



Riddles in Kashmiri Folklore: Source of Sharpening intelligence and preserving culture.

Mohd Shafi Wani

Research Scholar, Cca University Of Kashmir (India)

Folklore is diverse in nature, variegated in form and has diverse functions in society. It functions as a means of delight and cohesive force in a society. It provides cultural identity and promotes group feeling among the individual and most importantly sharpening the intelligence and preserving the cultural heritage of the society.

Oral folklore in kashmiri language has universally been applauded for its diversity, plenty and antiquity. It has received much attention both by the non-native and native scholars and has been anthologized and even translated into English and some other languages. The folklore has not been studied in the light of various insights from linguistics, anthropology and ethnographies. The anticipated study aims at thorough systematic analysis of oral genre of folklore, (riddles) in terms of its ‘sharpening intelligence and preserving cultural heritage of kashmiri society.’

Though kashmiri oral folklore has been studied quite seriously by many European scholars like Father Hinton Knowles, George Grierson and Aurel Stein and the local scholars have anthologized it quite thoroughly but study of this rich legacy in the light of modern approaches is still an unexplored field of study. The proposed study shall remain restricted to the study of kashmiri riddles as a vehicle of ‘*sharpening intelligence and preserving cultural heritage within the limits of kashmiri culture.*’

I.FOLKLORE

The word folklore was first coined in 1846 A.D by an English antiquarian willim Thoms and begins as a study of antiquities. Folklore is made of two words folk and lore.

It was defined by many scholars in different ways.

Alan Dundes: “the term folk can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor.”(1)

1) According to Ellen McHale, “Every group bound together by common interests and purposes, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban possesses a body of traditions which may be called its folklore. Into these traditions enter many elements, individual, popular and even ‘literary’ but all are absorbed and assimilated through repetition and variation into a pattern which has value and continuity for the group as a whole.”(2)

2) Robert Baron and Nicholas Spitzer defined folklore as,” while folklore is private and intimately shared groups in informal settings, it is also the most public of the activities when used by groups to symbolize their identity to themselves and others.”(3)



Folklore comes early and stays late in the lives of all of us, in spite of the combined forces of technology, science, religion, urbanization, level of education and social development. We prefer our close personal association as the basis for learning about life and transmitting important observations and expressions.

Folklore reveals to us the psychic development and intellectual evolution of the man. The different stages in his social evolution are imprinted on his psyche. These psychic notes are variously expressed through arts and crafts he is engaged with, his behavior and patterns of the relations he creates with objective world reveal his cultural base. This collective consciousness and this shared experience are revealed through folklore. It is one such means where the conscious and unconscious mind of a man creates ways and means to overcome these regulation and barriers. (4)

Folklore as an element of non-material culture presents tremendous spectrum of human expression that can be studied in a number of ways and for a number of reasons. It consists of songs, legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales, riddles, customs and traditions of a group or small collectivity. It also includes the set of practices through which these expressive genres are shared.

The small part of kashmiri folklore is riddle. It is not confined to literature alone it encompasses intelligence, culture and many other aspects of social life. This source of material strongly expresses that it sharpens the intelligence and preserving the cultural heritage of the society.

II. MEANING OF RIDDLES

Merriam Webster encyclopedia of literature describes it as:

1) A deliberately enigmatic or ambiguous question requiring a thoughtful and often witty answer. The riddle is a form of guessing game that has been a part of folklore of most cultures from ancient times. Western scholars generally recognize two main kinds of riddles: the descriptive riddle and the shrewd or witty question.

The descriptive riddle usually describes an animal, person, plant, or object in an intentionally enigmatic manner, to suggest something different from the correct answer. (pp, 949), (5)

2) Robert A Georges and Alan Dundes in 1963 suggested that a riddle is a verbal expression which contains one or more descriptive elements, a pair of which may be in opposition. The referent of the element is suggested.(6) (Antti-Arne, classic book of riddles)

3) Riddle is a statement or question or phrase having a double or veiled meaning, put forth as a puzzle to be solved. Riddles are of two types :enigmas which are problems generally expressed in metaphorical or allegorical language that require ingenuity and careful thinking for their solution and coundra ,which are questions relying for their effects on punning in either the question or the answer. (7)

4) Archer Taylor says that,” we can probably say that riddle is a universal art and cites riddles from hundreds of different cultures including Finish, Hungarian, American, Indian, Chines, Russian, Dutch and Filipino sources amongst many others . many riddles and riddle themes are internationally wide spread.(8)



According to Merriam Webster dictionary, riddles are:

- 5) i) a mystifying, misleading or puzzling question posed as a problem to be solved or guessed.
- ii) Something difficult to understand.
- iii) By the beginning of the 15th century riddles acquired the sense "a puzzling or perplexing thing." (9)

Riddles according to oxford dictionary are:

- 6) A) A person or thing that is difficult to understand and explain.

b) Talk or speak in riddles:

Express oneself in an ambiguous or puzzling manner.

- c) A question or statement intentionally phrased so as to require ingenuity in ascertaining its answer or meaning. (10)

According to fairoz lugat it means:

- 6) Riddle: *muamah, chiestan, bhajurat, paheli bujhana, paheli ka hul batana*, (11)

7) By Cambridge dictionary:

Riddle: a type of question that describes something in difficult and confusing way and has a clever or funny answer, often asked as game.

- ii) Something that is confusing, or a problem that is difficult to solve.
- iii) To make a lot of holes in something. For example the anti-craft guns riddled the plan's wings with bullets. (12)

In the light of these definitions and references we can say riddles shared wisdom.

There is no doubt that a very good deal of scholarly work has been done by both European and Indian scholars to highlight the social life of Kashmir's. But while dealing with very important and sensitive dimensions of Kashmir's social life, especially wit, intelligence and culture of Kashmir's, no cognizance was given to the oral literature which otherwise forms the real mirror of Kashmir's social life. Mostly the riddles, one of the important parts of Kashmiri folklore was neglected out rightly. (13) A few people talked thoroughly about kashmiri riddles and also collected some beautiful riddles like J.H Knowles, Najimunawar, Anand Koul, Mohd Ahsan Ahsan and Moti-lal Saqi. Let's try to explain some kashmiri riddles in this context.

III.KASHMIRI RIDDLES

By eminent European scholar Rev. J.Hinton Knowles. Told that "riddles almost as much as proverbs help to discover the wit and genius of people and open up to us their real speech. "This scholar collected 140 kashmiri riddles. (14) Pandith Anand koul collected 51 kashmiri riddles. (15) Najimunawar scholar and writer of native language created 102 riddles. (16) He also collected early 55 riddles in collaboration with Moti Lal Saqi. (17) Famous anthologist of kashmiri folklore Ghulam Nabi Atash collected twenty two riddles. (18) Shabir kousar one of the young students of the kashmiri literature created some beautiful riddles as well. (19) Which shows and explains the social and intelligent aspects of kashmiri peoples. For example,

- 1) Ya Dim Gamah lach



- Gud chus nun kach (Answer: Sieve)
- 2) Atangh patangh
Tra aas
Dah Zanga (Answer: Dand hoor tad and woal)
- 3) Sir houkh ta pach kani moyi (Answer: choung ,oil Lamp)
- 4) Muthi phola kuth baran (Answer:power-electricity)
- 5) Ashod hawa gumak dawa (Answer: smoking) (18)

Mohd Ahsan Ahsan said that riddles are showing collective wit of nation; there language is phrasal and symbolic. (pp55).(19) Dr Basher Basheer said that symbolic expression of art, of kashmiri riddles, it is due to kashmiri people's natural wit and genius of kashmiri language.(pp56)(20) the riddles of the folklore is the associative imagination. It is the test, to the fertile intellect.

Riddles are more formally structured than proverbs. Available in rhythmic prose, verse or songs. It was suggested that riddles are more frequently used by children and young adults than by older people. But adults use also riddles at some special occasions, like marriage, selection of bride or bridegroom and at the selection of king or minister etc. Velcheru Narayana Rao said that, "utterances of wise people, statements of lovely ladies to young men, and utterances of deities or their priests are made up of riddles."(21)(pp87, aspects of folklore).it is interesting to see that riddles appears open-ended is actually a closed statement to be opened by the person with wit and right knowledge.

IV.Kashmiri riddles sharpening intelligence and preserving cultural heritage:

Creating riddles is not an easy job. It is an intelligent and witty work. Some kashmiri riddles are thematically similar across the world. But some are identically, typically and culturally kashmiri's own creation. The kashmiri riddles are especially intelligent work where both the aspects are found. For example

- 1) Manz bag sars dazan nar (Fire in the middle of lake)

The answer is 'samavor' literally means 'self-boiler' is a heated metal container traditionally used to heat and boil the water in it. Space for water to boil. The kashmiri samovar is a traditional kashmiri kettle to brew, boil and serve kashmiri salted tea (noon chai) and kahwa. The kashmiri samovar is made up of copper or brass. Inside a samovar there is a fire container in which charcoal and live coals are placed. Around the fire container there is a space for water to boil. It is the biggest example of the art and intelligence /wit of kashmiri's preserved in the kashmiri riddles. (22)

- 2) Ayant nahi

Phant nahi

Zanga chor ta

Lut nahi

(Answer is boat or shikara)

Boat/shikara:



This is a cultural symbol of Kashmir, used for fishing, harvesting aquatic vegetation and transport, while the most are covered with tarpaulins and are used by tourists. Some are used by floating homes by poor people. It is preserved in kashmiri riddles, even if the Dal lake and other places where these boats are found, are shrinking.

3) Hul gandith batach nachan

(Answer is watermill)

Watermill

Watermill is the ancient cottage industry of Kashmiri's. They grinding rice, wheat, maize etc. there and getting flour from it. Still at some villages watermill is used. This cultural heritage getting disappeared now a days but in the kashmiri riddles it will never disappear.

4) Huch much kukrah thool trawan

(Answer is spinning wheel)

Spinning Wheel:

A spinning wheel is a device for spinning thread or yarn, from natural or synthetic fibers. It was used in Kashmir from ancient times. While as spinning jenny and spinning frame displaced the spinning wheel during the industrial revolution. But in the rich legacy of kashmiri folklore, riddles, our important symbol of cultural heritage (spinning wheel) can be never displaced.

5) Watal kats sunsond tyok

(Answer is oil lamp)

Oil lamp:

Oil lamp is an object used to produce light continuously for a period of time using an oil based fuel source. The use of oil lamps began thousands of years ago and continues up to these days. Although not commonly. In Kashmir it was mostly used. Now a days it was replaced by electric and solar bulb and oil lamp is extinguishing. But in the treasury of riddles it will remain always shining.

6) Ad guz mamani dod guz pooch.

(Answer is needle)

Needle:

A very fine slender piece of polished metal with a point at one end and a hole or eye for thread at the other, used in sewing. Kashmiri's used needle mostly for making the shawls. About kashmiri shawl it is said, "of all Indian textiles none excels in beauty, colour, texture and design as the famous kashmiri shawl." Although Shawl making handicraft is shrinking day by day in kashmir but it cannot be delete in the riddles chapter of kashmiri folklore.

7) Dur gaya darbar gaya

Aab dashet mar gaya

(Answer is paper)

Paper:

Paper is a thin material derived from wood. It is a versatile material with many uses, including writing, printing, packaging and cleaning etc. kashmiris derived the paper from the burza tree, was famous and known as good



quality paper. It was called burza or burza del. (peel of burza tree). If burza paper is not found today in kashmir but is found in kashmiri riddles, had preserved this and will remain preserved till the kashmiri folklore is alive.

8) Cheni paila aab during

(Answer is Egg)

Egg:

Eggs are laid by female creatures of many different species. Chicken and other egg laying creatures are widely kept throughout the world. Mass production of chicken egg is a global industry. The relationship of egg with Kashmir is ancient. In the age of poverty egg was considered a big dish for the guest. It was also the source of income for many families. It is our cultural ethos. Mentioned and preserved in the riddles.

9) Jaya lazm qada war

Thod tulath luchi har

(Answer is turban)

Turban:

Customs of Kashmir are well known for their embroidery and intricate designs, which reflects the richness of the culture and landscape of the region. Among these customs turban was one of them. It was wearied by all kashmiri's. It was symbol of gentleness and part of culture. Now a day's turban remains restricted up to hilly areas. But it cannot be restricted in riddles. It will lead always in the oral folklore of Kashmir.

10) Huchvis gurs zachu zeen

That kus khasi mohiuddin

(Answer is Handloom)

Handloom:

Handloom is traditional textile art of Kashmir. The production of handloom was important for economic development in rural Kashmir. The design of kashmiri handloom was unique. This cottage industry was supporting thousands of families for their livelihood. Due to industrial revolution the handloom vanished. But in the kashmiri riddles handloom will never vanish. This valuable cultural heritage of Kashmir can remain alive till the kashmiri oral folklore is alive.

As explained culture is preserved in the Kashmiri riddles, another dimension of these riddles is sharpening the intelligence. Brain teasers are one of the best ways to refresh your mental ability and stimulate your intellectual faculty. Riddles are actually aimed to develop verbal and logical ability of the brain. These riddles happen to be most fun filled and easy ways of sharpening intelligence. The great scientist Albert Einstein rightly said, "Brain is the only human organ that does not wear out. It works more vigilantly the more you put it into action." (23)

Kashmiri Riddles, these teasing, mystifying and funny puzzles are designed to sharpen intelligence, imagination, spontaneity and emotional balance.



Riddles allow us to forget stress, sharpen our logical and mathematical thinking capabilities. Riddles prove to be a healthy exercise for our mind, rejuvenate our mood and make us the brilliant one.

REFERENCES

- 1) Dundes , Alan, The study of folklore, prentice-Hall, America 1965.
- 2) Fundamentals of Folklore: Wikipedia.
- 3) Public Folklore-1992; Wikipedia.
- 4) Majeed, Gulshan , Edit. Aspects of Folklore, Center of Central Asian Studies, University of Kasshmir, Srinagar 1997.
- 5) Merriam Webster encyclopedia of literature, Spring Field Massachusetts America 1995.
- 6) Antti Aarene , Classic book of riddles./en.m.wikipedia.org.
- 7) en.m.wikipedia.org
- 8) en.m.wikipedia.org
- 9) Merriam Webster dictionary, Masschusetts America 1995.
- 10) Oxford Dictionary.com
- 11) Fairozudin ,Molvi, jamia fairoz lugat, New Edition,Delhi ,2011
- 12) Dictionary. Cambridge.org
- 13) Fayaz,Farooq. Kashmiri Folklore;A Study in Historical Perspective.Gulshan Books,Srinagar,2008.
- 14)) Journal of the Asiatic society of Bengal, part-I, history, literature &c.No-iii-1887/books.gyawun.com).
- 15) <https://archive.org/stream/kashmiri+riddles>
- 16) Munawar ,Naji. Shurain hund naji,unpublished
- 17) Munawar,Naji and Saqi,Motilal. kasher lukibath,j&k academy of Art culture and languages, 1965.
- 18) Kousar,Shabir.kashuri prayach. Unpublished.
- 19) Atash,Ghulam Nabi,Edit. Kashure luk bath,vol,9,Academy ofArt Culture and Languages,Srinagar.
- 20) Basheer,Khalid, Edit.Tameer,Srinagar,March,April,1984.
- 21) Ibid
- 22) Majeed, Gulshan ,Edit. Aspects of Folklore, Center of Central Asian Studies, University of Kasshmir,Srinagar 1997.
- 23) samovar-wikipedia.org
- 24) www.pinterest.com