

# LITERATURE PRESERVES PAPUA NEW GUINEA (PNG) CULTURAL HERITAGE

By: Helen Christine Kuli, BA Honors (Student), 2012,  
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The rich cultural heritage is gradually losing its value, respect and identity. The present generation is focusing on outside changes with drastic influences and not realizing the damage caused on the withering of their cultural traditions. This paper seeks to discuss the importance of literature as a vehicle for the preservation of cultural heritage in relation to some of many major issues taking place such as the transition of oral culture, language transition, the loss of traditional values through Education and religion; and national identity will be the main moments of consideration. It will also compare and contrast if necessary the issues brought forward in relation to changes occurring in other developing countries.

## The importance of Literature

Literature continues to exist as a vital entity in literary works and has become an important source of contribution toward nation building. It serves an important purpose to teach the people about many aspects of PNG cultural heritage such as national identity. In this respect the main aim of literature is to educate the public about the preservation of traditions from the changes taking place as a result of colonization and Western influence. For instance Beier (1980) notes that literature was used to respond to colonial masters on the importance of cultural traditions that they saw as less important through the so many written works done by national writers since the 1960s. That was one reason literature was used to resist such external forces and thus became the basis to nation building in which self-government and independence was also achieved. Beier also noted that many writers who involved in producing different literary works were some of the first writers. That involved the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies (IPNGS) as a publishing house for new Papua New Guinean writing in producing major works of novels, plays and poetry; and recording and analyzing art, music, folklore, and other works of oral history. The institute has been the main contributor in ensuring that more written work was published locally.

PNG literature also has relevance to national development because most of the national issues people faced related to political, economic and social were described and explained for people to understand their own experiences, those of others and applied them in their lives to cope with various situations they encounter to shed light for positive living. And particularly for women's issues Kumbeli (1996) wrote on common problems faced by women and encouraged them to write and explain their experiences. Kumbeli made the point that PNG literature is vital as it educate the reading public about social issues that contribute to integral development of individuals. Thus literature has become an important medium used while the writer becomes the informal teacher for wider reading audience allowing them to get first hand information relevantly applicable in their lives.

## The transition of Oral Culture to Oral Literature

Oral culture is derived from traditional societies and contains norms such as traditional belief systems of certain things handed down from successive generations. One aspect is the beliefs on the spirits of dead ancestors found in many traditional societies. For instance

Amadio (1993) compared the visible and invisible worlds of oral culture that these hold the source of mythology. That the people understand the invisible world more readily than most people in Western societies that believed in tales initially told by word of mouth. Hence they were receptive to the spiritual aspect of life as a necessity to live in the world of nature where most of their mythology begins. Thus the importance of preserving oral culture is preserving traditional heritage found in many forms and ought to be conserved for future generations. Most of its elements become part of people's main form of performance or entertainment such as dance, music or drama. The National (2008) also highlighted the importance of preserving such oral history through dance by describing the traditional attire, its value and significance of the gulf people in a dancing event that these need to be preserved not only for future but also for present generation's identity derived from various ethnic backgrounds. Similarly The National (2009) reported the recent Hiri Moale Festival that the contestants for Hiri queen were judged according to their explanations on the understanding of Hiri Trade history, the meaning of traditional attire and tattoos they wore, and their general knowledge of the trade expeditions that touched their inner ability.

In PNG traditional societies, oral cultures vested great wisdom that taught people virtues such as love and respect in building mutual relationships among individual in the community while at the same time seeing these cultures deteriorating. Brash (1996:59) states that the contemporary transitional changes caused much destruction to the country's cultural identity indicating the fear that in due time may lose its significance. However, the gradual transition of oral culture to oral literature slowly took shape in succeeding years. The collections of myths, legends, folktales, poetry, songs, chants, charms, proverbs and riddles gradually handed down by word of mouth eventually put down in written form for future generations and for the purpose of preservation. Winduo (2004) notes that these elements were initially existed in verbal communication and actions in the form that define people and their sense of belonging. Roskies et. al. (1970) also notes on the development of written language that oral cultures expressed man's creativity to fit different occasions and add meanings to conversations among individuals. Winduo further notes that these forms help to promote the significance of continuity involved in varied indigenous societies that survived to the present. Jawondibari (1980) also states that the values of culture should resist Western influences through individuals having participative share on cultural activities. Post Courier (2009) referred to cultures as rights similar to those of other entities such as political or civil rights and thus individuals' active involvement in such events is a way of promoting their own cultures.

Oral history or oral culture also has relevance to human development in the aspect of learning. The National (2007) noted on the art of dancing that it contributes to human development because in the learning of dance in schools and tertiary institutions promotes mental, physical and spiritual state of a person. Matane (2003) acknowledged that the art of dancing found in various societies should be seen as of greatest value toward personal development that enables the learner to explore his creative abilities. In contrast cultural traditions are further defined through the written works of novels, plays, poetry etc. in the field of literature. They served as a bench mark of nationalism in many postcolonial societies and thus interested individuals and sects such as education sectors, scholars, international organizations and universities endeavor to preserve indigenous knowledge systems and their continuity.

## **Language transition as Contemporary Change**

A major trend in the society is contemporary transition in the aspect of language development that complements culture in respectable ways. Nekitel (1998) observes that some major languages were affected because new language relationships between people were closely linked with verbal strategies in the kinds of utterances humans make because their judgments about people were culturally based on their own interests. He identifies that the slangs, peculiar lexis, idiomatic expressions, idiolectal features, slurs, drags and other elements are used by the addressees or listeners to decide the speaker's social, ethnic and educational backgrounds.

Another area in the development is language loss and shift. Nekitel further noted that some languages had disappeared in the 1970s because the primary and non-primary speakers have shifted the primary linguistic elements to new ideas of scientific or complex vocabulary with linguistic expressions made by ordinary speeches. This development accommodates the unexpected or complex blending of indigenous language elements made by speakers of different languages. The integrated foreign words and expressions consciously or unconsciously allow them to replace indigenous ones with foreign language elements. That the self-declared or formally-appointed custodians of language associated with culture and other quaint aspects of tradition tend to make it their business to admonish the young generation about linguistic dilution and destruction and thus these become a major concern in the development of language.

Further more, the main vernaculars are shifted into neolanguages of colonized influences and modernization. Nekitel also reasoned that a major area of influence affects the purity of traditional elements of language such as dialect speeches and pronunciations as a result of recent usage dominated by science technology and communication systems such as communication structure, networking and flows. This fact is shared by the two official languages, Tokpisin and Hiri Motu that are changing rapidly into a multilingual society. He acknowledged the reason that languages must be modernized to meet the need to improve modern-day communication which is heavily enriched by terms and concepts of many different professional fields, whilst linguists agree that all languages undergo changes to enable them to express things that need to be said and that linguistic development cannot lag behind social and technological progress. Similarly, Clifford (1986) states that modernization has synthesized the original concepts of language in verbal communication to accommodate the changing world in which all its textual strategies and methods depended on a prior critical disjunction of language and the world. That it made visual perception unmediated by concepts the origin of knowledge about the world and the means by which language appeared in descriptions. For instance UNESCO (1980:56) confirms that the development of language shift involved established strategies which are turning away from the top down models of recent decades and concentrating on greater participation of communities in expressing their existence, formulating plans and organizing actions to meet them. Thus the influence of language development is also reflected in the small scale among communities in which literacy programs have encouraged the survival of tradition in speech and performance and remain as the most common place that contribute to the growth of language complexity.

## **Loss of Cultural Values through Education and Religion**

Traditional values have always been the main strength of PNG traditional society and are naturally inherent derived from traditional social systems that people practically exercise in their livelihood. These values unify people of various communities until they were disturbed by external forces. Matane (2003:32) expresses the inbuilt natural intelligence of indigenous people that they were guided by traditional virtues such as love and respect that enabled them to submit to traditional authority and thus this was highly expected from an average person in the community. However, these values were greatly affected through the introduction of modern influence such as formal education, change and advancement which it is believed that in the cause of time and space may diminish. A goal of the National Education Plan and Education Reform Annual Report (2000) explains its objective that the restructuring of the education system and its implementation process is aimed to provide quality and relevant education to people who will live as productive and successful citizens in a competitive world. This change is giving new direction to children and students to achieve higher level of education and in this sense causing them to denounce their traditional values and confirmed to the introduced ones gained from formal learning and in comparison may not help them to live in a competitive world in the long run. Education Reform Facilitating and Monitoring Unit (2001) gave the reason that better education improved standards of healthy living and advanced lifestyle achieved in meeting the needs of the population when returning the children to the village community, for formal employment, or for continuation for further education and training and thus the learning of new values help to meet the education reforms expectations of the population. Similarly Post Courier (2009) reported the Universal Basic Education (UBE) plan for 2010 to 2012 that every child of aged five and over should be in schools to complete the first nine years of elementary education to gain basic knowledge, values and skills stipulated in the UBE curriculum under the new reformed education system. Education For All (2005) has similar vision of improving standards of living through relevant education system to address social, economic, political and spiritual or emotional problems faced by the country's population. The new education system aimed at seeing individuals freeing themselves from any form of domination and oppression as integrated persons living in harmony with others in relation to maximizing, socialization, participation, liberation and equality.

Moreover, the National Education Plan (1993:3) also describes that the reformed education has become a national issue in which the reformers are heavily involved in contributing to the achievement of the goals and directive principles of the national constitution that promote integral human development through equity and participation, and national sovereignty and self-reliance Thus the success of the reformed education system has a major impact in redirecting people's minds away from being anxious of the bad effect placed on traditional values caused by the demands of education toward modernity. Brash (1996:23) made a distinction among the well educated elites and the ordinary class in her stage representation by inviting only the prominent people who held prominent jobs such as the academic professors of the university and those with advanced educational backgrounds to attend the cocktail party. This is a clear indication that the current lifestyle shaped by advanced

education disregard the richness of national heritage by aiming and satisfying the expectations of modern living. That the learnt values of formal learning incorporated in formal curriculum have taken their place causing them to be diminished in their application.

Religion is another contributing factor and in the general sense of post colonial societies it was seen as enmity to traditional values by introduces new ideologies based on Christianity. The people approached things differently and thus unreasonably claimed that the most necessities in life are required by religion which has been obvious in most post colonial societies. Eri (1970) states that in traditional PNG society, cultural beliefs such as norms, taboos and traditional modes of ethics became main observance of traditional social systems until the introduction of Christianity. This created disunity that when an average person in the community desires to uphold his cultural traditions the majority of the people rejected them with the perception that they were ancient practices because of their Christian influence. This phenomenon was common in many contemporary societies. In the ancient history of Fiji, Thomson (1808:176) states that the customary values of traditional social systems have become Fijian way of life until the arrival of European missionaries who introduced Christianity and the influence of modern life, setting before the natives a new social system that was unfamiliar to their communities. In Kenyan society Wa Thiongo (1978:34) states that when Christianity and its new teachings were introduced in the society many people have adopted themselves to new ways such as being “born again Christians” and were so caught up with its influences for the purpose of being freed from oppression. Yet those who adapted these changes didn’t improve their lives to live as liberated individuals but divided people. Matane (2003:207) also pauses a rhetoric question as to why should religion be different when the people are all worshipping one God by providing the reason that it is because they are introduced by different religious leaders. Thus the new religious phenomena faved a way of civilizing people’s mind turning it away from traditional values so to speak providing the opportunity to choose a new direction based on modernity.

### **Preserving National Identity**

Literature played a vital role in preserving national identity that can be understood in the sense of nationalism which promotes freedom of people of an independent society. Narakobi (1975) confirms that nationalism promotes people’s co-operation and unity with common understanding of issues affecting their lives with a new hope of future despite their struggles but to stand as one people for bright future ahead. In contrast imperialism has contradicting factors toward unity in which it continues to influence and promote links or ties of colonialism that cause separation, division and faction of a united body. However, imperialism may also loose its superiority when the united body of people guided by national goals and directive principles of the national constitution safeguard it.

Moreover, the national identity was fully preserved when PNG got its independence. In the sense of legal discourse it concerns political system of government leadership in PNG based on traditional societies. The vital reason is that PNG traditions don’t change but rather are becoming stronger by continuously being practiced for the purpose of building a strong society. Kiki (1986) also expressed his loyalty to his local society, the microcosm of PNG societies. This representation shows the solidarity the subjects have for their own traditional societies that became the basis of PNG as a strong nation solidified by its rich traditions. Kiki

further suggested the type of government recommended for PNG society that a presidential system would suit the Westminster model that would provide a strong leader. However, the Australians preferred Western type of government for PNG independence that was foreign to PNG indigenous people. Somare (1975) noted that the general understanding of Westminster leadership was new to the indigenous people which only few could understand and that those who were educated had the duty to inform their people to help them see the new direction PNG was heading. Thus decolonization helps PNG society to preserve and promote its national heritage.

Literature remains as an important medium to preserve cultural heritage. It identifies, describes and compared the related issues that contributed to the deterioration of cultural identity while highlighting the main impacts involved. The paper also brought forward the vital need for preserving cultural heritage despite the drastic changes of modernity. It gives the opportunity to realize that the value of culture in various societies may disappear if the concern of preserving it is shifted to the preoccupation of living in the current life influenced by modernity.

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 Author of above article –

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Helen Christine Kuli

BA Honors (Student)

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