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A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF ORAL TRADITION ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

The transformation of any society always tends to be dynamic. Forms of oral tradition passed by the older generations to a child has contributed not only in saving the culture and good practices of the indigenous population but, also has an impact on the psychological thought process, perceptions, personality and behaviour of a child in a long run through social learning and modeling in the early stages of development. This study comprises three case studies from the memories of the geriatrics and viewpoint of two psychologists on the influence of oral tradition on child development from Bengaluru, Koppal and Bagalkot Districts of Karnataka. Attempts made to draw a better understanding on the relationship between oral tradition and child development from geriatric memories.

Keywords: *Oral Tradition, Transmission, Thought Process, Geriatric Memories, Child Development,*

Introduction

Oral traditions like the great Indian epics introduce human values, self-esteem, moral values like honesty, truthfulness and sacrifice (Kapoor & Singh 2005: 12). Folktales that carry the stories of Ekalavya, Abhimanyu, and Panchatantra influence positive personality traits and teaches one to be competent. Through songs, people communicate information about their daily lives, good practices followed, about culture of the place, situation and relative problems (Schniter et al. 2018: 94). Similarly riddles, proverbs and myths had their roles to play in developing logical thinking and shaping behaviour of children. Oral traditions are packed with key factors for cognitive, social and emotional development which are important aspects of child development.

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The early stages of childhood are very crucial in building positive thoughts, attitudes and behaviour of an individual. The socio-cultural theory framework proposed by Vygotsky emphasizes on how various social sources of individuals have its impact on learning and development thereby constructing higher order thinking (Steiner & Mahn 2011: 191).

Oral traditions transformed from our ancestors are rich in indigenous knowledge, values, ethics and healthy lifestyle for the overall development of the child in various aspects. With globalization there has been a change in the thinking and decision-making pattern among children and youth especially with regard to values and ethics. It is important to reinforce the rationale behind the oral traditions for a positive psychological thought process among the younger generation. There are very limited studies conducted in India and Karnataka on How oral traditions can enhance the development of the child in various aspects, the memories of Geriatrics/Grandparents on the significance of oral traditions and Child Development. Most interestingly the Comparative study from correlating perspectives of Geriatric Memories and Psychologists. Thus, this study is an attempt to understand the relationship between oral traditions and child development.

Review of Literature

According to Lehman et al., 2004 in the article "Psychology and Culture" highlights how psychological processes influence culture and one's actions evolve over time due to cultural paradigm shift. Further the authors state that the psychological needs and creation of culture were linked with the existential anxiety, awareness of our own morality, normative standards, socially acceptable behaviours and attitudes (Lehman et al. 2004: 689).

Devatine in the article "Written Tradition, oral Tradition, Oral Literature, Fiuriture" stresses upon the oral traditions in French Polynesian Literature being the base for the formation of human society which transmitted cultural traditions, thoughts, reflections and emotions of the people living in that society. Author further says the orality is relative to individual mannerisms, reactions, attitudes, ways of being, walking, talking, thinking, eating, sleeping, dressing, living. Therefore, orality blooms from the 'Thought' then takes the shape of singing, dancing, narrating, nurturing, rhymes, beaten on instruments or even screamed with phrases (2009: 10).

Bajpai in the article "Complimentary disciplines and their significance in India - Oral traditions, folklore and archaeology." states that oral traditions were varied across the country which were packed with their customs and traditions in their own language. Puppet show with the leather dolls were used to depict stories from mythologies, ballads, victory stories of kings, historical incidents, riddles, moral lessons and rich practices by the ancestors. Further the author concludes that if oral traditions and folklore are studied

collectively in a holistic manner it gives the current generation a clear picture on the importance of following any culture (2014: 125).

Vijayakumari in the article “Oral tradition as source of construction of history of pre-literate societies” emphasizes that oral tradition is not only mythology, sacred lore, legends and epics, folk songs and folktales, and proverbs and riddles. It has vast reserve of diverse secular knowledge on subjects like astronomy, agronomy, medicine, meteorology, and rudimentary engineering and technology. Further she adds that oral tradition represents the essence of culture, helps to understand the meanings that people create which acts as a road map for them in dealing with different life situations and challenges. The author concludes by saying that careful effort should be made to save the authenticity and diversity of traditional cultures by deeply analyzing internal and external sources of criticism” (2018: 140).

Sripadmadevi in the article “Indian Children’s Literature in Ancient Epoch- A bird’s eye view” states that India is a rich bank of verbally transmitted stories through oral tradition about the glorious past, ideals norms, values, morals, wisdom, myths and legends, cultural practices and folklore. The stories transmitted to children in their childhood is to lay down a strong base of nurturing, educating and to prepare them as a better individual to face the life challenges. The storytellers called as ‘Kathavachakas’ used to orally share the stories from epics, Vedas, purana, folklore in the religious places, under big trees, or common meeting places of the people (2021: 14).

Objectives of the Study:

- 1) To explore oral traditions followed by grandparents.
- 2) To study the relationship between oral traditions and child development.
- 3) To understand the trends evolved in transmission and transformation of the oral traditions from the respondents’ memories.
- 4) To identify the values and ethics taught to the future generation by the ancestors through oral traditions.

Methodology:

For the purpose of the study, geriatric memories from three different cultures of Karnataka and psychologists’ viewpoints are taken into consideration. Case study method was employed for the study through qualitative research with free flow sharing and expression from their memories along with predefined set of questions for the respondents identified from the literature review and research gap to keep them focused on the topic selected. The selection criteria of the respondents was based on the purposive sampling technique and consent obtained from the respondents for the same. The objectives of the case studies were (1) To collect data from their memories and

understanding along with the pre-defined set of questions (2) To avoid personal bias in data collection (3) To have respondents who are above 65 years, with grandchildren and psychologists who have knowledge on child development.

Results and Discussion

Case Study 1 :

“*Ajja -Ajjigalu... hirikaru indale manegalu, manemakkalu uddhhara agaodu. Avarugalu kalisikotta nadate, maatu, pravrutti, saralate, jeevanshyli evella mundina peelgege achukattina bunaadi.*” says the respondent Jayamma of 67 years from Bagalkot, Karnataka. *Translation:* The families and children will progress and prosper by our ancestors and grandparents. Their attitude, speech, activity, simplicity and lifestyle lay a clear cut foundation to the future generation.

She stated that they used to get oral information from schools, social gatherings, community places and mainly from family members, especially the elderly. Later radio came into picture and hardly one or two houses could afford to have it so people used to gather near their homes during news hour from doordarshan. The major genres of oral tradition she has witnessed as a child were folk songs on daily routine, life events like wedding and woman life after marriage, folklore on the victories of ideal kings, mythological stories, purana, street play, proverbs, ideals of basavanna and vachanas. Grandmothers and the elderly used to sing folk songs while stone grinding the grains. She sings one such folk song which speaks on life of women “*Attheya maneyali hotthagi needidare unabeku neenu magale*” and shares that wedding songs, called as maduve - beegara haadugalu used to be very informative and entertaining and also holds many emotions and sings “*Nee hadedavvana mane bittu hontyalla magale... ninna hetthavara hesaru jopaana magale*”. During shravana masa Tuesdays “Gullavvana Pooja” was their cultural tradition. Gullava is the goddess of folklore and the legend behind the gullavana worship is a poor farmer. The idols of Gullavva and Basavanna will be placed according to the respective week and decorated with saffron. In the evenings there would be a feast with millets, corn, jowar roti after which many cultural programmes like Mono acting of various mythological figures, folk dance like kolaata, stories of Tenali Rama, Kittur Rani Chennamma and many more were shared among children. The family has a tradition of getting poor girls married by giving all the required resources and conducting the marriage in their fields. In the past 40 years, the family has conducted almost 83 marriages in that way. The family believes in the ideals of Basava especially ‘kaayakave kailasa’.

According to her, some of the values and ethics transmitted from the family oral traditions to younger generations are honesty, right attitude, gender equality, adaptability, caring and sharing, responsibility, self-respect, selflessness, no corruption, discipline, ensuring that food is not wasted, feeding

the poor instead of giving alms, treating everyone equally with dignity, helping the needy and valuing relationships.

The paths/ways adopted to transmit these values were by being a role model, answering the doubts of younger generations without passing judgements on their opinions, giving clear and flexible instructions to learn and encouraging them to follow their own conscience, rather than with elder's coercion.

If given a chance to reinforce any family oral tradition, Jayamma wants to bring back the glory of the past folk songs and Basavana Tattva (ideals) which had true life lessons in it.

Case Study 2 :

“Maneye modala paatashaale, samajave ellarigu guru, namma poorvikara anubhavagale namma indina astitva” says the respondent Hulikal Nagabhushan Rao of 100 years from Bangalore, Karnataka. Translation: Home is our first school; Society is our teacher; The experiences of our ancestors is the reason for our life today.”

After witnessing the world from 1920 to till date, the centenarian recalls the memories of the scenario during those days in contrast to today's tremendous changes the world has seen. Be it our environment, human practices, technological influence, western culture influence, food habits, values and morals, everything has changed in its original meaning/form. He said their daily routine used to be simple and sustainable. *“Patriarchy was predominantly practiced within our tradition and culture but it was me who always opposed seeing women as subordinates thus setting an example with my wife. I always involved her in family decision making and let her pursue her passion because I believed in the progressive thoughts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Savitribai Phule and Ambedkar which we heard as a story from my grandparents, at Gurukul, freedom struggle speeches and social gatherings.”* ‘Gaade Maatugalu’; Proverbs were shared in the Gurukul on a daily basis which used to influence them in maintaining their moral values for instance ‘Ati aase gati gedisitu’, ‘Maadidunno maharaya’, ‘Satyakke saavilla sullige sukhavilla’, ‘Bekkige aata ilige pranasankata’ and many more like these. He stated that at home elders used to convey important messages through proverbs which used to keep them informed about the do's and don'ts, which guided their behaviour. The festivals were celebrated with enthusiasm and children were also involved in the preparation. Through such kind of involvement, children used to get to know about the cultural practices at home or village and their relevance.

“Being a farmer and freedom fighter, I have believed in the values of humanity, liberation and patriotism.” He states that the significance of Yoga, meditation, Geeta parayana, stories of Chanakya, Arjuna, Swami Vivekananda,

freedom struggle incidents especially on taxes/Quit India Movement/zamindari system and Indian citizen rights and duties and eat right food practices have been transmitted through oral traditions of family. *“I appreciate my children and grandchildren when they buy clothes from local weaver and when they buy grains for the household from farmers directly instead of shopping from so called foreign brands.”*

Some of the values and ethics that were transmitted from the family oral traditions to younger generations are humanity, liberation, freedom, gender equality, women empowerment, citizen duties, helping the needy, discipline, honesty, punctuality, commitment, time sense, value of relationships, farsightedness, valuing local resources, valuing others’ opinion and sustainable living.

The paths/ways adopted by his family to transmit these values were involving children in the elders’ activities, encouraging children to practice values first for others to follow, by being a role model, shaping the kids’ behaviour from an early age and instilling curiosity in them to know the importance of imbibing values.

“Given a chance to reinforce any family oral tradition will definitely bring back the glory of chanting AUM and Sandhya Vandana which keeps our body clock intact with nature.”

Case Study 3 :

“Culture and tradition are passed on through generations by many ways prominently from family, people and society. People live in harmony in society by sharing joys and brotherhood and celebrating every festival in the house with a lot of enthusiasm. The celebrations gave daily labour to many which encouraged life skills, arts and artisans. They were part and parcel of societal development where the market is a chain between producer, supplier, distributor and consumer. Thus, people of all sects together formed the society.” says Vasantha Laxmi from Koppal District, who is an expert in hand skills such as knitting sweaters, weaving baskets, making pearl ornaments and special garlands, singing and cooking.

She shares that during earlier days, the major source of information for them was the ‘*village katta*’ under a big tree where all people would gather and spend time together. Information was majorly through people, radio and later when television was introduced, people would gather in one house to watch Ramayana and Mahabharata. At that time treating people coming to their house to watch television was also a great joy. Her mother and in-laws taught her how to cook, draw Rangolis and the goodness that can be spread through such a tradition. The elders used to teach about the greatness and reasons for performing customs with scientific narrations. She said when we teach chanting mantras to the children it improves their fluency and it developed

concentration in the children. For some things that we feel as superstitions, she gave narrations and told the Vedic Gnana's of Body chakras and the connection of them with the ornamental wearing in the Indian culture, for example we wear Kumkum on forehead so that there must not be direct exposure of the Chakra to the material world. *"When we sneeze, the old people used to say "Shatayush" that's a blessing that let the person live for hundred years a scientific reason associated with this that for a fraction of millisecond the heart stops beating when the person sneezes so that the heart should be active they blessed Shatayush."* She claimed that now children ignore old customs, but if elders narrate their importance in an understanding way, they will also definitely follow them. She speaks about all medicines being present in the kitchen itself, for example, acidity can be cured with buttermilk, throat irritation with turmeric tea or basil tea etc. *"In the process of modernization, we must not leave behind our traditional background, we must pass it on to future generations."*

She has tried to inculcate many ethical values in her children and family, passing it to her grandchildren in the means of stories and songs. She rounds up her grandchildren and feeds them with "Kai Tuttu", the heaviest and tastiest food fed by grandparents. While feeding the kids she narrates many things to them about happiness in togetherness, enjoying family and the importance of eating together. In the evenings she used to gather all her children for chanting bhajans, she used to sing melodiously and teach all the children so they could sing along with her.

She says for the overall development of a child, the role of family and the atmosphere where the child grows is very important and elders play a very significant part in carrying tradition, culture, morals and ethics to the future generations. Even some famous folk songs depict the celebrations and emotions, Sings *"Panchami habba aitavva dina naaka Anna baralilla yaka karilaka"* claims these sorts of traditions enhance the bond between siblings and the child growing in such an atmosphere definitely will know the values of relationships and the importance of respecting elders.

Values transmitted from the family oral traditions to younger generations are honesty, right attitude, gender equality, adaptability, caring and sharing, responsibility, self-respect, discipline, valuing relationships, valuing food, treating everyone equally with dignity, helping the needy and feeding the hungry.

The paths/ways adopted to transmit these values were by being a role model, re-instilling values whenever the situation arises, involving children in family tasks, using right words without hurting others' opinions and addressing the children's curiosity in the language/forms which are understood by them.

"Given a chance to reinforce the lost family tradition, I would bring

back the glory of traditional songs like Seege Gowri folk songs, sobane traditional songs and shravana masa songs.”

Case Study 4 :

The psychologist opined that there are many sources of information that have an influence on people especially during their childhood. The first source which she felt has the most significance is one’s family, which comprises parents, grandparents, siblings, relatives, especially elders in the family. She also speaks of the religious playing an important role in influencing the child’s thought processes. Apart from family, societal and gendered expectations, societal norms, social relationships at home, with neighbours, in the play school with teachers also have an impact on the child. She also stressed on how children learn from caregivers too, which includes helpers as well. She stated that along with family and society, media also plays a significant role in attitude formation, television in particular for children, the programmes watched as a family and the communication that follows within the family. *“When I say communication, I also mean the current affairs that may be spoken at home, it could be political, it could be economic. There is a possibility that the children would form an opinion based on the viewpoint of the parents.”*

According to her, oral traditions are important for individuals, communities and societies. *“We understand the contributions of our history, we understand folklores of earlier generations. We can either relate or negate based on scientific understanding and use what is applicable to us now.”* She emphasized on language being a strong medium in oral traditions, which have been passed down with omissions and commissions and says that perhaps the originality was lost in the process.

“The rhymes that were sung by elderly are usually very same toned and with time, they have been improvised, wherein more music is added that would enhance a child’s attention as well as observational skills.” Improvisation in oral traditions, keeping in mind the present times is something that can be observed as a trend in oral tradition transmission which has an impact on child development.

She opined that the psychological aspects hidden in oral traditions are societal expectations, folklores, value systems, unmet needs and sometimes even warning signs that were conveyed through the rhymes and stories shared by the elderly. *“Oral traditions are very important, need to be preserved and documented in various forms including digital so that the younger generations have access to it.”*

Case Study 5 :

The psychologist who was interviewed was of the opinion that what’s most influential in any individual’s life is dependent on the time at which they

were born. *“In the past, the stories told by parents and caregivers were essential for the passing on of knowledge, cultural and social values, and collective memory, that was essential for the individual’s understanding and integration into a functional society.”* According to her, today, the oral tradition is just one source of information, and the impact has reduced due to the changes in how society is structured and the competing sources of information and influence.

She claims that oral traditions are useful and important to individuals but she does not believe they are equally important across all communities and societies. Some communities without a writing system continue to rely on the oral tradition to transmit information pertaining to history, literature, customs, traditions and the law; however, modern influences have permeated most traditional societies.

She opined that the forms of oral tradition she had come across were packed with lot of thought process behind it. *“The oral tradition emerged out of a necessity, and when no other means of conveying essential information existed, careful thought went into what was being said. You see evidence of this in rhymes and folklore.”*

She expressed that, oral traditions have hidden psychological aspects in them like expected social behaviour, family memories, social learning and value education. According to her, oral traditions contain collective memories that bind people together. These stories can build a sense of community through the feelings of closeness a shared history creates. Oral traditions inform the individual of what societal expectations are and the consequences of not abiding by the mores and laws of a place.

She was of the opinion that oral tradition is dependent on memory so the rationale is often lost among the younger generations. *“The ways societies are structured today is so different. People bring their oral traditions with them wherever they go and there’s a mixing and melding of many traditions which means what gets passed down from one generation to the next is significantly different. So many of the stories being shared may not be ones they can relate to or which continue to apply.”*

Table -1: Convergent and Divergent Findings of the Case Studies

Themes	Convergent Findings (Similar but highly quoted)	Divergent Findings (Similar & Lowly quoted)	Remarks
Sources of Oral tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elders of the family - Community Gatherings - Festival Celebrations - Cultural narrators - School - Books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TV - Radio - Movies - Caregivers 	Mouth to mouth transfer was the major source before the paradigm shift in communication modes.
Types of Oral Traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Epics - Proverbs - Purana - Chants - Ballads - Stories from history on famous personalities - Folk Songs - Riddles - Role play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Folklore - Kinds of songs - Riddles - Myths 	Depends upon the geographic area and culture followed in that region
Thought process behind oral traditions to impact on the child development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social learning - Social norming - Tradition transformation - Preserving cultural roots - Knowledge transfer - Moral & Value education - Social interactions - Life Skills development - Personality development - Solutions bank - Self awareness - Decision making - Valuing Relationships - Brotherhood - Sharing of Arts - Way of living - Depiction of emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entertainment - Rationale hidden 	Depends upon the orators/narrators/ translators/ understanding, skills and the authenticity of the sources they have received.
Memory Collection – Trends seen in Oral tradition transmission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Orality - Wall Writing / Rock writing - Mass performances - Books - Radio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tape recorders - Magazines - TV - Movies 	Depends upon the chronology of time, resources available to them, known ways to transform the same based upon the learners/receiver's interests.
Values and ethics derived from the oral traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Honesty - Truthfulness - Right attitude - Gender Equality - Adaptability - Caring and sharing - Right Speech - Responsibility - Self-respect - Selflessness - Justice - Value of relationships - Sustainable living - Humanity - Kindness - Time sense - Discipline - Citizen duties - Punctuality - Good Practices 	Shockingly all the 3 Geriatric respondents shared the same values and ethics even though they are from different cultures	Societal level oral traditional foundation lays on similar principles.
Lost oral traditions in the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Folk songs - Chants - Cultural songs and rituals - Proverbs - Folklore 	Kinds of the folk songs and traditional songs	Depends upon the family level traditions.
Ways adopted to save family oral traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being a Role model - Follow with conscience not by force - Give rationale on inquiry - Start from the early age for the children to learn - Involve them in the 	Don't pass judgements on the doubts or opinions of young blood	Mechanisms are adopted according to their family requirements and mindsets of the family members

- family important tasks
 - Share with life examples and experiences
 - Don't shout/abuse for not following traditions
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Suggestions and Conclusion

- Children need to be involved actively in important family tasks and events on a regular basis to feel connected and build curiosity to learn about their family oral traditions.
- Parents need to give a positive environment which helps the child to socialize and learn from different communities. Eg: Taking children for a tribal visit and giving them exposure to the indigenous practices, culture and their way of life.
- Schools need to add more lessons in the curriculum on oral traditions identified by UNESCO
- Early child development interventions from parents are very important for the holistic development of the child. Eg: Teaching them about the value of food by narrating a story about farmers' efforts to feed us, taking them to fields to witness the same etc.
- National level and state level cultural forums need to conduct competitions and awareness programmes regularly on oral traditions among school and college students.
- Media should highlight the oral traditions of different cultures timely which have scientific rationale and related socio-economic opportunities behind it. Eg: The tradition of preparing a few authentic food recipes/ tips which have high nutritional value and can create a good opportunity for the one who can trade the same as home-based food industries, earn livelihood and also be a part in inculcating healthy eating practices.
- There can be a family calendar like a school calendar which has important events. In that family calendar, each month can be named in relation to one value or ethic to be learnt from different forms of oral tradition. Eg: January is a month of harvest season celebration and thus sharing and kindness can be learnt. Children should know the reason for celebrating that and further can be asked to prepare either a poem, skit, folksong, dance, proverb, or story and share it with family and friends. It can be continued using positive reinforcement.
- Make the learning sessions interesting for the child so that they are engaged whole heartedly. Do not use coercion or harsh methods to impose values.
- Be a role model before you pass on values to the child so that the child

builds trust and accepts the value by his/her conscience.

- Make use of modern technology of communication to spread awareness on oral traditions and their significance & organise more symposiums, conferences, workshops and seminars in this regard to reach the masses timely.
- Ethnographic researches complemented with psychology would help in bringing more insights on oral traditions and psychology shaping of children.

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