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PRESERVING NARRATIVE HERITAGE: ART OF STORYTELLING IN PAKISTANI FOLKLORE

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic research aims at exploring the tradition of storytelling within Pakistani folklore focusing on its practices and changing patterns. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of global cultural flow by Arjun Appadurai, this research addresses the transmission and transition of oral narratives in the form of folk tales that have been passed down from generation to generation. For this study, the data was collected by conducting in-depth interviews and participant observation in Lal Kurti, Rawalpindi. The sample of the study consisted of 23 females belonging to diverse age, socioeconomic, educational, and ethnic backgrounds. The findings show that the tradition of storytelling played a significant role in constructing and shaping cultural identities in the past. Through folk narratives, people convey historical events, moral lessons, societal norms, and collective wisdom. However, this practice of storytelling has been transforming and diminishing due to the urbanization and technological advancements in society that have transformed the family structures in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of storytelling has been a part of human culture for thousands of years. People tell stories to one another for leisure, entertainment, to

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communicate, and to transmit knowledge from one generation to the next. We are storytellers by nature, but our varied racial and geographic backgrounds have influenced the ways in which we tell tales. (Berat et al., 2014). In addition to providing entertainment, certain folktales teach moral values and spiritual percepts, as well as historical and political knowledge. There were hundreds of legends and customs in almost every hamlet, which are fervently recounted by parents, and grandparents before bedtime as well as by storytellers during festivals and public gatherings. Certain folktales, which explain cosmology and the significance of local shrines and deities, become essential components of religious practice (Çelik, 2018).

Pakistani folklore includes folk music, folktales, myths, legends, customs, and proverb-shaped by the languages and customs of the country's numerous ethnic groups as well as by the religious beliefs of its citizens throughout the country. Folktales from Pakistan provide insightful historical insights into the traditions of many religious and ethnic groups as well as the impact of various cultures (Bronner, 2018). In this global age, wherein we see how television and plenty of different technological gadgets have saturated the art of storytelling. The once-popular tradition of storytelling wherein our elders reminisce about the adventures of fictional characters who face moral dilemmas at the end of their stories is gradually disappearing (Khan et al., 2015). This storytelling tradition has served as a teaching tool for future undertakings and ethical guidance. The storytelling tradition served to strengthen our bonds as a family and expanded the level of intimacy between grandparents and grandchildren. The present study employs the global cultural flow theory, coined by Arjun Appadurai. He argues that the cultural flow is a result of the process of globalization and identifies five distinct scapes: ethnoscap, technoscap, finance scap, media scap, and ideoscap, that contribute to the global cultural flow. The current research uses the concepts of ideoscap and mediascap. Mediascap denotes the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information and images, stories, and news through mass media i.e. television, film, and the internet to spread around the world created by these media. Ideoscap involves the global flow of ideologies and cultural ideas. Religious beliefs, political ideologies, and cultural norms move across borders influencing local societies at a global scale. Mediascapes and ideoscapes are inextricably linked to globalization (Appadurai, 1996). This framework provides a valuable perspective for understanding the complexities of changes in local cultures in this contemporary world. In the light of this theoretical lens, we can see in Pakistani society the cultural patterns changing implicitly and explicitly. Our cultural folk stories and folklore preserve our cultural heritage, values, and traditions. The path of things the world is usually taking nowadays, the first and main being urbanization, has an instantaneous link to the loss of rhetorical storytelling traditions. Due to the rapidly changing family structure and urbanization, the tradition of storytelling is disappearing. Westernization has permitted cultural traits such as languages, customs, and traditions from around the world to diffuse into each other.

While it opens doors, it also leads to an amalgamation of cultures and the decline of unique cultural differences. Today, the vanishing of our folk story tradition is disturbing the traditional culture of Pakistan. The media and

technological advancement play an important role in showing the changes in the culture and encouraging the values of a particular nation on a global platform (Khan et al., 2015). Thus, this study aims to explore how the tradition of storytelling in Pakistani folklore has evolved over time, and what are the key factors influencing its preservation. Furthermore, this study explores what role traditional story tellers play in the transmission and preservation of Pakistani folklore, and how has their role changed in the face of modernization and technological advancements.

METHODOLOGY

An ethnographic research method is used to collect data for this study. This approach is used to analyze the data in great depth and comprehend people's perceptions over an extended length of time in a natural context (Torres, 2022). In-depth interviews and participant observation were employed as the main data-gathering techniques. Participant observation refers to understanding the social world by actively participating in the natural setting for the in-depth study of the phenomena. A qualitative data-gathering technique called an "in-depth interview" involves conducting lengthy interviews with a select group of respondents to learn more about their viewpoints on particular phenomena (Milena et al., 2008). The methods of in-depth interviews were chosen to take the people's opinions concerning the vanishing tradition of folk storytelling in Pakistan. The total size of the sample is 23 females with an age range of 18-70 years old belonging to diverse educational, socio-economic, and ethnic backgrounds. The sample was selected from Lal Kurti, Rawalpindi using a purposive sampling technique. Field notes were taken during the interviews which were later converted into detailed transcriptions. The interviews were conducted in Urdu language and were transcribed later into English for data mapping and sorting. Afterward, themes were drawn from the sorted data. To analyze the collected data, thematic analysis was employed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Storytelling Tradition: Inculcating Social Cohesion

There are norms, customs, and values for the people of that culture in folk stories. Folk tales conform to the idea that those norms may be internalized, which might make a person conform without external rewards or punishments. Many types of folk stories may assist in telling people what is considered perfect and acceptable. These stories contain folkways, mores, taboos, and the law. Further, social norms can range across time, cultures, places, and even sub-groups (Kuutma, 1998). Folklores are manners that can be learned through cultural norms and shared through social institutions, which we often refer to as group customs that are not morally significant but are important for social acceptance. Each group has developed their own specific customs. However, there may be customs that might be embraced at a larger, societal level (Bronner, 2012). A respondent named Saima who is a 40-year-old housewife and belongs to the Saraiki culture expresses her thoughts on how to maintain informal social control within folk stories. She stated:

There was a king. He made a law. Every girl who gets married in the kingdom will have to spend the first night of her marriage with this king. This is how it happened and time passed. God gave a daughter to this king. After her marriage, according to the law, she had to live with her father. That night the wrath of God's deeds descended and the whole kingdom would be destroyed and ruined.

In her folk story, she elaborates on the family structure of her culture and additionally informs us of the paternal bond between father and daughter that is not acceptable in their culture. Moreover, she added that a social norm is an obligation to society, which can result in sanctions if one violates it. Therefore, laws are social norms that have developed officially at the ethnic or cultural local level and can be enforced through guidelines that can bring about formal punishment for violations, such as custody or death. Laws are a form of social manipulation that summarizes rules, habits, and customs a society uses to enforce conformity to its norms (David & Ali, 2021). The respondent argued that such folk wisdom should necessarily be passed down to the next generation through stories and folk tales to maintain the balance of the society. Most of the respondents also mentioned similar views about the need to ensure informal social control.

Similarly, a 25-year-old respondent, named Salma, hails from Gilgit Baltistan. She stated her views in her interview while telling me her famous cultural folk story about ensuring informal social norms. She articulates,

In the old days, a king used to eat live animals by cutting pieces of meat from their bodies and gradually he became a man-eater. Then people killed him under a conspiracy. After that, this special day is celebrated every year on 11th November in Gilgit till today. The locals call it Thomi Shelling. That is why this celebration is held. The day we put an end to this man-eating king.

According to her, these folk stories maintain the social cohesion that allows individuals to communicate with each other at these events. There are a number of social issues that are solved by celebrating these events with each other and telling this folk story to the next generation on November 11th. Moreover, folk story content contains the message in which the information is embedded. This kind of information is in the form of a taboo and is forbidden from doing something a step additional. It is a very negative norm that gets violated because people will be dismayed. Additionally, one can become excluded from the group as well as society. The nature and the degree of the taboo are in the traditions. By listening to these cultural folk stories, children understand that what they do is morally or ethically right (Yasmeen, 2022).

Narrating Stories: Source of Amusement and Inculcating Moral Values

There was a time when listening to a story from grandmothers in the villages of Punjab was one of the major sources of entertainment for children. This was the traditional way of engaging as well as training children. Through these words, children were taught the basics about society, family, and a way of life.

It was also a means to inculcate the basic values and importance of heritage. Usually, these stories were in the context of farming, bravery, and good moral values. These stories were also training for future endeavors (Dundes, 1969). The tradition of storytelling was also a means to develop intimacy between grandparents and children. This socialization was also helpful in strengthening family ties. Usually, at night time, Grandma would tell the story of legends and the bravery of our people. This was a two-way communication, as usually, we used to ask questions during or at the end of the story (Wadley, 1983). A 35-year-old respondent, named Nimra, belongs to a middle-class family. She stated her views in her interview about the moral and educational percepts in folk stories of Pakistan.

A body was found in the desert. A caravan had a brick lying next to it on which it was written that there are better turnips than wealth. At least appetite then ends after eating them.

She added further that the custom of folk storytelling was a major communication tool of old times. These stories were oral manuals of moral guidelines dictating to children the right and wrongs of society. There was a time when listening to a tale from grandmothers in the villages of Pakistan became the most effective source of amusement for youngsters. This was the traditional manner of engaging as well as educating children. It also served as a means of instilling fundamental values and the significance of heritage. Typically, these stories revolved around farming, bravery, and proper ethical values (Gómez, 2016). This custom of storytelling has been a teaching tool for future endeavors as well. A 23-year-old respondent named Noor belongs to Kashmir and is from a middle-class family. In her view, she told me the ghost stories in the mountainous regions, which were interesting stories.

A man lives in the mountains and has many dogs who kidnap those children who go to the mountains. And this man has supernatural powers. He tells these dogs to go to this place and catch the kids who are wandering there. Now that man is dead, but her dogs are still in the woods and the mountains.

In her interview, she narrated a Kashmiri folk story in which the content shows that through horror and fear of being kidnapped by dogs, they teach their children not to go to the mountains alone. So, these stories play a role in preventing children from involving themselves in dangerous activities. It is said that folklore is more primitive than the idea of towns in human civilization. People discovered the art of communication through folk stories, as that is the way they narrate and fill the colors in their imagination.

Storytelling has been a precious part of entertainment throughout history starting from the written symbols and carvings in an old cave that reveal the stories and evident expressions of a primitive man about the occasions around him. This art of narrating events traveled with humans anywhere they moved, however, with the advancement of human history, the tradition of oral storytelling extended to further areas and served the human wishes for fun and amusement in historic times. Despite the fact that scientific progress has

changed the mode of this magnificent art, folklore remains the most important source of statistics on human history (Samwel, & Duhoe, 2020).

Fading Tradition of Storytelling

The development of urbanization has disrupted Pakistan's cultural patterns and has modified the fundamental fabrics of society and the way of socialization. It has also cracked the concept of the joint family system. Educational and job chances urge parents to move away from their families and villages. Urbanization has fragmented the family dynamics. Now in Pakistan, the family structure is tending more towards a nuclear family system. Grandparents are living in the villages, and parents are residing in urban areas for work, so there is no one to entertain the children with folk tales (Pop, 1964). Another respondent, 45-year-old Nasreen said: 'I do not have to bother to share stories with my six children. They are not interested in listening to my stories because of social media, video games, and seasons that have eclipsed this ancient art.'

Naseem added that the "storytelling" tradition is not entirely over but has changed into other forms. During the interview, she argued that technological development has changed the pattern of many traditions across the world. Storytelling, an ancient tradition, is nowadays less common in society and among families (Smith, 1959). One of my respondents, Shafaq Hussain, a 50-year-old who is from Punjabi culture, said while telling me folk stories:

In my time the transfer of knowledge was verbal and reading stories was not very popular. Storytelling was a basic tradition and people considered themselves educated if they had heard enough stories. And I think that when I die, these stories will die with me.

In his view, she said that nowadays, children are now more likely to use mobile phones and the internet. It has come to be part of their daily routine. The Internet is beneficial for learning, connection, and leisure, but it diverges children from traditional ways of learning. Instead of finding time to pay attention to stories, youngsters are more inquisitive about watching cartoons on YouTube. Attractive movies and videos, a variety of cartoon series, and other desirable features on the internet wield youngsters towards this colorful sphere. This technological development has broadly disturbed the social structure of Pakistan. A 30-year-old respondent, named Shagufta, belongs to a middle-class family. She stated her views in her interview about the diminishing status of folk stories. She says that,

In the old days when we used to hear stories from our grandmothers, their content was mostly on the fact that after death the soul has to be held accountable. The torment of hell and the grave and the principles of Islam according to which we must live. And if you do good deeds, you will get to heaven. But now more attention has been paid to the content of horror stories. During the interview, she said that late-night gatherings were once a hub of cultural activities in Punjab. Usually, after dinner, all family members gather in one place and discuss all the matters, and the grandparents tell the stories of

their time. These are like festivals. Along with other activities, these gatherings were the center of cultural development in Pakistan. But rapid development has enormously diminished the attraction of these gatherings. TikTok and other social media platforms are now major sources of entertainment for the country's youth, wildly popular in part because it is accessible to all including illiterate users in rural areas just as the folk stories once were. However, many famous tales spread throughout Punjab through festivals such as those on shrines and trading. But now this tradition is dimming day by day (Samwel, & Duhoe, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The tradition of storytelling in Pakistani folklore is a dynamic and multifaceted aspect of the nation's cultural heritage. Each Pakistani language has a very specific repertoire of poems, songs, folk stories, and proverbs related to its beginning, data, and way of life. This tradition of narrating folk tales plays a significant role in shaping cultural identities, transmitting knowledge, and fostering social cohesion.

The manner of leisure has modified from oral traditions to digitization and social media at the same time, taking children far from collective lifestyles and folk expertise. Therefore, the obsessive usage of electronic devices has influenced storytelling culture that was once considered to promote good manners, parental love, a compassionate attitude toward animals, peers, special people, weaker segments of society, and respect for the elderly. Unfortunately, parents are unable to spend valuable time with their children and transfer the folk wisdom from the rich indigenous knowledge held by their ancestors.

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