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Research Paper

Possibilities and Difficulties in Documenting Oral Literature with Reference to "Vaai Pattu" By Kunnam Kulam Kunjalavi

English

KEYWORDS :

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Oral Literature and Its Importance

Oral tradition, while an important part of many cultures, is less reliable than the written form. It is often subjective and reflects the opinion of the storyteller. Oral tradition are highly structured and when the information's are passed on from one generation to other a lot of modifications happen in the message carried on which is called the message destruction. Oral literature can be mostly seen in the poem form and not in the prose form. Culture and tradition of a place relies on the oral literature.

The root of India's literary tradition goes back to the rich tribal or 'adivasi' literature of India. However, of the numerous languages in India only a limited number of languages are recognized and promoted. Until the practice of printing came, the literature of India existed mostly in the oral tradition. This tradition was followed to just boost up the spirit of the people of their own society. Almost all the oral literature was the personal experience of the author, which was conveyed in the form of a song. Nowadays oral tradition is given much importance because the culture of the place can be easily understood and analyzed.

Why Oral Literature Is Documented?

Writing being a recent invention is useful for keeping records of all orally told literature. Oral traditions are documented into a common language for the benefit of the learners in any part of the world. It enables easy understanding of the context in any tradition. An attempt to document, will add extremely valuable materials to our literary histories and substance to our literary criticism. It becomes necessary therefore to collect and publish literature available in these languages before any further depletion of their rich literary heritage takes place.

"Vaai Pattu"_ A Islamic Art Form which is nearing its extinction is taken to analyze the possibilities and difficulties in documentation process.

An Art Form Of Islam _"Vaai Pattu"

The art and culture of Islam has 1500 year old history in Kerala. Most of the Mappila musical art forms that once flourished and existed for hundreds of years before becoming extinct and a few others which are on the verge of extinction - all were the results of constructive, creative interactions of the native Indian and Islamic cultures. So these locally developed Islamic art forms like *Oppana, Duff Muttu, Kolkali, Arabana Muttu, Mappila Pattu, Vaai Pattu [Tholla Pattu]* – all had their base and theme on the epic life of the Prophet, his wives, Sahaba and Sufi saints who reached India to preach Islam, their personal and community life, their struggles to uphold and spread Islam. All the art forms were performed vocally by clapping hands ,sticks ,duffs because islam restricted the use of musical instruments.

Vaai Pattu' also known as 'Tholla Pattu' (Tholla means mouth). This art form was the most important ingredient of those nostalgic marriage nights of Malabar. Each region and clan would have a Vaai Pattu choir group. Performers use Tukil made of Brass as a clapping instrument. These songs was sung in praise of Prophet and great personalities of the Islamic history and at times in praise of guests on their arrival to the marriage function halls, with the intension of greeting them. More than just greeting or praising, the songs fulfill the purpose of introducing the guests to others present in the hall. The wealthy dignitaries will be most praised by the choir group as the instant poems are sung, expecting rewards in return. This art form is much similar to Aasu Kavi in Tamil (Aasu Kavi is to compose poems at once on a given subject or theme).

Ther are only few artists alive in malapuram district, kerala and are almost bedridden. Kunnam Kulam Kunjalavi [in his nineties], who still stands sound and is able to remember a few lines of those songs, is the leader of the Vaai Pattu choir group in the Mampuram, Chemmad region. Both the bride's clan and the groom's clan would arrange a vaai pattu choir group in those days and the songs are sung as a competition between the two groups.

In the present generation 'Vaai Pattu' faces challenges different from other Mappila art forms. Most of the Mappila art forms are still widely performed and people show willingness towards them because they are competitive items in the school, college, inter school and inter college art festivals. 'Vaai Pattu', however, has been neglected and is nearing extinction as the young generation finds nothing worth in learning it; as stages and recognitions are almost absent due to the negligent approach from the part of cultural and educational departments of the state.

Only two songs are recorded in this art form. The recorded songs are being documented by transliterating and translating it into English for a deeper analysis of the song.

The Transliterated and the Translated Form of the Song

The Transliterated Version:

Cheppu matiyam malar tharun nabiyae **Chorus**
Tharun nabiyae malar tharun nabiyae
Eppoviyil piranna Karunya noolee
Eppoviyil piranna Karunya noolee
Yaha padiyam maduvil nidhi kaakum paalee
Nidhi kaakum paalee
Nidhi kaakum paalee
Cheppu matiyam malar tharun nabiyae

Chorus

Tharun nabiyae malar tharun nabiyae
Eppoviyil piranna Karunya noolee
Eppoviyil piranna Karunya noolee
Yaha padiyam maduvil nidhi kaakum paalee
Nidhi kaakum paalee
Nidhi kaakum paalee
Cheppu matiyam malar tharun nabiyae

Chorus

Tharun nabiyae malar tharun nabiyae

The Translated Version:

Oh Nabi, thou art full of wisdom and heavenly beauty

Chorus

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Youthful beauty beyond measure

(Born with priceless kindness in this world

OR

Your kindness is an unending reward)
Your kindness is an unending reward
And in thy arms, the world is a prized treasure.
A celestially guarded treasure
A celestially guarded treasure
Oh Nabi, thou art full of wisdom and heavenly beauty **Chorus**
Youthful beauty beyond measure
Your kindness is a ceaseless bounty
Your kindness is a ceaseless bounty
And in thy arms, the world is a prized treasure.
A celestially guarded treasure
A celestially guarded treasure
Oh Nabi, thou art full of wisdom and heavenly beauty **Chorus**
Youthful beauty beyond measure

Difficulties in Documenting the Song:

1. Usage of more than one language in a song.

Interpreting the song becomes complicated. The song taken for the documentation has the combination of two languages in it (Malayalam and Tamil). The flow of interpretation of the translator is hindered by the occurrence of another language word.

2. Words without meaning are used.

To set right the rhythm of the song, words without meaning are used. The translation process becomes harder because the translator is in a dilemma to add on or delete the word in the translated version.

3. Difficulty in bringing back the rhythm of the song.

When a literal translation is done the equivalent word in the translated language may or may not exhibit the same effect given by the native word. The word translated must undergo a lot of revision to fit into the context.

4. Loss of emotional quality during translation.

There are chances for the lack of emotional quality in the translated text .Any literature in its native language will give the maximum pleasure to the readers. The translators can be even negligent in tracking the thought process of the author of the song.

5. Interpretations can be different.

There are many ways in which a single song can be interpreted by the same person. More than one interpretation will create a lot of trouble in translating. The translated work must have the correct meaning what the author conveys through his song.

6. Clarity of the recorded song.

The clarity of the song recorded is very important for the purpose of translation. The *Vaai Pattu* used for the documentation process is sung by *kunnam kulam kunjalavi*, who is in his nineties .the clarity of the song is less due to his age and the words pronounced is not very clear. This makes the translation task more complex. Only by repeated listening to the song certain words can be clearly understood.

7. Not familiar with the native accent.

Nowadays the native accent of a language has become outdated. Languages are modernized and made easy for the use of present generation. A translator from the present generation finds it difficult to comprehend the contents in a native accent makes the translation process time consuming and tiresome.

Conclusion

Language is the most significant vehicle for communicating and preserving intangible heritage. Knowledge of a place is better understood and transmitted in the best way through oral tradition. But in the present generation oral traditions are threatened mainly by the rapid urbanization, migration to multicultural urban centers, industrialization and environmental change. Modern entertainments replace the oral tradition and the practices followed, which would lead to the depletion of the priceless oral tradition and culture. Therefore recording and documenting oral literature can help to maintain knowledge that has been collected through generations.

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