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Symbolism in Kangri Love Folksongs: An Analysis of Two Songs

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Abstract:

The paper analyses Kangri love songs with cognitive poetics to understand the symbolism inherent in the songs. What functions symbolism in Kangri love songs serve have also been elaborated. The sources of symbols have been also explored with reference to the social background of the community where the songs are sung. I tried to discuss three levels of understanding of these songs: literary meaning, implied meaning and metaphorical meaning. The original songs which are in Kangri were translated into English language to make them more understandable and comprehensible. The findings are based on the theoretical as well as field research at Kangra Valley. An attempt has also been made to study the literary and social background of the Kangri love songs. On careful observation it is found that the symbols in Kangri love songs have been borrowed from diverse sources starting from natural to material objects existing in the Valley which have contextual dependence. Depending on the themes of the songs the symbols have been used in the songs.

Keywords: Kangri songs, Kangri love songs, Kangri folksongs, poetry and symbolism, love poetry, Kangra literary tradition.

1. Introduction

The paper attempts to analyze two Kangri love folksongs which are sung as a tradition in Kangra Valley since its origin, with a view to study the significance of symbolism in the folksongs with reference to its original context while analyzing through cognitive poetical perspective. This will also take into account the functions which the symbolism serves in those settings of Kangra Valley, where these folksongs have been originated and got prominence. It has been found that Kangri love folksongs contain a great many number of symbols. What has been the source of such symbols? And how is the meaning changing from the context dependent situations to context independent situations? These are questions for conducting the research. Therefore it becomes important to study how have the grammatical structures been used to direct the attention of the audience? Moreover, cognitive poetics has a more scientific base for analyzing a text as compared to other literary ways of analysis. As psychoanalytic criticism provides useful clues to the baffling symbols, actions, and settings in a literary work, but it has its own limitations. In order to interpret a thing, some critics rely on psychocriticism as a “one size fits all” approach, whereas others are of the view that no one approach can adequately interpret a

work of art, which is by default a complex work. As Guerin, et al. (1998) put it in *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*:

“The danger is that the serious student may become theory-ridden, forgetting that Freud's is not the only approach to literary criticism. To see a great work of fiction or a great poem primarily as a psychological case study is often to miss its wider significance and perhaps even the essential aesthetic experience it should provide.” (Guerin, et al. 180)

Whereas authors like Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels (1982) in an essay “Against Theory” poses counter-theoretical challenges against the primacy of “theory” in poststructural criticism. They claim that this is an impossible effort “to stand outside practice in order to govern practice from without” while defining theory as “the attempt to govern interpretations of particular texts by appealing to an account of interpretation in general”. They also state that the accounts of interpretation have no consequences for the actual practice of interpretation and eventually conclude that all theory should come to an end.

There has been a tradition of singing of songs on various important occasions of birth, engagement, marriage etc. These folksongs are the instrument of culture and are deeply rooted in Kangra Valley. There are well-defined songs for every occasion. As such no study has been conducted on Kangri love folksongs to study symbolism found in these songs. Most of the earlier research was conducted on the kinds of Kangri folksongs rather than on love folksongs. Furthermore the prose compositions have been analyzed so far with the help of cognitive poetics but not the poetry of this kind. Therefore in this regard also, this study is quite innovative. Moreover love songs are more important than other songs for the conservation of tradition of love in Kangra. The tradition of love depicted in the songs has been neglected in previous studies.

2. Theoretical Background

According to New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics (1993), the word "symbol" derives from the Greek verb *symballein*, "to put together," and the related noun *symbolon*, "mark," "token," or "sign," referring to the half-coin carried away as a pledge by each of the two parties to an agreement. Hence it means basically a joining or combination and, consequently, something once so joined or combined that stands for or represents, when seen alone, the entire complex. Since almost anything can be seen as standing for something else, the term has, and has engendered, a broad range of applications and interpretations. Here I constrained myself to confine to the poetry only leaving the larger contexts away.

There have been many philosophical disputes in recognizing, interpreting and understanding symbolism in poetry but one's approach to it is governed by one's theory i.e. the assumptions regarding literature, language and reality and by the kind of knowledge applied in it. E. Olson (1954) a neo-Aristotelian critic considers symbolism as a device to achieve certain artistic effects

e.g. to express remote ideas, to make clearer what is faint and to help in framing readers' reactions. He is concerned with literary works as artistic wholes of certain kinds. W.B. Yeats (1903) was interested in suggestive power of poetry. According to him, symbolism in poetry does not only include images, metaphors, and myths but also the 'musical relations' of a poem. This is clear from the following quote from W.B. Yeats:

"All sounds, all colors, all forms, either because of their pre-ordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions; and when sound, and color, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become as it were one sound, one color, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion. The same relation exists between all portions of every work of art, whether it be an epic or a song".(Yeats 244)

Whereas Wheel Wright, Langer, Cassirer and Urban (see P. Wheelwright, 1954; S. K. Langer, 1942; E. Cassirer, 1944; W. M. Urban, 1939) defend the poetry as having epistemological status. Wheelwright while putting his contextualistic view of poetic language commends poetry as it is important for the embodiment and communication of experience. On the other hand S.K. Langer explored the process of meaning-making in human mind through the power of "Seeing" one thing in terms of other. She propagated the idea that there is basic and pervasive human need to symbolise, to invent meanings and to invest meanings in one's world. Ernst Cassirer also developed a theory of symbolism and used the theory to expand phenomenology of knowledge into a more general philosophy of culture. He claims that symbolic forms are found in many modes- languages, myth, art, science and religion. Wilbur Marshall Urban introduced Husserl's phenomenology to the English speaking world and used the method of phenomenological reduction to know the essence.

As it is already stated that cognitive poetics have been used in analysing the songs, it is worthwhile to discuss it here. According to Peter Stockwell (2002), cognitive linguistics presumes an intimate relationship between meaning and knowledge. The understanding of our language is on the basis of our knowledge of the world. This develops due to our interaction with the world. This is also true about the language of literature and also as a tenet of cognitive poetics. In order to understand various issues like literary value and status and meaning, it is necessary to have a clear view of text and context, circumstances and uses, knowledge and beliefs etc. It can be done by cognitive poetics. Though its linguistic dimension we can have analysis of style and literary craft. It explains different types of knowledge and beliefs and the connection to the language of the literature. It puts a broader view of context which also accommodates social and personal circumstances. It has also the potential for offering a unified explanation of both individual interpretations as well as interpretations shared by group, community or culture. The focus of attention has been shifted around the triangle of 'author-text-reader'. Being a process of literary reading it also offers psychological and linguistics

analysis of it. It also provides discussion on the authorly version as well as to the readerly account of the text and how they are realized in the text. In this way cognitive poetics becomes a radical reevaluation of the literary activity.

The excellent example of the interactions of meaning with knowledge is metaphor widely discussed by Peter Crisp which is the reflection of our ways of dealing with the world. The experience with the world explains the conceptual structure and this structure explains the linguistic structure, which is the subject of our research.

The philosophical treatment of love is associated with many sub-disciplines like epistemology, metaphysics, religion, human nature, politics and ethics. The arguments about love and its relevance in human life connect all the theories of philosophy. The philosophical interpretation of love begins with the understanding of its nature which indicates that it has a 'nature' which others reject by saying that it is irrational as it cannot be described rationally and in a meaningful proposition. There are psychological theories, majority of which consider love as a healthy behavior, evolutionary theories, which state that love is a part of natural selection, spiritual theories showing love as a gift from God. Sometimes love is considered as a mystic experience. The problems associated with the meaning and the definitions could be solved to some extent by giving reference to the Greek terms, eros, philia, and agape. The term eros is used for a passionate desire for something which is often referred to as a sexual desire. In Plato's discussions, it is referred to as a common desire that seeks transcendental beauty. Philia constitutes a fondness and appreciation of the other. It not only includes friendship but also loyalties to one's family, community, discipline, job etc. for the Greeks. Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII says that philia is motivated for agent's sake or for the other's own sake. Agape refers to the God's love to man and vice-versa or in more general sense it includes brotherly love for humanity. It includes elements from eros and philia both. If it becomes clear that love has nature, then the question of its understanding emerges. Socrates says in *The Symposium* that love has nature but it is beyond human intellectual capacity to grasp it. Romantic love is said to have a higher metaphysical and ethical status than sexual or physical attractiveness. The idea of romantic love emerges from Platonic tradition. Romantic love was not to be consummated as it was a deep respect for a lady. Modern romantic love is the outcome of Aristotle's concept of one soul and two bodies. Some are of the view that love is physical. Hence it consists of various activities of the behaviour like, caring, listening, giving attention etc. Behaviourism propagates the idea that love is a series of actions and preferences which is observable and unobservable behaviour in terms of conditioning. The act of being in love can be explained by the events and conditions which led to believe the agent that he/she is in love. The love, according to expressionists, is also similar to what was proposed by behaviourists. They considered love an expression of affairs towards the beloved which can be communicated through language. It was also considered as a behaviour which is the reflection of inner emotional states. The forms love should or should not take are studied under the ethical aspects

of love. It is associated with the moral appropriateness of loving. In the area of political philosophy love can be studied through many perspectives e.g. instantiation of social dominance by one group over another etc.

3. Symbolism in Kangri love songs

Consider the following songs:

A. 'Toban Song' (The Washerwoman Song)

1. Kala kagra siyaike toban paniyejo chaliyo, ne teri so
'By getting black skirt sewn the washerwoman is going to fetch water.'
(The Washerwoman is going to fetch water by wearing a black skirt)
2. Mat jandi tohani tu meriye othu rajeyan da dera h ne teri so
'Don't go there, Kings are living there'.
(As King is hunting over there, don't go)
3. Tobani kada sire chukya o hay hay chukya o toban paniyejo gai h ne teri so-2
'The washerwoman puts the pot on her head; the washerwoman has gone to fetch water.'
4. Pailiya paudiya utri o hay hay utri o rajain gituedi mari h ne teri so o rajain gituedi mari ae
'When she got down to the first stair the king hit her with a small pebble.'
5. Dujiya paudiya utir o hay hay utri o rajain ba phad lai ae o rajain ba phad lais ae
'When she got down to the second stair, the king held her by her arm.'
6. Chhadidiyan rajeya baijo o hay hay baijo o meri jaat kamini ae ne teri so
'Leave my arm, King, I am of low origin.'
7. Jati teriyada mai kya karna teri surat badi sauni ae o teri surat badi sauni ae
'What I have to do with your caste, your face is too beautiful.'
8. Agein agein raja chaleya o hay hay chaleya pichhe tobanida da dola ae ne teri so-2
'In the front the king was moving and after that the washerwoman was carried behind him in Palanquin.'
9. Khabar karo mahlan raniyan o raniyan o teri sautan ji aai ae-2
'Inform the queen at the palace that her husband's second wife is coming.'
10. Aai hai tan aanaa de o hay hay aana de mai bi basna ni deni ae ne teri so-2
'If she has come, let her come, I will not let her live.'
11. Apu baithi rani palgein o toban pandi par bathai ae ne teri so-2
'The queen sat on the bed, and she was offered a carpet to sit.'
12. Kaliyan piniyan banaiyan o banaiyan o bich jaihar milaya ae ne teri so-2
'Black sweet was prepared and poison was mixed in it.'
13. Khai liya tohani tu pinniya o hay hay piniyan o pabi pyokhiyan te aai ae ne teri so-2
'Eat the black sweet, the washerwoman; the queen has come from her parents' house.'

14. Paile pini khadi ae tohani o hay hay tohani Toban mundi mua pai ae ne teri so-2
'When she ate the first part, she falls down on her face.'
15. duji pini khadi ae tohani o hay hay tohani o toban mari muki gayi ae ne teri so-2
'When she ate the second part, she died completely.'
16. Chandne de ber banaike o banaike o toban nadiya rudai ae ne teri so-2
'A box of sandalwood was made, and she was left in the river to flow.'
17. Agein tobi kapdeyan tomada o hay hay tomada o gan te bed rurdi aai ae-2
'Somewhere far from there, the washerman was washing the clothes.'
18. Per guariki dikhaya o dikhaya o meri toban rudti aai ae ne teri so-2
'When he opened the box and saw it was the washerwoman there.'
19. Sauni surat waliye o hay hay waliye o kajo jaan gawai ae ne teri so-4
'Why did you waste your life, having a very beautiful face?'

In the song, the washerwoman is not only representing the community of washerwomen only but also all the women of lower caste of those times. They used to believe that they will be spared by the king for being of low origin but it was not so. The reality was slightly different. The women of lower caste were also captured by the king. This is not only the story of a washerwoman but a story of a woman of lower caste who was abducted by the king and eventually murdered by the queen.

In the first line 'Kala Kagra' (Black Skirt) is a symbol which is of significance here. Why does she wear it? Does she want to impress the king? Does she want to hide herself from the eyes of the king? It may be that the women of that community in general or the washerwomen in particular used to wear this attire usually. It seems from the background that she looked beautiful in black skirt therefore the washerman was asking her not to fetch water. In line 4th and 5th, there is mentioning of two stairs which are symbolic of systematic and stepwise seduction of the washerwoman. In the lines 6th and 7th the comparison between the assumptions regarding the caste held by the king and by the washerwoman, is symbolic of caste based society, where lower caste women were conscious of their identity and kings give more importance to the beauty of face. In the 11th line the bed is symbolic of queen's high status and the carpet is shown to indicate the discrimination with the washerwoman. In the line 13th the 'Kaliyan Piniyan' 'black sweet' indicates not only the sweet but also the poison mixed in these. The use of word 'black' tells us about this. In the lines 14th and 15th the stepwise murder of the washerwoman has been intensified. The finding of her dead body by the washerman in the line 18 depicts a slight catharsis.

To examine the notion of 'profiling' in relation to the depiction of the plight of the washerwoman and analyze how the attention of the readers has been directed towards this plight of the washerwoman through grammatical constructions in the poem the linguistic structures were seen in close proximity. Profiling is an essential component of poetry. It shows the

subjective construal which is applied by a poet to any scene so that the readers could have the similar subjective view of the scene presented by the poet. Here in the song the poet has created a scene by his perception about the plight of the washerwoman and expects the readers to share this view of the plight of the washerwoman. The main character, the washerwoman is linguistically the trajector here and she is moving against many backgrounds. In the first stanza she prepares herself to go to fetch water and then she actually goes to fetch water, where she tries to fill the pot she was carrying, with water by moving down the stairs. There is mentioning of two stairs, which are also symbolic in nature, as we are not aware of whether there were actually two stairs. The stairs may reflect the step wise seduction of the washerwoman in the song. She remains the trajector in the whole song from the beginning till her death, when she is found floating in the river packed inside a box. Even before her death by poison she was taken away by the king to his kingdom. She has been in the suspended condition and through this profiling of the trajector (same one) and the backgrounds (many) the song has been organized. There are other profiles in the song too. The easiest way to discuss verbal profiles is to do it at sentence level. This song contains nineteen sentences and is full of alliteration, as the last phrase in each line has been repeated. The first sentence is: 'By getting black skirt sewn the washerwoman is going to fetch water'. 'Going' in its transitive sense profiles two participants: the mover 'the washerwoman' and the goal 'water'. 'Sewn' in its intransitive sense profiles one participant 'the black skirt' as the theme. The sentence has been made poetic by adding 'black skirt sewn' which indicates that she had been preparing for going to fetch water since long and in this way the description departs from the ordinary language. The second sentence: 'Don't go there, kings are living there' uses a prohibition and verb 'living' in transitive sense means hunting here and makes the king as the agent and the place 'there' is the theme. In this way by adding prohibition two functions have been served. Firstly she has been warned for not to go to fetch water and the fear from the king has also been intensified. The third sentence is: 'The washerwoman puts the pot on her head; the washerwoman has gone to fetch water.' The washerwoman is the agent and the pot is the patient and in the next line the washerwoman is the agent and the water is the goal. Here the location of the pot and 'going' are made significant by assigning these participant roles.

B. Kajo Nain Milayo Dila Mereya (Male) (Why Did You Let Your Eyes Meet)

20. Kajo nain milayo dila mereya, kajo chain churaya o jaani meriye
 'Why did you let myeyes meet, my heart?Why did you steal my relaxation, o my soul?'
21. Paile chori chori nakhare dhikae tain, phiri roi roi bafde lagae tain
 'In the beginning you showed your naughtiness secretly, then by crying produced fearful sounds.'
22. Kajo pola pala dil o mera lutya, chauan mari kanne tupa kajo sateya'
 'Why did you loot my innocent heart?Why did you destroy me in shadow and then left me in sun?'

23. Apu doliyach baithi chali pei tu, kajo chuthe laare minjo landi rai tu,
'You are leaving in a palanquin, why have you been making false promises to me.'
24. Tokha dei kar apna basaya, sari umrada rona o pallein paya.
'You secured your house by cheating, and left me crying for the whole of my life.'
25. Kajo nain milayo dila mereya, kajo chain churaya o jaani meriye.
'Why did you let my eyes meet, my heart? Why did you steal my relaxation, o my soul?'
26. Is dilru namane ne kya paayaa, din ratida bi chain gaaayaa,
'What did my innocent heart get? I lost my relaxation of day and night.'
27. Chuthe chakranch muye minjo paayaa, jindiji kajo maar mukaayaa,
'You trapped me in a false circle, you killed me while still being alive.'
28. Kajo nain milayo dila mereya, kajo chain churaya o jaani meriye.
'Why did you let my eyes meet, my heart? Why did you steal my relaxation, o my soul?'

In the song, the beloved got married somewhere else with someone else. The lover is unhappy at this. He is lamenting over her departure from his life. He is recalling his past meetings and experiences with her and cursing her for doing all that. In the very first line the heart is shown to be responsible of letting his eyes meet with the beloved one. Here a conflict between the heart and the body is shown by using heart as a metaphor for the lover. The beloved allured the lover first by her cunningness and by crying; and then destroyed him. The lover is asking question after question. In some questions he is introspecting himself and in others he is questioning the behavior and the actions of his beloved. The emotional atmosphere has been generated by these questions only. 'Meeting of eyes' is symbolic of falling in love and 'stealing of relaxation' is also symbolic of that. In the line 'why did you destroy me in shadow and then left me in sun' the persona symbolically tells us that he was destroyed by providing him the raptures of love therefore he could not understand the intentions of his beloved and finally he was inducted into loneliness when she deserted him. The poem is full of rhetoric questions which heighten the emotion. Line 26 contains an excellent rhetoric question where answer is also provided in the same line. Line 27 contains a word 'chakar' 'circle' which means that the beloved left the lover in the circle from which he will never come out. His life has been destroyed completely.

The lover is the trajector and the memories of past experience with his beloved are the background. The lover is physically stationary but psychologically is thinking about his mistakes and the cruelties inflicted on him by his beloved and in this way he becomes the mover. By using verbs 'meeting of eyes' and 'stealing of relaxation' both in transitive sense make two things important i.e. in the former 'the eyes' and 'you' both are important and in the latter 'you' and 'the relaxation' both are important. 'You' is an agent here and 'eyes' and 'the relaxation' are the themes. In the second sentence also 'you', 'your naughtiness' and 'sounds' are made more significant by taking two transitive verbs and 'you' as an agent of the change. These three

sentences of the song contain many love scenarios: ‘to let your eyes meet’, ‘stealing of the relaxation’ both are reflective of love relationships where such emotions are possible. The use of palanquin in line 23rd indicates the love scenario of marriage as palanquin is used in marriage to take away the bride. Moreover this is also symbolic of departure.

4. Conclusion

From the above account it is clear that the Kangri lover songs are fully loaded with diverse kinds of themes present in them. They have different songs for different occasions and hence the themes are also significant with their distinctive symbols. There are songs for the celebration of love. The symbols have literary as well as figurative meanings hidden in them. The imagery in the songs is based on nature as well as material objects. The symbolism existing in the songs would possibly have been the reason for the transformation of these songs from one generation to other as a medium of culture and for being so lively even after centuries have elapsed as the human mind is more fascinated by the symbolic effects as compared to the literary effects.

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