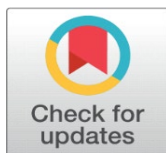


CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLAY 'BAWA JITTO': A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The legend of Bawa Jitto is a significant part of Jammu's folklore, portraying the sacrifice of a pious farmer who stood against injustice. More than a folk hero, Bawa Jitto is revered as a deity in the region, with narratives surrounding him serving as a medium for cultural expression and preservation. This study employs a discourse analysis framework to examine the linguistic, stylistic, and socio-cultural dimensions of the Bawa Jitto narrative, uncovering how meaning is constructed. Through an in-depth analysis of characters, plot structure, setting, dialogue, symbols, and themes, the research explores identity strategies, narrative techniques, and recurring motifs to reveal the play's moral, social, cultural, and historical significance. Using Professor Ramnath Shastri's Dogri play Bawa Jitto as the primary source, this study highlights the richness and uniqueness of Dogri cultural norms and values, while also examining the complex interplay between language, culture, and power in shaping social meaning.

Keywords: Folklore, Cultural Identity, Discourse Analysis, Stylistics

1. INTRODUCTION

The legend of Bawa Jitto stands as a powerful testament to the resilience and sacrifice of agrarian communities in medieval India. Rooted in the socio-economic struggles of the 15th century, Bawa Jitto was a pious farmer who defied feudal oppression and ultimately sacrificed his life in protest against the unjust exploitation of peasants. His story, passed down through oral traditions, has become an integral part of Jammu's folklore, preserved in karaks (folk ballads), theatrical performances, and religious practices. The Jhiri Mela, an annual fair held in his honor, continues to draw thousands of devotees, reaffirming his status as both a folk hero and a revered deity (Singh, 2021).

Beyond its historical significance, Bawa Jitto's narrative functions as a vibrant medium for cultural expression and preservation. Scholars have highlighted the play's unique fusion of historical reality and myth, showcasing the interplay between folklore, identity, and resistance (Sharma & Sood, 2022). Through the lens of discourse analysis, this study examines how linguistic and stylistic elements construct meaning in Bawa Jitto's narrative, exploring themes of social injustice, sacrifice, and collective memory. Using Professor Ramnath Shastri's Dogri play Bawa Jitto as the primary text,

this research aims to uncover how cultural identity, power dynamics, and resistance are articulated through language and folk traditions.

Treated as a revolutionary folk hero, against the feudal system to ameliorate the conditions of his fellow farmer, Jitmal, famous as Bawa Jitto (born in 1343), is the most familiar name in the revolutionary history of the Jammu region. Around 600 years back, the fifteenth Century folktale portrays the age-old saga of exploitation of landless farmers by the landlords. He along with his daughter Kaudi, came to village Shamachak near Jhiri village which is four kilometers from Jammu— Akhnoor highway to meet his old friend named Rullo Lohar (blacksmith), who promised to help him in every possible way. He took him to Mehta Bir Singh Rakwal who was the feudal lord of Ambgrota and minister to Raja Ajaib Dev Singh. Jitmal urged him to provide him a piece of land (Saxena & Saxena, 2021).

By analyzing plot structures, characters, dialogues, and symbolic motifs, this study seeks to illuminate the socio-political undertones embedded in the Bawa Jitto legend. The research also draws attention to the ways in which the play contributes to the cultural heritage of Jammu, emphasizing the crucial role of folklore in shaping historical consciousness. Ultimately, this paper underscores the continuing relevance of Bawa Jitto's story, not only as a folkloric artifact but also as a compelling discourse on justice and resilience.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE LEGEND OF BAWA JITTO IN FOLKLORE AND DISCOURSE STUDIES

The legend of Bawa Jitto has been widely documented in folk traditions, theatrical performances, and historical narratives. Scholars have examined its cultural significance, socio-political themes, and linguistic structure through various disciplinary lenses, including folklore studies, religious anthropology, and discourse analysis. This section reviews key literature to establish the scholarly context for this research.

1) Bawa Jitto in Jammu's Oral and Folk Traditions

Folklorists have emphasized the oral transmission of Bawa Jitto's story, highlighting its presence in Dogri ballads (karaks), folk theatre, and regional festivals. Sharma (2021) argues that Bawa Jitto's legend functions as both historical memory and resistance narrative, reflecting the struggles of peasant communities against feudal landlords. Similarly, Singh (2021) traces the transformation of Bawa Jitto from a historical figure to a folk deity, showing how oral traditions sanctified his sacrifice into a cultural myth (Singh, 2021).

The annual Jhiri Mela, dedicated to Bawa Jitto, serves as a living testament to his enduring legacy. Saxena & Saxena (2021) explore how the fair has become a ritualized space for communal identity formation, where historical suffering is remembered and reenacted (Saxena & Saxena, 2021). These studies establish Bawa Jitto as an integral figure in Jammu's folk consciousness.

2) Theatrical and Literary Representations of Bawa Jitto

Professor Ramnath Shastri's Dogri play Bawa Jitto (1985) is considered a landmark work in Dogri literature, transforming the oral legend into a structured dramatic form. Scholars like Sharma & Sood (2022) have examined the linguistic choices and symbolic motifs in Shastri's play, arguing that it employs Dogri poetic traditions and rhetorical devices to reinforce the themes of martyrdom and social justice.

Further, Chauhan (2021) highlights how theatrical adaptations of Bawa Jitto have played a crucial role in Dogri cultural preservation, ensuring that the story remains accessible to contemporary audiences (Chauhan, 2021). The dramatization of Bawa Jitto serves as a bridge between oral and literary traditions, making it an essential text for discourse analysis.

3) Socio-Political Themes in Bawa Jitto's Narrative

The legend of Bawa Jitto is often analyzed within agrarian and subaltern studies. Scholars like Waza & Sharma (2021) argue that Bawa Jitto's resistance against feudal landlords mirrors broader peasant uprisings in Indian history, drawing parallels with colonial and postcolonial agrarian struggles (Waza & Sharma, 2021). Similarly, Sharma (2022) frames Bawa Jitto within postcolonial resistance narratives, showing how folk traditions can serve as a counter-history to elite-dominated historical narratives.

Moreover, scholars have discussed the gendered dimensions of sacrifice in Bawa Jitto, particularly in relation to Bua Gauri, his daughter. Kumari & Nagpal (2017) explore how her character functions as both a mourner and a successor of

her father's ideological struggle, reinforcing traditional yet subversive gender roles in folk storytelling (Kumari & Nagpal, 2017).

4) Discourse Analysis and Linguistic Studies on Bawa Jitto

While much of the literature focuses on folklore and cultural history, fewer studies have applied linguistic and discourse analysis to Bawa Jitto's narrative. Sharma & Sood (2022) analyze rhetorical strategies in the play's dialogues, identifying how linguistic choices reinforce power relations and resistance themes. Further, Chauhan (2021) discusses how metaphors, repetition, and performative speech construct Bawa Jitto as a martyr-figure in folk discourse.

In addition, Saxena (2021) explores how the play's use of folk idioms, Dogri proverbs, and poetic structures contributes to the oral-to-written transition of the Bawa Jitto narrative. These studies underscore the importance of discourse analysis in understanding the socio-political and linguistic construction of folk narratives.

5) Research Gap and Contribution

While existing literature provides rich insights into Bawa Jitto's cultural and historical importance, fewer studies have systematically analyzed the play's discourse structure, linguistic features, and symbolic frameworks. This study fills that gap by employing a discourse analysis approach to examine how meaning, identity, and power are constructed through language and performance in Bawa Jitto's narrative. By bridging folklore studies with linguistic analysis, this research enhances our understanding of how oral traditions shape cultural memory and resistance.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative discourse analysis approach to examine the linguistic, stylistic, and socio-cultural dimensions of Bawa Jitto's narrative. The methodology is structured around textual analysis, thematic exploration, and socio-historical contextualization, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how language, symbolism, and discourse construct meaning in the legend of Bawa Jitto.

1) Research Design

This research is qualitative and interpretative, drawing from discourse analysis, folkloristics, and literary studies. By focusing on Professor Ramnath Shastri's Dogri play Bawa Jitto as the primary text, the study explores how linguistic and rhetorical elements contribute to themes of resistance, justice, and sacrifice. The following research methods are applied:

Textual Analysis – Examines dialogues, narrative structure, and character speech to uncover how discourse constructs social identities.

Thematic Analysis – Identifies recurrent motifs, symbols, and ideological frameworks within the text.

Socio-Historical Contextualization – Relates the play's narrative to historical and cultural factors shaping Jammu's folklore and agrarian struggles.

2) Data Collection

The study is based on secondary data sources, primarily:

Primary Text: Bawa Jitto (1985) by Professor Ramnath Shastri, analyzed as a discourse artifact.

Scholarly Literature: Research papers, books, and articles on Dogri folklore, folk theatre, and discourse analysis (Singh, 2021; Sharma & Sood, 2022).

Oral Traditions & Folklore: References to karaks (folk ballads) and Jhiri Mela, which contribute to the cultural preservation of the legend (Saxena & Saxena, 2021).

3) Analytical Framework

This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Stylistic Analysis to examine the linguistic and rhetorical construction of meaning in Bawa Jitto. The analysis is structured into the following components:

Lexical and Semantic Choices – Examining the use of Dogri idioms, proverbs, and poetic structures in character dialogues.

Symbolism & Motifs – Identifying recurring cultural symbols (light, sacrifice, oppression) that reinforce the play's central themes.

Power & Resistance Discourse – Analyzing how landlords, peasants, and deities are represented through language, dialogue structures, and hierarchical speech patterns.

Performance & Oral Tradition – Understanding how folk elements, songs (karaks), and performative speech contribute to the dramatic structure.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: DISCOURSE, SYMBOLISM, AND SOCIO-POLITICAL THEMES IN BAWA JITTO

The legend of Bawa Jitto serves as a multilayered discourse, blending historical struggle, folk identity, and resistance into a powerful narrative. This section critically analyzes the linguistic, symbolic, and socio-political elements of Professor Ramnath Shastri's Bawa Jitto, examining how folk traditions, power structures, and cultural identity are constructed through language and performance.

1) Discourse of Resistance and Power in Bawa Jitto

One of the central discourses in Bawa Jitto is the struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor, represented through linguistic patterns, character speech, and narrative structure.

Devotee's Speech as Resistance: Bawa Jitto, as a character, uses direct, defiant speech against the Jaagirdar (feudal landlord), Mehta Bir Singh. His language reflects moral righteousness and defiance, emphasizing justice, labor dignity, and self-respect.

For instance, when devotee's highlight Bawa's commitment to truth, reinforcing a martyr-like discourse:

"That Bawa Jitto, who lit the candle of truth!

That Bawa Jitto, who protested the atrocities of Mehta Bir Singh!

That Bawa Jitto, who thrust the dagger in his chest

and reddened his share of wheat grains with his own blood!"

The repetitive structure (That Bawa Jitto! That Bawa Jitto!) serves as a rhetorical device, cementing his heroic status in oral tradition. The symbol of wheat grains soaked in blood further connects his sacrifice to agricultural resistance.

Jaagirdar's Language as Oppression: In contrast, Mehta Bir Singh embodies tyrannical authority, speaking in a commanding, dismissive tone. His discourse dehumanizes Bawa Jitto, portraying farmers as expendable laborers rather than rightful landowners. His language echoes real historical power structures, where feudal landlords controlled peasants' rights.

The Role of the Panchayat (Village Council): The Panchayat's language is neutral yet complicit, avoiding confrontation with feudal power. By allowing the Jaagirdar's exploitation, the Panchayat represents the silence of institutional structures in historical oppression.

Key Insight: The dialogue structure in the play illustrates a clear power struggle, where language functions as a tool of both oppression and defiance, reinforcing a folk discourse of social resistance.

2) Symbolism and Folk Elements in the Narrative

The play employs rich symbolism, deeply rooted in Jammu's folk traditions, to reinforce its themes of justice, sacrifice, and cultural identity.

The Wheat Grains as a Symbol of Justice: Bawa Jitto's sacrifice on a heap of wheat grains is a metaphor for the exploitation of farmers.

The redness of the grains (soaked in his blood) symbolizes:

The sacred connection between land and labor.

The ultimate price of injustice.

A call for resistance against feudal oppression.

Light as a Metaphor for Truth. The phrase "Bawa Jitto, who lit the candle of truth" aligns with universal themes of enlightenment and social justice. In folklore, light often symbolizes divine guidance and moral clarity, making Bawa Jitto's role akin to a prophetic figure.

Possession and Ritual Healing. In one scene, Bua Gauri (Bawa Jitto's daughter) is possessed, and her father heals her using the Jhunda (iron rods used in religious healing rituals). This moment reveals:

The intersection of folk spirituality and resistance.

The belief in supernatural justice alongside human justice.

The Role of Karaks (Folk Ballads). Karaks in the play serve as both narrative and protest tools, preserving Bawa Jitto's legacy in oral tradition. Scholars argue that Dogri ballads transform historical events into collective memory, ensuring continued cultural resistance (Sharma, 2021).

Key Insight: The symbolic elements in Bawa Jitto enhance its dramatic impact, positioning the protagonist as both a martyr and a deity, reinforcing themes of sacrifice, social justice, and cultural heritage.

3) Socio-Political Themes: The Play as a Historical Commentary

- Feudal Oppression and Agrarian Struggles: The historical setting of Bawa Jitto aligns with real agrarian struggles in pre-colonial India, where peasants were trapped in feudal land agreements. The play highlights the exploitative Jagirdari system, drawing parallels with later peasant movements in India (Waza & Sharma, 2021).
- Gender and Resistance: Bua Gauri represents women's role in folk resistance, as she continues her father's legacy after his death. Kumari & Nagpal (2017) argue that women in Dogri folklore often embody both suffering and resilience, making Bua Gauri a symbol of inherited resistance.
- Modern Relevance: Protest and Cultural Identity: The Jhiri Mela (held annually to honor Bawa Jitto) continues to serve as a space for remembering historical injustices. Saxena & Saxena (2021) describe it as "a festival of remembrance and resistance," showing how folklore remains politically relevant.
- Key Insight: The play functions as both a historical record and a continuing call for justice, positioning Bawa Jitto as a timeless figure in agrarian resistance movements.

5. CONCLUSION: THE LEGACY OF BAWA JITTO IN DISCOURSE AND CULTURE

The discourse of Bawa Jitto is a complex interplay of resistance, folklore, and identity formation. Through symbolism, rhetorical structures, and thematic representation, the play preserves a folk memory of injustice while reinforcing collective resilience. The linguistic elements construct a hero who is both historical and mythical, ensuring that Bawa Jitto remains a cultural and spiritual figure of defiance.

The play is a linguistic and performative act of cultural preservation. It highlights how folklore operates as a form of historical consciousness, transforming individual sacrifice into a collective identity of resistance. By analyzing the discourse, this research uncovers deeper socio-political structures embedded in Dogri storytelling traditions.

Strengthening Argumentation in Bawa Jitto

The legend of Bawa Jitto is often discussed as a story of peasant resistance, cultural identity, and martyrdom, but for a more rigorous academic analysis, it is necessary to move beyond simple descriptions. Strengthening the argument requires engaging with theoretical frameworks, textual evidence, and comparative perspectives to demonstrate the significance of the play as a discourse of resistance and identity formation in Dogri folklore.

1) Moving Beyond Description: Establishing a Critical Lens

A common approach to folklore studies is to classify Bawa Jitto as a regional folk hero who opposed feudal landlords, but this perspective remains limited unless it examines how folklore constructs historical memory and resistance discourse. Eric Hobsbawm's theory of "Invented Traditions" (1983) provides a useful framework for understanding how Bawa Jitto's story functions beyond historical fact, transforming into a collective symbol of justice and resistance in Dogri oral traditions.

According to Hobsbawm, folk traditions do not merely record history; they reinterpret it to reinforce cultural identity and collective memory. In this context, Bawa Jitto's transformation from a real historical figure to a sacred martyr aligns with the broader phenomenon of peasant resistance narratives, where figures like Birsa Munda in India or Emiliano Zapata in Mexico became legendary symbols through cultural storytelling. This transformation is evident in Bawa Jitto's final act of self-sacrifice on a heap of wheat grains, which becomes not just a moment of personal tragedy but a performative political statement—an act that continues to resonate in Dogri folk consciousness. By applying

Hobsbawm's framework, we can argue that Bawa Jitto is not merely remembered as a tragic hero but as an archetype of agrarian justice, embedded in Jammu's oral traditions as a moral and political exemplar. This perspective strengthens the argument that the play serves as a historical and cultural artifact that constructs resistance narratives through folklore.

2) Embedding Textual Evidence: Demonstrating Resistance through Language

A strong argument is rooted in textual proof, as mere thematic discussions lack depth without analyzing language, symbolism, and rhetorical structures in the play. One of the most compelling examples of discourse construction in Bawa Jitto is the devotee's declaration:

"That Bawa Jitto, who lit the candle of truth!

That Bawa Jitto, who maintained dignity of labor!

That Bawa Jitto, who fought for his rights!

That Bawa Jitto, who protested the atrocities of Mehta Bir Singh!

That Bawa Jitto, who thrust the dagger in his chest and
reddened his share of wheat grains with his own blood."

This passage is rhetorically powerful due to its repetitive structure, declarative tone, and performative function. The repetition of "That Bawa Jitto!" functions as a rhetorical reinforcement of identity, echoing the structure of oral storytelling traditions where repetition is used to amplify meaning. Moreover, the reference to "lighting the candle of truth" carries a symbolic weight, signifying his transformation into a guiding figure of justice and enlightenment for future generations.

Further linguistic analysis reveals that Dogri idioms and proverbs embedded in the play reinforce themes of defiance and sacrifice. In one of the karaks (folk ballads), Bawa Jitto's naming ceremony is described as:

"Sadi pandit be:de ba:le rasi na:m rak h a:e..."

(To christen the child, the priest is called, the name Jitmal is given, ordained by the order of the sun sign.)

The name Jitmal, derived from Jitto (meaning "victorious"), foreshadows his destiny as a figure of righteous struggle. This linguistic insight strengthens the argument that Dogri oral traditions do not merely narrate events but actively construct identity through naming, etymology, and performative speech acts (Austin, 1962).

By integrating textual evidence and linguistic analysis, the study demonstrates that Bawa Jitto's story is not just about historical events but about how language and discourse construct resistance, cultural identity, and justice.

3) Comparative Perspectives: Positioning Bawa Jitto in Global Peasant Resistance Narratives

To further solidify the argument, it is essential to position Bawa Jitto within broader global resistance narratives, showing how similar figures in different cultures have been transformed from historical individuals into symbols of resistance.

In Mexican revolutionary folklore, Emiliano Zapata's slogan "Tierra y Libertad" (Land and Freedom) became a defining call for agrarian justice, much like Bawa Jitto's defiance against feudal oppression. Similarly, in Indian tribal resistance movements, Birsa Munda, who led uprisings against British landlords, was later mythologized into a divine figure among the Munda people, mirroring Bawa Jitto's deification in Dogri folklore (Waza & Sharma, 2021).

Additionally, Bawa Jitto's transformation into a sacred martyr echoes the historical trajectory of Joan of Arc, who was initially viewed as a political rebel but later canonized as a saint and national symbol. The symbolism of sacrifice in resistance folklore is a universal pattern, reinforcing the idea that Bawa Jitto's narrative is part of a larger discourse on historical memory, resistance, and martyrdom.

By drawing these comparisons, the argument is strengthened in two key ways:

It shows that Bawa Jitto is not an isolated cultural phenomenon but part of a global pattern where folklore constructs resistance figures.

It highlights how oral traditions are instrumental in shaping historical memory, ensuring that figures like Bawa Jitto transcend time and remain politically relevant.

6. CONCLUSION: STRENGTHENING THE ARGUMENT FOR BAWA JITTO AS A DISCOURSE OF RESISTANCE

Through the application of theoretical frameworks, textual evidence, and comparative analysis, this study demonstrates that Bawa Jitto is not merely a folk tale but a constructed resistance narrative. The discourse surrounding his character is shaped by linguistic repetition, folk symbolism, and oral tradition, reinforcing themes of justice, sacrifice, and defiance against oppression.

By situating Bawa Jitto within global peasant resistance movements, the argument moves beyond regional folklore and positions his story as a historically significant act of cultural defiance. This strengthens the claim that Dogri folklore is an active form of historical consciousness, ensuring that figures like Bawa Jitto continue to inspire resistance against socio-political injustices.

Thus, this research not only contributes to Dogri literary analysis but also to broader discourse studies on folklore, identity, and cultural resistance.

7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The legend of Bawa Jitto serves as more than just a folklore narrative; it is a historically embedded discourse on resistance, justice, and cultural identity. Through an in-depth discourse analysis of Professor Ramnath Shastri's play, this study has demonstrated how language, symbolism, and oral traditions function as tools for preserving historical memory and shaping collective consciousness in Jammu's Dogri folklore. The analysis reveals that Bawa Jitto is not merely a tragic figure but a martyr whose legacy is constructed through rhetorical repetition, folk symbolism, and performative speech acts. His sacrifice on a heap of wheat grains transforms from a personal tragedy into a larger act of defiance, positioning him within global resistance narratives akin to Emiliano Zapata, Birsa Munda, and Joan of Arc.

By applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), thematic interpretation, and comparative perspectives, this study highlights how Bawa Jitto functions as a symbol of agrarian struggle and peasant resistance. His character embodies the subaltern defiance against oppressive power structures, making his story relevant beyond its historical and cultural origins. The integration of Dogri oral traditions, linguistic patterns, and folk performances further reinforces his transformation into a folk deity, cementing his place in Jammu's socio-cultural landscape. The Jhiri Mela, which continues to be observed annually, underscores the ongoing cultural significance of Bawa Jitto, showing that his story remains politically and socially relevant.

However, despite these contributions, this research acknowledges certain limitations. While the study provides a detailed linguistic and discourse analysis, it relies primarily on textual interpretation rather than field-based ethnographic research. The impact of contemporary adaptations of Bawa Jitto in modern theatre, cinema, and social movements remains an unexplored area that could further enrich the discourse on folk resistance in contemporary contexts.

8. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Given the rich socio-political and cultural layers embedded in Bawa Jitto's narrative, future research could explore the following avenues:

- **Comparative Folklore Studies:** Expanding the analysis by comparing Bawa Jitto to other South Asian agrarian resistance figures, such as Rani Gaidinliu of Nagaland or Tantya Bhil of Madhya Pradesh, could provide deeper insights into how folklore constructs peasant identities across different regions.
- **Modern Political and Cultural Relevance:** Future studies could examine how Bawa Jitto's story has been adapted in contemporary Dogri theatre, regional cinema, and political discourse, analyzing whether the legend has evolved into a metaphor for modern agrarian struggles in India.
- **Ethnographic Fieldwork on Jhiri Mela:** Conducting interviews and field studies during the Jhiri Mela could provide first-hand insights into the ritualistic and cultural significance of Bawa Jitto's legacy among local communities, contributing to the field of anthropology and religious studies.

- **Translation and Global Dissemination:** Since much of the Dogri literature remains regionally confined, an important area of research could focus on the challenges of translating Bawa Jitto's story into other languages, assessing how linguistic nuances impact the transmission of cultural identity and resistance discourse.

By pursuing these research directions, scholars can further contribute to understanding the role of folklore in shaping historical memory, cultural identity, and socio-political resistance. This study establishes Bawa Jitto as a critical site of discourse in South Asian folk traditions, but future explorations will ensure that his legacy continues to be examined in new and evolving contexts.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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