

## A Socio-Cultural Study of Nalin Verma's Select Folk Tales

**Dr Krishna Kumar**

Assistant Professor,  
Department of Languages,  
Noida Institute of Engineering and Technology,  
Greater Noida, UP 201310.  
krishna.mgcu@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5189-1913>

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper explores the socio-cultural aspects present in the select folk tales of Nalin Verma, examining how traditions, beliefs, and social structures are reflected through narrative. Through a critical study of Verma's tales, this research investigates how his narratives portray the cultural ethos and social realities of the society from which they emerge. The study follows a qualitative research approach and prefers thematic analysis to identify and interpret socio-cultural elements provided in his select stories, which include "The Stork and Her New Husband," "The Lioness and the Cow," "The Fear of Tiptipwa," "The Gossiper," "The Young Boy and Hanumanji," and "The Malpua Tale." Each and every tale reflects the major aspects of social life, including marriage expectations, power relations and survival, superstition and communal fear, social behaviour, and gossip, faith and devotion, and moral lessons rooted in everyday practices. The analysis reveals that Verma's folk tales preserve cultural heritage, and subtly comment on social hierarchies, moral values, and the human condition. The findings suggest that these tales function as both cultural documents, and narrative reflections of societal norms and transformations over time. Furthermore, Verma's narrative techniques strengthen the socio-cultural messages showcased in his folk tales. This study brings out an exemplary thought to the world of folk literature and socio-cultural studies by offering a deeper understanding of Nalin Verma's role in sustaining and interpreting Indian folk narrative traditions.

**Keywords:** Folk Literature, Socio-cultural Analysis, Nalin Verma, Indian Folk Tales, Cultural Traditions.

## Introduction

Folk literature is an important aspect of our life, which makes us aware of our culture, tradition, social responsibilities, and religious faith since time immemorial. Additionally, Folk tales include oral history, moral values, traditional and cultural memories, and source of entertainment, which gives a glimpse of cultural identity. Moreover, Folk narratives are especially important in Indian society, which is diverse in its language, culture and traditions, as they help in the preservation and transmission of socio-cultural values. The stories frequently address multifaceted social issues, such as social hierarchy, belief systems, gender norms, and community practices, providing a valuable source of scholarly study. The research discusses the themes of caste relations, gender roles, superstition, and religious belief. The study concludes that Nalin Verma is one of the significant contributors of the Indian folk traditions and his contribution to the folk traditions is still sustaining and reinterpretation of the folk culture.

## Nalin Verma at a glance

Nalin Verma, graduated from BRA Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, is a renowned journalist who has worked with *Hindustan Times*, *The Telegraph*, and et cetera. Later he shifted from journalism to academia and he has taught at different institutes and colleges, such as Lovely Professional Institute, Patna Women's College, Patna, and others. Additionally, he basically writes about social, political, and governance issues of Bihar in particular, and Indian folk tale in English language in general. He has also written some praiseworthy folk tales in English itself. Some of his major works include *Lores of Love & Saint Gorakhnath* (2025), *Sacred Unions and Other Stories* (2026), and *The Greatest Folk Tales of Bihar* (2019). His works are important pieces of cultural text, capturing the intricacies of daily life and traditional ideas. His narrative technique is simple, symbolic and deeply rooted in rural and folk

sensibility. His stories utilise common cultural devices, mythological allusions and social contexts, but are accessible enough to be understood as well as having more elaborate socio-cultural implications. In his stories, Verma not only captures some of the traditions of folklore but also delicately interacts with the evolving dynamics of society.

### **Aims, Rationale, and Research Methodology**

The present research essay aims to conduct a socio-cultural study of some selected folk tales by Nalin Verma, such as “The Stork and Her New Husband,” “The Lioness and the Cow,” “The Fear of Tiptipwa,” “The Gossiper,” “The Young Boy and Hanumanji,” and “The Malpua Tale.” The stories have been selected because these stories cover a variety of themes, and have been developed to include different aspects of social life. Every story offers a glimpse of a specific socio-cultural aspect like marital life, adaptation, power dynamics, survival, superstition, fear of the collective, social conduct, communication, religious beliefs and devotion, and moral values in everyday life. The paper uses a qualitative research method, and the thematic analysis to highlight common themes, and patterns, which help to uncover the underlying cultural assumptions, and social norms.

### **Research Questions**

Revisiting the existing literature on folk literature, it can be said that there is a scarcity of literature that focuses on the socio-cultural study of Nalin Verma. So, this research generally recognises that he played a key part in maintaining oral history, but leaves unexplored thematic variety, social and cultural meanings of his stories. The present study aims to meet this void by utilising the thematic research method. It is a significant addition to the overall representation of Indian folk literature, and it showcases the role of the modern-day storytellers in preserving and reinterpreting the ancient stories; along with that the paper also tries to answer the following questions also:

1. How are the socio-cultural values, and traditions of Indian society represented in his select folk tales?
2. How are social structures, such as caste, gender roles, and power relations shown in his select folk tales?
3. At what extent, the belief systems, and religious faith are depicted in his select folk tales?
4. What is the importance of narrative elements, such as symbolism, characterisation, and moral lessons in showcasing socio-cultural meanings through his select folk tales?
5. How do his select folk tales play an important role in preserving cultural heritage, while reflecting changes in societal norms, since time immemorial?

#### **An analytical study of “The Stork and Her New Husband”**

“The Stork and Her New Husband” deals with the socio-cultural aspects of traditional Indian society, along with marriage, social expectations, and gender roles. The thematic aspects of the story are marriage as an institution, which reflects personal relationship, alongside social customs, adaptations, and duties. The stork represents a woman who has to get used to the new situation after being married, which is a perfect reflection of the belief that a bride is supposed to get used to her husband’s family.

It is also used as a tool to reflect gender roles, and the power imbalance in marital relations. The “new husband” is the symbol of authority, and supremacy, and the stork symbolises the submissive, and adaptive nature typically allocated to women. The stork’s capacity for enduring, and adapting also represents a kind of resilience, hinting at a quiet strength in the lives of women, who are limited by the norms of patriarchy, but assert themselves which is evident in the following lines — “The male stork promptly said, ‘I will

offer you delicious fish to eat. I will love you and keep you close to my heart, guarding you with my feathers against rain and shine.” (Verma 15) It also shows the complex role of women in society due to patriarchal norms.

The narrative technique of this story provides a glimpse of the importance of conformity to society and community norms as one of the important socio-cultural aspects. Additionally, the narrative also confirms that the people have to accept the set norms of society to maintain the social order. Actions of characters judged in light of moral standard based on community values so that if they do not meet the moral standard, they may be disapproved or conflict. The story thus serves as an educational and an expression of the pressures exerted by society, helping to teach people socially appropriate behaviour and also highlighting the difficulties involved with it which is evident in the following lines — “But the wafting from the pan stoked the stork’s desire to eat the fish. Away from his wife’s guarding glances, the stork dug his beak into the pan and got burnt to death.” (Verma 16) The socio-cultural context is enhanced by the use of symbolism.

It is said that in the East the stork symbolises grace and patience, and thus the idealised image of a good woman; the “new husband” is a symbol of the unfamiliar and sometimes challenging circumstances in which a woman finds herself upon marriage. The storytelling of the narrative, the animal characters and its simplicity make it possible to convey complex human experiences in a simple way, so that the audience can absorb the moral and cultural messages contained within it. Lastly, “The Stork and Her New Husband” is a cultural document that will capture the values and conflicts of traditional society in the context of marriage and gender roles. It also reflects the aspects of conformism and resilience, a key story for socio-cultural analysis of folk literature.

### **An analytical study of “The Lioness and the Cow”**

The folk tale “The Lioness and the Cow” is a fascinating example of socio-cultural aspects like power relations, survival, hierarchy and moral coexistence in a structured society. On a symbolic level the lioness symbolises authority, dominance and the ruling class whilst the Cow symbolises vulnerability, submission and the marginalised part of society. This contrast is a reflection of the hierarchical nature of traditional social structures that have unequal power distribution. The dialogue between these two characters underscores the conflict of strength and dependence, indicating that sometimes survival depends as much on negotiation as on confrontation, which can evidently be seen in the following lines – “‘Lioness aunty has devoured my mom. I am an orphan now,’ the calf said. Tied in the bond friendship with the calf for so long, the cub was angry with his mother. He went to his mother and instantly killed her.” (Verma 33) The story also embodies the cultural significance of living together and depending upon one another, even when power is unequal.

The lioness is powerful, while the cow has a presence of compassion, nurturing and moral restraint. This is a kind of commentary on the idea of absolute power and the notion that even those with a strong command over their subjects are subject to ethical considerations. So, the story is not merely a reaffirmation of hierarchy but is also a proposition of an ethical framework for the exercise of power, which can be sensed in the following lines – “Gripped by guilt at the loss his dearest friend, the cub, too, jumped into the fire, ending his life.” (Verma 34) The other socio-cultural feature of the story is its portrayal of class and caste differences. However, the lioness and the cow may represent various social classes: The Lioness is a stronger class, and the Cow is a weaker class, who must be more flexible and cleverer to survive. But often within the story lines, these hard lines are broken down due to kindness, trust, or dependence. This implies a belief in a culture that harmony is possible even in a hierarchy across social classes.

Moreover, the story has moral and didactic content, reflecting ethical principles like empathy, self-control, and harmony. Folk tales are frequently used for moral education, and this story contains the message that strength must be balanced by compassion; weakness is not weakness. The use of animal characters enables these lessons to be conveyed in a simple but powerful way, accessible to a wide audience and with deeper socio-cultural meanings embedded in the narrative. “The Lioness and the Cow” is a socio-cultural text, which provides a reflection of the complexities of power, hierarchy, and moral responsibility within society. In symbolic characterisation and in the simplicity of the story the tale not only supports but also critiques the prevailing social structures.

### **An analytical study of “The Fear of Tiptipwa”**

The folk tale “The Fear of Tiptipwa” vividly illustrates the socio-cultural aspects of superstition, collective fear and the psychological dynamics of rural communities. The entire story is about the creation and maintenance of fear of the unknown, based on shared beliefs and oral transmission. The word ‘tiptipwa’ is an unseen or ambiguous item, representing the irrational fears that may arise in traditional societies with no scientific explanation for natural and/or unexplained things. This fear is not personal but collective and affects the way people act, thereby cementing their conformity, which is clearly shown through the following lines – “The woman fears Tiptipwa more than me. This means that Tiptipwa is either a more dreaded animal than me or a monster or a ghost,’ the tiger mused. The thief, on the other hand, thought that Tiptipwa might be some dangerous species and got frightened.” (Verma 52) The story here is a metaphor for how superstition can be a strong social force, influencing actions and decisions.

The oral transmission of fear and belief systems from one generation to another is also an important aspect of the story. An exaggerated account of this event, combined with rumours,

helps to build up a shared imagination, causing the distinction between reality and fiction to become unclear. This is a sociological aspect of folk-lore as a tool of informal social control, with fear as a means of regulating behavior, especially for vulnerable groups like children. In this context, Tiptipwa could be seen much less as a figure of fear and much more as a cultural tool meant to make people think twice, submit and follow community rules.

The other important socio-cultural factor of the story is the image of ignorance and absence of rational enquiry. There is a particular sense in which the acceptance of Tiptipwa's existence is taken for granted; a society that is more inclined to traditional beliefs over empirical reasoning. Nevertheless, the elements of subtle critique can be included as well, if a character questions or overcomes this fear. These times represent the shift from naive belief to awareness, and an increasing influence of rational thought in traditional environments. This duality reflects changing cultural beliefs and the possibility of change in communities.

Moreover, the story highlights the role of collective psychology in the construction of social reality. With internalisation, fear becomes self-reinforcing within the community and impacts on community behaviours as well as individual perceptions. The intangible nature of the idea, hence its symbolic presence, is what makes it real, socially speaking, in the minds of those who repeat and believe it which is evidently shown in the last lines of the story – “The Jackal did exactly that. The petrified tiger fled again, dragged the jackal with him. On the other hand, the jackal that had been stripped of his tail, lived happily with his family thereafter.” (Verma 54) The narrative's simplicity and evocative images make it a powerful tool for conveying these complex socio-cultural dynamics. Lastly, “The Fear of Tiptipwa” can be considered an excellent socio-cultural piece of literature and is used to analyse the interweaving of superstition, fear and community life.

### **An analytical study of “The Gossiper”**

The folk tale “The Gossiper” is about socio-cultural aspects of communication, social behaviour and the implications of rumours in traditional communities. The story is about gossiping, and it suggests that gossiping is a common, social activity that can affect relationships, reputations and harmony in the community. The story highlights how rapid the spread of information can be in rural and tightly-knit communities, and how the lack of verification can lead to misunderstandings, the propagation of fear, and the reinforcement of social hierarchies which has clearly been shown in the following lines – “But there was neither a man or a woman around other than the husband and wife, now engaged in an angry spat. Soon, they realized that they had fallen prey to the pranks of the gossiper.” (Verma 64) The story also has ethical and moral issues in the socio-cultural environment.

Gossiping is not just an individual’s problem. It is a social problem that affects the individual and others. The Gossiper is a narrative that cautions against the use of speech and teaches the values of discretion, responsibility and the development of trust within social networks. This story is thus simultaneously a guide to moral behaviour and a commentary on culture, and provides insight into the ways communities can control social interactions and establish community cohesion through stories.

The story also represents gossip as one of the socio-cultural aspects of folktales. Gossip is a form of informal social control that helps to reinforce the norms of the group and observe deviations. It also shows the gendered and hierarchical nature of communication in traditional society; gossip is frequently linked to certain social roles or status groups. The story follows complex social dynamics by anthropomorphising characters or using symbolic representations in an accessible and memorable way, making them entertaining and informative which has been shown through the following lines – “Furious with the gossiper, the confectioner

brandished his stick and asked, ‘You stupid gossip! You played all sorts of pranks on us... The gossip smirked, ‘You were the one who asked me to gossip.’ (Verma 65) Finally, “The Gossiper” offers a glimpse into the ways in which oral narratives can serve as a vehicle for the transmission of cultural values and social norms.

### **An analytical study of “The Young Boy and Hanuman ji”**

The folk tale “The Young Boy and Hanuman ji” carries emotional, social, and cultural connotations which include the beliefs, devotions, and moral values of traditional Indian society. The story is primarily about the relationship between the child, and the deity Hanuman ji. Religious belief plays a key role in the way one should behave, and act along with that, the central theme of this story is the interaction between the young boy and the deity Hanuman ji, which can be seen in the following lines:

Hungry as he was, he got furious. He now added one more laddu in the bowl and whipped out a baton, shouting at the Lord, ‘You have kept me hungry for a long time now. I have spared one laddu from my share, and I am keeping only two for myself. If you still don’t eat, I’ll smash you with this baton. (Verma 81)

The moral is that devotion and piety are not only spiritual, but also cultural practices that help to strengthen the moral values and unity of the community. Hanuman ji is a symbol of divine authority and moral guidance. At the same time, the young boy is a symbol of human curiosity, obedience, and moral development in the context of cultural norms. The story is also a reflection of the socio-cultural phenomenon of the use of narrative for educational and socialisation process.

The story demonstrates the effects of using certain actions, and the benefits of devoting oneself to others, and it also instils group morals and strengthens group norms. Moreover, it represents the social conversation of myth and everyday life, through which our life gets

affected at a great extent in terms of individual and communal identity. Additionally, the story can be considered as cultural archive of traditional belief, and preserved social behaviour, which showcase the importance of faith in developing people's character and social ethics.

### **An analytical study of "The Malpua Tale"**

"The Malpua Tale" discusses the socio-cultural issue of people's life, such as conflicts between husbands and wives, family and society, along with the discord of inner-self and outer-self. The narrative highlights that the preparation of the malpua, a traditional sweet dish, is the symbolism of social integration, and sharing the same with others is the symbolism of hospitality and rituals. The story also deals with the holistic development of cultural, moral, and ethical understanding of people. Additionally, it teaches people that they should be generous, fair, and helpful to one another. In this story, the malpua serves as a symbol of sharing, a sense of community, and ethical behaviour which can evidently be seen in the following lines – "Both the husband and wife ate the malpuas that had been prepared nearly sixteen hours ago. They had become cold and tasteless. The villagers were stunned at the couple's stupidity." (Verma (105) It also shows socio-cultural hierarchies, relationships between people and moral responsibility in a community.

The behaviour of the characters involved in hoarding, sharing or cheating of the malpua reflects values of fairness, generosity and social responsibility within society at large. The storyline emphasises the need to behave well and demonstrates how each person in the community is connected to others and how their actions impact others. The simplicity and relatable nature of the story make it easy to pass on socio-cultural values from generation to generation, ensuring the continuity of the community and its culture.

## Conclusion

The paper concludes that Nalin Verma's select stories ("The Stork and Her New Husband," "The Lioness and the Cow," "The Fear of Tiptipwa," "The Gossiper," "The Young Boy and Hanuman ji," and "The Malpua Tale") perfectly showcase the socio-cultural aspects through its narrative technique. Each story deals with a certain aspect, such as married life, fear of survival, gossip as a tool of entertainment, religious belief, superstition, and communal relationship. The stories serve a dual purpose of both entertaining and offering moral lessons, social advice, and an understanding of human nature, showcasing the multifaceted role of folk literature as a cultural document and moral guide. It also gives a glimpse of Verma's use of symbolism, characterisation, and simple narrative, which deals with social hierarchy, gender roles, and collective values. As a whole, the paper highlights the continued relevance of oral and written narratives in the transmission of cultural heritage, social cohesion and moral principles from one generation to the next, and validate Nalin Verma's important role in the preservation and interpretation of Indian folk narrative traditions.

## Works Cited:

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