

## Why and how should we document Oral tradition?

### 1. What is oral tradition of a speech community?

*The ways and means by which a speech community engages itself verbally. It may include all or some of the following:*

- *Creation Myths/Tales of Origin*
- *Epic tales*
- *Historical narratives*
- *Folk tales*
- *Shamans*
- *Songs:*
  - *Ballads*
  - *Lullaby*
  - *songs of valour, worship, history*
  - *chanting used in rituals such as marriages, child birth and death*
  - *invocation of gods and goddesses*
  - *work songs related to profession/s (while working, tilling the land, husking the rice etc. or making pottery)*
  - *song of nature, e.g. rain songs*
  - *songs of play and games e.g. swing songs, and songs while playing with hands etc.*
- *Oral poetry*
- *Riddles*
- *Jokes*
- *Language of rituals*
- *Chant to mark the opening and closing the ceremony*
- *Chant to mark the digging the foundation for making religious building, e.g. temple, mosque, house, school and other.*
- *Healing language*
- *Chanting before undertaking a voyage*
- *Register used for hunting in sea or in forest*
- *Appeasement of gods, goddesses and ancestral spirits*
- *Abuses and curses*
- *Mimicry*
- *Any other*

### 2 Why should we document these?

- Evidence of ways and means of human survival and sustenance
- Evidence of collective memory
- Evidence of sharing among the communities
- Evidence of archaic structures of language which may not be in use at present
- Evidence of archaic theatrical performance
- Evidence of communicative pattern outreaching wide variety of listeners
- Evidence of archaic linguistic structure.

3 What is the **structure** of oral tradition?

- *Participatory in nature [ahankar and kahankar]*
- *Without boundaries of prose, poetry, narration, theatre, gesture all integrate in one*
- *Speaker and listener are interlocutors in the same oral rendering.*
- *Not frozen. Keeps evolving and thus is very current and contemporary.*
- *Bold. Divulges the belief and faith or distrust for the rulers.*
- *Sacred and at times not permissible to put it in writing. The concept of **vachan***
- *Outcome of collective memory and hence there is no single author with a copy right.*
- *Ever flowing like a river but very holistic in nature.*
- *The language of oral tradition in various genres may not be the same as that of speech or conversation. Thus, some specific archaic structures may be represented.*
- *Older than written tradition and hence may not be comprehensible to the community engaging in oral tradition. Migrants to different parts of the world and diaspora across the globe using language of various rituals are case in point.*
- *Oral tradition may differ according to the gender and age. Thus, Men's speech and women's speech may differ substantially (Kurux) and children's speech or adolescent speech may differ from the adult. This may be especially true of males.*
- *It may be restrictive to certain parts of the society. Some sections of the society neither can participate nor hear the renderings.*
- *Multiple renderings of the same text.*

4. Composers and composition

In certain speech communities, composers are acknowledged and venerated because:

- *The right to compose is restricted to certain parts of the community.*
- *Historical narratives are rendered by elderly experienced persons only.*
- *Certain rituals are confined to women of some type and not to all.*
- *Healing practices are confined to certain section of the society.*

5. Questionnaire should seek the following information

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Languages known to the consultant \_\_\_\_\_

Home Language of the consultant \_\_\_\_\_

Language of the Oral tradition \_\_\_\_\_

- performance sites (private/public); (men/women) (within or outside residential areas)
- Time frame (time of day; period of time (hours, weeks, days)
- seasonal aspects
- What constitutes the 'stage' in performance?
- Dos and don'ts of the Oral tradition
- Functional aspects: On what occasions a particular oral tradition is rendered?
- Any variation to be noted down
- Is any other activity associated simultaneously with oral tradition?
- Is the oral text considered sacred?

**Challenges**

1. How to do justice to the performative element of the oral tradition in translation or in writing mode?
2. How to accommodate multiple rendering of the same text?
3. The ontological condition of the oral tradition is that---it changes every time it is rendered. How to accommodate that?
4. How to accommodate mimicry—an essential part of Oral tradition?
5. How to translate in writing the subjectivity of the performer?
6. Flexibility of the oral tradition and the rigidity of the written/print has to be accommodated.
7. Since essential dynamism that underlies the oral text changes in written format and is far from the real situation—oral text has to be recorded in multi-media format.

**Happy note**

Oral tradition can serve as a device to retain memory and recollecting indigenous knowledge system—which may serve against amnesia and forgetfulness in old age.