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PROVERBS AND RIDDLES IN YERUKALA FOLKLORE OF TELANGANA- A SAMPLE
ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Folklore of tribal communities is very rich. These communities have no script and their traditional wisdom and experience is embodied in their folklore which is handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. This paper presents the analysis of two selected samples of proverbs and riddles of the Yerukala community of the state of Telangana. The analysis is based upon the data collected from a field survey conducted for this purpose.

Key words: Yerukala, folklore, tribe, Telangana, proverbs, riddles.

Introduction:

Folklore is the most ancient form of world literature. It is handed down from generation to generation through word of mouth. Folklore had a tremendous influence on the beliefs, customs, values, attitudes of people at the collective and the individual level in a speech community. It also provides guidance to their individual and collective behaviour. Of the different forms of folklore which are considered very valuable in non-literate communities are Proverbs, Riddles, Songs, Folktales, Myths and Legends. Folklore according to Abrams and Harpham (2013) consists of folk drama, folk songs, legends, superstitions, tales, proverbs, riddles, spells and nursery rhymes along with pseudoscientific lore about the weather, plants, animals, customary activities of birth, marriage, death and traditional dances and forms of drama performed on holidays or at communal gatherings.(pp.135-136)

In this paper, an attempt is made to analyse a sample of proverbs and riddles of the Yerukala tribe in the State of Telangana in South India. The Yerukalas are an ancient aboriginal and semi-nomadic tribe found in the states of Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra. They are known by different names in different States. They call themselves "Kurru". They are called "Yerukala" after their women's traditional profession of fortune telling (Yeruka chepputa). The Yerukala tribe has a dialect of its own which is called Yerukalabasha or Kurrubasha or Kulavatha which has no script. It belongs to the Dravidian family of languages and is related in syntax vocabulary and phonology mostly to Telugu, Tamil and Kannada. The major storehouse of the wisdom of their ancestors is their folklore. The above-mentioned forms of folklore are illustrated and analysed in the following sections.

Proverbs

Proverbs, according to M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, are "short and pithy statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life. Many proverbs are allegorical, in that the explicit statement is meant to have, by analogy or by extended reference, a general application: "'stich in time saves nine', 'people in the glass house should not throw stones'" (Abrams &Harpham,2013:10)

The present researcher has collected several proverbs through field survey in the districts of Telangana and collected data regarding the Folklore of the Yerukala community in the State of Telangana. The present analysis is limited to a select sample of proverbs and riddles which are part of folklore. For the constraints of space, only a few proverbs are considered here as a sample.

Majority of the proverbs have a general application to the community life. Look at the following:

1. **Original:** thaanu mechhadu Rambha thaanu munugundu ganga.

English: The woman one loves is an Angel and the river one dips in is the Ganges.

In this proverb the general psychology of an individual is described in a metaphorical way, i.e. whatever a person is attracted to appears to him to be right and universally acceptable. The proverb therefore warns individuals in the community to be careful about their preferences, likes and dislikes, which may not be always be correct.

2. **Original:** vokadurthukanna Vodonadadu melu

English: It's better to accept defeat than to fight.

In general people, particularly youngsters, who are emotional will be ready to fight even for insignificant and irrelevant causes which may cause final despair to them. Hence, this proverb warns people against meaningless anger, emotion and fight which are not always reasonable and useful. However, it does not advise people to behave in a cowardly manner.

3. **Original:** getlu kanabugakumu kaani gethilu kanabugamura.

English: One can see the mountains but not the future.

This proverb underscores the limited vision of humans. People can see clearly even such natural objects as mountains, but they cannot envision their own future. Therefore, this proverb implies that man should have an extended vision and overcome illusions caused by his limited vision. Thus, it exhorts people to be modest in their estimate of the world.

4. **Original:** monsa lothu thelerra kaanni genru lothu thelaku.

English: One can estimate the depth of a well but not the depth of a man.

This proverb is similar to the English proverb "All that glitters is not gold". People should be careful about their estimate of other people. It is easy for them to fathom the depth of a well filled with water but not the depth of another person's mind. That is, one should not be misled by external appearances like height, weight, depth, colour, size etc.

5. **Original:** kesara mikkirdenthuku nadapaana kevuurdenthuku ?

English: Why should one step into dirt and then wash one's feet?

Syntactically this proverb is a rhetorical question to which the answer is universal. It implies that one should not step into a dirty spot and later wash their feet. i.e one should not commit an error or a sin thoughtlessly in haste and later should not regret or seek remedial measures which will be difficult. Some sins or errors could be irrevocable.

6. **Original:** shenchila sagabettiralli anganichhulla.

English: By the time you get ready with your bags, the shop is closed.

This proverb is similar to several English proverbs like "A stich in time saves nine", 'Make hay when the sun shines', 'Strike the iron when it is hot' which emphasise the importance of right action in right time. It exhorts people to complete their tasks at an appropriate or appointed time because delayed action is no action in terms of time and circumstances.

7. **Original:** kavva kutti kenderuka undilla debba?

English: What does a baby crow know about the blow of a catapult?

This proverb is also a rhetorical question in its syntax. It means that a baby crow doesn't know anything about the severity of a blow from the catapult. The implication is that inexperienced people, not knowing the consequences, taking wrong or hasty steps may push themselves into a tight corner. Thus, the proverb emphasises the importance of experience in life.

8. **Original:** nammuntha munchamanalo narkathuku pogamanalo

English: Don't cheat those who trust you and don't go to hell.

This proverb has an implication of the need for ethical behaviour in life. It advises man not to betray the people who believe him because by doing so he will go to hell. Such piece of advice is based upon religious principles of moral behaviour.

9. **Original:** orrakoru thalondittu vonka enthke beethuhagara

English: Why do you fear the blow of the pestle after putting your head into the mortar?

Again, this proverb is a rhetorical question syntactically. It questions the wisdom of a person who takes a risky step and worries later. The implication is that man should consider the pros and cons of his deeds before he initiates action. It is like the English proverb, 'Haste is waste'.

10. **Original:** vanguna kommaku vanke ella.

English: There is no defect in a bough that keeps itself bent.

This proverb underscores the importance of humility in behaviour. If a person behaves or talks in a braggart or boastful manner he will sometime be attacked or condemned by others. On the other hand, if he behaves in a modest or humble manner like a bending bow, he will be liked by one and all. No one will harm such a person. This may be translated into English as 'Humility is the best policy' which echoes the well-known proverb, 'Honesty is the best policy'.

11. **Original:** endomo thindru saagura ellaromo therpi saagura.

English: A rich person cannot eat well before he dies while a poor man cannot clear his debts before he dies.

This proverb is quite general in its implication as it means that a rich man being a miser cannot enjoy his life fully while a poor man also cannot enjoy life because of his poverty. This statement describes the condition of the rich and the poor who equally fail to enjoy the pleasures of life due to over identification or complete lack of wealth in life. Indirectly, it means that a middle-class person alone can enjoy life.

12. **Original:** vodi vodi volpa kudikirthukanna vukkandu thenni kudikirdu nalla'

English: It's better to drink water while standing than to drink milk while running.

This proverb implies, 'haste is waste' and exhorts people to be satisfied with whatever is available to them without much agitation and not to run after a mirage or inaccessible objects like money and power. A parallel English proverb is, 'Cut your coat according to your cloth'.

13. **Original:** mondhi vaathala ketindu marmanam ponike, malla varalliki vudu vondosu.

English: Trusting the words of the public, a person set out for a remarriage, but when he returned; his house was on fire.

This proverb has an indirect reference to male chauvinism in a patriarchal society like that of the Yerukalas. In such a society a husband relies on the public opinion about his wife's fidelity and suspects her character when people may tell him false things about her. In such a condition he may go for remarriage which may ultimately ruin his own life. Thus, this proverb reflects the fate of women in a male dominated society and how men in such a society bring ruin upon themselves.

The proverbs cited above are generally in their implication and advise. In addition, there are also proverbs in the folklore of their community which have a female -orientation. Consider the following examples.

14. **Original:** nammi naotike puchhi burralasumu.

English: I soaked grains in water in good trust, but they turned out to be rotten

The surface meaning of this proverb refers to a women's kitchen service consisting in soaking grains in water for a while before cooking, but they turned out to be rotten. Symbolically or at the deep level the meaning of this proverb indicates how a woman is cheated for the trust she placed in a man who married her, but after marriage she found that he was a false person. This was so, because even in the tribal community men idled away their time in drinking while their women were forced to work hard for subsistence.

15. **Original:** uttikekkaru monu sargathhukokkata.

English: A person who cannot climb to the swing of ropes in which pots are suspended aspires to reach heaven.

This proverb makes fun of people who desire or dream of unattainable targets, whereas they cannot accomplish even the smallest things. This is a common fact about human behaviour in general. People who are work-oriented focus on their work rather than dream of imaginary goals. That is, the implication of the proverb is that one should be aware of one's abilities and efficiency and behave accordingly to keep one's life happy. This has a relevance to the women folk in their community because most of their men waste their time boasting of themselves without doing anything while their women are working hard.

16. **Original:** voduputhoni vuda kattindu vodikudshi suddotusu.

English: He built his house with patience but set it on fire in an inebriated condition.

This proverb also ridicules the behaviour of the male member in the yerukala community who are given to drinking and vain- glorious talk. At times they work hard but ruin the fruits of their hard work due to their alcoholism. Hence, the proverb shows concern for the helpless life of women in this community who suffer constantly from the stupidity of their men.

17. **Original:** ettuvaakaramma vodumadhhi puniki paachhu.

English: The women who never cared to feed thoroughly examined the whole body with a searching touch.

This proverb refers to the behaviour of women, those in particular who express false concern for others who they have never helped. That is, they are habituated to suspect innocent people who visit their home. This reflects the common trait in female behaviour marked by indifference and suspicion regarding their relatives and visitors.

18. **Original:** vutti menu sooru, oorukoru vorkam.

English: Rice in the rope sling and sleep in the village.

This proverb is syntactically an elliptical sentence. It means that a husband in this community eats his meal at home and sleeps elsewhere in the village. This implies, that the men folk in this community are mostly dependent on the hard work of their wives but sleep elsewhere because of their illicit sexual relation with other women. This reflects their irresponsible and immoral behaviour as well as the helpless condition of their wives. From a feminist point of view, this proverb has a universal implication.

19. **Original:** yendillaromunuku yethulekkuva, gidhhadi yershiki pongudekkuva.

English: A person who has nothing valuable in himself boasts of like a small quantity of rice which overflows when boiled.

This proverbial statement is parallel to the English proverb 'Empty vessels make much noise.' That is, most men in this community are characterised by a braggart behaviour and such behaviour is compared to small quantity of rice which overflows repeatedly while it is boiling. This comparison is obviously associated with the feminine psyche in this community because it is women who make raw rice into edible rice by boiling it in the kitchen.

20. **Original:** shippa rasi monago vanchhammo shibbikoru shinthapanga naanodamm

English: Mother! The gentlemen have come! Please soak tamarind in the meshed bowl.

This proverb is ironical in its implication. That is, when the husband returns home after wasting his time and with empty hands his wife makes this comment describing him as a gentleman who should be served soon with his meal because he is a very important man. This is a highly sarcastic statement which has a respectful surface meaning but a derogatory deep meaning.

Riddles

The *English Oxford Reference Dictionary* defines a riddle as "a question or statement testing ingenuity in defining its answer or meaning". Riddles also embody the wisdom and cultural perception of reality in the world covering different spheres of communal activity. In this section a sample of riddles of the Yerukala community is analysed.

1. **Original:** yendi golu podurthuku aakku gaani vanguthuku aagura. (muggu)

English: It is possible to draw the silver chain but not possible to bend.

Answer: The pattern is drawn in front of a house with rice powder or lime powder by way of decoration.

This riddle is related to the decoration of a house in this community which is a hut or a thatched structure. Tribal people as well as poor people in the Hindu community compensate of the shabby appearance of their small houses with their decorations like beautiful patterns in the front yard, colours, festoons etc. This riddle tests whether a person is aware of the decorative, artistic and complex structure of such patterns. Thus, this riddle is reflective of their community culture.

2. **Original:** vondomo renderuna kuthhaku (mullu karra)

English: One fellow prick two with a pointed end.

Answer: A goading stick.

This is a riddle related to agricultural activity. A farmer while ploughing his land with a pair of bullocks drives them fast by pricking or goading them with the pointed stick. This riddle tests the knowledge of agricultural operations. A person not familiar with such operations cannot give the correct answer. In this way this riddle indirectly tests a person's familiarity with agricultural activities. Thus, is a riddle related to the occupation of agriculture of rural community in general.

3. **Original:** vondarra koru mooderu monimishi maaru. (amudamu kaya)

English: There are three ladies in one room.

Answer: A green unripe castor fruit.

This riddle is associated with another farming activity of the community namely growing castor plants which is a common activity in rural Telangana. They sell this fruit or extract castor oil from them. Familiarity with this plant is tested in this riddle. The unripe castor fruit consists of three pods which contains its seed. Therefore, this riddle also is related to farming activities.

4. **Original:** angadi koru kongakumu munne yechhugundu agakumu.(vulli gadda)

English: People buy this in a shop but shed tears keeping it in front of them.

Answer: Onion

This riddle is also related to farming activities. Onion is cheap vegetable used by all poor people including the Yerukala community as a food item along with green chilli and salt. When an onion is cut, its caustic power produces tears in the eyes. This riddle tests a person's familiarity with the onion and describes the painful predicament of women who cut the onion in the kitchen for making curry or chutney.

5. **Original:** akka thengishi marru akkumu gaani kittaku varamura. (kallu)

English: Both are sisters but cannot meet each other.

Answer: Eyes

This riddle is associated with the body parts namely eyes etc. It is a common knowledge that the two eyes cannot meet or touch each other despite their proximity of place on either side of the nose. This tests the knowledge of body parts and therefore can be considered general in its purport. This could also be an ironical statement about two sisters or brothers who don't meet each other.

6. **Original:** voodikkiri kaani thalupu ella, monsa ekkiri gaani vaathalella. (samaadhi)

English: It is a house but there are no doors and there is a man who cannot speak.

Answer: Grave

The knowledge of the grave is tested in this riddle. It is metaphorical and describes the physical structure of a grave and its content.

7. **Original:** ootumenu nellu geddi eddanartha volaku.(thalondu)

English: There is hay on top of the house, but it grows the more, the more it is cut.

Answer: Hair on the head

This riddle poses a puzzle regarding the place and nature of hair on a person's head. Thus, it tests the knowledge of a person about the human body.

8. **Original:** adavilo putti aadavilo perigi, maaintikochhindi thandanaladindi. (jonnalu, rokali)

English: Born and grown in the forest they reached our house and performed dance

Answer: Maize and Pestle.

This is also a riddle associated with tribal people. they grow maize in forest lands and pound the maize with a pestle to make it edible after cooking. Similarly, they make a pestle with wood cut from the forest trees to pound the maize in a mortar. This riddle also tests a person knowledge of the grains grown by the rural people for food and the kitchen tools like a pestle.

9. **Original:** gettu suttu kunju thalondalu. (kallu lotlu)

English: There are round heads of birds overlooking the boundaries of fields.

Answer: Toddy pots

This is an interesting riddle related to the habit of consumption of toddy in the Yerukala community as in the case of many such rural communities in Telangana. Toddy is extracted from palm trees normally grown along with the boundaries of fields. Toddy tappers cut the top of the trunk and tie up pots at that spot so that the juice of toddy would fill the pots. This riddle is metaphorical for its picturesque description.

10. **Original:** ubbi shibbadasu, vondu theddadasu. (aaku kura)

English: It has filled the meshed bowl in water but as become only a ladleful after boiling.

Answer: A leaf curry

This riddle also is related to cooking. Poor people like the yerukala community in the rural areas depend upon edible leaves for curry because they cannot afford expensive items like chicken, mutton, dal, vegetables etc. But procuring such leaves also may be difficult sometimes and even after gathering a lot of leaves, their curry will be very little in quantity in the process of cooking. To answer this riddle, one should be familiar with the impoverished condition of the community and their food habits.

11. **Original:** kelluku naaku voku. (mondi vaadu)

English: There is dispute between me and a stone.

Answer: An obstinate man

This riddle which is highly symbolic refers to the position of an innocent and inefficient man in dispute with another man who is stubborn or a helpless wife who is always troubled by her heartless husband. The meaning underlying this riddle connotes to the social situation in tribal or rural community where 'might is right'.

12. **Original:** marri koru marri parruchhu, marri chakram parchu, thingaru pangasu theepi ghanamaasu. (infant/ child)

English: A Banayan is born out of another banayan in the form of a round shell, but the fruit cannot be eaten because for it is dearly related.

Answer: A child

This is also a highly metaphorical or symbolic riddle in its meaning. A mother is compared to a tree who gives birth to another small tree by carrying it in her womb which is like a sheltering shell. The result is a sweet fruit which cannot be eaten like any other fruit because it is a dear human infant. Thus, this riddle tests the general knowledge of a person.

13. **Original:** aarukalladu booru boddidu vukandu meesanga duvvaku. (eega)

English: It has six legs and a swollen ass and stands curling its whiskers.

Answer: fly

This riddle is enigmatic and tests a person's knowledge of the world of insects and animals. The clue lies in six legs, fat back and shaking of whiskers. It also has a sarcastic implication that a man who is very weak and inefficient like a fly and but boasts of himself ignorantly in front of others.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that the present analysis is only limited in its coverage of the Yerukala folklore in the selected area. There is a lot to be done in this respect. It is hoped that future research in this area will reveal more fascinating facts about the culture of the Yerukala community in Telangana.

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