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Indian folk lore and Its adaptation in films, TV and Digital media

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Abstract: *Wonder! Films and folk, despite having a quintessential and complementary dependence for substantial success, have not corroborated and acknowledged each other's share in their respective odyssey so far. Need there is for an open, full and complete interchange of properties between both of these media, and it is invariably present there too but without a vocal, lucid and apparent approval. Neither the directors or producers of films nor the organising secretaries or folk artists and performers concede a merger of its properties with welcome and encouraging spirit. Surprisingly enough, but both these forms have enjoyed a tacit affiliation, mutual interchange and irresistible sharing of each other's lively properties. One arch reason for this hide and seek game or intersection between folk narrative and visual culture in all its forms from films to TVs and from digital media to video games etc is paucity of research in our Academics too. This situation is altering, by degrees, in last two decades. Adaptations of folk in films, TVs and in digital media are more manifest, phenomenal and rampant as far as Indian films, TVs and digital media is concerned. Penchant for Nativism in Postcolonial era has impacted all academic discourses made by Indian intelligentsia. This present paper intends to focus merely on identification of preponderant folk properties in India and its adaptation in Indian Movies (primarily in Hindi cinema/Bollywood movies), TV serials and soap operas, advertisement and digital media. Success of this varied visual media now-a-days largely due to the maximised use of folk properties viz. dialects, music, song, dance, costumes, edibles, hinterland stories and much celebrated desi andaz or panache (Jackson, 65). It is utmost difficult to name even a single movie today that is totally devoid of folk elements. Such an idea of dwelling upon this issue is obviously sparked by Paul Smith in Contemporary Legend. Here he notes, "there is perhaps a certain irony in the fact that, while such films as Candyman (1992) recognises the role of folklorist as collector of contemporary legends, very little attention has been given by folklorists to the role of films and televisions industry as users and disseminators of contemporary legends" (1999: 138).*

Key Words: complementary, dependence, corroborated, acknowledged, interchange, invariably present.

Traditional media, especially folklore, performances and stories provide the means for expressing the social, ethical, cultural and emotional needs of the human and to the society in which they are a part of. With this it is also to be borne in mind that audiences to folklore are very limited in comparison to audiences of films, TVs and digital media. The audiences are also not very diverse and varied. They are often local, regional and belong to one linguistic group. Film makers and directors of daily soap operas who owe a varied, large and constant audience have to rely on folk sources and properties in order to engage their audiences for long. In the last decade folklores, folk dialects, slangs, costumes, their lingua franca have crept more into the main stream cinema and TV serials and it has been widely appreciated and acknowledged by common populace. Folk art forms in India are prevalent in numerous forms. Even today folk media continue to retain its most distinctive features because of inbuilt capacity to adjust with the changing situation. "The multiple approaches", remarks Thomas, "of films, TVs and digital media, results in a form that is self contained and is complete entertainment for the audiences to whom it is directed. It is more than an entertainment, a complete emotional experiences and aims at creating an environment in which communication of ideas is an effortless process"(Thomas, 73).

Beginning its stride from 1912-13, Indian cinemas (Hindi cinema) has made a very long and rich journey



and this journey has been strengthened intermittently by an apt use of folklores and properties. With its larger than life canvass Indian cinema has earned several witty accolades, like one is "it is the biggest centre of human attraction" (Milan Rani, 98). India is the largest film producing country in the world that produce on an average of 900 films annually. These films are not limited to Indian audiences only but have reached almost every continent in the world. Its heavy use of traditional folk song and dance routine is liked by almost all people irrespective of their language and culture. These folk properties have convinced foreign audiences to believe that India is rich in culture and heritage. Raj Kapoor, first superstar of Indian films, has been recognised as a folk star in abroad including Soviet Union. His film *Awaara* in 1951 was highly acclaimed and popular worldwide.

Cinema opens a new window into culture by studying it we get a deeper understanding of the customs, behavioural patterns, values and arts and crafts of the Indian people. Deeper insights into the complex process of modernisation, colonialism and freedom status of women can be acquired through films. Cinema not only mirrors culture but also effectively shapes it.

While dealing with people film maker may enter into a series of open ended inquiries, the result may not enter the film but they provide necessary contextual material about the subject. This is done by sustained and non-intrusive observation that looks closely at everyday observation, daily routine of life, network of family and friends at work and at home. A place is not just a backdrop for the characters to stand against but has a character of its own. This can be seen whether it is remote wilderness, suburban neighbourhood, inner city zone, a school, bus, station, market place etc (Lisa, 17). While keeping the space in mind the local myths, folklore, legends and superstitions related to the space become itself important. Along with space time also is of prime importance. Time has to be captured with its intact zeitgeist and the popular folk articles within it, eyes are not allowed to miss even ordinary calendar art, graffiti, painting, icons, oral traditions, myths, music and ilk.

Folk ideas and folk motifs have also found its way in Indian cinema and have regularly been used in particularly in Indian film songs and dances. Several folk tunes for example songs sung by Lata Mangeshkar, Ila Arun, Sadhna Sinha, Kailash Kher, Hans Raj Hans, Sukhbir and many more names are there who have utilised folk tunes, music and songs and that too with great success. Lata Magehskar's *Yaara sili sili*, Ila Arun's *Morni bag ma* and *Choli ke peeche kya hai*, Sadhna Sinha's *Kahe tose sajna in Maine Pyar kiya*, Kailash Kher's *Jay Jaikara*, Hans Raj Hans's *Dil chori sadda ho gaya* etc are brilliant examples how these songs with folk tunes, coupled with folk dance and accents facilitated a gigantic success to the entire film. Many dance numbers also borrow folk concepts. Saroj Khan, the famous dance choreographer is heavily influenced by folk dance of India. Lets take some examples. The famous dance of Sudha Chandran in *Nache Mayuri*, A R Rehman's (Ghazi Khan) *Limbuda* in *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, Mangal Mharaj's phenomenal choreography in 1955 film *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje*, *Aa re pritam pyare* dance by Shakti Mohan in *Rowdy Rathore* is another example of use of raunchy dance forms of folk.

By studying Indian cinema we can enter productively into the thought worlds and the performance worlds of other traditional arts such as folk ones. Many Indian film directors from pioneers such as DadaSaheb Phalke to directors like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Shyam Benegal have sought to employ creatively the visualisations and the other symbolism that can be seen in folk dance, music, mime and theatre. In the use of song, dance, humour, structure of narrative, the melodrama, the folk plays of Lavani, Tamasha of Maharashtra, Jatra of Bengal, Raamleela of UP, Bhavai of Gujrat, Terrukuttu of Tamilnadu, Nautanki of Northern India etc have had great influence on popular Indian films.

Folkloric films are those films that document folklore for research and other purposes. This was coined by Sharon Sherman for those Hollywood films that use folklore as a major theme. One such example is *March of Time*, brought out in 1950, wherein an interview of Alan Lomax with a musician Leadbelly was depicted. On the same pattern Hindi films were also full of such examples wherein folk properties were used to draw attention of



major populace. Common folk always outnumber elite citizens in India and it is their attention and love Producers and directors try to target for commercial success of films. This was evident as early as in 1940s and 1950s. Mythology has been an invariable part of Indian cinema and has been one of the most influencing materials required for success. Raja Harishchandra, directed by Baba Saheb Phalke, was based on Ramayana mythology and was first blockbuster of Indian cinema. Phalke saw a movie on the Life of Christ and decided to make a similar film based on Indian legend of King Harishchandra. Apart from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas and legendary tales are recurrent sources and materials used in Indian film. Local folklegends have also supplied crucial and inspiring material to Indian films. Sant Tukaram, Savitri, Satyawan, Jodha, Ruzia Sultan, Heer-Ranjha, Soni Mahiwal and even great social reformers like Vinoba Bhave, Sai baba and Dashrath Manjhi. To lift the much circulated story of Dashrath Manjhi for celluloid screen has been a daunting challenge for Ketan Mehta, director of the film, but he brought the story of that indomitable will of a native and the audience from all over the country and they loved to see such an unmanly task done by a man. Dashrath Manjhi's uphill task of breaking a mountain alone after a rigorous labour of twenty two years acquired status of a legend. Legends are a common but invariable part of every region and ethnographic clan. Stories from the remote hinterland also draw applause from people in general. Karl Heider has remarked about the potential strength of ethnographic legends for films,

In some sense we could say that all films are ethnographic, they are about people.... there are many films which have little pretension to ethnographicness but which are of great interest to the ethnographer. I personally feel that *The Last picture Show* (1971), about the high school class of 1952 in a small Texas town, is a statement which captures the culture of my own high school class of 1952 in Lawrence, Kansas. *The Harder They Come*(1973), *Scenes From a Marriage*(1973), or *Tokyo Story* (1953) all present important truths about cultural stories and situation in which some phenomenal work took place. As statement about culture, these films are important, and they could be very easily be used as raw data or documents in ethnographic research. I am tempted to call them more than just "raw data" and think of them as "naive ethnography." (1976:5)

Ketan Mehta's *Dashrath Manjhi* (2015 release) brings the story of a poor labour with the similar name from Gehlaur village, near Gaya in Bihar who has alone made a 30ft wide and 360ft long on a 25ft high hill just with his traditional hammer and chisel in 22 long years. At the very first impression the story seems to be unreal and pure fantasy because only the local residents knew about such a tremendous work of Manjhi. By dint of his consistent rigorous work of 22 years he was a folk-hero and folk-stories were made even in his life time. Ketan Mehta translated this folk story with impeccable efficacy with the help of equally deft actors like Nawajuddin Siddiqui, Urmila Mahanta and Radhika Apte. The film was made in a very remote area in order to procure verisimilitude for the film, the setting, the location, costumes and even dialect was copied with great precision. The film was critically appreciated by critics and people alike. Essence of the film's action is indomitable will of an individual who is devoid of any assistance either from the government or from local neighbours. Despite this he takes a pledge to wedge the mountain for making a straight path to next city Wazirganj. He is laughed at by the fellow travellers and near relatives but their sarcastic remarks steeled his resolution more and in 22 years he does what any other even collective force will not think to do.

Another phenomenal example of brilliant and congruous mixture of folk properties in films is Ashutosh Gowariker's blockbuster *Lagaan* that became a smash hit in 2001. Primarily the film is based on an archetypal folk theme of successfully resisting and overpowering enemy's challenge with sheer grit, constant determination and exceptional diligence coupled with heavy suffering with intermittent obstacles; natural and man-made. The film is set in 1893, during late Victorian era of India's colonial British Raj. Film's story is inspired by an original Gujrati folk tale but the Director set the movie scenario in Avadh region and uses native Avadhi language with Avadhi songs, music, rituals etc. The story revolves around a small village whose inhabitants are trapped into a difficult



situation of winning a cricket match against a British team of soldiers if they want to avoid paying of usual annual tax. The narrative spins around this situation as the villagers face the arduous task of learning a game that is alien to them and playing for a result that will change their village's destiny. Almost all characters like Bhuvan, Gauri, Lakha, Bhura, Guran, kachra, Arjan etc all sound to be real characters of Avadha region. Even one devotional song used in the movie is also a part of folk practice in Avadh region.

O palanhare! Nirgun aur nyare

Tum bin humra kauno nahi.

Humri uljhan suljhao bhagvan

Tum bin humra kauno nahi

Tumhi humka ho sambhale

Tumhi humre ho rakhwale

Tum bin humra kauno nahi.

The song renders a complete devotion, body and soul, of the villagers to the almighty. And this devotion, as per the preponderant belief, will save them from their utter gloomy situation.

The impact of folk lore on television is also another important avenue wherein we can understand how folk has broken into the lives of human being residing in forlorn rural areas and countryside. Today in India television is not an exclusive urban luxury but has become invariable an essential commodity of everyone living amidst paddy of crops. Earlier villagers used to go to bed early but now television has delayed their bedtime and they have become more aware of rapid changes going on around the world. The skylines of Mumbai and Delhi are not made of rooftops but are covered mostly by DTH antennas. In fact televisions are a more powerful medium to address several important issues to gentry in every nook and corner of the country (Mutthukumarswami, 23).

Folk related topics have made their way into televisions from the very beginning and serial with mythological themes and folklores are all time favourite of Indian spectators. Productions like Ramayana and Mahabharata have introduced mythology in every house hold of India with daily soap operas. This soap opera ran successfully for more than 93 weeks and one news paper reported in 1990 that almost 92% of Indian audience watched these serials. This was the greatest serial rating in the history of Indian televisions. These serial attended such charismatic success because Indian viewers has great emotional attachment with such mythological characters and themes. People, it was told and seen in markets, started worshipping idols and photos of actors who played the role of characters. Much later even currently so many serials based on rural folklores and characters are being broadcasted on TV and attaining much importance and success. There are serials like Agle Janam Mohe Bitiya Hi Kijo, Imli, Balika Vadhu, Diya Aur Bati, Laxmibai, Raja Harishchandra, Krishna etc that have brought in stories of folk and mythology in every house of the country. These serials find an easy connectivity with Indian audience and also facilitate a sense of cohesiveness and integrity among the viewers.

Advertisements are, without exaggeration, life line of all TV productions. To imagine TV without advertisement is to imagine earth without Nature. Advertisement messages are directed to the consumers and these consumers are bound to watch their favourite TV serials, hence there is hardly scope of an escape from advertisements. Even directors and scripter of such advertisements also undergo a great deal of research in order to make these adds catchy, attractive and even amusing for a higher rate of convincing. It is in this venture they explore folk properties too for making their adds watchable and interesting to most of the viewers. The majority of TV programs are sponsored by big commercial establishments that are either multinational or closely linked to multinational cooperation. Almost 15% of Doordarshan and 20-25% of other private channels (Kirk, 32) output comprises advertisements which is aired mostly during the entertainment programs as they retain most attentive audiences. For example a child who watches about 40 hours of entertainment TV a week is exposed to five hours of commercials.



From toys to ice-creams, from liquors to clothes and from eatables to everything that is even not necessary in life. Advertisement sends its messages rather indirectly to its targeted viewers. Experts in Arts and human psychology create artificial and unnatural associations between specific products and something appealing. Therefore folk motifs are often seen in advertisements. We often see brightly coloured local costumes, adorned pretty and glamorous models clad in complete local attire posing for some pizza or chocolates of roaming in search of some handsome groom. Rajasthani and Punjabi costumes dressed by people are most seen in ads. A village beauty clad in traditional Rajasthani attire voyeurs a gentleman from the town and tries to win his love. Some local boys and girls sing in Bhojpuri tone while promoting Bournvita, an energy drink. Some foreigners try to quench their thirst with cold drinks in arid area of Gujrat etc. By using folk themes in such ads, logic is often ignored. Just the folk theme and motif is used for making a universal appeal in the minds of the audiences. It puts the desire and inner feelings of the viewer into action. As well as the ads does provide all the information needed and required. These appeal to viewers more in comparison to ads acted by celebrities. People have developed a consciousness that these celebrities are paid spokesperson and that's why they are less affected by their promoting of products. On the other side folk characters seem to convince them more because of their sticking to local grounds and nearer reality. For example a Rajasthani folk singer will be heard more attentively while singing for a product local or global than a film actor or sports player.

Thus we see that folklore and themes are now decentring the much hyped urban stories, glamorised world of stars and established themes of foreign locales. Our films, TVs and advertisement world have renewed its vigour and spectacle with folk properties and this has impacted a deeper carving in the mind of audiences because it makes them feel to be on an equal footing with the persons on screen.

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Filmography:

1. Lagaan, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker in 2001.
2. Dashrath Manjhi by Ketan Mehta in 2015.
