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## **ORAL TRADITION IN KATTUNAYAKA: PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES**

### ***Abstract***

*Oral tradition is a form of societal communication that transfers knowledge, ideas, piece of information, custom, culture, behaviour etc. orally from one generation to the next through songs, stories, etc. It can be defined as an enormous scope of communication. Ethnic groups are rich in oral tradition. It has unique qualities that shares moral values, ethics, legends, proverbs, chants etc. It is said that, the oral tradition sustained the egalitarian, recurrent nature of the pre-historic period.*

*Kattunayaka people are belonging to ethnic groups widely known as a sub-group of south Dravidian language family. They are mainly found in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Though the cultural occasions are practiced in their community, the folklore contents are less in number. Apart from two festivals 'Vishu and Onam', kolkka?i, is a dance form usually perform on marriage ceremonies and they celebrate. In this study, the researcher tries to give emphasis to the concept of oral tradition, a study based on the perspectives and practices of Kattunayaka community residing at Wayanad District of Kerala State.*

**Keywords:** *community, culture, folklore, linguistics, oral tradition, perspectives and practices.*

### **Introduction**

The history of Western Ghats has always embraced the eternity of tribal culture and lore. And the history of the oral tradition started from the early days of humankind. A society's culture and oral tradition are interdependently interconnected. This is because there survive communication. In Oral tradition, communication overlay an integral part. While considering the socio-cultural frame of Oral tradition, it can spread lifetime guidance from generation to generation. The discussions related to Oral tradition are primarily connected to ethnic groups. The basic ideas that come to any mind regarding oral tradition are; myths, memory, social space, social impact, recall of a corpus of history, etc. These are linked to social actions. These social actions

differentiate them and form an identity that makes a community. That identity itself shows uniqueness inside and outside of a society. Inside (individual) and outside (society as a whole) identity can be described as a repository of universal history. Oral genres include; epic, myths, legends, folktales, fairy tales, fables, proverbs, riddles, songs, jokes, etc.

The significant factor in the concept of oral tradition is its nature of maintenance of continuity. Generally, it is believed that the oral tradition and folk culture of any community is for entertainment. It is for generations. Oral tradition conveyed our most cherished values and contributed in a very major way towards the extension of our worlds. These myths, tales, ballads, songs, etc. are assisted people in educating values and ethics about the past and also in general about life. Its contributions are reached over the years.

The land of the 'Malayalees' i.e., Kerala is a compact linguistic unit having a unique and continuous tradition and history especially when it comes to indigenous people. The rich primeval forests having a picture of different cultural outlooks existed for generations with considerable understanding and amity that transmitted through the word of mouth

### **Terms and Concept on Oral Tradition**

There are three terms that are connected to the affinity of oral tradition;

- ◆ Value system,
- ◆ Social structure and
- ◆ Constancy.

The value system connotes the act of handing down the cumulative social heritage, habits, customs, beliefs, and practices that reflect in someone's personality and to the society. Social structure defines the societal attitudes, judgments, superiority, desirability, and perspectives that control the pace and direction of a community as a whole whereas constancy means the nature of eternity of culture which is in fact changes over time. In primitive societies, there is no distinction between traditional terms and concepts. In recent days these are defined in terms of characteristic features belonging to a tradition, folk, social-cultural perspectives, art, etc. And these terms have survived for centuries and thus they become the characteristics of tradition and all. The flexibility and interconnection of these terms would be able to carry the message of change as well as the development of society. The varied impulses of their lifetime and the experiences propagate certain policies which are the basis of their identity. This identity is the integral part that reflects the unique qualities hidden with meaning and communicates knowledge around.

The socio-cultural perspectives regarding oral tradition incorporate folk, folk songs, folk culture, and socialization that serve as a form of social

protest against immoralities. Folk is a term that includes a consciousness of commonness in cultural and behavioral traits. Folk songs are lyrical and rhythmic those are composed by the folk for a purpose. i.e., to spread moral values, an emotional outlet, warning, etc. Folk culture indicates a general pattern of characteristic features of communities that fulfill a social function and socialization is a kind of process constantly imparts knowledge to the existing and upcoming generations. Thus the oral tradition help in generating a society that have the capacity to act according to their need, can neglect the social nuisance, fight against oppression, make their life simple, transmits beliefs, and the fragment of this tradition thus literate a community in a responsive way. In this study, the researcher tries to describe the concept of Oral Tradition in the Kattunayaka community, an ethnic tribe in the Wayanad district of Kerala State based on their perspectives and practices.

### **Kattunayaka**

Kattunayaka community belongs to the South Dravidian tribal group mainly found in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. They got their name /ka:ˆ,unajaka:s/ because they believed that they are 'najaka:s' (heroes) of 'ka:ˆ,u' (forest). They are not merely a food-gathering tribe. Most of them are agricultural laborers. They are non-vegetarians. They speak ka:ˆ,unajakabha:fa, Malayalam and Kannada. Their languages don't have a script. In the early days, they are believed to be Hindus, and they worship the God /oVija:n/ and Goddess /oVitti/. Kattunayaka celebrates two festivals; Vishu – middle of April and Onam, in the month of August / September. The oral tradition of Kattunayaka is rich as like other communities.

### ***Oral Tradition and Kattunayaka***

The discussions related to Oral tradition are primarily connected to ethnic groups. The basic ideas that come to any mind regarding oral tradition are; myths, memory, social space, social impact, recall of a corpus of history, etc. These are linked to social actions. These social actions differentiate them and form an identity that makes a community. That identity itself shows uniqueness inside and outside of society. Inside (individual) and outside (society as a whole) identity can be described as a repository of universal history. Oral genres include; epic, myths, legends, folktales, fairytales, fables, proverbs, riddles, songs, jokes, etc. The significant factor in the concept of oral tradition is its nature of maintenance of continuity. Generally, it is believed that the oral tradition and folk culture of any community is for entertainment.

The oral tradition of Kattunayaka can be identified with its myth, folk songs, and folk dance forms. They use these as a medium to express the concepts, affiliation, feelings, common frame, intellectual adventure, punishing, abolishing, goodwill, buttressing the traditional values. They have a flair for folk songs and dance. They perform on different occasions. Mostly they do

perform during puberty, marriage while collecting honey, and sometimes sing lullabies to put the child to sleep, and sing worship songs during rituals.

#### *Myth of Kattunayaka Origin*

Almost all the tribal groups of Kerala have their own myths and tales of their origin which have some indication of their history. A popular myth Kattunayaka proposed is that two babies stolen by a local tribe from the /aryapaVa/ and the /vaniyapaVa/ were called /paidal/ (children) by their abductors. When the soldiers of the respective forces hunted around for the children, their abductors became panicky and approached all the gods; Siva, residing at Thirunelli, ultimately protected them by hiding them in a cave in the deep forests. The babies, when they grew up, became the leaders, and taught them the /sastra/. The myth seems to be indicative of the fact that the tribal people were the original inhabitants, who were acculturated into the Aryan tradition by two young 'missionaries'. The Aryan influence accounts for the ubiquitous application of the /sastra/ mumbled or recited at all the rituals (Encyclopedia of Dravidian Tribes, 1996).

#### *Folk Songs and Folk Dance of Kattunayaka*

As like other communities they also sing different types of songs. Considering their folk songs, there are mainly four types.

- (1). osa:gepadraga/ tiraGVukalja:Ga (puberty song),
- (2). Ie:rpadruga (honey song : sing like honey bee's voice),
- (3). IoIopadruga and
- (4). ko:lpadruga (worship song).

Moreover these songs, there are other worship songs, occasional songs are also practised by them.

The first three songs are related to their daily life where as the ko:lpadruga , folk song that praise their deiti (Uchal festival, putta:riyabbŸ (festival), Vishuetc) that represented their religious song. Mostly they use jo:Vumara (drum), ko;al (trumpets/ musical instrument through which the air is blown (naramull) and sound produced) on all occasions such as marriage, puberty, death, uchal festival etc. These are made from bamboo, wood, sometimes with grass, animal skin, and etc. Mostly the names of trumpets they use are ba:Vi, va:Vi, pi:pi:, and ko;al whereas the drums are known as; mara, tampa'e and seGVe. According to their culture, men and women in their community participate and dance to instrumental music during all kinds of functions. Their folk songs have a stock of tales about love, witchcraft, worship, and etc can be identified. Moreover lullabies (to put the child to sleep), elegies during sorrows are also seen. Some of the folk songs and the lyrics as

follow:

(1). osa:gepadraga/ tiraGVukalja:Ga (puberty song)

guVsa:ta: ni:{  
 gudugu<sup>~</sup>ika:da:vu  
 madujejessake  
 vi:ta:mo: .....so:ba:na:  
  
 so:ba:na: banni{e:  
 ja:la:ke: su<sup>~</sup>ioevana:nto:  
 kYnne:jessumaVe:{ioeinna:  
 to<sup>~</sup>ukumija:kku: .... so:ba:na:  
  
 so:ba:na: so:ba:na:  
 onduta<sup>~</sup>e:jalli{anna:  
 ko:luva:nantta:te  
 padika:ma: .....so:ba:na:  
  
 antakeki{igence  
 ka:lumga:{a: sa{appa:mi<sup>~</sup>u  
 ceunga:{a:va:kittu  
 madusi:tedevi:gu.... so:ba:na:  
  
 hanne{aVukumbha:  
 anne{uVu i:me  
 kumba:gemaVugabekku  
 naqnija: ba:{a:... so:ba:na:  
 gaKge:ja: ta:ji  
 gaKge:ja: ta:jamma:  
 i:meva: koVuva:ka  
 dukka:be:Vi.... so:ba:na:  
  
 ka:ligebimuvaga:  
 dukka:be:Vinamagomdu  
 nimuta:jima:ma:{u  
 u:<sup>~</sup>u jeta{ube:Va: ..... so:ba:na:  
  
 ba:gYIYbiVabe:ku  
 namuta:jima:va  
 ba:gYIYbiVabe:ku..... so:ba:na:

Each stanza of this song defines the ceremony that observed when a girl attains puberty. i.e., Blessed water with a mixer of cardamom and ginger paste should be boiled and let the girl take bath. Later they do a turmeric ritual. (Stanza I & II) They draw rangoli and make 'ta:lam' –a plate decorated with betel leaves, rice, and the copper pot placed in the middle of that 'ta:lam'. Ask her to get ready beautifully like the 'Sita' goddess, wearing a toe ring and anklet (Stanza III & IV). Twelve pots, twelve betel leaves should place above a

mud block with twelve pillars. She should submit ‘ta:mbu:lam’ –betel ta:lam to ‘Ganga’ goddess to the next day to a nearby river (Stanza V & VI). When the girl submits the ta:lam, her uncle should take betel leaves from it by his bow and arrow. The rest which he isn’t able to take from it is supposed to have by a goddess. (Stanza V & VI). They gave support to a girl by giving promises not to fear anymore, uncles will protect her from all the problems. She should take blessings from elder ones when she came to the house after rituals. They ought to give coins when she washed their legs. While she enters her room, her uncle asks her to stay back from the room if she doesn’t give him the coins she had before. It is uncle’s duty to protect and serve that girl. Later she asked his permission and enters her room. (Stanza VII & VIII).

The significant point about this ceremony is that it is as important as a marriage and still it is followed by the community without fail.

(2). Ie:rpadruga (honey song : sing like honey bee’s voice),

During honey gathering they usually sung Ie:rpadruga (honey collecting song). The primary occupation of Kattunayaka community is honey collection. Infact the Kattunayaka tribesmen are known as master honey hunters.

kunnaathigdekaccabe:Va:  
doVVaathigdekaccabe:Va:

This song is sung by the time they are going for honey harvesting. They consider the worker bee and the queen bee as sisters. Though they are collectors of honey, they have respect for the bees. The word ‘athigde’ is a respectful expression to refer women. Here the ‘kunnaathigde’ represents the younger sister, i.e., the worker bee, and ‘doVVaathigde’ refers to the older sister; the queen bee.

(3). ko:lpadruga (worship song)

(a). so: battire,  
so:ba:na: battire  
sojanaka:lçnannake: ke:^uba:me:  
na:rina: bagimY  
teippakateippakateippakasa:mi:  
te:varekunde: ko:Vimunde:  
te:vusappanu:ruka:me:  
te:varekundçko:Vimunde:  
teippakateippakateippakasa:mi:  
te:varekunde: ko:Vimunde:  
te:vusappanu:ruka:me:  
te:varekundçko:Vimunde:  
titteiho..ho..ho

It's a kind of worship song. This is sung when they are going hunting. In recent days they are not supposed to hunt wild animals. The government permitted to hunt animals only on Malayalam month Thulaam 10th as part of their rituals. On this day they do hunt wild rabbits and other small animals.

(b). lu:velu:veluka:ramallike

luverimaju:ra:geru:ta:ramallike  
 lu:velu:veka^a:malu:ta:ra: mallike  
 lu:velu:veluka:ramallike  
 luverimaju:ra:geru:ta:ramallike  
 lu:velu:veka^a:malu:ta:ra: mallike

This is a worship song mainly sung as a part of expressing their devotion to the deity. While singing this song, they do dance around a symbolized tree.

(4). Occasional song

(a) ra:seiya:ro: , ra:jara:seiya:ro:  
 raa:jara:seiya:ro: , ra:jahu: ma:le: tha:  
 ya:ra:loanneya:ra:loanneimallike u: e:na: mallike u:  
 himbigamumo: na:rakabumo: kerisa:mbaranoVora:  
 u:to:^alu u:no:^i kerisa:mbaranoVora:  
  
 ra:seiya:ro: , ra:jara:seiya:ro:  
 raa:jara:seiya:ro: , ra:jahu: ma:le: tha:  
 himbigamumo: na:rakabumo: bakana:raka ta:  
 hu^o:Vo: kumusutiriki ne: le:  
 le:lambakala:le: nannaninne le:

This is actually a piece of advice given by grandmother or mother to their children to be careful of poisonous thorns while they pluck wildflowers in the forest.

(b) e:le:lamba e:le:lamba e:le:lamba  
 e:le:lamba e:le:lamba e:le:lamba

Even though they are professional honey collectors and elephant trainers, they do labor jobs too. They sing-song while they do heavy loads. This song helps to reduce their tiresome during work.

### **Oral Tradition : Perspectives and Practices of Kattunayaka**

The oral tradition of Kattunayaka has a common frame of ideological communication that stands for achieving their social actions. The tribe generally performs by way of worshipping. Considering their perspectives and practices on oral tradition, they perform accordingly for the following reasons:

- (1). Integral part of their life effectively followed because of the fear of God and ancestors.

- (2). Source of enjoyment and aesthetic pleasure.
- (3). It reflects the constancy of belongingness.
- (4). It fulfills some social functions.
- (5). It helps to forget the fatigue and tiresome of their work.
- (6). It helps to modify the behavior of their youngsters.
- (7). It propagates continuity of their tradition.
- (8). The instruments used for folk music inspires and
- (9). They consider it as divine and sanctified to arouse love and devotion.

Their songs have a variety of themes. Most of them bring out not only facts of their social life but also reflect their thoughts and surrounding culture. One interesting factor is the language of these songs is not affected by modernity. The words in these songs are said to be primitive Kattunayaka. The pace, expression, and pronunciation of these words are not much similar to the present generation. The younger generations are not known of many of these songs. A strong sense of interdependence and respect towards land and nature is one of their qualities to appreciate.

They are still maintaining a distance from the outer world but the ideas are deeper than the usual understanding of the world. They seek ritual blessings before taking up every task of their life. They believe that their ancestor's spirit always controls uncanny powers. Basically, their spiritual foundations are for their survival and development.

### **Conclusion**

Studies on the oral tradition of Kattunayaka are comparatively less in number. The maintaining of the oral tradition of Kattunayaka is thus significant these days. The reflection of their ancestral qualities is fading in certain cases or situations when it deals with present generations. The songs of Kattunayaka are related to their culture and deities but they can share with the outer world as an introduction and lifestyle followed by the Kattunayaka community. Each human is part of society. It doesn't matter whether he alone stands for or represents a community as a whole. Due to pandemics, people suffer a lot to manage their academic as well as daily life these days. If corpus that belongs to oral tradition is available, then it can be shared with youngsters and kids, so that this tradition may enlighten them with good vibes.

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