

Text, Textuality, and digital media
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Dastangoi: Chouboli
Part -2

Hello, welcome back so we are going to in this course in this particular lecture we are going to look at a very specific rendering of Dastangoi. As we had been noting in the previous lecture that the important source today for the Dastangos is the series of the Dastan-i Amir Hamza printed by the Nawal Kishore Press. Now what is interesting about the about this entire printing project is that, it it was the series of books were published the volumes were published across 25 years and what we had was set off 46 big volumes, only one such set actually survives today.

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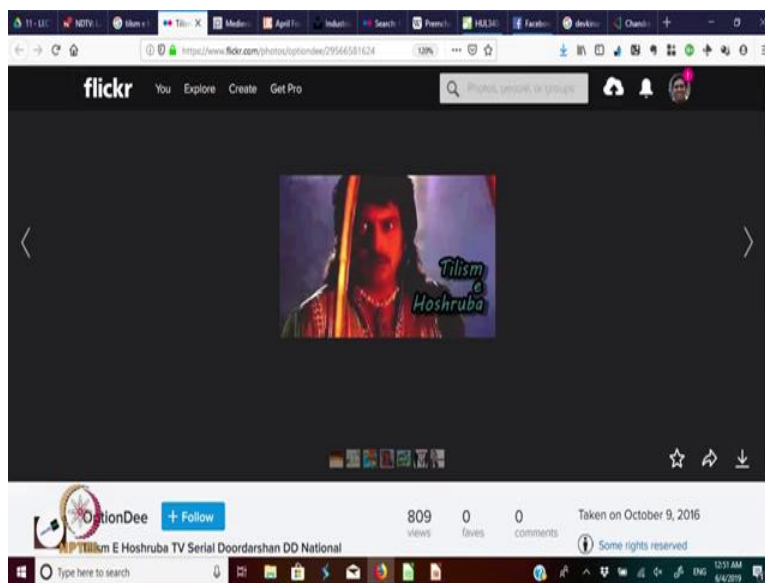
And each had about a 1000 pages and they could have many many stories within it. So what happened is and this kind of kind of story telling collection of oral oral narratives is something that was done at various parts of the world as well as certainly India. For example, the Grimms story Fairy Tales is one example, where these stories were collected from around Germany and other adjacent areas, and the is what we know today is the collection of stories called the grimms fairy tales, alright.

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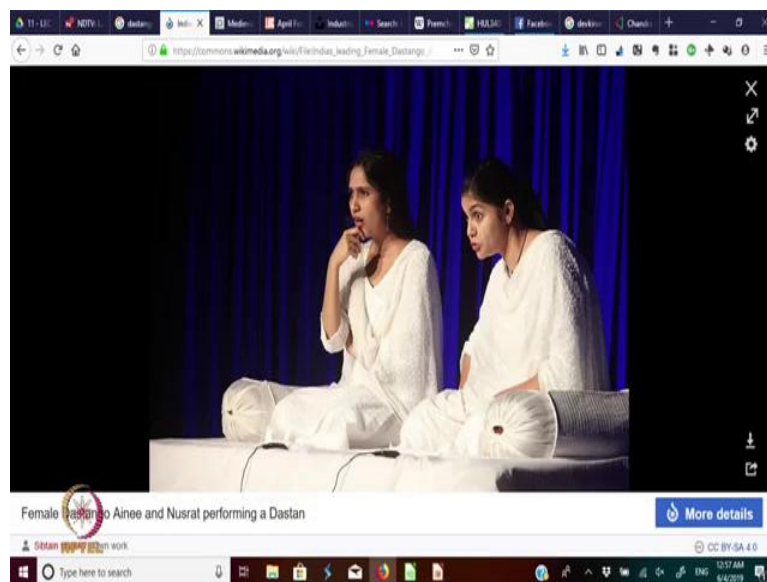
You also have the Thakur Mar Jhuli or the repertoire of the grandmother as one can say, which were collected by someone called Darshan Raj Mujumdar in Bengal which collected many oral narratives which were prevalent within Bengal. So similarly, the Nawal Kishore press did that for the Dastangoi repertoire of stories and they were collected and these 46 huge volumes were created.

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However the most interesting most popular sort of series section of that is the Tilism-E Hoshruha as I said, the enchantment that steals away all the senses, the Tilismi, that magic which takes away one's consciousness almost and it is these printed tales which which survive till today. And becomes a very important source for the contemporary Dastangos, because the Dastangoi tradition actually ebbed away with the coming of print of of films and television, but these were revived and when they were revived by very importantly artists like Mahmood Farooqui and and Danish Hussain and their their associates in around 2005, they try to try to keep as much of the original form but they realised that the contemporary audience requires a very different setup.

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So if you had noted, the previous instances of storytelling were by single storytellers but the innovation that has been worked out in the modern Dastangoi tradition is that it is told by two story tellers, very importantly that allows a certain kind of conversational storytelling. That is possible when two characters are interacting among themselves, the the two Dastangos can also imitate that, so it is a very performative form, alright.

And very very importantly, they have also over the years, they have moved away also from narrating only stories from the Tilism-E Hoshruha. They or the stories of Amir Hamza, they now take on many contemporary stories and stories from other sources. So one of the sources that they have they have sort of converted into a Dastangoi is a very important work done by engaged in by Vijaydan Dehta Padmashree, and he was also a recipient of many awards, including the Sahitya Academy Award and he his Vijaydan Dehta's lifelong activity lifelong achievement has been collection of many stories from across Rajasthan, and and making them available for for the for the contemporary readers the children which produce which gives them a sense of what other other other cultures that the cultural traditions that they belong to.

Very important point about about Vijaydan Dehta. Dehta's way of telling these stories, we had already looked at how when the Nawal Kishore Press was putting together the narratives of Amir Hamza, when they are they are written down. that is when the writers are making their own in bringing in their own inputs and writing it down which is which is the case with any any oral narrator any oral story teller. They would well, telling the story, tell it in their own language, tell tell it in their own format, bring in their own stories, make their own innovations. But in print, the moment this the thing comes when the story comes into print, it gets a solidity. It seems as if that is the story, but it is only the the the the story, the version of the story, which is that of that of that that teller of that particular tale, alright, which in this case is Vijaydan Dehta.

So Vijaydan Dehta makes a very very important choice when he when he writes down, notes down these stories. He tells this in the local, tries to maintain the local Rajasthani language, primarily Marwari but he tries to include many other Rajasthani languages. And this is a choice because we would understand in today's day and age, Rajasthan to be a Hindi speaking state. But what he is trying to do is that Hindi is not one language, Hindi is a collection of many languages which are spoken across across India.

We are going to study more about Hindi and Hindustani and the history of Urdu later on in the course. But to tell you that you would have to be aware that the Hindi that is spoken in the eastern part of the country is very different from the Hindi that is spoken in the western part of the country. But print by its very nature, and this is something that we are going to study later on within the course when you study Benedict Anderson, that print brings a certain kind of fixity to the language, but Vijaydan Dehta tries to tell the story as much as possible in the, in in

within a certain Rajasthani language, principally Marwari but he calls it Rajasthani trying to put together shape a Rajasthani cultural tradition within the story. The particular story that we are going to study today and please watch the video, which would be there in the links of a particular rendering of the Dastan-i Chouboli. Dastan-i Chouboli is a set of four stories which are again within a overarching framework of of of of a narrative. And we know within the story that, you know, there is the it is the will or the guile of the of the of the of the Choti Thakurayan who who goes into Chouboli's house to to sort of challenge, to to take on the challenge that Chouboli has thrown.

So to tell you the story in a nutshell, for the moment that, you know in this particular narrative there is the Thakur, the Thakur has has his wife who is the Thakurayan and one of the things that the Thakur does is to show his prowess on a moonlit night or by the light of the moon by the moonlit he he makes his wife which is the badi Thakurayan stand on the terrace of house then walks 108 hands away. Hath is a is a is a measure that is there and takes aim or his bow and arrow. And the aim is that he should the bow-- the arrow should go through the nose ring of of the of the Thakurayan.

And it is extremely bewildering for the for the Thakurayan and disconcerting for her. And she remains always worried. Now once, one of her relatives who comes to her and she shares her her her pain with her and she says that this is not what a what a man should do, this, if anybody does it, she throws a certain challenge to the to the to the Thakur, and the Thakur when the badi Thakurayan tells this to the Thakur he says what, I am going to do the same thing to her I am going to marry her today, so the choti Thakurayan gets has to get married to the to the Thakur and when the Thakur again tries to take aim on the Choti Thakurayan which is his new wife, the Choti Thakurayan says tells, throws a challenge to him that there is this princess Chouboli who has thrown this challenge that anybody who can break her vow of silence, anybody who is talented enough should break a vow of silence, can, I will marry that person.

And Chouboli is supposed to be very very beautiful, very attractive. She is supposed to be a famed beauty. And you know, and Thakur being what he is, is very very proud, is proud of his male prowess. He cannot he cannot ignore this, ignore this challenge that the Choti Thakurayan has told to to the Thakur, has has thrown before the Thakur really, in fact, he is so clouded by his

idea of his prowess that he is he thinks that this is nothing but of course the story-- this is this is no kind of a challenge to him. He can easily sort of win the hand of Chouboli.

And of course make him his third wife, so to say. And he, once he goes there of course he is not able to, he is not successful. He is not able to get Chouboli to speak. And as a result like many other princes who had come to accept Chouboli's challenge, have have been thrown into the dungeon where they are, they are made to grind and grind pulses and grind grains and and that is how they are spending their lives. So of course, the Choti Thakurayan being a being a wise woman, she understands what this entire, that that that that it was not in within the Thakur and the Thakur would not have been able to, make, he is not witty enough it it is not merely the physical prowess that is important, but it is your wit intelligence, which is also important in the world.

And the Choti Thakurayan then now goes to to, on a mission to actually rescue the Thakur. And what what she does is she takes on a male attire. There is cross-dressing, she takes on a male attire and goes to Chouboli's palace. And she takes on this challenge. And in the process tells four stories a set of four riddles and each time Chouboli speaks, the challenge is that Chouboli should speak four times. And each time Chouboli speaks.

And when she speaks this fourth time of course the bow is broken and Chouboli gets married, is supposed to get married to the Choti Thakurayan, which is again a bit of a danger because a woman getting married to a woman which is a which is a which is a suspense within the story, which is there, worked into the narrative and, you know, ultimately the Choti Thakurayan tells of his of his of her secret to Chouboli and they become, they become friends or sisters, so to say.

And the Thakur is freed as a, as a part of a deal. And, and the story ends there. So that is the story in a nutshell. Now, Vijaydan Dehta, he he puts together all these stories, some of Vijaydan dehta's stories are very famous. For example, you know the Bollywood Film the Shahrukh Khan Film Paheli which is based of one of the stories by Vijaydan Dehta.

So, the Dastangos, they also take on these one particular story from his collection and that is the Dastan-i Chouboli and converts it within the Dastangoi form. And what is interesting for us to note here, is the way of course, what we are going to, what we are going to use as a text for this particular lecture is the video that I have shared, which is a performance of a Dastangoi and also the English translation of the of the Chouboli stories were published in this volume which is given in the reading list translated from Rajasthani by Christie Merrill and Kailash Kabir, alright.

So, we will look, take a closer look and what we are going to look at in the story is are these elements, these this specific narrative elements, which are, which are traces or features of oral narratives, okay. Now what we are going to look at, one is we are going to look at the story and we are also going to look at the performance which is access through the video. The one thing that I must tell you is that when you are looking at the performance, you must understand that that performance is is a single instance, right.

Not all performances of Chouboli would be exactly the same, that is because performativity is ephemeral. They come and go because you have it recorded means that what you are seeing is just that one performance, right, whereas other performances of the Dastan-I-Chouboli could be very different. Simply the actors could be different, the storytellers could be very different. So you want to look at the performative elements, but we are also going to access the text through the translation, alright. Now, very important elemental of of of of the new oral form is an invocation of of of the supernatural. Now, if you look at the if you look at the video you find there are two invocations. One is the invocation, which is in Persian. And sorry invocation which is in Urdu, and the other invocation, which is seeking the blessings of Lord Ram, the story begins May Lord Ram bless us that this tale of Chouboli, be reborn again and find new readers in the new listeners in age after age.

That, so this is, this is something that you would find that is that is inherent within any storytelling tradition and and when when oral narratives move into print, it becomes part of the print tradition as well. Famously, those of you who have who would have read Milton's Paradise Lost, Milton's Paradise Lost is an adaptation of an epic form. Epic oral form into print. But it begins with the new location where, where where Milton invokes the heavenly Muse in order to, so that he is able to tell the stories of God. Because he is an ordinary mortal.

And this is part of the story. I mean, in any any traditional performance form, be it a play or a be it a nautanki or you know, it could be a Bharatanatyam performance- there is an invocation of God. There is a prayer that begins with the prayer, alright. Because what the idea that the storyteller is performing a certain role is carrying a certain tradition, through him or her, and and seeks a certain blessing of external supernatural forces. It is part of the tradition. So it is, it is there in the print as well. It is there in the performance as well, that the the the that the storytelling begins with an in vocation.

Then invocation also marks a very importantly, it also marks a sense that, you know, now the story actually begins. It prepares the audience to pay attention that there is something serious is about to happen. Imagine when a film happens when a film starts, before the film when you go to a, if you go to a movie theatre, you find there might be advertisements and others people are moving around. The moment the credit starts rolling or moment the opening, opening sequence starts of the film, people start settling down or they should really settle down. And and that sort of marks the beginning. It is like opening the page of the book.

It, it marks off that, okay, now we are ready for the performance. So the invocation marks, it is it is a ritual which not only the storyteller perfo-- participates in but also the audience participation. And through that they get used to just as a way, let us say, when I begin the lecture, I say, welcome everybody. It is tells you that, okay, the lecture has begun. It also dtells the recordist that the lecture has begun, so he must, he knows where to cut, alright.

So that is very important, invocation is a very important aspect of of oral storytelling. Now, you see when when this story is being told, there is a very important element which I am going to point out some of the important elements that are there within the story. You have this, at the very beginning that he made her place, place her feet exactly on the prints.

You know, they were they were a pair of footprints which were painted in a, in a hinglu red, and he made on the terrace and he makes this Thakurayan place her feet exactly on those prints and wait. He would then go to his sport 108 hands away where he had a pair of footprints, painted for himself, placed his feet exactly on those footprints and stand ready. Then he pulls back. Then he would pull back the bowstring, note-- notice this, the tense of of the sentences- he would pull back. It is in past perfect. This is what he would do, right.

So, it is like he continuously does that. It is not one occasion, but in many occasions, so this is detailed description of what the Thakur does to the Thakurayan, the exact process. Next time he is going to, he is going to repeat it, the audience already knows what is the process through which he has got. He may repeat it, but the story teller might repeat it, but choose also not to repeat it, the second occasion or the fifth, the third or the fourth occasion when with the same action happens could be abbreviated. So oral narratives work with both ways. One is through abbreviation as well as through a refrain through repetition and both of them interplay with each other because, it becomes a way for the audience to sort of understand or visualize the entire story.

Remember Dastangoi was a tradition where,, which had a lot of visualization, but after the 19th century, the visualization went away. The the the volumes which Naval Kishore press also printed did did not have images other than maybe on the cover. And certainly the performance that you are, you have, referred to, did not have any illustrations.

So the visualization in these circumstances for the audience is through the words, the details that descriptions that are provided by the by the narrator. So he says, he would he made her place her feet exactly on those prints and wait. He would then go on to his spot, 108 hands away where he had a pair of footprints painted for himself. Placed his feet exactly on those footprints and stand ready. Then he would pull back the bow string to his ear and let the arrow go whistling through the air towards the Thakurayan straight through her nose ring and whizzing out the other side. With each arrow, the Thakurayan could feel her organs doing flips inside, and this is the important point here: to tell the audience how of of just emphasizing, the audience in some members in the audience has in the process just got lost in the description and has not been able to capture exactly what the danger really is. What the what the risk really is.

He says, if he missed his mark, even by a hair, there would be nothing separating her from the beyond but the grace of Lord Ram. And this is, this is where the story really begins. And sometimes the Thakurayan tried many times to convince her Lord to stop, But the routine addicted Thakur was not about to give up his daily practice any which way, he is you know you, he did this, everyday every morning night he would do it. Each time his reply was the same. It would not be right for a big man to follow a woman's advice. Someone who is known some-- big as in not in size but big in status, big in fame. If I am somebody who is an big within the

whatever the social hierarchy, maybe certainly he is a Thakur. So he is from the upper upper upper castes, right.

So, each time his, he is a warrior cast, right, so he he is, he is not supposed to follow a woman's advice. You do what you have to do. I do what I have to do. If a big man gave up his daily practice at a woman's say, then he was not big at all. So there is this male pride in him that that is there. And this becomes a fulcrum of the story, really, if we really try to analyse the story because at the end it, he he he has he owes his life to a woman, his other wife that is the choti Thakurayan, whom he marry in the course of this particular story.

So, he he is unable to challenge Chouboli. He is not able to break Choubolis bow despite his great show of bravado, great show of, you know a great show of a courage or skill. It is all a show. He really is not where where really matters. He is not able to perform, alright. So that is the fulcrum, that if a big man gave up his daily practice at a woman's say, then he was not big at all.

So this is something that that becomes the opening sequence of of this particular opening sequence of this particular performance. How does, so any narrative as you understand, any narrative and it has to begin, it has to begin with we know, it begins with certain a beginning, and then it develops and then it, there is a resolution to it, right. So at the beginning, you have first of all, we know who the characters are, where the, where the story is placed, some some sense of what of exposition or introduction to the story. Then there is a conflict. A conflict has to begin and the conflict gets more complicated as every pose or move forward. So here you are. There is in the story. There is the character of a Thakur and there is a character of the Thakurayan, alright, and here is a case or the Thakurayan is troubled by a certain practice of the Thakur and she is not able to get out of it. That is where the suspense is created. That is where the conflict is created, again the Thakurayan get out of it. But then we come to the next part of the story where the choti Thakurayan throws this challenge to, to the Thakur.

So now look at the second description, which comes on page 37 of the volume. In the end, the Thakurayan had to stand there in the footprints. It was full it was a full moon night the moon and all the stars hanging in the sky laughed at her ill luck. Now I would I would advise you to go back to the go back to the video recording and listen to this particular portion. You see there is there is a far greater, far more picturesque description of the moon lit night, right, which was not

there in the first part because this is a particular occasion and a particular moon, the moon is not, does not shine the same way every day.

This is a different tense and, it is a particular occasion which where where the Thakurayan is actually going to talk about what the choti Thakurayan told her, right. So this is a particular occasion and if there is a particular moon and therefore there is a particular description on this description, which is far more picturesque, you know, in the far more symbolic, in the, in the actual, in the performance that, am I referring to.

Now this description is not something that is that need come specifically as part of this story. This could be the description of a moonlit night. It could be just a, just a template of the description of a moonlit night, which the story teller just picks up whenever he has to describe a moonlit night he, maybe in his mind have two or three, descriptions of a moonlit night and he picks one of them, one that he feels most appropriate for the occasion and puts it in here, there is no written text. It is all there in the mind.

All is everything is embodied and a and a better storyteller, the more you know, talented storyteller would be one who would have a greater repertoire of these epithets, greater repertoire of these templates of description and pick one each of the description at at that point of time. So a far more, and, and therefore, where when it is there in print, it will always read the moon and all the stars hanging in the sky laughed at her at her ill luck- that is the description that we will always read when we read any any edition of this printed volume. Whereas, if we when a person is telling a story, can maybe introduce a few birds there may be a river passing by, the description could be buried for different performances.

Now, so, so the after this particular occasion the Thakurayan says, tells, so she used the pretext of telling him what the-- used the pretext of telling him what the Seth's niece had said. Because Thakuryan did not have the courage to tell answer back to the to the Thakur. He says, this is what your niece has told me. Who, the niece is the one who, the woman who was going to become the Choti Thakurayan, and who has told the Thakuryan earlier, that he is, she would not have allowed the Thakur to treat her like this. And says, says, this is what your niece said about feeding such a rogue of a husband, roasted chickpeas fodder. And that is, you know, and serving him water used to clean her feet, sitting astride his back and riding him around the bed seven times. Now this is a repetition.

This passage keeps on getting repeated within within the first few sequences of the of the story. And it also gets repeated at the end because this is exactly what, what the Thakur has to do when, when he fails to make Chouboli speak and goes into the dungeon. And that is where he has to grind the grains and eat them. So this is so obviously the choti Thakurayan is successful and these words when when they are repeated, it has this effect on the audience because audience hears it once and then hears it a second time, they can connect the dots, they can remember it better.

And it is important that they remember it through the story because while all through the while that the Choti Thakurayan is telling the stories to Chouboli, there is constantly refers, reference to what is happening in the dungeon. That there are prisoners in the dungeon who are, you know, who are grinding grains.

And, and the audience knows that in the dungeon there exists the the the the presence of the of the Thakur is also there, alright, which nobody else knows only the Choti Thakurayan knows and the Thakur knows and the audience knows. So that that difference in level of knowledge, is what creates the suspense within the story, alright. Lets move forward. So, and then further down, that, you know, we find that there is a there is a particular episode where, the Choti Thakurayan is not left with any choice as to whether to marry or not. When the Thakur says, I am going to marry the marry my niece, there was no choice. It was not, just not in the stars for Thakurs to possess forgiving natures. When the uncle saw that he was not getting anywhere, he said he would ask the girl's parents and see what they said.

But the Thakur made it clear that there was no need to ask anyone. It was his wish. And so it be after all the parents, her parents' village fall under his Thikhana. Once royal wishes were made known, nothing else need be considered. This is an aphorism and oral narratives work on aphorisms. These are givens and it is a reiteration of the given and any, any sort of arrangement that is worked out within the oral these narratives, because these narratives are part of a traditional, traditional society, which has its very hierarchical set of rules, right, and the oral narratives remind the audience of those rules- that once royal wishes were made known, nothing else would be considered.

So the audience knows that there is no other way the Tha-- Chot-- the niece has to marry, marry the Thakur. But any arrangement that is worked out is worked out within this, this without questioning this larger aphorism. Very important for us to note that in this story there is a very important, this this element of the cross dressing, right. And what we end up is a situation of a possibility of a same sex relationship, which could have emerged because at the end, the, the person who is able to make Chouboli speak four times, would would get married to Chouboli. So the audience knows that the young man is actually a woman.

And so what, what what would happen if that marriage actually happens? It would challenge challenge social norms, gender norms. That remains a certain tension within the within the story. So, at once, it is a challenge to patriarchal norms, but it also succumbs to patriarchal norms at, at the end because ultimately the marriage actually does not happen. The marriage happens to the Thaku--, I mean Chouboli gets married to the Thakur and not not not to the Choti Thakur-- to the Choti Thakurayan, right.

Now, let us let us pay attention to this particular particular passage. There is this challenge of of the of the of the of the of Chouboli which is narrated here, which which which the choti Thakurayan throws. Why is your chest also puffed up over this trifle you are, you are, you want to just you know throw arrows at me and you think that is a matter of great prowess. This is merely a trifle. The real challenge is one that is thrown by Chouboli. You put on a nose ring and stand there, so I can, I can shoot. Why do not you do the reverse this is, this is very interesting. Where the where the Choti Thakurayan choti Thakurayan says, why do not you do the reverse? You put on the nose ring and stand there and I can shoot a thousand arrows through your nose ring. Easy as a flick off my left wrist. I mean I can, I can do it as well.

What you are doing. I can do it as well. No, to do something truly extraordinary. This is ordinary. Hitting a target with a bow and Arrow is, is a lot of people do that. That is very ordinary. Doing something extraordinary, if you want to try something really extraordinary, you would have to win the hand of the Princess Chouboli and bring her home to this fort. 17 Times 20 Rajas and lords have scrubbed their faces clean, ready to make Chouboli speak four times and wed her. This has been tried. It is so this is the challenge. This is the challenge that is thrown. This again, the description is detailed. If you, but all of them are sitting in a dungeon grinding fodder for

their horses. If you can pull off this feat, it would be something truly remarkable now more impressive than shooting arrows through the nose ring.

Now look at this. There is a linguistic trap here because the Choti Thakurayan, before she got married, she had said that if someone, if my husband tried to hit throw arrows at me, shoot arrows at me, I would make him grind chickpeas and eat the fodder, right, and this is exactly the task which has been said: that if you fail in making Chouboli speak, then you will have to grind the fodder.

So this is a kind of a linguistic trap. The audience would be, because of the description, be able to link the two things and understand the wit that the fact that, that that the Choti Thakurayan has a, has a certain intelligence, has certain wit and understand the character and what they can expect out of her. But anyway, for the moment we forget about Choti Thakurayan, and it is the it is the it is the Thakur who tries to first go and win the hands of Chouboli.

On the third day, so the Thakur arrived at the town of the princess, he bathed, got ready and headed off in the direction of Rajmahal. And mighty Nagara drums were posted every hundred paces. The Thakur pounded every drum he's passed to announce his intentions and presented himself at the royal court. Everywhere in the town, people now knew a new suitor had arrived to marry the princess. Many had beaten this drums before, but none could meet her challenge.

The suitor came with faces well-scrubbed, ready to-- remember the previous passage also talked about the faces well scrubbed, cleaned. So that is a repetition. -- ready to join their hand in marriage, were sitting on their hunches in the dungeon and grinding fodder for the horses of those same hands.

There were so many suitors down there, you could find a buyer for the-- you could not find a buyer for the mound of chickpeas at even half a paisa. So this this is a foreboding. This is a pre nomination. This is, this is what is going to happen to the Thakur. This is what may happen to the Thakur if he fails. The moment he enters, his, so at the moment he is entering with great pride and a great show, but the narrative is undercutting it.

It's saying that, really is he different from the others? That's the question, alright. So, another, so we now move on to the place where the Choti Thakurayan actually dresses up as the, as the suitor and comes in. The handsome young suitor sat down on the carpet before, he looked up into Choubolis face and began. So his-- Chouboli is not going to urge me for a for for she is not going to break the oath of her silence. So who will give the Hunkaara for my story, for a story without a Hunkaara is like food without salt.

And this is something that is repeated in the in the, in the performance, you can see the these exact lines are repeated as a refrain each of the four times. And this is a very interesting structure that someone has to give the Hunkaara. Someone has to give, the point is there has to be a thirst for the story. The story teller cannot tell the story unless the audience asks them to tell the story.

In fact, if you can think of the teacher as as a storyteller, then this is a very interesting instance when there are no students. I mean, I, I add that at this point of time when this recording is taking place, I have no awareness as to who the students are going to be. So this is actually a kahani without a Hunkaara in a very interesting case.

But to return to the Dastan-E Chouboli, the storytelling tradition depends on this on this thirst for a story, it is the audience who says: what happens next? Tell the story. Tell me another story: Dadaji ek kahani sunao. Without that, the story does not happen, right. So the thirst for the story has to come and if it does not come from Chouboli, it has to come from something else. It can come from the flame, it can come from Chouboli's necklace, it can come from a smoke.

Each particular story has a particular giver or Hunkaara and and and Chouboli gets into an antagonistic position. Chouboli does not want the story to be told. She wants to maintain her vow, she does not want her, how we, to be to be tested. This is, this is a trial that she has, right. Now you see within the first story, and this is something that is going to get repeated in the future stories as well, that within the first story there is this place, where this man who, the student who wants to test out is a guru and goes, looking for Ajoobas, you know and something that is marvellous. And he finds four interesting characters there, right. And this is a structure. Every time he goes across, he sees something marvellous and he picks them up and and moves on.

So someone who can see very long distance, someone can run very fast. Someone who can, shoot arrows at targets at unimaginable distances. And so someone who can make ropes, these

are four people who are gathered to them, but there is a structure to it. There is a structure within the structure of the story.

Overall structure, there is a structure of the four stories, which has been created in this frame where Chouboli will be made to speak four times. But within each of the stories, there is a certain structure and a structure of repetition. Every time he encounters somebody, he asks, what are you doing? And he gives a marvel a, a very imaginative, very extraordinary answer. And figures out this is a marvellous person and let me take along. And that structure is returned back at the end when, when the the task that these four people who are being paid a huge sum of money by the Raja, has to has to, that they each of them perform a certain role in getting that, getting that, treasure from Khujbuj which is, many many course course or miles away.

And each of the stories actually begin. This is another repetitive structure. Each of the stories, just like the Vikram Betal story, each of the stories ends with the riddle and in each particular case the Hunkaara giver, which is an inanimate object, gives an answer and the the the storyteller that is, Choti Thakurayan gets into a conflict with that person. And that compels the the the Chouboli, to speak, right. And this is a strategy adopted obviously by the choti Thakuryan because she knows the answer, she is witty, she is the most intelligent person within the within the particular story. And she carries forward this argument till such time that Chouboli se raha Na Gaya. Chouboli as if, is not able to able to keep, keep silent.

Suddenly, the two started arguing with one another. The bed insisted that the path clearer was the most marvellous and the storyteller insisted that the runner was the most marvellous. Suddenly the syllables exploded from Chouboli's lips as if from a cannon and she stood up from the bed like a shot struck like lightning. You are worthless you are a worthless bed. How could you spew such nonsense right before me and this, she speaks. But then at the end, the answer is pointless the because the storyteller is not interested, the choti Thakurayan is not interested in the answer.

This is: who could say anything further with Chouboli standing there and gnashing her teeth with the handsome young but the handsome young gentleman who was there- storyteller- placed his hand on the hilt of the sword and announced: beat the drums to glorious beat and unspeaking Chouboli has deigned once, then the drums beat. This is the structure that keeps on repeating each time and the audience sort of. So it closes the story just as invocation begins the story.

The exposition begins the story, this, this sort of repetitive structure sort of ends the story, alright. And, and then the focus after this goes to those prisoners, those prisoners who are there, all the suitors began splitting their chickpeas 10 times faster in the joyous anticipation of being set free.

There is nothing in the world, more scared-- sacred and more wonderful than freedom. You know, freedom from being Chouboli's slave. You know, that is the structure and we are ready for the next. Now, what happens then right after that, immediately, immediately after this climax that Chouboli has spoken and what would happen, is that you have a coming down, now you have a heightened anticipation, the Nagaras beating and this anticipation of freedom and everything. But remember, Chouboli has to speak four times, not once, not twice, not thrice, but four times and it has not happened. So there's a climb down of the climax.

So, just as eyes look more alluring outlined in coal and a brow looks prettier, decorated with tikri and soon with a tikri in sindhoor red, so is a story better told with a Hunkaara- again you begin to that come back to the same point. So the climax is a climb down from the suspense, level of suspense there is a climb down, alright.

So if for a moment you thought that this structure of the beginning, middle, and end is very Aristotelian, this is an a, this, this, this climb down from the climax is something that is very Aristotelian by its very nature, oral narrative will move, have many beginnings because there is a story within a story.

It moves to a climax and falls down, moves to a climax and falls down. So we, we could retell the story again and say that there is just once if Chouboli had to speak only once, then the rest of the, the final part of the narrative could have simply been put there and it does not matter here which of the four narratives. What is the ordering of the four narratives? You could you could actually interchange them. There is no narrative structure within the arrangement of the stories.

It is not that one story builds on the other, you could say one exchange, one with the other, just like the slides of the Kamishibai, alright. And so, so this this this repetitive structure, return of the repetitive structure after the climaxing of the of one story, one story within a story is is a feature of the oral narrative. Because the oral narrative is about telling of smaller stories within a larger narrative, the larger narrative becomes an excuse to tell a tell tell tell the small story.

Now before I-- so these are some of the features of oral narratives really, and before I, sort of finish this lecture, I would like to focus for a moment on on on a certain aspects which are also in the performative, right, in the performative domain. For example, if you if you if you looked at looked at this particular video which I have suggested that you watch, you would find that there is a there is a particular reference to the Seth as rich to the description when describing how the Seth, how rich the Seth or the merchant is in in the third story of this particular set of episodes. He refers to a particular rich person in contemporary India alright.

The name of that person, obviously that is not there within the traditional story. It is not there even in the recounted stories by by Vijaydan Dehta. But it is a way to, it is it is a conversational sort of style because the story tellers are telling the story to a particular audience and the audience possibly responds to a certain contemporary detail a whole lot more. And oral storytelling is, allows us to include that that reference, which which which a printed form may not allow us to because you cannot adapt your story from from time to time. A book once printed, will probably have a long life, maybe 10 years, maybe 15 years, maybe less than that. But it has a longer life. Whereas the oral narrative, it has a shorter life. I tell a story, moment everybody walks out of the room, the narrative ends, it is over.

So, I can afford in an oral narrative to be absolutely, I can refer to something that happened this morning or yesterday, alright. And that kind of referencing is possible within an oral narrative, which is why you would not see that reference to that rich person in the printed version. You will see that that reference occurs in the performance itself. Another example of a similar kind: in the final episode, when there is a there is a reference to this these, nine lac coins, which are to be distributed, so, and there is a reference to the streets of Bhubaneswar.

As you know, this is this is a this is a particular event, this performance was actually located was happening in Orissa, in Bhubhaneshwar. And just to to open up this conversation that it is an intimate, you could see it unlike unlike this particular lecture where the audience is sitting invisible to the speaker or a film or a television where the audience is not actually seen by the, by the performers or even the writer of a book, when the writer is writing, they are, the audience is not there.

But those images of the Dastangos or the Kathakar speaking is, very much there right in front. They are there, the audience's right in front, right next to, a few a few hands away, little bit away from the from the speaker from the storyteller.

So, so it is a much more intimate style. And in that intimacy, one gets into a conversation, one refers to certain things that the audience would know. It brings the story closer to to the audience, right. So these are some of the other examples. Another, another point that I would like to also refer to is that, because we are re when, when you are reading, we are reading the translation. Of course the Hindi text is also available. So those of you who can access the text, I would encourage that you actually read the Hindi text.

But because this is a Pan India transmission, I have referred to the English texts instead. And so in translation, some of the nuances of language are lost. For example, look at this, look at this particular reference where one of the women says where the where the so the, the Seth's wife the Sethani says, before he goes to meet the Thakur in the in the fourth story, she goes and she says that, how can I do this? *Main Saas bhi leta hoon to mere saas ko khabar ho jaata hai*. I cannot go from here because my mother-in-law would get to know even even if I take a breath, my mother in law gets to know. Now this play of a between the two words of *saas bhi leta hoon to mere saas ko khabar ho jaata hai* is some--, is a very important aspect of oral transmission. Oral because it is it is playing with the sound of the word, not the way the word is spelled.

The two words are spelled very differently so they would not show up similarly in print, certainly not in translation, but the effect in the speaking of it: in the oral version, the sound would be very different. So these are some of the aspects of oral storytelling. I would urge you to read these these stories and watch the video several times to understand the nuances of an oral performance. And also, if, I would advise you please watch more, some, engaging some performative oral performances. Storytelling is becoming very popular now.

There are many more storytelling festivals happening in India. Please go and watch some of these, participate in some of these performances to get a better understanding of what a world without a mechanical reproduction could possibly be. The world before print is something that we need to understand. But all the while, do remember, that even though we are watching, we are, we are watching our oral performance today, these oral performances are actually mediated

through print. So the it is not exactly the way they would have been in the pre print era, but still, it is, it would give you some bit of idea. Thank you.