

Folklore: Fabricating Womanhood in the Works of Vijaydan Detha

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ABSTRACT

Folktales are an important part of cultural legacy and serve as a realistic reflection of that society. These tales are considered as a treasure trove of a community's collective memory and passed down through generations by word of mouth. Folktales portray the customs that are typical of a certain society. Vijaydan Detha is one of the regional writers who present a panorama of mediaeval Rajasthani culture by providing insights into the social, political and economic practices of the past which continue to influence contemporary culture, shaping cultural heritage and fostering a sense of shared identity among communities. His folk stories have universal as well as regional qualities as his *Batan ri Phulwari* (A Garden of Stories) which was published between the years 1960 and 1975 in a total of fourteen volumes, emerges with some specific themes related to feminism and the paper throws light on the dreams and dilemmas of women. In a societal structure that is hierarchical, men are in charge of establishing the rules and laws that govern society. In his several collections of short tales, Vijaydan Detha explores the hopes and predicaments that her female protagonists face. The majority of which have been translated from the original into other languages and published in collections such as *The Dilemma and Other Stories* (1997) by Ruth Vanita, *New Life: Selected Stories* (2008) by Mridul Bhasin, Kailash Kabir, and Vandana R. Singh, *Chouboli and Other Stories* (2010) by Christi A. Merrill and Kailash Kabir in two volumes, etc. A spark of women's assertion can be seen directly in Detha's folk stories, women characters from every caste and class of Rajasthani society are described by him with great attention to detail, and he has tied the tales to the contemporary world in a number of different ways.

KEYWORDS

Vijaydan Detha; womanhood; feminist components; patriarchal system.

1.1 Introduction

Vijaydan Detha, also known as "Bijji" due to an endearing nickname, has collected more than eight hundred folktales in the Rajasthani language and has won a number of accolades for his authoring of Rajasthani folktales that originate from the *Thar* Desert region of the state of Rajasthan. The stories that he

gathered have been adapted several times for cinema and theatre and have also been translated into English. As a result, he has garnered the attention of a worldwide audience that appreciates the distinctive vernacular tone of his writing. This paper presents the significant interpretations of folktales, which give room to female narratives and investigate gender issues. In

addition, the purpose of this article is to illustrate how the gender problems raised by the tale continue to resound with modern readers.

In addition, the paper will make an attempt to explain how class dynamics and caste hierarchies in rural India, particularly in the state of Rajasthan, provide conditions for the sexual exploitation of women. Through his stories, Detha reveals the dual nature of the preexisting social order and casts doubt on the social sanction and sexual agency that women get as a result of their participation in the institution of marriage. Men have usually presented women as weak, powerless and objects of pleasure. However, the stories of Vijaydan Detha shatter all patriarchal barriers and present women in a different light. Women as witty and strong characters are portrayed in his many folk stories.

1. 2 Vijaydan Detha and his Representation of Womanhood

1.2.1 Chouboli and Other Stories

The book is titled *Chouboli and Other Stories*. This collection includes short stories that tackle difficult subject matter and touch on controversial cultural topics. It appears that the translator was more interested in the stories that had anti-patriarchal and so-called feminist components. In point of fact, one may argue that the primary narrative, "Chouboli," is a feminist inversion of the conventional fairy-tale form, which entails a prince coming to the help of a princess. "Chouboli" is an exception to the rule and an inversion of the pattern because, in this story, an oppressive husband is challenged and instigated by his wife to go for a test, and then after being humiliated and tortured by others, he is rescued by his wife, who then inflicts final punishment on a humbled husband in the form of pornographic domination of horse riding. The ladies arrive at a definitive and overarching conclusion: "For women, the

only significant difference between one man and another is how they appear." This may sound like a formula, but it is important to keep in mind that such a notion is prevalent not only in India but in all patriarchal societies.

1.2.2 Duvidha [The Dilemma]

The rollicking, folk-based stories of Rajasthani writer Vijaydan Detha have been receiving accolades in India since the 1970s. Only recently, however, have they become available in English translation. Detha has a flair for picking the most startling tales he hears from his fellow villagers and re-creating them in a written style as interesting and adventurous as his oral sources. In one legend a ghost uses his abilities to change a lady's sex so that she might stay wedded to the woman she loves. In another—re-created in cinema by Mani Kaul in the early 1970s as *Duvidha* and more recently by Bollywood filmmaker Amol Palekar as the enormously popular *Paheli*. In this story a ghost falls in love with a young bride and assumes her husband's body so convincingly that her in-laws are misled.

How artfully the author presents the ultimate conundrum that has always faced humankind: whether to choose love or wealth. A wealthy businessman weds a beautiful young woman, and on the night of their wedding, he breaks the news to her that he will leave the country the next day for business, and that he won't be back for a long, long time—five years to be exact. Even if only for a moment, the husband is forced to decide whether he should prioritise his thriving business or his young wife, but his father, a shrewd businessman, steers him in the direction of the latter option. When the husband leaves the house, a ghost who is entranced by the attractiveness of the wife transforms into the husband so that he might enter the home. He is overjoyed by the affection that he receives not only from the wife but also from the mother and the aunt. This love has

an overwhelming effect on him. The wife has never been loved and appreciated to such a great degree, and yet she can't help but fall head over heels for this spirit. The story offers puzzles that find fresh relevance across languages and eras: Who has the authority to advise us whom to marry? What qualifies as truth when it comes to safeguarding someone we love? How do the epic stories we hear urge us to reenact scenes of racial violence?

Detha's tales mix the indigenous Rajasthani storytelling idiom with narrative technique from the modern short story to create a new benchmark for current literature in India. Translator Christi A. Merrill has worked with the author and his Hindi translator Kailash Kabir to establish a style that allows these stories to come alive in English with similar creativity and vitality.

1.2.3 Timeless Tales from Marwar

His traditional stories are given a fresh start via the publication of the story collection naming *Timeless Tales from Marwar*. It is a selection made by hand from the well-known collection known as *Batan ri Phulwari*, also known as the "Garden of Tales,". This collection has some of the oldest and most well-known stories from the Thar Desert region, and it is recounted in the enchanted storytelling style that Detha is known for using. It also contains visuals. Find out about malicious witches, exploitative thakars, miserly seths, intelligent insects, and beneficent snakes, among other villains and heroes, in this collection of stories. One of the most revered people in Rajasthani folk culture is brought to the attention of a larger readership thanks to Vishes Kothari's evocative translation into English.

1.2.4 Antarala

Vijaydan Detha has been referred to as the "Shakespeare of Rajasthan," and why his work was put forth for consideration for the Nobel Prize in 2011. This legendary

magician by the name of Vijaydan Detha, also known as Bijji, compiled 16 of his most notable tales into the book *Antaral*. The characters that Detha has crafted are endearing, and they exude an innocence that leaves no room for interpretation. Some new words were created, and the readers were presented with new emotions as a result of the author's skillful use of metaphors. In addition to evoking profound emotions, his characters also elicit chuckles, such as Hawwa from the story "*Duri*," who is adamant on remaining in her seat behind the wheel even though she is desperate to go to her kid as soon as possible.

1.2.5 Trikon

Reading this book by Vijaydan Detha, Trikon, can improve not only our reading abilities but also other aspects of our personality and life. This book is published in Hindi, and the printing is of a very good quality. The novel books will almost certainly provide us with the most enjoyable reading experience.

1.2.6 Press the Sap, Light the Lamp

The short stories "Press the Sap, Light the Lamp" and "The Dilemma" are two more in the book that highlight important feminist themes and topics. Both of these short stories are included in the anthology. The tales originate in a culture that places little value on women, does not practise romantic love, and accepts as common knowledge the notion that a woman is only a passive object that neither has nor is capable of having wants. This is the place where the stories were first told. It has been shown that the ramifications of maintaining such an erroneous view about the patriarchal system may be highly unpleasant for everyone involved. However, in order to put light on the brutality and torture that are common in the society, demonic and supernatural agencies have been brought into play. This

has been done in order to shine light on the brutality and torture that are prominent in the society. There are occasions when these institutions are in a position to provide what the human civilization is lacking. In the short story "Press the Sap, Light the Lamp," for instance, the narrator offers the following comment about the woman who is going to be murdered by her husband after the death of her snake-lover: "Instead, she grinned. A charming grin, the brilliance of which remained unabated even after she had placed her head in her hands."

1.2.7 New Life: Selected Stories

The girl was too young and naive to comprehend either her coming of age or the path that life had in store for her. She had spent many years being treated as a son, and as a result, she now regarded herself as a man... She was under the impression that when she got married, she would start growing a moustache. The collective recollections of a people are preserved in the form of folktales and are passed down from one generation to the next. The act of passing down these folktales, however, frequently causes them to become frozen in time. Vijai Not only does Dan Detha, one of India's most famous and iconoclastic writers, bring these primarily oral stories into written form, but he also weaves modern themes into them and gives them renewed significance. This makes him one of India's most iconoclastic writers. His tales describe alternate ways of living and, at times, they advocate for women, who were among the most frequent people to suffer at the hands of feudal society. In the movie "A New Life," two ladies named Teeja and Beeja end up being married to one other in order to appease the whims of their rigid father. They recognise the error that they have been accidentally pushed into, but they also see that this is the ideal union for them, and with the assistance of the ghost chieftain, they construct a new existence

for themselves. The selfishness of a husband, his in-laws, and other benefactors leads a young wife, who is the protagonist of "The Crow's Way," to believe that the only meaningful human relationship is the one between a prostitute and her client. The myth told in 'Discretion' is about a she-jackal who is more pious than Sita but yet betrays her husband by having sexual relations with the sun and the moon. The refreshing absence of stereotypical elements in the stories included in New Life, many of them tread new ground in Indian writing, This, is an indelible compilation because to Detha's profound awareness of human interactions as well as his matter-of-fact engagement with a variety of odd topics.

1.2.8 The Dilemma and other stories

It has been said that the supernatural agents may sometimes teach humanity an important lesson about right and wrong. The plot of "The Dilemma" focuses on the neglect of a lady by her husband in favour of earning money, and the presence of a ghost is used to demonstrate how far things might go wrong when they do not go as planned. This ghost finally teaches the highest moral, and via its agency, the narrator powerfully illustrates what is lacking in a society that is focused on acquiring money: "The love and care I received in the guise of a man brought me joy that is incomparable." There is no enjoyment that can compare to that. You people, on the other hand, are trapped in a different web.

"Until the day she is dragged away to the cremation site," the final line of the novel, brings the reader to the depressing conclusion that a woman's life is miserable in a society ruled by men. The remaining four tales in this collection, "The Ninety-nine Rupee Snare," "The Dove and the Snake," "A Straw Epic," and "The Crafty Thief," focus on peculiar human situations in which the themes of greed, anger, pride, and truthfulness are dealt with quite

effectively in order to explain human follies and foibles. These tales are titled "The Ninety-nine Rupee Snare," "The Dove and the Snake,"

The tales included in Volume II are of varying ages and settings, spanning from the distant past to the present day. But "Two Lives," a narrative that Detha oddly obtained from a Jain sadhu, is the one that stands out as the most compelling of the bunch. Even more startling is the fact that it tells the narrative of a love affair between two ladies of the same gender. Two women are put in such a humiliating position as a result of the money-making, male-dominated culture that serves as the backdrop here as well. As a result, the ladies choose to leave this civilization and enter a demonic world. They will be able to have same-sex love once they have moved beyond the socially delimited region and have broken free from the conventions of society.

The inhumane nature of that kind of male-dominated society is re-enacted when one of the women is transformed into a man through the agency of a spirit chief, only to experience the same kind of domestic violence and greed for material possessions. This serves to re-enact the inhumane nature of that kind of society. After coming to the conclusion that the entire society functions as a machine for inflicting pain, the women come to the conclusion that the only way to escape the vicious cycle of violence is to terminate the pregnancy of one of the women.

Another one of Detha's stories, titled "The Dilemma," again focuses on the rebellion of women against the unnatural expectations of men, and in this endeavour, assistance is offered once again by a metaphorical agent in the form of a ghost. The narrative explores the role that a woman plays in a conventional household setting. A newlywed woman is expected to adhere to the illogical directives of both her husband and her in-laws without revealing her true feelings to any of them.

She gives off the impression that she is open to the idea that her future husband has proposed—that they delay the consummation of their marriage for another five years since he will have to go away for some business engagement—and that she is prepared to follow his advice. It is asserted that "whatever her master, the husband wanted, was also her wish" (whatever her master, the husband requested, was also her wish). This proverb is accurate to the very letter. Despite the fact that she has very few options available to her, she decides to go ahead and take the symbolic call that comes from an unknown source, despite the fact that she had displayed some initial reservations over the matter. Detha is drawing attention to the limited options that women now have to get their opinions heard in the modern world. He makes the point that if a method is accessible, women will not stay non-communicative in order to convey their worries about male apathy towards their thoughts and emotions. He holds this view because he feels that if a way is made available, there will no longer be a need for women to maintain their non-communicative state. The objective of gender politics is to guarantee that women do not exist and that they stay subservient under the pretence of numerous social and professional duties.

The female virginity and loyalty are widely valued social attribute in Indian homes. The whole weight of keeping family honour is on females while males are granted the final authority of making the judgements without owning any obligations. A slight error may cost a girl her life but for guy it is nothing but an opportunity to restart his life over. The novella "The Crow's Way," written by Detha, draws attention to the horrible situation that women hold in Indian society. The young bride in the narrative is highly pious and is fulfilling all her chores with care and kindness. Her husband has been granted a blessing by swans to get out

of his impotence but this leads the female heroine to a lengthy trail of sufferings. Due to the fact that this information is not widely known, nobody is willing to acknowledge that she conceived her child through her spouse during her brief encounter with him.

She is requested to make sacrifice for the honour of the family and no begging of her is accepted. Detha illustrates the hard truth of Indian woman, "A lady, deserted by her in-laws, is not welcome even in her parents' house". Moreover, even her son who is blessed to vomit forth pearls has been snatched from her by a clever hungry jeweller. All the more, her husband who understands the entire reality is satisfied by marriage with some other lady. He demonstrates his masculine 'theatrics', "It is awful enough for a woman to be out of her house even for one night, and god alone knows who you have been with all this time" (56). She is suffering for no fault of her own and her misery is merely because of blindly embracing the conventions of the masculine culture. She is a victim of human avarice before which all human concerns come to nothing. Detha contrasts her with Sita who had to go through the 'agni pariksha', "Sita, the good wife of Lord Rama, was banished to the wilderness just once and here was this Sita who had been flung into wilderness thrice"

Vijaydan Detha's novella 'Rajinavo' is an exceedingly lovely picture of the shifting ideals of our era. It discourses on a serious topic in an entertaining fashion with the use of symbols, with economy of words, and without sermonizing. In addition, by employing the structure of the folk tale it has given a new form to the story, breaking new boundaries in the evolution of the short story.

Vijaymohan Singh's perspective is "Detha the writer is basically missing (in "Rajinvo") (in "Rajinvo"). Only Detha the compiler of folktales is there in the story - but like a human audio-visual machine-

recording and photographing everything". Amrita Pritam said:

He relates his story in the guise of a folktale, and at some point, comes out with remarks that shift the proportions of the story. It becomes a truly current narrative. This is a lovely skill of which he is a master. It is not merely a craft. Behind it lies a complete method of thinking that makes the narrative universal even if it is about things spoken before.

Dr Santosh Tiwari's perspective is:

His universe as a tale teller is pervasive and distinct, but much better is his clarity and elegance. We sense we are in the company of a like-minded and fascinating elder, who is acquainting us with the bitter-sweet and painful experiences of life via the agency of various people, an older who is familiarising us with life's intriguing and nasty features. There is such beauty and inquisitiveness in the telling, the strands of the tale are so skilfully interwoven, that even while each event is sensed in segments it left the illusion of an undivided whole (Tiwari 88).

1.3 Conclusion

Thus, Vijaydan Detha is entirely conscious of the fact that the *Rajasthani* folktales have been the subject of an uncountable number of written accounts over the course of history but have since vanished without a trace. He believes that the single line that he has written in *Phulwadi* is the greatest and most incontrovertible proof of his superiority, and it reads as follows: "To date I have not made any answer to these people's illogic, envy, heartburn, and small-mindedness." expresses Detha.

The author Vijaymohan Singh writes these words in the preface to his collection: "The biggest irony as he said

was that many writers in Rajasthan did not consider me as a writer at all." They saw him as nothing more than a compiler who was responsible for recording folktales in written form. From their point of view, he was nothing more than a compiler. "No writer can ever have suffered such savage attacks on his work by his own state, by the people of his own language," he writes with a tremendous amount of pain in the story 'Roonkh.' "no writer can ever have suffered such savage attacks on his work by his own state, by the people of his own language" (Kabir: Preface).

Some of the people who have examined this practise of rewriting folktales have the opinion that it is not

particularly fruitful. The rewriting, in their opinion, has not resulted in the continuation of the folktale in its original form, nor can it be considered to be an original piece of writing. Moreover, they argue that it cannot be considered to be an original piece of writing. Instead, they are of the opinion that it is currently unreadable. Detha is of the opinion that his writing is in the style of folktales, and that the end product is his own and is not conditioned by the folk content. However, he acknowledges that his writing is in the style of folktales. However, he admits that he has been influenced by fairy tales and folklore in his writing.

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