

HISTORY PRESERVATION AND FOLK LITERATURE-A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Folk literature has played a significant role in the preservation of history by providing insights into the beliefs, traditions, and experiences of past societies. This paper aims to explore the importance of folk literature in the preservation of history and its potential as a valuable source of information for historians and researchers. The paper first discusses the definition of folk literature and its various forms, including folktales, legends, and ballads. It then highlights the ways in which folk literature provides a glimpse into the past, as it often reflects the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which it was created. The paper also discusses the challenges associated with using folk literature as a source of historical information, such as issues of authenticity and the biases of the storytellers. However, it argues that folk literature can provide valuable insights into the lives and experiences of marginalized communities that may have been excluded from official historical records. Through case studies of various folktales and legends from different parts of the world, the paper illustrates the potential of folk literature as a source of historical information. For instance, it explores how African American folklore provides insights into the experiences of enslaved Africans in America and how oral traditions in indigenous communities have preserved their cultural heritage. This paper argues that folk literature has played an essential role in the preservation of history and provides a unique perspective on the past that is often excluded from official historical records. By recognizing the importance of folk literature as a historical source, researchers and historians can gain a deeper understanding of the beliefs, traditions, and experiences of past societies.

Keywords: Folk Literature, History, Preservation

Introduction

It is safe to say that our earliest and most essential literary tradition is that of folklore. Finding the exact beginning of folk literature is not only impossible, but also unnecessary. As a result of these shifts, direction civilization took as it progressed.¹ Large and prosperous societies can disappear suddenly, but sometimes even small communities manage to hold on to their traditions for the long haul. But there are also countries like India that serve as cultural epicentres when viewed from a regional perspective.²

There have been many variants throughout human history. Every culture and civilization has experienced the ups and downs of war, commerce, the arts, architecture, and the spread of empires. Cultures emerge out of particular moments in time and historical periods, so it is with every civilization. Gillin and Gillin, two sociologists, "Culture can be defined as the shared set of norms and practises for how people should interact with one another and the world around them, both privately and publicly. These norms and practises are then passed down through families and communities and taught to children. It's still possible that culture is the umbrella term for these broad trends".³ Augburn, an American sociologist,

has proposed a two-part framework for classifying cultural practises:⁴

1. Material culture
2. Non- material culture.

Buildings, weapons, vehicles, ornaments, and so on are all examples of material culture, while non-material culture refers to intangible practises and ideas. They are built in such a way that the distinct identity of each community is preserved. Non-material culture includes things like ideas, beliefs, practises, norms, laws, languages, and literature.⁵

A fundamental and essential component of any culture, folk literature is an invaluable resource. Every second, something new takes place in society, but only a select few achieve historical significance.⁶ Literature refers mostly to works that have been written down and published, but literature has been a part of human culture even before script was invented. "Shruti" (listened) literature was the dominant form of literature for a very long time. Only after the development of scripts was the oral tradition transformed into literature and new works put to paper.⁷ Folklore, music, theatre, rituals, and customs have provided a foundation for generations of people to learn about and discuss important historical figures,

events, customs, religions, and knowledge.⁸ Historians of the future gathered these, verified their accuracy, and systematically wrote the history books.

What Folk Literature Has Done to Help Us Keep the Past Alive

Folk Literature Helps Us Keep the Past Alive: The most pervasive force in modern society is religious ideology. Culture is heavily influenced by religious ideology. The vast majority of people have some sort of religious faith, whether it's in the form of idols, the natural world, or the written word.⁹ The sages of the Vedic period wrote hymns, poems, verses, etc. in Sanskrit to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences with others. These sacred texts, including the Vedas, were passed down orally for thousands of years and are now preserved in Shruti and Smriti texts. Ved Vyas put pen to paper based on oral tradition to create the Vedas, Puranas, and Upanishads. Folk literature arrived in India in the form of history only much later.

The Ramayana, India's most revered book, also began as "shruti" literature. Luv Kush, sung by Sita and Ram's sons, was foretold by Maharishi Valmiki to them. One of the most pivotal texts in Indian history and culture, this epic was written centuries later by Valmiki. Somewhat similarly, this was also a problem in Islam. According to Islamic tradition, Hazrat Ibrahim was the recipient of a divine revelation consisting of four books of God, or couplets, verses, or Ayat in Persian. Muhammad received a revelation of the ancient book Quran. He would tell his "Sahba" (colleagues and followers) about the trials Mohammad Sahebused to face each day. They still recall his words as being particularly meaningful. Sruti literature, also known as folk literature, served as the foundation for the Quran, which has since been translated into many languages. Similarly, Hadees, the historical record of Muhammad's opinions on various topics discussed before him, is considered a form of folk literature in the Islamic tradition.¹⁰ The disciples of Lord Buddha were able to remember the instructions, messages, knowledge, and ideas that he used to give to his disciples, followers, supporters, and the general public through excursions and

discussions, and they were able to record those ideas in writing. Buddha's entire canon was recorded in what is known as the Shruti literature or folk literature. The historical record we have today is based on the writings of those who committed Buddha's teachings to memory.¹¹

The Protection of History by Folk Literature from Extinction-Folk comes from Anglo-Saxon, while the German word for "people" is "volk," so the word folklore is a compound of two words. Learning (or knowledge) is what the Anglo-Saxon word 'lar' refers to. So, Folklore literally translates to "wisdom of the uncultured." Despite common misconceptions, folk literature is not limited to the written works of rural or uneducated populations; rather, it permeates every aspect of human culture and informs our everyday actions, values, and worldview. The role of folk literature in documenting the past cannot be overstated.¹²

India was a frequent target of foreign invaders. The country's cultural treasures were looted and destroyed by these foreign invaders. When viewed in this light, numerous attempts have been made to eradicate India's history because of its cultural heritage. Because Muhammad bin Qasim, looking to expand his empire, invaded Sindh and obliterated it in 711 A.D. Mahmud Ghaznavi invaded India in the early 11th century. For twenty days, he pillaged and attacked Mathura as he sacked the Ganga Yamuna Doab. Then they annihilated Kannauj and Somnath. Timur invaded northern India in 1398, resulting in the destruction of Delhi.¹³ When Taxila and Nalanda University were destroyed, a significant portion of human knowledge and history were lost. Aurangzeb, king of the Mughals, ordered the destruction of thousands of Hindu temples and, with them, centuries of culture.

Similarly, many wars and epidemics destroyed the recorded history, but folk literature was preserved through word of mouth from one generation to the next. Abstractness is inherent to folk literature.¹⁴ Thus, it was impregnable to any means of destruction. This was an attempt to prevent the loss of an important piece of folk literary heritage. The foreign invaders tried everything they could think of to wipe out the past and the Indian way of life. Library books

were burned, historical landmarks were demolished, people looted, and thousands of people were killed. Every single the culture's sacred idols were broken. In a similar vein, many historical artefacts have been lost due to natural disasters such as fires, epidemics, earthquakes, and floods. Folk literature, however, is abstract by nature. There is nothing alive about it.¹⁵ It rests on the collective mind of the population. History was rewritten in a factual and systematic manner on the basis of folk tales, music, traditions, customs, and beliefs, which the people used to preserve their culture.¹⁶ Cultural artefacts were recovered from the rubble of destroyed sites, and this is how folk literature prevented the loss of human history.

Folk Literature's Role in Recreating the Past:

Both natural and man-made disasters have had significant impacts on human culture. Large numbers of people moved from areas where their homes were abandoned because of war or an epidemic. As people moved away, historic landmarks were abandoned and eventually collapsed. In every place where humans have made permanent settlements, those cultures have inevitably spread. A large number of people in Malwa were forced to relocate from Rajasthan's Marwar province as a result of the drought. People who endured the brunt of the war on multiple occasions fled to different safe areas of the country, taking their history and culture with them. When the war was over, the plague was gone, the floods stopped, and the drought abated, people turned to folk literature to remember their past. In later times, they attempted to rewrite history and reawaken their culture through writing. Through songs, plays, and other forms of folk literature, historical figures and events have been passed down through the generations. The dissemination of both culture and history can be seen in the works of folk literature. For a very long time, history could not be created without written accounts of the events that would later be preserved in folk literature. When it comes to piecing together the past, folk literature is where it's at.

Folk literature's role in establishing the historical significance that is ingrained in a culture : Cultural elements that include both history and folk literature include both. Folk

literature is a combination of fact and fiction, while history is primarily a factual and systematic record of social events. Historical events are brought to life in works of folk literature, which also make them more accessible.

It's tough to retain precise historical details in one's memory. Stories, pictures, music, traditions, and other forms of folk literature keep the past alive and well. Many celebrations, markets, and other cultural events are held annually in India.¹⁷ Many people celebrate holidays and commemorate historical dates without ever learning the reason why. Rajasthan is home to a wide variety of folk gods and goddesses. Folk deities such as Pabuji, Gogaji, Ramdevji, Tejaji, etc. are viewed as supernatural by their devotees, who pray to them and offer sacrifices.¹⁸ There is an abundance of devotional singing and storytelling surrounding these deities and their miracles. Looking at their past, we can say with certainty that they have accomplished heroic acts, but these deeds were not the result of any supernatural means.¹⁹ Contrarily, historical figures, events, and milestones are often lauded in works of folk literature. It does this by keeping the past alive in the form of folklore and writing. Without folk literature, history would not be accessible to the general public; it would only be known by academics and specialists. Throughout history, folk literature has served as a vital link between people and their past.

A Priceless Historical Relic That Is Folk Literature:

It wasn't until much later that history began to be written down and recorded. In this society, history was only available through the oral tradition known as Shruti. In fact, there existed and even exist today social groups whose mission is to preserve family trees through folklore. As with other types of knowledge, historical accounts were passed down through the ages via Baatposhi (storytelling). The study of folk literature is like discovering a treasure trove for historians. Many factors may have contributed to a historical occurrence. The story of what happened can be found just about anywhere. Since many hitherto unexamined facets of life are compiled by collecting facts from folk literature alone, the motivations behind it need

to be brought out more. A great deal of cultural advancement can be traced back to the dissemination of folk literature. Folk literature is the only way we know about many previously unknown but crucial events in history.

As a result of differences in geography, climate, and availability of resources, human civilization has developed at different rates in different parts of the world. Despite the vast variety within human society, folk literature has always played a significant role. How to choose a name for a newborn, how to teach a child, what standards should be set for offspring, and other parenting. Among these norms and customs, the rituals surrounding the disposal of a deceased person are universal. It is the unique experiences of each culture's ancestors that give that culture its own character. Knowing the literature of a culture is the first step towards understanding its past because it provides access to previously inaccessible information. Looking back at the ancient kingdoms, we find that there were writers employed by the royal courts who specialised in writing about the king. Their biases could be more systemic, they thought. However, folklore and folk music ensure that history's unsung heroes will never be forgotten. Folk literature has been the only source for learning about many crucial historical events, heroes, etc. Traditional literature is analogous to the ocean. One such ocean is that of folk literature, at its depths lying an unwritten

history like a treasure trove of irreplaceable artefacts. This collection of folk tales is a priceless artefact. When properly mined, folk literature can shed light on many previously unknown facets of human history.

Conclusion

Since both folk literature and history are intrinsic to a people's cultural identity, they naturally mirror one another. Traditional literature has ancient origins in human culture. It is true that the history of each and every civilization is unique. Folklore was one of the ways that history was preserved for a long time. The primary purpose of folk literature, however, is not merely amusement, but the maintenance of cultural norms and customs. Folk literature's inherent simplicity has made it successful at keeping history fresh in people's minds and hearts. Through its stories, songs, dramas, drawings, and traditions, folk literature has simplified the region's complex history, making it more accessible and memorable. It takes a lot of work and learning to be familiar with and remember historical facts, but folklore makes this information accessible to people of all educational backgrounds. If it weren't for folk literature, history might still be locked away in stacks of books in libraries, inaccessible to all but the most scholarly among us. As a result, folk literature plays a crucial part in ensuring the continuity of past events.

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