

## Elements of Naturalism in The Folktale Enchanted Mandolin of Kurukh Literature: A Comparative Perspective

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### Abstract

In literature Naturalism displays how nature and living conditions affect human life. Naturalism often presents nature as powerful, indifferent, and sometimes cruel In Western literature. There are some writers like Thomas Hardy, Émile Zola, and Stephen Crane who claim that environment and fate-controlled human beings. But the Oraon Kurukh literature have different opinion about naturalism. Unlike western thoughts this folk tradition is connected veery deeply with nature and it respects its ecological values. The Kurukh folktale *Enchanted Mandolin* expresses that nature is not cruel or indifferent but it is shown as kind, helpful, living, considerate, and morally guiding. It supports in healing and restoring balance. This research paper studies the naturalistic elements in the folktale *Enchanted Mandolin* and compares them with Western naturalism. In this paper it is discussed that Kurukh naturalism gives a positive and ethical view of nature, which challenges the negative and pessimistic ideas found in Western naturalism.

**Key Words:** Naturalism, Mandolin, pessimism, determinism, ecological, ethical, dimensions.

### Introduction

Naturalism is a literary movement that started in the late nineteenth century as an extension of realism. It shows life objectively and gives emphasis on the influence of nature, environment, heredity, and social conditions on human beings. In naturalistic literature, characters are often depicted as strugglers who fight against forces beyond their control such as poverty, social oppression, and harsh natural surroundings. Instead, the Kurukh tribal literature, belonging to the Oraon community of India, reflects many elements of naturalism. The Kurukh people are mainly live in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal. Their language, Kurukh, is considered to be one of the languages of Dravidian family. The literature of Oraon people is developed through oral traditions such as folk songs, myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, and ritual chants. Today, written literature in Kurukh has also developed. Since this tribe is deeply connected with the nature the themes and style of Kurukh literature strongly reflect naturalistic elements.

In Kurukh literature the folktales emphasize interconnection and coexistence with the nature, in contrast to Western literary traditions that frequently divide individuals from the natural environment. In the current Folktale *Enchanted Mandolin* a terrible human struggle is described and it is also discussed how that problem is settled by natural forces rather than by social institutions.

### Literature Review

In the late nineteenth century Naturalism, became a separate tendency within realism in Western literary which was influenced by determinism and scientific ideas. According to the writings of Thomas Hardy, Stephen Craneand, Émile Zola, literary naturalism places a strong emphasis on how the environment and genetics shape character and destiny. It very often depicts a world that is unconcerned with human misery and desires. According to Zola's views, the book is a sort of scientific experiment in which characters are influenced by forces outside of their control and nature doesn't seem to care about morality (Encyclopedia.com; Britannica). Western naturalism, which gives stress to the harsh social and biological forces that affects human behaviour

and often result in decline or degeneration, is criticized for having a tendency toward pessimism and material determinism (Encyclopedia.com). On the other hand, multidisciplinary methods like eco-criticism

### Objectives

The aims of this study are to evaluate how the tribals are closely interlinked with the nature and how nature, animals, and ecological forces shape human destiny and moral order in Kurukh (Oraon) literature, as well as to analyse the naturalistic components in The Folktale of the *Enchanted Mandolin*. The purpose of this paper is to show the comparison of Kurukh naturalism with Western literary naturalism especially with regards to determinism, human suffering, and the moral role of nature. The paper also aims to examine the unique characteristics of indigenous naturalism, highlighting its morally sensitive and restorative perspective on the environment. Lastly, by emphasizing the ethical and ecological aspects of Kurukh folktales, the study advances the discussion on comparative literature and eco-criticism.

### Hypotheses

Unlike the deterministic and apathetic depiction of nature found in Western literary naturalism, the Folktale *Enchanted Mandolin* represents a type of naturalism in which nature plays an active role as an ethically responsive agent.

Secondary Hypotheses: The folktale's animals and natural elements serve as moral mediators, helping people in ways that aren't found in Western naturalist literature.

The story illustrates moral equilibrium and ecological fairness, implying that Kurukh naturalism incorporates moral and healing values that are lacking in the gloomy perspective of Western naturalism.

### Summary

There were four brothers and one sister in a family. Since the brothers worked in the field the sister stayed at home to cook for the brothers. One day while preparing lunch she cut her finger with knife while cutting the vegetables. She was afraid of her brothers that if they saw the blood stain at home, they will shout at her so she wiped the stain on the veggies. She then cooked the veggie. The brothers admired the dish and curiously asked the sister what ingredients she used. She told the truth what happened to her and how she wiped her blood on the dish. The greedy brothers wondered and thought how delicious her flesh would be if her blood was so delicious. The three oldest brothers planned to kill their sister to eat her. One day they took her into the forest. When they discovered a suitable place, they made her sit on a high platform and began shooting arrows at her in accordance with their birth order. But because they didn't want to take the blame, they deliberately missed the girl. One of these three wanted to kill her so purposely they missed the arrow because they did not want to take the blame of the killing of the sister. When the time came of the youngest brother, they threatened to murder him as well if he missed the chance. The youngest brother was so terrified that he killed the sister.

After the sister was killed by the arrow of the youngest brother he himself was forced to prepare the meat of the sister. The elder brothers forced him to cook. He wept for his sister. Crying he went to the jungle in search of the firewood. In the middle of the jungle, he met a snake. The snake asked him why he was upset. The boy told everything what had happened. The snake sympathises the boy and to help the boy to carry the wood easier for the boy, the snake volunteered to coil around it. The brothers found later that they were without water. When they got a pot with a hole in it, they asked the youngest brother to collect water. Crying he went to bring water. When he reached the river a frog approached and asked him why he was upset. He told the entire story. The frog was filled with sympathy and volunteered to cover the pothole for the boy. The boy caught few fish and crabs from the river, and went back. Together with the meat of his sister, he prepared the fish and the crabs. When the lunch was ready, they started eating their part. The youngest brother ate fish

and crab instead of the flesh. The elder brothers could not notice what he was doing. When the elder brothers chewed the bones of the sisters the youngest brother chewed the crab. Later on the youngest brother secretly buried his portion of flesh and bones into the ground after the older brothers had finished eating.

After few weeks a bamboo tree emerged from the anthill. One day a mendicant saw the bamboo tree and planned to cut the tree. The bamboo tree was chopped by a mendicant and turned into a mandolin after hearing a young girl's voice coming from the bamboo forest. Then the mendicant moved to beg from home to home while playing the mandolin. When the mendicant reached the elder brothers' house a voice said, "Don't ring, don't ring o mandolin: this is a culprit's house," The mandolin voice repeated the same thing at the homes of the other two brothers. When the mendicant reached at the youngest brother's house and played the mandolin, a voice was heard which said: "Ring, ring o mandolin: this is the small brother's house". When the youngest brother heard it he brought the mendicant into his house. The youngest brother offered rice beer to the mendicant until he was very drunk and lost his mind. Then he changed his mandolin with another and hid it. From that day onwards his sister would appear in front of him whenever he played the mandolin himself. One day the youngest brother invited the three older brothers for the dinner. When they were all at youngest brother's house the sister came out to serve her brothers food. When they saw her they fell on their backs in shock and terror. She was dressed in a white dazzling cloth that was surrounded by light.

### **Nature as an Active Determinant of Human Destiny**

It is noticed in the story **Enchanted Mandolin**, nature actively determines human destiny rather than being passive. The brothers killed the sister in the jungle that represents a breakdown of moral values. This violence is absorbed by nature, which then makes it easier to see. Unlike the philosophical approach of Western naturalism, the youngest brother's survival—both morally and physically—is determined by his alignment with nature, exhibiting an ecological determinism. In this story the nature did not destroy the character of protagonist but it helped him everywhere he needed someone. In this story natural forces bring about truth and moral equilibrium.

### **Animal Agency and Ecological Ethics**

In the folktale **Enchanted Mandolin** portrayal of creatures as moral beings is one of its most distinctive naturalistic features. The snake is considered to be very dangerous whereas frog is considered very dirty creature but the fact that the frog and snake volunteered to help the youngest brother when he was in miserable condition. Here it is seen that the natural world is involved in moral judgment. This type of connectivity is not seen in western naturalism. In contrast to Western naturalist depiction of nature, which typically gives stress to human insignificance rather than serve as moral parallels, this ecological interconnectivity stands in stark contrast.

### **Material Transformation and Natural Causality**

The Oraon community is a tribal group which has lots of concern for the natural world. An ecological perspective on life cycles is seen by the conversion of the sister's interred remains into bamboo. The story very well tells that the natural processes cause regeneration after death. First the bamboo turns into the mandolin that holds truth and remembrance. In the Kurukh story, natural change instils meaning and continuity in the surroundings, whereas in Western naturalism, death frequently serves to support existential-finality and gloomy ends.

### **Music as Nature's Voice of Truth**

In the story the mandolin plays very active role since it expresses the truth revealing wrongdoing and confirming innocence without the need for human intervention. This moral duty of the mandolin talks about - an idea that is mostly missing from Western naturalist literature. Here the mandolin is not mere a musical

instrument but it stands for truth and justice. One mandolin was a living plant. When it was a living plant, it has felt the rays of sun, the rain, the wind. It has experience of everything which happened in the natural world. That is why when it is played the life and experience comes out through its musical sound.

Through the bamboo mandolin it is observed that nature has its own moral power. The narrator of the story tells that Justice does not come only from courts or people—it exists within nature itself. Nature is the ultimate and all the human beings are part of nature, not above it. The melody of the mandolin demonstrate that truth cannot stay hidden forever, because nature remembers and eventually reveals it.

### **Human Suffering and Environmental Justice**

The Kurukh folktale *Enchanted Mandolin* represents human sorrow, which is based on ethical values and ecological resonance, in a realistic yet non-nihilist manner. In the story it is seen that the how the younger brother put into trial, he was threatened to death if he missed the arrow. Later on, he is forced to prepare the meat, and for that he had to bring the firewood and water. It was hard time for the boy to da all these tasks. But Resolution is made possible by the youngest brother's anguish, which brings him into harmony with nature. Instead of representing punitive retaliation, the elder brothers' fear upon seeing their sister's brilliant look symbolizes psychological consequences. Justice affirms balance rather than hopelessness and is ecological and healing.

### **Comparative Evaluation**

In Western literary naturalism Nature is often depicted as a deterministic, uncaring, or even antagonistic force. These narratives leave little opportunity for moral or ethical participation since environmental, social, and biological forces affect human destiny in ways that often appear inevitable. In western naturalism Characters are very often presented as miserable in front of natural forces, and the conclusions frequently serve to further a sense of pessimism or fatalism.

Unlike the western Naturalism *Enchanted Mandolin*, a Kurukh folktale, offers a sensitive and morally aware portrayal of nature. In this story the nature plays very important role. The entire nature even the the dwelling creatures, become part of the story and this togetherness of nature with the humans contribute to the restoration of moral equilibrium rather than acting as neutral forces or passive backgrounds. Here the snake, frog, bamboo made mandolin with the nature enter in human's life to reward virtue and punish wickedness, pointing to a cosmos where moral behaviour is consistent with the ecological system. In the western naturalism the nature is passive watcher it is only the background for the character. By demonstrating that environmental factors can be agents of justice, continuity, and moral equilibrium rather than merely arbiters of fate, the folktale challenges Western presumptions about the inevitable and morally indifferent nature of naturalism.

### **Conclusion**

The folktale *Enchanted Mandolin* has presented very distinct kind of naturalism based on an ethical and ecological perspective. The main concern in the story is the active participation of the nature In determining human fate, which contributes to the moral order. In the story virtue is acknowledged thus animals and other environmental components serve as moral go-betweens like poisonous snake played the role of a rope to tie the firewood whereas frog volunteered fix in the pothole. This story's magical or restorative activities are examples of material transformations that emphasize the interdependence of all life and the continuance of justice. The Kurukh story presents a radically different viewpoint from Western literary naturalism. The folktale *Enchanted Mandolin* demonstrates humans as part of a natural world, responding ecological system—one that feels, talks, and takes action to restore balance—unlike Western naturalism, which frequently highlights human powerlessness in the face of uncaring forces. The worldview of the story which emphasizes reciprocity, moral agency, and harmony between humans and the natural world, not only deepens our understanding of naturalism but also expands the ethical and ecological possibilities for literature.

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