



Kumaoni Folklores: Analysing the Shift from Oral Tradition to Modern Form of Storytelling

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Abstract:

We do not rely only on tales to teach us about the existence of our life. Now, people are more inclined toward the scientific explanation for natural calamities rather than considering them to be the fury of the Divinity. So why would it be a good idea for us to save myths and legends from vanishing?

India's land of cultural heritage has diversified myths, legends, and old tales. Myths, legends, and folklores encapsulate those cultural and historical values that hold a community together.

Uttarakhand, a state in the Northern part of India, comprises 13 districts further divided into two divisions- Kumaon and Garhwal. The state is known as Dev Bhoomi as it is assumed to be the abode of God.

Kumaoni, also known as 'Pahari,' is a dialect of the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand. Kumaoni folklores are mainly based on local deities, old kings, and seasonal festivals. This paper focuses on how the preservation of traditional folklores is essential in the era of globalisation. It explores how society can keep up with remarkable cultural interpretations, and their insights that can be passed on to the future generations.

Keywords: *folklores, kumaoni culture, myths, cultural interpretations*

Introduction

Literature, in one of its forms, represents the world's different communities and cultures. It holds the capability to embrace the values and traditions of diverse cultures for generations. Literature ruminates the community's beliefs, ethics, rituals, and natural laws with peculiar experiences. Culture and Literature build a society together, but culture as a concept has a symbolic value. Literature bears the responsibility to initiate curiosity about culture in the community. The interrelationship between culture and Literature has its basis in folkloric studies. Folk literature comprises popular, organic, long-established, and time-honoured cultural practices. Folklores

authenticate social conduct, customs, and cultural codes by giving grounds to the particular cultural institution.

Before the term 'folklore' came into existence in 1846, it was generally referred to as 'popular culture' or 'popular antiquities'. William John Thomas, a British classicist, coined the term 'folklore' and worked to develop folkloric studies. Grimm Brothers, who played a vital role in understanding German folklore, interpreted folklores and their techniques. A K Ramanujan has also discussed 'folklore' in his work *Who Needs Folklore?* Ramanujan has profoundly analysed the relevance of folklore in contemporary times.

India's rich culture and heritage have always been mentioned regarding folklore. It is not just a matter of rich heritage or glorious past, but Indian Myths and Legends are a part of everyday life. India, today, is the amalgamation of its history and modern Identity. Through its cultural significance, Indian values and traditions are internationally recognised for their integrity and meaningful practices. Every city, every state, and the region has its own set of conventions. With this diverse culture and rituals, India has been fortunate to have a firm and stable base of rich legacy for its modern Identity.

Kumaon: The Sacred Landscape

Uttarakhand, a state in the Northern part of India, comprises 13 districts further divided into two divisions- Kumaon and Garhwal. Earlier unified with Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, formerly known as Uttaranchal, became an independent state on 9 Nov. 2000. Garhwal region has Chamoli, Uttarakashi, Tehri Garhwal, Pauri Garhwal, Haridwar, Rudraprayag, and Dehradun as districts, while Udham Singh Nagar, Champawat, Almora, Bageshwar, Nainital and Pithoragarh are part of Kumaon region. The state is known as Dev Bhoomi as it is assumed to be the abode of God. Forest has always been the central figure of the state. It has been the basis of the socio-cultural and socio-economic existence of the people of Uttarakhand. Since there is a difference between Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand geographically, Uttarakhand has suffered a severe identity crisis after the separation from Uttar Pradesh. It was difficult for the Pahari people to match up with the norms of the plains region as their routine was different due to topographical differences. Their lifestyle was a bit distinct from the rest of the state. Hence, the Pahari people needed to have their own Identity. The state has evidence of ancient Panchal kingdoms. It is believed that *Pandavas* spent their *Agyaatvaas* in Uttarkhand. There are several temples and other sacred places in the state. It is a significant pilgrimage as Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati; the holy rivers originate from this state. Kumaoni, also known as 'Pahari,' is a dialect of the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand. Like any other regional dialect, the Kumaoni dialect holds the responsibility of representing its regional culture and social conduct. Kumaoni culture draws its practices from local Myths and Legends. Kumaoni folklores are mainly based on local deities, old kings, and seasonal festivals.

Folklores of Kumaon: The Cultural Representation

Kumaoni folklores are the representation of their beliefs and codes. They have been narrated by the elders so that the younger generation can familiarise themselves with the cultural importance of their dialect. They get to experience the vast vocabulary of their dialect. Along with imparting knowledge about the community, folklores never miss the opportunity to enhance the creative side of children.

A Glossary of Literary Terms defines folklores as "the collective name applied to sayings, verbal compositions, and social rituals that have been handed down solely, or at least primarily by word of mouth and example rather than in written form." (Abrams 138). There are different forms of folklore like folk ballads, folk songs, folk tales, folk drama, and even folk sayings. Every culture has its way of presenting its mythology according to its myths and legends. The most prominent form of folklore is folk songs, a melodic amalgamation of lyrics and music. They are rich with regional dialect and soothing to the ears. With music, the poems create a massive impact on the audience.

Kumaoni folksongs have a wide range of religious, seasonal, dance, and so on. A famous folksong in Kumaoni is *Shakunaakhar*; the term roughly translates into 'auspicious word'. This song is considered pious and sung on almost every auspicious occasion, like before the commencing of any new event. This song is sung for God, requesting to eradicate all the negative energy and complications on their way towards a new beginning. The lyrics of *Shakunaakhar* are as follows:

Dena Hoya Kholi Ka Ganasha

Dena Hoya Mori Ka Narena Hey (Tiwari 54)

The festive songs of Kumaon are equally beautiful and didactic. Holi is a festival that the people here celebrate with love and excitement. The Holi celebrations stay for more than a month in Kumaon. *Baithhaki* Holi is one of the primary forms of Holi celebration where 6-7 people sit and sing Holi songs together. It is one of the traditions during which people visit each other's homes in groups and sing Holi songs in the vicinity of their homes to shower blessings of well-being and happy life.

Makar Sankrant is another festival that Kumaoni people celebrate with zest and zeal. Commonly known as '*Uttaryani*' and '*Ghughutiya*,' this festival is a unique celebration of children offering sweetmeats to Crows. Sweetmeats are prepared with flour and jaggery, and the following day children offer them to crows by saying, "*Kauva kale, ghughuti mala khaale khaale*", which means 'black crow, come and eat the *ghughuti*' (sweetmeats). Strangely where black crows are considered a lousy omen, in some regions of Kumaon, people believe them to be the incarnation of their ancestors, and their visit brings good luck to the family. Children actively participate in this festival.

Folk Ballads are usually songs or poems with music that narrates a story. Most Folk Ballads are orally told and rarely found in printed manuscripts earlier. But with the emerging field of cultural studies, folklores are now available in printed form. Kumaoni Ballads have equal prestige in the Pahari culture.

Jagar, the ballad of local deities, is considered to invite spirits from another world to show humans the sinless path to lead their lives. This spiritual worship practice is based on the belief that the spirits can help people neutralise any complication in their lives. *Jagar* represents the profound faith of the Kumaoni people with a pure conscience to eradicate damaging thoughts. *Jagariya* is the person who organises and supervises the whole *Jagar*, and *Dangariya* is the person who lets the spirit of God enter his body. It is believed that to convey with other people; god enters into the human body.

One of the most popular Kumaoni love ballads is *Rajula and Malushahi*. King Dulashah of Biarath and his wife meet Sunpat Shauka and Ganguly at the 'Bhagnath' Temple in Bageshwar. Both the couples came there to pray to the Lord to give the children as they were childless. They also promised to get their kids married if one couple gets blessed with a girl child and another with a boy child. With the grace of God, Malushahi was born to king Dulashah and Rajula was born to king Shauka. A prophecy was made for Prince's long life on the fifth day of his birthday. Soon after fixing Malushahi's marriage with Rajula, King Dulashah died, and Rajula was held responsible for this unfortunate incident. Both Rajula and Dulashah remained unaware of their marriage plans. Meanwhile, Hunn King Bikki Pal threatened King Shauka to make her daughter marry him. One night Malushahi and Rajula dreamt about each other, and Rajula decided to meet Malushahi. She, alone, travelled to Bairath with a diamond ring. Malushahi also chose to marry Rajula, unaware of her journey. When Rajula reached the kingdom, Malushahi was in a deep sleep due to the herbs her mother gave him to prevent him from getting married to Rajula. Malushahi woke up; they bet Rajula was long gone. He found a letter and a diamond ring. He sought the help of Guru Gorakhnath to do tantra Mantra to defend King Shauka from King Bikki's evil plan. Malushahi, on Guru Gorkahnath's advice, asked him to disguise himself as *Jogi* and visit the Hunn kingdom. He managed to defeat the King of Hunn and marry Rajula.

Social-political discriminations influence the contemporary print versions of this ballad. People like Gopi Das, Mohan Upreti, and institutions like Parvatiya Kala Kendra, Delhi, have been educating about Kumaoni culture through their works and performances. Nitya Nand Misra's *Malushahi: A Romantic Poem of the Hills* (1936) discusses this ballad's historical aspect and the verse's folkloric elements. However, Malushahi was initially the story of a king Katyuri which the minstrels or bards sang along with Dholi (drummers); over some time, societal differences among it lost their performative perspective. Rajula represents all the Kumaoni women who are strong enough to take

action. In a society where women are treated as mere objects, Rajula is an example of a brave woman who does not cage herself in social norms and believes in making her own decisions. In Kumaoni folk drama, various folk myths have been represented, and Kumaoni Ramleela has been recognised as an integral part of cultural heritage. Ramleela in Kumaon is performed with lyrics and music. Hence, it becomes essential that the people, who participate in Kumaoni Ramleela, have to be good singers. The dialogues in the drama are usually sung in couplets, and special bhajan mandli and different musical instruments like dholki, Murli, Pahari-Baja, and harmonium participate in Ramleela. There is also a hint of classical music in Kumaoni Ramleela. Several writers in Kumaon attempted to write versions of Ramleela, like Deviduut Joshi, Nand Kishore, and Kundan Lal Shah. Kumaoni Ramleela has a significant portrayal of Kumaoni women. Sita's character is represented by strength and bravery. Her identity speaks for the power of Kumaoni women.

The Swift Shift

'Identity' as a concept has become significant in cultural studies. From a psychological point of view, it refers to 'self' and, to some extent, it relates to an individual's social position. Therefore there are several forms of identity, 'political identity, 'social identity, 'sexual identity, and more. The deconstruction of established identities and their reconstruction has been a substantial field of research in cultural studies. Regional identity has become a significant category in academics in contemporary times. Regional narratives, like oral narratives, offer perspectives on what identity as a concept stands for. This brings out the need to analyse the relationship between identity and restricted spaces to understand how these relationships channel the energy to publicise the particular region or create social divergence.

Modern-day Kumaon seeks its identity based on its cultural representation. Like many other tiny regions, Kumaon still follows its old tradition and takes pride in continuing them. Where the younger generation has always been accused of diverging from their cultural roots, the Kumaoni people have always encouraged them to participate in the customs. For instance, young children are an integral part of the *Phool dei* festival, which is celebrated to welcome the Spring season. This auspicious festival is all about flowers, as the first term 'Phool' suggests, whereas 'Dei' stands for a regional dish prepared by jaggery. Young girls visit every house in the vicinity with a plate full of flowers, rice, jaggery, and dry coconut. They bless the homes with health and prosperity. The participation of young girls induces cultural curiosity among them to gather more information about the festival. The cognisance of values has controlled the Indian psyche from old times. Each part of learning stresses the didactic perspective with literary character. Folklores have given moral greatness and a character to the general public.

Many young people participate in Kumaoni Ramleela. They start preparing for their roles way ahead of the actual performances. The process of learning dialogues familiarises them with the rich heritage. The story's progression develops interest credited to pleasure's psychological and authentic experience. It is verbal craftsmanship by which the account content layouts the tasteful aspect and strikes upon sentiments.

Social media is flooded with cultural content. In the struggle to present a unique content, influencers return to their roots. They thoroughly analyse their cultural beliefs, costumes, songs, and other traditions. People who intend to present something new on social media familiarise themselves with their age-old customs and traditions. The purpose is to get good engagement on the social media platform, but the process of creating cultural content is swiftly changing their perspectives towards their tradition. Social media boosts the development of cultural practices in a significant way.

Conclusion

One may assume that folklore is related to customs or history, but its significance is beyond this factual and cultural representation. The all-pervasive nature of folklores makes it a part of our day-to-day lives. Folklores find its articulation in present-day writing, regardless of the steady projection of a cognitive model of didacticism. It swiftly flows like a propensity in modern-day children's fiction composition.

The old stories and traditions have shifted and spread over various modes and readerships, conveying a recuperating soul over the modern-day anxieties. The paper explored the cultural aspect of Kumaoni folklores and how they represent modern-day Kumaoni identity.

Hence, it becomes a necessity to persevere the oral traditions. Rich with regional perspectives, folklores are a pool of vernacular language holding the significance of cultural codes and conducts. Kumaoni folklores depict the anecdotes of Uttarakhand's ethnic and social authenticity. Hence, folk narratives are profoundly associated with the social cycles, and their meanings cannot exist in isolation.

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