ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A SURVEY OF ANYWAA (ANUAK) PROVERBS RELATED TO ANIMALS

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ABSTRACT

Ethiopia, a nation of more than eighty ethnic groups and a similar number of languages, some of them having no written form, has a great heritage of orature. Reflections on historical events and legends as well as expressions on religious, political, social and cultural life of the people dominate this vast treasure of oral literature. Though the Anywaa (Anuak) people, living in the Gambella Region of Ethiopia, are a small ethnic group in the country, their oral literature is very vast. Their social gatherings like 'Achonga' and 'Wimaach' are occasions for oral performance. Even their conversations are packed with proverbs related to occupations, like farming, hunting and fishing. This study concentrates on some of their proverbs related to animals. These proverbs represent the culture of the concerned society and, most importantly, they influence the day-to-day life of the people. Moreover, the samples of oral sayings selected for the study are typical as they serve the pedagogic, etiological, and entertainment functions of the genre.

Keywords: orature, oral literature, Anywaa, Anuak people, proverbs

INTRODUCTION

Oral literature or orature is the unwritten form of literature existing in the form of stories, poems, proverbs, riddles, and sayings. With its moralizing or didactic effect, it works as a corrective force among people. The pedagogic, etiological, and controlling functions of oral literature helps to unify the users. Over and above, it caters for the needs of moral up-lifting and protection of tradition among the members of the society. As Walter Ong says, "Oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the psyche" (Ong, 1982, p. 14). It is a matter of pride that oral literature continues to dominate the literature of Ethiopia, not because of the lack of writing or writers but because of the mesmerizing quality of its face to face performance.

The term oral literature refers to the verbal art of traditional cultures usually composed orally and transmitted from generation to generation. While Finnegan (1970) defines it as unwritten literature that depends on the performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion, Dorson (1972, p. 661) defines it as oral composition imaginatively created or recreated by

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individual oral invention. Explaining its didactic function, Okpewho (1992, p. 112) opines that teaching ideals and conduct is a function of oral literature which helps society to justify its place in the universe. However, Barre Toelken (1996, p. 147) points out that oral literature gets its essence from the general context of its performance as it is continually renewed. He adds that the survival, continuity, and success of oral literature depends on how reasonably it satisfies intellectual interests as well as socio-political and economic needs of the society. As a utilitarian art, oral literature helps the society to maintain its history, culture, tradition, beliefs, and practices. The pedagogic, etiological, and controlling functions of oral literature serve as a unifying force. Though the subject matter in orature lacks reality, it continues to entertain masses. As Propp states, "The lack of correspondence with reality...offers special delight... Reality is intentionally turned out, and this is why people find them fascinating" (Propp, 1985, p. 19).

Generally, there are three levels of orality we find in African orature. The first is the level of ordinary communication with a purely denotative use of language, as in simple factual statements and commands; the second is the level of rhetorical uses of language, the use of proverbs and aphorisms which regularly channel communication in African cultures, and the third is the level of purely imaginative uses of language. The oral literature of Ethiopia can also be classified under these three levels of orality. As Abiola Irela says, "In reality these three levels exist along a continuum, for it is difficult to draw a sharp line between denotive and connotive use of language in oral communities" (2009, p. 9). As Hymens (1974, p. 32) states folklore study is the study of a communicative behavior with an aesthetic, expressive, and stylistic dimensions. Moreover, according to Ruth Finnegan (1992, p. 176) literary devices like metaphor, symbolism and allusive language have always attracted attention in the literary study of a style to which oral forms, especially proverbs, are no exception.

CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Ethiopia, a nation of more than eighty ethnic groups and more or less a similar number of languages, has a great heritage of orature. Gambella in the south-west of Ethiopia and one among the nine regions of Ethiopia, is comparatively small but has many ethnic groups with varying cultures and languages. The major five languages of the region, Anywaa (Anuak), Nuer, Opwo, Majangir, and Komow are very rich in oral literature. Most of these peoples crossed the border of the Sudan in search of better pastoral life in the fertile banks of River Baro, which provided them with better living conditions. As Robert O. Collins suggests, the frontier line drawn by the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of May 15, 1902, has failed to bring peace in this area as "rivers do not automatically make good boundaries, and almost never do when the same people live on either bank" (1983, p. 366). Currently, the Anywaa, the Nuer, and the Majangir are established in three zones of Gambella.

Gambella is progressing rapidly. The modernization of Ethiopia has considerably affected its oral literature, and the orature of the Anywaa people

is no exception. Megbaru Esayias (2010, p. 14) suggests that "the rapid growth of globalization and technological innovation seem to be the reasons for low prevalence of oral literature". He emphatically points out, "Folk literature in Ethiopia seems overshadowed by western tradition in the name of globalization and modernization" (Ibid, p. 5). He fears that changes in lifestyle of the young generation, characterized by excessive movies and football games may be harmful to the survival of orature.

Some of the Anywaa informants who helped the researcher in collecting the proverbs also pointed out that the older generation could not transmit the oral literature to the younger generation, as it used to do in the past, because the youngsters have freed themselves from the direct grip of the community; most of them have gone to other parts of the country either for higher studies or for better jobs. In short, the younger generation has lost its enthusiasm for orature or has little or no time to formally inherit this legacy. Therefore, unless their orature is preserved for posterity through surveys like the present one, Ethiopia might lose a great legacy.

Though with the advent of writing, oral literature is losing ground, it continues to be produced as a natural outcome of inspired minds. Enlightened persons express their surprises and fears, protests and indignation, helplessness and victory, joys and griefs in such a way that their audience is delightfully entertained and morally edified by oral literature. While the modern progressive world is ignoring this great treasure of literature, it is encouraging that the people of Africa, especially of Ethiopia, still give great importance to their legacy.

This study is delimited to the orature of the Anywaa people, particularly to selected proverbs and sayings related to animals. The study aims at contributing to the understanding of the deep implications of such proverbs on the ways of life of the people.

The methodology used for the present paper is translation and interpretation without any deep theoretical underpinning. However, a self-reflective approach, which focuses on what the Anywaa orature tells about the concerned society and how 'writing' of oral data changes its performance, has been adopted.

The paper is the result of a few years of research on Anywaa. A preliminary discussion of the research was presented earlier in an article titled "The Anywaa {Anuak} Proverbs and Their Social Implications: A Thematic Study" (Raju, 2013). The research was conducted among Anywaa student community. The study focused particularly on proverbs because unlike other genres of oral literature, proverbs have little chance from time-to-time changes made in accordance with the whims and fancies of the performers. In other words, if a performer changes the structure of a particular proverb, it will lead to the creation of another proverb so that the number doubles.

The data for the present study was collected with the help of Anywaa students who were undergoing their undergraduate or postgraduate studies

at the University of Gondar. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to visit Gambella Region to collect the data directly or to interpret them with the help of the elders of the society. Instead, Anywaa students were, first, interviewed individually and, later, group meetings of selected interviewed-students were arranged in which the proverbs were discussed. The meanings of the selected ones (proverbs related to animals) were explained and interpreted, and the interpretations were unanimously approved.

In the paper, the proverb in its original Anywaa script is given first. There follows an orthographic transcription in English with a word-by-word meaning which should help those who are not able to read the Anywaa script. It must be noted that the Anywaa language today is written in the Latin script with various diacritics to capture the phonology of the language. Then, the English translation of each proverb is given followed by its explanation and interpretation. The proverbs are arranged in alphabetical order of the names of the animals related to them.

THE ANYWAA PEOPLE: THEIR HISTORY AND ORATURE

In the past there, was no border line between Sudan and Ethiopia and the people crossed and moved wherever they liked in search of water and other resources. According to tradition and legends, a tribe called Masango was the original inhabitant of the banks of the Rivers Baro and Gila. Then tribes like the Anywaa and the Nuer came from the present Sudan area and pushed the Masango into the nearby forest. "The Masango meat and honey gave way to Anuak fish and corn, that is, hunting to fishing skills", as Alan R. Tippet (1970, p. 60) points out. Gradually, together with fishing the Anywaa people learned hunting, cultivation, and domestication of animals. The total population of Anywaa in Ethiopia is approximately half-a-million, excluding those in the Sudan.

As mentioned above, the major occupations of the Anywaa people are agriculture, fishing, and hunting. Various aspects of their economic and social life are reflected in their oral poems and sayings. Thus, a lion's share of their orature is related to fishing and hunting, but this study concentrates only on those proverbs which are directly related to animals commonly found in their area. The Anywaa proverbs tell us about their society, occupation, relationships, day-to-day life, and so on. They are historical evidences of community ethics, moral, and world views. In fact, they serve as corrective forces among the members of the society, by giving them time-to-time warnings against the impending social hazards.

The Anywaa inherit a great treasure of oral literature. They perform them during gatherings called 'Wimaach', a sort of get-together around a bone-fire before dinner. When guests or relatives visit a family house, all male members lit a fire and sit around it, waiting for their food to be prepared by the female members. Usually they spend about four hours, from 6 pm to 10 pm, and the leader of the group, called Kora, recounts stories related to Anywaa history, which tell of wars and tribal feuds or of 'economic' issues, such as cultivation, hunting, and fishing.

A commonly performed story is that of the origin of kingship among the Anywaa. Once a young and beautiful Anywaa maiden named Akango went to a nearby fish-pond to fetch water. She saw a young, strange-looking person sitting by the side of the pond. She informed her parents of this matter, and they scolded her for not inviting him to their house. The next day, she noticed the stranger again and invited him to her house where he was welcome. When Korri, the mother of Akango, gave him food, he refused to eat it. Later Akango herself gave him food and water and he accepted. The young man's name was Ochudho and he stayed with them for a few weeks. Their relationship became stronger and Akango became pregnant. When Ochudho came to know this, he gave her a garland of five turquoise-blue beads and went back to the fish-pond. Nobody saw him later, for he might be the spirit of the fish-pond. Akango delivered a boy-child who became the first king of the Anywaa people. Even today, at the time of the coronation, the Anywaa king is given the garland of those beads, as a token of his authority.

Another occasion for using oral literature, especially proverbs, is a general meeting of the people, called 'Achonga'. There orators use a number of proverbs in their speeches in order to make their arguments emphatic and powerful. It must also be recalled here that the Anywaa frequently use proverbs in their daily conversations.

According to Mengistu Melakneh (2009), "The term oral literature refers to verbal art of traditional cultures usually composed orally and transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth" (p. 9). This suggests that the writing of oral literature changes its performance. However, unlike other genres of oral literature, proverbs have little or no chance for time-to-time changes which occur in accordance with the whims and fancies of the performers. In other words, if a performer changes the structure of a particular proverb, it will lead to the creation of another proverb so that the proverb becomes two proverbs, instead of one. Therefore, the present paper concentrates particularly on proverbs in a manner that does not upset their authentic effect and flavour. It is also hoped that this study of proverbs will help in promoting their preservation for future generations.

PROVERBS RELATED TO ANIMALS

There are a number of proverbs and sayings related to animals, both domesticated and wild, which are actively used among the Anywaa. They are classified and presented below alphabetically in accordance with the names of the animals.

Antelope

Tääng dee døø ii dwaar tøanga ba da nyää dëëre. Tääng (antelope) dee døø ii (again) dwaar (hunting) tøanga (my spear) ba da nyää dëëre (wouldn't bother)! If the antelope went to the opposite direction of the hunting place, I wouldn't bother about my spear. The hunter regrets if the antelope goes away from the hunting place. This saying is used to express one's regret when people accuse somebody. It is like saying: If I knew such bad things happened, I wouldn't go to that place. Sometimes, the elder of a village is severely criticized for his decisions by others in your absence, and then you would say, "If I were he, I

wouldn't become the elder!". This proverb is an archaic expression of it.

Cat

Ngäc løw opäära adhuri ki yie. Ngäc (know) løw (which side) opäära (jump) adhuri (cat) ki yie (place). Know which side the cat jumps. This means that one should know the pros and cons of a matter before taking a decision on anything; one should be aware of the consequences of the decision.

Cow (and Calf)

Dhir nuwaak ba week dhöödhö. Dhir (cow) niuwaak (sharing) ba week (can't give) dhöödhö (milk)! To share the food, prevent the calf from drinking the cow's milk! It means that if everyone co-operates in farming, the benefit is shared by all. It is the responsibility of every individual to protect public property for the benefit of the community. The Anywaa cultivate corn and keep domesticate animals. In their oral literature, references to pastoral life and farming are quite common. Another proverb related to cow is: Dhieng cwoba ri nyilaal. Dhienq (cow) choba (stab) ri nqilaal (through a child)! The cow struck the child. You do something pretending that it is for your child. For example, when you starve, you collect food in the name of your child, because you are ashamed to say that your family is starving. In other words, when you are in dire need of money, you borrow it from somebody saying that it is for the child wounded by the cow! Another proverb on cow is: Dhira angany jaala wanni dëëri. Dhiira agany (Agany's cow) jela (care) wanni deere (the owner to it)! The owner looks after Agany's cow! It means that each one should care for his work. It the owner doesn't look after his cow, who else will look after it? He who works for something is the owner of that thing. Another meaning is that if you do your work, others will come and help you. The owner of the cow should begin the construction of the cowshed or house; then, others will come and help them to complete the work.

Crocodile

Nyaang ba buut wøk jaak. Nyaang (crocodile) ba buut (can't sleep) wøk jaak (outside)! A crocodile sleeps only on the river-banks! It means don't do anything without knowing the way to escape from its adverse result, or else, you will suffer the consequences. The Anywaa people use some of their proverbs even in their common conversation. Some of them have didactic effects and contribute to entertainment. Another saying related to crocodile is: Nyaang caama dïpööy. Njyang (crocodile) chama (eat) dipooy (teacher)! Crocodile ate the teacher! A preacher of morality caught up in immoral traffics. Another saying indirectly related to crocodile is: Kar tier jwöthi japi. Kar tier (don't) juothi (armpit) japi (open)! Don't open your armpit. Let not your own deeds turn against you! To find its relation to animals, I asked one of my Anywaa students to explain it and he told me a tale. A crocodile was afraid of guur, a huge fish found in the Baro, until the guur revealed that it had no teeth, and the next day the crocodile swallowed the fish. So the proverb warns that it is dangerous to reveal your weaknesses to others.

Deer

Luubö atimö ni cwiek tiedo. Luubö (speech) atimö (becomes) ni cwiek (soup) tiedo (deer)! The speech is Tiedu's soup. When somebody makes a wonderful speech, you exclaim like this. The speech was as tasty as the soup made with

the meat of *tiedu* (a kind of small deer). The speaker's words are very healthy and useful.

Dog

Gwök kwanynya ri wääth ki cöö. Gwök (dog) kwanynya (take) ri wääth (by walking) ki cöö (bone)! Unless the dog searches, it won't get the bone! The dog can find its favorite bone if only it is ready to walk a long distance. Unless you move from place to place, you won't get any benefits. It advises you not to expect benefits to come to you if you are not ready to try for them. The hunters used to move from one place to another to find the game. Lazy people will starve. Another saying related to dog is: Gwök ma mägö ki lääy ngic ki tiete. Gwök (dog) ma mägö (which catch) ki lääy (animal) ngic (is identified by) ki tiete (its legs)! A good hunting dog is identified by its legs! It means that one can easily identify a capable man through observation. Another proverb says: Gwök ba guuyi jaak. Gwök (dog) ba guuyi (can't bark) jaak (nothing)! A dog cannot bark at nothing! One cannot say something without any reason. In other words, if somebody says something about someone, there will be a reason behind it.

Elephant

Liec thöra apoote. Liec (elephant) thöra (is finished) apoote (piece by piece)! An elephant can be finished by taking it piece by piece! Nobody can finish an elephant as such, its body must be cut into pieces. It means that the big work should be finished bit by bit. So, piecemeal work is recommended for difficult tasks.

Goat

Atea dhie jeeya koodhi. Atea (goat) dhie (mouth) jeeya (ignores warning) koodhi (thorn)! The goat that ignores warnings gets the lesson from the thorns! If you do not listen to the advice given by elders, you will learn by suffering the consequences of your deeds, like the goat that eats thorny plants, gets its mouth injured by thorns.

Hyena

Odiek pëëte nøk. Odiek (hyena) pëëte (skins) nøk (few)! Scarce are the hyena's skins! It means that fear will protect one from danger. Hyena runs away from human beings like a coward, but cowardice saves its life. One can't find hyena's skin at home because it is a coward. There is also an alternative explanation. Being afraid of hyena, nobody hunts it, and its skin is rarely available. In hunting one must be courageous but that does not mean that you must be fearless! Too much courage and overconfidence is dangerous. Another proverb related to hyena is: Angwala ni toor baam odiek. Angwala (imitation) ni toor (which break) baam (hip-bone) odiek (heyana)! Hyena pretends as if its hip-bone is broken. When a hyena walks, the hind legs lean to a side as if imitating an animal that has a broken hip! The proverb warns against imitating another person's doings because you will be caught in your action.

Leopard

Kwac kit moe ba wiile. Kwac (leopard) kit (spots) moe (it) ba wiile (can't change). A leopard can't change its spots. This means that it is difficult for a hard hearted person to change the basic nature or his/her personality traits.

Monkey

Ajwomi nø kwääka wï thuurë. Ajwomi nø (every monkey) kwääka (plays in) wï thuurë (its place)! Every monkey plays in its own place. It means that everybody feels free, relaxed, powerful and authoritative in his own place. When you are in a strange place, you cannot fight even against injustice. Another proverb related to monkey is: Ajwom ba buut bäät cwa. Ajwom (monkey) ba buut (won't sleep) bäät cwa (on the tamarind tree). The monkey won't sleep on the tamarind tree. The sour-tasting tamarind fruits are the favorite food of monkeys. The proverb means that one should not sleep in the barn. If you sleep in the room where the food is kept, you may continue eating and thus keep nothing for the next day. The proverb reminds of preserving things for future.

Mouse

Ngat dhee ongiic acela thaac waange waange ni kweelø. Ngat (anyone) dhee ongiic (who is a customer) acela (to mouse-meat/bush meat) thaac waange waange (will burn) ni kweelø (a ball made of dry-grass—kept between the head and the head-load)! One has to burn even his grass-hat to taste the mouse-meat! To get benefit, use whatever measures you have. To smoke out a rat from its hole, don't go away in search of dried grass, but use the grass of your 'support-hat' which you made to keep in between your head and the load on your head. A number of Anywaa proverbs and sayings are related to hunting and cooking of bush-meat. This proverb teaches that in hunting, quick, timely action is crucial.

Musk-cat

Kwøro wir ki maar dëërë. Kwøro (musk-cat) wir (fragrance) ki maar dëërë (by its own oil/secretion)! A musk-cat makes itself sweet smelling by its musk. The saying means that one can become well-known or famous by his/her own abilities. One should utilize his/her talents or capital in a more beneficial way.

Tiger (and Wild Cat)

Pääri ki dum kwøro kanyo poode ni kwac poot naanga ree. Pääri (jump) ki dum kwøro (with muscat's skin) kanyo poode (before) ni kwac (a tiger) poot (isn't yet) naanga (licking) ree (itself)! Jump with the wild musk-cat's skin before the tiger licks its own skin! This proverb is a complicated one. Both the big tiger and the small wild cat lick their own skins, as if to get courage for the next jump. It would be better if the cat licked the larger skin of the tiger. Then, the cat will get the courage of the tiger. It means that before you plan to do a small thing, you must have greater preparations. Though your forthcoming work might be small, prepare as if it is a big work, then you will be able to complete it very easily. The proverb has another meaning too. Do things according to your ability or don't do bigger things until you have the capacity to do them. The cat should lick its own skin and not that of the tiger!

Tortoise

Ocirö cäädhi ka akwaane. Ocirö (tortoise) cäädhi (walk) ka (by its) akwaane (shell)! A tortoise walks with its shell! Learn the lesson from the tortoise that carries its own house (shell) wherever it goes. One must go for a journey with

all the necessary things. In other words, don't expect to live with another's property.

Wild Boar

Obang ko Omøt gena apät cøøyø. Obang (name of a person) ko (and) Omøt (another person) gena (are) apät cøøyø (spoons and fat of wild boar)! Obang and Omot are intimate friends. The spoon and the fat of wild boar love each other. When you cook the meat of wild boar, its fat will stuck on the ladle. This proverb is used to point out the intimate friendship between two persons. Their friendship is inseparable like the ladle and the fat on it. Another proverb related to wild boar is: Aana purö ki puur kul. Aana (I) purö (tilled/cultivated) ki (like) puur kul (wild boar's cultivation)! I tilled like a wild boar. Usually wild boars come to the field and upturn the soil or plough the land with its tusks in search of some edible roots but in vain. This proverb is used to express one's own despair when facing a loss in cultivation. You have invested your energies in cultivation but, as there was no rain, no benefit came out of it and hence your work was like the useless tilling of the wild boar.

CONCLUSION

It was man's desire for self-expression, his interest in people and their doings as well as his observation of the world in which he lives and the world of imagination he hopes to bring that inspired him to produce literature. His feelings, thoughts and experiences, his reactions towards the happenings around him and his practical responses to problems he faces forced him towards this creative activity. Moreover, man's instinctive desire to tell others about his unique experience stimulated him towards the production of imaginative literature which, as Meyer points out, "is a source more of pleasure than of information" (1994, p. 46). In the case of the Anywaa the proverbs represent their culture. By analysing the Anywaa orature we can find out how this literature influences the day-to-day life of the people. Until recent days, when writing was slowly introduced into their society, the Anywaa presented their ideas and thoughts through stories and songs, with the accompaniment of impressive gestures and, later, of musical instruments.

Ethiopia has a number of small ethnic groups, each one with a language and culture of its own. Their oral literature, if brought into limelight, will turn into an asset for the world literature. It is high-time that the government and other social organizations take appropriate steps towards protecting and saving their oral literature lest the age-long accumulation of this heritage vanishes in the present surge of modernization. It is often argued that the 'writing' of oral data changes its performance. Yet, it is my contention that such instances of orature as proverbs cannot be changed by a performer. Therefore, the preservation of proverbs and other genres of orature in their written form can be valuable for the future generations.

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