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A Social and Cultural Overview of Bundeli Folklore

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Abstract

This particular paper aims to throw light on the culture and folk tradition of Bundelkhand region, a place which is located in the middle of Indian geographical map that's the reason this place is known as the heart of India. If we peep into past, we will find that this particular region was known by various old names such as *Chedi*, *Dasharn*, *Yudhdes*, *Vanyadesh*, *Aatavyadesh*, *Jejakhukti*, *Jujharkhand*, *Vindhyelkhand*, and later on *Bundelkhand* due to the impact of Budela Dynasty that was very popular and celebrated for their bravery and great deeds. Among the people of this region there is a folk saying which describes geographically this region- "*BhainsbandhihaiOrchha*, *PadaHosangabad*; *LagveyahaiSagre*, *ChapiyaRewapaar*." In this saying, with the help of animals' name they tried the map the boundary of the region. The folk of the region are very simple and coloured with rich cultural tradition. In their day to day life and activities, the impact of culture and tradition is clearly visible. This was still untouched by growing industrialisation so it is known as backward region due to less development and poverty but at the same time with increasing effect of Globalization and technology the folk and their culture and traditions greatly affected by. We will explore the richness of culture and society and its traditions and rituals in the prevailing folklore of Bundelkhand.

Keywords- Culture, Folk, Values, Tradition, History, Rituals

Bundelkhand, geographically and culturally is a plateau cum hilly region of India, known for its distinct culture, customs and traditions. Bundelkhand is the central part of India, comprised seven districts of Uttar Pradesh and six of Madhya Pradesh. The name Bundelkhand falls after the name of Chandela and Bundela Rajput rulers who ruled over the region from 10th to 16th centuries. Bundeli folks have their own customs, traditions, rituals and sayings that culminating into a colourful culture

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and are specific to this region which separate and identify it as culturally rich and distinctive part of India. Due to lack of education and industrial development, the region has received comparatively lesser reception in media and academia as far as the elucidation of culture concerned. But the folk tradition of Bundelkhand is very rich and diverse in forms which emerged and flourished over the centuries, based on region, religion, season, occasion, caste and creed. The culture of Bundelkhand has many dimensions in the form of folk songs, folk dances, folk arts, musical instruments and many festivals and celebrations, giving opportunity to artists to demonstrate their performance.

Before we move ahead one thing I would like to clear one thing that the aim of the present paper is to make people acquainted with the culture society and values of Bundeli folks and the objective of it is to preserve its all aspects for upcoming generation. We are living in an age where science technology and computer playing its role in extreme then why we are focusing on old dated things like customs traditions and culture? Why is it necessary? The answer of these questions is very simple that we are living in an age of Globalization and Liberalization in which the world has become a village. It has brought the people and cultures of the world together and has made a unique collage where it became difficult to find out a distinct and particular culture out it. Under the force of globalization mainly the identity of culture is problematic. This chaotic condition has drawn the attention of the academia across the globe. "In demographic distribution and cultural configuration never has been such a shuffling of people and shifting of boundaries, intertwining of histories and overlapping of cultures as that seen in the last fifty years. There are many causes for these changes that have been taken place during half a century. Consequently, all the cultures are intermingled, none of them is single and pure, and all the cultures have become hybrid. Yet every culture still has maintained something its own identity, its own flavour and distinctiveness. It is within this context that a rebuilding of cultural cartography has been at work in the last half a century. Now here is a phenomenon better articulated than the in the literatures of different people and regions."

Exploring the trajectories of folklore in this context is quite appropriate. Here in this paper to make everything easy to understand we shall discuss the term folklore in brief as well culture society and values too. Therefore, the term 'Folklore' coined by William John Thomas in 1946, this is consisted of two different words having separate meanings. Literally, the term 'folk' means people and 'lore' means knowledge, thus folklore means people's knowledge or wisdom of people. At first this term was implied to the manners, customs, observations, ballads, superstitions, proverbs or saying and so on. But now when we talk about folklore the first idea comes in our mind is that folklore is oral

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literature which is not in written form. It is transmitted orally generation to generation. These folklores were considered the storehouse of a culture and subculture that were never written but they were the best means to preserve the manners, customs, superstitions, myths, proverbs etc.... Each culture of the world has its own specific customs, traditions, manners, songs, proverbs, tales, riddles, incantations and many other things that are specific to that region. In this way, folklores are the traditional beliefs, customs and stories of a community that have been passed through the generation by word of mouth. Different scholars have expressed their views regarding folklore. Folklore has been defined by Ben Amos, something as “an artistic communication in small groups. (Ben Amos 4)” Stith Thompson has defined folklore in the following words, “The common idea present in all folklore is that of tradition, something handed down from one person to another and preserved either by memory or practice rather than written record. (Stith Thompson 21)” Kennedy has a view regarding folklore:

“Folklore includes songs, stories, myths, proverbs and any rituals, customs, medicines etc. that have putative origin in the mythic past of the folk. For some, this means that folklore signifies a world of ignorance and pseudoscience, captive to bias and prejudice; for others, it signifies an authentic expression of agrarian or village life. In either case, folklore offers rich material for cultural and anthropological analysis, and literary specimens of folklore such as folk ballad and folk epic have had a profound influence upon genres of high art. (Kennedy etal. 74)

The culture of Bundelkhand has many dimensions in the form of folk songs, folk dances, folk arts, musical instruments and many festivals and celebrations. Bundeli folklore can be classified under the following genres where culture and society is clearly explicit.

- Folk Drama (LokNaty)
- Folk Lyrics or Songs (LokGeet)
- Folk Ballads (LokGatha)
- Folk Tales (Lok Katha)
- Folk Sayings (LokSubhashita)
- Folk Dance (LokNritya)

Folk drama tradition of this region is very rich, on which the impact of religiosity is clearly visible that shows the mind-set of bundeli folks. Folk drama is divided into two sub-genres like Nautanki and Ramleela. Both are performed on some specific occasion.

Nautanki- Nautanki is very famous folk drama in Bundelkhand which is performed on the occasion of marriage and other ceremonial events. It is an extended and modern form of Swang. It is

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performed on a well-designed stage with music and musical instruments. It is considered as the best means of entertainment for the folks which depict social evils or bad practices of society in ironical and humorous way. There are two styles of Nautanki which are very popular in this region. The one is in 'Kanpur style' and the other is in 'Hathrasi style'.

Ramleela- Ramleela is mythical and religious folk drama form that is performed every year in the month of Chaitra (April) and Ashvin (Sep-Oct), during the festival of Navrat or Navratri, in which Bundeli folk perform events related to the life of Lord Rama.

Apart from these two there are other celebrated folk drama forms in Bundelkhand. **Swangis** the oldest folk drama of this region. The meaning of the word 'Swang' is to 'imitate or copy'. These swang are based on social evils and orthodoxy as well as social incidents. Humour is a key component of swang. The purpose of swang is the same as of satire. **Jogiya Baba** is another type of folk drama popular in Bundelkhand region. This is performed by only women on the occasion of marriage.

Bundeli folk lyrics or songs are popular in this region. There are various folk lyrics of Bundelkhand which are related to occasions, seasons and festivals. Sometimes these lyrics belong to a caste, creed and tribes. Bundeli folk lyrics can be divided into various sub-genres; the most celebrated of them are as follows.

Faag- faag songs and its rhythmic music can be heard in the whole Bundelkhand region during spring season when crops are ready for harvesting. This folk song is related to agricultural life of folks. After harvesting they enjoy by singing faag and use colour to express exalted feelings. Isuri is considered the representative folk singer of Faag.

Gari – Gari is very musical folk lyric of Bundelkhand. It is sung on various occasions especially on marriage to express excessive joy and happiness. We may say it is the main folk song of Bundelkhand due to its popularity.

Dadre and Sohre- Dadre and Sohre are very popular folk songs of this region sung at the time of marriage and birth of a child.

Lamtera- Lamtera means 'the call of God'; it is sung by Bundeli pilgrims during devotional festivals of Bundelkhand in the month of January, February and March after Rabi crop in winter begins to blossom.

Khyal-Khyal singer recites a mythical stories, heroic deeds, social events and family relations.

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Kaharwara-It is a kind of folk song in which sentiments of heart culminate into the romantic expression. It is always sung by a drummer which is followed by a dancer.

KajriGayan-It is semi-classical singing genre, which is often sung by a maiden for her lover as the black monsoon clouds come during the rainy season.

Achri Gyan-Achri is a devotional folk song of Bundelkhand. It is sung in the honour of mother goddess Durga during Navratri.

Got – This folk song is of very strange rhythm and it is sung through the night to seek the good health of cattle.

Kahri - These folk songs are sung to welcome rain.

Raai- This is very popular folk song of Bundelkhand which is followed by a dancer.

Tamura Bhajans- These folk songs are sung to celebrate a nirguni (formless) godhead.

Like folk songs, Folk ballads of Bundelkhand are rich in flavour of valour and heroic deeds. Mostly ballads of bundelkhand celebrate history and great warriors. '*Alha*' and '*Jhansi Ki Rani*' are very popular ballad of Bundelkhand which can be heard in each part of this region. There are some other folk ballads of this region such as 'Amra Singh koRaghro', 'PranDhareKoRachhro', 'VanasurKoRadhaRachhro', 'ChandrabalKoRachhro' 'TejbaliKoRachhro' and 'KajriyutKoRachhro' which are also popular among the folks of this region.

Folk tale is also a very celebrated folk genre among bundeli folks. It was the custom and still at present in some part, people gathered at a place, known as '*Athai*' in the evening and with slight gossip they start telling tales. These tales are nothing but their common experiences and sometimes these tales are based on historical and religious themes. The main purpose of these tales is to input moral values in young minds. Folk tales are also very popular among children. They are very interested to hear from their mother, grand-mother or grand-father. These folk tales used to develop imaginative and thinking power of children.

Folk Sayings and proverb of Bundelkhand is a rich asset of Bundeli folk tradition. These sayings are based on common and practical experience of folks and are pregnant with meaning. These sayings are witty and sharp. Folks of Bundelkhand mostly use these sayings in normal talk in day to day life. These sayings are the best means to understand the society and culture of Bundelkhand. Folk sayings reflect all aspects of social, political, economic and religious life of the folks of this region. Sometimes they best express human nature and behaviour as

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‘*jotohbadohoodhhai.*’ This particular saying is all about the nature of Hoodh dynasty because Hoodhs were very notorious.

Folk dance tradition of Budelkhand is very old and rich have various forms as folk lyrics, these folk dances are based on festivals and occasions. Mostly folk dance of this region somewhere has a mythical connection in its origin. Folk dances of this region are as given under.

Diwari Niratya- This is very popular folk dance of Bundelkhand. It is known as ‘Baredi Dance’ as it is mainly performed by the people who keep animals. These people are Shepherd, Aheer or Gwal. This is a symbolic dance of warlike activities. Those who take part in this dance, they are skilled in various techniques of this dance. This dance is related to Diwali festival. This dance has an epic connection, when in Gokul, Lord Krishna raised Govardhan Parvat on his finger to save people, people danced in joy.

Rai Nritya- Raai is the oldest dance form of this region. It is considered a classical dance of this region.

Holi Nritya- Holi Nritya is a festive folk dance of this region. In this dance form, people dance with colour to express their joy and brotherhood. This takes place on the occasion of Holi.

Horse Nritya- This dance form is performed on a ceremony with a trained horse on heavy drum beats called as Rabbi.

Ravala Dance—It is a dance drama. It is performed during marriage and some other specific ceremony. This dance form is known for its funny expressions and humorous dialogues.

Badhai Nritya – This is a ceremonial dance form, performed on the occasion of child’s birth. It is performed in a group by dancers.

Apart from these folk dance forms, there are some other bundeli folk dances as Ghat Nritya, Jwara Nritya, Palna Nritya, Jhinjhiya Nritya etc...

Bundelkhand socially undeveloped, agrarian and culturally is a rich part of India which not remained untouched by various cultures whether natives or foreign still it didn’t lose its social and cultural values and traditions. This shows that Bundeli folks are still deep rooted to their culture, this would not be appropriate to say or assert as due the impact of globalization and growing technology, young people of this region are taken away from their cultural and social standards. There is much need to work on it to save these valuable social and cultural assets.

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