

Literary Documentation of Cultural Environment: A Critical Analysis with Reference to the Novel, *Fakira*

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Abstract

Literature and culture are two sides of the same coin as one defines the other. Literary library examines the penumbra of our society. Literary documentation not only expresses the quondam phase of society but also plays a vital role in anticipating life. As the father of our nation Mahatma Gandhi said, “The future depends on what we do in the present.” Culture is the underpinning factor to design the unborn chapter. The researcher will investigate and analyze the cultural environment of the iconic text ‘Fakira’ originally written by Anna Bhau Sathe in Marathi and translated by Dr. Baliram Gaikwad in English. The researcher will delve into traditional beliefs followed by the Dalit community which sprouts bravery among them. Secondly, nature plays a critical role to unveil the shield of inhumanity by teaching lessons about the culture of values. Lastly, the researcher will unwind the integration of literature and culture.

Keywords – culture of bravery, culture of values and integration of literature and culture

Introduction

Literature is one of the platforms which allows us to step back in time and explore the numerous social branches. In fact, literature helps in diagnosing the ancient culture, tradition and beliefs, knowledge of which assist mankind to carve not only their present but also to construct the future. Since the culture of their respective society is been unknowingly manifested in their day-to-day life. It is only with the help of literature, the culture of a particular society or nation can be studied and comprehended. Cultural Environment is the behaviour or beliefs of a certain set of communities based on factors influencing their culture.

Marcus Garvey a Jamaican political activist has well said, “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” So, with this thoughtful saying researcher

has made an attempt to explore the culture of Maharashtra by delving into the text *Fakira*, originally written in Marathi by the emissary of Dalit mass, Shri Tukaram Bhaurao Sathe popularly known as Annabhau Sathe. The essence derived from the iconic text *Fakira* (1959) was not just limited to Marathi readers but its literary fragrance expanded far and wide after the text was translated into the world language by Dr Baliram Gaikwad in 2021. This unique endeavour of translation has unveiled the fact of the Indian subaltern to the world in a fictional approach and an absolutely comprehensive fashion.

Manifestation of the culture of bravery among the Dalit Community-

The dalit community in Maharashtra is among the untouchable marginalized community commonly known as Indian subalterns. Settlement in the village

followed the age-old custom and culture of holding jogani Jarra.

Fakira the protagonist's grandfather Daulati explained to Fakira's father Ranoji, he said-

“A wedding procession is taken out. The jogani holds in her hands a vati, half a dry coconut wrapped in a yellow cloth. If someone dares to snatch it from her and take it away, the village loses its right to hold the jogini jatra. The village where the coconut vati is taken then gets the privilege of holding the fair...It is not just a coconut vati, it is the symbol. It carries the prestige of the village.” (Fakira 10-11)

Hearing this Fakira as a child innocently ordered his father Ranoji to grab the vati come what may. This thought was nested in Ranoji's intellect and he decided to grab the vati no matter at the cost of his life so that villagers will be proud as they were always ill-treated being an inhabitant of the dalit community.

The prevailing culture of jogini has boosted the dormant flow of bravery in the dalit community from Vategoan village. Basically, the dalit community has inherited the quality of being courageous from their ancestors. Due to their gallant attitude Fakira's father Ranoji along with a few Mahar comrades succeeded in grabbing the vati from Bapya Khot of Shigaon. Ranoji wisely reached his territory after grabbing the vati but Bapya Khot in a fit of rage trespassed and beheaded Ranoji.

Fakira as a child silently imbibed the valiant attitude of his father Ranoji. Later as a young lad his stalwart approach captivated the heart of the Vategoan villagers. Such culture of jogini sprouted the tradition of bravery among the Dalit community but due to their

marginalization they aren't acknowledged. This is well capsulated by Canadian author Ardytha Basham in her text *Untouchable Soldier*.

“Even though the untouchables and other lower castes of Hindu have played a significant role in the military history of India, very little has been recorded owing to the deep-rooted prejudices based on caste and untouchability.” (*Untouchable Soldier* 13)

The pride Vategoan village of holding the fair prevailed since no one had the courage to grab the jogini vati. Later after a few years Bapu Khot treacherously planned to grab the vati but Fakira shattered his dream by chopping off his hand.

“All breaths were stuck in their chests because the jogini had been snatched away...Khot raised his sword. Fakira ... knocked it out of Khot's hand...Khot quickly got up and with a pitiable face, started pleading for mercy. “Don't kill me...Here take the jogani”.” (Fakira 81-82)

It is lucid that the custom of jogini has instilled a culture of fearlessness among the dalit community. Fakira and his comrades have carried out the tradition of valour and which further resonated as a culture of bravery. He had a strong mindset; no elite person can challenge our prowess even if we die the nature where we grew will be here forever. Before devastating the Nerle camp he addressed his Mahar friends, Fakira said

“Let's die as we destroy those who shackled us, shackled our honour, our offspring, our mother the Krishna River... This Nerle camp, we will destroy it. We may die but this land, the mountain, these trees, there is no death for them...” (Fakira -202)

Culture of bravery is flashing in high voltage through these words of Fakira. Researcher has lucidly examined the first keyword, 'culture of bravery', references from the text were quoted to prove the manifestation of bravery due to jogini culture.

Unveiling the shield of inhumanity by teaching the culture of values-

Now proceeding towards 'culture of values' the second keyword, there was also a strong belief pertaining to this jogini tradition, the faith is firm that the successful procession of jogini brings glory to the village.

"Firm in their faith that once the jogini was conducted successfully all the ills of the village – misfortune, grief, poverty- would be routed, the villagers rushed to pray to the jogini and ask for a long life." (Fakira 14)

Fakira's father Ranoji laid down his life and succeeded in bringing jogini to his Vategoan Village. Fakira also gave a strong fight to retain the jogini. So as per the above faith, misfortune should not reach the village of Vategoan but this blind belief was dissolved by the natural disaster. People were falling prey not only to the famine but also to the epidemic that engulfed the Vategoan Village. The death rate was accelerated and at the same time, the villagers were without any saviour. Patil of the village had briefed the government about the pitiful state of the villagers but to no avail, government didn't pay any heed to this dreadful milieu. "Disease, famine and death joined hands to crush the superior and supreme human race. Death danced its horrible way to the village of Vategoan ... People had no dhani, no master, no saviour to turn to." (Fakira 133)

Vategoan was possessed by the shield of inhumanity since the men in authority had hidden sacks of food grain, the guards were vigilant so that the sack of grains shouldn't be robbed by the villagers. In some of the bins, grain was rotting this reflects that inhumanity has reached the pinnacle. Rotting is preferred over starvation. Holding the produce at the cost of the lives of villagers was acceptable. No action was taken by the government nor did the men in authority display any mercy towards the villagers. So Fakira along with his brother Sadhu and comrades decided to attack the wada and seize the grains so that villagers can eat bhakari. "Axes hacked the bins fastened to the pillars and a river of grains flowed out of them towards Fakira's feet. 100 sturdy men began to hastily fill sacks with the split corn and drag them outside." (Fakira 145)

The culture of values was radiated by Panta, as he was touched by the condition of the villagers, his efforts to seek government help failed so he openly advised helpless Fakira that, "Do whatever you can but live.". The value of loyalty, kindness, security and leadership sparkled in his advice. Fakira displayed the value of humanity in the shades of compassion, concern, empathy and courage. Comrades of Fakira cooperated wholeheartedly which in turn reflected the culture of values. The value of honesty, friendship, patience, achievement and happiness.

According to the law, the action of Fakira to loot the Malawadi matthkari so that poor villagers can survive seems like a crime which resulted in the dismissal of Panta from the post of Patil and mandatory marking of attendance twice during the day and once at night for all the villagers. This stratagem was laid so that the angry young men of the village shouldn't carry

out any loot in future. Lawfully looting is a crime but this gesture of Fakira brought a smile back to the faces of poor starving children.

“It was a golden day in the lives of the Mangs and Mahars. Their children sat in the doorways eating, not the warm sunshine but fresh hot bhakaris.” (Fakira 147)

Natural crisis like famine is beyond the control of mankind, and even the elite set of people fails to avert but the value of humanity can reduce its repercussion. Epidemic engulfed Vategoan but again the hypocrisy of men in authority made the condition of villagers bad to worse as they executed the inhuman policy.

The dalit community is the epitome of humanity as they empathize. Respect towards women is canvased by the marginalized community. When Fakira attacked the wada of Raghu Brahmin to loot the treasure,

“Raghu’s wife said, “Baba, clean out this wada if you wish, but these two girls are yet unmarried. I beg of you, our honour, our dignity... to which Fakira replied, Ai wait! he said remorsefully. I have come only to loot the khajina. Not to loot your honour. Your honour will not feed my hungry people. Go get back into your house.” (Fakira 189)

The dignity of women was never disrespected by the dalit community, and the value of respect is well-practised by this marginalized community. On the other hand, the newly appointed Patil of the village Raosaheb who was hand in glove with the government and not with the villagers inherited negative values like pride, discrimination, wickedness and unfair -criticism. Once during the night, he visited Fakira’s house to mark the

attendance and called for him. Fakira didn’t come outside but responded from his room that he is at home to which Raosaheb said,

“No, marking attendance from your wife’s side will not do. Come out here.” ...Fakira stepped out of the door frame and looking intently at Patil said, “ What did you say?” “Come outside to mark the attendance.” “And what else?” (Fakira 160)

The sentence of Patil provoked Fakira, he planted a tight slap on Patil, forgetting about his designation since Raosaheb disrespected the value of humanity and behaved inhumanly. Though Fakira belonged to a dalit family but his upbringing reflected the culture of values.

The researcher has investigated the second keyword, the culture of values taking into account various moral and immoral values reflected in the text Fakira, references pertaining to it are well enveloped by the researcher.

Integration of Literature and Culture -

Finally, the third keyword ‘literature and culture’ will be examined through the lens of the text Fakira. Writers encompass the prevailing culture, beliefs, and customs in their text so that the readers get introduced to diversity. Anna Bhau Sathe has authentically summarized the realistic delineation of the Dalit life, troubles, tortures, their exploitations by the upper caste so-called authorities in the villages and yet the intact moral values among dalits, the strong fervour to live life and not to give up hope are the aspects of novel Fakira.”

Reading such a text will not only encourage today’s dalit generation to voice out against injustice but also deliver the message for the upper elite class to know about their norms. Verily literature is the

expression of society and it has the magnitude to foresee the future.

The plight of the dalit is aptly depicted in the text *Fakira* though very much present in the social fabric but eliminated from the political and economic stream by the autocratic turpitude. Ignominy is the social curse bestowed over the dalits, being an offspring of a Dalit is a dogma which cannot be evaded. As a social reformer and a writer, Annabhau Sathe has perfectly entailed the responsibility of liberating dalits seconded by Dr. Baliram Gaikwad to globally expand the circumference of the readers. Emancipation of dalits from exploitation is possible to a certain extent through such steps towards humanity. The text *Fakira* has also exposed the age-old culture of weddings, where the participation of a widow in the marriage seems to be a bad omen for the newly wedded couple. *Fakira's* mother Radha couldn't participate in the joyous occasion of her own son's wedding nor did she mourn for it.

"Radha, being a widow, did not participate in the rituals and it was Fakir's grandparents, Daulati and Rahibai, who performed them. Radha was truly happy. She did not mourn for the loss of her kunku." (*Fakira* 130)

The global reader will find this culture strange. It is because of literature this culture is highlighted worldwide. Many places in India may not be following this age-old tradition in today's era. On the contrary, there are certain aspects that prevailed then and are much visible even in today's era too. As mentioned in the text the spread of the epidemic uprooted many families. Death was hovering all over the village but there wasn't any solution for it.

"The whole Mang colony was in the grip of the disease. Those who were standing

were struggling to get food... The responsibility of burying not just the Mangs and Mahars, but all the dead from the whole village, had fallen on them. Death had wiped out caste discrimination." (*Fakira* 133)

The above situation which was captivated by Anna Bhau Sathe still stands true. Literature through the fictive medium encompasses the reality of humanity during the natural crisis. 'C.S Lewis has well said that Literature adds to reality'. It is not very far we all have experienced the eclipse caused by covid 19. People not only in India lend a helping hand to the needy but even universally countries collaborated in all possible aspects and emerged victorious. The news of that time was absolutely dreadful.

"Covid cases surges in 24 hrs in state (2,940) & city (1,750) 6,300+ cases, including 660 in Delhi, 140 deaths. Epidemic reaching its peak, next few weeks key: Expert"

(Times of India 23rd May 2022)

The third keyword literature and culture been explored by the researcher and practically proved that literature is the mirror of culture. Literature works are the portrayals of social culture, it is the shredded virtual reality.

Conclusion:

The researcher has probed into the cultural dimension by exploring the root of various cultures. Society is a fertile ground where culture germinates. The Blueprint of those cultural realms is then enveloped by the literature. Anna Bhau Sathe has documented the plight, bravery and helplessness of dalit of Maharashtra in the library of Marathi literature but the translated version of the text *Fakira* in English by Dr. Baliram Gaikwad has

globally raised the curtain. Social history of age-old culture has crossed the Maharashtra border by placing a strong scaffolding globally. Now worldwide literature lover became aware about, the tradition of bravery and embodiment of moral values inherited by the dalit community.

Salman Rushdie has rightly said,

Literature is where I go to explore the highest and lowest places in human society and in the human spirit, where I hope to find not absolute truth but the truth of the tale, of the imagination and of the heart.

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