

Folkloristic Values in the Writings of Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay

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ABSTRACT

Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay, one of the most celebrated figures in Bengali literature, intricately wove the essence of rural Bengal into his works. His narratives, deeply imbued with folkloristic elements, serve as a repository of local traditions, beliefs, customs, and oral histories. This paper examines how Bandyopadhyay's writings reflect the folkloristic ethos of his time, using vivid textual examples to highlight the cultural and social tapestry of Bengal.

Introduction

Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay (1898–1971) is revered for his portrayal of rural life in Bengal. His literary oeuvre, which includes novels, short stories, and plays, captures the rhythms of life in agrarian societies, integrating folklore into the narrative fabric. Folklore in literature is not merely ornamental; it serves as a critical lens to understand societal dynamics, and Bandyopadhyay's works exemplify this approach. His works such as *Ganadevata*, *Hansuli Banker Upakatha*, and *Arogya Niketan* encapsulate the collective consciousness of rural communities.

Folkloristic Elements in Bandyopadhyay's Works

1. *Depiction of Rural Life*



In *Ganadevata* (The People's God), Bandyopadhyay portrays the everyday life of a village community. Through characters like Aniruddha and Chhramoni, he unveils the interconnectedness of human lives with nature, local customs, and agricultural practices. For example:

"মাটির গন্ধে ভরা বাতাস, ফসলের মাঠে নীলমি আর পাখির ডাকই যেন গ্রাম বঁচে আছে।"

This vivid imagery reflects the dependency of rural life on agrarian cycles. Festivals like Nabanna (celebrating the new harvest) are intricately described, showcasing the community's bond with the land.

2. Folk Beliefs and Superstitions

Hansuli Banker Upakatha delves into the lives of the Kahar community, revealing their beliefs and superstitions. The villagers' reverence for the "Hansuli" or the crescent-shaped river bank mirrors their fear of nature's wrath.

For instance, the text mentions:

"গ্রামের মানুষ বিশ্বাস করে নদী দেবী, যার রোষে বন্যা আসে, আর যার আশীর্বাদে ফসল ফলে।"

This belief underscores the syncretic blend of religion and folk cosmology.

3. Folk Music and Oral Traditions

Bandyopadhyay often incorporates folk music and oral traditions to enhance the authenticity of his narratives. In *Ganadevata*, the characters hum Baul songs and Jhumur melodies, emphasizing the spiritual and emotional dimensions of rural life.

For example, a Baul song is described:

"মন তোর পথ ঘাট কোথায় / এক পাগলের মতো।"

This lyrical insertion not only enriches the narrative but also preserves the intangible cultural heritage of Bengal.

4. Folklore as Resistance

In *Arogya Niketan*, the protagonist Jibon is portrayed as a repository of folk medicine, embodying the indigenous knowledge systems that resist the hegemony of modernity. The villagers trust his remedies, which often blend superstition and empirical knowledge.

An example from the text highlights this resistance:

"জীবন ডাক্তার তার শকিড়-বাকড়রে ওষুধে গ্রামরে বউকে বাঁচালো, যখনে শহররে বড়ো ডাক্তারও ব্যর্থতা।"

This reflects the tension between traditional wisdom and colonial modernity.

5. Mythical and Archetypal Characters

Bandyopadhyay's characters often mirror archetypes rooted in folklore. In Hansuli Banker Upakatha, characters like Banamali represent the archetype of the village priest, a mediator between the divine and the mortal world.

An excerpt illustrates this:

"বানমালী ব্রাহ্মণরে আশীর্বাদে যনে পুরো গ্রাম নরিাপদ বোধ করে। তার মুখে শাস্ত্ররে কথাই গ্রামরে আইনা।"

This highlights the authority of oral traditions and spiritual leaders in rural Bengal.

Discussion

1. Socio-Cultural Representation

Bandyopadhyay's works serve as ethnographic records of rural Bengal. His descriptions of festivals like Durga Puja, marriage rituals, and death ceremonies provide a window into the cultural ethos of the time. In Ganadevata, he writes:

"দুর্গাপূজোর চার দিনরে উসব যনে গ্রামরে নবজীবনরে সঞ্চার করে।"

This reflects how folklore binds the community, offering both continuity and resilience in the face of change.

2. Linguistic Fidelity

Bandyopadhyay's use of regional dialects, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions enriches his narratives. For instance, the dialogue in Hansuli Banker Upakatha incorporates colloquial terms like "বাপা" (father) and "মা মাইয়া" (mother and children), which capture the rhythms of rural speech.

3. Interplay of Myth and Reality

The merging of myth and reality is a hallmark of Bandyopadhyay's storytelling. In Hansuli Banker Upakatha, the crescent-shaped river is personified as a living entity, blurring the line between natural and supernatural.

"হাঁসুলারি ধারে সন্ধ্যার বাতাস যনে মন্ত্র পড়ো।"

This poetic depiction transforms the mundane into the mystical, reflecting the villagers' worldview.

4. Legacy in Bengali Literature

Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay influenced a generation of writers by demonstrating how folklore could be seamlessly integrated into modern narratives. His works remind us of the importance of preserving cultural traditions in the face of rapid urbanization.

Conclusion

Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay's writings are a treasure trove of folkloristic values, offering a profound understanding of the cultural and societal dynamics of rural Bengal. By weaving folklore into his narratives, he preserved the collective memory of a bygone era, making his works timeless. As we engage with his texts today, they remind us of the richness of our cultural heritage and the enduring power of storytelling.

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