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Significance of Voice Culture in Oggu Katha

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Abstract

Oggu Katha is a traditional folk art form of Telangana that holds a unique place in cultural expression. One of its distinctive features lies in vocalisation, the intricate use of voice to convey emotions, stories, and cultural nuances. Oggu Katha's vocalisation involves a rich tapestry of linguistic elements. From phonetic nuances to rhythmical patterns, performers leverage the inherent linguistic diversity to create a mesmerising auditory experience. The vocalisation in Oggu Katha serves as a powerful cultural conduit. It becomes a means of passing down stories, myths, and historical narratives from one generation to the next. Through their vocal expressions, performers not only entertain but also contribute to the cultural identity and collective memory of the community. This analytical research paper is aimed at documentation in a descriptive method, through data collected from personal interviews, audio-video recordings, participatory observations, and material from related printed books, etc. The findings of this research paper will explore the fascinating realm of vocalisation in Oggu Katha, examining its linguistic intricacies, cultural significance, and the role it plays in preserving and transmitting traditional knowledge.

Keywords : Vocalisation, Folk music, Voice Modulation, Oggu Dolu, Telangana Culture, Yadav community

Research Paper

Introduction

Oggu Katha, a traditional folk art form from the Indian state of Telangana, is distinguished by its distinct blend of storytelling, music, and dance. A community's folklore serves as a treasure trove for its cultural legacy. The Kuramas and Gollas are among the various Yadav sub-castes that have dedicated themselves to singing ballads in honour of Lord Siva (also known as Mallikarjuna in the local dialect) and his offspring. This community, which is devoted to tradition and performs rituals, travels from one place to another, telling the tales of Mallanna, Beerappa, and Yellamma.

'Oggu' is a synonym for 'submit'. Those who fully submit to Mallanna, the god, are known as Oggus. Oggus are individuals who completely surrender themselves to the god Mallanna. OGGU is the term for the traditional priests of the Yadavas. The Oggus tell stories (KATHA) about the family god Beerappa (Veerabhadra), the goddess Yellamma, and Mallanna. Every three years, the hamlet honours Beeranna (who resides at a temple situated outside of it), in the eight-day Beerappa Festival. The Mallanna Festival (believes that Mallanna resides in the house of every Kurama and Golla) happens regularly at least once a year.

Classification of Oggu Katha

Folk music falls under the categories of vocal and instrumental music in the classification of folk arts. Folk narratives and songs can be further sub-categorized under vocal music. Thus, the Oggu Katha falls under the category of folk narratives. Oggu Katha was originally only a customary folk ballad told on special occasions. It evolved gradually into an art form that included elements of theatre, dance, and music and began to be performed on many platforms. If the entertainment component is absent from any kind of art, it will not grow or develop. Oggu Katha's growth and development were paved by entertainment considerations, which transcended the boundaries of caste traditions. The 'Oggu Dolu' musical instrument exhibits rhythm. Thus, the folktale Oggu Katha is centred on rhythm.

Overview of Performance method

Oggus, before being permitted to act as priests, narrate Mallanna's stories. Oggus are ordained to undergo 'Diksha', an initiatory process. The freshly initiated man is given an Oggu and a Trishul, or trident, as symbols of Mallanna by a senior Oggu minstrel. This ritual is performed at temples, mostly in Srisailam,

Komatelli, Eileni, and Vemulavada, where Siva is revered as Mallanna or Mallikarjuna Swamy. The instrument known as the Oggu, which is invoked at the start of every narrative and during Mallanna marriage festivities, is the source of the name of Oggu Katha.

Oggu is the colloquial folk name for Siva's damaruka. Oggu Katha is the tale told with Oggu's assistance. These ballads are in the desi metre known as 'Manjari Dwipada' which is interspersed with spontaneous prose that is performed in a poetic manner with intricate rhetorical and oratory details. The group comprises four to six individuals. The main narrator, a supporting narrator, and at least two instrumentalists—one on a large brass tala (larger than the typical talas used in bhajans), and the other on a massive drum called a Rana Bheri (Oggu Dolu). One member plays the Kanjira, while the other sixth sings and plays the 'Napheera', a wind instrument, along with a miniature Damaruka. Only males play the roles of the narrator, prompters, and backing orchestra. Males who dress like women even play feminine roles in art and performance.

The importance of a Voice Culture

Voice culture is an important factor in improving Oggu Katha performance since it plays a critical role in properly expressing the narrative. Voice culture is a vital aspect of Oggu Katha, contributing significantly to the richness and authenticity of this traditional folk art. Through skillful voice modulation, expressive storytelling, and a deep connection with the cultural roots, Oggu Katha performers are captivating the audience and keeping this ancient art form alive for generations to come. Voice culture in Oggu Katha involves the careful cultivation of vocal skills, modulation, and expression to bring life into the characters and emotions depicted in the story. In terms of modulation and pitch, Oggu Katha performers are adept at modulating their voices to suit different characters and situations. They use a variety of pitches to distinguish between protagonists, antagonists, and other supporting characters, adding depth and realism to the narrative. The success of an Oggu Katha performance relies heavily on the artist's ability to express a wide range of emotions through their voice. From joy and sorrow to anger and fear, the performer must skillfully convey the feelings of the characters to engage the audience emotionally.

Vocal imitations and expressions

Oggu Katha's vocalisation goes beyond communication to become a vehicle for emotional expression. Performers use variations in pitch, tone, and rhythm to convey a spectrum of emotions, from joyous celebrations to poignant reflections. Oggu Katha typically follows a rhythmic pattern, and voice culture is essential in maintaining the cadence of the storytelling. The performers use their voices to synchronise with the beats of accompanying instruments, creating a harmonious and captivating performance. Given that Oggu Katha is often performed in open spaces or large gatherings, the performers need to project their voices effectively. Clear articulation ensures that the audience can follow the story easily, even in the absence of microphones or amplification. Voice culture in Oggu Katha also involves the ability to improvise and respond spontaneously to the audience's reactions. Skilled performers can adjust their voices on the fly, adding humour, drama, or suspense based on the audience's engagement.

Oggu Katha is essentially a folktale of verbal significance. Even though everyone in the audience is aware of the basic plot, it is still interesting to listen to it again while evoking excitement through vocal imitations and expressions. The story is given life by a narrator with strong storytelling abilities. The eagerness to listen again depends on the speech capabilities, even though the audience of these narratives are well aware of when the story finishes. This also applies to Oggu Katha in its entirety. The story's elements–Daruvu, narrative, conversation, etc.–promote its specialisation through Vachika, or speech. (Sanskrit word)

Characters express their emotions, such as grief and rage, in the story. Briefly put, verbal imitation and expression through speech or dialogue are known as 'Vachika Abhinaya'. The interpretation of the narrative, voice modulations, and generic vocabulary imitations such as Alaapa, among other variants, are all evident in the Oggu Katha presentation. These elements are present in both the everyday, wordly realistic imitation and the Natya Sastra of Bharata. 'Kaaku' or "Modulation" refers to the altering of words and voice to convey the desired emotions. 'Kaka' is the term for the feeling of 'modulation', which is the collective term for trembling, shaking, moving, wavering, or unsteadiness brought on by emotions like sorrow or fear. The verb 'Ku' is derived from 'Eesshta' meaning trifling and 'Vachya bhoomi' meaning voice of moods. Combining 'Ku' with 'Ka' creates 'Kaaku', requiring rendering in passive or active voices for modulation. Kaaku, meaning 'Jihva', refers to the tongue's experience of tastes or essences. The word 'Kaaku Swara' is proposed to help interpret meaning in rhetorical figures. When Kaaku and rhetorical figures

are combined, it expels the modulation of voice with full sense, resulting in Kaaku Swara Vyanjana, or 'Modulation in Voice'.

Daruvu (Telugu version) - Daevudu pothaa vuntaenoo Desamantaa velugunu

Raju pothaa vuntaenoo Rajyamantaa velugunu

Ekkaraani kondalu digi pothaa vunnaadu

Barma devuni kodukunu baaludu Beerayya

Nagulakonda pattanam padamatiki vachaenu

Daruvu (English version) - If the god is riding then his country will shine

If the king is riding then his dynasty will shine

He is crossing the untrekkable mountains

Son of Brahma Deva Beerayya

Reached the west of Nagula Patnam

Research Problem

The research problem addressed in this paper is the exploration of the vocalisation aspects of Oggu Katha, a traditional folk art form from Telangana, India. The study seeks to understand how vocalisation contributes to the cultural transmission, storytelling, and preservation of traditional knowledge within the Oggu Katha performances. Specifically, it investigates the linguistic elements, voice modulation techniques, and their role in enhancing the narrative and emotional impact of the performances.

Research Objective

The primary objective of the research is to examine the linguistic intricacies and cultural significance of vocalisation in Oggu Katha. This involves analyzing how voice culture, modulation, and enunciation methods are employed by performers to convey different characters, emotions, and stories effectively. Additionally, the study aims to understand how these vocal techniques contribute to the preservation and transmission of traditional narratives and cultural heritage within the Yadava community and the broader cultural context of Telangana.

Research Methodology

In this research paper I have used methods like descriptive documentation, Observation, Data collection of related printed books, Manuscripts, audio video recordings, Photographs and oral literature, Interview etc.

Relevance of the Study

By focusing on vocalisation, the research highlights how oral traditions maintain cultural continuity and communal identity across generations. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between language, music, and performance arts, enriching the fields of ethnomusicology and linguistic anthropology. The study offers practical insights for performers to improve their craft. Understanding how vocal techniques can enhance narrative delivery and emotional expression helps preserve the art form's authenticity and effectiveness. The study's findings have interdisciplinary relevance, offering valuable information to scholars in fields such as folklore studies, cultural studies, performance studies, and South Asian studies. It enhances academic discourse on how traditional art forms adapt and survive in contemporary settings. The research documents the practices and nuances of Oggu Katha, contributing to the broader effort of preserving intangible cultural heritage. Detailed documentation ensures that the unique aspects of this tradition are recorded for future generations, supporting cultural diversity and heritage conservation initiatives.

Analysis

Abhinava Gupta's observations on the inflexions specifically Saakanksha and Niraakanksha, highlight the importance of these in the narrative. The narrator in Oggu Katha can narrate a narrative for three days and condense it into thirty minutes without interfering with the main plot. The narrator's vocal intonating spelling features are used to display inferior and superior characters. The Oggu Katha concludes in a single pitch mode, with most of it in higher pitches.Bharata outlined six enunciation modes in Implies Inflexions of Modulations. Uchaalankara, the highest pitch, is used to convey the story to a distant audience, while Deeptha, the bright form, expresses pride and valour. Beerappa uses this mode when the Ganga River obstructs him. Dhruta, the fast form, is used when the story needs to be done quickly or in a hurry.In Oggu Katha, the narrator prioritizes the audience over the characters and their psychological backgrounds, using high pitch modulation to make the story audible. The choice of enunciation

method is entirely up to the narrator, resulting in variance in their attributes.

Conclusion

Oggu katha is a folk narrative with a focus on voice and speech vachikaabhinaya. Verbal imitations and expression, also known as Vachikaabhinaya, have grown in importance in this art form over time. The Oggu Katha does not provide the forms of address. However, it followed the world's ways of human tendency and relations, and it agreed with dramatology to some extent in terms of address forms.

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