

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



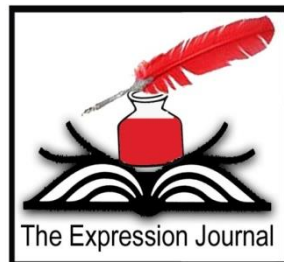
Impact Factor 3.9

Vol. 6 Issue 4 August 2020

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

www.expressionjournal.com



TRACING THE TRADITION OF STORYTELLING AND ITS RELATION WITH WOMEN IN THE WRITING OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

Anupama Rai

Assistant Professor, Department of English

S.M.M.T.D. College Ballia,

Uttar Pradesh, India

.....

Abstract

The paper attempts to draw a genealogy of storytelling-tradition in general, and to map the special bonding that does exist between storytelling and women within the rubrics of Indian storytelling tradition in particular. The paper also tries to expand the frontiers (Turner and Jos Gommans' term) of storytelling tradition through interpretation of women-narrative by elucidating the nuances which are pertinent at the level of narration, symbol and language. The storytelling-tradition reverberate the central cord of Indian aesthetics, history, geography, cultural, and to some extent indigenous tradition of our society. The paper attempts to encapsulate the key components of women-storytelling tradition by encompassing Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's writing within the range of its discussion. In order to keep the tradition of storytelling saturated and flourished, her stories produce a new form of discourse by telling and re-telling the saga of Indian women in different settings and different frames of narratives.

Keywords

Storytelling, Women-narrative, Tradition, Discourse.

.....



TRACING THE TRADITION OF STORYTELLING AND ITS RELATION WITH WOMEN IN THE WRITING OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI

Anupama Rai

**Assistant Professor, Department of English
S.M.M.T.D. College Ballia,
Uttar Pradesh, India**

.....

In Indian context, there is a rich tradition of storytelling where we are born and brought up with stories which consolidate the bond between them imperative and inseparable, both at the personal and impersonal levels. Further, its oral form makes them discursive in nature, since they directly associate with the history of man's existence on earth. Their (Stories) concrete presence is visible at personal level, familial level and at the level of caste, class, community, gender religion, and nation, and often, surpasses the boundaries of the time and space. In India, storytelling tradition is known as *Katha-wachan*, which is made of *Dhatu* (root) *Kath* (to be spoken) and *Wach* (refers to the oral nature), and it refers to the old-age tradition and cultural of our society.

For example, I have been at Varanasi from last six to seven year, and I often find myself baffle at the encyclopedic range of stories which are found at every nook and corner of the city which is again according to a folktale known as the city of lane cum labyrinth. There is a chain of stories which are narrated since the time immemorial. These stories can be found in the multiple-façade like mural, painting, architect, folktales or in live tradition of *Ghats*. For example: there is an embedded story behind each *Ghat* like "*TulsiGhat*", which is said to be named the legendary author Tulsidas who is known after his magnum opus *Ramcharitamanas*. It can be bifurcated in the following manner:

Oral type of stories: Bed-time stories, stories of indigenous groups about their deities, as in the case of <i>Santhal</i> tribe.	Written one: <i>JungalBook</i> which is often assigned with the stature of 'prince' among the stories.
Local stories: belongs to a particular	Stories related to nation: 1857 Indian

regain or locality like <i>Kalam</i> of Puduchery, <i>Kalamezhuththu</i> , <i>Sanjhi</i> of Braj, <i>SinghiChham</i> of Sikkim, and <i>TholuBommalata</i> of AndhraPradesh (<i>ThePenguinDigest</i> , n.p.), and stories related to community's religious fervor and tradition; such as story of <i>KalaBhairav</i> , who is considered as the guardian spirit of Varanasi, there will be numerous like this, as India is land of cultural diversity.	war of Independence is one such event which is full of stories of valor.
Non-performative: Stories in the form of signs, letters, i.e. Varanasi named after the confluence of <i>Varuna</i> and <i>Assi</i> rivers).	Performative: Stories meant to be performed in the form of gesture like Pantomime and mime forms
Personal stories: autobiographical and biographical in nature (<i>Joothan</i> and <i>Akkarmashi</i>).	Impersonal stories: stories which have surpassed the boundaries of time and place such as <i>Cinderella</i> and <i>Snow White</i> .
Traditional stories of mythic world (<i>Ramayana</i> and <i>Mahabharata</i>).	Non-traditional: like the one found on online platforms (Terrible Tiny Tales), blogs and social-media.
Stories in live form (the form of Performance; <i>Ramlila</i>).	Stories at the verge of existence; Tribal stories which are at the verge of extinction. For example, Arjun Dangle's <i>The Poisoned Bread</i> which narrates the saga of food-culture, which are very specific to a particular community.

The rich corpus of Indian stories is susceptible to various type of adaptation, creations and re-creations, etc. A cursory glance at the rich genealogy of the compendium of Indian stories would be enough in itself to verify this point. For example: *Hitopadesha*, by Narayana for which he is heavily indebted to *Panchatantra*. After that, *Katha Sarit Sagara* (the Sea of Stories), *Vetal Pancha Vimshati*, and *Vatrish Simhasana* are great collections of tales, with literally crisscrossed the chronology. In the context of Indian storytelling-tradition, Utpal Kumar Banerjee in his article "The Subtle Art of Story Telling" has counted some of the prominent storytelling traditions of India, which include grand traditions of storytelling such as *Phad*, *Kawad* from Rajasthan, *Patua* from Bengal and *Ramlila* from Varanasi. There is one common element which renovates them in a cohesive order and turn them into performative nature.

Addition to the above discussion, the paper endeavours to trace the special bond which does exist between a woman and storytelling- tradition. It will also try to locate woman at the centre of the storytelling tradition, and to show the subtle differences which do exist at the level of narrator, narration and narratology.

Accordingly, there is a bulk of women-centred stories where narrators are from different age, class, location, race, and section of our society without any ghettoization. Mostly, "These tales are narrated by women-normally the older women in the family-while children are being fed in the evenings in the kitchen or being put to bed" (Karnad, TP 16). Through the woman-narrator, the writer wants to establish a sense of clarity because a woman through the medium of stories "expresses a distinctly woman's understanding of the reality around her, a lived counterpart of the patriarchal structure of classical texts and institution" (Karnad, TP 17).

The difference between a man storyteller and that of woman is succinctly visible at the level of representation, since a woman in a male-centered story is presented from a man's perspective which is totally different from a women-centred story. For instance, in a man-centred story "These stories end in marriage – for they speak of emancipation of the hero from the parental yoke and the setting up of a new family, as he comes his into own. In women-centred tales, by contrast, the heroine is either already married or she is married early in the tale, and then the women's troubles begin" (A Women's Tale, n.p.).

The differences at the level of usage of literary devices can be boiled down to some of major headings:

"In such tales, not only is the pattern of the tale different (not easily accommodated by Propp's schemes, which work well for male-centred tales)" and further, he has explicitly delineated these differences at the level of women's stereotypical presentation and usage of literary devices like symbols. "For example, a snake in a male-centred tale is usually something to be killed, a rival phallus, if you will. In women-centred tales, that is, where women are the protagonists and also usually the tellers, snakes are lovers, husbands, uncles, donors, and helpers" (A Women's Tale, n.p.).

Similarly, these stories aren't meant for entertainment and recreation only. In fact, there is a purpose behind such tradition which not only keeps our tradition enliven, but also fulfills educational need of our society. For example, through their stories elderly one wants to establish a strong bond with their posterity, by imparting the knowledge about the past, present and paving the way for their bright future. But stories about women sensitize even the men as a readers and listeners towards the sensitive issues of women's lives. For instance, the story "A Flowering Tree", by Ramanujan, subtly exposes the agencies of patriarchy which has commoditized women's body, and tries to repress woman's sexuality.

In the context of women writer, there are some writers who have carved their niche by creating a chunk of literature which have thoroughly saturated in woman- tradition of storytelling. These stories have centred their focus on women, both as characters and narrator of these stories. Eventually, it leads to dismantling of the hegemony (Gramscian term) of men writers. Since they have written stories about women, on women and for women by using their own ideas, language, narratology, perception and technique. Further, it is well-established fact that there is a sharp and severe difference between men's and women's writings, as it is already contested by scholar like Cixous. Likewise, it becomes imperative to name

few writers who have sensitized the readers by their daunting stories. In Indian-English literature, they are, to name few, Anjana Appachana, Anuja Chauhan, Arundhati Roy, Bama, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Indra Gowami, Ismat Chugta, Judy Balan, Mahasweta Devi, Mamang Dai, Sivkani and Tinsula Ao, while in Hindi literature there are writers like Krishna Shobhi, Mahadevi Verma, Maitreya Pushpa, Mannu Bhandari and Urmila Shirish.

According to "*Love of the Land: Storytelling Traditions of India*", there are thirty-eight traditions of storytelling in India which is again not a fixed number instead just an estimate. These traditions are an attempt to bring back Indian storytelling tradition. The paper tries to boast the storytelling traditions which are at the verge of extinction. Storytelling is a tradition through which lore is passed on from generation to generation-be it from grandparents to grandchildren at home or from village chieftains to curious listeners sitting around a bonfire. And these stories comprise everything, from history and mythology, to science, from local legends and mysteries to rituals, from fictional accounts and gossip to everyday happenings (Ramachandran, n.p.).

Predilection for Women Narrator:

Stories map the formation, deformation, re-formation of woman, who is placed somewhere in the dead-locks of the daily chores, and tries to find a refuge in the corpus of her story. In fact, the story is an attempt of the writer to record every bit of a woman's life and to turn them into an adequate medium of assertion of the subjective self which enable one to crackle like thunder amid the challenges. In the case of Mrs. Dutta ("*The Unknown Errors of Our Lives*") she narrates her story in a very dignified manner, and lastly takes her decision confidently. The women characters evolve concurrently with the development of the story which can be easily visible through their actions. Accordingly, their character sketches are the sketches of strong women, who often narrate bildungsroman saga of subjectivity. Through the stories, Divakaruni exerts to present the element of uncommonness that lies deep in the womb of the apparent commonness of a woman's life which is also done in a subtle way. In some of her stories, she has followed the conventions of storytelling method astringently, while in others she experiments with the narrative form, and often tries to cross the generic boundaries.

The story within the story or frame narrative technique is applied by Divakaruni to tell and manage multiple stories concurrently with equal dexterity. For example, in "*The Maid Servant's Story*" the first narrator (daughter) also knows that she will retelling process of narrative. Eventually it is her mother's story. So, she tries to pretend that she doesn't know anything about it. "Mashi speaks with the plump and breathless exuberance she brings to all her stories. 'And last year, grace of god, we celebrated our twentieth anniversary.' She shuts her paan case with a victorious snap, as if she's won a major argument" (MSS 111). She herself confesses:

She's not telling me everything, I sense it. Is this a cautionary parable for brides-to-be? An ancestral tale taken from some outlying branch of our convoluted family tree? Then it strikes me- but without surprise, as though

the realization had lain in my subconscious throughout the telling. The events could have happened to my own mother (MSS 165).

While at other place she states: "I tell myself that it's only my aunt is storytelling taking root in my over fertile imagination. But I'm sure they happened to me, those sun-filled balcony mornings when I sat at the feet of a woman with a smile sweeter than palm-honey" (MSS 166).

Mrs. Dutta has adopted the defense mechanism for hiding her emotions, and Her personal life is always subsided at the altar of family's happiness. She didn't know how to express herself; the letter is tracing the bildungsroman saga of her life. Uniqueness of Divakaruni's stories lies in the face that they don't follow a singular path, instead their unpredictable development stands as the feast for the readers which always keeps the interest and curiosity of the readers' alive. At the level of characterization, one can say that they are not flat character (Forster's terminology), as the development in the character of the main protagonist is very sharp and subtle one which can be map through their dialogues and actions in the stories. For example, Mrs. Dutta is a typical Indian woman who is in her late fifties, and usually it is hard to find the progress which is traceable in her character keeping her strong socio-cultural background.

She has taken symbols from so-called domestic world of women, not to demean them, but turns the very image of spice, which is a typical object from her kitchen, to revert the traditional notion attached to the spices. The spices are no longer have culinary properties only, in fact they bestowed supernatural power to her character, Tilotama, to help Divakaruni to create a tale of science-fiction where the spices heal and suggest remedies for the other characters in the novel *The Mistress of Spices*.

The following lines from *The Palace of Illusions* can aptly justify this point, as Draupadi declares:

I couldn't breathe, I would go to my nurse and ask for a story. And though she knew many wondrous and edifying tales, the one I made her tell me over and over was the story of my birth. I think I liked it so much because it made me feel special, and in those days there was little else in my life that did. Perhaps Dhairya realized this (Divakaruni, 01).

Hence, we can say the tradition of storytelling is strong and relevant one which leads the professional like Stephen Denning to proclaim that it can be one of the best skills of a leader to overcome the challenges of his/her professional life. In his book, *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative*, he highlights the captivating power of storytelling one can easily lead his/her guild, and further, can bestow the art and discipline of business in the employees. This again validates the point that though there are challenges, but nothing can destroy the art of storytelling regardless of time and place of the world.

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132

Work Cited

- Banerjee, Utpal Kumar. "The Subtle Art of Story Telling." *Indian Literature*, vol. 52, no. 4 (246), 2008, pp. 147–152. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23347960.
- Barthes, R., & Duisit, L. *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative*. New Literary History, 6(2), 237-272.1975. doi: 10.2307/468419
- Karnad, Girish. *Three Plays*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.
- Banerjee Divakaruni, Chitra. *The Palace of Illusions: A Novel*. London: Pan Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi: Gita Offset Printers, 2015. Print.
- Ramachandran, Nalini. *Love of the Land: Storytelling Traditions of India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2017. Print. <http://booksgoogle.co.in.>>
- Siebers, T. (1988). "The Ethics of Sexual Difference". *ITHACA, LONDON: Cornell University Press*, 1988, (pp. 186-219). *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt207g679.11>
- Hill, Mary Louise. *Theatre Journal*, vol. 51, no. 2, 1999, pp. 212–214. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25068660.