



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

IN SCIENCE, ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT

Volume 11, Issue 3, March 2024



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 7.580



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Tribal Culture: An Integral Part of Folklore with Special Reference to the Selected Folk Stories of Vijaydan Detha

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ABSTRACT: Vijaydan Detha is undoubtedly the most important writer of Rajasthani prose in the twentieth century. He draws the reader into the complex and quirky world of the common folk of Rajasthan, while bringing alive the magic of folklore and fable.

His stories have been made into popular and critically acclaimed films like Duvidha, Charandas Chor and Paheli.

KEYWORDS- Vijaydan Detha, folklore, Rajasthan, stories

I. INTRODUCTION

A seth who lends money by mortgaging the borrower's next birth...

A bride who, after the wedding, discovers her husband is actually a woman...

A jogi dwelling in the skies who quells his lust by imprisoning women in his Cloud Palace...

Vijaydan Detha is undoubtedly the most important writer of Rajasthani prose in the twentieth century. He draws the reader into the complex and quirky world of the common folk of Rajasthan, while bringing alive the magic of folklore and fable. Traversing landscapes that are both earthly and cosmic, his tales, while being about the rich and poor, the saint and sinner, are also populated by trees, animals, the wind and the rain, gods and goddesses, and even ghosts. And between them, they explore humanity in all its myriad manifestations: love and desire, innocence and cunning, wisdom and folly, greed and deceit, righteousness, valour and the illusion of power.[1,2,3]

Translated masterfully by Vishes Kothari, The Garden of Tales is a definitive selection of Detha's work that will amuse and absorb you until the very last page.

Vijaydan Detha (1 September 1926 – 10 November 2013), also known as Bijji, was a noted Indian writer of Rajasthani literature.[1] He was a recipient of several awards including the Padma Shri and the Sahitya Akademi Award.[2]

Detha has more than 800 short stories to his credit, which have been translated into English and other languages. With Komal Kothari, he founded Rupayan Sansthan, an institute that documents Rajasthani folklore, art, and music. His literary works include Bataan ri Phulwari [4,5,6] (Garden of Tales), a 14-volume collection of stories that draws on folklore in the spoken dialects of Rajasthan. Many of his stories and novels have been adapted for the stage and the screen: adaptations include Mani Kaul's Duvidha (1973),[3] Habib Tanvir and Shyam Benegal's Charandas Chor (1975),[4] Prakash Jha's Parinati (1986),[5] Amol Palekar's Paheli (2005),[6] Pushpendra Singh's The Honour Keeper (2014),[7] Dedipya Joshi's Kaanchli Life in a Slough[8] (2020), and Pushpendra Singh's Laila aur Satt Geet (2020).[9]

II. DISCUSSION

Vijaydan Detha (1926–2013) is one of the most prolific and celebrated voices in India and is undoubtedly the most important writer of Rajasthani prose in the twentieth century. He spent decades of his life collecting folk stories from in and around his village Borunda and retelling them. His work received national and international acclaim – he was awarded the Padma Shri, the Rajasthan Ratna Award and the Sahitya Akademi Award among various others. Detha's timeless classics have been adapted into major plays and movies, some notable names being Duvidha, Charandas Chor and Paheli. Detha, also known as Bijji to his close friends and associates, belongs to the bardic community of the Charans of Rajasthan who professionally sang praises of and sometimes criticized their feudal lords. His grandfather, Jutidan Detha, was known in the entire Marwar region. His father, Sabaldan Detha, was a good poet too. It was this creative legacy inherited by Vijaydan Detha that prompted him to become a writer at an early age. After spending a few years in Jodhpur where he took up writing as a career,[7,8,9] Detha was exposed to Russian literature, which

inspired him to return to his native village Baroundi and write in his native language, Rajasthani. It was here at Baroundi that he along with his friend Dr. Komal Kothari set up the iconic Rupayan Sansthan, an institution that has done pathbreaking research and archival work gathering and restoring oral literature of Rajasthan. Determined to “garland the age-old Rajasthani folklores with story-writing skills” (p. ii), Detha started a hand-composing press that brought out the periodical Lok Sanskriti (Folk culture).[3] The stories published in it were later compiled in his tour de force Bataan ri Phulwari (Garden of tales [1960-76]), a fourteen-volume collection of stories drawing on Rajasthan folklore. Having written more than eight hundred stories in Rajasthani, Detha has received several honors and awards for his life-long work, which include Padma Shri (2007), Sahitya Chudamani Award (2006), Katha Chudamani Award (2005), Fellowship of the Sahitya Akademi (2004), and the first Sahitya Akademi Award for Rajasthani (1974). His popularity, however, rose mainly after his story “Charandas Chor” was adapted first for theater by Habib Tanveer (1975) and for a children’s film by Satyajit Ray (1975). Amol Palekar’s Shahrukh Khan Starrer film Paheli (2005), based on Detha’s story “Duvidha,” made Detha a household name. The collection under review is the second volume of a two-volume collection entitled Chouboli and Other Stories. The first volume contains the title story “Chouboli,” which is a string of eight connected stories and six other stories. The second volume includes eleven stories, adapted by Detha from Rajasthani folktales and tastefully selected from his vast body of work. The compilation is skillfully translated and presented by Detha’s able American translator Merrill along with Kabir (who has also translated a large body of Detha’s writing into Hindi).[10,11,12] Eternally enthralling as they are, the stories throw new challenges in the understanding of fiction as a form in modern times. The paradoxicality of it is foregrounded in the insightful introduction to the first volume by the translators and in the diligently charted genealogy that attempts to give the source of each story retold by Detha. While the obsession with the “original” author both by Detha and Merrill appears ironic in the face of the fact that both deem their own roles as translators whose true calling is not just to reproduce but also to recreate the world of orality which inevitably involves creation, it also invites us to dispense with the polarized view of folklore and short story, oral and written, retold and authored, and so on. As both partake of the role of author in this altered mode of tale-telling that weds oratory with the “framed” world of story writing, both also acknowledge their secondary role as tale-tellers and not story writers.[2,3,4]

Detha said, “My land [Rajasthan] is full of stories, whatever I’ve written is just a drop of the ocean”. Detha, was inspired by Shah Govradhan Lal Kabra to write in Rajasthani “till date I have not written in any other language”, he said regarding his love for the language. He portrayed the sufferings of the poor in his writings and was also tipped for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2011 which ultimately went to Tomas Tranströmer.[10]

III.RESULTS

The make-believe world of fantasy in these stories by Detha, as in the narrative tradition of any oratory, takes for granted the connection between nature, nurture, natural, and supernatural. Here, humans interact freely with other products of the mother environment, such as animals, birds, insects, and plants, often interchanging their forms as also their language; here, ghosts participate in worldly affairs, while mighty kings, seths (rich businessmen), and thakurs (lords) turn out to be cowards and foolish and ordinary lowly folk, wise. In this world of traditional wisdom, where worldly ways are ridiculed and human frailties and strengths are delineated, Detha has injected his own ideological preferences for social justice (influenced by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Detha has been a leftist all his life). “My main themes are against god, religion and capital,” says the writer acknowledging his Marxist values.[4] Hence, in spite of hardships, the subjugated always survive and the candle of hope is never allowed to extinguish. Notwithstanding their apparent simplicity, these stories unfold the complexities of human life in its myriad forms. The first story in the collection under review, “I’m Alive, I’m Awake,” delineates a heart-wrenching tale of the steadfast love of a heron for his mate. Such is the love of the heron for his mate that even when he is being slaughtered, cooked, and eaten by the farmer who captured him, he continues to send out messages to his mate. Characters, like the greedy Brahmin of “Cannibal” or the thief of “Weigh Your Options,” represent prototypes of human frailties. The story “The Thakur’s Ghost” explicates the extraordinary wisdom of ordinary folk and takes a dig at the everoppressive class of feudal lords, like the thakur, who derive pleasure out of the hardships of the poor. “Alexander and the Crow”[13,14,15] is an interesting story about Alexander the Great who is bitten by a burning desire to achieve immortality. When he follows the path to immortality told by the venerable physician, he meets a crow who has all the wealth and immortality but craves for death as “there is no curse worse than that of death-deprived immortality” (p. 79). The story begins and ends with teasers for readers as the teller challenges their wisdom and their ability to choose. In this way, the subjectivities of the readers, like yesteryears’ listeners of oral tales, are merged with the subjectivities of characters in the tale, as they are encouraged to actively engage with the dynamics of its direction. “To Each Her Own” is a light story about the plight of a fisherwoman who is forced to spend a night in the house of the royal gardener. While the fishy smell of the fisherwoman makes the gardener sick, the fisherwoman can barely stand the fragrance of flowers and feels relieved only when she quietly tiptoes out of the gardener’s room and sleeps on the floor outside with her empty fish basket over her face. “A True Calling” is yet another riveting story about a professional impostor

who is so realistic in the guise of a dayan (witch) that the king who, in spite of being forewarned about the consequences, challenges him to don the guise, and runs for his life while a drunken brother-in-law is killed by the witch. The king, in order to eliminate him, finally asks the imposter to take the guise of sati--or a woman who immolates herself. In the story "Untold Hitlers" ("Alekhun Hitler"), a professional cyclist dares the arrogant owners of a newly acquired tractor and meets his tragic end. Speaking of the story,[16,17,18] Detha says, "There is a Hitler in every one of us. It draws its strength from condescension for another being and the realization of the power to overpower and destroy it." [5] The stark note on which the story closes brings out the evil lurking in the heart of man: "But ... the painting of the two World Wars, pictures of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Vietnam, Bangladesh ... those are true master-pieces. Compared to this one, those are so much more refined, so much more complex and nuanced. This one doesn't quite compare. Still, considering it was done by a band of rustics, it wasn't bad. Yes, the five were only men. Each man spoke like a man. Each man walked like a man" [3,4,5]

IV.CONCLUSION

Similarly, the story "Two Lives" introduces a contemporary theme of same-sex marriage where the two girls deceitfully married to each other by their parents due to their greed for dowry later develop a great love for each other and choose to continue living together. Each story by Detha involves telling as well as a retelling. Drawing as it does from the repertoire of stories representing the collective wisdom gathered over the centuries, these stories are played out through earthy characters, occupying a world not fraught by disruptive forces of colonization or partition but rather a world of continuum, where the conflicts exist only at the level of internal structures of society, such as caste, class, and clan, as well as conflicts arising out of human emotions of ego, oppression, and desire for power and authority. Rich in the use of riddles, idioms, and proverbs, these stories reveal a dynamic use of language where the force of oral-aural telling-listening is retained in written words. Detha's reverence for idiomatic expressions is borne out by the fact that he has coauthored a dictionary of Rajasthani idioms, called Rajasthani-Hindi-Kahawat Kosh (2001). Detha certainly deserves adulation for passing on the verbally transmitted, traveling tales to us by translating them into the equally forceful and dynamic stories where the narrative voice retains the flexibility of the oral storytellers; where the readers are continuously prodded to partake of the wisdom carried in the story, or to face the same dilemma of choices that the characters are faced with; where the currency of hope always wins over the occasional disruption of the absurd; and where the seething psychoanalytic penetration into the established discourses results in an astute diagnosis of culture and society. Merrill and Kabir have accomplished a task no less daunting than Detha.[18] Their success in translating the work in all its vibrancy and vitality into a completely alien language and to a completely different set of audience spells out their own excellence as tale-tellers. It would not be an overstatement to say that if Detha is the author of Rajasthani tales, Chouboli and Other Stories in its elegantly produced English avatar (surely the best English avatar of Detha's stories by far) belongs to the two translators.[5]

Works

Rajasthani

- Batan Ri Phulwari, vol. 1–14, 1960–1975, folklores Published by Rajasthani Granthagar, Jodhpur
- Prerana co-edited with Komal Kothari, 1953
- Soratha, 1956–1958
- Parampara, edited three special issues – Folk songs, Gora Hatja, Jethava Ra
- Rajasthani Lokgeet, folk songs of Rajasthan, six volumes, 1958
- Tido Rao, first pocket book in Rajasthani, 1965
- Uljhan, 1984, novel
- Alekhun Hitler, 1984, short stories
- Roonkh, 1987
- Kaboo Rani, 1989, children's stories

Hindi

Due to respect for his mother tongue Rajasthani, Bijji has never written in any other language, most of his works are translated into Hindi by one of his sons Kailash Kabeer.[19]

- Baton Ki Bagiya vol. 1–14, 2019, (Hindi translation of Batan Ri Phulwari) Published by Rajasthani Granthagar, Jodhpur
- Usha, 1946, poetry
- Bapu ke teen hatyare, 1948, critics



- Column in Jwala Weekly, 1949–1952
- Sahitya aur samaj, 1960, essays
- Anokha Ped, illustrated children's stories, 1968
- Phoolwari, Hindi translation by Kailash Kabir, 1992
- Chaudharain Ki Chaturai, short stories, 1996
- Antarat, 1997, short stories
- Sapan Priya, 1997, short stories
- Mero Darad Na Jane Koy, 1997, essays
- Atirikta, 1997, critics
- Mahamilan, novel, 1998
- Priya Mrinal, short stories, 1998
- Detha also been credited for editing following works[11]
- Complete work of Ganeshi Lal Vyas for Sahitya Akademi
- Rajasthani-Hindi Kahawat Kosh

Awards and honours

- Sahitya Akademi Award for Rajasthani in 1974[11]
- Bhartiya Bhasa Parishad Award in 1992[11]
- Marudhara Puraskar in 1995[11]
- Bihari Puraskar in 2002 [12]
- Sahitya Chudamani Award in 2006[13]
- Padma Shri in 2007[14]
- Rao Siha 2011 by Mehrangarh Museum Trust
- Kavi Kag Award, 2011[15]
- Rajasthan Ratna in 2012[20]

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