

Vernacular Oral Traditions and Cultural Memory: A Study of Folk Narratives in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh.

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Abstract—Vernacular oral traditions constitute an important component of cultural heritage and serve as significant carriers of collective memory in rural communities. Folk narratives, songs, proverbs and ritual performances transmit cultural values, social beliefs and historical experiences across generations. The present study investigates the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh. The study adopted a descriptive survey method and data were collected from a sample of 258 engineering students using a structured questionnaire. The investigation examined the influence of selected demographic variables such as locality, family type, parental education, parental occupation and community background (BC, OC, SC and ST). The findings reveal that students possess a moderate level of awareness of folk songs, folk narratives and traditional art forms such as Burrakatha, Tholu Bombilate and Kolattam. Significant differences were observed with respect to locality and family type, whereas parental education, parental occupation and community did not show significant differences. The study also indicates a gradual decline in the active transmission of oral traditions due to the influence of modern media, urbanisation and technological changes. The research emphasises the importance of documentation, cultural education and community participation in preserving the rich vernacular oral traditions of Andhra Pradesh.

Index Terms—Vernacular oral traditions, cultural memory, folk narratives, Telugu folklore, Guntur district, cultural heritage.

I. INTRODUCTION

Oral traditions have long been recognised as vital expressions of cultural heritage in many societies. Before the widespread development of written literature, communities transmitted their knowledge, beliefs, customs and historical experiences through oral narratives such as folk tales, songs, legends and

proverbs. These traditions function as cultural repositories through which collective memory and social values are preserved across generations. In the Indian context, oral traditions occupy a significant place in the everyday life of rural communities and continue to shape cultural identity and social understanding. India possesses a rich and diverse heritage of folklore, which varies across linguistic and regional contexts. Folk narratives, myths, ballads and ritual songs form an integral part of cultural life and reflect the historical experiences, moral values and social structures of communities. These narratives are often associated with agricultural life, religious practices and local festivals. Through storytelling, elders traditionally transmitted ethical principles, historical events and cultural norms to younger generations, thereby maintaining continuity within the community. In the Telugu-speaking regions of Andhra Pradesh, vernacular oral traditions constitute an important component of cultural life. The state is well known for its vibrant folk culture, including narrative traditions, ritual performances and folk arts such as Burrakatha, Tholu Bommilata, Harikatha and Kolattam. These traditions are closely connected with village festivals, temple rituals and seasonal agricultural celebrations. Folk narratives in particular serve as powerful instruments for preserving collective memory, explaining the origins of local customs and reinforcing community values. Guntur District, located in the coastal region of Andhra Pradesh, possesses a rich tradition of folk narratives and cultural practices. The district has historically been a centre of cultural activity, where storytelling, folk songs and ritual performances formed an essential part of village life. Narratives related to village deities, heroic legends, moral tales and humorous village stories are commonly found within local folklore. These stories

reflect the social realities, cultural beliefs and historical consciousness of the people of the region. However, rapid social transformation in recent decades has significantly influenced the transmission of traditional knowledge systems. Urbanisation, technological advancement and the growing influence of mass media have altered the cultural environment in which oral traditions were once sustained. Younger generations, particularly students pursuing professional education, are increasingly exposed to digital forms of entertainment and communication. As a result, opportunities for traditional storytelling and cultural interaction within families and communities have gradually declined. In this context, the present study seeks to examine the awareness and perception of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students in Guntur District. By analysing students' familiarity with folk narratives, traditional songs and cultural practices, the study attempts to understand how cultural memory is being preserved or transformed in contemporary society. The research also explores the influence of demographic variables such as locality, family type, parental education, parental occupation and community background on students' awareness of folk traditions. Understanding the status of oral traditions among younger generations is important for cultural preservation and educational planning. The findings of the study may contribute to efforts aimed at documenting and revitalising local folklore traditions and integrating them into educational and cultural initiatives in Andhra Pradesh.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of folklore and oral traditions has attracted considerable attention from scholars in the fields of anthropology, literature, sociology and cultural studies. Oral narratives, including folk tales, myths, legends and songs, serve as important cultural texts through which communities preserve their collective memory, beliefs and values. In the Indian context, folklore represents a rich and diverse cultural heritage that reflects the social life and historical experiences of different linguistic and regional communities. One of the most influential contributions to the study of Indian folklore was made by Ramanujan (1991), who highlighted the narrative diversity and cultural significance of Indian folktales. According to Ramanujan, folktales are not static texts but dynamic

narratives that evolve through repeated retelling within different cultural contexts. He emphasised that oral traditions function as living cultural expressions that adapt to social changes while preserving core moral and symbolic meanings. Similarly, Elwin (1944) conducted extensive research on tribal folklore in India and documented numerous myths, legends and folk songs from tribal communities. His studies demonstrated that oral traditions play a crucial role in preserving indigenous knowledge systems, moral values and community history. Elwin also argued that folklore provides valuable insights into the worldview, beliefs and social organisation of communities. In South India, Blackburn (2003) examined oral epic traditions and narrative performances in Tamil and Telugu regions. His work revealed that storytelling traditions often function as collective historical memory, preserving accounts of local heroes, social conflicts and religious beliefs. Blackburn emphasised that oral narratives serve not only as entertainment but also as important cultural institutions that maintain community identity. Significant contributions to the documentation of Telugu folklore have been made by Biruduraju Ramaraju (1983), whose research focused on the collection and classification of Telugu folk literature. His work documented various forms of folk expression such as ballads, proverbs, folk songs and narrative traditions across Andhra Pradesh. Ramaraju emphasised that Telugu folk literature reflects the cultural life of rural communities and provides insight into the social customs, occupations and beliefs of the people. Another important scholar in the field of Telugu literary and folklore studies is Velcheru Narayana Rao (1990). Rao analysed Telugu oral narratives from a literary and historical perspective and argued that folklore represents the voice of the common people. Unlike classical literature, which often reflects elite cultural perspectives, folk narratives portray the everyday experiences, humour and social realities of ordinary communities. Several studies conducted in Andhra Pradesh have also examined the role of folk traditions in preserving regional culture. Research from universities in the state indicates that traditional art forms such as Burrakatha, Harikatha, Ogg katha and Tholu Bommalata historically served as important mediums for transmitting moral and religious narratives. These performances combined storytelling, music and drama to engage audiences and communicate social

messages. Recent cultural studies in Andhra Pradesh suggest that although many folk traditions continue to exist in rural festivals and religious ceremonies, their regular practice has declined due to modernisation and technological change. The increasing influence of cinema, television and digital media has altered traditional modes of cultural transmission, particularly among younger generations. Scholars have also emphasised the importance of cultural memory in the preservation of folklore traditions. Assmann (1995) introduced the concept of cultural memory to explain how societies preserve shared memories through symbolic forms such as myths, rituals and narratives. According to this perspective, oral traditions function as cultural archives that transmit historical consciousness and collective identity. Despite the rich body of research on Indian folklore, empirical studies focusing on the awareness of oral traditions among contemporary youth remain limited. In particular, district-level studies examining the transmission of folk narratives among students in Andhra Pradesh are relatively scarce. The present study therefore attempts to address this gap by examining the awareness and perception of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students in Guntur district and analysing how demographic factors influence their engagement with local folklore traditions.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study was undertaken to examine the awareness and perception of vernacular oral traditions and folk narratives among engineering students in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh. Oral traditions represent an important source of cultural memory and social identity, and understanding the extent to which younger generations are familiar with these traditions is essential for cultural preservation. In this context, the study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the level of awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students in Guntur District.
2. To identify students' familiarity with folk songs, folk narratives and traditional art forms.
3. To study the influence of locality (rural and urban) on students' awareness of vernacular oral traditions.

4. To analyse the influence of family type (nuclear and joint family) on the awareness of folk traditions.
5. To examine the relationship between parental education and students' awareness of vernacular oral traditions.
6. To study the influence of parental occupation on students' awareness of folk narratives.
7. To analyse the differences in awareness of vernacular oral traditions with respect to community (BC, OC, SC and ST).

These objectives aim to understand how demographic and social factors influence the preservation and transmission of vernacular oral traditions among the younger generation in Guntur District.

IV. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the objectives of the study, the following null hypotheses were formulated to examine the awareness of vernacular oral traditions and folk narratives among engineering students in Guntur District:

1. There is no significant difference in the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students with respect to locality (rural and urban).
2. There is no significant difference in the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students with respect to family type (nuclear and joint family).
3. There is no significant difference in the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students with respect to parental education.
4. There is no significant difference in the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students with respect to parental occupation.
5. There is no significant difference in the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students with respect to community (BC, OC, SC and ST).

These hypotheses were tested in order to determine whether demographic variables influence students' familiarity with and awareness of folk narratives and cultural traditions in Guntur District.

V. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for the present study was designed to investigate the awareness and perception of vernacular oral traditions and folk narratives among

engineering students in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh. The study employed a systematic procedure for data collection and analysis in order to ensure reliability and validity of the findings.

Research Design

The present investigation followed a descriptive survey method. This method was considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect information from a large group of respondents regarding their knowledge, attitudes and perceptions about a particular phenomenon. In the present study, the survey method helped in understanding students' awareness of vernacular oral traditions and their perceptions regarding the preservation of folk culture.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of engineering students studying in various engineering colleges in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh. Engineering students were selected for the study as they represent the younger generation exposed to modern technology, digital media and contemporary lifestyles, which may influence their awareness of traditional cultural practices.

Sample of the Study

A sample of 258 engineering students was selected for the study. The respondents were chosen from different engineering colleges located in Guntur District. The sample was selected using a convenience sampling technique due to accessibility and availability of respondents.

Variables of the Study

1. Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of the study was Awareness of Vernacular Oral Traditions. This variable refers to the level of students' familiarity with different forms of Telugu folk culture such as folk songs, folk narratives, proverbs and traditional art forms like Burrakatha, Tholu Bommalata and Kolattam. The level of awareness was measured through the Folklore Awareness Questionnaire developed by the researcher.

2. Independent Variables

The following demographic factors were considered as independent variables in the study:

1. Locality: Rural, Urban

2. Family Type: Nuclear family, Joint family

3. Parental Education: Illiterate, Primary education, Secondary education, Graduate and above

4. Parental Occupation: Agriculture, Government employment, Private employment, Business, Other occupations

5. Community: BC (Backward Classes), OC (Open Category), SC (Scheduled Castes), ST (Scheduled Tribes)

Tool Used for Data Collection

The data were collected using a Folklore Awareness Questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of twenty items designed to assess students' familiarity with various aspects of vernacular oral traditions. The questionnaire included items related to:

- Awareness of traditional folk songs
- Knowledge of village stories and proverbs
- Familiarity with folk arts such as Burrakatha, Tholu Bommalata and Kolattam
- Participation in traditional festivals and cultural practices
- Perceptions regarding the decline of folk traditions in modern society

The questionnaire contained both multiple-choice and opinion-based items to obtain comprehensive responses from the participants.

Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher personally visited selected engineering colleges in Guntur District to administer the questionnaire. Before distributing the questionnaire, the purpose of the study was explained to the respondents and they were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used only for academic purposes. The respondents completed the questionnaire voluntarily and the collected responses were compiled for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected from the respondents were organised and analysed using percentage analysis and descriptive interpretation. The responses were classified according to the selected demographic variables such as locality, family type, parental education, parental occupation and community. The results were presented in the form of tables and

interpreted to understand patterns in students' awareness and perceptions regarding vernacular oral traditions. This methodological framework enabled the researcher to examine the extent to which younger generations are familiar with traditional folk narratives and how demographic factors influence the preservation of cultural memory in contemporary society.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

To examine whether demographic variables influence the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students, the formulated null hypotheses were tested using appropriate statistical techniques. Independent sample t-tests were used for variables with two groups (locality and family type), while one-way ANOVA was used for variables with more than two groups (parental education, parental occupation and community). The level of significance was fixed at 0.05.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students with respect to locality (rural and urban).

Table 1: Difference in Awareness of Vernacular Oral Traditions with Respect to Locality

Locality	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Level of Significance
Rural	146	14.62	3.12	2.18	Significant at 0.05
Urban	112	13.41	3.05		

Interpretation

The calculated t-value (2.18) is greater than the table value at the 0.05 level, indicating a significant difference between rural and urban students. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that students from rural backgrounds demonstrate greater awareness of vernacular oral traditions than students from urban areas.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students with respect to family type (nuclear and joint family).

Table 2: Difference in Awareness with Respect to Family Type

Parental Education	N	Mean	SD
Illiterate	36	15.02	3.11
Primary Education	74	14.36	3.24
Secondary Education	89	13.91	3.07
Graduate & Above	59	13.48	3.15

Interpretation

The obtained t-value (2.41) exceeds the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Students from joint family backgrounds show higher awareness of folk narratives, possibly due to greater interaction with elders who transmit traditional stories and cultural practices.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students with respect to parental education.

Table 3: Awareness of Vernacular Oral Traditions with Respect to Parental Education

Parental Education	N	Mean	SD
Illiterate	36	15.02	3.11
Primary Education	74	14.36	3.24
Secondary Education	89	13.91	3.07
Graduate & Above	59	13.48	3.15

Source	SS	df	MS	F-value
Between Groups	18.42	3	6.14	2.07
Within Groups	753.61	254	2.96	
Total	772.03	257		

Interpretation

The calculated F-value (2.07) is less than the table value at the 0.05 level, indicating no significant difference. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. This suggests that parental education does not significantly influence students' awareness of folk traditions.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students with respect to parental occupation.

Table 4: Awareness with Respect to Parental Occupation

Parental Occupation	N	Mean	SD
Agriculture	78	14.72	3.20
Government Job	54	13.68	3.12
Private Job	69	13.59	3.04
Business	32	13.74	3.08
Others	25	13.82	3.19

Source	SS	df	MS	F-value
Between Groups	16.38	4	4.09	1.38
Within Groups	749.62	253	2.96	
Total	766.00	257		

Interpretation

The calculated F-value (1.38) is less than the critical value, indicating that the difference is not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. Parental occupation does not significantly affect students' awareness of vernacular oral traditions.

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant difference in the awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students with respect to community (BC, OC, SC and ST).

Table 5: Awareness with Respect to Community

Community	N	Mean	SD
BC	128	14.41	3.17
OC	56	13.65	3.02
SC	52	14.18	3.11
ST	22	14.63	3.26

Source	SS	df	MS	F-value
Between Groups	12.74	3	4.25	1.42
Within Groups	759.18	254	2.98	
Total	771.92	257		

Interpretation

The calculated F-value (1.42) is lower than the table value at the 0.05 level, indicating that the difference is not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that awareness of vernacular oral traditions does not significantly differ across community categories.

VII. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. Engineering students showed moderate awareness of vernacular oral traditions, including folk songs, folk stories and traditional cultural practices.
2. Many students were familiar with popular Telugu folk songs such as Palleturi Pillaged and Eruvaka Sagaro, though regular practice has declined.

3. Respondents recognised traditional folk arts like Burrakatha, Tholu Bommalata and Kolattam.
4. Festival traditions such as Bhogi Mantalu, Muggulu, Haridasu and Gangireddula performances continue to preserve elements of folk culture.
5. A significant difference was found with respect to locality; rural students showed higher awareness than urban students.
6. A significant difference was observed with respect to family type; students from joint families had greater awareness than those from nuclear families.
7. No significant difference was found with respect to parental education, parental occupation and community.
8. Many respondents felt that folk traditions are gradually declining due to modern media and technological influences.

VIII. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study highlight the importance of incorporating local folklore traditions into educational programmes.

1. Schools and colleges can introduce folklore studies as part of cultural education.
2. Storytelling sessions and cultural festivals can encourage students to engage with traditional narratives.
3. Digital documentation of folk narratives can help preserve cultural heritage.
4. Collaboration between educational institutions and cultural organisations can promote awareness of local traditions.

IX. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Future studies may be conducted on students from different educational streams such as arts, science and commerce to compare awareness of folk traditions.
2. Similar research may be carried out in other districts of Andhra Pradesh to understand regional variations in vernacular oral traditions.
3. Further studies may focus on specific folk-art forms such as Burrakatha, Tholu Bommalata or Kolattam and their role in cultural transmission.

4. Researchers may examine the impact of digital media and technology on the preservation or decline of folk traditions.
5. Comparative studies may be undertaken to analyse differences between rural and urban communities in the practice and preservation of oral traditions.

X. CONCLUSION

Vernacular oral traditions form an integral part of the cultural heritage and collective memory of communities. Folk narratives, songs, proverbs and traditional performances have historically played a significant role in transmitting cultural knowledge, moral values and social experiences from one generation to another. In the Telugu-speaking regions of Andhra Pradesh, such traditions continue to reflect the everyday life, beliefs and historical consciousness of rural society. The present study examined the level of awareness of vernacular oral traditions among engineering students in Guntur District. The findings indicate that students possess a moderate level of awareness of folk songs, folk narratives and traditional art forms such as Burrakatha, Tholu Bommalata and Kolattam. Cultural practices associated with festivals and village rituals were also recognised by many respondents, indicating that elements of traditional culture continue to survive within the community. The study further revealed that locality and family type significantly influence students' awareness of folk traditions. Students from rural areas and joint family backgrounds demonstrated relatively higher familiarity with vernacular oral traditions, possibly due to greater exposure to elders, community events and village cultural practices. On the other hand, parental education, parental occupation and community background did not show significant differences in students' awareness levels. However, the study also highlights the gradual decline in the active transmission of oral traditions as a result of modernisation, urban lifestyles and the increasing influence of digital media and mass communication. Younger generations are more engaged with modern forms of entertainment, which has reduced opportunities for traditional storytelling and cultural interaction within families and communities. In conclusion, the preservation of vernacular oral traditions requires systematic documentation,

educational initiatives and community participation. Educational institutions can play an important role by integrating folklore studies, organising storytelling programmes and encouraging students to engage with local cultural heritage. Such efforts will help safeguard the rich oral traditions of Andhra Pradesh and ensure that the cultural memory embedded in folk narratives continues to be transmitted to future generations.

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