Abstract

Keywords*: Kaavad, storytelling, portable shrine, Kaavad design, identity construction, performance, symbolic pilgrimage, sacred space.*

The *Kaavad* storytelling of Rajasthan is an important part of the oral tradition of the regions of Mewar and Marwar. A portable, painted, wooden shrine, it is made by the *Kaavad* makers (*Basayati Suthars*) of Bassi, Chittor, for the storytellers (*Kaavadiya Bhats* or *Ravs*) of Marwar. The storytellers unfold the multiple panels of the *Kaavad* as they recite stories and genealogies of their patrons (*jajmans*) spread across Rajasthan and adjoining states.

The choice of the *Kaavad* storytelling phenomenon provides a unique opportunity to study an object which has multiple societal and design functions, as well as to examine the intersections between the *Kaavad* object, the storytelling, performance and its reception. In addition it occasions the documentation and understanding of an important living oral storytelling tradition that has received little attention. The question is what purpose does the *Kaavad* serve and what it means to the community concerned? The *Kaavad* recitation includes the narration of stories and genealogies for the patrons by the storyteller simulating an experience of travel; a journey not unlike a pilgrimage. As he recites their genealogies, in a myth making exercise - elevates their status by connecting them to ancestors who are heroes with connections to the divine. The aim of the study is to arrive at an understanding of the role of the 'designed' object, and to investigate how its design contributes to the experience of a pilgrimage and the construction or elevation of identity.

Fieldwork and visual ethnography including film and photography inform the study along with ethnographic methods of observation, interviews and field notes. Three-fold multidisciplinary route and approach to fieldwork is influenced by visual research methods used in design. Fifty-four stories elicited from one storyteller and translated in English indicate a close connection between the stories and lives of the carriers of the *Kaavad* tradition. Performances by three storytellers recorded in their natural settings offer rich data as do information on methods of making and painting by the makers.

A structural and semiotic approach is used for analyzing the physical, visual and narrative structures of the *Kaavad*. The analysis reveals a strong connection between the *Kaavad* recitation and the experience of a pilgrimage; manifested and delivered by the 'designed' *Kaavad* object and mediated by the storyteller.

Organization of Chapters

The first chapter introduces the *Kaavad* and its location in storytelling, specifically within the oral tradition of Rajasthan. Oral tradition often employs visual devices such as symbolic artifacts, portable shrines, painted scrolls and performance to enliven the telling of tales. A brief introduction to some of the traditions is followed by an overview of the *Kaavad*, its practice, its origins and its practitioners today. The chapter outlines our motivation to investigate and describes the relevance of this study. It ends with defining the aims and objectives of the study which is to examine the intersections between the *Kaavad* object, the narratives, their painted images, the storytelling and its reception, to arrive at an understanding of the role of the 'designed' object and narratives in the *Kaavad* recitation.

The second chapter surveys the existing literature around the *Kaavad* and other portable shrines to identify similarities and differences between them and the *Kaavad*. An examination of the literature on storytelling practices using objects and images in India follows historical references to *Kaavad*-like practices and storytelling traditions within Rajasthan. Although the focus is on the *Kaavad* object and its narratives we see it in the context of a larger body of work on its social structure, *Jajmani* system, religious life, caste identity and the Rajasthani way of life. This allows us to understand the *Kaavad*'s cultural and socio-economic context within Rajasthan. The chapter concludes by summarizing findings and identifies the gaps and emergent questions around the role of *Kaavad* within its community.

In chapter three we discuss the fieldwork undertaken in the practitioners' natural settings and the visual ethnographic material brought together. The ethnographic model is extrapolated to include visual methods such as film[1] and photography in addition to interviews and conversations. Detailed descriptions about the maker, storyteller and patron, follow; including their home and work environment, their village and everyday work life and the *Kaavad*'s role within it. Origin myths that connect them to each other and their practice are documented. In the case of the makers and tellers processes by which they transfer their knowledge to the next generation, their perceptions and point of views about the tradition, the purpose it serves and its

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[1] A short documentary film 'Makers of Tales' has been created by this investigator to support the fieldwork and the collection of data on the ethnographical information of the narrators.

future are reported. Practitioners also discuss the past and present patronage and how they interact with each other. Recordings of a *Kaavad* performance in its natural settings form a part of this chapter. The patrons also discuss the significance of a *Kaavad* recitation in their lives.

Chapter four explicates the Design and Structure of the *Kaavad*. The *Kaavad* anatomy includes the physical/material structure, the visual structure, the narrative structure and the navigation through the *Kaavad*. Samples for studying the physical and visual structures include *Kaavads* from storytellers, extant ones in Indian museums and from the *Kaavad* makers. For the narratives we examine transcripts of performances from three storytellers. This chapter concludes with a short discussion on the relation between the structures and the unfolding of the *Kaavad*.

In chapter five the methodological approach is discussed in relation to the investigation of the *Kaavad*. The *Kaavad*, a folklore object may be examined from the perspectives of oral narratives, material culture, social customs and as performance. The rationale for using a structural and semiotic approach is described and discussed. Brief introductions are given about key figures related to structuralism and semiotics with an emphasis on Vladimir Propp and the binary discriminations of Lévi-Strauss. Proppian methods are discussed in detail as well as the work of contemporary Indian scholars who have used these methods with success. The concluding discussion integrates the approaches of semiotic, structural theoretical analysis and visual ethnography in strengthening the inquiry and analysis of the *Kaavad* as a symbolic pilgrimage. A sample analysis illustrates the use of methods.

In chapter six analytical tools are used to examine the similarities between the *Kaavad* recitation and the journey undertaken by a pilgrim. Proppian analysis is used to identify the key functions in the *Kaavad* stories, *Kaavad* performances and that of a pilgrimage followed by a comparison between both. The binary discriminations of Lévi-Strauss further explain the narratives within the *Kaavad* and semiotics analysis explains the role of images and restricted code in the *Kaavad* narration. With the findings it is argued how the *Kaavad* comes to be a 'pilgrimage' in space and an 'identity' in time.

Chapter seven summarizes and discusses the findings from the previous chapters. The significance of pilgrimage and recitation of genealogies is explained with reference to its role in the lives of the *Kaavad* communities. Unique characteristics of the *Kaavad* phenomenon that contribute to creating the experience of pilgrimage are identified and elucidated. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the implications for design and designers.

Appendix I has fifty four stories elicited and collected from one storyteller that have been translated and organized with their concerned images from the *Kaavad*. These are arranged with the corresponding image and their specific locations in the *Kaavad*.

Structural analysis of 54 individual stories using Proppian methods is included in Appendix II. Each story is analyzed separately and then collated together for a comparison.

Appendix III has three performances by three different storytellers recited for three different patrons. They have been transcribed in Hindi and translated in English although many more performances were recorded in the field. These performances were recorded on location in the presence of patrons with their permission. We accompanied the storytellers to the residences of their patrons in the desert regions of Jodhpur, Barmer and Jaisalmer districts.

Appendix IV is a glossary of terms used in the thesis and the stories. The glossary explains their nings in the context of the *Kaavad* tradition.

Other appendices include an illustrated book "Home', published papers, and a 23 mins ethnographic film titled: 'The Makers of Tales'.

1. **Papers in refereed journals (Published)**

   'A Structural Analysis of the *Kaavad* phenomenon using Propp's methods'
   Journal of Indian Folklore, Zooni Publications, Mysore 2009

   'A Note on Using Digital Media for the Study and Documentation of *Kaavad* Tradition in Rajasthan'*Journal of Indian Folklore* Vol 9, Zooni Publications, Mysore 2008

   The Challenges of a Sleeping Giant: *DESIGN ISSUES*, MIT, USA vol. XXI # 4, 2005

   'Claiming Animation for India', *ANIMAC*, SPAIN, 2005

2. **Papers in conference proceedings (Published)**

   Sharing Stories: Learning with Stories, HCI 2007 Conference Beijing, China, 2007

   Traveling Stories: Mobile applications for storytellers, HCI 2007
   Conference Beijing, China, Co-authored2007

3. **Papers presented in conferences**

   '*Kaavad*: A site for Multiple Identities' at a conference organized by the 34th*Indian Folklore Congress* at the Nagaland University, Kohima, on 9th December, 2010.

   'Homing in with Stories' at the International conference *Designing for Children,* organized and hosted by IDC on February 3rd 2010

   'A Structural Analysis of the Kaavad Phenomenon using Propp's methods' at a conference organized by the 33rd*Indian Folklore Congress* at the Manipur University, Imphal, Manipur on16th November 2009.

   'The Challenges of using Digital Media for the study and documentation of the Kaavad Oral Tradition in Rajasthan'at a conference organized by the 31st*Indian Folklore Congress* at Santiniketan, West Bengal

   'Traveling Stories' at the International conference on Storytelling, *Sutra: Storytelling in the Digital Age,* organized by NID and MIT Media Lab, NID, Ahmedabad, in December, 2002

4. **Chapters in Books (Published)**

   (*The Kaavad phenomenon: a folk tradition of Rajasthan* in the book: *Indian Painting: The Lesser Known Traditions* Edited by Anna Dallapiccola. Niyogi Books, Delhi, 2011

   'About myself, about my work' Contributed towards a book WOMEN IN DESIGN by Liz McQuiston, Rizzoli, NY 1987

   'A Student Remembers' Contributed towards a book NASREEN IN RETROSPECT edited Altaf

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