

## FOLKLORE ITS CULTURAL ESSENCE AND APPLICATION TO KASHMIR

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### Abstract

*Folklore is a knowledge of folk-songs, folktales, myths, legends, customs and proverbs and traditions etc. of a simple folk living in a particular community. Their heritage is passed on from earlier generations it is transmitted orally and still preserved by memory. Any such ethnic, social or geographical group usually gives a free expression to their sentiments through their folk songs and folk music that serves as a group work to prepare their socio-cultural history. It is through their folk songs and folk music that we come to know of their inner life, their social and environmental set up, their culture, whether they may be living in far off woods in thatched cottages at the foot of the Himalayas, lush green meadows or river-basins. Folk music happens to be the most spontaneous outburst of their feelings and strong emotions, their inner moods. Actually, it is through folk-music that we come to appreciate the various aspects of these people- their customs, arts and social institutions.*

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deeply influenced by the geographical surrounding and natural environment of a given region. It may be a Bhojpuri folklore or a Kashmiri folklore (typically that of Nagirai) or folklore-music, they all bear the regional, geographical and environmental stamp. Hence songs and ballads that play a significant role in folk-music are in turn deeply influenced by the natural environment of the land in which they live.<sup>1</sup>

These songs and ballads reflect the cultural and economic conditions of the people. They provide a most useful tool for a study of their social and religious conditions as a whole. Folk music is closely inter-linked with folk dances that help to understand the basic traits of human character and personality. Folk songs and folk-ballads sung in various tunes to the accompaniment of their musical instruments in sharp contrast to Homer's *Iliad*, and *Odysseus* (describing the adventures of Odysseus) that is an embodiment of Greek literature but too sophisticated to be considered folk literature. We have an unsophisticated mind with its simple and natural attitude to life that constitutes the core of folklore.

**Meaning and Content:** Folklore is a knowledge of folk-song, folktales, myth, legends, customs and proverbs and translations etc. of a simple folk living in a particular community. Their heritage is passed on from earlier generations. It is transmitted orally and still preserved by memory. And such ethnic, social or geographical group usually gives a free expression to their sentiments through their folk song and folk music that serves as a ground work to prepare their socio-cultural history. It is through their folk songs and folk-music that we come to know of their inner life, their social and environmental set up, their culture, whether they may be living in far off wood in thatched cottage at the foot of the Himalayas, lush green meadows or river-basin. Folk music happens to be the most spontaneous outburst of their feelings and strong emotions, their inner moods. Actually, it is through

folk-music that we come to appreciate the various aspects of these people- their customs, arts and social institutions.

Folk songs and ballads, say almost the whole folk material, is deeply influenced by the geographical surroundings and natural environment of a given region. It may be a Bhojpuri folklore or a Kashmiri folklore (typically that of Nagirai) or folk-music, they all bear the regional, geographical and environmental stamp. Hence songs and ballads that play a significant role in folk-music are in turn deeply influenced by the natural environment of the land in which they live.

These Songs and ballads reflect the cultural and economic conditions of the people. They provide a most useful tool for a study of their social and religious conditions as a whole. Folk music is closely inter-linked with folk dances that help to understand the basic traits of human character and personality. Folk songs and folk-ballads possess a rich variety of music and besides depict the daily life of the common man. All his hardships, struggles, joys and sorrows, rituals and manners are well represented by the themes of his songs and ballads sung in various tunes to the accompaniment of their musical instruments. In sharp contrast to Homer's *Iliad*, and *Odyssey* (describing the adventures of Odyssey) that is an embodiment of Greek literature but too sophisticated to be considered folk literature. We have an unsophisticated mind with its simple and natural attitude to life that constitutes the core of folklore.

Many a folklorist interested in the study of folklore include the mysterious nature worship, cult of some ancient people, magic, witchcraft, arts crafts and other forms of artistic expression of rural and tribal folk to have a boarder understanding of man to man relationship. Most often, in an extended sense, it is applied to riddles, children's' songs, folk dramas, folk tunes, proverbs, folk remedies etc.

### Folklore and History:

Folktales are not historical tales and so they cannot give an evidence of history. They, however, contain elements which can be classified historically. If, for example, you find a folktale that there is a king, Andha Yudhisthira (*Rajatarangini, I, i*) who is turned out of his kingdom for his physical deformity and injudicious condition followed by the queens of his seraglio, weeping and lamenting, all the way, that may point out the democratic traditions upheld by the people of that period. His forced abdication brought to an end the Gonanda Dynasty. Sandimata Arya-raja's tale (*ibid, ii*) of being elevated to the throne, replacing Jayendra, is another example of popular will that helps in dating the reign period in the backdrop of the customs, habits and attitude towards an elective monarchy.

### Nature and Scope:

There are two aspects of folklore, one is traditional and the other psychological. While the former deals with the phases of racial and social life, the other is concerned with the present or the period contemporary to the existence of those beliefs. Folklore is today considered a social science, having some relation to archaeology, history and literature. The science of folklore is, therefore, a branch of study that collects, classifies, preserves and deals with materials covering all aspects of folk-life – how human civilization evolved through the ages. Folklore material has been classified by Bonser, Garside, Burne, Boggs and others. One of the characteristic of folk-lore is its rigidity in form i.e. the contents may vary but not the form which remains stable. For instance, the deciding factor of the metre in a folk song is the rhythm and the tune of the song; hence the folk singer never bothers about the actual number of syllables and words in his composition. There are certain branches of folklore that are regarded as the fore-runners of the modern material science, including medical science and pharmacopoeia. There is close relation between folklore and

region, folklore and various festivals. Folklore material, in spite of its regional variety, materially remained unchanged. Folklore songs and ballads of Scandinavia may be traced in those of France or Spain though there may be some grammatical or prosodical differences. It touches every aspect of tradition and legend and cannot remain limited to a particular society or race or country.

#### **Folklore and its land of origin**

Some scholar would locate their horizon in the ancient Orient. There are others who would do so in respect of eastern or Northern Europe. Benfey, a German Indologist, postulated that India was the origin of most of the fairy or folk tales. India has not only a rich tradition of folklore, it has also produced some work on it, e.g. *Panchatantra*, *Hitopdesa*, *Kathasaritasagar*, the first and the last being generally attributed to Kashmir, Visnu Sharma and Somadeva respectively. Gunadhyas *Brihatkatha* in Paisachi (now lost to us) must have contained valuable folktales and reflected the culture of different tribes in and outside Kashmir - Pisachas, Nagas, Abhiras, Murundas etc. *Panchatantra* reveals the harmony between the animal and human kingdom, a rare feature of such tales in our folklore.

#### **Traditional Heritage:**

The basic framework of a society is mirrored in its folklore. It is the guided force in social institutions and grounds of individuals. The folk community preserves the older tradition, traditional social institutions and rigid social organisation. The transmission of thought, tradition, songs, festivals, superstitions, beliefs are all oral. The products of their culture complex are spontaneous. The tradition survives in their life activities. Folk songs, transmitted though oral tradition, continue to live in the memory of the people through the ages. These folk song lack the style and personality of a classical style, yet they; are the expression of the simple mind with primitive activities. The subject matter and the source of inspiration of folksongs may vary but they are very much close to

life. For instance, *Nagirai* and *Heemal* strikes a plaintive note like that of *Arnimal* and *Habba Khatun* but that of *Akanandun* betrays a situation of extreme distress created by a Yogi. Folk songs may be sung individually (solo) or in group to commemorate a community festival. They are nevertheless free personal expression of human feeling or the group attitude of life. Folklore touches every aspect of legend and traditions as well as other lore relating to plants, animals, stars, etc. it embraces folk culture as a whole. Folklore became a strong instrument and inspired the Romantic movement in England and France, as it did in Kashmir with Rasool Mir.

#### Kashmiri Folklore:

The Kashmir folklore rkpakath or kakath can boast of a hoary Past. The early paintings and sculptures have contributed to the rich tradition, which has turned into folklore gradually. Sir Aurel Stein's pioneering field work in Central Asian Archaeology has revealed a rich store house of wall paintings in Khotan, Tunhuang, etc. They bear a clear imprint of the Kashmiri artists in depicting various scenes, secular and religious in these cave wall paintings. Not only is the combination of colours superb, these murals distinctly point to the artist's virtuoso. It is interesting to note that a craftsman's art had developed during a dull season in Kashmir, generally covered by a blanket of snow in winter. Crafts were traditional by nature, being handed down from father to son, through their guilds. Families preserved their distinctive designs and village carried on the same technique of glazing and lacquering their potteries. Metallurgy reached its high water-mark and Po-ta-la monastery in Tibet is a standing testimony to thousands of Kashmiri bronze sculptures there. The secret processes were zealously preserved throughout the centuries. Dr. Lokesh Chandra has drawn our attention to some of the wooden prints of line-drawings of Tibetan Buddhist deities. These are fascinatingly fine techniques of wood-carving and again originate from Kashmir.

No less exquisitely sculpted images of Vajrayana deities, some forty two in number and again of nearly 35 Kashmiri artists are preserved in the Tabo Monastery of Himachal Pradesh. Throughout the centuries the folklorists and craftsmen have been concentrating their skill in objects of arts. Woollen and silken fabrics were famed for their intricate workmanship. The local beliefs, customs and social prejudices have a strong background in the production of the craft objects. The Buddhist religious scrolls and painted wood works are good examples of folk painting and arts. The art experiences of the folk people are discernible in their terracottas and tiles as at Harwan. The rich imagery of these tiles and their painting remains something of an enigma to the art historians. These inscribed tiles with a variety of motifs have successfully brought to life in the plastic art various incidents from the daily life of the humble village folk. A musician and a drummer in several tiles show how folk song has been the most ancient and popular form of folklore in almost all parts of Kashmir. Folksongs here, as elsewhere, are woven generally around the motifs concerning mainly the domestic life of a villager - love, marriage, child birth, child play, etc. They also relate to spring, agriculture, hunting, fishing, grinding and so forth. These are songs for the worship of ancestors, saints, evil spirits, trees, animals etc. rituals, superstitions, rain-invoking and stopping ceremonies- told and re-told to the younger generations by the elders. Harwan tiles give a pleasant insight into human character and a clear perception of what the tribal life must have been - Scythians, Parthians, Nagas and others in a process of intermixing. The tiles art graphically depicts a fleur-de-lis, a lotus, a vine creeper in association with geese and other birds of this Himalayan Region. A common man's natural trial brought him close to the animal and plant kingdom.

One is struck by the folk opera, a play in which songs were sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. Singing in comic operas must have been very common and frequent after

the harvesting season. The folk operas were performed in open surroundings or enclosed places. The first striking note of such play was the common refrain: *Rinda poshmala gindne drayi lo lo!* (look how lovely damsel is going to play). Its recollection still persists among the common folk.

*Rinda poshmala gindane draye lolo  
Shubhi Shabhas chani puta Cchai lo lo  
Raja Hindayani naaz kya anzni garden  
Ya ilahi chasmi bada nisha rachhtan  
Gacchi kya kam chani bargahi lolo  
Zael vankan kaail (bali) yali lagi  
humr Paccha lagans ganjranas lacch tai hazaar  
Ami saayi no muklan paya madano  
Valo karyololamata lae madano*

These songs and ballads not only reflect the cultural and economic conditions of the people but are also very useful for a study of the social and religious condition of the society as a whole. Folk music is a permanent source of happiness and entertainment. The *Nilamata Purana* is full of such material, detailing several occasion of entertainment and get-together in the form of *Madana-trayodasi*, blossoming season, folk operas, which suggest how simple folk enjoyed life in close harmony with the enchanting beauty of their valley.

Apart from common themes as in *Hatim's tales* (collected by Aurel Stein) narrated by an oilman, love lorn figures outnumber others. The classical folk-tale of Nagirai has a plaintive pattern. Heemal, accursed and consumed by the dreadful bites of Nagins Living in the underworld (talapatal) meets a tragic end.

Arnimaal's song is a song of *virah* (separation) in which she laments the absence of her beloved. The tune is sweet and sung slowly.



arni ranggom roananiyehiye  
karsana yiye darshun me diye  
Shyam-sunder pman lajis  
aam tavai kotah gajis  
naam paigam task us niye  
arni rang gom [roananiyehiye  
kand nabad aarud mutaya matyo  
Khanda karinam lookan thiye  
Karyiye darsun diye  
Haa valo muniya ho vandayo paadan  
Aadan bji myni yaaro ye  
Aadan bji asti ranjnaavaan  
Yaaran tas kadr no jane he  
detimo darsun chhum.... Laavun  
aadan baaji myani yaro ve.

The refrain is an important feature of all the folk- ballads and folk- songs best illustrated by Lolo-Bambro:

Bambro Bambro, Shym rang Bambro  
Kyaaji chhuk ca yuta naalaanai  
Ho ho ho ho  
Haal bhva pananyu  
Ha Shym Sundaro ho ho ho ho  
Asi karoi jaan kurbano ho ho ho ho  
Yemberzal Bombrus seth melanaavon  
Neirnas prani armno  
ho ho ho ho

The songs convey the emotions of the singer. There is an element of spontaneity as well as simplicity in a folk song. It springs from a common man's natural desire to give expression to his feeling and emotions in so far as these can be expressed though

musical forms.

In Nagiria Hemal, the lover actually makes frantic but heart-breaking efforts to spot his beloved.

*Lakchi chhui lakhcun bhumi hañji sumital*

*Ll prajalvun*

*Jan Nagirais Yre akis tal*

*Manaka chhu mothamuta*

*Balapuris chhaaran Heemal*

*nata smnas ronidmnas.*

*kocchi kyath hyutmuta sangarmal*

We have songs that do not follow any tradition of ceremony, but talk of divine love:

*yas laye naad su cchum ni[ey*

*kami [isa chyavanas moi*

*ami lola gratan kad me pisi*

*farhad ame nisa kyh lablihey*

*yatha joi myni chhu aab hame[i*

*kami [isay chyavanasmoi*

*ashka, naave vasu darve[o*

*muska posa phulnavi*

Nyam sab's cup of divine love overflows, brimming with divine ecstasy.

The key of our folklore has been to go inside yourself and reconnect with your spirit. As we begin learning the ways of our journey, we try to live in balance, with mind, body and spirit. The spiritual side of us does not conform to external parameters, nor to external rituals. The very sound of inner peace tells us where to go. You cannot find it outside of yourself, you have to go inside. In the case of Ahad Zargar all externals lose their meaning in his madness for the divine love.

looth kukmam d)nasta )manas  
kroothyaar dodh vyataraun pyom paanas  
jyooth safrah ky vana begnas  
s+r sukhnik t+r phaal yas sanith gav  
irke taya ho[ni[a yus pathar pyav  
p+r futwah ky d+vanas  
looth kurnam d+nas ta +mnas  
Wahab khar longs for the divine love  
Ha shih svaaro kor gacchak  
akhar ci marun cchy  
yi ci alima ti mey vanatam  
ti mey parun chhuy

to know the secret of life after death from the prince of a moving caravan.

Whether a reaper in the field or a damsel to be married, a Kashmiri could not be one with the enthralling beauty of nature.

Poshivuni baagche posh gundaye  
Gris koori naazneen saundaye  
or  
ya kad chyon ky chhu posh-i-kul  
phulaya barjast chhas bilkul  
phujis yaamat lajis vuchhney  
gajis chyni kale bambroo  
or  
aakho shahri shiraazo  
or

*vanavan* that invokes the blessings of various deities to make life joyful and free-sweet melodies, of course. Our folklore is as rich as it is varied. We have enchanting folksongs of joy and sorrow and of helplessness and philosophic resignation to fate.

My childhood personal experience has been that I have often heard from wandering village singers, who have no images, temples, scriptures, or ceremonials, who declare in their songs the divinity of man, and express for him an intense feeling of love. Aren't they the messengers of healing herbs and wild flowers of the Alpine land that blossom, inspire and get them- intoxicated with joy? Aren't they the Kashmiri Bauls of Bengal?

### References

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