CHAPTER-V

CONCLUSION

The dialects and languages spoken by tribals in India are very large in number. The literary composition in most of them have survived in oral form, though some tribal languages have taken to writing as a means of recording literary compositions. The value of these oral literary works can by no means be undermined. Conventionally, they have been perceived as mere anthropological curiosity, or at best a source for oral history, and they have rarely been translated into English or an Indian language as a representation of tribal imagination. However, no systematic attempt to document and publish literary works in tribal languages –as literature _per se_ has been made in the past, the need for doing which can be hardly over emphasized (Devy, Forward x)

The rich and varied literatures of tribal communities in India have been often marginalized or neglected and not considered as part of the mainstream Indian literatures either due to the fact that most of the tribal literatures are in oral form or due to the reason that they have not been collected or documented and studied as part of literary canon. This besides the traditional conception of literature is that it is necessarily written and documented within the canonical constructs of its language’s creative
history. Thus since literature is always and often considered as written and hence the oral literatures of communities such as the Muduvan are often considered as mere folklore. This takes us to another point, regarding the conception of folklore as not being a part of literature. The assumption has begun to change slightly now and the need to preserve such oral literatures which are vanishing due to the influence of globalization and information technology is being accepted. As such in India, the Sahitya Akademi took the initiative to preserve such dialects and languages of tribal communities and its projects envisage the documentation and publication of Indian literatures in tribal languages. Apart from this effort, individual efforts by scholars and researchers contribute to this visionary endeavor.

As an initial step in this direction from within the academy of comparative studies, this thesis attempts to bring forth the rich oratures of Muduvan tribe into main literary canon, through inscription, documentation and translation which is the most effective cultural link between the peoples of today’s global village.

It is to be noted that Muduvans, one of the prominent tribal communities of south India, have many oratures preserved and transferred from generation to generation and performed in various situations. Their life and various life-cycle rituals are never devoid of renderings of songs such as at the time of marriage, puberty celebrations and death. The collective and communal feeling is always projected in the songs sung at
the time of work and the festival seasons. The conversation at leisure time, especially after work in the field and forest, is filled with tales and songs along with the experiences of the respective days. It is clear that the performance of their oratures is completely content-based. The performers, listeners and the ‘oral texts’ are all part of the text/texts which reaffirms their social and communal relationship with each other and their cultural coexistence since each member of the community is socially embedded in certain ways. The performance of the oratures is the celebration of life and helps the performer/community establish their identity. Even if the performer’s/communities’ individual authorship cannot be attributed to oratures, its relatedness with culture makes it an indispensible part of Muduvan life. It is Muduvan literature in its most literal sense.

The validity of considering Muduvan’s oratures as part of their folklore is one aspect examined in the thesis, as a part of their repertoire and performed for entertainment, teaching and learning. Performance can be considered the primary practical aspect of folklore. In documentation, the performative aspect is lost. It is a mere printed word. Canonical literary pieces, like novels and poetry do not rely on performance for totality of meaning. These are self-contained and in that sense more complete than inscribed/document oral literatures. This point seems to be the disadvantage of oral literatures.
Muduvan’s oratures is the main part of the verbal performance of folklore manifesting their traditions which is thus transferred from one generation to another. The familial bonds, social and communal patterns of a tribe are reflected and always documented in their literatures. Hence their folklore is a mirror of their culture and a channel to express their feelings, emotions, memories, experiences and so on. The tribal people who live mostly in the hills and forests do not have much contact outside their settlement and that is one of the reasons why they can preserve their oral literatures without much changes. However, now migration towards towns in search in jobs is changing this.

The concept ‘ethnopoetics’, a non-conventional, non-western frame to look at various divergent cultures which are hitherto considered irrelevant and not part of mainstream culture is used as the perspective of study in this thesis. As such oratures of Muduvans are examined from their socio-cultural background in their original language, situation and context. It helps to understand the role of their oral literature in their daily life. It also helps to preserve the beauty and aesthetic value of their oral literature. Since ethnopoetics does not encourage a comparative study of oratures with normative regional or European literature the studies in the thesis are largely descriptive, classificatory and highlight the poetic features of a community’s oratures, in themselves.
Muduvans’ oratures comprises of folk song, tales, proverbs and riddles which are collected from the field are the primary source in the thesis. The folk songs include different genres sing at various contexts. As such Āśaippāṭṭu (Love-song) is the first genre of songs examined in the thesis. These short songs are in the form of dialogue sing mainly at the time of marriage between the bride and bridegroom. These songs are also performed in other contexts like when a girl attains puberty, when a boy leaves the bachelors-dormitory to get married and/or when they spend time in the bachelors- dormitory. Thus the songs are classified according to the context they are performed. Further, to understand them more easily, the songs are classified depending upon the various themes they deal with like desire, praise, flirtation, mocking, elopement etc. Even though these themes are prevalent in different songs in different ways, the intention in majority of the songs is to explicitly reveal the feeling of love and hence the name Āśaippāṭṭu. Other genres of folk songs include Tāḷāṭṭu (Lullaby), Kummippāṭṭu, Songs sung at the time of work and work places and Festival songs and Oppāri (song sing at the occasion of death). These songs are lengthy and more context-oriented than Āśaippāṭṭu. These songs are notable for their rhythm and rhyme. Tāḷāṭṭu or Lullaby is the first genre of folksong encountered by the child in any community. Muduvan women do not have the custom of putting their children in cradles to make them sleep. But this genre of folk song is a main part of their culture showing
innate love of mothers towards children. *Kummippāṭṭu* is another genre of folk song that Muduvan women sing especially after the harvesting season. To reduce the boredom of work Muduvans sing songs when they go for work in fields or go to forest with cattle. Songs sung at the time of various festivals like ‘pongal’ form a major part of their folk songs. The use of divine and mythical characters in some of their songs indicates the influence of epics in their oral literatures. The other genre of folk song is *Oppāri* sing in the form of lamenting death. Most of the songs of Muduvans are related to their real life situations. Their songs are distinguished by the use of images, metaphors, similes and other poetic devises. Illustration of nature especially about animals, birds, vegetation, mountains and natural phenomena are part of their songs. The tales are usually narrated to the younger generation to make them aware of their culture and tradition and history even though there are some tales which are narrated for pure fun and entertainment. Other forms like riddles and proverbs have their relevance in daily life. These form the subject of the core chapters of this thesis, i.e. chapters II, III and IV prior to the conclusion.

To bring forth the oratures of Muduvans into mainstream literary canon has not been easy. The initial problem was in the collection and documentation of the primary sources. The settlements of Muduvans are largely in the dense forests and hence x permission was needed from the
state authorities to visit them. It was time consuming to reach their settlements by walk for hours and later to make rapport with them, to gain their trust and friendship. The data collection was from seven settlements. The Muduva women do not interact much with outsiders and hence the most of the songs and data are collected from men. The use of digital instruments in front of them to record the renderings always failed since they were not willing and shy. Still the research scholar managed to record some and the rest of the renderings were transcribed. Followed by this the main issue started when these songs were translated into English.

In this thesis a sincere attempt is made to place Muduvan oratures into the larger arena of literary studies through translation. Language seems to be more powerful and appealing in the oral form but while translating them into a print form, the original charm cannot be preserved as such. It is mainly because the oral literatures are more situational and contextual and fluid in nature. Geographically Muduvans are in a place where two languages converge. To the eastern side of the Western Ghats which they inhabit, Tamil is spoken while Malayalam dominates the western side. Since Tamil and Malayalam have influenced their oral narratives substantially, it is difficult to demarcate their language from these prominent, widespread languages of Tamil and Malayalam while one attempts to posit their language in the wider spectrum of languages. This makes it difficult for a translator in his/her act of translating since he/she
has to be open to the linguistic and cultural nuances of all Dravidian languages (Tamil, Malayalam, Muduvan language, English). Keeping this in mind the Muduvan oratures were approached by Malayalam which is the mother tongue of the research scholar and partially by Tamil which is the research scholar’s acquired language.

Certain general features relating to the research may be summed up as follows:

1. Although a lot of gender-related research is now taking place in the academy, the researcher could not find any instances of gender-constructs particularly characterizing Muduvan oral literature. The community itself is liberal in intra-relationship and at the same time, very conventional and strict in maintaining their links with the tribes outside. Both men and women seem equally well-empowered. In ordinary conversation although there are a lot of mutual light-hearted banter, and although the community itself is structured as a patriarchy with the men officiating as priests and head-men, the women are equally respected, but for individual instances of disagreement or quarrels.

2. The researcher noted that a lot of songs and tales are already lost by the Muduvans and that only the elders of the community were able to give the researcher most of the primary material. The younger could only contribute the smaller pieces like the riddle and love-songs. This sad fact strengthened the researcher’s conviction that the documentation and
translation of Muduvan oral literature into English, was indeed relevant and
timely. Changes were noted by the researcher even within a period of two
years.

3. However, the Muduvans were very proud of their songs and tales and
innate pride in their oral heritage was seen as a reassuring factor by the
researcher.

4. Growing state-control of access to and stay with the tribal settlements for
security reasons and preservation of forest-life, will also be a real factor
that will determine the facilitation of primary research material for a study
such as this, in the future.

The problems of translation were mainly at the linguistic level and
cultural level. The differences in grammatical structure in source language
and target language and ambiguity in meaning are the main linguistic
problems. In the case of the Muduvan dialect (source-language) the
grammatical pattern is same as that of Malayalam and Tamil; that is
subject+object+verb. But in English (target language) the grammatical
pattern is subject+verb+object. For example in the tale 4:

Vayal+ oruttan +olakittēnē = literally, field+ a man+was ploughing

A man +was ploughing +the field

The grammatical pattern in the songs is more complex than in tales
because in most cases the subject is absent in singing though it is
understood. But while translating them in to English the subject is needed to be added to get the sense. For example in Song 10:

Malayaṭivāratilu,
Manipṛā mēyakaṇṭe.
Cembṟāntu vēṣatilu,
Centūkku tūkkiṭuve.

Translation:
In the valley I saw
A dove roosting.
In a kite’s disguise
Will I swoop down and pick you.

The ambiguity in the meaning of the word is another linguistic problem. One fine example is in the Song 27 in which the word kanniyaliṇjālum is loaded with three meanings; the loss of the virginity of the girl, man, and land. But in target language only one meaning is retained; that is the loss of the virginity of the girl and hence translated as “even if the virgin is consummated”

In some cases the ambiguity arises in source language due to the reason that the same song can be sung in different context and as such the meaning varies. In such cases the context that matters rather than the rendering. In Song 48 the contextual ambiguity is created with the word maṇitavāla which is translated as beautiful frog. The word maṇitavāla in
source language, literally ‘bejwelled-frog’ is equated with a pregnant with the baby in the womb, the precious child being equated to the bejwelled-frog in the pond of water. The analogy is scientifically accurate, incidentally with reference to the foetus within the fluid of the womb.

Iṭi iticu maḷa peye,
Irukarayum koḷam perake
Koḷattil kiṭakkum manitavaḷa,
Innu vāi polambe keḷkeliye

Translation:
While it thunders and rains,
And the pond breaches its banks
O, bejwelled-frog’ in the pond,
Your sweet words are not heard today.

The other major problem in translation was at cultural level. Many words in source language like māngalyam, tāli, kuṭumbi etc are culture-specific and cannot be translated as the equivalent in target-language is not available.

Other cultural specific words which are related to flora and fauna, name of animals, name of god and goddesses etc are difficult to translate. A detailed glossary is given at the end of the thesis in which culture-specific words are explained. Translation can bring forth Muduvan oratu res and cultures making it available to the rest of the world. Translation enables them to be in par with other literatures.
Through the various efforts as mentioned above, the present thesis tries to bring forth the rich oral literature of Muduvans into the mainstream literary canon. Due attention is given to the literary and stylistic aspects of their oral literature since it is not an anthropological study but a research work in literature. Since no full-fledged research work has been done on Muduvan oral literature so far, the thesis is a pioneer study, an exercise in primary research. Although all available Muduvan oral literatures in all their versions cannot be accessed, a sincere attempt is being made to make the study as comprehensive as possible, keeping the scope of research in mind. It is hoped that this documentation of Muduvan oratures will help scholars in the field of literature and folklore to do further research to understand the literary and cultural aspects of not only the Muduvans, but the many ancient and poetry-rich tribes of India. Like Muduvan oratures there are many tribal communities with rich oratures which needed to be preserved by documentation and publication. A comparative study of oratures of different tribal communities outside the realm of ethnopoetics is also a possible area to be explored, in the future.

The oral literatures of tribals who have no written literary forms, exhibit their culture via poetic creativity. It is clear that Muduvan’s oratures are interrelated to their culture and tradition and the performance of each genre in different occasions has its relevance in their life. Their oratures show that they are not just performers of received poetry and song but
are also gifted poets. As such the research scholar takes the freedom to conclude this dissertation with a song that the Kāni /headman of Susanukudi sung exclusively for the research scholar when the latter took leave of the tribe after field-work to collect primary research data. The most important point to note is the reference to the never-ending treasures of oral literatures, apart from the fact that the song itself is a standing piece of evidence to the hospitable and affectionate nature of the Muduvans:

Malayāḻi kuñciyē pāṭṭelutum kaiyā

Pāṭṭeluti muṭiyum munne pāṭiyilum yāṭraya?

Pāṭṭu muṭiccuvittu pāṭiya kūrviṭaye kāl piṭṭuccu

Santōṣamāke pōyi vā en makanē.

Translation:

O, Malayāḻi child, writing down the songs

Are you leaving halfway, before finishing it all?

Finish this one and with blessings at the feet of the singing-master,

Leave happily and return again, my son.