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**TRANSLATING THE MADIA GOND FOLKLORE IN MAZI KATEMUNDARICHI
SHALA: CONCERNS AND ENCOUNTERS**

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Abstract:

The book Mazi Katemundarichi Shala by G. N. Munghate is originally written in Marathi. Though written in Marathi, words and expressions in Gondi are in abundance in the course of narration throughout. The book was the recipient of the prestigious award by the state Government of Maharashtra in the year 2003 soon after its publication. It seeks our attention, perhaps, little for its artistic creation but more for its realistic description of the world of Madia Gonds in the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra which is symbolic. The name of place (Katemundari- Kate (Thorns), Mundari-any odd place) it bores, does not exist in reality says its writer. But, it is any odd place out of plenty you will meet in the tribal belt. This proclamation reminds the classic imaginary place we meet in R. K. Narayan's anthology of stories named "Malgudi". Prima-facie, the book records the pathetic story of primary education in the tribal region of Maharashtra through a committed teacher's experience, rich in realistic details. With this, the book also introspects, meditates and comments not only on education of the Madia-Gond people but exhibits their socio-cultural ethos in the backdrop. Translating such text is never easy a task the translator has already discussed in the previous paper on this book. Through this paper, the translator wishes to unfold the mysterious world of myths, folktales, legends, narratives, beliefs, customs, traditions, food habits, scarcity (of all kinds), riches (Ghotul), knowledge, commitment and everything the narrator (Teacher) experiences and finally narrates in the book for the reader. Intention behind this endeavour is to shed light on the dark corner of our cultural and social reality within the limits of this book, where the true gemstone is fighting its battle for existence from generations.

Keywords: Tribals (Adivasis), Madia Gonds, Folklore, Tribal Culture, Legends, Myths, etc.

Introduction:

Mazi Katemundarichi Shala is a work of fiction narrating the tribal world of Madia Gond community. Though, its narrator is a teacher and the book is famous for its major theme as the narrator's concern for education of the tribal children, in course of narration we unknowingly get into the life of this community. Their being, routine, hardships, traditions, customs, beliefs, festivals, myths, dance, songs, narratives, worldviews, inter and intra-relations and last but not the least their orthodoxy and backwardness from the viewpoint of contemporary beliefs form the basis of their existence. The narrator narrates mostly Madia Gonds and rarely other communities speaking Marathi language (Maral and Bhoie). Though the book is originally written in Marathi but Gondi words and expressions make their way quite frequently. In this article, the researcher



who is translator also aims at discussing the folklore of this community that finds place occasionally during the course of narration. Folklore in general and in the context of this community is a vast subject, the researcher through this paper aims at exploring this topic within the limits of the book *Mazi Katemundarichi Shala*.

Folklore:

'Folklore' is supposed to have been coined by the famous folklorist William John Thomas in 1846. By folklore he meant....the traditional institutions, beliefs, art, customs, stories, songs, sayings and other life current among backward people or retained by the less cultured classes of more advanced people (Quotes Richmond XI). It is an expressive culture shared, practiced, preserved and transferred to the next generation by a community or a cultural group. Often, it is in the form of oral traditions through narratives, tales, fables, legends, myths, and proverbs. Even dance, music, songs, food, celebrations, practices, beliefs of all kinds and even habitual routine forms the basis of folklore. The book, *Mazi Katemundarichi Shala* uses a very interesting folklore of *Madia Gond's* subtly in course of its narration.

***Madia Gond* Folklore in *Mazi Katemundarichi Shala*: An Analysis:**

The narrator, who is a primary teacher in the novel *Mazi Katemundarichi Shala* through his narration, opens the book of *Madia Gonds* of Katemundhari in terms of their life style, their routine, source of livelihood etc. People in this village unlike other villages have a different routine and way of life. They are not busy like other farmers we see in villages. Many of them keep wandering in the forest in search of food and other things of need. The narrator observes them and puts as below in his narration,

People in Katemundhari were bereft of the ideas of systematic agricultural life. Rarely a few of them plough a piece of land for crop that was limited to Paddy, *Awatya* and *Kosari*. Most of them do it purely for survival. During hours of crisis, they always go without food; such insecure was life in those broken huts in the forest. Though in poverty and hunger, these *Adivasis* seemed satisfied at heart and they appeared so when seen often under the influence of liquor extracted out of wild flowers. Perhaps, that was their need to forget their difficulties and sustain in life. I thought, maybe, I was wrong. Because, the difficulties I considered were not the difficulties for them but, the normal course of life and being under the influence of liquor made easier. In leisure time, a few *Made* would go on daily wages and rest of the time keep wandering in the forest. They collect the *Ranmewa; Moha, Tol, Dink* and *Charoli*, sell them in the weekly market to buy things of necessity like salt, chilly etc. Thus, life was busy in search of food during day and dancing with fervour or snoring during the nights (Munghate, 22).

Thus, people of Katemundhari are not farmers. They are dependent on forest for their livelihood. They are not in the habit of hoarding things; even if they wish to, but they don't have this opportunity. Mostly during critical hours, they go without food. The true mystery is further; they do not blame anybody for this condition in their life which is serious. They remain under intoxication mostly. The narrator suspects this as a medicine for forgetting their poverty and pain in life. The true reason is illiteracy and lack of knowledge the reader can understand about them.



The narrator soon after joining his school calls for a meeting. In fact, he speaks of such meetings called regularly as and when they have something to decide or inform all the people. They gather at the decided place on time secretly. Such meetings the narrator says sometimes are not less than the modern courts. This is a very good practice among the tribals which keeps the community intact in thought and practice. They have one another very good practice for entertainment. That is their occasional dance and music. *Adivasis* need no special occasion for dance and enjoyment. The narrator in the book points at one such occasion in the words,

I suggested for a meeting, but it was called by the head of the village and perhaps, they had another reason of dance in the same night. The neighbouring villagers also were there to take part in dance. The drums and *Ganjrya* were ready. The fire set a tune and everybody was enthusiastic. Young stout male and beautiful women were ready; as if they were to have *Paunmasya* (a ritual on twenty first day) of the dead teacher in their own way (Munghate, 23).

People of Katemundhari are really innocent and respectful. Madgu Patil is their leader. They follow him strictly both in word and in action. Madgu Patil also is very much responsible a person to his every core. When the teacher requested them all in meeting to send their children in school regularly, Madgu Patil translated his request in *Gondi*. They all replied in anticipation with approval saying, “*ego-ego*”. Madgu Patil introduced the new teacher as a *Devmanus*. *Devmanus* is not *Dev* (God) neither is he an Angel. He is a human being having Angelic qualities. *Devmanus* is a term used with utmost faith in the person by the people in this context. Accepting the newly appointed teacher such respectfully, soon after the murder of previous teacher for his misbehaviour can happen in Katemundhari only. In fact, it is their culture transferred from earlier generation in them. Edward W. in this context says,

The cultural values of a community gives it an identity of its own. A community gains a character and a personality of its own, because of the culture of its people. Culture is shared by the members of a community. It is learned and passed from the older generations to the newer ones. For an effective transfer of culture from one generation to another, it has to be translated into symbols. Language, art, religion and folklore serve as the symbolic means of transfer of cultural values between generations (Edward, 18).

We read about the bosom friendship the tribals have with nature through literature. People of Katemundhari also cannot imagine their life in four walls of their home or in case of children in school. Narrator shares his experience in connection with students not turning to school. Sidu, a student reveals the reason, he informs about the various reasons behind students not coming to school. Almost all of them had a valid reason behind their inability to come in school regularly. Somebody had to look after younger siblings, the other had to take the cattle for grazing and some others had to search for food in the forest. A few of them could not come just because they don't like to sit in the school for such long. Result is, they couldn't come to school. Sidu could sense the problem and he suggested tricks so as to involve them in class as follows,

Masterjilet's have school sometimes on the bank of the stream. There is a banyan tree. Students enjoy swings on its hanging roots. Once a week, we shall have our



school on the river bank. They will enjoy playing in the sand and swimming in the water. Sometimes, it should be on the peak of the nearby mountain. There it is interesting to play on the mountain slope. They will enjoy eating *dake* there. They love hunting squirrels, *lave* and rabbits. Masterji birds can also be hunted by applying gum on big *moha* trees. Let's have our school there also someday (Munghate, 25).

The *Madia Gond* community members have many traditions. They have rituals for every occasion be it birth of a child or death of an individual. It is celebrated with equal zeal and enthusiasm. Marriage is the most awaited and equally cherished ritual among the *Madia Gonds*. The narrator in the course of his narration gives ample space for detailed description of the marriage ceremony, its traditions, customs, rituals, participation of members, and their approach, its long course running in weeks, the feasts, and arrangement for the same. The narrator in one of the chapters gives detailed information of the same as follows,

Marriages in *Madia-Gond* cult exhibit the true life style of ancient human beings. If one wants to know the true relationship that human beings have with the nature, has to attend and study the rituals and performance by these people in marriages. In modern city life, it is matter of a day. In the recent times, it has been reduced to three-four hours. But among *Adivasis*, it needs weeks. The family starts planning for it well in advance. Food is offered throughout during the period. Graceful part of it is, the guests and all others attending marriage, contribute their part of collective responsibility in the organization of such celebration. Guests look after making plates out of the available tree leaves for serving food. The most important part of the marriage pendal is '*Laganmundi*'. In fact it is a wooden pillar erected at the centre. Every ritual of the ceremony is performed before the wooden pillar as if it is their ancestor and they seek its blessings in everything they are doing. It is a witness of the whole activity. The making of *Laganmundi* is very crucial part. It takes at least a week to sculpt *Laganmundi* out of a wooden log. Seven to eight skilled carpenters of the clan work through days and nights for the same. Even the band has a very important role in the *Adivasi* marriages. A big drum and its associate eight instruments are kept ready well in advance. The most important part of this marriage is, three main days of marriage ceremony and the community dance of men and women making a circle. Women wore *cowries*' necklace and crown on their head. Men also take part in this ancient ritual with all enthusiasm and zeal. They forget about the surrounding and enter into trance while dancing under the influence of liquor. Women also play their role equally.

Normally, on other occasions, only young boys and girls take part in dance. Marriage is the only occasion wherein, young, middle-aged and even old people take part in dance. All of them make a circle and with enthusiasm keep dancing and singing their folk songs, '*rela..re..lare..rela, relare*' throughout night. This blissful atmosphere imprints its auditory marks in the surrounding. It could be seen and heard from one or two miles. Their dancing in the dark and yellow-red light of the burning *tembhe* leave mesmerized. No doubt, this dance must be making them forget their poverty, problems and oddities in daily life for some time. Erstwhile, they have to work hard often and not even minimum required to feed themselves is earned by them is a fact. So, such occasions



have deeper meaning and reason to celebrate. Hence, when it is marriage, the whole of village and the relatives from nearby villages come and take part in celebration with family. One such description we witness in the text as follows,

Adivas is have a tradition of singing and dancing in every celebration. Feast is often offered after complete tiredness due to dance. They do not have to serve food. One has to take it personally whatever the dish is. Eat it, drink again and join the group singing, '*rela..re..lare..rela, relare*'. This is the only business they have on such occasions. Chief of the family has to bear huge losses for such occasions. They have to cook rice of four to six *khandi*. In short, the family organizing such marriages; spends its stock of food for the entire year within eight days and roams in search of food for the remaining days. So, often people avoid such marriage ceremonies out of fear though, they feel to have it inwardly. Many of them fall in love, live together, have children but keep their marriage postponing (Munghate, 30).

Madia Gonds survive practicing such difficult routine, the narrator reveals through the story of Sidu's family on return from marriage. They had no rice for the lunch. So the family manages not by even throwing the veneer of the crushed rice. This is reality in majority of the houses of the community. But even after that, people of this community are very sharp, physically and mentally fit and alert in whatever they do. Madgu Patil reminds the narrator that this hunger is not new for the people and they don't care for such difficulties. Rather, they fight with it every day afresh and succeed.

The members of this community never encroach on other animals or forest. Perhaps, because of this, their social life is flawless and blissful. One feature of this community is, they don't have their isolated thought. They never face the dilemma raised out of choosing person or clan. Clan is always superior to all and they never challenge this faith, hence their social life is blissful. Certain secrets and principles of their communal life they respect and follow on priority basis. Because of this responsible behaviour, they lead a happy communal life in the forest. The narrator describes the murder episode of the previously appointed teacher by the villagers for his heinous crime. Villagers in the meeting decide that no member of the village will open mouth and will speak about the event before the police inspector. They are known to the punishment of *Dhabba* if they go against the community. They can choose death but they cannot even think of disobedience. *Adivasis* are illiterate, poor, backward compared to the so called educated people but they have a very strong community life nourished and nurtured through generations we experience in this text.

Reading through the text, we also come across the *Shankar-Pata* and the colourful, affluent and energetic picture at *Bhimgadi Jatra*. Young, old, artists and even erstwhile busy people get ready in new clothes. Such occasions are awaited in the tribal regions we learn through narration. People keep a cut of their daily income especially for this occasion. On this occasion, the narrator requests Madgu Patil for his information about the myths and history behind this place and the tradition. The information shared appears unfolding the true folklore as below,

My waiting ended with arrival of Madgu Patil's horse-cart in the end. I literally got shocked after seeing him. He was dressed with coat and *feta* gifted to him by his father-in-law in his marriage. He appeared none the less than a protagonist in a drama. Clean washed *dhoti*, leather shoes and leather wrapped stick to drive the cart reminded



me of the archaic chariot image of Lord Krishna. He helped me in settling on the cart with respect. There were five well-built wrestlers walking around the cart. Out of curiosity I asked, “Why these young Ramoshis with us?” With pride he touched his moustache and explained, “If it needed in the fair or in competition to teach lesson to the extremists, they will be of help.” Thus, our procession in the cart set for the fair. I felt like I am accompanying the king of Katemundhari for this event. I enquired Patil, “What is the speciality of this occasion, so that all people have set for it in all enthusiasm?” Patil explained the history behind this myth. Patil use to inaugurate the *Mandi* at *Bhimgad* by worshipping the God on the mountain. His offering of the coconut used to signal the start. Then the mob would dance with all fervour on the drums and *Manjri*. The villages in this vicinity remain calm from the time of rainy season almost for six months. With arrival of this festive occasion they woke up with zeal and make start of new life. One another story about the importance of this place is, nearby there is a range of mountains named after *Bajargaon*. On the mountain peak there is a stone erected. During the times of need in the history, that stone has been used as a bell to inform the landlords and *Adivasi* kings. It is said that, to gather them against the Britishers it was used effectively. But, later on, when they offered certain degrees and won the feudal lords, they could establish their rule in this part. Now, nothing is in order. Britishers left and with them dissolved the honour of these landlords. People come to know about the performance of puja annually of the deity with the sound of this stone and same is the signal for the fair to start. It is followed by colourful exuberance of people forgetting their self and becoming one with the mob.

Adivasis are very strict in observance of their traditions and customs. In the book, the narrator presents one such event of honesty to their custom through the event of death. Sadu’s father wanted help from Guruji but that he refuses to take as help. He has brought a brass pot to mortgage against the money that he needed from the narrator. He says, “Masterji, the money we offer to the dead need to be our own. We cannot offer borrowed money to the dead. So, you please keep this vessel and give me two rupees.” These *Advasis* have a treasure of such proverbs full of self-respect about their clan. Kinnary Bharatbhai Patel quoting R. B. Browne says about proverbs, “To the most credulous members of society, proverbs and the proverbial expressions are the accumulated knowledge of the ages, the voice of the history, they are tried and true, and as such are pragmatic unassailable wisdom” (Tribal Folklore of India).

Conclusion:

To conclude, Katemundhari is a place where we have everything necessary for the people. They have a set pattern of doing things. Disseminating information among the villagers and performing rites and rituals, the news of somebody’s demise is informed by *Kotwal’s munari*. They drink while in procession, dance and bid farewell to the dead happily. A stone is erected in the memory of the dead and is called *Karsal*. They believe that the dead person becomes a part of the deity named *Karsal*. They do not have separate grave-yards. Dead body is buried nearby the living area. Thus *Madia Gonds* have their language, capable words, proverbs, narratives, myths, legends to sustain in life. However poor they are but their riches we see in hours of need.



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