



SONGS OF THE HILLS: BADAGA FOLKLORES AS A TOOL FOR KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

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“The words of the bards come down the centuries to us, warm with living breath.”

Padraic Peare

The Badagas are the largest tribal group in the Nilgiris. They speak a language called ‘Badugu’ and it has no script. The indigenous wisdom of their culture, tradition, values, medicines and education is embedded in their folklores. They have narrative songs or ballads that are different for different occasions. These long and short narratives are on the verge of being lost as a result of the progress and change in lifestyle. These folklores are not just songs to entertain the mob but play a very important role in knowledge transfer as well. This paper aims at discussing the process of knowledge transfer through these folklores. The importance of translating and recording these indigenous folklores is discussed.

Key words: Folklore, indigenous wisdom, knowledge transfer.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Badagas are the largest tribes in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu. There are many theories about their initial settlement and the most accepted one is that they moved from Mysore before or during the rule of Tipu Sultan. The language they speak is called ‘Badugu’, the language does not have a written script and Tamil is used for writing.

Badugu has a rich history and culture and that results in a great collection of literature as well.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The folklores, myths, proverbs and ballads were mostly oral narratives. In recent years, they have been recorded and translated to English. This is a major step as without this effort this great literature that has lived all these years carried by the winds of the Nilgiris would otherwise be lost. The oral literature serves as a great encyclopedia of information. The songs and proverbs are not only a source of entertainment but also serve to enlighten the community



1.3 KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER THROUGH ORAL LITERATURE

Oral literature of the Badaga community plays an important role in providing information, values and other details to the community. The great wisdom of the elders has been passed from generation to generation through oral literature. There is a challenge that it might get modified with time and lose its essence but still most of the oral literature has retained its originality. Translation and analysis of the oral literature plays a very important role.

2.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This Paper aims to

- Study the importance of recording Oral literature
- Knowledge transfer through Oral literature

2.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study restricts itself to the selected works of Badaga literature.

2.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The folklores and oral literature play a very important role in shaping our tradition, values, beliefs and ideas. A detailed study of the folklores helps us to connect to our roots and understand ourselves better. The works are not recorded and in this age of shift in technology and life style there is a threat of it being lost. The knowledge transfer that happens through the oral literature is analyzed.

2.4 METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative paper that collects data from Books, Journals, research papers and articles and the same has been analyzed. The paper also includes extracts from an interview with an elder of the community.

3.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Speaking about the Badaga community, Paul Hockings in his book, 'Ancient Hindu Refugees: Badaga Social History 1550-1975' has stated that "their ancestors did not all come to the Nilgiris at the same time" although many believe that they came to the Nilgiris as refugees at the time of Tipu Sultan (Paul Hockings, 1980)
2. "Orature means something passed on through the spoken word, and because it is based on the spoken language it comes to life only in a living community. Where community



life fades away, orality loses its function and dies. It needs people in a living social setting: it needs life itself." (Routledge, 2003)

3. The story of the Okkaliga bride who ran away without marrying Tipu Sultan and the foods that saved them is told as one of the major story for the immigration. (Paul Hockings, 1980)
4. Mr. Balasubramanian Bellan in the book, 'Paame' has rightly stated about the badagas that, "the pride of the community rests in its unique history and value system". The Badaga literature is a reflection of this unique history and value system. (Mr. Balasubramanian Bellan, 2009)
5. Mr. Balasubramanian Bellan in the book, 'Paame' states that the true essence and value of the Badaga literature is not lost although it lacks a written script. The oral literature has ensured "minimal deletion of the nuances of thoughts" (Mr. Balasubramanian Bellan, 2009)

4.1 ANALYZIS

This research tries to analyze the literature of the Badaga community to get a deeper insight of the culture. The research also aims at understanding the process of knowledge transfer through the oral literature.

The oral literature of the Badaga community is classified as songs, proverbs, stories and epics. There are songs that are sung for different occasions that includes wedding, funeral, birth. Each of these songs has a lot of hidden meaning as well through which values are imparted to the next generation.

Badagas are the largest tribes in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu. There are nearly 400 villages called 'Hattis' in 'Nilgiris' where the Badagas have settled. They speak a language called 'Badugu'. The festival of the Badagas is called as 'Habba' and all the members celebrate the festival together and women of all age group sing and dance together.

The interview with Ms. Uma was very useful as she said that she remembers the stories that were told to her from childhood. She said that she clearly remembers the story of a beautiful girl who was turned to stone because she ventured to go out of the village boundary alone. This story is recited with great details and is a long narrative. The main aim of this story was to instill fear in the tender minds and to ensure that kids would not venture outside alone. There are also stories that show the power of women, where the goddess who destroys evil is portrayed as a woman.

1. The folklores of the Badaga community are vast and has clearly served the purpose of education and entertainment. The process of storytelling has also played an important



role in knowledge transfer and ensuring that the traditional beliefs and values are not lost. The spread of technology and the process of modernization is a major threat for this vast culture and folklores. People prefer watching movies and listening to music. People have started to move to different places and prefer other languages. There is a great need for these works to be translated and recorded so that future generations will benefit. In recent days there is a lot of anthropological study done and a great value is given to the oral literature as that has served as the main source of knowledge transfer.

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