

**SPEECH OF HON'BLE GOVERNOR SHRI V. SHANMUGANATHAN AT THE
INAUGURATION OF THE FOUR DAY CONFERENCE ON ORAL TRADITIONS:
CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION- NORTH EAST INDIA AND SOUTH
EAST ASIA.**

Childhood is the most beautiful time in a person's life. In general, it is believed that childhood shows the man, as morning shows the day. During my childhood days, when I was around 4-5 years, my mother used to tell me the stories of Ramayana, Mahabharata every night before going to bed. She also taught me the Tamil shlokas of Dewaram and Thiruvagam.

Even today, I remember her teachings. These oral stories taught me the importance of our culture, of our background and are still very close to my heart. I have immense respect for oral traditions.

Oral traditions and expressions form an integral part of our past. They carry the essence of our intangible cultural heritage. They come in different forms such as proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, legends, myths, epic songs and poems, charms, prayers, vedic chants, dynamic performances and so on. It is through oral traditions that our ancestors passed on the knowledge, ways of life and social values and collective memory and thus kept the ethnic culture alive.

We need to safeguard these oral traditions since they help us maintain our everyday roles in the society. It is also essential that opportunities for knowledge are passed on from person to person.

When we talk about oral traditions, we can say that Indian Literature has the highest record of preserving and propagating oral traditions and folklores. For example, the oldest form of music that is still surviving is the Sama Veda. It is the finest and ancient music that the world has ever witnessed. The role of Indian Literature in maintaining and fostering cultural unity and identity in the vast land of India is noteworthy.

Our forefathers have promoted oral tradition through the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, tales of Buddhism, Panchatantras, Hitopadesha, Katha Saritsagarin and others which are written in almost all the main languages of India. Women also played an important role in preserving folklores. The roles played by Gargi and Maitreyi of the distant past to Andal of Tamil Nadu at the beginning of the previous millennium to Lalleswari of Kashmir to Molla of Nellore in Andhra Pradesh to Akka Mahadevi of Karnataka to Sahajo Bai, is nothing short of stellar.

India is a land of folktales and other forms of oral traditions such as proverbs, aphorisms, anecdotes, songs, impromptu folk street plays. All these stand as a proof to the rich and diverse culture of our motherland.

Oral traditions help us in organizing rituals and traditional functions such as

marriages, naming ceremonies of baby, death ceremonies and so on. I would like to refer to some rituals involved in a Manipuri marriage. A Manipuri marriage or rather wedding comes with many rituals and traditional practices that are observed before and after the day of the actual marriage.

Waroiopot Puba: It is the practice of fixing of an auspicious marriage date. The groom's party goes to the residence of the prospective bride with sweets, fruits and other ritualistic items. A dress is also presented to the bride. A consensual date for the marriage is also arrived at.

Heijjinpota Puba: It is held two days before marriage. The groom's party goes to the bride's residence with specific ritualistic items such as 7 specific varieties of fruits, 7 varieties of flowers, betel nuts and nuts, etc. these are offered to five different Gods and Goddesses seeking their blessings for the bride and the groom. The bride is presented with a comprehensive set of traditional jewelry and other items such as umbrella, mirror, scissors, etc. On this day, the bride's mother gives away the horoscope of her daughter to the groom's mother.

Bor Bartan: It is held one day before marriage. A child, usually the younger brother of the bride accompanied by a community elder goes to the groom's residence with betel nuts and invites the groom on behalf of his sister.

Day of Marriage: The bride makes the garlands for her marriage. Facing East, she makes two garlands with a flower white in colour, locally known as Kundo. The groom's procession starts after a puja by a Brahmin, at a specific time considered auspicious, which usually falls in the afternoon. At the bride's residence, the groom is received with three fire sticks known as diuty. The fire represents life as life is not possible without fire. The groom and the bride and the other members are seated in specific directions in the mandap. A Sankirtan is offered at the mandap. The groom enters the mandap guided by an elderly professional known as Bor Sennaba and the bride is guided by a woman professional called Keinya Sennabi. The puja is conducted by a Brahmin, Keinya Dan is usually given by the bride's father. After that, the couple takes the seven pheras and then the garlanding takes place. After the completion of ritualistic formalities, the groom and his party along with the bride leaves for home where they are received by the groom's mother.

Mangani Chakkouba: This is held after days from the day of wedding. It is the last customary practice of a traditional Manipuri wedding. This is the practice of hosting a grand lunch for the newly wedded couple hosted by the bride's parents

India, unlike many other countries of the world, is able to hold on to these art forms even today in spite of the rapid industrialization and globalization. It thus spreads a strong and loud message to the other parts of the world. Folk literature and folk art forms carry the culture and also strong reflections and deep insights of a particular tradition. They are platforms which hold the moral ground and draw a picture of the present day reality. Several folk plays like Chaakiyar Koothu and Veethi Naatakam are used even today as satire plays and commentaries on the current social and political reality. Folk songs also hold a strong

place in promoting the traditions and customs.

In India, Folk Literature is pursued both within the academia and outside it unlike many other cultures. Efforts of Sahitya Akademi and other similar organizations form a part of this collective attempt to preserve and disseminate Indian Folk Literature.

Earnest efforts should be made to preserve these age old lessons. The tales, songs, music and drama can be preserved using modern day technology such as books, newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the Internet. Through the use of such facilities, Oral Traditions can reach a higher section of people all over and thus save itself for the future generations without getting completely lost.