International Journal of
Science, Architecture, Technology and Environment

Orature as Cultural Resistance: Negotiating Banjara Identity in a Changing World

Dr. Badavath Veeru[1*]

[1]*Junior Lecturer, Department of English, TGMRJC, Khanapur, Boys-1*

[*]*Corresponding author, Veerubadavath38@gmail.com*

DOI: https://doi.org/10.63680/ijsate092623.22

Abstract

Banjara orature constitutes a vital repository of collective memory, cultural knowledge, and indigenous identity, transmitted across generations through songs, stories, narratives, proverbs, rituals, and performances. In the context of rapid social transformation, globalization, migration, formal education, and linguistic change, these oral traditions face the threat of marginalization and gradual cultural loss. Yet, Banjara orature continues to function not merely as an expression of tradition but as a powerful form of cultural resistance through which the community remembers its past, articulates its values, and negotiates its identity in the present.

This article examines Banjara oral traditions as dynamic cultural practices that preserve historical memory, social values, communal experiences, and indigenous worldviews. It particularly explores how oral songs, narratives, and performative traditions sustain a sense of belonging while responding to changing social and cultural realities. The study argues that Banjara orature challenges the dominance of written literary traditions by demonstrating that knowledge, history, and identity can be preserved and transmitted through the living voice of a community. Drawing upon perspectives on orality, cultural memory, indigenous identity, and resistance, the article interprets Banjara orature as a living archive that connects generations and reinforces cultural continuity. It further highlights the significance of documenting and revitalizing these traditions to safeguard Banjara cultural heritage in the contemporary world. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that Banjara orature is not simply a remnant of the past but an evolving medium through which cultural identity is remembered, reaffirmed, and renegotiated.

Keywords: Banjara, Orature, Tribal Identity, Cultural Resistance, Oral Tradition, Cultural Memory, Indigenous Knowledge, Cultural Heritage, Identity Negotiation, Orality.

Introduction

Literature is commonly associated with writing, books, manuscripts, and printed texts. Such an understanding, however, does not fully accommodate communities whose histories, values, memories, and knowledge have traditionally been transmitted through speech and performance. Songs, stories, proverbs, myths, rituals,

chants, and narratives have long served as important means of preserving collective knowledge. Oral expression should therefore not be considered merely an earlier stage of written literature; it constitutes a significant cultural and aesthetic mode in its own right.

The concept of **orature** challenges the hierarchy that places written literature above oral artistic expression. Associated particularly with Pio Zirimu, the concept recognizes oral forms as significant literary and intellectual practices. Walter J. Ong's study of orality and literacy further demonstrates the importance of memory, repetition, rhythm, formulaic expression, and communal participation in oral cultures (Ong).

These perspectives are particularly relevant to the Banjara community. Banjara people, also known in different contexts as Lambada or Lambani, possess a rich cultural heritage expressed through oral traditions, songs, narratives, festivals, devotional practices, social customs, language, dress, embroidery, and community performances. Existing scholarship has documented several aspects of Banjara culture and oral literature. However, greater attention is needed to the ways in which oral traditions actively participate in contemporary identity formation.

This article argues that Banjara orature functions as a living cultural archive and a form of cultural resistance. It preserves collective memory while enabling the community to negotiate its identity amid modernization, migration, education, globalization, linguistic change, and digital transformation. Cultural resistance here does not refer only to overt political protest. It also includes the everyday preservation and transmission of cultural practices in circumstances where indigenous languages, memories, and knowledge systems may become marginalized.

The central argument is therefore that Banjara orature is not simply a remnant of the past. It is a dynamic cultural practice through which the community remembers its history, communicates values, maintains belonging, and negotiates its place within the contemporary world.

Review of Literature and Research Gap

Scholarship on Banjara society has examined its history, social organization, cultural practices, language, festivals, economic life, and artistic traditions. D. B. Naik's *The Art and Literature of Banjara Lambanies* provides important documentation of Banjara artistic and literary traditions, while Deogaonkar and Deogaonkar examine broader dimensions of Banjara culture.

Studies of Banjara oral literature have identified songs, narratives, proverbs, chants, and other oral forms as important vehicles of cultural transmission. Recent scholarship has also examined Banjara literature and lifestyle in Telangana and emphasized the significance of oral traditions in preserving cultural identity (Veeru, “Living Words”; Veeru, “Oral Histories”). Research on globalization further demonstrates that Banjara social and cultural practices have undergone substantial transformation in response to changing economic and social conditions (Lal).

The broader theoretical scholarship on orality is equally important. Ong demonstrates that oral cultures depend upon memory, repetition, performance, and participatory communication. Hall's theory of cultural identity, meanwhile, emphasizes that identity is not a fixed essence but a continuing process of becoming shaped by history, memory, and representation.

Although existing scholarship establishes the importance of Banjara oral traditions, a significant research gap remains. Much of the literature documents what Banjara traditions are, whereas comparatively less attention has been given to how these traditions function as cultural resistance and enable identity negotiation under contemporary conditions. This article addresses that gap by connecting Banjara orature with cultural memory, resistance, language, gender, and changing identity.

Research Questions

1. How does Banjara orature preserve and transmit cultural identity across generations?
2. In what ways do Banjara oral traditions function as forms of cultural resistance?
3. How do Banjara songs and narratives preserve collective memory and indigenous knowledge?
4. How is Banjara identity negotiated amid modernization, migration, education, globalization, and linguistic change?
5. How can contemporary documentation and digital technologies contribute to sustaining Banjara oral heritage?

Objectives

The study aims:

1. To examine Banjara orature as a repository of cultural memory and identity.
2. To analyze oral traditions as forms of cultural resistance.
3. To explore the relationship between Banjara orature, indigenous knowledge, and collective memory.
4. To examine the changing nature of Banjara identity in contemporary society.
5. To consider the role of documentation and digital preservation in sustaining Banjara oral heritage.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary, and ethnographically informed methodology. It draws upon Banjara oral traditions, including songs, Dhavalo, wedding-related expressions, narratives, devotional forms, children's songs, mourning traditions, and other community-based oral practices, alongside secondary scholarship on Banjara society, oral literature, orality, cultural identity, and indigenous traditions.

The oral materials are examined thematically through categories such as identity, memory, cultural continuity, resistance, language, gender, indigenous knowledge, and social transformation. The study treats oral forms not merely as verbal texts but as performances situated within specific cultural and social contexts.

The theoretical framework combines Ong's concept of orality, Zirimu's concept of orature, and Hall's understanding of cultural identity. This interdisciplinary framework enables the study to interpret Banjara oral traditions as literary, social, historical, and cultural practices.

Ethical documentation is essential in the study of oral heritage. Oral materials should be recorded and published with appropriate consent and acknowledgement of community knowledge. Translation should preserve the cultural context and, wherever possible, retain the original linguistic form alongside the English version.

Theoretical Framework

Orality and Orature

Ong's theory of orality provides a foundation for understanding the role of memory, repetition, rhythm, and performance in oral cultures. These features are not weaknesses of oral literature; they are mechanisms through which cultural knowledge remains memorable and transmissible.

Zirimu's concept of orature further challenges the assumption that writing determines literary value. Banjara songs and narratives can therefore be approached as legitimate cultural texts whose meaning emerges through voice, performance, audience, occasion, and memory.

Cultural Identity

Hall's conception of cultural identity is particularly useful for this study. Identity is understood as a process rather than a fixed inheritance. Banjara identity is similarly shaped through interaction between historical memory and contemporary experience. This makes negotiation more useful than a simple opposition between tradition and modernity.

Banjara Orature as a Living Archive

Banjara orature operates as a **living archive** because cultural knowledge is stored and transmitted through people, voices, performances, and memories rather than only through written documents. Elders, parents, women, performers, and community members act as cultural custodians.

Banjara songs preserve memories concerning family, marriage, childhood, motherhood, devotion, separation, celebration, work, mourning, and community relationships. Their significance is not limited to their verbal content. The circumstances in which they are performed, the people who participate, and the emotions expressed through performance contribute to their meaning.

The oral archive is also dynamic. Unlike a fixed written document, oral traditions can vary across performers and generations. Such variation should not necessarily be regarded as cultural loss. It can demonstrate the capacity of oral traditions to adapt to new circumstances while maintaining their cultural function.

Thus, Banjara orature preserves identity not by reproducing the past mechanically but by remembering, performing, and adapting inherited knowledge.

Dhavalo: Gender, Memory, and Identity

Dhavalo provides an important example of the intersection of orature, gender, emotion, and cultural memory. Associated particularly with wedding and lamentation contexts, Dhavalo provides a culturally significant space for expressing separation, family relationships, marriage, emotional transition, and social expectations.

Its meaning is created through performance as much as through words. Voice, repetition, emotional intensity, communal participation, and occasion contribute to its significance.

Dhavalo also demonstrates the important role of women in preserving Banjara oral heritage. Women transmit songs that communicate knowledge concerning family, kinship, marriage, motherhood, emotional experience, and community values. Such oral forms may preserve experiences that remain underrepresented in formal historical records.

However, these traditions should not be romanticized. They may reproduce established gender expectations while simultaneously providing women with a space for emotional expression and negotiation. Banjara women's oral literature therefore represents a meeting point between cultural continuity and cultural agency.

Language, Memory, and Cultural Identity

Language is fundamental to cultural identity. Banjara oral traditions, including forms associated with Gor Boli/Lambadi, preserve culturally specific expressions, metaphors, memories, and modes of social communication.

The increasing use of dominant regional and national languages creates challenges for intergenerational linguistic transmission. When a community language becomes less frequently used, culturally specific knowledge may also become vulnerable.

For this reason, the preservation of Banjara oral literature should ideally involve the original linguistic form, transliteration where required, translation, contextual explanation, and audio or video documentation where ethically permitted.

English translation can make Banjara oral literature accessible to international scholarship, but translation should complement rather than replace the original language.

Orature as Cultural Resistance

The central argument of this article is that Banjara orature functions as cultural resistance in at least three important ways.

Resistance to Historical Forgetting

Oral traditions preserve community memories that may not be adequately represented in dominant written histories. Songs and narratives can therefore operate as alternative cultural archives.

Resistance to Cultural Homogenization

Modernization and globalization expose communities to increasingly standardized cultural forms. Continued performance of Banjara songs, rituals, narratives, and linguistic traditions maintains cultural distinctiveness.

Resistance through Memory

The most fundamental resistance of orature may be the refusal to forget. Remembering one's language, songs, ancestors, values, and cultural practices maintains a relationship between present and past.

The process can therefore be represented as:

Memory → Performance → Transmission → Identity → Cultural Continuity

Cultural resistance in this context is not necessarily confrontational. It can exist in the ordinary act of continuing to speak, sing, remember, and transmit.

Negotiating Banjara Identity in a Changing World

Banjara identity is being reshaped by education, migration, urbanization, changing occupations, globalization, mass media, and digital technology. These processes should not be understood simply as forces that destroy tradition.

A contemporary Banjara individual may receive formal education, work in an urban environment, communicate through several languages, use digital media, and participate in modern professional life while maintaining a strong sense of Banjara cultural belonging.

Identity is consequently negotiated rather than simply preserved.

The important question is therefore not whether Banjara culture remains exactly as it was in the past, but whether inherited traditions continue to provide cultural meaning in the present.

Orature plays a crucial role in this negotiation because it connects cultural memory with contemporary experience.

From Tanda to Digital Spaces

Digital technology has created new possibilities for the preservation and circulation of Banjara oral traditions. Smartphones, online video platforms, social media, and digital archives can help document songs, record

elders, connect younger generations with cultural heritage, and make Banjara traditions visible to wider audiences.

However, digitization also carries risks. A song removed from its ritual or social context may become merely an entertainment product. Therefore, meaningful digital preservation should include the recording, language, performer, occasion, cultural context, translation, and interpretation of an oral tradition.

The younger generation can play an important role in this process by using contemporary technologies to document and revitalize the cultural knowledge of elders.

Findings and Discussion

The study establishes five major findings.

First, **Banjara orature functions as collective cultural memory** by transmitting histories, values, experiences, and indigenous knowledge across generations.

Second, **oral performance strengthens cultural identity** because shared songs and narratives create a sense of belonging and continuity.

Third, **orature constitutes cultural resistance** by maintaining cultural practices, language, memory, and knowledge in contexts of social transformation.

Fourth, **women are significant custodians of cultural memory**, particularly through wedding, lamentation, and family-related oral traditions such as Dhavalo.

Fifth, **Banjara identity is dynamic and negotiated**. Modern education, migration, urbanization, and digital technology do not necessarily eliminate identity but create new contexts in which cultural belonging is expressed and reconstructed.

These findings indicate that cultural preservation should not be understood as the mechanical reproduction of an unchanged past. A tradition can survive through adaptation. The continuity of cultural meaning is more significant than the absolute preservation of every traditional form.

Conclusion

Banjara orature is more than a collection of songs, stories, and cultural performances. It is a living repository of collective memory, indigenous knowledge, language, emotion, and identity. Through oral transmission, the Banjara community maintains a relationship with its cultural past while responding to contemporary social realities.

This article has argued that Banjara orature functions as a form of cultural resistance. Its resistance is expressed through remembering, performing, transmitting, and adapting cultural knowledge. It challenges historical forgetting, linguistic marginalization, and cultural homogenization while providing a means of sustaining collective belonging.

At the same time, Banjara identity cannot be regarded as a fixed cultural essence. Contemporary Banjara communities negotiate inherited traditions alongside education, migration, urbanization, globalization, and digital technology. The future of Banjara culture therefore does not depend on preventing change but on enabling cultural traditions to adapt without losing their meaning.

Digital documentation, community-based archives, educational initiatives, translation, and intergenerational transmission can contribute significantly to this process. However, preservation must remain community-centered and ethically responsible.

Ultimately, Banjara orature transforms memory into identity and identity into cultural continuity. It is not simply a record of what the Banjara community was; it is a continuing cultural voice through which the community remembers its past, negotiates its present, and imagines its future.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and publication of this article.

References

- Deogaonkar, S. G., and Sailaja S. Deogaonkar. The Banjara. Concept Publishing Company, 1992.
- Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 222–37.
- Lal, B. Suresh. “Impact of Globalization on the Socio-Cultural Life of Banjaras in Telangana.” International Journal of Political Science and Governance, vol. 5, no. 6, 2023.
- Naik, D. B. The Art and Literature of Banjara Lambanies: A Socio-Cultural Study. Abhinav Publications, 1982.
- Ong, Walter J. Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2002.
- “Oral Histories and Lived Realities: The Banjara Community's Literature and Lifestyle in Telangana.” International Journal for Social Studies, vol. 10, no. 8, 2024, pp. 110–16.