signified is the mental construct of the implication. In the history of human civilization, the language system have evolved among the series of symbols. Primitive men have constructed their life through a series of signs and symbols that they have seen around them. The ancient cave paintings and inscriptions are transcription of the nature that they have seen and tried to reciprocate the same as an imitation of what they saw. Ecosystem is an indispensable part of human life, hence it holds immense significance in the culture, ethics, aesthetics and tradition of the people. The nature around man influences his way of living. Since ancient times, people developed a metaphysical connection with the nature. Animism prevailed in the lifestyle of those inhabitants where the nature around them assumed the shape of a living entity that foster them, protect them and sustain them. This resulted in the formulation of certain Eco- Symbols. Eco- Symbols are special signs which have a signification in the cultural domain. They create a sense of commonness. While looking at those objects, the members of that social setup find a sense of belongingness. They become a stamp of their ancient heritage. The primitive tribes of Tripura too were no different. They ingrained their cultural aesthetics among these natural phenomenon, some of which were reflected in their folktales. On studying some of those tales, one can trace such eco-symbols that echo the culture of this ancient kingdom.

One of the eco-symbols can be traced to the *Khumpui* flower. *Khumpui* is a recurrent flower found in Tripura. It's scientific name is *Epiphyllum oxypetalum*. This flower has a mysterious trait. These flowers bloom for only one night, typically between 10 pm and 2 am and by the day it loses it's vivacity. Due to it's mysterious nature it has entered the oral tales of the tribal communities. The tale of *Khumpui*, the elder girl of the Ochai (priest of the tribal community) makes a pledge that who so ever makes a *gayring* for them, be it a god, man, snake, tiger or bear, she will marry that person. Consequently, a python created a huge *gayring* and as a result of her promise she gets married to that python. She treated it like a person and would daily offer food. But the *Ochai* could not accept that and was looking for a remedy. As a redemption from this, the *Ochai* cut off the python's head and threw it near a spring where later wonderful flowers called *Khumpui*

started blooming. On seeing the python's head, the elder daughter jumped into the spring to reunite with her husband. The blooming of the Khumpui on either side of the spring became an indication of reunion between the girl and her husband, the python who have transformed to a man. By integrating it in the tales this flower has now become a symbol of union and mystery. It has become a symbol of union between human and nature. Every time it blooms, it becomes a reminiscence of this folk tale where the lovers united in their after life.

Another translated version of this same tale narrates the story of *Raima –Saima*. They were the two daughters of the *Ochai*. Among them, the elder daughter *Raima* had to marry a python as a result of her pledge. As a redemption from this, her father, the *Ochai*, had cut off the Python's head and threw it near the streams where the Khumpui flowers bloomed. Saddened by this event *Raima* started crying and asking her husband to not leave her alone. Her tears turned into stream which then became a small river and submerged her within. The river was thus called as *Khumtwi* and later renamed as *Gumti* or *Gomati*. Thus the river became an eco-symbol to which people could relate their tale. This tale also allude the Hindu mythological deities Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. Mythically their union is also taken as a symbolic unity of *Purush* and *Prakriti* which is the union of Man and Nature. *Raima* is believed to be an incarnation of Goddess Parvati and the Python as Lord Shiva in disguise. The river is a blessing that they showered on people of Tripura for their welfare. The two rivulets from which the river *Gomati* originates is officially named as *Raima* and *Sharma*, which is a cultural echo of this tale.

Tripura is a land of ten major rivers. Civilization in Tripura has thrived near the river banks which made these rivers a great element in the oral tales. They became prominent eco-symbols further backed by the tales. Most of them are rain fed rivers which originate among the streams that reside in the deep forests. Thus their origin or geographical features were a kind of mystery to the ancient tribes, who then started weaving oral tales about those rivers, their appearance and their humanistic fervors. In the *Tale of Nuwai*, the story of *Twī-Korma* river can be traced. The tale is about the two step sisters Kormoti and Khumti. Being jealous of the fair, turmeric, yellow complexion of Kormoti, her dark complexioned sister Khumti threw her into the stream while playing. After she fell, the water of the river turned all turmeric yellow. Even her grandma was wonder struck by the changed colour of the river and figured out the foul play by Khumti and later punished her to live in a cage like bird. When she was released at the mercy of her sister Kormoti, she turned into a bird and before escaping into the sky she gave a verdict that from now on that particular river will be called after her sister as "*Twī-Kormo*" or Turmeric river. This is now commonly known as Howrah river and it still maintains a yellow complexion throughout the years.

Thus, these tales were embedded in the natural scenario and provided a source of explanation to the extraordinary phenomenon. The mystic aura of those natural events instigated the ancient oral story tellers to embed their heritage among the all pervading nature. The natural attributes of the state such as unique flowers and rivers got incorporated in those tales and are established as certain eco-symbols which signify a story that reflect on the cultural life and belief system of the inhabitants. The culture gets echoed within these geographical features and establishes certain eco-symbols.

## . VI. Myths and the Collective Unconscious

According to Cambridge Dictionary, Myths "are ancient story or set of stories especially explaining the early history of group of people or about natural events and facts". Most of them are traditional in origin which explains the early history of cultural belief or particular practice of group of people or explaining a natural event. Myths are relevant as they create certain archetypes which are association to the cultural community. They establish a set of beliefs and faiths to which everyone adheres. Knowingly or unknowingly they enter into the unconscious. Carl Jung elucidates the working of such a phenomenon in his theory of 'Collective Unconscious'.

The term "Collective Unconscious" appeared in Carl S Jung's essay *The Structure of the Unconscious* (1916). In this essay, he distinguished between the Freudian Individual Unconscious of repressed desires to that of encompassing the soul of humanity at large. Jung linked the collective unconscious to Freud's notion of "Archaic - remnants". Archaic remnants are mental remnants that cannot be explained by anything in individual's own life as they are aboriginal, innate and inherited state of human mind, where the archaic ancestors maintain their influence on present day human mind. According to him, the far fetched

mythological motifs and symbols appear recurrently in exceptional states of mind as a result of influence of traditions, excitations and traditions working upon individual. These primordial images or archetypes, as Jung calls them belongs to basic stock of unconscious psyche and cannot be explained as personal images as they are a result of common traditional influence. Together they make up the psychic stratum or what Jung calls Collective Unconscious. The Theory of Collective Unconscious states that there is a collective reservoir of archetypes that is common to all humans. There are universal images that appear in dreams, myths, art and literature to which all find a common association. They encompass shared human experiences and emotions evoked by similar images. Myths of Tripura work with these principle where it narrates tales that establish certain images and figures which in turn form a great part of the tradition. They shape and reshape the human life. They have a collective impact and hence they enter into the cultural space of the Tripuri people.

It is the cultural and ethical appeal that constructs an ideal myth. The oral tales of Tripura are drawn from such historical, ethnical, religious and supernatural backgrounds to which people find being associated and related. They get rooted in the unconscious of the collective mass. The tale of *Golden Frog*, *The Son of the Moon* narrates the story of the beautiful girl Kuphur who gave birth to a golden frog, which was assumed to be the son of Moon God. It was prophesised that the frog, named Chandra Kumar would become a man if a woman marries him. Eventually he turns to human and married a woman, got free from his curse and went on to become the King. From this the royal decency of Tripura of being *Chandrabangshi* or descent of Lunar dynasty became a myth. This a common motif found in the German fairytale of ‘The Frog Prince ‘ collected by Brothers Grimm, where a frog turned to a handsome prince on being kissed by a princess. Thus this motif of magical transformations are a recurrent symbol of the myths that with time has become an archetype.

Religious fervor of the communities further illuminates the myths and foster the archetypes present in them. Religion exists as a conscious practice which installs certain faith and belief system in our unconscious. And being widely practiced, it becomes a collective behaviour. The tale of *Blood Thirsty Gods* narrates the tale of Fourteen Gods or the “Chatturdashdevta” and how the tradition of their worship began. The story begins when the fourteen Gods were once chased by a buffalo who were later rescued by Queen Heeraboti, wife of King Trilochan. After that the Fourteen Gods stayed in the kingdom of Tripura and since then they are worshipped by everyone. These Fourteen Gods are also mentioned in the Hindu mythology thereby establishing a set of common belief system. Historically too it is found that the worship of Fourteen Gods started during reign of King Trilochan. Presently the idols of Fourteen Devtas are located in Old Agartala, whose temple was built by King Dhanya Manikya in 1761. Every year the festival of Kharachi is organised in honour of the Fourteen Gods where every community of Tripura participate with joy. Thus these tales are harbinger of customs and traditions ingrained in the myths. The myth narrated by this tale has entered into the unconscious which is still fostered in the belief system of the people.

The primitive tribes of Tripura were mostly forest dwellers and lived amidst the nature. They were worshipper of nature since it sustained their daily life. The tale of *The Priest* narrates the tale of nature worship. It talks about a lazy boy who was rescued by an old man who was none other than the Forest God Burassa. In the disguise of an old man, the Forest God preached the lazy boy how to worship him after which he will remove all the troubles from one’s life. People still believe that if Burassa is pleased, he will solve all their problems and restore them to happiness. Such tales establish myths which remain in the mind of people and are passed on from one generation to another as a part of the tradition. They become a collective unconscious.

## Conclusion :-

The tales of Tripura are not just pieces of amusement but are a reflection of the rich heritage shared by the people. They are even relevant to the modern literary theories and help us in assuming the craftsmanship of their anonymous creators. They echo the culture ingrained as the symbols and myths in their tales which became a unique identity of any community. They encompass the hidden beauty of this small land. They are literary pieces that still makes the reader feel the wonder.



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