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Phagwa Poetries: A Glimpse at Indian Literature on Phagwa

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Abstract

The present paper discusses` Portrayal of Phagwa in poetry verses. Phag is Uttar Pradesh folk song sung on the occasion of Holi. While celebrating the festival of Phagwa, the beauty of nature and the love of Radha Krishna is depicted. The Phagwa songs are sung in the form of music as Hori in vocal classical music .Many poets of Bhakti Movement had taken Holi as symbol of showering of divine grace in the form of Rang. A number of literary pieces on Phagwa by leading writers and poets are examined.

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This paper examines the portrait of Phagwa in Indian Literature. Phagwa or Phagwa is a folk song sung in Uttar Pradesh; it is also sung in other parts of India and certain parts of the world. Different communities, cultures, races and religious traditions celebrate this festival according to their own traditions and faith. But the thread which interweaves through this diversity is the thread of ecstasy. The spring in Indian heartland marks the festival of 'Holi' in Vocal and Classical Music bridging the summer and spring. While celebrating the festival of Phagwa, the beauty of nature and celestial glow of Radha and Krishna are glorified. Phagun is a word for Holi in local Bhojpuri dialect.

Phagun or Holi has inspired the resonant outpourings of art and literature in India. Since time immemorial, this festival finds glorious expressions in scriptures especially Jamini's Purva Mimansa Sutras. Description of Holikostav are found in the 17th Century work Ratnavali of King Harsha. The Festival is also mentioned in text of Vishnupurana.

The representations of Phagwa that occurs in the literary canvas of Indian poets form entirely a new genre presenting before us a variety of word pictures of Phagun. Phagun festival reinforces the eternal theme of our meaningful existence on this earth i.e., victory of good over evil. Holi celebrations begin on the night before Holi with Holika Dahan. On this occasion we pray for our internal well-being and forgive others. People carry drums and other musical instruments, sing and dance, drench each other with colors. Holi is associated with a number of agricultural products variety of foods, mixture of cultures, poetic and musical get-together.

Shades of human love in the backdrop of Phagun

In the first set of poems cited here are those which were written by poets to express the impact of Phagun on human mind. The odour of spring season fills the mind and psyche of poet. In the poem *Tan ke tar chuye bahuton ne man ka taar na bheega* Harivansh Rai Bacchan comments on the depth of true love in which the lover transcends from worldly relationships to reach the height of celestial love. Unless and until one is able to touch the mind and soul of someone there is no meaning in that relationship. Getting drenched into the color of pure love one can feel or understand the joy inherited in the festival of Holi.

Delighted with the festivity of spring Jaishankar Prasad, another Chhaya-vadi poet, sees Holi as *Vishva mein Aisa Sheetal khel*. The poet metaphorically says that Holi is a festival to renew and rebuild ruptured emotional relationships. He defines this festival as a chance to cool our burning desire and sentiments by spreading colors on each other. The peace and harmony that follows Holi celebration is referred to here.

The references of Holi are innumerable in Urdu poetry Nazeer Akbarabadi, who wrote eight songs about Holi. Nazeer feels elated with joy to see the fun and frolic at the festival of Holi.

*Holi ki hai baharein,
Jab phagun rang jhamakte hori,
tab dekh baharein Holi ki,
aur dekh ke shor khadakte ho
tab dekh baharein Holi ki...*

The Urdu poet, constantly desirous of expressing his views on multiculturalism, wrote:

*Amir Khusro has well said,
There is color today o mother there's such color today,
There is such color in my beloved's home today.*

Khusro was not only an enthusiastic Holi player but also composed verses for this occasion:

*Aaj rang hai maa rang hai more Khwaja ke ghar Aaj
Rang hai mohe peer payo Nizamuddin Auliya,
Desh-videsh mori peeli re tere rang bhaiyyo Nizamuddin
Auliya aaj sajan mila more angan mein.*

Much has been written on Holi by poets and writers. The feelings of Bharatendu Harishchandra are captured as follows:

*Gale mujhko laga lo ae dildar Holi mein,
Bujhe dil ki lagi bhi to ae yaar Holi mein*

Holi is a time to embrace each other with love by forgiving and forgetting the past.

*Sajan Holi aayi hai
Sukh se hansna
Jee bhar gana
Masti se man ko bahlana
Parv ho gaya aaj
Sajan Holi aayi hai
Hansane hum ko aai hai*

.....
*Dukhmay Jeevan ko bahla le
Masti ki aag
Rang udati madhu barsati
Kankanmeinyauvanbikhrati
Ritu Vasant ka raj
Lekar Holi aayi hai
Jilane humko aaihai
-Phaneshwarnath 'Renu'*

Shades of the beauty of nature in the context of Phagun

This celebration is marked by spreading colors all around, blossoming of flowers, insects coming out of their hidden corners and birds melodiously chirping in the sky. The main thrust of the poets is on the shift of the things as the dark and gloomy winters give way to vibrant and blissful season. The morning sings for the end of the dreadful winter.

Suryakant Tripathi Nirala, in one of his representative nature poems Sakhi vasant aaya, expresses very well that with the onset of spring every object of nature looks anew:

*Sakhi vasant aaya
Bhara harsh man ke van navotkarsh chhaya....
Svarna shasya anchal prithvi ka lehraya*

The poet is overjoyed to see the greenery all around. The rapturous sound of birds resonates in the atmosphere. Everything is filled in the juice of joy and love.

The beauty of nature shaped Tagore's poetic sensibility. In *Elem Notun Deshe* the poet visualizes his lurk into an outland with his beloved in the crimson month of Phalgun to relish the nature's grace.

*We believed that in the full flush of youth,
And with Phalgun's spring time surge of desire,
Clove vines word ring with their anchor bells,
As damsels unfurled their flowing tresses in the south wind.*

The merriment of the spring season is brought out in the words weaved by the poet. These lines capture and compare the bloom in the nature during the spring time with the bloom in the desire of a youthful girl. Tagore talks about clove vines unfurling just as the damsel's anklet bells as if the surge in nature

uplifts the awakening as she unchained herself from the rigid norms of the society. The juvenile girl lets herself flow as free as the south winds. Nature all-around is filled with the music of joy. The stream of ecstasy is flowing in the atmosphere. Absorbed in the aesthetics of nature, Tagore in his *Cycle of Spring* (1917) sings what a strange time is this that comes out of the music of spring?

Toru Dutt finds tranquillity in spring while year-round she spends recounting the sorrows. In *The Young Captive* she says:

*I am only in spring,—the harvest I'd see,
From season to season like the sun I would be*

Relishing nature in its full bloom Kedarnath Singh says *Geeton se bhare din phagun ke ye gae jaane ko jee karta* which marks the joyousness spread out and surrounding us during Phagun. He expresses his innermost wish to sing the festive song whole day as they probably resonate with the song of his soul. The traditional songs of Phagun which are generally sung in groups, paves the way for mankind to come in contact with their fellow men and get colored in the shades of glee and contentment.

In a beautiful poem *Dheere dheere utar kshitij se* the elegance of Phagwa season is realized by eagerness.

*Dheere dheere utar kshitij se
Aa vasant rajani.....
Sun priya ki padchaap pulkit ho gayi ye avani*

Mahadevi Verma welcomed spring night as a beautiful bride whose echoing footfalls delight and decorate the place where they fall. Such personification of nature is used as a hyperbole to intensify the human-nature bond.

Graceful sensuality of color and love is grounded in Kalidasa's *The Seasons*. Indian tradition is relished as a realization of literary qualities. Music of love resonate with blossom of spring.

*The lakes are bright with lotuses,
The women bright with love;
The days are soft, the evenings clear
And charming; everything
That moves and lives and blossoms, dear,
Is sweeter, in the spring.
(The Spring : An extract from The Seasons)*

It is an evocative poem where Kalidas calls spring '*Rituraja*'. A poem on how lovers react to the changing landscape.

In *The Magic of Spring* Sarojini Naidu exhibits her expression as a poetess, sprinkling her poetic endeavour with colors of hope and sunshine.

*The koels began to sing,
The soft clouds broke in a twinkling tide
My heart leapt up in its grave and cried.
"Is it the spring, the spring?"*

The poetess visualizes spring with effervescence of optimism and courage. She views death as a measure of time, despite whose arrival she is passionate enough to unite herself with the spirit of spring. She vividly depicts imaginative justness of nature. She brings out the theme of revival. The poetess has an acute desire to overcome her tensions and tumults. The singing of the cuckoo bird denotes sunrise, hope and rejuvenation. The poet presents before us an imagery, of how the oncoming of spring makes the environment chirpy, bright and spontaneous. The clouds of dreary winter are parting to give way to sun rays and aspirations. Her heart leaps up from the hopeless grave like body and starts welcoming the spring season. Fascinated by the sight and beautiful color of nature, Sarojini Naidu sings:

*The earth is ashine like hummingbirds wing,
And the sky like kingfisher feather,
O' come let us go and play with the spring.
(The Call of Spring)*

The poetess has compared the shining earth to that of the gleam of the wings of a hummingbird. When sunlight reflects on it, she also imagines as if flowers of different colors blossom in the prime time. Next, she compares the sky to the kingfisher's feathers. The joy prevailing in the atmosphere clears the sky. Likewise our heart's hope and desires also get renewed with the onset of spring time.

Revelation of the poets imbued in the divine hue

Lord Krishna is one of the supreme muses of Indian art. It is obvious that he remains at the centre of all Holi descriptions. In majority of poems he is seen playing Holi with Radhika.

Poetry of Raskhan, Surdas, Meera, Kabir, Saint Bulleh Shah etc. portray Holi celebration in which the mystical rendering can be observed.

Meera is dyed deep in the love of Giridhar. She is soaked in the five colors. Meera loves her divine bridegroom with the loyalty of a young wife.

*In the month of Phagun
they celebrate Basant Panchami
and all sing songs.
Giridhar is playing Holi,
He plays to perfection,
The flute, the lute and the drums,
Along with his companions,
The women of Braj...
He sings the appropriate songs for Holi
Clapping exquisitely in time with the music
That great artist shyam is playing Holi ,
And all Braj is flooded with joy.*

Meera says that only those who have felt the gash know the pain of love wounds. She feels desolate. She enjoys nothing in separation.

*Kin sang khelu Holi
Piya taj gaye hain akeli, (Meera bai)*

Meera seems to be reflecting on the difficulties of spiritual love.

*Holi khelat hai Girdhari,
Murali chang bajat daf nyaro,
Sang jubati brij naari. (Meerabai)*

Colors play a vital role in our cultural and spiritual land. The artists use color to paint their deities and adornments.

*Gopia ai nand ke dware,
Khelat phag Vasant Panchmi, pahunche nand dulare
Kou agar kumkuma kesar,
Kahun ke mukh par daare
Kou abeer gulal udaave,
Anand tan na sambhare
Mohan ko Gopi nirkhat sab,
Neeke badan nihare
Chitavani mein sabhi bas kini Manmohan chitchore,
Tal mridang murli dhap baje*

*Jhanjhar ki jankare
Surdas Prabhu rijhi magan bhaye
Gop vadhu tan ware (Surdas)*

Inspired by Krishna frolicking with Gopikas in Mathura, much of this sort of poetry derives its spirit or essence from the ideas of unconditional surrender in love.

*Hari sang khelati hai sab phag.
Ihi mis karati pragat gopi,
Ur aantar ko anurag
Dasahu disa bhayo paripuram,
Sur surang pramod (Surdas)*

This is an excerpt from writing of Surdas, a noted Bhakti poet, who envisioned himself as the bride of Lord Krishna. He portrays how beautifully and gracefully the Gopies are dressed up and express their love for Hari under the pretext of Holi. Flute and other musical instruments reverberate in nature just making Braj an earthly paradise.

Raskhan describes the most popular celebrations of Phagun in Braj, a region surrounding the Yamuna river where the festival not only sounds the festival of colors but also glorify the celestial love of Radha and Krishna.

*Phagun lagyo sakhi jab te,
Tab te brajmandal dhoom machayyo hai..*

Raskhan continues:

*Ritu phagun niyarani ,
Koi piya se milave*

Here Kabir uses the metaphor traditionally employed by the mystic devotees to refer to themselves as female counterpart. With the arrival of spring season the poet is intensely craving for divine communion. He strongly pines for quenching his spiritual thirst to have the vision of the graceful look of the divine bridegroom as if the beauty of the month Phagun has doubled his quest for God realization.

*Saheb hai rangrej chunari,
Mori rang daari*

Kabir refers Saheb for the divine and chunar for his soul. The divine has showered his grace and illumined his soul by coloring it with the light of truth. The lord is an expert in coloring the impure worldly cloth in divine color. The divine color expert was so benevolent that the poet surrendered himself completely at the sacred feet of his master. The dirt of life has been washed away by the water of divine love and the sari of the poet is looking bright and beautiful.

*I am dyed in the hue of the lord's name,
In a hue that can never fade there is no color in the world,
That can vie with the color of god
All other colors are washed away by the gorgeous color of name
(Kabir: The Weaver's of God's Name)*

The colors of material pleasure and attachments easily fade the seeker who turns within and tastes the bliss of inner regions, as dyed in the indelible color of love and devotion. The devotee remains absorbed in divine meditations. Says Kabir:

*In a color that is constant
In a hue that will never fade;
In a glorious flush of divine love,
Kabir stays forever immersed.*

The name of god washes away passions and worldly attachments. The divine name purifies the mind and saturates the rich color of divine love.

*Satguru Ho Maharaj
Mohe sai rang dara.*

Colors play a very important role in culture and religion. The color of love has greater implications and helps one to transcend the wall of worldly impurities. One can withdraw oneself from the material world to relish the divine truth all at once.

In a spirit of ecstasy these visionary poets proclaim their oneness with their Divine counterpart. Such rapturous and mystical declarations and outpourings are the real jewels of the literary ocean. Those who establish communion with God are dyed in the indelible hue of divine love. One who is drenched in the celestial hue, all other worldly colors become dull and meaningless to them. This thematic study of literature produced in the context of Phagun can be appreciated and enjoyed by the real seeker of spiritual bliss in all times to come. In a spirit of ecstasy these great poets proclaim their oneness with their divine counterparts.

Such rapturous and mystic outpourings are the real pearls of literary oceans. Those who established communion with god are dyed in the indelible

divine hue. Poets who are drenched in divine colors considered other worldly colors as dull and meaningless.

It will be no exaggeration to say that the season of Phagun finds a salient account in the domain of Indian Literature, be it the exploration of human love or the portrayal of spring and Phagun in nature poems or the revelations of poets embracing their counterparts in divine love, Phagun or Phagwa has fostered in Indian Literature from eons ago. The relevance of this entire project lies in illuminating these different explorations and the thread which coheres them together to form a unified universal theme. Winter season symptomizes suffering, hopelessness, dullness, barrenness but the onset of spring season absolves all our agony, suffering, separation by rejuvenating our lives with new hopes, aspirations, creativity, love, harmony and bliss. We never contemplate on the reason why we feel so revived during spring time. The real answer to this question lies beyond any human comprehension. This is the central motif around which the poems having different supramental shades and dimensions are composed, which this paper aimed at highlighting.

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