Vanishing Oral Tradition: "Kathani"- A Folktale in Odisha

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Abstract

"Kathani" is a folk tradition that is transmitted orally from one generation to the next. Many of the Kathanis have similarities with the tradesman and craftsman that are described in history. The Rajkumar seeing the Rajkumari at the bathing pond, falling in love with her at the first sight, and the journey of marrying the Rajkumari are the most entertaining and attracting of the kathanis. However, this folk tradition is at the verge of extinction due to the forces of Urbanisation, westernisation, and globalisation. The advent of Television, mobile and internet have dismantled the value of Kathani. Spending time in Mobiles and watching T.V has become commonest form of passing time. The children of the present generation either love to watch television or to listen songs and play games in mobiles when they are free. The changing pattern of leisure time activities and changing pattern of family from joint family to nuclear family coupled with the aged from "privileged" to "neglected" category have destroyed the importance of Kathani.

Key words: Aged, children, family, folk tradition, leisure time

Introduction

Folklore flourished since the dawn of civilization though it waited, for centuries, for the so-called folklorists to appear and treat it as a special branch of learning. It had a rich heritage in India and was used not only in practical life but also in sophisticated works of art and treatises. This position continued till the English came and started collecting and study of folklore materials, which was soon followed up by native scholars. During the British period both English and Indian scholars, taken together, have laid a sound foundation of the study of the subject. In the post-independence period, however, the activities have been intensified with general awareness of its importance and support from the Government. In recent years, the study is becoming more and more sophisticated with introduction of modern equipments and methodologies. During Pre – Independence Period : Like other parts of India, Odisha is rich in folklore. It is found that folklore has been incorporated in abundance in the epics and kavyas

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of ancient Odia literature. The great epic Mahabharat by Sarala Das (15th C.) embodies folklore to such an extent that it can, very well, be termed as a folk-epic. It will not be improper if Sarala Das, the author, is accepted as the first Collector of Odisha folklore. Folk-elements found a prominent place in the medieval kavyas as well. Dramatis personae and themes were very frequently drawn from the folkworld. Some kavyas such as Sasisena and Kanchikaveri (18th C.) were completely designed after folktales and ballads prevailing then. During the period of renaissance, on Western impact, too, poets had tendency to make use of folk-elements in their poems and depict rural life. Some poets worth mentioning are Radhanath Ray, Gangadhar Meher and Nandakishore Bal. The novels of Fakirmohan are also replete with folk-elements.

As globalization spreads its wings to cover diverse domains of local life and cultures, different local communities too become assertive in affirming their identities. The special aspect of tribal culture is the connection between mind and matter. For the tribal people, space is important than time. That's the reason why we find land is identified with a land, caste and language (bhumi, bhasha and jati). According to their belief, human being is part of the whole eco- system and not superior to others. The geography determines the nature of economic life of tribal society. Survival of the self is regulated by the community, and concept of individuality is shaped by the society. Life is a shared understanding, togetherness, freedom and autonomy of the self-guided by the social rules. The landscape determines nature of cognition. Tribal thought and creativity are designed by the situated cognition and visual images are drawn from the every day life and living environment.

Most rural communities are oral by nature. An oral society retains the knowledge of the epistemic world though community sanction. Here, elders are authority of tradition and youngsters are learners of the cultural knowledge. All forms of knowledge by and large are connected to work, labour and production of matter and creation of ideas. Learning is possible through productive activities. The minds of rural people are not confined to the present time only, but past and present inter-play in their everyday life. Visible and invisible both regulate rural mind. Past is present in their every day practices. Eco-spirituality is the basis of looking at the world around them. The rituals and festivals are results of the sanction of natural or economic products and their use in the community.

Understanding Oral Tradition

Similarly, Oral tradition', oral culture' and oral lore' are cultural material and traditions transmitted orally from one generation to another. The messages or testimony are verbally transmitted in speech or song and may take the form, for example, of folktales, sayings, ballads, songs, or chants. In this way, it is possible for a society to transmit oral history, oral literature, oral law and other forms of knowledge across generations without a having writing system. It has been there in different cultures throughout the ages.

Oral tradition is basically transferred to us by the elderly people in the various forms of stories, songs and sayings which distinct it as a mark of tradition in our society irrespective of cultures. We learn a lot of things through this system of knowledge transmission, such as our age-old customs, beliefs, rituals, etc., which are given to us in the childhood so that we can carry them to future. By oral tradition one can also know about the society very closely. It also gives us the information about the past. Various factors such as how the people lived, what they did and what they performed are much reflected in the oral cultural tradition. Oral tradition also shows glimpses of history when we don't have any sufficient relevant information documented. In such cases, we examine Oral history which is also a part of oral tradition and it helps us know facts about a tradition. Therefore, oral history is an integral part of any culture that we seek in explore in the present generation.

Oral tradition is a tradition which is still followed however modern we are and they preach basic human ethic values in our life. Though this is the age of modernization, one can understand the impact of modernity on everyone but still one cannot forget the past. Where it is seen that we are losing our tradition and following westernization which is not good to full extent but till some it is good in some cases. But we should not forget our own culture, tradition, values which are given to us by the parents. If we don't have basic norms then at time the society comes and blames us that we are going towards modernity and a parent have not imparted the basic values of life but if we look when one is following the tradition and modernity both then there is praise of them by everyone.

If we look at the people in the villages where they follow each and every parcel of tradition but still we tell these people are backward and they don't know anything. Which it shows the face of the society in real sense but in fact this people are living a happier live then the others who live in urban area and there is concept of tradition where there is careens of own people where old parents are thrown away from their own house and they stay in old age home or ashram then is it tradition or modernity and if we look then the village people are far better and there living a life with full of happiness and joy .So we can is it the loss of tradition or the advent of modernism which we copy cat from the western culture which we take to develop our self or towards the own downfall which still remains a question mark for all of us.

Their importance is that it gives us a source of historicity. It gives us an understanding of past lives and about our cultures and civilization. They are source of entertainment. They educate

us as the stories have different morals which one can learn. It also tell us the situation in which they live the harder condition spent by them during the night where they sang songs and chants to past their night. They also show the enlightment of joy during different season sang at different seasons. It tells us about the cultural past and values. They are the main sources of knowledge acquiring from the past and it also so the value of past and how it was and how the people act on them. They also show the various rituals which have been still practice in the modern society and which it shows the linkage of passage from generation to generation. Some stories are told only during certain seasons, at a particular time of day, or in specific places. In the same vein, some stories are meant to be heard only by specific people. Such stories often teach important lessons about a given society's culture, the land, and the ways in which members are expected to interact with each other and their environment.

The English scholar and administrator who first took interest in Odisha folklore was John Beams. He was the then Collector of Balasore. The folk-materials which attracted him most were the superstitions and charms prevailing among the peasants. His article Folklore of Orissa "appeared in Indian Antiquary in the year 1872. The author, at the outset, records his impressions on the life and behaviour of Odisha peasants. To him, they were full of superstitions and shy of imparting these ideas to strangers". He attributed the reason to the isolation of the land from outside world for a long period. John Beams was preoccupied with the belief in witchcraft. He devotes a few paragraphs to record the habits and habitation of the so-called witches, the symptoms of the person possessed by them and also the mantras that are uttered to counteract their spell. He also had recorded some traditions and taboo relating to construction of houses, effects of coming across an empty vessel while going out on a suspicious work, touch of a broomstick and so on. Beams did not attempt at classifying, coordinating or analyzing the folklore that he collected. He made his intention clear in the essay itself that he did not wish to complicate his simple remarks "but to string them together" as he heard them nothing here and there curious parallelism' between them and those of the English peasantry. He wanted to collect folk-materials because it was necessary for his administration. He believed that human nonsense, like human sense is very much the same everywhere and it is only because in ruling men one must take their nonsense into consideration quite earnestly as their sense that those scraps of folklore are worth recording at all. Though Beams laid the foundation of collection and study of Odisha folklore, his contribution is limited only on one article on the subject. However, he inspired some native scholars who developed an interest in the subject. Fakirmohan, the pioneer Oriya novelist, was one of his companions at Balasore. Beams discussed matter relating to folklore with him. Fakirmohan drew inspiration from him and made free use of such materials especially proverbs, in his novels.

The eminent Indian folklorist Devendra Satyrathi, visited Orissa in 1931. He made an extensive tour in different parts of the State and collected a good deal of materials out of which only a few songs were published in English and Hindi journals like Modern Review, The Asia and Viswamitra. His venture, however, was an inspiration to the Orissan youth. Shri Chakradhar Mahapatra who came under his influence made a laudable collected of folk-songs from the princely States of Orissa. His first collection Gaunli Gita Chumbak' (1939) presents samples

of Oriya folk-songs along with their Hindi transcriptions and translations in English. His outstanding collection of folk-songs Utkal Gaunli Gita' appeared 20 years later. So far the emphasis was laid on collection of Oriya folk-songs. But Laxminarayan Sahu, a member of Bharat Sevak Samaj, paid attention to tribal folklore. He collected songs from the Khond, Saura, Gonda, Gadaba, Santal, Paraja, Koya and other ethnic groups and published them under the title Gandharbika Satadals' (1937). He published a critical study on their religion, faith, rituals, songs, tales, etc., in ―His Tribes of Jeypore‖ (1942). His work on Danda Nata', a dance drama of Orissa (1947), is also of worth mentioning.

Post – Independence Period:

The years following the independence saw the appearance of at least three major scholars in the field of Orissan folklore, namely, Verrier Elwin, Chakradhar Mahapatra and Kunjabihari Das though it had nothing to do with independence. All the three had started their work much earlier. But their major works appeared only in the fifties. Besides, we have a non-folklorist in Pt. Nilakantha Das who had much to do with folklore and perhaps deserves to be mentioned first. Pt. Nilakantha Das the veteran poet, philosopher and critic has discussed, in depth, the role of folklore in the development of Oriya literature and culture. He has also stressed on the contribution of the tribal inhabitants to the Oriya language and culture in his ‗Odia Sahitya Krama Parinam' (1948-53) and in his other works. The contribution of Verrier Elwin to Orissa, folklore deserves special mention. He spent years among the tribals and brought out a monumental volume entitled Tribal Myths of Orissa (1954). What is striking about his collection is his field method. He almost settled down among the people, lived with them, shared life as an outsider could and did several works together. This means that he did not depend merely on asking questions but knowledge of the people gradually sank in until it was a part of him. In fact, his works were the fruits of participant observation

Significance of *Kathani*

The "kathani" tradition has much significance in the life of the Kathani (story) teller mostly grandparents and the kathani listener(s) mostly children. Traditionally one child is hardly found to be listening the Kathanis. Usually the children gather in front of the grandfather or grandmother who used to be the kathani teller during evening and take the fun of listening kathanis.

The *Kathani* Teller (Story Teller)

'The grandparents', the phrase itself makes many significant senses as it indicates the old age; they are the "grand-parents". The old age has been the subject of research for many disciplines like anthropology, sociology, home science, social work, economics leading to the development of Gerontology, the study of old age. Gerontology has gained more popularity in the modern era especially in the industrial and post-industrial era. The growing number of aged both in the west and the east has paved the way for many emerging problems in the society. The industrial revolution that started in Europe and later on spread to Asia has destroyed the joint family system and the society has witnessed a paradigm shift from the joint family system to the nuclear family system. The aged who were once considered as the great asset to the family by way of their wisdom and subject knowledge on agriculture in the agrarian society lost their importance in the industrial society.

There is a popular saying in Odia "Ghare Budha te, Khete Muda te". It means there must be an old man in the family and there must be a pond in the farming field. An old man is a threshold of a family likewise a pond in the farming field. The agriculture-based knowledge gathered through many years of experience in cultivation (the agro-knowledge for agro-economy) seems unimportant and irrelevant in front of the modern education system that measure knowledge through grades, divisions and marks. Hence, the aged of the present generation have been pushed into the marginalised zone (who were once in the centre in the agro-economy/agrarian society) leading an excluded and vulnerable life. The mushrooming increase in the old age home throughout the world is an epitome of the declining and lost importance of the aged.

The increased education of women and their participation in the workforce and the many forces of social changes induced due to industrialisation, westernisation, globalisation have reinforces many changes in the Indian family pattern. The extended family pattern that was once the most effective measure of social security has been replaced by the nuclear family pattern. The most hazardous impact of this paradigm shift has been inflicted upon the aged being 'neglected'. The image of aged as "knowledgeous' enjoying high status in the family has been changed to an 'unimportant and unutilised' sections. This is because of the utilitarian approach of the modern era in which the importance of any object/thing is measured on the basis of its utility and once the utility is over, the importance is lost. The neglect of aged in the family has been becoming severe partly due to the forces of social change, change of agro-based economy to industrial economy and most importantly due to the degradation of the Indian value system. The marginalisation and neglect in the family of the aged has led to the establishment of many old age homes in both eastern and western countries. Though the concept of old age home has become very popular in the western countries, gradually it is becoming professional and constitutional.

In this system of Indian society the Kathani gives a special position to the Aged. Many family members do not have time to talk and spent with the aged and this folk culture of kathani provides impetus to the aged to engage themselves with the children and being respected by the children. The Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs positions self-actualisation and self – esteem at the highest and physiological needs at the lowest. The aged of the present generation somehow fulfil the physiological needs but they lack self-esteem which everyone strives for during the old age. The kathani fulfils the need of self-esteem for the aged as the children behaves in a manner with the aged during listening kathani and the aged aged grandparents are paid high self-esteem. Though the industrial modern society considers aged as valueless human resource and hence a burden upon the family, the 'lost high self esteem of aged' of the days of yore is substituted by the 'self esteem gathered from children through kathani' which provides the ray of hope to the aged for living in a meaningful way.

The passing on of these stories from generation to generation keeps the social order intact. As such, oral histories must be told carefully and accurately, often by a designated person who is recognized as holding this knowledge. This person is responsible for keeping the knowledge and eventually passing it on in order to preserve the historical record. In contrast, written history does not present a dialogue so much as a static record of an authority's singular recounting of a series of events. As readers, we may interpret these writings, but the writing itself remains the same. Oral narratives, on the other hand, do not have to be told exactly the same way—what is fundamental is whether or not they carry the same message. Oral tradition is, therefore, a collective enterprise. A narrator does not generally hold singular authority over a story. The evident in distinct versions of a specific history represent a broader understanding of the events and the various ways people have internalized them. Often, oral histories must be validated by the group. This stems from the principle that no one person can lay claim to an entire oral history. Narrators will also ―document‖ the histories they tell by citing the source of their knowledge, such as a great grandparent or an elder. This is sometimes referred to as ―oral footnoting''. Such collective responsibility and input maintain the accuracy of the historical record. Nonetheless, discussions of oral history have occasionally been framed in over simplistic oppositional binaries: oral/writing, uncivilized/civilized, subjective/objective. Critics wary of oral history tend to frame oral history as subjective and biased, in comparison to writing's presumed rationality and objectivity.

Socialization of Children through *Kathani*

Teaching through story telling has been one of the key methods frpom ancient time to the modern era. In the vey ancient period of Indian society started during the vedic period the form of teaching was through story telling in the form of 'upanayan'. Upanayans were basically different stories to induct and inculcate moral values and ethics in the minds of the children. since then, story telling has been used in India during different phases and is still prevalent as part of the teaching methods though not existing in its original form as kathani told by the aged. In corporate sectors also it is used as a method of inducting and orienting the new employees to the organisational culture. Story telling has also been one of the key programme media in social work used in Group Work practice. Hence kathani fulfils the aim of Upanayan by way of moral teachings and socialization of the children.

The theory of 'functionalism' propounded by August Compte in the 18th century and developed by Talcott Parsons analyses every social phenomenon in term of its functions and tries to see them as an integrating force. The kathani has also functional importance in the society as it is one of the key mediums of socialization of children. The moral values, ethics, principles, concept of right and wrong, virtues and vices are inculcated into children of early age through Kathani. The subject matter of most of the famous kathanis are filled with moral teachings. Some kathanis also raises questions in between the stories and children are asked toi answer the questions. This develops reasoning ability of the children. The protagonist of the kathani shall be unable to solve it where the kathani teller(grandparents) ask the children to prescribe solutions for the protagonist of the kathani and hence the children make the decision and from "kathani listener' they are transformed into 'decision-maker' and literary become part of the story itself.

Emotions Management by the Children

'Empathy' has a permanent role in social work and has been described as one of the key attributes of a social worker. All social workers must have empathetic attitude to understand the problem of the client in a better way. An empathetic social worker has always been considered better and placed at higher level than a sympathetic social worker. However, the empathetic social worker has a higher degree of getting emotionally involved in the client's problems and may finds difficulty in maintaining objectivity and maintaining the principle of "controlled emotional involvement". It is really a challenging task for social workers and hence a good social worker must be good in 'management of emotions'.

Management of emotions has not only to be a key attribute of social worker but also is part of everyone's life for better social functioning. People come across many emotions like love, jealousies, anger, fear; both positive and negative in their life situations. A person has a better social functioning who can manage well both his positive and negative emotions in successful manner. The mismanagement of emotions leads to frustration and is reflected in personality sometime leading catharsis, sublimation or in extreme cases to suicidal attempts. Thus management of emotions along with other life skills is crux of the social functioning of individuals.

The grandparents as story teller during the course of kathani telling create many emotions among listeners unfolding the story in a gradual manner. The children as listeners unconsciously get attached to the story and a close observation of the facial expression of the children indicates that they also travel the same journey with the Rajkumar's (protagonist) journey of hunting, meeting with the Rajkumari (heroine), falling in love with her, courtship, Rajkumari being kidnapped by the Asur (Villain), fight between the Rajkumar and the Asur, Rajkumar's victory over the Asur, rescue of the Rajkumari and the marriage of Rajkumar and Rajkumari at the end .

The children travel an internal journey while listening Kathani with the journey of the Rajkumar that creates many emotions among the children. The children are seen to be happy when the Rajkumar and the Rajkumari's love affairs and courtship is told. The description of the Asur creates the emotion of fear and anger, and some children are seen to be getting closer with one another. The fight between the Rajkumar and the Asur creates the emotions of anger for the Asur and sympathy for the protagonist (Rajkumar) with an internal support and wish for the victory of the Rajkumar. The defeat of Asur, his death and the marriage between the Rajkumar and the Rajkumari suffice the anger of the children and brings happiness, their wish being fulfilled. Thus, the journey of Rajkumar from hunting to killing of Asur creates a journey of imagination and emotions of excitement, happiness at the beginning and moves towards agony, fear, uncertainty, anger and again happiness regains at the end. The shift in the story from one episode to another reinforces the shift from one emotion to another within the children. Hence, "kathani" is a natural form of learning of management of emotions which get reflected during adulthood. The children learn and manage and have control over their emotions.

Borrowing Characters from Story to Real Life Situation

It is observed that the mothers the mothers make use of the some characters of the story in their life situation. A mother affectionately addresses her boy child as her 'Rajkumar' (prince) and her girl child as 'Rajkumari' (princes). The mothers visualise and imagine their children with the virtues of the Rajkumar and Rajkumari respectively. Though gender inequality is a common phenomenon in India, the use of names of the story in the life-situation maintains gender equality. It is noted that the character of Asur is also used in the day today life of the mother-child relations. When the child is indiscipline/mischievous and the mother finds it difficult to manage the child, then she brings the character of Asur/Asuruni to afraid the child saying that s/he will be kidnapped by the Asur/Asuruni if s/he does not obey the mother. Here the basic purpose is to create a sense of fear in the mind of the children to discipline them without giving any kind of physical punishment. Hence, the use of the characters of the story in the life-situation is a common phenomenon in the socio-cultural life of the people of Odisha.

Dichotomy of Age and Importance of *Kathani*

The two age groups who take part in Kathani are grandparents and children. One common feature that is shared by both is that they are in the category of 'dependent'. Both the child and the grand-parents are dependent, most of the time, upon the person who is a father to the child and a son to the grandparent. There are also other common features like both lack participation in the decision-making process of the family and have less or no economic contribution to the family income. It is not uncommon to refer children and aged as the vulnerable and marginalised sections of the society. However the utilitarian and materialistic perspective creates a sharp difference between the two. The child is seen more in a positivistic manner being described with many positive metaphors. He is considered as a future economic asset with many expectations and hopes with all optimistic attitudes. The famous saying "child is the future of the Nation" has dominated the human resource discourse and hence child is considered as resourceful to the family and to the nation at large. He is the rising sun. On the other hand, the aged are seen with pessimistic attitude having less or no economic value/utility to the family. The aged have lost their value in the modern world of materialistic and utilitarianism and perhaps most of the time considered a 'burden'. The mushrooming growth of the 'Old Age Home' is just a reflection of the aged being rejected and neglected from the family. Thus the dichotomy of child being described as a 'future human resource' with the expected responsibility of building the nation and the aged as the 'burden' with no/less responsibility creates 'differential position and preferential care' in the family where the child enjoys the advantageous/superior positions and the aged remains marginalised and vulnerable.

The importance of Kathani lies in the fact that it brings together these two categories of age group and fulfils the emotional needs of one another. The children need care and affection and vice-versa. The assembly of children and grandparents during Kathani accelerates the energy and emotion of both the age groups. No one can deny the fact that the strong emotional bonding between the grandparents and the grand children is an epitome of the seminal role played by the aged in the socialisation of children. The children may share and learn certain things which they may not feel comfortable to share with their parents. Hence the Kathani satisfies the ego of the aged and fulfils the need of self-esteem to certain extent among the aged. Though for a while, the aged lives in an environment free from the worldly sufferings creating some value and utility of themselves.

The Utkal Gaunli Gita (1959) of Chakradhar Mahapatra, referred to earlier, is not only a magnificent collection of about 800 pages but also is valuable for containing a long introduction bringing out salient features of the materials. Dr. Kunjabihari Das has made his mark among Indian folklorists both for the corpus of materials he has collected and comparative as well as analytical study of the same. With him the folklore studies in Orissa attained a height which could very well be compared with that in other parts of the country at least in the fifties. He did his Ph. D. degree on Orissan folklore from Viswa-Bharati in 1954. The thesis Odia Lokgita O Kahani was the first thesis on Orissan folklore. It comprises of a general survey of Oriya folk-songs and tales and also critical studies on the special features. A Study of Orissan folklore (1953) written in English made his own laurels from abroad. In the N.B.T's folklore publication series he wrote Folklore of Orissa (1979) in cooaboration with Professor L. K. Mahapatra. He has several papers in English and Oriya on Orissan folklore to his credit. Dr. Das has made an enormous collection of folk-songs and tales. Those folk-songs had been published in several volumes under the title ―Palli Giti Samachayan‖ and out of six volumes of folk-sayings under the title ―Lok Bani Samachayan‖ four have been published till now. He has published two volumes of folktales too. The ―Lok Galpa Sanchayan‖ contains over 200 tales classified into 16 types. Such collection was possible on the part of Dr. Das as he was dedicated to his subject, he carried on his work for long three decades and also he used both the open and closed systems of field methods. He made extensive tour in Orissa and also had collected folk literature through Government agencies, especially with the help of school teachers; Through Government circulars. While adopting the open system he had to depend upon many untrained collectors. As he himself admits, there was a lot of unwanted rubbish with genuine folklore pouring on and he had to depend upon his long experience in the subject, to sort them out. Dr. Das has done the best that was possible on his part in the circumstances prevailing then. Even in his thesis he had devoted a chapter to the motifs of Odishan folktales. This was the prevailing tendency in the study of folklore in his time. He paid visits to the States and had contact with leading folklorists like Stith Thompson and Richard M. Dorson. This made him up-to-date in his field.

Concluding Reflections

Both the Government and scholars in the field of folklore are playing more and more attention to tribal literature and culture of Orissa. The Academy of Tribal Dialect and Culture, Bhubaneswar with Dr. Khageswar Mohapatra as its Director has done commendable work in collection, study and publication of works on tribal folklore. Sitakanta Mohapatra, the noted poet and bureaucrat also has made worthwhile contribution to this field. Different organizations of folklore-fellows of Orissa are gradually coming forward to serve the cause of folklore. Some of such organizations are the Cultural Forum and the Folklore Academy of Bhubaneswar and the Orissa Lok Sanskruti Parisad of Mayurbhanj. Thus, though folklore research has been invigorating in Orissa, it is quite inadequate in consideration of the vast field and materials. Even some basic needs of folklore research such as publication of a journal, establishment of a folklore museum and an institute of folklore are yet to be achieved. In spite of its importance for aged, children and the society as a whole, Kathani is gradually getting degrading from the rural Odisha. If attempt can be made to capture and preserve this culture as part of the process of preservation of rural culture would be a remarkable step by the administration of Odisha. It is high time that children be involved with the aged through Kathani which bring mutually satisfying benefits for the children and aged.

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