

The Intangible Folk Heritage of the Tuareg of Ahaggar in the Southeast of Algeria

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Abstract:

This study explores the importance of preserving the intangible folklore of the Ahaggar region in southern Algeria, emphasizing the urgent need to protect it from cultural erosion caused by globalization and rapid technological change. These factors pose a threat to Arab-Islamic identity and cultural uniqueness. Algeria's diverse cultural and intellectual legacy, shaped by the succession of civilizations and historical events, highlights the responsibility of researchers in safeguarding national identity. The research underscores the necessity of preserving intangible folk traditions and calls upon authorities to implement immediate strategies, including the creation of museums and cultural centers dedicated to documentation and preservation. It also advocates support for individual and grassroots efforts in heritage conservation. The study concludes that sustainable preservation depends on active transmission across generations, and on collective awareness and participation. Ensuring continuity requires reviving traditions, raising awareness, and removing barriers that threaten the survival of this rich cultural heritage.

Keywords: Ahaggar, heritage preservation, intangible heritage, popular heritage, Tuareg

1. Introduction :

This study falls within the framework of what is known as popular culture. Popular culture is defined as everything that reflects the material and spiritual aspects of people's lives, and it is also referred to as the popular heritage that the people have inherited or created to meet their living desires. It includes literature, arts, crafts, customs, beliefs, artifacts, and architecture.

Popular culture differs from official culture, just as popular literature differs from formal and classical literature in terms of form, language, and even philosophy. The scope of this study is limited to the intangible popular heritage in the Ahaggar region in southeastern Algeria.

The importance of this research lies in the significance of the subject matter it addresses, namely the intangible popular heritage, which constitutes a national wealth that is not limited to a certain generation, but rather a right for all people and for different generations. It also represents a document of covenant between the previous, current, and future generations, and acts as a link between ancestors, parents, children, and grandchildren. The past lives on in the present, but it may also fade away as people's awareness of it diminishes or as they turn away from it. Therefore, the issue at hand is one of rescuing what can be saved from what remains of our neglected heritage.

2. The Importance of Folk Heritage:

Folk heritage is considered an essential part of the history, civilization, and identity of any nation. It documents and reveals the roots of that nation, and is a clear and honest recording of its most significant events. Many civilizations have disappeared, but their heritage is the only means that gave those civilizations their identity. We can deduce the greatness of those civilizations through their archaeological buildings or the oral legends that have reached us.

If we want to know the history of any city, we must return to its heritage and all the traces it left behind, and link it to the period and history in which its people lived. Heritage also contributes to the study of cultural history and social life by rearranging past historical periods or using the method of historical reconstruction used by researchers in scientific research. Heritage provides a direct service in the process of cultural change, knowing its factors, speed, and directions, and this is important for studying the history of culture and sociology. Heritage also helps us to analyze the relationships of interaction and mutual influence between different cultures.

In general, the heritage of the Algerian people is rich and diverse in its forms and types. It does not only come from the differences in the nature of the geographical and social regions, but it also comes within the framework of the same region. You can see a small area with a defined geographical framework carrying different patterns of the same heritage color, whether in its artistic form or its human content, due to its many aspects of the Algerian human life. This heritage still exists to this day, as we can witness the beauty and magnificence of its multiple images that manifest in the villages, countryside, and cities of Algeria.

The folk heritage, whether material or non-material (oral), is considered rich in its diverse elements, some of which are threatened with extinction in certain regions. This calls for renewed emphasis on the importance of addressing the state of the folk heritage and preventing its disappearance. The components of folk heritage are the same as those since the dawn of humanity, including gestures, signs, words, actions, and culture. As for the components of oral heritage, they include all spiritual aspects falling under the umbrella of folk literature, songs, customs, traditions, beliefs, knowledge, religious and popular rituals, and more.

3. A historical and Geographical Overview of the Ahagar Region:

The area of the Algerian Sahara is approximately 1,987,600 square kilometers, which covers an area of approximately 90% of the

total area of Algeria, estimated at 2,195,100 square kilometers (Halimi, 1968, p5).

The Ahaggar region is located in the far southeast of Algeria, with a rich history dating back to ancient times as evidenced by the ancient rock paintings(Halimi, 1968, pp12-14).. Most of the Ahaggar Mountains are the result of volcanic disturbances, with their peaks still prominent to this day in the form of cone-shaped formations rather than extended mountain ranges. The region still boasts high peaks, reaching up to nearly three hundred thousand meters, including Mount Tahat, the highest mountain peak in Algeria(Sari, 1983, p20) with a height of 2819 meters.

The region is characterized by a hot and dry desert climate, with almost no rainfall in its northern parts, and a dry tropical climate with few rainy months and long dry seasons. Historical sources indicate that the Sanhaja tribes (also known as Al-Mulathameen) were among the first tribes to settle in the region, long before the Islamic conquest of North Africa. The most important of these tribes include Lamtuna, Kedala, Msufa, and Lemta, all of which belong to the Al-Mulathameen tribes, which played a role in the establishment of the Almoravid movement in the Sahara (Ibn Khaldun, 1959, v6, p206).

It is worth mentioning that a small group of the Sanhaja Almohamid people have preserved their purity, they are the Tuaregs (Imuhagh or Imohag), who originate from the Amazigh people and are nicknamed "Almaseemen". This is because they wear veils on their faces, while their women are bare-faced and they speak an old Amazigh dialect called "Tamahaq" or "Tamashaq" with its letters from Tifinagh. These people live on animal husbandry and a small part of agriculture (Bissuel, 1988, p 29).

The most important tribe that prevailed in the region of Ahaggar is the Koul-Ghala tribe. As for the Taytoq tribe, they were forced to migrate to Mali with the arrival of the first waves of French occupation of the region, which led to the confiscation of their lands (Betka, 2012, pp. 270-273).

The Tuaregs are part of a social tribal structure that is under the control of the tribe leader. They embraced Islam since the Islamic conquest of North Africa and belong to the Maliki school of thought (Salvy, 1955, pp 93-100).

The veil is considered one of the most prominent features of the distinctive attire of the Tuaregs (Imuhagh or Imohag) of the Hoggar region. It is a type of turban that is wrapped in a specific way according to certain length and width measurements. The veil is usually worn only by wealthy men and nobles, as it is considered sacred to them unlike slaves, who do not cover their faces completely. The Tuareg people do not allow anyone to see their faces, not even their own family and closest friends. They wear the veil all day and also at night, and sometimes even when sleeping. During meals, the veiled person reveals their mouth to eat. Some of them may lift the veil and place the food inside their mouth, while others may take their food aside to eat it in privacy so that no one can see them. The veil is considered one of the most distinctive elements of the dress of the Tuareg people of the Sahara. It is a long colored and embroidered piece of cloth that covers the head, forehead, neck, and face, leaving only the eyes visible, which are covered by a piece of the same cloth (Duveyrier, 1864, p. 406) .

The Tuareg veil is approximately twelve (12) meters long and made of thin fabric in blue, black, or white color. It is used as a symbol of respect for social traditions that consider wearing the veil as a sign of modesty and dignity.

Currently, the population of the Ahaggar region is a mixture of diverse human elements with multiple origins from the North African coast, indicating the extent of cultural interaction that occurred between African culture and its Islamic counterpart.

Until recently, the tribes of Ahaggar lived in tribal federations that were under the control of a leader, or as they call him "Amenokal", meaning the keeper of the reins. He is usually characterized by wisdom, and his wisdom qualifies him to make

decisive decisions regarding tribal affairs, such as war and peace. He is the one who governs in disputes, and his word is final in matters that are difficult to resolve for leaders of the tribes that branch off from the main tribe. He is also considered a spiritual leader and no individual from the tribe can object to his opinion in all matters presented to him. He is a sovereign without a throne, and people owe him loyalty and obedience, and they turn to him in matters that are difficult to resolve in social affairs and life conflicts (Hogari,1975, pp 583-609).

In addition, this position is traced back to the dominant tribes and nomination to it is done through inheritance. It is customary for the Tuareg people to assume the rule after the Sultan's death by his nephew, and if there is no male heir, it is transferred to one of his second-degree relatives, such as grandmothers' and aunts' children. The election is always from the mother's side and not from the brothers or even the children because the Tuareg people believe that "the nephew carries in his blood the pure lineage of the Sultan more than the brothers and children whose blood purity may be doubted"(Al-Qashat, 1989, p. 48).

It is well known that the Tuaregs of Algeria participated effectively in resisting the French occupation. In fact, their first battle against the French dates back to 1881 during the reign of Aminokal Ahitaghel Ag Mohamed Biska (1877-1908). This battle took place in Wadi-In-Ahawen near Tin Terabine, which is part of the Tamanghasset province. In this battle, a French officer with the rank of colonel was killed. In the same year, the revolution of Sheikh Amoud Ben Mokhtar (1928) occurred, and he managed to defeat a French unit near Bir Djemma Musa and kill its commander, Flatters. One of the most famous battles that the Tuaregs later fought was the Battle of Tit in 1902, in which they killed the entire attacking French group, including its commander Countess (Al-Eid Beshi, 2013, pp. 31-44).

The Tuaregs of Ahaggar did not hesitate to join the glorious liberation revolution and support the rear bases of the revolution, especially in Mali and Niger. The position of the Tuaregs, led by Akhamouk Baï, who rejected de Gaulle's divisive project for the Algerian Sahara, will remain one of the immortal positions in the history of contemporary Algeria.

4. Aspects of Non-material Cultural Heritage in the Ahaggar Region:

4.1. Folk Literature among the Tuareg (Al-Qashat, 1989, p. 125)

Folk literature in the Sahara relies on memory and oral storytelling, which are often lost with the death or departure of the traditional keepers of poetry and stories. This is due to the nomadic lifestyle of the people and the lack of a fixed literary canon. As a result, this literature is often limited and narrow in scope (Al-Arabi, 1983, p. 204).

The Tuaregs were interested in poetry recitation during the debates that took place in the evenings of the locals, but their poetry was passed down through generations via oral tradition and was never written down. That is, until Charles de Foucauld (Foucauld, 1858,) came to Tamanrasset in 1905 and endeavored to collect Tuareg poetry verses. He became particularly attached to Dassine , a Tuareg woman known for reciting and singing poetry to the rhythms of the Amzad.

In general, the Tuaregs do not have a written literature that is passed down through generations, increasing or decreasing in value, or that evolves over time. Rather, they have an oral literature that is transmitted from one generation to another through observation, with the elders passing it on to the young through continuous storytelling, whether in the form of poetry or stories that children hear in the gatherings of their fathers. We also see examples of sayings that are spoken according to their place and time, or poems that preserve their stories and verses.

Like all peoples on earth, the Tuaregs have customs in various forms, including poetry, prose, stories, small plays, rare events, proverbs, and wisdom dictated by experience, life battles, and struggles with it.

The constant nomadic life, the vast emptiness, the long desert nights, and the longing and nostalgia for the homeland, along with the love of performance, are all motivations that drive the Bedouin to compose poetry, sing it, and recite popular desert poetry. It is born in a narrow region and echoed by the people, who are captivated by it for a certain period of time. When it becomes widespread and they grow tired of repeating and singing it, they forget it and turn to embrace the new narrative to captivate their ears.

That is indeed a general phenomenon in desert literature everywhere, but the Tuareg region in the Sahara Desert is an exception to this rule. In terms of its abundant production of poetry, it has reached us through generations. This poetry, as a whole, does not deviate in its purpose and style from desert poetry. Its themes revolve around love for women and singing about their beauty, lamenting the absence or loss of a beloved, praising the beauty of camels, and boasting about bravery in battles or raids, or expressing love for the homeland. Tuareg poets, in most cases, compose and recite their poems during gatherings by the warm fire or under the moonlight reflected by the warm sand (Bouchareb, 1995, p59). These cozy poetic evenings and gatherings, which are enlivened by cups of mint or plain green tea, are called "Ahel" by the Tuareg people. Alongside poetry, Saharan literature in general, and specifically Tuareg Amazigh literature, includes proverbs that are often repeated for preaching and insight, as well as stories that do not differ in terms of theme and inspiration from poetry. It also encompasses popular sayings and wisdom that adults are keen on memorizing and internalizing in their memories to recite on appropriate occasions.

4.2. Tuareg popular proverbs

Tuareg popular proverbs are considered one of the prominent elements and among the most important oral narrative traditions in folk culture. The significance of proverbs in folk culture lies in their ease of circulation and transmission across generations (Murthad, 1982, p 192). The Tuareg people have an oral literary tradition that revolves around historical stories, tales of heroism, and myths about jinn and other supernatural beings. However, this rich unwritten literary heritage is challenging to extract from sources and is predominantly passed down orally between generations. In this article, we will attempt to mention some popular proverbs that bear similarities in content and essence to Arabic proverbs, whether they are spoken in the vernacular of North Africa or in the eloquent language of Arab literature during their dominance and power.

5. Examples of Folk Proverbs (Al-Qashat, M. S. ibid., p132) :

a. "Aman eeman."

Meaning: Water is safety, indicating that water represents life, blessings, and comfort.

b. "Yezidhart nelli tawqad athgirthatniyat."

Meaning: The patience of a free person equals their lifetime, implying that one should embody patience throughout their entire life.

c. "Warafri yin amezdin yalahi."

Meaning: The hair on the head does not feel cold, implying that the proverb is used to describe someone who remains calm and unaffected despite being mistreated or facing harsh circumstances.

d. "Aman shadrin waarma diba atakuklen."

Meaning: A long rope does not prevent tripping, implying that having a long rope or thread (metaphorically referring to resources, power, or influence) does not guarantee protection from harm or failure. It is

similar to the proverb "The longer the thread, the more chances of losing the needle."

e. "Ufa ilal arzan dagh taghma, ohn ilal irzan dagh tina."

Meaning: A noble person with a broken spirit is better than a noble person with broken words.

f. "Warta sayd dagh takmounanak."

Meaning: Do not mock the misfortune of others, as you may face a similar fate yourself.

g. "Wurbet irt yinak warhan aksud yallah."

Meaning: Do not wish harm upon someone who does not fear God, because their lack of fear of God is the height of misfortune.

h. "Okul akl orhennit nahagin."

Meaning: Whoever wants to kill you, there will inevitably be loss in a land of oppressors.

i. "O etrehid etret autrehid suterd."

Meaning: Seek what you desire and let people seek what you don't desire. This proverb advises focusing on one's own concerns and interests, allowing others to take care of their own affairs. It emphasizes the importance of self-care and not getting overly involved in other people's matters.

j. "Abrarha n amaln ardat."

Meaning: Whoever loves whiteness should provide it. This proverb emphasizes the importance of self-reliance and taking responsibility for fulfilling one's own needs and desires.

These proverbs include advice, guidance, and cautionary lessons that help the listener overcome obstacles. The monk Charles de Foucauld managed to collect around 215 proverbs (Basset, 1922,

v63, p 490), One common proverb among many nations and peoples is: "If speech is made of silver, then silence is made of gold(Basset, 1922, v63, p 494)." Since the Tuaregs write poetry and express themselves through proverbs, they understand the importance of social relationships and fraternal solidarity. Hence, the proverb says: "If you have only one hand and do not have a sister, what do you do? You cannot untie a tightly knotted knot " (Basset, 1922, v63, p 498)

6. Some Popular Riddles and Puzzles:

From the children's riddles, we select this collection to shed light on the Tuaregs riddles during their evening gatherings.

- Akal ijān tikst – taya tufat.

Translation: A patched land.

The solution to the riddle is "Ant's Nest."

- "Eitnzan in mli wn eishnaoun ditran."

Translation: "A sheikh sifting - Al-Barqouq."

Solution: The sky and the stars

- "Talit war itoxwad isnann - Tootala."

Translation: "A girl who is not afraid of thorns."

The solution: an axe that cuts trees.

"Asyarantehount – yri wirtaziyid isawa yakad tahoult".

Translation: A key made of stone.

Solution: A souvenir given by a stranger.

"Tamat waret hani haaratsot – Tifanlat."

Translation: "A woman who can only see when she is pregnant."

Solution: "The flashlight - It only lights up when the battery is inserted."

As for the stories and riddles, the Tuaregs usually gather around a lit fire in the evenings, where their elder begins to tell stories and legends that have been passed down through oral narration. These stories are enlivened by cups of tea, and the characters in the stories are often animals. For example, we will provide a story titled "The Rabbit and the Bone."

Once upon a time, a rabbit found a bone one day and decided to carry it. The bone spoke and said to the rabbit, "I am heavy and burdensome." The rabbit replied, "Stay calm and don't worry. I have plenty of time, and I have no other tasks to occupy me(Hashemi, 2012, pp. 114) "

This is a small glimpse of a vast ocean. In fact, we wanted to provide a general idea of their thinking and how they present riddles, which are inspired by the desert environment in which they live.

7. Folk Music and Dance

The desert climate as a whole is not suitable for visual arts, and the social and cultural life does not facilitate the blossoming of genius. However, we can confidently say that poetry is the field in which the desert dwellers have shown undeniable talent.

The word "poetry" should be understood in its broad sense, encompassing singing, music, and even dance. This is because music and dance have always been closely associated with poetic singing in various civilizations.

The desert musical instruments, such as melodic fragments, are characterized by simplicity and naivety, although they are not devoid of influence. The "amzad," a one-stringed violin known among the Tuareg people, is considered the primary musical instrument in the entire desert region, and it is played by both men and women.

It is known that poetic singing, music, and dance are among the arts that indicate the openness of the cultures practicing them to civilization. They represent a folk heritage that is capable of growth and development, considering the oral nature that characterizes Saharan poetry and music. Due to the absence of records and collections, they are destined to circulate within an empty circle, without expecting significant progress to be recorded.

8. Folk Songs and Musical Instruments:

It appears that singing among the Tuareg people was as essential as eating and drinking; they could not do without it or give it up. Tuareg singing is either to celebrate heroic deeds and bravery, express admiration for a beloved person, or mark special occasions (Al-Qashat, 1989, p 145). There is a variety of musical instruments crafted in the desert, which artists play at weddings and celebrations. Perhaps the most significant musical instrument sung by the Tuareg is:

- **The Amzad:** The Amzad instrument is considered one of the finest musical instruments among the Tuareg and the most influential. It consists of a wooden bowl with a sheepskin stretched over its mouth, and two wooden sticks that protrude from its ends, with a horsehair rod tensioned between them. The skin is pierced with two or three holes in the center, and they attach crescent-shaped rods to it, connecting their ends with another horsehair rod (tail hair), and they rub the hair against each other to produce a beautiful sound. They alter the tones by changing the fingers of the left hand while the right hand is engaged in rubbing. This instrument is somewhat similar to the Arabian Rababa or the European violin (Al-Qashat, 1949, p 146). The Tuareg consider the Amzad instrument sacred, and it is played exclusively by women.

- **The Mizmar:** It is the same Arabic Mizmar and is played in the same manner ((Al-Qashat, 1949, p 146).

- **The Ghubtah:** It is a well-known instrument, with a medium-length reed. At the top, there is a small reed that produces sound when blown into by the player. It has holes that the player uses their fingers to cover and uncover, and at the bottom, there is a rounded piece resembling a funnel.

- **Al-Tindi:** It is a hollowed-out gourd with goat skin stretched over its opening, and it is struck by women during celebrations. This type of singing, accompanied by music and dance, is considered one of the most diverse and captivating musical arts among the Tuareg people.

- **Al-Duff:** In reality, it is scarce among the Tuareg people, but those who reside in urban areas have access to it, and it is played by women during celebrations.

- **Al-Tabl:** It is used as a symbol of power, authority, and strength. It consists of a large piece of wood to which camel or cowhide is attached using a sturdy rope for tension. The hide is punctured with three or four small circular holes close together to allow air to escape when struck. The drum is played with a specially designed stick or a sturdy rope, often made from a camel's tether. The tent that houses the drum is exclusively reserved for the sultan. Therefore, the drum is not to be tampered with and is only played by a trusted individual who has the permission of the authorities (Amenokal), usually one of their obedient slaves (Al-Qashat, M. S. *ibid.*, p148).

Among the songs accompanied by the rhythm of musical instruments and dance among the Tuaregs of Ahaggar, we can mention: "Tazngherht," "Tihigalit," "Alyun," "Aswat," and "Sharwa." (Bouchareb, A., *ibid.*, pp. 69-70)

9. Folk Dances among the Tuareg People

The Tuareg people, are passionate about dancing. In dance parties, everyone, young and old, dances together. There are specific dances for men and others for women. However, mixed dancing, as commonly perceived, is very rare. Among the important traditional folk dances, we can mention⁽ Al-Qashat, M. S. *ibid.*, pp.148-149):

- **Sword Dance:** In this dance, the musicians are positioned inside the circle, while the dancers form two facing rows. The excitement builds as the drumbeat intensifies, and the cheers of the spectators increase, adding to the beauty and brilliance of the dance.

- **Camels Dance:** The dance is accompanied by adorned camels, showcasing the exquisite craftsmanship of traditional artisans. In the midst of a crowd of spectators, there is also a camel race, where the owner of the camel proudly displays dance movements and gestures synchronized with the rhythm, captivating the audience. Additionally, there are other dances, including the Full Wind Dance, and there are mixed dances performed by young men and women during autumn, when citizens gather around saltwater wells.

10. Conclusion:

To sum up, we can draw the following conclusions. If the Tuareg people accepted Islam effortlessly, they have adapted Islamic heritage to fit the desert environment and harmonize with their ancient cultural heritage. It is important to note that the Tuareg people are the only Berber (Amazigh) people who have maintained their written Berber language and preserved their distinct taste in poetry, rich traditions of handicrafts, and the unique patterns of weapons and household tools invented and developed by their ancestors for centuries. The Tuaregs of today, particularly those residing in the region of Ahaggar, especially in the city of Tamanrasset, have been greatly influenced by urbanization and modernization. At times, it may be hard to recognize them except on special occasions such as Asihar, Tafsit, or a visit to Daghmouli, where they proudly display their traditional attire and engage in those ancient folklore dances that embody their authenticity and cultural heritage throughout history.

In general, preserving folk heritage means reviving that heritage as it is the background of our cultural formation. This is accomplished by uncovering, preserving, restoring, collecting, highlighting, defining, and studying it. The first step in this process is to document and register the heritage, so that its significance becomes

known and its profound meaning is interpreted. Moreover, it is possible to reutilize it in a beneficial way and encourage the reproduction of its valuable elements.

Therefore, every individual and governmental institution bears the responsibility of protecting heritage. Media institutions, in particular, have the duty to raise awareness among citizens about its value and historical significance. Preserving heritage is a collective responsibility because it belongs to all people, not to specific individuals or groups. Thus, it is a public sector concern rather than a private one.

In conclusion, it is essential to emphasize the importance of preserving folk heritage because it reaches all segments of society and deeply resonates within people's hearts. It is more accessible than classical culture, and neglecting or undervaluing it undoubtedly opens the door wide for foreign cultural invasion. Our traditional folklore has the ability to meet the needs of our youth in areas such as music. Discouraging its encouragement and dissemination pushes the younger generation towards Western music. The same applies to traditional arts and other aspects of life.

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