ABSTRACT

The properties of Indian oral literature, song cultures in particular, have influenced in many ways such as to understand the social and cultural changes in the society. The haunting melodies in song cultures of Indian languages establish cultural belongings of people of their home land. Song cultures provide the impetus for nationwide investigation that helps to provide a comprehensive picture of the art forms, cultural changes in a civilization: and such investigation aids in their survival by stimulating the structure of local preservations of societies.

The song cultures are the avenues for research. The song cultures respond to the social changes in the contemporary times. Though the song cultures differ from language and to region they share one common factor that is nothing but singing. Singing is one of the mankind’s fundamental activities and is commonly regarded as the universal language of the human spirit. Singing serves as a bridge between the man and society, the physical and spiritual the individual and other human beings.

When we study and analyze the song cultures in Indian languages like Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Hindi, the lives of poet-saints or saint-singers in different ages suggest that, singing can be observed as a holistic experience: it consists of body and memory, voice, rhythm, melody and words, as the main instruments of a song and performance: the body
determines the emotion, quality and subject of song and communicates message about the state of self and the society. Song is one of the major important parts of the peoples' cultures in India. We cannot trace out the time when the songs of peoples’ cultures have become the major part of the people’s lives. An analysis of the songs in Tamil and other languages tells us that the songs were composed and sung in 4\textsuperscript{th} century are still alive in the public domain to the present day. Song is one of the major parts of the people’s culture. The people in various regions in India sing songs on every occasion in their daily life.

In most of the song cultures in India, the poems composed by famous song composers or saint-poets in different languages like Annamayya in Telugu and Nayanars in Tamil were meant to be sung. The saint-poets drift into other neighboring regions of the country with their singing. Therefore, the oral poetry could be called as song-poems or songs. The culture of singing continued from a long time is still alive in various regions of the country. Thus the song and singing is the most important component of the song cultures.

Four widely spoken languages of the Indian union, Kannada, Tamil, Hindi and Telugu, form what could be termed Indian song cultural zones, and all the four languages have very good number of songs and famous song composers of different times. Scholars in recent times made modest attempts to study the importance of song cultures in above Indian regions. Although the attempts academically useful these attempts lack the coherence of interpretation which the song cultures deserve. Moreover, regrettably,
contemporary song cultures of Telugu have not found any space in these attempts. Except some of the professional writings on song cultures, there was no strong or interesting academic study on the oral song cultures of India. It is because, people look at the song cultures as the field of uneducated people and they do not consider song cultures as a part of literature. The scholarship in 19th century added an umbrella term to bring all the song culture into one group. Hence, the song cultures are merely Bhakti poetry or devotional poetry. This thesis asks: can't we find anything more than bhakti or devotion in the songs of Alwars to Annamayya?

The song composers and singers from the ages of Alwars to the modern age of Gaddar and Venkanna sing and perform without taking any textual support the process of singing. In other words the song composers recollect the oral text of the song from their memory and sing in public domain spontaneously. On the one hand the memory at an individual level is making the singing possible with no text, on the other, the memory at the level of group of community making the song cultures alive and enabling them to resist the impact and influence of the scribal and other technical developments in the world. Therefore, the thesis will attempt to find out the role and importance memory in song cultures. The questions that the thesis deals regarding memory are: how do the song cultures became one of the major parts of the cultures of memory? Is memory in the public domain played any important role in making song cultures live on? What happens, if there is no memory called public memory in the mnemocultures or song cultures? What happens when the cultures of memory encounter the cultures of text or cultures of
writing? Since the study of song cultures is one of the major important discourses in recent times.

The oral poetry produced in different languages, in different times in Indian regions demands tremendous academic study. This thesis deals with important questions in the field of song cultures such as: what can we do with the rich song cultures? How the song cultures are understood and treated in academics in recent times? The thesis reveals the importance of song cultures to demonstrate how the song cultures have fought with social evils such as social inequalities and other social problems in contemporary times. When we look at the liveliness of song-poems it is sure that the song-poems are alive because they are registered in peoples’ memory. So in that context the thesis will reveal how memory is helping the song culture to be alive in the public domain. How memory of singer and song composers or memory of a community is playing an important role in the field of song cultures. The thesis also will deal with the role of song cultures in responding to the social happenings in India.

The thesis studies and analyses the song cultures from 4th century onwards. The poetry composed or produced by Alwars and Nayanars in Tamil, Vachanakaras in Kannada are not merely poetry to read in silent mode. They are meant to be sung and performed in social or religious context. So I call the poem-songs and name them ‘song cultures’ in different language and different times in India. The study of song cultures of Alwars and Nayanars in Tamil, Vachanakaras in Kannada, and poem-singers like Kabir in Hindi
language will help the study to analyze and find out the changes in themes and subject matter of the songs.

When we evaluate the song cultures from classical times to the modern times, the songs composed by Gaddar and Venkanna in Telugu are quite different from the song-poems of classical times composed and sung by poet-singers like Alwars and Nayanars Tamil and Annamayya and Kshetrayya in Telugu song cultures. The themes in the modern song cultures in Telugu are expanded into a wide range by song compositions of Gaddar and Venkanna. For instance Gaddar and Venkanna compose songs on very varied themes like songs on mourning, songs on women and so on. In other words, the life of a common man and pain of the working class peoples are the major themes of their songs in modern times of Telugu song cultures. Though the themes and songs may differ but the culture of singing and song composition with their (singers’) embodied memory continued to the present day. To be precise, the thesis will engage with the study of thematical changes in song cultures.

Apart from engaging with the importance of memory and its role, the thesis will study the themes of songs composed by Gaddar and Venkanna in the following chapters of the thesis. It also would reveal the impact of socio-political like peasantry movement in Telangana on compositions of Gaddar and Venkanna in recent times. Though there are plenty of resources to do an academic research in song cultures, no research has been taken up to study the important concerns that the songs carry, the role of a song in human
civilization and the role of memory in the field of song cultures. Here, I really hope that the thesis would be useful for further research and enable others to look at the song cultures with different perspectives.

The thesis concludes by sustaining its argument with proper scholarship and suggests that since song cultures are performed by embodied memory of the singers and performers i.e. the song cultures need to be digitized. I feel that the text does not capture the image, song, and performance which are the major parts of the performative cultures. So the study of performative cultures of any language and any region in the world demands a digitization and help of technical assistance to emphasize the performance of singers and to make its argument sustained.

The thesis also includes an important prose work of Gaddar entitled “Never – Ending treasure: The history of peoples’ songs”. The book consists of various chapters and sub chapters and it was published 1992. In this book Gaddar writes about his personal experiences of his life. He also describes how to understand a folk song. He describes differences between capitalist songs and peoples songs. One of the chapters in this book describes how to study oral poem-songs. Every song that he takes as an example is a haunting melody. He also teaches how to study the tune of the songs and how the song-poets like Gaddar uses tunes of the people’s songs to his songs. Gaddar tells us that the tune is important as well as the field work in writing songs. So I felt the section of translation zone enriches the dissertation since the book is one of the unique works in Indian song cultures.