

Kokana Folktales as a Source of Tribal Worldview

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Submitted: 15-sept-2025 Revised: 20-Sept-2025 Accepted: 25 Oct-2025 Published: 31-Oct-2025

Manuscript ID:
IJEWLPSIR-2025-020511



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DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.17758250](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17758250)

Link:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17758250>

Volume: 2

Issue: 5

Month: Oct 2025

E-ISSN: 3065-7873

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Abstract

Forty seven tribal communities dwell in Maharashtra out of which twelve tribal communities such as Warli, Mahadev Koli, Malhar Koli, Tokar Koli, Katkari, K Thakar, M Thakar, Kathodi and Kokana and the like reside in the purely tribal district called Palghar, the then Thane. Tribal communities living in Palghar district have been preserving folklore or folk literature in abundance with an oral tradition passed down generations to generation. All the tribal communities have their own folklore. But the researcher has taken some of the folktales from Kokana community. This research paper explores tribal worldview which is very important to understand and study social values, the cultural and ecological significance of Kokana folktales, a vital component of the oral tradition of the Kokana tribal community in Palghar district of Maharashtra. By analyzing selected narratives, the paper demonstrates how folktales function as repositories of collective memory, ecological wisdom, folk mind, folk belief and social values. These narratives not only preserve the tribe's worldview but also act as tools of identity formation and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Keywords: Kokana Folktales; Tribal Worldview; Oral Tradition; Cultural Identity; Social Values; Ecological Wisdom; Indigenous Knowledge; Folklore Studies; Maharashtra Tribes; Cultural Preservation.

Introduction:

Tribal communities living in Palghar district have been preserving their folklore with an oral tradition since ancient times. They have passed down it from generation to generation. Their folklore comprises folk songs, folk dances, folk culture and folktales of their own. Tribal community living in Palghar district called Kokana has been preserving a treasure of folklore such as folk songs, folktales and folk riddles and folk proverbs. It is seen that folktales have always played a pivotal role in shaping the social and cultural lives of tribal communities in India. Among the Kokana tribe, folktales are not merely stories told for entertainment but serve as powerful cultural texts that embody ecological ethics, social norms, and spiritual beliefs. Kokana community is situated in the hilly regions Nandurbar, Dhule, Palghar and Thane districts of Maharashtra and Dang district of Gujarat. The Kokana tribe relies heavily on oral traditions to sustain their heritage. This research seeks to examine the ways in which Kokana folktales reflect the worldview of the community and highlight their relevance in contemporary times.

Literature Review:

Studying tribal folklore from the point of view of cultural study is a recent phenomenon. However, many foreigners, Indian and specially Maharashtrian scholars such as Verrier Elwin, Sontheimer, Dr. Sarojini Babar, Durga Bhagwat, Dr. Prabhakar Mande, Dr. Shaileja Devgaonkar, Dr. Govind Gare, Dr. Maheshwari Gavit, Laxman Topale, Dr. B.A. Rajput, Dr. Kirankumar Kavthekar and the like have studied folklore from different tribal communities. These scholars have prominently emphasized the significance of tribal folklore in understanding indigenous cultural systems through folk songs. Studies on Indian tribal communities reveal that oral narratives act as unwritten archives of history, religion, and environmental consciousness. However, limited research has been conducted specifically on the Kokana tribe. It is observed that Dr. Uttam B. Sonkamble studied cultural aspects of Kokana folktales. But an adequate research work on Kokana folktales has not been done and need to be explored much and more. This gap necessitates an in-depth exploration of their folktales as cultural texts and their worldview.

Methodology:

The folktales discussed in this research paper were referred from the book entitled Kokana Janjatichya Lokkatha, 'The Folktales of the Kokana Tribes' collected by Laxman Topale. A narrative analysis approach was adopted to study tribal worldview in terms of nature, social values, morality and survival.

Analysis and Discussion:

Narrating and listening folktales are the instincts of human beings. So, many and more folktales are found to be narrated and listened in tribal and Non-tribal communities in Indian contexts. Kokana community is certainly not exception to this also. So far as Kokana folktales are concerned, it is known as *Goth* (a Tale). They are generally told and listened in the winter season sitting around the fire. (Topale, 13) It does mean that folktales are narrated in the leisure time or in a particular season not only by tribals but Non-tribals also. There are twelve folktales of Kokana in the book referred in this paper. As Dr. Maheshwari Gavit rightly said in the preface of the book, "Folk literature is an important source for studying their various traditions, customs, language, costumes, festivals, collective life and natural and perfect joy they get while living a life dependent on nature." (Topale, 7) It clearly implies that folk literature is very significant for studying and understanding culture of tribes. Folklore of tribes should be studied in order to understand folk mind, folk beliefs and social norms and values. Folktale is the part and parcel of folk literature. Folktales and tribal life cannot be separated and studied separately also. Folktales give an account of social values, moral lessons, environmental wisdom and customs and traditions and the like. Therefore, some of the folktales were taken for analysis to study the worldview of the Kokana tribe specially living in Palghar district.

Social Values of Kokana Tribe:

Social values of a particular tribal community can be studied and understood through folktales. There is a folktale named '*Kulambi Jela Dayiva Anayala*', A Farmer went to Fetch the Fate, which is the first folktale in the book. It is a unique and distinctive folktale. The folktale is:

"There were two brothers. They earned well. Elder brother's wife was lazy. The wife of younger brother was active but was fed up of work she did in the farm. She told her husband to separate from his family and to eat separately. They were happy initially. So, younger brother did not dare to tell his elder brother. He became very thin because of the thought of separation. Once elder brother asked him why was he becoming thin day by day even though he was eating and drinking. He answered that his wife asked for separating from the family. Elder brother happily agreed. They twelve stores of grains. They were divided between them..." (my trans. Topale, 16)

This folktale shows a tale of two brothers. Elder brother loses his all grains in the course of time as his wife is lazy and he is dishonest. She does not take care of home properly. She does not help others. She does not have respect for grains. And therefore, the goddess of grains called *Kansari* is displeased with her and husband and this is how the happiness of the house goes off. It is clearly seen that a fate does not live in the home of a lazy and dishonest. In fact, fate, in general, is associated with success and failure in non-tribal communities. But it is not the case in tribal communities. This folktale narrates that the laziness and selfishness bring poverty and starvation. One day, elder brother goes to the God in the search of his fate. God orders him to be active in life and everything will be fine. Finally he becomes happy as he gets what he wants. The essence of the folktale is that one should work hard honestly to earn bread and butter in life. And the fate will live in the honest worker's home. This is how, the folktale narrates an importance of work and honesty in life. It also asserts that if one works hard honestly brings fate at one's home. This is the moral lesson of the folktale for the younger generation of the present era.

Another folktale called *Gunachi Gunvanti*, Virtuous Guwanti is found. This folktale narrates a human tendency born out of jealousy and selfishness. There was a daughter in law in the house of a rich farmer named Harpati. He had four sons. He was very happy with his last son and his son's wife as they were honest towards their works. But rest of the sons and daughters in law were jealous to them. Out of jealousy, one day they decided to drive a virtuous woman from the house. They thought of a plan to deceive her and declare to be a witch or a ghost. An extract from the folktale is taken here:

"All the people went for the work in the field. They thought of a plan. We would do this, if a virtuous woman came to the field with breakfast, we would eat a wild root and fall unconscious. Thereafter, father would offer grains upon us and go to the Bhagat. We would already tell the Bhagat of a plan to declare Gunwanti to be a witch. Once she was declared to be the witch, we would not allow her to live in the home. Father and mother would also be convinced to drive her away..." (my trans. Topale, 69)

As a result of a plan of the rest of the people of the home, it so happens in the folktale that in laws drive a virtuous woman away from the home by calling her a witch. But she is a very courageous and virtuous woman. She goes in the forest works hard and build her house with stories of her own. Most of the people work under her supervision. On the other hand, people in her earlier home have been homeless and have nothing to eat. Even the neighbouring people does not give them anything as they are considered to be pretending. Ultimately, all of them have to go to her for getting work. She gives them work. They cannot recognise her as she was in the disguise of a man. But she recognises them all.

One comes to know that she is a virtuous woman. Nevertheless she has to leave home. She is declared to be a witch only out of jealousy only. It is the only human tendency that makes one to leave the home and the village, too. It is one of the kind of the matter of superstition in the community. But this folktale narrates that it has taken place only because of jealousy. A number of women like Gunwanti in the society succumb to this kind of mentality and the tendency of human being. It also denotes that a woman can do anything if she determines. It will be, more or less, a truth in the present times. But it showcases the human tendency here. It teaches the present world a lesson not to be jealous and selfish that is very seminal for the future generation.

One of the folktales called Sonulibai, A Daughter. It reminds a *Chawak* Drawing Square, a *Pooja* performance done at the time of marriage which shows that all men and women on the earth are brothers and sisters. Their view about this *Pooja* is that it socially permits and converts them into a husband and a wife from brother and

sister. This folktale narrates a sibling relationship and ecological importance. It narrates that a brother and a sister cannot marry. It showcases a sacred relation of a brother and a sister. In the folktale, a brother says,

“Oh, this hair is so beautiful, how beautiful that woman must be! I want to marry the one who has hair like this, the one whose head has hair like that.” (my trans. Topale, 47)

This is how, a brother falls in love with a long and beautiful hair wrapped in a leave found in the stream and determines to marry a girl who has this hair. At end of the tale, it is found that it is a hair of none the other but his own sister. The sister does not allow him to do so and sacrifice her own life for keeping the sacred relationship. This is what is the teaching of tribal folktale. Even the entire world is maintaining this sacred relation.

Findings:

1. Kokana folktales teach social values.
2. Kokana folktales impart importance of hard work and honesty.
3. They help to sustain tribal heritage and strengthen community bonds.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Kokana folktales compiled by Laxam Topale are not simply oral stories; they are cultural texts that transmit the worldview of the community. They embody a deep ecological consciousness and act as moral and social guidelines for future generations. Documenting and analyzing such narratives is essential, especially in the face of modernization and cultural erosion. The study of Kokana folktales contributes not only to folklore scholarship but also to the preservation of indigenous wisdom that remains highly relevant in contemporary debates on sustainability and cultural identity. Therefore, the researcher strongly recommends that this kind of folktales not only from Kokana tribe but also from all the tribal communities should be collected, preserved and studied for a comprehensive understanding of unknown, untold and uninformed worldview of tribes.

Acknowledgment

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the principal and colleagues of Arts, Commerce and Science College, Onde, Taluka Vikramgad, Dist. Palghar, for their constant encouragement and academic support throughout this research work. Heartfelt thanks are due to scholars and collectors of tribal folklore—especially Shri Laxman Topale—for their invaluable contribution in documenting the oral heritage of the Kokana community.

The author also acknowledges the insightful studies of eminent folklorists and cultural researchers whose works provided the necessary foundation for this paper. Finally, deep appreciation is extended to family and friends for their patience, understanding, and inspiration during the course of this study.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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