

# The Function and the Poetic Nature of Tonga Work Songs

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**Abstract**— Song is perhaps the most powerful genre of oral literature because of its versatility and communicability. It is distinguished from the oral narrative not only by its mode of performance and use of verse, but also by its extensive use of imagery and symbolic language. Song has permeated so many areas of Tonga people's social existence that it requires somewhat classification into many sub-categories. These are lullabies and children's songs, songs for child birth and child naming ceremonies, initiation songs, weeding songs, work songs, satirical songs, war poetry, political songs, praise songs, ballads, epics, funeral and ritual, and songs on cultural transition.

A number of scholars have written extensively and impressively about the Tonga people and their culture, their history, and even their literature. For instance, Lubungu (2016:123) has documented the origin, history and present day status of the Citonga language in Zambia while Elizabeth Colson has substantially written about the Tonga people's culture in Southern province of Zambia. However, there is hardly any documentation about functions and poetic devices of work songs in Tonga literary works. There has been lack of serious scholarly attention to collect, interpret and analyse the literary forms used in them (songs) bringing out the functions and Poetic devices and Techniques.

The main objective is to examine the Tonga work songs as literary forms bringing out their functions and Poetic devices. From this examination, the primary purpose of this research is to analyse the content of the songs in order to discover literary devices used in their composition.

The study was done in three districts of Sothern Province in Zambia through interviews and Focus Group Discussions. 100 respondents were targeted. The study revealed that Tonga Work songs are rich in Poetic devices such as figures of speech, Imagery, repetition and many others. The study further reveals that Tonga work songs have different functions in the society. These include: To communicate values and objectives, to tell about culture, lifestyle and state of mind, to boost morale as one works, to make work easier, to share memories of the past among others. The study further reveals the relationship between work songs and poetry.

**Keywords**—Tonga Work songs, Poetic devices, Functions, literary aspects

## I. INTRODUCTION

The study of work songs has captivated many scholars such as Mbathio (1999:30, Finnegan (1977), Okpewho (1992), Porter (1992), Gioia (2006) and many more who have argued that work songs intervene in all moments of life, especially on

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occasions of ritual ceremonies. A work song has been defined by some scholars as a piece of music closely connected to a form of work, either sung while conducting a task, usually to coordinate timing, or a song linked to a task which might be a connected narrative, description, or protest song. Mbathio (1999:3) asserts that songs occupy an important place in the index of the African oral literature. He further posits that some even defined the song as being "the adornment" of the verb.

Song is perhaps the most powerful genre of oral literature because of its versatility and communicability. It is distinguished from the oral narrative not only by its mode of performance and use of verse, but also by its extensive use of imagery and symbolic language. Song has permeated so many areas of Tonga people's social existence that it requires somewhat classification into many sub-categories. These are lullabies and children's songs, songs for child birth and child naming ceremonies, initiation songs, weeding songs, work songs, satirical songs, war poetry, political songs, praise songs, ballads, epics, funeral and ritual, and songs on cultural transition.

Among the song categories cited above, this paper will direct its utter attention to analyzing work songs in order to discover literary devices used in their composition. The paper will also endeavor to examine the relationship between the work song and literature and indeed evaluate the social function of the Tonga work songs. The paper will also examine the significance of the literary devices used in the Tonga work songs. It is paramount to note that records of work songs are roughly as old as historical records, and anthropological evidence suggests that all agrarian societies tend to have them, including the Tonga speaking society. Most modern commentators on work songs have included both songs sung while working as well as songs about work, since the two categories are seen as interconnected. (Gioia,2006:xi).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different scholars have undertaken studies or rather written on work songs. The researcher read a variety of documents that include journals, theses, presentations and books that have dealt with work songs. However, these documents still leave a lacuna for further research as they do not analyse Tonga work songs on the literary bedrock. Finnegan (1977:265) elaborates that songs are known to be based on events and to have been composed with the purpose of influencing people with regard to these events. In her study of work songs among various

societies, Finnegan indicates that the occasions for these work songs include almost all contexts in which monotonous labour is involved: though conventions as to their use vary in different societies. She cites co-operative songs for hoeing, weeding, mowing, launching a boat, sawing, hauling in fish-nets, pounding, floor-beating, throwing water up from deep wells in a human chain, carrying a chief in his hammock, hanging up beehives, or rubbing animal skins to make them soft; and domestic and solitary songs for women grinding corn or pounding rice; gang songs for pulling trucks, for road work, for factory hands, and for miners.

Finnegan was more concerned with describing the composition of the songs and their rhythmic action and indeed their social functions than the literary devices used in their composition. It is this gap Finnegan leaves that this study intends to bridge through examining the relationship between work songs and literature and by discovering the literary devices used in the composition of Tonga work songs.

### III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A number of scholars have written extensively and impressively about the Tonga people and their culture, their history, and even their literature. For instance, Lubungu (2016:123) has documented the origin, history and present day status of the Citonga language in Zambia while Elizabeth Colson has substantially written about the Tonga people's culture in Southern province of Zambia. However, there is hardly any documentation about functions and symbolism of work songs in Tonga literary works. There has been lack of serious scholarly attention to collect, interpret and analyse the literary forms used in them (songs) bringing out the functions and symbolism.

The analysis of the literary forms in bringing out the functions and Poetic devices and techniques in Tonga Work songs is apparently non-existent. This is one aspect of study that has escaped the attention of many literary scholars who have attempted to study the Tonga culture in Zambia despite being important. Relying on the literature that has been reviewed so far on the subject, one can confidently state that nothing has been done to study the functions and symbolism in Tonga work songs in Zambia, except Takara Kalabula who carried out a study on Bemba work songs. This is the knowledge space that this this research strives to fill. It is hoped that going back to the roots of indigenous Tonga work songs and showing their functions, symbolism and literary forms as the way of the people's expression of their feelings, and as a way of preserving and passing their culture on to the younger generation, would help the Tonga and other interested people, particularly the scholars to understand and appreciate the relationship between work songs and Literature.. It is further hoped that bringing these work songs to the fore, would help readers understand the thinking processes that go through the minds of the singers as they sing on Tonga indigenous themes as stated in the background.

#### A. Primary Research Objective of the Study

The Primary objective of this research will address the following:

- To examine the Tonga work songs as literary forms bringing out their functions and symbolism. From this examination, the primary purpose of this research is to analyse the content of the songs in order to discover literary devices used in their composition.

#### B. Secondary Research Objectives

The Secondary objectives will address the following:

- To examine the relationship between the work songs and Literature
- To evaluate the social functions of the Tonga work songs
- To discover the literary devices used in the Tonga work songs
- To examine the significance of the literary devices used in the Tonga work songs

### IV. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in two ways:

*Through Desk Research:* A desk research was conducted to find out what has been done in the field of oral literature and work song studies in particular. It enabled the researcher to peruse through works written on work songs and on oral literature and this in turn helped the researcher to consolidate his research problem. The desk research also enabled the researcher to collect more data to add to what the researcher obtained from the field.

*Field Research:* The field research was done in two stages: *Pilot Survey (Study):* The researcher and the enlisted research assistants undertook this stage to familiarise themselves with the respondents and the areas of study. The pilot study also helped the researcher to survey the kind of data they would use in the main research programme. Therefore, the pilot study gave the researcher an opportunity to improve on the methodology during the main field work.

*The Main Fieldwork:* The fieldwork was undertaken in three (3) districts of Southern Province in Zambia, namely Choma, Pemba, and Monze. The districts were picked at random to represent other districts. The researcher felt that since oral literature and work songs in particular are based on the lives and experiences of a people, there would be no significant differences between data from different districts of Southern province. A total of 100 respondents were sampled from the three districts. In some areas, the researcher used friends or relatives to help the researcher approach members of the community and select appropriate informants. This helped to build a rapport with the informants. The researcher also enlisted the help of one local person per research area as research assistants. The informants of both sexes were of various ages. This was necessitated by the fact that oral literature and work songs are used by all the people in the society. The researchers collected all data on different types of

work songs without selecting any particular type. The sorting out was done after the researcher felt that he had acquired a representative sample of the data required.

The study to collect songs of the Tonga people mainly used qualitative method. The researcher employed the research methods used by anthropologists when they need to collect data. The study opted to use ethnomethodology as a research strategy. This entails that a combination of data collection methods such as observation, asking questions, self-administered questionnaires and focus group discussion will be adopted as would befit any qualitative research.

## V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher managed to collect 35 songs from the field through interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions. The following were the findings, that is, Tonga work songs:

### SONG 1:

#### **FARMING (KULIMA)**

*Cayina cikafu cizwa mumunda*

*Kamuza mulange nywebo x2*

*Ndolu ndolu ndolu ndolu ndolu x2*

*Wazyimina kaili ....., wazyimina kaili .....nde mwana mutaka nduweni?*

*Ndime Jeke.*

*Nobasune bakwa Mafuta mwacizyiba cina moofu*

*Zapuleni kuNewspaper Yayinda page maamaaa*

#### **English version**

*Sweet is the food from the field*

*Come and see x2*

*Refrain*

*Here it is x2*

*Lost in slavery, Lost in slavery, who are you prodigal son?*

*I am Jeke*

*Oxens of mafuta you have known the job*

*Check from newspapers/magazines for more information about agriculture.*

#### **Literary Devices**

##### **1. Alliteration**

- Cayina cikafu cizwa mumunda
- mwana mutaka

##### **2. Refrain**

- ndolu ndolu

##### **3. Assonance**

- Wazyimina kaili
- Mwana mutaka

##### **4. Imagery of sight**

- Mulange

##### **5. Allusion**

- Mwana mutaka nduweni – prodigal son.
- Ku-Newspaper Yayinda page – magazine

##### **6. Metaphor**

- Ndime Jeke. (The still metal for rifting vehicles) singer here exaggerates his/her muscles, abilities to such an instrument.

##### **7. Rhetorical question**

- Wazyimina kaili , wazyimina kaili nde mwana mutaka nduweni?

##### **8. Pause**

- Wahimina kaili... punctuation mark

##### **9. Caesura**

*Ndolu ndolu a pause before hizyimina kaili.*

This song basically falls under modernism when industrialisation was at its peak. Initially, Tongas would travel to Zimbabwe ( Nyansaland) in search of employment. Thereby, learning new methods of farming which were used after the end of slave trade when people got back to their indigenous places. Kaili- etymologically is a slave. At the time slaves Africans were bought like merchandise to work in farm plantation in America during industrialisation. At the same time there was a growth in urbanisation as people migrated from rural areas in search of employment.

Additionally, reference to newspaper explicitly shows how the integration of formal education agriculture and the new methods of production that people had to adopt at the time. Even so, the skills were consumed across borders through television, magazines and newspapers as seen in the song typical of modernity.

## VI. DISCUSSION

*Cikafu* etymologically is Zulu a word which denotes sweet food worth of praise. It could be maize, groundnuts, and sweet-potatoes whatever. The singer here glorifies oneself for the produce. The singer latently mocking the lazy people and imploring them to emulate his/her hard work evident in the bumper harvest.

*Ndahyimina kaili-* the sing alludes that when he was a slave he thought his or her labour was futile but the lessons he learnt of hard-work are now paying off.

This song is sung whenever one is harvesting as long as the produce is worth praising.

The purpose of the song is to encourage/ admonish the audience that without sweat there can't be sweet. It is also meant to appreciate own bumper harvest. One feels proud and happy when singing this song. The song is sung by both males and females.

### **SONG 2: POUNDING SONG**

*Nsetwisyi kansi kalemu Namwiinga x2*

*Cinduluko*

*Munakwesu ndayaaya x2*

*Kansi kangu nkalubulo Mwiinga x2*

#### **English Version**

*I pound not using a heavy pestle mother of Mwiinga x2*

*Sibling I melt x2*

*My pestle is metallic mother of Mwiinga x2*

The singer here is using innuendoes to justify why she does not use a wooden pestle. She says she melts (ndayaya) which is a hyperbole aimed at self aggrandisement. Instead she claims she uses the metallic pestle. Here the singer uses symbols and images to bring out her feelings. Metallic pestle is symbolic of strength, strong and determined. Thereof, the singer dispels gossips of her being a weakling. This song is mainly sung by women whenever they pestle.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated the functions of Tonga work songs and also the literary devices used in their composition. The study has shown that work songs can be used to lighten work, to lament on social issues, to unify people when they are engaged in collective endeavours like working together when harvesting, for instance. The study further revealed that work songs are also used as a source of entertainment and to ease the strain of work. Work songs also function as a means of social control and of reinforcing group mores. Hence they enhance social bonding. The study also revealed the relationship that exists between work songs and poetry through an extensive analysis. A number of literary devices have been exposed and explored.

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