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46. Cultural Storytelling and Knowledge Sharing: A Study of Humorous Aspects of Tulsidas's *Sunderkand*

Sukant Tiwari
Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism
Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (A Central University), Lucknow (U.P.)
Email - sukanttiwari1@gmail.com

Vinit Vishal
Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism
Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (A Central University), Lucknow (U.P.)
Email - v.vishalresearchscholar@gmail.com

Abstract

This research paper attempts to explore the humorous aspects of Sunderkand, fifth chapter of 'Shri Ramcharit Manas of Shri Tulsidas. The Sunderkand describes Lord Hanuman's journey to Lanka, depicting his heroic deeds, playful conduct and devotion to Sri Rama. The study highlights how humour is effectively used as a narrative tool in cultural storytelling, thereby improving both the engagement and transmission of cultural values and spiritual knowledge. By examining the humorous portrayals of Hanuman's character, this paper seeks to show how Tulsidas uses humour to convey profound wisdom in the form of spiritual and moral lessons.

Keywords - Knowledge Sharing, Humorous, Transmission, ShriRamcharitManas, Sundarkand.

1 . Introduction

Shri Ramcharitmanas is one of the many texts composed by Goswami Tulsidas Ji. There are a total of seven kands in this text, of which Sundarkand is also one. This chapter prominently depicts the bravery, devotion and wisdom of Hanuman ji. This kand is based on Hanuman's journey to Lanka in search of Sita and his adventures in Lanka. Hanuman ji's journey to Lanka is filled with epic confrontations as well as humour. It can also be said that Tulsidas ji has also added a humorous tone to this story to make it interesting. He uses humour as a powerful tool in this chapter that connects and attracts audiences of all ages to the story.

1.1. Sunderkand - A Brief Introduction

Sunderkand is an important and celebrated part of the Sri Ramcharitmanas epic, which mainly centres on Hanuman's quest for Sita in Lanka and his heroic deeds there. This Kand exemplifies the virtues of bhakti (devotion), bravery and resourcefulness.

The word "Sunderkand" itself means a beautiful story or a beautiful incident, which depicts the devotional qualities of Hanuman ji and his noble efforts in the service of Lord Rama. This Kand represents a major turning point in the Ram Katha, because Hanuman's successful

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journey to Lanka or successful search for Sita led to the release of Sita from the captivity of Lanka and the union of Sita and Rama became possible.

Here are some key highlights of the *Sunderkand* :

1.1.1. Hanuman's Oceanic Leap : The story begins with Hanuman making a huge leap across the ocean to Lanka. It demonstrates his heavenly strength and devotion to Lord Rama.

1.1.2. Discovering Sita : Hanuman's search for Sita in a garden called Ashok Vatika in Ravana's palace is an important aspect of the Ramayana. After talking to Hanuman, Sita not only gains faith in Ram's love, but also becomes confident that she will be freed from captivity.

1.1.3. Clash with Ravana's army : Hanuman's major actions in Lanka include the destruction of Ravana's garden, his battle with Ravana's demon army and the killing of Ravana's son Akshay Kumar. Apart from this, Hanuman also meets Ravana in his court and warns him to return Sita and also burns Lanka.

1.1.4. Burning of Lanka : When Hanuman is tied up and brought to the court by Ravana's son Meghnad, he tries to convince Ravana to return Sita or else he should be ready to face the consequences. When Ravana does not listen and orders to set fire to Hanuman's tail, Hanuman sets fire to Lanka with the same tail. This warns Ravana about who he will face in the coming war and what will be the consequences.

1.1.5. Return to Rama : Hanuman ji's return to Lord Rama with the news of Sita is an emotional aspect of not only Sundarkand but the entire Ramayana. Hanuman informs Rama about Sita's well-being and also about their love. Which brings a new hope to Rama and his companions.

Tulsidas ji has used very beautiful language in the entire Shri Ramcharitmanas. Similarly, the language of Sunderkand is also very beautiful and is full of inspiring couplets, chaupais and verses. The entire Shri Ramcharitmanas and especially Sunderkand is read by people as a prayer to overcome obstacles and get divine help in their lives.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cultural Storytelling in Religious Texts

Religious texts have long served to preserve social values, propagate moral teachings, and strengthen community identity through cultural storytelling. According to several scholars, many texts of the Hindu tradition, including epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, are rich in narrative techniques that combine moral teachings and entertainment (Sharma, 2000). These texts serve to communicate complex spiritual and cultural messages using a variety of rhetorical devices, including humour, irony, and exaggeration. For example, Tulsidas in his Shri Ramcharitmanas not only described the life and deeds of Rama but also used cultural storytelling to instill the values of devotion, humility, and duty (Pandey, 2015).

2.2. The Role of Humour in Religious Storytelling

Humour can serve many purposes. It can also draw attention to complex things and connect people to them. Humour is used for this purpose in religious texts as well. According to Raskin (1985), humour in sacred texts can serve as a “cognitive lubricant,” simplifying complex ideas and reducing resistance to them. Sunderkand by Tulsidas is an example of this approach.

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Hanuman's humorous interactions with figures such as Surasa and Ravana's demons serve to lighten the text while actually reinforcing his courage and devotion (Raskin, 1985; Das, 2018). In the Sunderkand, Hanuman's clever and playful manipulation of his size and his humorous and sarcastic interactions with his enemies show that humour can also be used to underline religious virtues such as devotion and fearlessness. By adding these light-hearted elements, Tulsidas has not only attracted the audience but also ensured that the text is accessible to a wide range of readers (Mishra, 2013).

2.3. Knowledge Sharing through Storytelling and Humour

In many cultures, knowledge is shared through storytelling and humour. Storytelling is also used to share knowledge and to propagate traditions, morals and social norms. Stories communicate facts as well as shared values and collective experiences through the various characters and the dialogues and situations between them. According to Attardo (1994), humour can be used as a strategic tool within storytelling to promote community identity and cultural continuity. Humour has also been used in Hindu texts. Humour is often used to humanise divine characters, allowing the audience to relate to them and absorb the spiritual teachings contained in the stories (Attardo, 1994; Sen, 2007). For example, the character of Hanuman in the Sunderkand is portrayed as heroic and playful, making him relatable.

For example, the character of Hanuman in the Sunderkand is portrayed as heroic and playful, making him relatable to people. According to Sen (2007), humour in cultural storytelling is used not only for entertainment but also for the purpose of incorporating cultural norms and religious insights into the story.

2.4. Theoretical Perspectives on Humour in Epics

Many theories of humour apply well to religious epics. According to the **Incongruity theory** of humour, humour arises from the unexpected or incongruity. This can be clearly seen in the Sunderkand, where Hanuman's playfulness is juxtaposed with the burden of his mission. According to the **Relief theory**, humour provides psychological relief. This can also be seen in the Sunderkand. It uses lighthearted moments to ease the tension of the serious themes of the extensive epic(Bergson, 2008; Raskin, 1985). Applying these theories to Shri Ramacharitmanas shows that humour does not diminish the importance of a religious message but rather serves to make complex themes more accessible and simple for the audience.

This review of literature introduces the relevance of cultural storytelling, the role of humour in engaging audiences, and the theoretical basis of humour in sacred texts, and lays the groundwork for an analysis of the Sunderkand in terms of Tulsidas's purposes.

3. Research Gap

There has been a lot of research on the cultural and religious significance of Shri Ramcharitmanas, especially Sunderkand. Studies on humour as a means of cultural storytelling and knowledge sharing are quite limited. Most studies focus on the devotion and moral lessons in this epic. Researches on how humour works as a storytelling and teaching tool in Sunderkand are still limited. Analysing humour in this context reveals how Tulsidas used humour to increase people's engagement with the story and to convey complex spiritual messages.

4. Objectives

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1. To analyse the humorous elements in Sundarkand and understand their role in enhancing the storytelling experience.
2. To explore how humour facilitates the communication of complex cultural and spiritual messages in Tulasidas's Ramcharitmanas.

5. Methodology

A qualitative approach has been used for this study. The analysis focuses on the Sunderkand of Shri Ramcharitmanas. It focuses on the scenes where Tulsidas has used humour to make Hanuman's journey interesting and meaningful. Sunderkand has been used as the primary source. Apart from this, related studies of Ramcharitmanas and other religious texts have been used as secondary sources. Textual analysis has been used for this study. For which humorous moments were closely read and identified and grouped based on themes such as irony, exaggeration and playful banter. Each instance has been analysed with the aim of understanding how it contributes to cultural storytelling and spiritual insight.

6. Scope of the Study

This research work is based on the identification and analysis of humorous elements in the Sunderkand. It attempts to see how humour contributes to cultural storytelling and knowledge sharing. Specifically, it explores:

1. How Tulsidas uses humour to create relatability and accessibility within the spiritual and cultural themes of the Sunderkand.
2. The role of humour in enhancing the appeal of the narrative while reinforcing essential cultural values such as devotion, courage, and humility.
3. Theoretical underpinnings of humour, such as incongruity and relief theory, as applied to humorous interactions and episodes involving Hanuman.

7. Limitations of the Study

7.1. Textual Analysis: This study focuses exclusively on the text of the *Ramcharitmanas* written by Tulsidas. It does not take into account other cultural interpretations or alternate retellings of the story.

7.2. Contextual Focus: The analysis examines humour from a specific cultural and religious viewpoint. As a result, it may not reflect other perspectives on humour from different religious or cultural traditions.

7.3. Limited Supporting Literature: The research relies heavily on direct analysis of the text and general humour theories because there are few secondary sources that specifically explore humour in the Sunderkand or similar religious texts.

8. Theoretical Framework for Analysis

The following frameworks within the context of literary and cultural studies are appropriate for this analysis:

8.1. Folklore and cultural memory theory : This theory sees humour in traditional texts as a way of reinforcing shared cultural memories. Tulasi Das's use of humour in *Sunderkand*

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contributes to a collective cultural identity, ensuring that values such as devotion, humility, and resilience are remembered and celebrated through generations.

8.2. Hermeneutics of Humour in Religious Texts : This approach emphasises interpreting humour as part of a broader religious discourse. In *Sunderkand*, humour is not merely playful but is symbolic, adding depth to spiritual themes and making complex theological ideas more accessible. This interpretive approach aligns with Tulasi Das's intention to bring spiritual messages to the layperson in a manner that is engaging and accessible.

This analysis, framed through these theoretical perspectives, highlights how Tulasi Das's humour operates on multiple levels, enhancing the storytelling experience while also serving as a medium for cultural education and spiritual insight.

9. Analysis of Humorous Elements in Sunderkand

This analysis explores the use of humour in Sunderkand from Ramcharitmanas, focusing on their role in storytelling and knowledge sharing.

9.1. Humour as a Tool for Relatability and Engagement

Tulsidas uses humour in Sunderkand effectively to captivate the audience as well as to convey deeper cultural values. Hanuman's playful self confidence is also one of the major comic aspects of the Sunderkand. When Jambavan reminds Hanuman about his forgotten powers, he joyfully prepares to leap across the ocean to Lanka. The text describes Hanuman performing this difficult task with almost childlike enthusiasm ("जामवंत के बचन सुहाए। सुनि हनुमंत हृदय अति भाए।") (Sunderkand, Chaupai 1). The dialogues and scenes of Sunderkand are based on irony, exaggeration and playful humour. For example, in the chaupai after Doha 1, when Surasa opens her mouth Hanuman also enlarges his body, which displays his power and skill in a comical manner (जोजन भरि तेहिं बदनु पसारा। कपि तनु कीन्ह दुगुन बिस्तारा॥) (Sunderkand, 4th Chaupai, Doha 1). This kind of humour serves as a means of expressing Hanuman's divine abilities without diminishing the seriousness of his mission.

In a scene, the chaupai following Doha 24 describe Hanuman's tail being set on fire, turning it into a playful but powerful act of resistance (रहा न नगर बसन घृत तेला। बाढ़ी पूँछ कीन्ह कपि खेला॥) (Sunderkand, 3rd Chaupai, Doha 24). When Hanuman's tail is set on fire and he is paraded through Lanka, people laugh and make fun of him. Hanuman uses their laughter as a distraction and sets the city on fire (पावक जरत देखि हनुमंता। भयउ परम लघुरूप तुरंता॥) (Sunderkand, 4th Chaupai, Doha 24). Hanuman cleverly turns an unfavourable situation to his strategic advantage. This is a great example of humour used to underscore the intelligence and resilience of the spiritual warrior.

9.2. Humour as a Medium for Cultural and Spiritual Messages

The humour in Sundarkand is not merely for amusement; it also conveys deeper cultural and spiritual insights. Hanuman's encounter with Lankini, the demoness who guards Lanka, is also a comical episode. Despite her fierce appearance, Hanuman knocks her to the ground with a single punch, causing her to vomit blood ("मुठिका एक महा कपि हनी। रुधिर बमत धरनीं ढनमनी।") (Sunderkand, 2nd Chaupai, Doha 3). Lankini's change of heart from bravery to sudden submission adds a

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comic element to the story. Her realisation of Hanuman's divine nature and her subsequent humility creates an amusing contrast that enriches the story.

Hanuman's humorous encounters with Ravana's warriors, such as in Chaupai after Doha 17 (चलेउ नाइ सिरु पैठेउ बागा। फल खाएसि तरु तोरैं लागा॥) (Sunderkand, 1st Chaupai, Doha 17) and Doha 18 (कपि देखा दारुन भट आवा। कटकटाइ गर्जा अरु धावा॥) (Sunderkand, 2nd Chaupai, Doha 18), illustrate the notion that strength and wit are complementary virtues. Hanuman takes down Ravana's guards easily and has a little fun teasing them, showing that his divine strength mixed with a sense of humour makes the deeper spiritual lessons more relatable. Through humour, Tulsidas smartly emphasises the importance of resilience and staying true to one's values, even when facing challenges.

Moreover, in Chaupai following Doha 53 and 54 depict Ravana's conversation with his messengers, where the messengers are giving information to Ravana about Rama's army (अस मैं सुना श्रवन दसकंधर। पदुम अठारह जूथप बंदर॥) (Sunderkand, 2nd Chaupai, Doha 54). Tulsidas ji has written it in a very humorous tone. They mention that the one who burned the city (Hanuman) and killed Ravana's son (Akshayakumara) is actually one of the lesser powerful monkeys (जेहिं पुर दहेउ हतेउ सुत तोरा। सकल कपिन्ह महँ तेहि बलु थोरा॥) (Sunderkand, 4th Chaupai, Doha 53). The humour in this place is sharp and precise. The spies unintentionally mock Ravana. They point out that even the weakest members of Rama's army are powerful. By humorously attacking the pride of Ravana's army, Tulsidas subtly teaches the importance of humility, a core value in Hindu philosophy.

9.3. Humour Through Incongruity: Divine Playfulness and Human Responses

The humour in Sunderkand often comes from the incongruity—unexpected contrasts between expectation and reality. In the episode of Lankadahan When Ravana orders Hanuman's tail to be set on fire, Hanuman sets fire to the entire city of Lanka with his burning tail. Jumping from one building to another, he enjoys the chaos he has caused ("निबुकि चढ़ेउ कपि कनक अटारीं। भईं सभीत निसाचर नारीं॥") (Sunderkand, 5th Chaupai, Doha 24). The humour here lies in Hanuman's carefree attitude. This turns a destructive act into a playful event. The combination of Ravana's anger and Hanuman's playful spirit enhances the comic effect.

A good example of incongruity is in the chaupai after Doha 51, where there is a funny but meaningful encounter between Ravana's spies and the vanaras. Ravana's spies disguise themselves as monkeys to blend in with Sugreeva's army. Despite being Ravana's spies, they cannot stop themselves from praising the virtues of Lord Rama. This ironic twist is hilarious. They are loyal to Ravana yet start praising the virtues of Rama (जो हमार हर नासा काना। तेहि कोसलाधीस कै आना॥) (Sunderkand, 3rd Chaupai following Doha 51). This scene fits well with the idea of incongruity theory of humour, where laughter comes from the mismatch between what is expected and what actually happens. Ravana's spies trying to blend in as monkeys create funny moments as their actions are not in line with their assignment. This unexpected twist not only makes the audience laugh but also helps them connect more easily with the deeper spiritual messages of the story.

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9.4. Humour in the Context of Cultural Storytelling and Knowledge Sharing

In traditional Hindu epics, storytelling often serves as a vehicle for imparting moral and cultural values. The humorous aspects of Sunderkand offer a unique way to passing down lessons about devotion, bravery, and humility within a cultural framework. Tulasidas uses Hanuman's interactions, particularly his humour, to make complex spiritual messages easier to grasp. For instance, in Chaupai following Doha 20 presents a tense interaction between Ravana and Hanuman in Ravana's court. Here Hanuman is mocking Ravana (धरइ जो बिबिध देह सुरत्राता। तुम्ह से सठन्ह सिखावनु दाता॥) (Sunderkand, 4th Chaupai, Doha 20). Hanuman's use of humour here is not just for laughs but serves a didactic purpose. When Hanuman jokingly calls Ravana's courtiers "fools," he's highlighting the risks of being arrogant and ignorant.

Hanuman's bravery in Ravana's court is portrayed with humour, where he mocks Ravana and his courtiers without any fear. When Ravana asks Hanuman about his identity, he replies fearlessly ("जाके बल लवलेस तें जितेहु चराचर झारि। तास दूत मैं जा करि हरि आनेहु प्रिय नारि॥") (Sunderkand, Doha 21). He teases Ravana and reminds him of his clashes with Sahastrabahu and Bali (जानउँ मैं तुम्हारि प्रभुताई। सहसबाहु सन परी लराई॥) (Sunderkand, 1st Chaupai, Doha 21). Right there in Ravana's court, where even the devtas kept their heads down out of fear, his humorous conversation conveys the message of how strong his divine protection and his unwavering devotion to Lord Rama is. It is a clever way of using humour to teach a lesson, gently reminding the audience that real wisdom comes from recognising the divine, while ignoring it often leads to trouble. It's also a reminder that faith doesn't always have to be serious. It can also be expressed with happiness and playful spirit. This way, Tulsidas shows how lively and adaptable bhakti (devotion) is, making it a big part of culture.

This analysis shows how Tulsidas's use of humour works on many levels, making the storytelling more engaging while also offering lessons in culture and spiritual wisdom. Through his clever use of humour, Tulsidas not only entertains but also educates, giving the audience a deeper understanding of important values and beliefs.

10. Discussion

Sunderkand uses elements of humour in a very interesting way to tell a cultural story and share wisdom. It makes the narrative more interesting, while also making it easier to understand for those who find the epic's spiritual themes challenging to comprehend. It helps humanise Hanuman and also plays a role in making him feel more relatable. It transforms him from just an invincible hero to someone whose bravery and actions both entertain and teach valuable lessons. It also highlights the qualities of devotion, courage, and humility, showing that even the greatest accomplishments can be achieved with a joyful heart.

In Sunderkand, humour is not just for the sake of laughter. It is an important part of sharing cultural values. It shows that true devotion is not serious or solemn but filled with grace, joy, and the ability to find laughter even in difficult times. Tulsidas uses this storytelling approach to make sure that spiritual lessons are not seen as strict rules, but as vibrant, memorable stories that bring joy and enlightenment to the audience.

11. Conclusion

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Tulasidas's Sundarkand shows how humour can be an efficient vehicle for storytelling and knowledge sharing. In Sunderkand, Tulasidas skillfully employs humour as a storytelling tool to deepen the audience's connection to spiritual teachings. By presenting Hanuman's journey with humorous aspects, Tulsidas captures the essence of devotion in a way that is both profound and accessible. The skilful use of humour as well as the themes of heroism and courageousness makes the text more engaging as well as its morals more memorable. The comical elements of Hanuman's behaviour not only serve as entertainment, but also spiritually reinforce the divine messages of devotion, humility and the power to overcome fear. Humour is used in this way to communicate the complexities of culture and spirituality in an organized manner so that the story can be used to share knowledge. Through the character of Hanuman, Sunderkand becomes not only a tale of divine adventure but also a medium of cultural storytelling, where humour reinforces important values and makes spiritual knowledge accessible. This study shows that humour is not just a literary device but an important element in the cultural transmission of knowledge and values.

12. Future Extension

Future research could expand upon this study by:

1. Exploring how humour works in other religious or mythological epics from different cultures, to see what's similar or different.
2. Conducting empirical studies to assess contemporary audiences' responses to the humorous elements in *Sunderkand*, investigating how humour affects modern perceptions of spiritual messages.
3. Analyzing adaptations or performances of *Sundarkand* to explore how humour is represented in theatrical or visual forms, and how it influences public understanding of the epic's messages.

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