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Oral Tradition: A Medium of Cultural Transmission

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Abstract

Every society is dynamic. Transformation is an inevitable process for any human civilization orality or oral tradition are most widespread mode of communication in rural areas. Oral tradition is a medium of communicating ideas, perceptions knowledge and non-material culture. It is transmitted, accepted and conserved orally from generation's oral lore or traditions is any community's traditions, custom values passing down by word of mouth. This process continues from one generation to other without any written script. Oral traditions are generally passed by elder generation to younger generation. It is a medium of conserving and preserving the culture of a community. Oral traditions inculcate good behavior healthy habits and also mould good personalities. It also has an impact on psychological thought process of an individual.

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Introduction

Oral tradition has always been important in all societies although the present societies depend on all scripted records. Oral tradition is based on firsthand or direct experience and most importantly it contains unfiltered responses to the questions presented. It does explain the change and continuity in any society. Verbal traditions are based on folk-lore, poetries, legendary stories, proverbs rhymes and riddles. Local information perception of life, and wisdom all rely on oral traditions. The oral traditions are inherent with cultural identity and values of the concerned society. Oral traditions are seen as messages of information that are transferred from first to second generation and so on. The medium of such transmission are varied which can be in the form of speech, song, stories, proverbs etc. This medium of communication help the individuals be it children or adult. The major and even simplest aspects of their own culture are often learned orally. Oral traditions bring out the possibility of transfer of knowledge and information without scripting or writing. Oral tradition serves as the heritage of local knowledge. Through different mediums of orality, culture daily life affairs, best practices of the community local culture of that place etc. are transferred. Oral traditions are rich in indigenous knowledge, values, ethics which help in overall development of that

society in general and individual in particular. With the impact of factors of change including Westernisation, Urbanisation, industrialisation and globalisation there has been a change in the thinking and decision making pattern of a society.

This paper is an attempt to understand the relationship between oral traditions and change and continuity of a society.

Review of Literature

Bajpai writes in his article "Complimentary disciplines and their significance in India-oral traditions, folklore and archaeology" that oral traditions were different across the nation, packed with their customs and traditions in the local language. Puppet shows with leather dolls were shown to depict mythological stories, ballad, moral stories, rich ancestral practices.

In his conclusion Bajpai emphasises on the fact that if oral traditions are studied in totality, it will surely stress on the fact that studying culture is an integral part of any society.

Lehman. *et al.*, 2004 in his article "Psychology and Culture" highlighted the influences of psychological processes on culture and how an individual's actions evolve over time due to shift in cultural paradigm.

Objectives of the Study

1. Understanding the relationship between oral traditions and continuity and change in a society.
2. To analyse oral traditions in general by society and particularly by elderly.
3. To recognise and link the values and ethics taught to the young generation by the elderly through oral traditions.

Methodology

Case study technique was used for the study through qualitative research method. Purposive sampling method was considered suitable for the study in which respondents chosen were above 60 years of age. I will be discussing here two case studies.

Case 1

GM 72 years of age lives in Rahimabad with her husband Murli (78), her husband was from neighbouring village. Talking about her childhood she recalls how important source of knowledge and wisdom oral traditions were indeed.

According to her development of transport, urbanisation and influence of social media has reduced the impact of oral traditions. Now the oral traditional method of transmission of knowledge has to compete with the modern sources of information and influence.

She claimed that oral traditions are useful but are not as important as they were 50 years back. Some neighbouring communicatives still mainly rely on oral traditions for transmission of knowledge, custom, law, traditions of the local area. However modern influences have permeated most traditional societies. She also opined that oral traditions have hidden social behavioral patterns family memories, societal learning and value education. Thus explaining the importance of oral traditions.

Many of the incidents and stories shared in form of oral traditions are not relatable to younger generations who fail to rationalise them hence it loses its essence. Thus proving continuity and change in a society. It also expresses oral traditions through the lens of an elderly of a society.

Case Study 2

Swaroop Kumar in his late 60's has four sons and two daughters lives in the village Baqinager while interviewed about 'Oral traditions' expressed that in his childhood he was most influenced by his family especially the elders of the family. The views opinions the type of communication among elders all formed his opinion. But with the passage of time, the influence of outside world, development of technology emphasis on education and literacy all played their part in diminishing the impact of oral traditions in a society. There is lot of improvisation in oral traditions. He also tried to explain that earlier these values were transmitted by engaging the youth with elderly. But in present times young minds are engrossed in latest technology they hardly spare time to interact with elderly thus reducing the impact of oral traditions in their lives. Once again proving continuity and change.

Oral tradition represent a multifunctional and an important means of verbal communication that in its true sense supports diverse activities in different cultural constructs.

It is indeed mankind's first and still most important and prevalent mode of communication. In its true sense it is a means of preserving culture and tradition. It helps in giving us a sense of identity and preserves our ancestral past. It does help to connect communities. Thus undoubtedly oral traditions is an important medium of cultural transmission.

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