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Loka, katha and folk: An overview of terms

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Abstract

This study will focus on the important role played by folk-lore and folk-cult in terms of psychosocial factors, and understanding of terminological aspect of loka, katha and folk.

Methodology: A self made questionnaire was prepared and many references were selected for the purpose of study.

Conclusion: The findings of the study reveal that our Indian folk has very significant role in the culture enrichment of India, term loka, katha, loka - katha have little bit grammatical differences but in real manner it has very much similarity in terms of cultural oneness.

Keywords: Loka, ktha, folk, tale

Introduction

Meaning of "Loka"

The meaning of the word Loka denotes society. It is mentioned in the mantra of "Purusha sukta" ^[1]. That is, "He a (Loka) is a great man, who has thousands of heads, thousands of eyes and thousands of feet. Therefore, the word 'Loka' implies the common masses only. All great imagination can be included in this.

Throughout the world the folk tradition is considered to be as old as human existence. Human culture must have originated with the human race itself. Folk culture must have pulsed in a plenary manner among the mutual relations that developed between the humans and nature. In the same manner, folk became the pedestal of the society. It is this very culture that has remained etched in the memory and soul of the people and has withstood the test of time. Every village in India has got its own primitive culture in which the lives of all our human group share making an endeavour to preserve our folk culture. As a result of which, folk has become a tradition now and that has provided a sense of sustainably developing tradition. It is due to this reason that 'folk' is considered to be the nucleus of tradition.

Meaning of 'Katha' (Tale)

The word Katha has been derived from the Sanskrit word 'Katha' which means to speak. The words katha and kahani are used interchangeably with the latter being a corrupted form of the former. Some people often tend to differentiate between Katha and Kahani. They believe that in terms of text, Kahani tends to be more voluminous than the Katha. But such a differentiation is purely illogical on the grounds that the text of a Kahani need not be extensive and that of the Katha need not be finite. Both these words are at par in terms of meaning and expression. The only difference is that Katha is a Sanskrit term while Kahani is a Hindi term and the word Katha is more popular than Kahani. The words Aakhyana and Aakhyayika (both meaning and narrative) are used to convey the expression of Katha but there is no difference among these two words apart from the gender point of view. The words Aakhyana and Aakhyayika have been limited exclusively to literature but Katha is of common usage in both literature as well as folk-literature. Those tales which have been a part of our oral tradition since generations and do not form a part of the elite culture, rather are associated with the lives of the common people are known as Lokakatha or folktales.

Dr. Kundanlal Upreti mentions that - "There are two types of Katha found among the human groups one, where contemporary experiences and events are narrated as it is. From an ethnographic perspective it is mandatory to study them as they are devoid of any stability or literary aesthetics whatsoever their scope and extent are very limited and such Katha later go on to take the shape of myths and fables.

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Whenever the components of folktales enter some story, that particular story becomes a part of the folklore tradition. The second kind of Katha are those which have a sound plot, artistic beauty and literary skills about them. These are in the form of poetry as well as prose [2].

Meaning of 'Folk'

The word 'Loka' is being used in Indian literature since times immemorial. Its originated by mixing the 'ghajn' suffix with the 'Lokyate' asau 'Lokadarshan' lok dhatu or conjugation. Lokadarshan means 'to see.' Its third person singular form in 'lata lakara' is 'Lokate.' So, the original meaning of the word Loka means 'the one who sees.' So, the term 'Loka' folk can be used for the entire community who does this. "In the Rigveda, the word 'Loka' is used as a synonym for the word 'jana' meaning tribe or community [3]. According to Ramachandra Verma – "There are multiple meanings of the word Loka. Prominent ones being – to see, receive direct knowledge, to know, examine and retrospect. Not only this, there are other meanings as well. Upon looking into the dictionary, we find – the world, proof of the universe, the three Lokas or worlds – aswarga) heaven, aPrithwi) the Earth and aPatala) underworld. In any case, there are 14 Lokas as per the Hindu tradition and 7 among them are prominent -BhooLoka, BhuvLoka, MrityuLoka, SwargLoka, JanaLoka, TapoLoka and BrahmaLoka. In the same manner, 7 Lokas are considered to be below the earth's surface. Among them are Atala, Satala, Vitala, Mahatala and Patala. Apart from these names, the word 'Loka' has some other connotations as well. Human, caste, subjects, residents of the nation and daily life of the world [4]. The word 'Loka' finds mention at many places in the Upanishadas as well. For example. In Atharvaveda, the position of two Lokas – parthiva and divya are mentioned. In the Jaiminiya Upanishada, 'Loka' is defined as widespread and omnipresent yet indecent [5].

Panini has also recognized the hegemony of 'Loka' separate from the vedas. He has separately mentioned the forms used in the Vedas and the 'Loka.' In Ashtadhyayi, the words 'laukika' (cosmic) and 'alaukik' (supernatural) has been replaced by the words 'Loka' and 'sarvaLoka' using 'than' suffix. Vararuchi and the author of Mahabhashya, Patanjali have used the word in different meanings. Bharatmuni in his 'Natyashastra' has mentioned the populist trends of 'nataka' or drama. The author of Mahabharata, Veda Vyasa while mentioning the chief characteristics of his book, has used the word 'Loka' for the common populace [6].

Mahabharata mentions the Lokayatra or 'Folk Tour.' Vyasa has written –

"Agyan Timirandhasya Lokasya Tu visheshatah" [7]

In the same manner, there is mention of 'Loka' and 'Lokasamgraha' (a compilation of folk) at several places. The meaning of Lokasamgraha has been derived from the behavior and mannerisms of the common people.

Famous Hindi poet Tulasidasa regards the values of 'Loka' and 'veda' as equivalent based on the foundation of love.

"Lokahu Veda Susahiba Reeti,
Vinaya Sunata Pahuc nat Priti [8]."

Dr. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi too has put forward his views regarding the concept of 'Loka.' According to him -

"Loka does not mean a janapada (territory) or gramya (village) but the entire population residing in the cities and villages whose practical knowledge is not just limited to books. As compared to the sophisticated and cultured people of the city, they produce all that is required to make the daily lives of people easier [9]."

Dr. Kunj Bihari Das, Head, Department of Odia, Vishwa Bharati University has given a brilliant interpretation of the word 'Loka' while defining the term 'Lokageeta' (folk songs).

He has written – "Folksongs are spontaneous expression of the lives of those people who tend to stay away from the effects of sophisticated and culture lifestyles and instead prefer primitive lifestyle [10]."

A popular folklorist of India, Dr. Satyendra has interpreted the word 'Loka' in the following manner –

'Loka' is that class of the human society who is indifferent to the elitist lifestyle, classicism, arrogance and consciousness of erudition and prefers to remain with the flow of one particular tradition. It's in fact that ethnographic interpretation of 'Loka' which emphasizes on a specific social class for it [11].

A scholar of Indian public consciousness Dr. Vasudev Sharan Aggarwal is of the opinion that –

"Indian folk comprises of that human society which has developed in the entire stretch of land from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Indian folk life is the nectar of our rich and glorious history. Folk is an invaluable treasure of our country. The beautiful and stunning elements of our history are safe in the realm of the folk [12]."

Lakshmidhar Vajpeyee too has defined this word 'Loka' in his own way. According to him, "Loka implies the common masses as well as the destitutes, dalits, exploited, victims and the forest tribes like Kol, Bhil, Santal, Oraon, Gond, Naga, Saka, Kirat etc., all these come under the category Loka [13]."

There are a lot of scope of study which will reveal visionary outcome of abovementioned terms. Although, this stream is being popularised with various perspectives as per requirements in interdisciplinary discourses. Still, focussed and analytical method is the need of hours especially in Indic studies.

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