

The Role of Sudanese Rural Women's Oral Folk Poetry in their Social Life: with Regard to Darfur Culture

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Abstract: Sudanese rural women's folk poetry plays an important role and covers a wide area in their social life. In Darfur region, which locates in Western Sudan, the rural women's oral folk poetry is of great significance in both social and cultural life. The folk poetry can be recited in some settings or recited and sung in other occasions. These tribal women come from different social backgrounds. Some are nomads whereas others are farmers. According to the rural folk poetry composers' language or vernacular, they are nicknamed as hakkama, tele abeera (singer), shaera (poetess) or badia (semi desert). Their poetry reflects Darfur clans' variety of cultures. The impact of such art, in undeveloped areas, is so great. Because it can be regarded the public information in its broader sense, where there are no media facilities nearby. Although most of these women are illiterate, their social contribution towards their communities is highly acknowledged. Hence, the rural folk poetess is of high prestige and widely respected by the clan members and her audience.

Key words: folklore, nomads, pastoral, vocal literature, poetess, hakkama, oral folk poetry, lampoonery, public information, Darfur.

دور الشعر الشعبي الشفاهي للنساء الريفيات السودانيات في حياتهن الاجتماعية: مع الأخذ بالاعتبار الى ثقافة دارفور

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المخلص: إن للشعر الشعبي الشفاهي للنساء الريفيات السودانيات دوراً عظيماً يغطي مساحة واسعة في حياتهن الاجتماعية في إقليم دارفور الذي يقع في غرب السودان. وإن للشعر الشعبي الشفاهي للنساء الريفيات أهمية كبرى في كل مناحي الحياة الاجتماعية والثقافية. فالشعر الشعبي يمكن إلقاءه في بعض المواقع أو تتشد وتغنى في مناسبات أخرى. هؤلاء النساء القليلات ينحدرن من خلفيات اجتماعية مختلفة: بعضهن من القبائل البدوية بينما الأخريات من المزارعين. ووفقاً للغة مؤلفات هذا الشعر الشعبي الريفي أو لغتهن الدارجة فإن لهن ألقاب كثيرة مثل الحكامة والبننت المغنية وشاعرة البادية وغيرها. إن شعرهن يعكس الثقافات المتنوعة لقبائل دارفور. فتأثير مثل هذا الأدب في المناطق الأقل نمواً قد أصبح عظيماً. لأنه يمكن أن ينظر إليه على أنه الاعلام الشعبي بمعناه الواسع. حيث لا توجد وسائل اعلامية في المنطقة. وبالرغم من ان معظم هؤلاء النساء أميات إلا أن مساهمتهن تجاه مجتمعاتهن تثمن عالياً. لهذا السبب فإن شاعرة الفن الشعبي الريفي تحظى بمكانة مرموقة واحترام واسع من قبل أعضاء عشيرتها ومن جمهورها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفولكلور، بدو، رعاة، الأدب الشفاهي، شاعرة، حكامة، الشفاهي، الشعر الهجائي، الإعلام الشعبي، دارفور.

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Introduction

This paper is an attempt to investigate the role of the Sudanese rural women's folk poetry in its social and cultural life. It is known that Sudan is a big country with different ethnic groups, tribes, languages, dialects, cultures, with different climates, arts and colourful folklore. This diversity gives the Sudanese people their uniqueness in several fields including fiction, drama and poetry. Therefore, in the Sudanese culture, oral literature plays a very significant role throughout thousands of years. In this respect, the Sudanese poetry is divided into two major categories: written and oral or vocal verse. The latter is what this paper matters and concerns with. Especially the feminist voices are endowed with acute talent and considered as silent as a result of social or gender differences. Vast areas of the rural country constitute a potential storage of this type of poetry.

The Sudanese diversity of languages is spoken in different vernaculars and accents throughout the Sudanese regions. There was no written script before the independence of Sudan; since then, the writing of the Sudanese orthography has not had much effect on the composition and dissemination of oral poetry. The majority of the Sudanese, largely nomadic pastoralists, still remain illiterate. Even a literate populace has little relevance. However, since learned poets, considered the best male poet of the present generation, continue to transmit and publicize their poetry orally. Through their performances before live audiences or through their recordings of poetry on cassettes or videotapes, the oral dissemination process continues unabated. Sudanese literature is therefore still predominantly oral. It is orally composed, memorized, and recited. One cannot adequately summarize here the function of oral literature or poetry in the society, because it affects the daily lives of most of the Sudanese wherever they are. Poetry, proverbs, riddles, and other genres are used as acts of communication and as forms of education from elders to the young and from generation to generation.

These female poets play a significant role in traditional courts, tribal and political affairs. In times of conflict, poets adopt the position of journalists, spokespersons, and politicians rolled into one. Poets from different sides of the conflict exchange poetry that is performed at assemblies and traditional courts. These poetic compositions are also passed to different settlements and communities by word of mouth through the professional memorizers and recites. Proverbs are used in everyday verbal exchanges in both rural and urban societies. Riddles are more commonly used by nomads, who continue to test each other's knowledge and intelligence by presenting complicated oral puzzles to one another. Last but not least, other forms of oral literature are performed or listened to purely for entertainment. In this paper women's poetry will be examined. Sudanese classical poetry, the type of poetry best suited to address issues of serious interest, is classified into major themes and subjects such as descriptive, pride, lampooning, lyrics, seduction entertainment, ballads, wisdom, war and peace. According to this classification, based on the way the poem is chanted and the rhythmic pattern of words, some are seen as male genres while another is considered the female style.

During the last few years one can witness kinds of poetry by different Sudanese poetesses and can recognize the style adopted by a poet or a poetess depends on that particular artistic talent. There also seem to be regional influences on the artist's style. For example, women from the rural areas in East and Western regions of Sudan have composed fine types of poetry. In the past, there have also been examples of poets who

employed the Shukria, Kababeesh , and Butana tribes styles. Yet, there are very remarkable Sudanese rural poetic styles in Darfur and Kurdufan (except the Kababeesh) which have not been highlighted or investigated by researchers except for a very few of local interests and it is not in wide circulation.

The oral memorization and recitation is the main medium of publicizing and disseminating of poetry whatsoever its genre. The reciters are the factor who passes their favorite poetry from one area to another and from one generation to the next. In this sense Andrzejewski (1985:37) puts: "let us say, a hundred people can memorize a text from one performer, and that each of these hundred can perform it to a hundred more, and so on. In a very short time a story or poem can be known to several thousand people, without recourse to printing or to the radio." However, this otherwise effective medium of transmission does not work for women artists. The position of recite\dancer process has always been a male role; because of the restrictions imposed on women by Sudanese society. There have never been professional female reciters\dancers. The reciters commit to memory only poetry by male verbal artists, viewing the act of memorizing poetry by women as demeaning and insulting. As a result, women do not receive exposure through the traditional network. Since the Sudanese script was instituted decades later, attempts have been made to document in writing orally composed poetry.

However, traditionalists and scholars who made such an effort concentrated strictly on poetry by men. The little poetry by female artists collected so far happens to treat subjects associated with what are seen as female roles. These include oral poetry, which has now become a folk form without individual authorship, and lullabies when the mother sings to her baby. It is also known as lull rhyme or nursery rhyme.

Because Darfur region is remote from the capital of Sudan, its people's cultures had long been neglected. Yet, some efforts are initiated by individuals to register and collect this legacy. That is what let this paper attempt to investigate. Hence, it will concern with Darfur rural women's oral poetry.

1.1 Darfur Rural Women's Oral Folk Poetry

Darfur is the biggest region in Sudan. It is inhabited by more than 140 tribes with different languages, vernaculars, dialects and cultures. Some of them have extensions with their similar counterparts in the neighboring countries. The biggest Darfur clans can be exemplified in Fur, Zaghawa, Arabs, Berti, Meedoub, Masaleet, Dajo, Tama, Gimir, Borno,Borgoo, Birgid, Fallata, Erenga, Masalat, Abu Darag, Kinneen and others. Every clan, especially those which dwell the rural areas, has its renowned folk poetry poetesses. Such a woman is considered the spokesperson of her clan and its defender in some cases. The prototypes of this rural female poet have different nicknames such as: Hakkama (the woman whose poetry has the force of negative or positive provocation), Shaera (the poetess), Tele Abeera or Teneh Kaura (girl singer) and so forth. The recited poetry of some of these women will cause war against the neighboring tribes and consequently it breaks the social ties between these communities. On the other hand, she can call for peace and her clan will immediately execute her decision. This reform occurs as a result of social and political changes in the country. Furthermore, oral poetry is also sung by the same women.

1.0 Literature Review

Henning (1942) defines folklore as "the unwritten lore (stories, proverbs, riddles, songs, and [poetry]". Also Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines it as "the traditions and stories of a country or community...The story rapidly became part of family folklore". Furthermore, Roderick Beaton, in Amazon.com defines folk poetry as follows: "A wide ranging study of popular poetry and song in the Greek language from the last years of Byzantine Empire to the present day. The folk poetry of the title includes the songs, composed and handed down by word of mouth, of unlettered villagers, of wandering minstrels with pretension to professionalism, and in more recent times, of the poorer inhabitants..." Whereas Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines folk song in two respects:" 1. A song in the traditional style of a country or community. 2. A type of song that became popular in the US in the 1960s, played on a guitar and often about political topics".

As the folk poetry is associated with songs in most situations, therefore, the website www.poetrysoup.com presents forms of songs in the following respect: "Songs whose content is primarily lyrical rather than narrative conventionally grouped under the headings of love songs, wedding songs, religious songs, lullabies, exile songs, gnomic songs, dirges and songs of the lower world". Coles Notes also defines folk song as "A song that originated among the common people and has been transmitted, usually orally, from one generation to the next".

Furthermore, David Coplan (1986) thinks that the oral poetry is a study of popular culture, self- definition and social experience. Likewise, Amatzia Bar-Yosef explains it in terms of homogeneous style with distinctive musical characteristics of the rural musical tradition. Denis Wepman (1974) clarifies that folklore in the urban communities reveals expressions, and life styles. Moreover, Hasan Akca (2007) presents Asik Veysel as a folk poet and singer in a Turkish rural village. But David Atkinson (2004) justifies that oral traditions are considered as a defining characteristic of folk songs which can be described as vernacular, whether they are sung or printed.

2.0 Themes of the Folk Poetry

The feminist composers of the rural folk poetry are of two groups: nomads, who always travel from place to place raising camels and livestock. Then dwellers in rural areas who live stable in villages as farmers and raise livestock. Each group has its own way of composing and reciting oral folk poetry in accordance to the traditions, customs, institutions and the believes of the clan. Wikipedia avails an account of information about the pastoral themes. They include seduction, love, mourning, death, idealizing country life, and sometimes politics. A common type of pastoral poem genre is eclogue. Moreover, the rural poetess's verse cements itself on the bases of the rhythmic sound and sense. Also it depends on conventional thematic aspects of their poetry which run as follows:

- a. bravery and heroism.
- b. pride and generosity.
- c. dignity and wisdom.
- d. provocation and revenge.
- e. Good and Evil.
- f. virtuous values
- g. cooperation(nafeer and faza).

- h. respect and guest serving.
- i. family wise and traditions
- j. grace and patience
- k. respect and tolerance

3.0 Characteristics of the Rural Folk Poetry

Women voices in the pastoral and dwellers areas are overt especially in the traditional occasions like wedding, circumcision, planting and harvest festivals. Always the setting where the audience gathers to attend these folk poetry and songs will be in a public place, generally outdoors. The rural folk poetry must necessarily consist of the following characteristics:

- a. unrhymed verse as general.
- b. Usage of various languages, dialects and vernaculars.
- c. compliments: praising the brave, the generous, virtuous and with good ethics.
- d. lampoonery: insulting or disgracing the coward, selfish, miser, vicious and of any bad deeds.
- e. description: landscapes, seasons, images, the beloved, camels and horses.
- f. mourning: for death, loss, disaster, unhappy events...etc.
- g. war and peace: rejection of war and acceptance of peace settlement.
- h. travelling: migration, in diaspora, for work, tourism and desertion.
- i. farming: planting, harvesting, transporting, storing.
- j. festivals and ceremonies: marriage, wedding, arrivals, departures, circumcision, triumphant, religious or national occasions.
- k. al joodiyya: means a traditional way of mediation and facilitation to solve any big problem between two parts or enemies (persons or tribes) by a group of trusted elder people under a big tree, in the open air, even the big crimes like death, theft or robbery.

4.0 Anthology of Darfur Rural Women's Oral Folk Poetry

The following poems are just examples of Darfur rural women's oral folk poetry from different parts of the region through forms of their oral literature. These types of poetry convey situational occasions. It is worth mentioning that these poems are composed and sung at the same time.

Hence, this paper will provide names of some folk poetesses, aspects and themes of their poems, anonymous female works, the purposes and usages of their poetic forms and a considerable amount of excerpts by other women whose work has been transmitted through the audio-visual aids facilities.

4.1 Al Zayyadia Arab Hakkamas are female composers of folk poems.

They sing and dance at the same time, and the participants repeat the refrain after the singer. Usually these poems are composed of short dual lines and even of single line elongated by the chorus of a group of women. This tribe's dances are al jarray, al shiglab, al merdama, al hasees and umsigaiddo. Al Hakkama Hediyya Al Shaikh Ajabad Dor describes beautiful girls of her clan while they are dancing as follows:

Hittenna al ma wisail azrag sebeeal khail.

Move your long unpaired braids black like the horse tail

The poetess asks the girls to dance moving their long hair that has not been joined with anything to make it longer, and it has not been dyed as black as the horse tail. Also Hediyya sings a social song simultaneously with the dance. She says:

Semhal leem wad demer tihtal juruf al hamar
So fine gathering and camping under the red drift

She admires the image of her nomad clan dwelling and fixing their tents at the brink of the red cliff. Being together in one site, will indicate the solidarity of her tribe in cases of roaming or encamping.

In the following line, she focuses on two significant social issues: her people's watering their camels and marriage wise. She declares that in sweet melody:

Tebber fim bayada sigayt akhayyer fi banatam makhidei
Overstayed in Um Bayada watering [and] chose his cousin to marry

She reminiscences an occasion in one summer when her relatives settled in a valley in North Darfur called Um Bayada, where the unnamed chap watered his heard of camels and chose his uncle's daughter to marry. She intends to date that season as an unforgettable setting where it evoked passion and happiness.

4.2 The following poem is one of the famous lyrics, composed by an anonymous

Darfurian woman and widely sang by some Sudanese singers in wedding festivals and through the audio- visual media. It became a prominent example of Darfur rural folklore heritage. It is entitled 'Woolaid Darfur' which means 'The Son of Darfur'. Its theme is a love ballad of a daring girl who declares her strong desire and passion to marry her lover, whom she conceals his name. It comprises of three stanzas. The first two lines recurrently recur as a refrain after every stanza. It runs as follows:

Woolaid Darfur bamshee maakal Leila,
Mahal ma'd door bamshee maakal Leila.
Hayyy..
Ummee galat ley:
Mitain bigeeti binei?!!
Irifti derbal ghei ?

Ligeetoo fougat beer,
Laihoo ramanish shoug.
Bijumbo ma maagoog.
Tagool sagani uroog.

Ligeetu fougat beer,
Ad daloo gisteer.
Bai haggoo mahoo ajeer.
Ya yumma khairoo keteer,
Ab sunoonan jeer,
Tagool akhatboo,ateer.!

Oh, Darfur's son, I'll go with you tonight,
Wherever you want, I'll go with you.
Oh,
My mother asked me:
'When have you become adolescent,
And know the path of love?!

I met him at the market place,
 To him, eagerness threw me
 Tightly, me and him.
 As though he irrigated me a medicine!

I met him at the well,
 The bail is made of tin.
 Wealthy, he is, and not hired.
 Mama, his fortune is great,
 May I engage him and fly with?!

The narrator of this poem is the intended girl. She is declaring an issue which is considered, in the past, as breaking the social traditions. It is unacceptable for a girl to reveal her passions to her semi-conservative family and society. But this girl rebels against such constraints, and directly imposes her prejudice towards her lover whom she nicknames the son of Darfur. In the first refrain, she tells her lover her acceptance and determination to elope with him wherever and whenever he chooses. Then she tells her audience, probably her peers, what her mother said blaming her of her open revelation.

In the second stanza she traces her lover's wanderings. She describes his image when she had a glimpse of him at the market. And that passion threw me in to his heart. Something is pulling her at him as though he is a magnetic field! She moves to the third stanza at the well while he was watering his livestock. She depicts him as a wealthy man who owns a lot of animals and he is not a wage earner. Meanwhile, she shifts to her mother telling her that his fortune is immense. Finally, she projects his teeth as white as the lime. And dramatically she 'asides' and discloses to herself willingly if she can engage him, fly away with him, and marry him.

4.3 The following poem was composed by Ashay Koonce a member of Zaghawa nation.

Her theme and subject matter are opposite to the latter girl's. She was a rural beautiful slender girl who had been engaged to a man against her will. She resisted her father's decision, who insisted not to retreat. Therefore, she rebelled and composed this poem\ song refusing that man. She complains the abuse and misjudgment of girls by their fathers and declares her refusal in the marketplaces, festivals and marriage weddings. Also she roams from village to village and from town to town singing and dancing in any opportunity. The poem runs in the Zaghawa language (Beria) as follows:

*Tuna Teenaru jari kana di aygona,
 Nanoo sururu jari kana di aygona,
 Khartoom Tootiru jari kana di aygona,
 Sorro Shirkaru jari kana di aygona,
 Khazzan durduru du jari kana di aygona.
 Gooji gooji Beybaru jari kana di aygona.*

*Usum boroogay no we,
 Taree terbo gay no we,
 Igaray tey di koiro,
 Bagoo meh gol di kidiyo,
 Tari ardii teree keiree,*

Ta kidiyeh nibiyar kei no.

*Ganjoo kayri gatar orbi kana di aygona,
Efir kayri noori orbi kana di aygona,
Gree gree tayar orbi kana di aygona.
Doori doori murkab orbiga, kana di aygona.*

From those inhabitants of Tuna Teeneh, I couldn't find justice,
From those inhabitants of NanooSuroo, I couldn't find justice,
From those inhabitants of KhartoomTuti, I couldn't find justice,
From those inhabitants of KhazzanDurdur, I couldn't find justice.

He is just a name of a man,
He isn't elegant like his peers.
He gets nothing when he accompanies others.
His speech sounds less than a woman's!
Dirty are his clothes.
Mindless to migrate to Libya for work.

From those travelers by smokefull train, I couldn't find justice.
From those travelers by dust full lorry, I couldn't find justice.
From those travelers by the roaring plane, I couldn't find justice.
From those travelers by a boat, I couldn't find justice.

In the opening stanza Ashay Koonnee mentions some places where she went to narrate bitterly her complaint to the local chiefs of these towns. But she became disappointed for not finding any justice in the courts of Alteenaa, Basao, Khartoom and Halfa in Sudan, and in Tchad the courts of Nanoo, Beyba and most probably Hiriba.

The second stanza describes her humiliation towards her suitor and insults him for his negative attitudes by saying that he is a man of nonsense. He is not fashionable and the worst thing is that his speech sounds less than a woman's. And that he gets nothing of advantage when accompanying his peers.

In the last stanza she changes her melody by shifting to describe the means of transport which she travelled by widening the scope of her complaint. She uses anomatopoeia in portraying the train, lorry, plane and the ferry. At the end of all these attempts, she could not get justice. Her tragic death without marriage and poems/songs became social remembrance.

5.0 Recommendations

The paper would like to recommend that this topic is a vast and important area to be dealt with in a few pages. But the problem resides in shortage of references which such studies lack. Hence, the researcher recommends further scholars and researchers to carry on in this rich neglected area. Because humanity will get great benefit of knowledge if this potential cultural legacy is given more concentration by the officials and academicians. Furthermore, I recommend the Sudanese Ministry of Culture and Information to facilitate the process of collecting Darfur cultural legacy and transmitting it through the media for the sake of the global knowledge.

5.0 Conclusion

The study comes to conclude that the role of the Sudanese rural women's oral folk poetry in Darfur is essential as the potential resource of regional and global literature. Darfur women voices are not widely focused on, nor investigated by researchers. In spite of that, this public information plays a significant role in the rural areas, where tribes interact positively on the one hand and negatively on the other hand according to the consequences of different occasions.

The impact of this poetry constitutes a cornerstone in the tribal life, where ethnicity has a strong effect on its subjects, themes and concepts. Hence, through these genres of the rural oral folk poetry, these poetesses portray the culture of Darfur region and try to transmit it worldwide in great difficulty and strong determination.

The paper could discover, when collecting data, some other rural female oral folk poetry composers and singers like the Hakkama Khadeeja Hammad, Meiram Meriam Abbo, Meriam Sasa, Hawa Ramadan, Haleema, Safia Hisain and Tombo Kujuga.

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