

**THE INTERPLAY OF FOLKLORE AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE SHORT STORIES OF
MANOJ DAS: A CRITICAL STUDY****Deepthi Singh**

Research scholar

Department of English,
School of Education and Humanities,
IFTM University, Moradabad**Email:** deepthi10.angel@gmail.com**Dr. Monika Jaiswal**

Asst. Professor

Department of English
School of Education and Humanities
IFTM University, Moradabad**Email:** monikajaiswalmjp@gmail.com**Abstract**

This paper presents a critical analysis of the interplay of folklore and philosophy in Manoj Das's short stories. A prominent figure of twentieth-century Indian literature, Das is known for his bilingual literary productions in English and Odia. He is unique in modern Indian literature for his capacity to bring into conversation the oral and the narrative with deep philosophical enquiry. This paper engages in a qualitative, interpretative analysis of a series of short stories, and shows that for Das, folklore is not only a narrative strategy but a site for philosophical exploration of ethics, human life, and salvation. In placing his work in the context of Indian intellectual history and contemporary literary debates, the paper suggests that Das builds a narrative epistemology based on indigenous knowledge systems. He universalises local myths, legends and traditions in his stories, presenting them as meditations on morality, spirituality and the world. The research concludes that the blending of folklore and philosophy in Das's stories complicates Western binary oppositions between reason and imagination, and presents an integrated view of human life.

Keywords: Manoj Das, Indian English literature, Odia literature, folklore studies, philosophy in literature, oral tradition and narrative, narrative epistemology, indigenous knowledge systems, myth and legend in literature, ethics in fiction, spirituality in literature, comparative literary studies, postcolonial literature, Indian intellectual traditions, cultural hermeneutics, storytelling and philosophy, mythopoetic narratives, moral philosophy in fiction, tradition and modernity, interdisciplinary literary analysis

1. Introduction

Folklores and philosophies have surely met, and the confusion of the two has led to the evolution of the literary cultures particularly in India where the story and the philosophical are very much united. The western philosophical tradition tends to believe in the abstract approach, but the Indian philosophy has been more traditionally combined with the philosophical approach with the folklore, myths, and tales. It is a powerful representation of modern literature in the short stories of Manoj Das, which in turn are the bright examples of the appropriate use of folklore in the philosophical search (Behura, 2016).

The central argument of this paper is that the folklore that Das has employed in his short stories is more than a mere embellishment of the culture but the core. His tales challenge the line between myth and reason, and spread out folklore as a type of legitimate knowledge. By a combination of classic narrative structures and modern literary techniques, Das creates an ambivalent storytelling arena where philosophy is born of cultural activities (Manoj Das, 2018).

This study attempts to critically address this folklore/philosophy connection as it explores how Das employs narrative method, use of figurative symbolism and cultural motifs to address ethical and ontological questions. By doing it, it contributes to the increasing amount of academic literature to the topic of the role of indigenous knowledge systems in the modern literature.

2. Literature Review

The themes of Manoj Das have often been subject of critical discussions regarding his distinctive style of narrative that is a perfect blend of realism, fantasy and mysticism. Much attention has often been given to his portrayal of rural situations, in which his tales have reflected the customs, values, and norms of the traditional Indian society. However, the folklore aspect of his work has not been meeting its due respect though philosophical implications were not given the appropriate consideration (Panchanan Dalai, 2023).

Study of Indian folklore more broadly indicates it serves as a source of cultural knowledge, storing moral, social and cosmological knowledge. Narrative traditions (e.g., the Panchatantra) demonstrate ways in which narratives may be employed as an instructive device. In this case, folklore is an entertainment and education thus teaching complex ideas by use of storytelling.

According to some scholars in the modern Indian literature they have indicated that the writers are negotiating issues of identity, tradition and modernity through the use of folklore.

3. Theoretical Framework

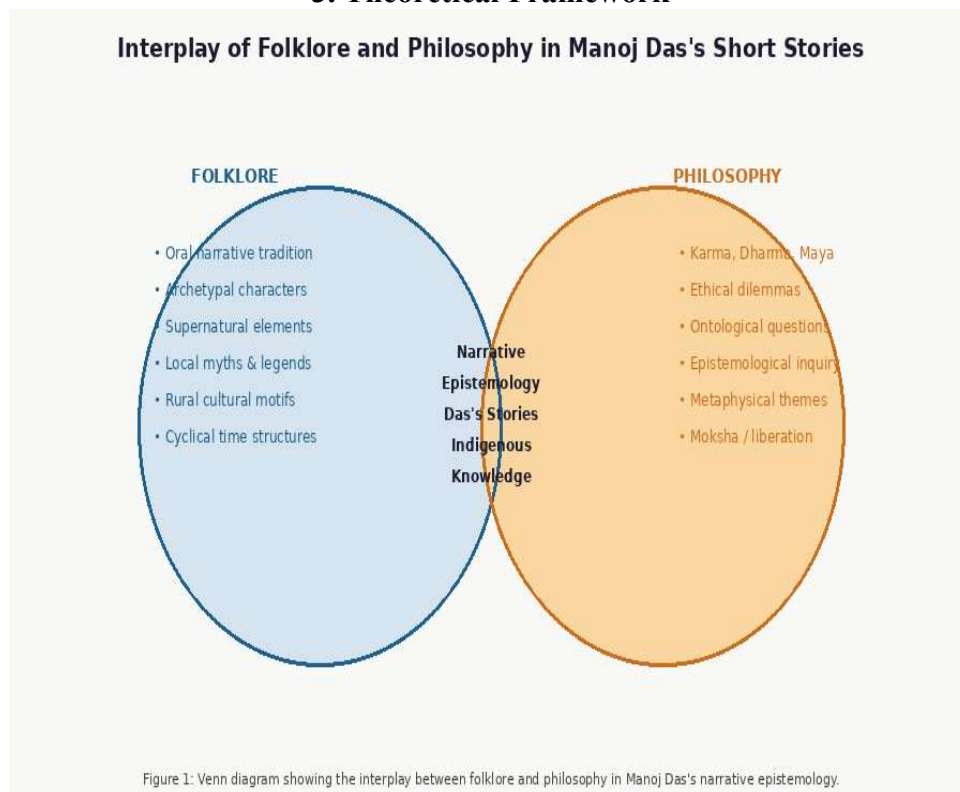


Figure 1: Venn diagram showing the interplay between folklore and philosophy in Manoj Das's narrative epistemology.

Source: Adapted from Behura (2016); Nayak (2019); Vishwanath Bite (2021). Folklore and philosophical themes in Das's short stories.

The present research uses an interdisciplinary theoretical analysis based on the folkloristics, philosophical hermeneutics and postcolonial studies. This view enables us to have a complex interpretations of the relationship between folklore and philosophy in the works of Manoj Das. Folkloristics is used to provide an analysis of the pattern of narrative, motifs and oral cultures in the Das narratives. It emphasizes the social and cultural facets of narrative by highlighting the significance of narratives in sustaining and passing on cultural knowledge and identity. Meanwhile, philosophical hermeneutics is what enables us to extract the meanings out of these stories. It is a method which recognizes philosophy as it is found in cultural texts and practices and not an abstract idea. This method is inherent in the narratives of Das as he does not indicate philosophical matters in abstract terms, but he narrates such matters on the basis of narrative (Vishwanath Bite, 2021). This set of practices can provide a holistic way of examining the interaction between folklore and philosophy in Das's short stories. What is really impressive about short stories of Das is the fact that he uses folkloric forms of narration. They are simple, straightforward and easily comprehensible in structure, yet can convey some very complicated philosophical ideas. The use of oral storytelling features, including the use of the linear narrative structure, repetition and archetypal characters provide the reader with a sense of familiarity, inviting them into the narration.

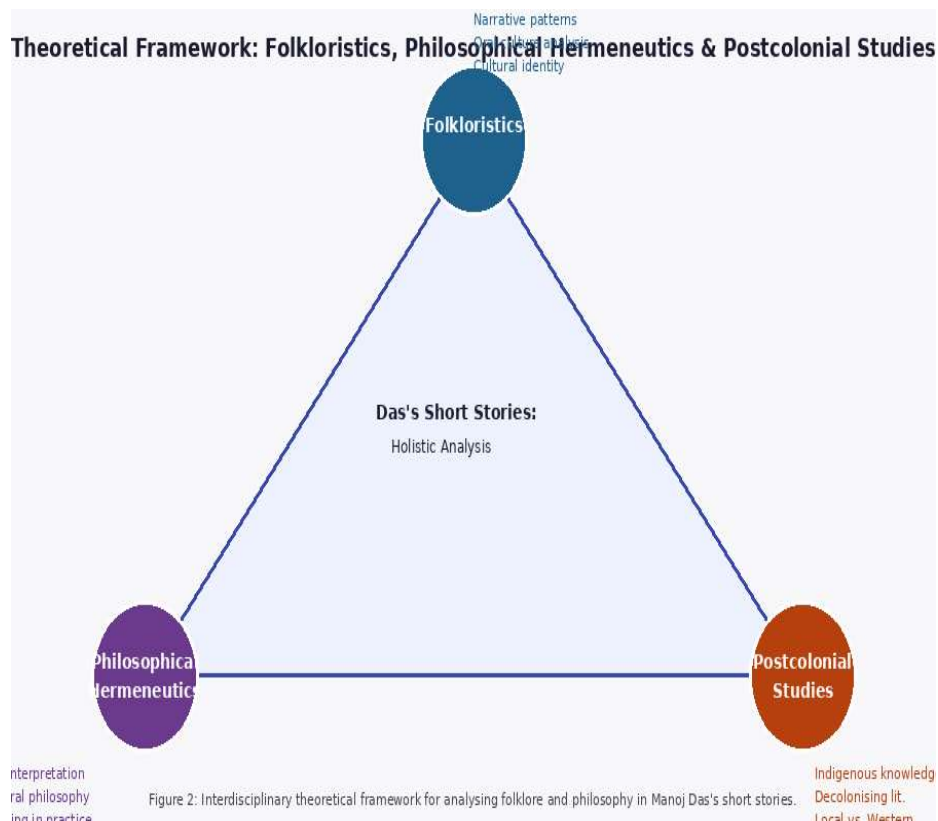


Figure 2: Interdisciplinary theoretical framework for analysing folklore and philosophy in Manoj Das's short stories.

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Source: Adapted from Panchanan Dalai (2023); Snehal Ratnakar Hegishte (2021); Anoop (2023). Theoretical approaches to Das's narratives.

Das employs archetypal characters, such as the sage man, a gullible peasant or the stranger, in some of his stories. They are not psychologically rich characters but the embodiment of moral and philosophical concepts. The moral ambiguity on these characters is revealed through the conflicts and dynamics between them, making the reader open to questioning the bigger theme of ethics (Vishwanath Bite, 2021).

Most importantly, folklore in Das is dynamic. It is flexible to social and cultural changes, and is a living element of tradition. Das demonstrates that folklore can be a part of contemporary literature discussions through his recreated tales.

5. Philosophical Themes in Folklore

Philosophical nature of the stories of Das is connected with his ability to introduce abstract ideas to concrete plot lines. Words such as karma, dharma and maya do not give a literal explanation but rather illustrates the experiences of characters.

As an illustration, karma is often employed in narratives when available to characters when they realize the consequences of their actions, which are quite often unexpected. These stories bring out the concept of cause and effect and this means that moral responsibility is not determined by the instantaneous conditions.

Similarly, the element of maya or illusion is eminent in the stories of Das. Most of his tales have situations in which appearances may be deceptive, and how the human senses are unreliable. It pertains to the irony that portrays the contradictions and doubts about human life (kitab, 2020).

6. Case Studies of different stories.

A discussion of a few short stories will offer more illustrations of how folklore and philosophy come together in the writing of Das. The Crocodile Lady is a local legend based story revolving around the themes of romance, metamorphosis and self-sacrifice. To develop themes of love, responsibility and morality, the folkloric nature of the story is employed including the magical creature and its role in the story.

In A Turtle from the Blue, the plot is outlined around one of the miraculous षट्कानAs, which are contrary to the expectations. Philosophical aspects of the tale are expounding the topics of mystery and wonder, that there is something that meets the logical eye, about the world.

Similarly, One Who Lifted the Mountain employs mythical themes to develop themes of faith and piety. The story is a reenactment of a myth, which highlights the importance of spiritual values in the contemporary world (Behura, 2016).

Manoj Das also has to be put into a postcolonial context in the work where cultural identity and autonomy of current knowledge is at stake. As Das inducts indigenous folklore he validates the validity of indigenous knowledge regimes in the face of colonial and postcolonial power disparities that privilege a Western mode of thinking. (Vishwanath Bite, 2021).

In emphasising rural settings and local cultures, Das breaks with literary conventions that privilege urban and elite perspectives. Das's stories foreground the viewpoints of cultures that are excluded from the mainstream.

Lastly, the philosophical elements of his stories contribute to a project of knowledge decolonisation. By presenting philosophical speculation in terms of folklore, he subverts the idea that philosophy is something restricted to the institutionalised practice of the West. Rather,

philosophy can emerge from different cultures. This postcolonial dimension enhances his as a literary and intellectual work. It points to the need for the recognition of multiple epistemologies and the contribution of non-western philosophies to the world.

7. Discussion

The discussion reveals the relationship between folklore and philosophy in Manoj Das' works to be complex. His narratives are founded on folklore, which provides cultural and narrative contexts, and informed by philosophy, which provides intellectual and moral meaning.

This melding undermines the conventional distinction between myth and reason, and suggests narrative and philosophy are not antithetical but complementary. Das' stories illustrate an integrated model of knowledge production, in which narrative can be used as a means of philosophical enquiry (Santosh & Nayak, 2019).

This ontological element is echoed in his stories' forms of knowledge. Knowledge comes not from institutional teaching, but from experience, collective knowledge, and the spiritual. On the face of it, marginalised characters like village elders or ascetics, or even naïve characters, can know the world better than someone who relies only on reason. The reversal of the epistemic order resonates with a philosophical critique of modernity's instrumental rationality (Panchanan Dalai, 2023).

Additionally, the uncertainties and vagueness in Das's stories highlight the limits of rationality. In many of his stories, events are not resolved, leaving a world without certainty or clarity. This is in line with philosophical schools that emphasise the provisional nature of knowledge and the importance of interpretability.

This cycle of time may be seen in the motifs of repetition, return and renewal. In his stories, events from the past are repeated, which indicates a link to the past. These returns to the past highlight that human events are not part of a cosmic whole (Panchanan Dalai, 2023).

This conception of time has philosophical implications. It refutes the notion of absolute advancement or completion, it emphasises the continuity of being and the interdependence of beings. The past is not dead but is alive in the now.

8. Conclusion

We have seen in this article that Manoj Das's short stories are an amalgamation of folklore and philosophy. His storytelling techniques re-visualise traditional narratives as a means of philosophical reflection. Das's methods challenge the marginalisation of folklore in contemporary literature, and demonstrate the power of folklore to express philosophical themes. It also emphasises the role of indigenous knowledge in addressing contemporary ethical questions. More research could also be done on comparative elements of Das's work, and its relation to other literary traditions that intermingle folklore and philosophy. Such analyses would contribute to widening the scope of the nature of narratives in human lives. This study is relevant for literary criticism and philosophy. They draw the attention to the possibilities of narrative forms, particularly folklore narratives, for philosophical analysis. This crosses conventional boundaries, and calls for an interdisciplinary model of study for literature and philosophy.

For the study of literature, it stresses the need to consider cultural and narrative forms. It highlights the need to go beyond formalist approaches, and to understand the epistemological qualities of narrative. In philosophy, it stresses the importance of recognising other forms of discourse. It demonstrates that philosophy can be told, expanding ideas of philosophical discourse and the textual analysis could be complemented with empirical approaches such as reader-response studies to investigate readers' reactions to the philosophical aspects of his stories. Cross-cultural studies could also be carried out to explore the use of folklore for philosophical purposes in various

cultures. This would give us a better grasp on the nature of narrative knowledge. As the analysis above demonstrates, Manoj Das' short stories are a fusion of folklore and philosophy. This is also not an accidental or superficial feature of his stories.

In his stories, folklore embodies an active field of knowledge that comprises ethical, metaphysical and epistemological elements.

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