

Gender dimensions of punjabi folklores



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The present study aimed to identify the gender images depicted in riddles posed by women and men of the rural areas. It was assumed that stereotypical images are depicted through riddles and gender images of riddles reveal a great deal about the societal attitudes toward gender and toward structuring the individual's identity and identification of the gender role. And by these riddles, gender roles has been analyzed in which women are seen as submissive, obedient and caregivers whereas the men are considered to be the breadwinners, prominent and strong. The study consisted of collection and documentation of riddles.

The present study also intends to identify the contribution of women and men in the formulation of gender specific dimensions through riddles which articulated and reinforce the masculine and feminine images, prevalent in rural society of Punjab.

Culture is the way of people's life, which is consisting of both material as well as ideological components. Culture consist straight patterns of thought and behavior, including values, norm, belief, rules of political organization and economic activity etc. Culture isn't biological inheritance, it passed-on from one generation to the next by learning and oral transmittion (Decorse & Raymond, 1992).

Every culture is different from other and has different cultural values. It is not a creation of single man but emerge through different people who lived there and share land and emotions (Maswan, 1977).

Culture is mixture of norms, belief, and values, which are orally transmitted to one generation to another generation. Oral tradition is one of the oldest

forms of art in any society that transmitted their values, belief and norms through communication. In world two third of it population are preferred to orally communicate (Kalim, 1978).

Every culture has its own values and traditions, Pakistan as a culture contains multi-cultural values and traditions. It has lots of influence by their neighboring cultural areas like Central Asia, Iran, the Arab World and India. Pakistan has strong cultural and historical roots. Modern Pakistan was the land of Indus civilization which was mixture of Persian, Indo-Greek and Islamic cultures. Pakistan has been arranged by the Aryans, Persians, Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Afghans, Mongols and the British. Pakistani folklore contains elements of all of these cultures. In Pakistan first phase of folklore was collected and started by British rural (Report of SARRC Tourism of Pakistan, 2010).

In Pakistan, because of different culture, the different languages are spoken. Each of the language spoken in Pakistan has unique quality of poems, songs, stories and proverbs which are associated with its cultural norms and values (Ultey, 1968).

According to Agarwal, Punjab is a vast plain dotted with thousands of villages that are of great importance to be studied. Like other societies, the rural society of Punjab is a patriarchal society. Patriarchy is a phenomenon which is prevailing in most of the cultures in the world. It is a form of social organization that structures the dominance of men over women where social institutions construct gender differences in the society and women are

considered as private or communal property and men as the natural heirs of all power (Agarwal, 1994).

Quddus discussed in his research that, Punjabi is traditional language of Pakistan (Punjab) which is spoken since Middle age. The first written Punjabi sample was found in 13th century, which was short verse of Baba Farid Shakar Ganj. By the 16th century; Peelo, a poet has notable contribution in Punjabi literature, who was also the writer of Mirza Sahiban. In Pakistan, mostly the folklores are prevailing in Punjab (Quddus, 1992).

“Folklore” is a complex meaning of “folk,” which mean common people, and “lore” means the knowledge or traditions. Hence folklore is the tradition of common people and it is also a source to express the culture (Ultey, 1968).

In oral tradition Folklore is considered as main source of information which moves in multiple generations. In Folklore and folk life, include the all way of living in that particular cultural through which people can become a member of that culture (Hassan, 1995).

Research done by Quddus (1992) concluded that folklore plays the significant role to express the culture, through folklores the norms tradition and values are shared form one area to another or one generation to another. In Folklores basically the characteristic of that culture are shown, that also help to expose any culture within a particular population comprising the traditions of that culture, subculture, or group (Quddus, 1992).

According to Ultey (1968), folklore helps to understand the past and also often help to shape the present. Folklore is then, is an important oral tradition, transmitted by word of mouth, source of learning in specific culture that starts from lullaby which used to sing when children are very little. Through lullabies, folk stories, proverbs, riddles, actually the roles and norms of that specific culture are transmitted and internalized by the person that how life can spend. These norms and tradition supports person through out the whole life. These folklores are dominating on whole part of man's life like folk song sing at the time of happiness, riddles proverb indirectly give the message of norm and belief (Ultey, 1968).

Folklores are the oral literature and are also a form of socialization. Gender roles, in particular, are reflected in legends, tales, and myths etc traditionally shared in oral traditions of particular interest. Folklore oral literature provides a rich source of cultural history and socialization, transmitting and reinforcing messages associated with central values (Allen etal, 2006).

Folklores work as vehicle, through which tradition circulate, like tool to transform values from one culture to another culture. Folklores serve both as entertainment as well as socialization, where gender roles and images are depicted. Through folklores the man and women socially accepted role is explained. These roles and duties are slowly changed with passage of time but still practices in any shape in world. Gender images created by folksongs can therefore reveal a great deal about the societal attitudes toward gender (Mahan, 1978).

Tempest stated in her research that folklores are the most important tool of socialization as these are sometimes used as stereotype. Different kinds of stereotype roles are being presented through folklores (Tempest, 2001).

Munir (1990) described in his research that, in Pakistan large number of unwritten folklores passes orally from generation to generation. The crafts, rituals, legends, epics, ballads, folk tales, songs dances and riddles are still alive today and their main characteristic are the mixture of different culture and region which makes the culture as unique and specific. But fusion of different culture doesn't become the cause of removal of originality of Pakistani culture. The patterns of culture clearly move on its own right way. This diversity and dynamic of cultural make our heritage powerful and alive (Munir, 1990).

Shahed said that folk literature is changed and diminished due to urbanization. He stated that in older times folk literature was related to land, peasantry and traditional things but now knowledge is transformed because of urbanization (Shahed, 1993).

Folklores have broad ranges of expression. It can be oral, material, and behavioral. folklores include; ballad which is traditional poem or folksong, fairy tales which are traditional stories, conveying stereotypical messages, folk dance are also called ethnic dance that are originated with the common people of the cultural group, folk song is a traditional song that is collected for different occasion and handed down orally, joke is a technique in which game of word play, in humorous way that provoke laughter, legends are traditional historical tales usually containing a mixture of fact and fiction but

regarded as true, superstition is an irrational belief usually involving supernatural forces and associated with rituals, folk tales popular tales, which are love stories and mostly tragically ended, Folk games are those games which are traditionally very famous; these are practice and passed from generation to generation and riddles are linguistic puzzle in the form of a question which also containing clues to its solution (Bruchac etal, 2004).

Riddle is one of the aspects of folklore which is important medium for transmitting of culture, education, knowledge and skills to children. Riddles play important roles as a means of socialization and social learning. Riddles are actually puzzle, games of words, it can be comprised of one or two sentences or more than that, which can be solved through interaction and symbolic activities (Eastman & Kallen, 1979).

A riddle is a mysterious statement and description that contains a hidden meaning to be guessed by to whom it is addressed. Riddles also involve analogy of meaning, sound, Rhythm, or tone (Fant, 1985).

Mostly riddles are taken as a game and structure of those riddle are like question, through its analyses and definition other people assume the answer. Riddles have binary relation, which has question and answer of it. Riddles are formulated in special sitting, in which two or more then two people sit in one place, one asks the riddle's question and other person or persons guess its answer. Mostly these sitting are arranging in some occasion like harvesting, in evening, leisure time, in homes, in field and any other social meeting, where group of people assembled, belong to same culture; know about tradition, belief, etc (Burns, 1976).

The riddling can be played in different ages of people. In some tradition only children engage in riddling. In some tradition adults can participate in the riddling of children, in some traditions riddling is mostly an adult hobby. In some traditions, riddling is mostly an activity associated with only males. But in the majority of cultures it is leisure-time activity or traditions, both male and female participate in this activity and they also participate in mixed groups including both women and men while elsewhere females are said to specialize in formulation of riddles. It is general belief that females are more intelligent than man and riddles require intelligence. Riddles mainly based on common household items, crops names, animals names, daily activities, heavenly objects, cultural artifacts, parts of the body, etc. (Green & Pepicello, 1984)

There are no proper and strict rules and regulations for riddling, that has to follow. But mostly two or three things are arranged before to start riddling, that is to have people who ask question or guess answer, and the event or scenario from which riddle asked. Nevertheless these rules are important, whether it is verbal activity. Riddles functions as umbrella categories, of socialization, entertainment, and education (Burns, 1976).

According to Messengers (1960), Riddles are part of folklore so through folklores, culture and tradition are transferred from one generation to another. Riddle inculcates the culture and proper behavior of life in a child. Interesting sessions and repetition of asking riddles mostly memorize the children who repeat it with their friends, or other people and learn them (Messenger, 1960).

Research done by Tempest (2001) found that riddles are type of folklores that are used to convey the stereotype messages. These stereotypes are also gender related and these riddles are mostly categorized between boys and girls, sons and daughters (Tempest, 2001).

Another function of riddling is entertainment that plays in leisure time which is called leisure-time riddling. Riddling is also play in greeting occasion like marriage ceremony where people are gathered and enjoy their gathering (Burns, 1976).

Riddle is usually played by people to entertain themselves during long winter nights. Of course it also helps to measure the intelligence of the people. Another time at which riddles are also played when people busy in field with harvesting they also play riddling for time pass and entertainment etc (Green & Pepicello, 1984).

According to Ishengoma (2005), riddles have important educational value because they develop critical thinking and memory among young children. It is meant for entertainment and education as well, especially for child's learning. In addition to enjoyment, riddles help in memory training for children as they are expected and encouraged to remember the correct answer to the riddles. They play important role in socialization and social learning of children. But riddles are still prevailing to use for education purpose as device to learn about cultural value, attitudes, and to teach dominant and submissive roles (Ishengoma, 2005).

Green & Pepicello (1984) discussed in the research that the main role of riddle is socialization of younger generation, that know about the items of

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daily routine like name of crops help to know about it, then their season of harvesting and using of that crops, these information are internalize through riddle. Riddles helped children to learn about gender roles and duties, their characteristic, culture and tradition according to which they spend their life (Green & Pepicello, 1984).

On the other side is also criticize that riddle has lacking the capacity to improve the mind, because riddle has stereotype question and answer and mostly answer is already known to the audience (Awedoba, 2000).

Riddles have been a rich oral tradition, without doubt, throughout the world. Some societies play it in present times also. Now the concept of riddling is less in urban and rural population, but still play in rural population. Because in rural population has less source of entertainment like video, television, cinema and many others are not available. So people enjoy through riddles (Green & Pepicello, 1984).

Gender Roles are assigned by different folklores which gives identity. It means these biological and social characteristics become social-identity. These identities are internalizing in every person, and motivated to play these roles which actually culture associated with them, because those roles are socially and culturally accepted (Hassan, 1995).

Culture also constructs the gender specific socio-economic differences in roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities and needs of men and women. These are set up in opposition to biological sex.

“ Gender is a process of allocation of differences that is varied according to time and space, it needs to be historicized and situated geo-politically but also in terms of other structural variables such as social class, age, race, ethnicity, religion and sexuality.”

(Eagly, 1987)

Gender roles are socially and culturally constructed and are a dynamic term that can be changed over time. Gender roles refer to the rights, responsibilities, expectations, and relationships of men and women. Gender is a logical concept for examining the status of women and men in a culture. Social Construction of gender is an end result of the process of socialization where the values, norms, beliefs, wisdom, philosophy, customs, skills and practices of the society are learned, acknowledged and internalized. (Njau, 1994)

Through the process of socialization, values and behavior patterns associated with maleness and femaleness, are learned, acquired and assimilated. Gender roles are affected by socio-cultural expectations, qualities and behaviors that are expected from a male or a female by their society. These expectations originate in the pre-conception that certain qualities and roles are ‘ natural’ for women and ‘ unnatural’ for men. Males and females are socialized through social pressure, learning condition and act according to the different traits that society considers ‘ suitable’ for them. Socialization aims at preparing individuals for their respective roles in society, installing principles, forming individuals and making them practical members of society.

“ Socialization means that people are taught to accept and perform the roles and functions fixed by society for them. Men and women are socialized to accept different gender roles from birth till death. Establishing different roles and expectations for men and women is a key feature of socialization in most societies. While men and women differ on account of their biological and anatomical constitution, gender differences are a product of socio-cultural traditions, which are created and perpetuated through cultural forms such as belief systems and rites as well as through proverbs and tales.”

(Kabira, 1994)

Society is an enduring and cooperating social group, whose members have developed organized patterns of relationships through interaction with each other. It is also a broad grouping of people having common traditions, collective activities and interests. Social groups develop society. Every society has its own norms, customs and traditions, which depend on its geographical and social culture also. Through socialization individuals, are prepared for their respective roles in society to make them useful members of society (Edgar, 1987).

Male family members are considered the breadwinner and head of the household and make decisions for family members. The sexual division of labor is hierarchical with men on top and women on bottom.

“ In Punjabi culture, it is society, who ascribes various roles for men and women in a fixed location and family life is determined by the men folk alone due to the customs of patrilineal character in the families that is found there. Customs and property generally flow from the male persons of the previous

generation to the next generation and women of the family have no articulation in family matters.”

(Quduss, 1992)

The study aims to look the functionality and importance of riddles in Punjabi society. The significance of the present study can be used as a source in reviewing the riddles that had been posed in past by village people and will present gender images depicted in riddles. It will also explain how gender is portrayed in these riddles and how this folklore play important role in socialization process. The present study also had a unique dimension as a very few researches had mainly focused on riddles. The purpose to conduct this research is to preserve our cultural-lore which was diminishing with the passage of time. The study would be focused towards collection and analysis of riddles. It was an attempt to capture and understand the feelings of people of the rural society of Punjab.