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Maithili: Nursery Rhymes, Riddles Aphorisms & Proverbs

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ABSTRACT

The folk literature of Maithili refers to oral traditions and creative expressions of a community, including tales, myths legends rituals and songs-- like Nursery Rhymes, Riddles, Proverbs and Aphorisms etc. It passed down through generations, reflecting shared cultural beliefs, values and collective wisdom. In this article, it is explained in detail on the key point of Nursery Rhymes, Riddles, Proverbs and Aphorisms respectively, but among it, Aphorisms is discussed in its six parts, in detail-- relating auspicious movements, householder's, seasons, astrological, cultural and Miscellaneous aspects. The article marks the deep customs and culture of ancient and medieval periods of Mithila. Finally, we can say, its impact reflects in the modern - Mithila.

Key words: Nursery Rhymes, Riddles, Proverbs, Aphorisms, Medicine, Jyotish, Agricultural, auspicious movement, Seasons, Astrological, sayings, Miscellaneous.

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MAITHILI: NURSERY RHYMES, RIDDLES APHORISMS & PROVERBS

Maithili Folk literature refers to the oral traditions and creative expressions of a community, including tales, myths, legends, songs, and rituals, like ---nursery rhymes, riddles, aphorisms and proverbs etc., that are passed down through generations, reflecting shared cultural beliefs, values, and collective wisdom. Though often conveyed through informal, spoken channels, much of it has been transcribed into written forms. These dynamic narratives and artistic expressions serve as a repository of collective identity and cultural history, adapting to changing social and historical contexts while providing insight into the human experience. Here, it is focused only on nursery rhymes, riddles, aphorisms and proverbs.

(1) NURSERY RHYMES:

Nursery Rhymes is also known as Jingles, and Children's Play Songs. There are many kinds of these songs. Grown up girls when playing with their dolls use the songs of the elders, but young children have set formulas for their games. These are numerous. In some of them, the renowned scholar of Mithila, Pandit Riddhi Nath Jha has collected.

Mere jingles are called 'phakadas', children love to recite them. They are mostly based on the trick of repetition, e. g., in the famous 'phakada' of the scapula: -

*"Khelait dhupaitme loha paol
 Seho loha kahe lae, hasua gadhabae lae
 Seho hasua kahe lae, kharhi katabe lae
 Seho kharahi kahe lae, bangala chharabe lae
 Seho bangala kahe lae, mahisi banhabae lae
 Seho mahisi kahe lae, chautaba parabe lae
 Seho chautaba kahe lae, angna nipabe lae
 Seho angna kahe lae, gahuma sukhabe lae
 Seho chikasa kahe lae, puria pakabe lae
 Seho puria kahe lae, bhauji khoaabe lae
 Seho bhauji kahe lae, betaba biaabe lae
 Seho betaba kahe lae, tal-gulli khele lae
 Seho tal-gulli tuti gel, bau rusi gel
 Re baua kane sasur jo
 Sasurak sanes kane tauhu le
 Kane hamro de." 1*

---- Budha Jhamalal

Budha Jhamlal, a funny figure of Mithila is the hero of many of these 'phakadas'.

(2) RIDDLES:

A riddle is a confusing question or statement that has a clever or surprising answer, often posed as a game or intellectual puzzle. The term can also refer to anything difficult to understand, a conundrum, or an enigma. Additionally, the word "riddle" has other, unrelated meanings, such as to pierce with many holes or to separate materials using a sieve.

There are riddles like 'Mukaris'(Apanhutis) and 'Kutas' and even 'Ahiyaris' which are, really parts of literature proper, but 'Pihana's' such as those given below belong to folk literature. They are a man of sense and witty:

(i) "Kalatala me jhilmil pani,
 Ohime nachai budhia rani" 2

. The translation of the above lines--- An old woman is dancing in the black pond in which it is full of flickering water (=Pancake/ Puri)

(ii) "Assi kosak pokhari assi lok nahathi. Bajra khasai ohi pokhari jau panchhi piasal jathi"

Translation-- There is a tank of eighty kosas and eighty people have bathed in it but the bird goes away without satisfying its thirst. (=Dews)

(iii) "Chari chiraiya chari rang, Charu bedarang

. Pinjara me jaita deri charu eke rang."3

The translation of the above lines- Four birds is in different colours, but when they go into a cage, their colour is the same. (= betel)

(iv) "khand karu taruuri,

. Taio ne katal jae supari."

The translation of these lines--- The sword may cut into pieces yet the nut may remain unbroken. (= shadow)

(v) "Pani me panbatta hilait achhi
 . Chora sab takait achhi."

Translation---- A valuable big cup is floating on the water but thieves cannot steal it. (=Moon)

Hence, there are various Jyotisa and mathematical riddles current, which people like to ask their guests, especially during marriage, to test their intelligence and presence of mind.

(3.) PROVERBS :

A proverb is a short, well-known, and traditional saying that expresses a fundamental truth, piece of advice, or common-sense observation based on experience or cultural wisdom. Proverbs use figurative language and complete sentences to offer insights into life and human nature, often reflecting cultural values. For example 4 -- (a) "Apana dashiki Keo khatam kata Kasich", means to give the importance of your own things. (b) "Apane tele nachi", means to be independent. (c) "Anaha gam me kahaha raja", means the reputation of a sociolite among fools, etc.

A large number of Maithili Proverbs have been collected and published. The works on the subject were George Abraham Grierson's 'Maithili Dictionary' and 'Bihar Peasant Life'(1881); Christian's 'Bihar Proverbs'(1884) and U. S. Bhatta's 'Magahi Kahavata Sangraha' 5 and other than these Rameshwar Jha and Vidya Nand Thakur have published 'Maithili Lokokti (Va Upalekshana-ka) Sangrha'(1931) respectively. RameshwarJha's work does not give meaning like that of Vifyanand Thakur, but it is the most comprehensive collection of Maithili proverbs in print. Pt. Surendra Jha 'Suman' and Raddhinath Jha have made fresh additions to these collections, but their works are still un-published.

(4.) APHORISMS:

An aphorism is a tersely phrased statement of a truth or opinion or a brief statement of a principle. This is also known as (or similar to) a saying, maxim, adage, saw dictum, and precept. In The Advancement of Learning (1605), Francis Bacon noted that aphorisms go to "the pith and heart of sciences," leaving out illustrations, examples, connections, and applications. In other words, a short phrase that expresses in a clever way something that is true. The word Aphorism" comes from ancient Greek "Aphorismos" which means denoting 'delimitation', 'distinction', and 'definition' is a concise, terse, laconic, or memorable expression of a general truth or principle. Aphorisms are often handed down by tradition from generation to generation.

Daka, Ghagha, Bhaddari are mysterious figures who will never probably cross the frontiers of mystery. Pir Mohammad Yusuf (In introduction to Daka, athi's " Ghagha Aur Bhaddri",

Hindustani Academy, Allahabad), MM Dr. Umesha Mishra(Hindustani, 1934) and Jivanand Thakur (see his book, Maithil Daka) are strongly pleased that 'Daka' should be regarded as Mithila. Saying similar to those, are known to be the common knowledge of various provinces of India e. g., in the United province, (Cf Tripathi: Ghagha Aur Bhaddari) in Bengal and in Assam. MM Haraprasad Sastri discovered a work called 'Dakarnava'6 in early eastern Vernacular containing " aphorisms and wise saying..... regarding agriculture, medicine astrology and other matters of interest to domestic life. Dr. Umesh Mishra the maithili version of Daka's saying, to be as late as the 16th century.

There are also a large number of Maithili Aphorisms that have been collected and published. One of more importance is the collection of the Aphorisms of Dska, Pt.Kapileshwar Jha (son of Mukund Jha of Subhankarapura) published in 1927 A. C. titled 'Dakavachanamrita'. Other than this, Jivanand Thakura's 'Maithi Daka', (Maithili Sahitya Parisad,Darbhanga, 1949-50); Dr. Ramnaresh Tripathi's 'Ghagh Aur Bhaddari' (Hindustani Academy, Allahabad, 1931); 'Dakavachan Sangrah'(Published by Raghuveer Book seller, Madhubani); P. D. Goswami's 'Man in India' 7; Dr. Shashinath Jha's 'Dakavachan Sanhita'8; Kamalkanta Jha's 'Maithili Lokokti Sanchaya'9; Mohan Bharadwaj's 'Dak Dristi'10; Jha Dr.Bijayendra's 'Maithili Vyakaran O Rachana'11 and many others collected and published a large number of Maithili Aphorisms.

It appears that Daka belonged to the North-East of India. He was born in the family of cowherds as his saying consistently speaks of him as 'Goara'. See the following example:-

(i) "Kankara sukhahi karka me, Bhije singh siyar.

Anna Mahagatame kahahi, sundar Daka Goar"12

(ii) "Raviya ravi sut o angar, pusa amavas kahala Goar"13

(iii) "ma, ma, fa, ve jetha, asadh kanya biahi kahthi Goara"14

And was gifted the extraordinary powers of forecasting and linking up agricultural and astrological thrust in terse and compendious language. It is impossible to fix upon any date when he flourished; all that can be said is that his aphorisms are quoted in some Maithili Mass. of Jyotis-sastra in the 14th and 17th centuries. 15

The published Maithili aphorisms of Daka can be divided into six parts.16

(i) worldly behaviour and auspicious moments, see examples:-

"Kapati mitra koshiliya may

Buribak beta, tetah jamai

Kahathi Dak charu parihari

Buribak san sasuro nai kari."

(ii) Those relating to agricultural life; example:-

"Uttam kheti madhyam ban, adham chakari bhikh nidan"

"Thora kae jotiha, khub mohiabiha, Uanch kae banhiha aari.

Tahu sau jau nahi upaj', tau Daka kae padhih gari."

(iii) Those relating the householder's life, example:-

"Ravi kae pan Som kae darpan, Mangal kichu dhania charvan, Budh kae gur, Vrihaspati rai.

Shukra kahay mohe dahi sohay. "

(iv) Those relating to strolological pronouncement, example:-

"E juni bujhiha Dak nirbudhi.

Nasahi kal vinasahi buddhi."

(v) Those relating seasons,for example:-

Adi barase aadra, anta barase hast,

Katabo raja danrai-banhai, sukhi rahai girahastha"

(vi) Miscellaneous, including Vratas and questions and reading signs on the human body. See a few examples given below:-

(a)"Gaye magha unatis din banki"

(b) "Mangal mukhi sada sukhi"

(c) "Adha tab sadha, satha tab patha."

It should be pointed out here that there are several independent vernacular aphorisms and vernacular documents of jyotish current Mithila; very often they are introduced in the middle of Sanskrit texts. Many of these read like translations of well-known statements in Jyotish classes, which have been condensed with no. verses so that they may be easily remembered. Such separate or consolidated vernacular Mss as Ksika - (sic-chikka) laksana or chikavicara, Kagavicar, Grahana-Bhukampadiphalam and so forth are extant. Even such an elementary & popular Sanskrit text as 'Singhrabodh' has vernacular aphorisms and Dohas init. A few more have been collected by the author 'Muhuritta-chakram', edited and published by Dharendra Narayan Chaudhari, Vilege Ballipur, District-Darbhanga, a Maithili hand-book of jyotish.

There is hardly any literary beauty in these sayings and aphorisms. Infrequently however, they show a clever manipulation of words and phrases such as in the following--

*"Sutabe uthab panjar mora.
Tahi bichh me janmal chhaura.
Rajak beta Ramlal,
aath nao ye 'Daka' nehal,
Batahak chaudah batahik aath,
Anna tyagi kae jivan kat." 17*

Here the words are made to give an independent sense different from their explicit meaning which makes "Sutab" stand for Harisayana-Ekadas, "Uthab" for Devotthana-Ekadas, "Panjar morab" for parsva Parivarttini-Ekads, "Janamal chhaura" means Krishnastami "Ramalala" for Ramanavami Ashtami and Naomi in Devipaksha, "Batahak chaudah" for Shivchaturdasi and Shivratri and "Batahik Aath" Mahashtami.

There are numerous Aphorisms on medicine. Some of them are known after a Dhanvantari, but a majority of them are just popular sayings and beliefs. Many Sanskrit works on medicine and Jyotish a large number of recipes in vernacular are current in Mithila.¹⁸ They claim to cure all sorts of diseases like as -- knot in the throat, ring worm, asthma wind and to subdue the enemy or to conjure a man or women.

Finally, we can say that there is the most important role of Nursery Rhymes, Riddles, Proverbs and Aphorisms in the history of Maithili literature.

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