

The Role of Oral Tradition with Special Reference to the Thadou-Kuki Society

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Thadou-Kuki society is well known for its oral tradition that expresses valuable messages. The Thadous have a rich collection of folk literature in different genres that include folk narratives, songs, proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, lullabies, war songs, sacrificial chants, etc. All forms of oral tradition in Thadou society contains various informational values on religion, history, customs and public practices, and information that has the values of local wisdom in the daily life of the community, as well as genealogical information or descendant of a family in the community. All of the information are received, developed, and derived and transmitted to the future generations through a wide variety of oral tradition. However, with the advent of education, modern entertainment, changing lifestyle and advanced technology, oral tradition has begun to be gradually abandoned and forgotten by the Thadou society. This has adversely affected the existence and transmission of the rich and valuable oral tradition of the Thadous. The aim of the present paper is to discuss the gradual decline in the role and status of oral tradition in Thadou society and the need for maintaining and preserving before it is lost forever. The paper argues for collective responsibility of every member to preserve and store this rich oral tradition. Additionally, documentation and information centres, such as libraries, archives institution, and museum can help to identify, collect, document the oral tradition and preserve the information contained in the oral tradition.

Keywords: Oral tradition, Thadou, Documentation and preservation

Introduction

Folk literature, also called folklore or oral tradition, is the lore (traditional knowledge and beliefs) of cultures having no written language. It is transmitted by word of mouth and consists of both prose and verse narratives, poems and songs. Folk literature is a collection of songs, poems, tales passed from generation to generation; it

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includes all the myths, fairy tales, legends, epics, fables, folktales and other traditions of preliterate society passed down by word of mouth through the generations. The authors of traditional literature are usually unknown or unidentifiable. Legends share stories of the heroic deeds of historical figures – usually saints, kings, or heroes. Many think such stories as historical accounts, even though the basic historical facts generally have been embroidered upon and may even be questionable. Oral narratives are cultural materials and documents transmitted verbally from one generation to another in speeches or songs that later take up the form of folktales, folksongs, ballads, sayings or even chants. These stories have endured because they are entertaining, they embody the culture's belief system, and they contain fundamental human truths by which people have lived for centuries. Knowing the characters and situations of folk literature is part of being culturally literate. Folk literature, regardless of its place of origin, seems clearly to have arisen to meet a variety of human needs. The needs are:

- I. to explain the mysteries of the natural world,
- II. to articulate our fears and dreams,
- III. to impose order on the apparent random, even chaotic, nature of life, and
- IV. to entertain ourselves and each other.

In addition to this, languages live in oral traditions and expressions and these traditions help to safeguard more rather than dictionaries, grammars and databases. Playing a crucial part in keeping cultures alive, oral traditions and expressions are used to pass on knowledge, cultural and social values and collective memory.

The functions of oral literature

Oral literature is the repository of the critical knowledge, philosophy, and wisdom for non-literate societies. This literature, through it is a narrative, poetry, song, dance, myths and fables, and texts for religious rituals, provides a portrait of the meaning of life as experienced by the society at its particular time and place with its unique existential challenges. It encapsulates the traditional knowledge, beliefs and values about the environment and the nature of the society itself. It arises in response to the universal aesthetic impulse to provide narratives that explains the nature of life and describes human responses to challenges. This literature portrays how one is to live a moral life and explains the nature of one's relationships to divinity. It thus retains the society's knowledge to be passed on to succeeding generations. It contains the history of the society and its experiences. In various forms, this oral literature portrays the society's belief system that makes sense of life. It provides a guide to human behaviour and how to live one's life. With the arrival of literacy, the core of this literature and its art rapidly disappears.

Oral literature is also the repository of artistic expression in a society. Its beauty resonates across cultural frontiers. As such, this literature is a response to the universal human instinct to find balance, harmony, and beauty in the world and the need to understand pain, suffering, and evil. It explains the causes of human suffering, justifies

them, and suggests ways of mediation and the healing of suffering. Oral literature also functions to fulfil the need for religious belief and spiritual fulfilment necessary for human existence. This universal human realm, peopled by spiritual beings and their personalities, is revealed through stories, tales, songs, myths, legends, prayers, and ritual texts. Such literature recounts the work of the gods, explains how the world and human existence came about, and reveals the nature of human frailty. Oral literature serves to communicate ideas, emotions, beliefs and appreciation of life. This literature defines, interprets, and elaborates on the society's vision of reality and the dangers in the world. It deals with the human adventure and achievements against odds. Through the texts of the society's rituals and ceremonies, the ecological elements that are critical to the society's livelihood are portrayed and their functions sanctified.

Oral literature is also a form of entertainment and fosters feelings of solidarity with others who have had similar experiences. In sum, oral literature may encompass many genres of linguistic expression and may perform many different functions for the society.

The Thadous

The Thadous are an indigenous tribal people native to Northeast India, Chin state and Sagaing Division in Burma and eastern Bangladesh with a population of 20,00,000 approximately. In Manipur, the Thadous are mostly found in Churachandpur district, Senapati district, Ukhrul district, South-Western Hills and Sadar Hills, Chandel district and Jiribam.

At present, the Thadous practice Christianity as their religion. Christianity among the Thadous can be traced back to an Anglican missionary named William Pettigrew who worked in Manipur as a missionary from 1894. However, prior to the coming of Christianity, the Thadous had their own indigenous religion.

Language

Genetically, Thadou belongs to the Northern Kuki-Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman group of the Sino-Tibetan languages and their language is called *Thadou pao* 'Thadou language'. Thadou language doesn't have a script of its own. However, it is believed that Thadous had their own script. There is an interesting and hilarious folktale that illustrates how the Thadous lost their script. It is known that the Thadous were in possession of some documents, inscribed on leather, known as *Savun Lekhajo1* 'leather scroll'. These scrolls were lost in the passage of time and along with this, the Thadous also lost their script. The script was written on the skin of animal. The story tells us that while the *Savun Lekhajo1* was being dried in the sun, the dog ate it and that is how Thadous lost their script. There are many initiatives by the native people to retrieve this lost script but they have not been successful. As a result, for a very long time, Thadou was an oral language until Ngulhao Thomsong with the help of the Christian missionary Dr. C. Crozier and his wife M.B. Crozier translated the Bible. With the publication of the first primer 'Lekhahul' in 1927 using the Roman script the language became a written language. Since then, many books have been in and about the language. At present, the language is taught as a language subject in Manipur

in the under graduate and graduate courses and the Thadou Literature textbook committee looks into the matter relating to the pedagogical development of the language. Some selected oral narratives in the form of prose and poetry have been included in the syllabus.

Socio-cultural life

The Thadous have numerous types of culture and tradition. Rice is the staple food of this people. They domesticated a number of animals and some of them are very useful and helpful to their masters. Of these animals, *sel* 'mithun' is the most prized possession, while a dog is considered as a faithful animal.

The festivals of these people include *Lawm Sel Neh* 'a celebration by young people of the community after the season's work is over', *Chang Kut* 'a celebration by the whole community after rice harvest', *Mim Kut* 'related to maize harvest and similar in content to *Chang Kut*', *Sa-Ai* 'a celebration of a successful big game hunt of big animals', *Chang-Ai* 'a celebration of bounteous rice harvest', *Hun* 'an occasion of worship in ancient times', *Chawn le Han* 'hosting of this occasion involved feasting and holding of sporting events' etc. There also have different kinds of musical instruments to enhance these festivities. *Khong-pi* 'big drum', *Khong-cha* 'small drum', *Dah-pi* 'gong', *Pengkul* 'trumpet', *Gosem* 'bagpipe', *Theile* 'flute', *Theiphit Selki* 'horn of an animal particularly of Mithun's' & *Lhemlhei* 'a peculiar mouth instrument' are a few musical instruments. These instruments are useful not only for raising the festival spirit, but also for adding solemnity to certain auspicious occasions.

Oral Traditions in Thadou Society

Thadous have a rich collection of oral literature in different genres that include folk narratives, folk songs, proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, lullabies, war songs, and sacrificial chants. Earlier, the Thadou community did not have any written document. Hence, the community preserved their traditions and cultures through oral tradition and artifacts. Every materials with which the community define its identity, existence and world where he/she is living in, taking from the anthropological myth to fairy tales were transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition. The people regarded their oral traditions as communal intellectual property.

The Thadou oral tradition records the lives of the common people, their beliefs, simple joy and sorrow, customs and their encounter with strange forces of nature. The common themes of the tales are adventures, love, beauty hunting, hero tales, legendary tales, revenge and vengeance. The stories also represent the customs, rites and rituals of the people, beliefs of the people. On the other hand, they also records all the notable events of the past embedded with thought provoking stories revealing the historical, cultural, inhabitation, religious aspect and names of great men and women and chieftains of the community in the past. The folksongs also memorised almost all the drive made by the people. For instance, song for dead, song for harvesting, word play, song for encouragement, song celebrating success, song sang on their usual way of challenging the evil spirits, songs celebrating their hunting spirits and their way of courting their beloved, etc.

Thadou oral literature includes legends, myths, folktales, moral fables, riddles,

the chanting of *gamlen* and *gal la* (hunting and war cry), romantic songs, songs of victory and merry making. The stories range from historical tales, creation stories, genealogical tales, tricksters, explanatory tales, romantic stories, legends of the brave men, stories of the beauty of women, jokes, riddles etc.

Mentioned may be some of the most popular ones:

- 1) The famous *Chhinlung* or *Khuul* myth
- 2) *Changmai te thusim*
- 3) *Lendoute thusim*
- 4) *Lengchonghoi*
- 5) *Ahsijolneng*
- 6) the famous romantic story of *Khupting* and *Ngambom*
- 7) The poignant story of *Jonlhing* and *Nanglhun*
- 8) The legend of *Galngam* and *Hangsai*, the two great warriors
- 9) The well-known legend of *Chemtatpa*
- 10) The legend of *Lengbante*
- 11) The story of *Jamdil*
- 12) The story of *Sangah le Ahpi*
- 13) The story *Changkhatpu le Ahshijolneng*
- 14) The story of *Khalvompu le Lenchonghoi*
- 15) The story of *Chipinthei le Mailangkoh*
- 16) and the famous trickster tales of *Benglam*.

In addition to this, there are also many bedtime stories for children like fables which always have a moral at the end of the story. As an art, oral literature appeals to children's senses and satisfies the child's creative and educational needs. There are also explanatory tales that explain the environment and the universe. These are very entertaining, educative and have rich moral content. The social values and moral lessons contained in oral literature strike a chord in children's curiosity to learn about the world around him/her.

All these above mentioned stories are now available in written form. All these represent the rich variety of the Thadou culture and tradition. Some of the common themes across these tales were the undying true love, the importance of hard work, the victory of good over evil, the fruit of perseverance, the importance of sharing, the poor or the weak helped by nature, the importance of love, sacrifice and unity in the family, the love of siblings, the wicked being punished and the good rewarded, victory of good over evil, etc. *Benglam* is a household name in almost all homes. There are many stories of the wittiness of *Benglam* that even today if anyone is dumb and slow he is called *Benglam* or compared to *Benglam*. Like any good trickster, *Benglam* displays several negative behavioral characteristics, including laziness, insincerity, and greed. Not only were history and stories passed down, but genealogies and songs. In addition to folktales, in Thadou society, proverbs, riddles and wise sayings are part of every spoken language and are important forms of oral tradition. Proverbs are central to indigenous education and various themes of traditional education were imparted through the vehicle of proverbs. Thadous also have a huge collection of

proverbs and wise sayings which have high moral and educative content. They are often used by parents to impart moral values and cultural values to the younger ones. A person with knowledge of proverbs and who is capable of utilising them at the right situation is highly regarded and considered as a wise person. Some of the common proverbs and wise sayings, which are still prevalent and relevant in the present day, are discussed in the following section.

1) On the importance of obedience to parents, this is a proverb, which is still popular and relevant till today. *Nu thu pa thu ngailou analo a-eh e*. It can be translated as “a person who does not obey his/her parents even the leaf he/she plucks is torn or not good”. This is a proverb often told to children to impart to them the importance of obedience to parents. A person can never be successful without obedience to his/her parents.

2) Another important theme in the Thadou proverbs is the virtue of solidarity and willingness to help others in the community. There are many proverbs centering on the theme of community feeling and peaceful co-existence in the society. One such example is: *Igol paipeh a ihetle eipaipeha jong akiheng e*. This illustrates the importance of mutual sharing and selfless sacrifice. It means ‘We get help by helping others’. The more you help, the more help you will receive in return. This proverb emphasises the values of good deeds and good neighbourliness as criteria for harmonious living and is still relevant in the present time.

3) On values of goodness and kindness and reward for good and punishment for evil there are many proverbs. One such popular proverb still prevalent today is: *Mihemin atutu a atat e*. “Man reaps what he sows”. This is similar to the English proverb. “As you sow, so shall you reap”. This is used to teach a child to do good deeds so that he/she can reap the fruit of the good deed. If you do good things, you will receive good things and if you do a bad deed, bad things will happen to you. Everything comes back. In short, it tells us that you cannot expect good things to happen when you have been doing only evil things to others.

4) The theme of co-operation at the family and society levels is a precondition for harmony in Thadou world view. There are many proverbs which illustrates the importance of respect for the elders and care for the younger ones. One such example is: *Upale lamsah akipel thei poi*. This proverb also depicts the social hierarchical structure of the Thadou family system in which the eldest son is the custodian of the family. The line of descendents is through the eldest male child and the entire responsibility of the family is vested on him. He is compared to the road, which can never be avoided. Like this road, you can never avoid the eldest brother in the family. It is therefore his responsibility to take care of all the other members of the family in their good times as well as in their bad times. In return, it is the duty and moral obligation of the younger siblings to show their love and respect to the eldest brother. In this way, children are taught the

virtues of living together peacefully in the family.

5) Thadou people respect the elders and believe in their world-view that their words are sacred and wise. Thus, the role of the elders as repository of wisdom, customs and values of the society is underscored. There are many proverbs and wise sayings based on this theme. This is one such wise saying: *Voh eh chon kha masa* “Referring to the older or more experienced person as wiser”. This illustrated the importance of respecting elders who are more experienced and consequently wiser. Respect for elders is considered a virtue. How educated and well-placed a person, she/he should show respect to anyone older. Old age is given due respect and recognition in Thadou society. A person is expected to have this virtue.

6) Thadou proverbs also cover aspects of patience and perseverance. *Thohhat gal jo* “a person who endures and perseveres wins the battle”. Thus, values of patience and perseverance are needed if achievement is to be recorded. Through patience and perseverance, success is obtained.

7) On values of self-restraint, another Thadou proverb says: *ah in ne talo ing nge ati le akilo khu e*. This proverb talks about the effects of being greedy. A person who is too greedy and tries to gather more, sometimes messes up the whole thing like the hen that spilt the grain in the process of trying to eat more.

8) There are also many proverbs directed towards women and their good conduct in the society, which depicts the social structure. Here is a popular proverb: *Numei le balke alhah lhah nan a poi*. Thadou society is patriarchal and patrilocal. Women are expected to leave their parental home and live with their husband’s family. Along with this, she gives up her nature, her name, her lifestyle, etc. to fit into her new environment. This proverb talks about the status of women in the society, how she changes to adapt herself to her new home after marriage. She is compared to a shoot of a taro plant which adapts itself any environment that it is planted.

In addition to this, Thadou have a rich collection of proverbs, wise sayings, taboos and riddles that cover different aspects of living harmoniously in the society. Thus, in Thadou society, proverbs are essential for a deep understanding of the communal bases of the society and the bonds which tie them together.

In the olden days, at the end of the long tiring day, everyone would gather around the fire and regale the stories of the people before them while all the time adding new ones to account for the present acts and deeds of their members. Younger members memorised them for lack of a way to write them down, and therefore passed along the history of the people to their children until someone learned to read and write or someone came in contact with the people, learned to communicate with them, and recorded the stories in writing for all to see. The younger ones longed for this moment when the grandparents start their stories. Storytelling thus becomes an important part of child socialisation. They are taught gender roles that make work easier

within a traditional cultural setting. The cultural knowledge learned through communicative practices such as storytelling includes cultural expectations about social roles and relationships. The oral narratives represent the adult point of view and has many social and psychological functions to fulfil.

Traditional stories are a key part of the process of cultural continuity. Thus, oral tradition in its various forms played a very significant role in the life of the Thadou. Folklore is probably the most important and well-acclaimed component of the cultural heritage of a community. It can reflect the essentials of the community's cultural attributes as in a mirror and is recognised as a basis for its cultural and social identity.

Role of Oral tradition in Thadou society

Oral literature is meaningful and useful in many and different ways. Forms of oral tradition such as narrative and song often serve as important cultural resources that retain and reinforce cultural values and group identity. It is not only material from the past but also a great deal of new material is being composed and performed today. Storytelling is a traditional art form which has been practiced for thousands of years in every society and culture known to humankind. Traditional stories have been passed from generation to generation through folktales, songs, rituals, chants and even artifacts. These oral narratives are critical historical components that pre-date written words. They explain the culture and how it came to be. The multiple role of oral literature is not peculiar to Thadou tradition. Genres of oral tradition do serve more than one social function which entertains, socialises and teaches children some of the important cultural aspects. This sections discusses some of the roles oral traditions particularly folktales in Thadou society.

1) Oral literatures, particularly, folktales have been shared in every society to entertain, educate, and preserve culture. Today's children may think of folktales as old-fashioned or even irrelevant. However, the influence of folktales is alive and well even today. Despite the advent of contemporary literature, folktales are unique and different from other types of literary fiction in many ways. Folk tales serve as an important means of entertainment and recreation. An exciting well-told story, a sweet melodious and rhythmic song, or even a simple exchange of jokes and riddles soothes our minds and refreshes our brains. Folk tales help them to relax, to amuse themselves and get their minds off the dull struggles, worries and sorrows of life.

2) Secondly, folktales along with its entertainment function and are also useful means of educating and informing people. The wisdom and knowledge of the older members of the community are passed down to the younger generation. This serves as an important vehicle for intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cultural information. In other words, folktales along with their entertainment function can be viewed as an important means of education and information.

3) Folktales are interesting, soothing, and enjoyable and at the same time infor-

mative and useful. They also contain useful information and skills which we can be learnt along with enjoyment and recreation. Everyone is attracted to stories, proverbs or songs because they are enjoyable. Proverbs are particularly useful because of their moral content.

4) Different forms of oral tradition such as narratives serve as important cultural resources that retain and reinforce cultural values and group identity. This is particularly true of Thadou folktales as they contain high moral content and are typically aimed at children.

5) Oral traditions such as tricksters of *Benglam* form an important body of knowledge that not only preserve cultural values and philosophical orientations, but also continue to imbue its listeners with these values.

6) Oral literature makes us aware of ourselves, other human beings, our environment and our history. Stories, songs, proverbs, riddles and jokes in oral literature use colorful words and vivid images to describe human beings, their feelings and their behavior towards one another. These performances also portray natural phenomena like landscapes, plants and creatures in the same lively language. They also recount events and happenings in our lives and in the history of our societies. Hence these performances stimulate our observation and imagination. We begin to understand the things described better and in a new light. Oral literature gives us insight into people, things and events.

7) Folktales have obvious and recurrent themes. Goodness is always rewarded; heroes and heroines live happily ever after, while villains are suitably punished. Throughout the generations, the story may change, but its core message remains the same. The famous story of *Lendoute ucha* can be cited as an example. This story of the two brothers (*Lendoute ucha*) is very often told to children to teach them the importance of brotherly love, selfless sacrifice and sharing in the family. Therefore, folktales serve as an important tool to teach the moral values and customs of the community.

8) The language of folktales is an important part of children's literary heritage. Because of the oral tradition, the language in a folktale is musical, rhythmic and melodic. In addition, the characters' direct dialogue punctuated with quick action excites readers' and listeners' interest. Story is the best vehicle for passing on factual information and is thus a useful teaching tool. By retelling a story they have heard, the learner transfers images into his own words repeating the information and integrating it into the database. Children are taught that hard work is a virtue and they are not too young to start cultivating those virtues.

9) In addition to this, oral traditions can be used for multiple purpose source material for reconstruction of the past histories of the Thadous, as writing came much later. Writing, being a relatively recent invention, most cultures, especially the nonliterate indigenous cultures, including Thadou recorded their experiences, history, traditions, proverbs and beliefs through oral traditions which

are remembered and passed on through generations. Oral tradition serves as an important tool to reconstruct the history of a particular family community where written records are not available. The *Chhinlung or Khul* myth is a common theory of origin to almost all the Kuki-Chin groups.

10) Because stories rely on words, they become a source of language for humans. Storytelling is a foundation for literacy. We store information in our brains, but if the database is not filed, the retrieval is not possible.

11) In Thadou society, folk songs and folk singers are important repositories of traditional oral literature, as stories are typically not only told but also embodied in song cycles. The folksongs also memorised almost all the drive made by the people.

12) Proverbs and wise sayings of the elders play an important role in the society. The younger ones can learn from this and apply to their own lives. The language of proverbs has a rich vocabulary of words, phrases and combination of words, symbols, pictures, allusions, association and comparison. In Thadou society, proverbs act as a catalyst of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics and morals which provoke further reflection and call for a deeper thinking and consideration of issues. Proverbs are the vehicle with which socio-cultural and philosophical thoughts underlying social values, issues, ethnic and religion are transmitted across generation. Thus, proverbs are essential for a deep understanding of the communal bases of the society and the bonds which tie them together.

13) Like any other genre of traditional literature, riddle helps children develop imagination. Riddles are culture specific. Riddles and riddling exercises are enjoyable ways of teaching children about the environment in which they live. Since the riddles require at least two persons for its performance, it act as a tool for cementing relations among children. They learn to compete and more importantly learn that life is “give and take”.

14) Whereas the riddles exercise the mind, tongue twisters like *papao pa paipeh poh pum pel pel* exercise the tongue and lips. Other popular tongue twister is *kapi sisuh kapu sidu*. Tongue twisters are great fun and their main function is to assist children in developing and improving language pronunciation and articulation.

15) Folk literature also helps in understanding their history, origin and their culture.

Therefore, it goes without saying the relevance of oral narratives in Thadou society. Oral literature, in different ways, has played and will continue to play a significant role in the Thadou society.

The Changing Scenario

The wisdom passed down from generation to generation had a central place in many

cultures where the extended family has traditionally played a major role in childrearing. In Thadou society, as in many other oral societies, there was also a tradition of passing narratives from one generation to the next, hence ensuring the values were kept alive in the society. The Thadous were noted for their cultural heritage which was reserved and transmitted from generation to generation through a system of traditional education. Traditional narratives were told by grandparents to their grandchildren, for specific and psychological goals. Children were taught the virtues of living together peacefully under the same roof. The principle of community living centered around themes of moderation, solidarity, respect for parents and elders, respect for authority, respect for truth and honesty, willingness to work and suffer for self and community advancement, sense of honesty, modesty, tolerance, sense of goodness and kindness, love of one's neighbour, respect for life and so on.

However, with the advancement of technology, other means of entertainment—television, mobile, movies and the fast lifestyles, folk tale telling is losing its importance. Parents don't find time to narrate stories to their children and the children also have their other means of recreation and entertainment. The pressure of the modern educational system on the children on the one hand and the work pressure of the parents on the other give very little space for modern recreation and entertainment. This leaves with no place for story telling or passing down of oral tradition. The younger generation is going away from their traditional social atmosphere with the changing life style of urbanisation and the growing challenges of change which affect oral traditions that these traditions may disappear along with elderly people of the society.

The communities themselves often do not see the importance of preserving their oral traditions. It is essential, therefore, not only to create a political environment that values and respects minority cultures but also to encourage communities to become aware of their own cultural treasures and to help them find ways to preserve those treasures.

When folklore, along with cultural wisdom and pride, are no longer passed down to the next generation, children and our society as a whole lose something. The richly diverse cultural and familial traditions of our own society, and the intergenerational wisdom that is imbedded in them, are all being lost. Yet these could serve us well in our struggle with some of the complex social issues that face us.

Vast archives of indigenous knowledge and expertise deposited in the form of folklore in traditional societies all over the world are spilling into oblivion, leaving humanity in danger of losing its past and perhaps jeopardising its future as well. Depositories of folklore are vanishing as indigenous people have been threatened for centuries as development encroaches on their land and traditions. Folklore also disappears because the young who are in contact with the so-called modern world have embraced the view that their traditional cultures are illegitimate and irrelevant. Thus a state of cultural holocaust is prevailing in most of the indigenous societies, where a deplorable socioeconomic and cultural situation threatens people.

Observations and Suggestions

As mentioned earlier, different forms of oral tradition serves as important cultural

resources that retain and reinforce cultural values and group identity. Each genre of oral literature plays an important role. However, the role and status of oral literature in the Thadou society is gradually declining with the changing time. It is saddening to see that oral literature is losing its relevance in the modern Thadou society, both in the urban and rural areas. With the advent of modern technology in the form of sophisticated gadgets like smart phones, television, computers, etc., oral literature do not find a place in many homes. With modernisation and urbanisation, the family system is also changing. Modern education and the pressures of modern urban lifestyle have also made oral literature impractical, irrelevant and outdated.

Oral literature is disappearing because the young who are in contact with the so-called modern world have embraced the view that their traditional cultures are illegitimate and irrelevant. The present younger generation has almost forgotten many of the folk literature. Thus, a state of cultural holocaust is prevailing in Thadou society as well as most of the indigenous societies, where a deplorable socioeconomic and cultural situation threatens people.

Gone are the days when grand children used to wait for the bedtime stories to be told by the grandmother or grandfather. As a result, the wisdom of the older generation is longer transmitted to the younger generation. With this, a lot of cultural and linguistic knowledge are lost as this is one of the best means of transferring language and culture in any society. This is alarmingly harmful and calls for a serious and conscious effort to protect and safeguard the existing oral tradition. Unless this is done, the already endangered culture and language will face the doom of extinction and this is detrimental for the society. There is no systematic documentation of the rich oral tradition except for some interested individuals who are making efforts to document in their own capacity. However, this is not sufficient and more needs to be done to preserve and document the valuable oral literature. The Thadou-Kuki Literature Committee is the one body involved in the publication of school text books and other creative writings in Thadou. Thus, the safeguarding and preserving of the various forms of oral literature is an important factor in the process of safeguarding cultures, especially among minority peoples whose cultural heritage is at greatest risk.

Modern technology can also be employed to document and preserve the rich cultural heritage. Computers can help preserve language diversity by enabling native authors to produce literature in their own languages. Recording oral tradition can help to maintain cultural knowledge contained in traditional stories and songs. The recording (audio and video) of rituals and dances can be a valuable means for preserving records of cultural activities and expressions and offers an alternative means for passing them on to future generations. Documentation of storytelling, songs, rituals, everyday life can be another step towards developing and preserving indigenous of the existing oral tradition. The increasing availability of multimedia and the expanding capabilities can be use for archiving oral literatures so that they can be more available than ever before in multiple formats (audio and video in addition to print).

New approaches to preserving cultural heritage emphasise that indigenous people themselves should record and collect the variety of language use and cultural activi

ties in their communities although researchers from outside the communities can provide assistance in planning the methods for observing, collecting and recording data. When minority people take the lead in data collection, they are able to choose and select the information, expressions and rituals that they perceive as important, wish to preserve and pass on. They are also encouraged to recognise their own cultural heritage as being worthy of preserving and passing on to future generations.

Conclusion

The paper highlighted some of the issues with regard to the oral traditions and its gradual decline in the Thadou society. Suggestions and recommendations have been proposed to protect, preserve and promote the oral literature that is still prevalent. When oral literature, with its wisdom and pride, are no longer passed down to the next generation, children and society as a whole lose something. The richly diverse cultural and familial traditions of the community, and the intergenerational wisdom that is imbedded in them, will be lost forever. It is therefore essential to create awareness about the importance of the role of oral literature to the community and particularly to the younger generation. The native speakers have a great responsibility in this respect. Modern technology can be used as a means to promote, protect and preserve the rich oral literature and culture. Additionally, documentation and information centres, such as libraries, archives institution, and museum can help to identify, collect and document the oral tradition and preserve the information contained in the oral tradition. It is therefore the collective responsibility of every member of the community to preserve and store the rich oral tradition before it faces the doom of extinction.

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