



Exploring Indian folk music: A focus on the traditions of Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

Folk Music in India represents a profound connection between culture, tradition, and community identity, reflecting the diverse socio-cultural heritage of the nation. This study explores the rich tapestry of Indian folk music with a specific focus on the traditions of Uttar Pradesh. The research delves into the historical roots, stylistic variations, and cultural significance of folk music practices across the region, including prominent forms such as Kajri, Birha, Rasiya, Sohar, and Alha. Special emphasis is placed on the role of folk music in local festivals, rituals, and storytelling, highlighting its contribution to preserving oral traditions and fostering community cohesion. By analysing the interplay of music, performance, and regional identity, the study provides insights into how folk music continues to evolve while retaining its cultural essence in contemporary settings. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of Uttar Pradesh's folk music traditions and their enduring significance in India's cultural landscape.

Key Words: Uttar Pradesh, folk music, folk culture, Kajri, cultural heritage

Introduction

Uttar Pradesh, a state celebrated for its rich cultural legacy, presents a captivating blend of traditions and artistic expressions. Among its most treasured cultural facets is its folk music—a vibrant and living symphony that resonates with the region's history, spirituality, and everyday life. This article takes a closer look at the diverse genres of folk music in Uttar Pradesh, examining their historical origins, cultural importance, and timeless appeal in the modern era. (Tiwari, 1991) [6]

Situated in northern India, Uttar Pradesh is a thriving tapestry of cultures, traditions, and artistic heritage. Within this mosaic, the folk music of the state shines as a powerful symbol of its deep-rooted legacy. This article explores the fascinating and multifaceted world of Uttar Pradesh's folk music, shedding light on its various forms, historical background, cultural significance, and its continued relevance in contemporary society. The history of folk music in Uttar Pradesh is as ancient as its civilization, with origins deeply rooted in age-old traditions. Over millennia, the region's music has undergone significant evolution, shaped by diverse demographic influences and cultural interactions, including those from the Vedic period, the Mughal era, and British colonial rule. The harmonious blend of Hindu and Islamic traditions has further enriched this musical heritage, giving rise to a unique soundscape that reflects the spiritual, emotional, and social essence of its people. (Sinha, 1981) [5]

Under these categories, Indian folk music has been classified into different types as follows- folk songs, folk instruments, folk dance.

As culture became complex, the complexity of folk music also increased. The development of Indian folk music is very ancient, that is, since the beginning, human heart has been attracted, experienced and expressed towards the beauty of nature and life. When human beings expressed these expressions in the form of their joyful expressions, vague words, the folk music sprouted in the same way, hence, our Indian music has been spreading, developing and blossoming since time immemorial. Human life is a long

saga of pain and suffering. Every day in human life, there are many pains, difficulties and obstacles. (Singh, 2016) [4] When any wave of happiness or sorrow touches the heart, the heart starts vibrating like the strings of a Veena. The feelings of the heart become expressive and become rhythmically saturated and take the form of folk songs. Songs are simple, free and sweet because they are created by the folk mind, for the people, in a peaceful and free environment, under the open sky, amidst the fields spreading far and wide, flowing waterfalls, lush groves and growing flowers. (Verma, 2023) [7]

Classification of Folk Songs- Folk songs are classified as follows: –

Nature related folk songs

1. Family related folk songs
2. Religious related folk songs
3. Folk songs related to various subjects
4. Nature related folk songs

Under nature related folk songs, songs based on natural seasons are sung; for example– Nabhayaka– while describing the difficulties in growing 'jeera' crop, urges the hero not to sow the 'jeera' crop. The lyrics of that song are "Yo Jeero Jeev Ko Barea Re Mat Baavo Mhara Parvya Jeera.

Jhuloon Chaloyo Reskhi Ri Baga Mein, Sawan Aaya Rambhajham Rambhajham Badu Padeghani Jhulo Baga Mein.

Kajri Folk Song: A genre of folk music, Kajli or Kajri is a type of folk music that is sung in different states on different occasions, celebrations, festivals etc. These are sung in different types of tones, rhythms and verses. Among these, there is a type of song called Kajri which is sung in the month of Saavan. This is a type of popular folk song sung in Uttar Pradesh. We can also call it a seasonal song; in the same way this song can be sung in any season. Kajri is also called Kajli.

Description of Kajri folk song

Its area is mainly the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. The area around Bhojapur is famous for Kajri. Kajri reached Banaras from Bhojapur only and was later adopted there. A very natural description of the world is found in these songs. Many songs also show the essence of Shringar Rasa. In many songs, a beautiful description of nature is found. Many styles of Kajri singing are prevalent. In some, the Mari part is especially seen. (Ranade, 1997) ^[2]

Examples of Kajri folk song are as follows–

Kaise Khelan Jaiboo, Sawanmankariya. Badriya Gheri Aayi Nandi.

The delightful monsoon, the velvety greenery that pleases the eyes, the beautiful flowers – their true picture is actually found in Kajri. In fact, if we observe, most folk songs are related to some season or festival. Kajri/Kajal expresses the new joy and enthusiasm that people feel on the arrival of the rainy season. In the month of monsoon, Banaras, Bhojapur and their neighbouring areas are filled with Kajli. Not only women, but men also sing Kajli and sing it with great enthusiasm. It is said that Kajri is named after the dark clouds of rain. According to Bharatendu, after the death of a popular king named Dadu Rai of Madhya Pradesh, the women there invented a new song, which was named 'Kajli'.

ii. Folk songs related to family - In this, the heroine is requesting her hero to come to her home from another state. The lyrics of this song are "Kesariya Balam Aavoni Padharo Mharaidese Ji." This song is based on the Mod singing style, which is the identity of Rajasthan in the world. This song is the main folk song of Rajasthan. This type of songs includes songs related to customs and relationships. Folk songs related to Dhaavamak. Under the folk songs related to Dhaavamak, religious songs are sung to please their favorite deity or to pray and worship, like

People go there to please the famous folk deity of Rajasthan. And sing. His huge temple is situated in Runicha village near Pokharan. "Rubhacha Ra Dhaniya, Ajmal Ji Ra Kanwara, Mata Menadera Lal, Raninetal Ra Ritar, Mharole O Sanoji Ramjir Ji. The central themes of *Kajri* often revolve around the divine love of Radha and Krishna, a symbol of eternal lovers widely depicted in various forms of North Indian art. Other recurring motifs include the mango tree, the Kadam tree, and the *jhoola* (swing) that is traditionally tied to these trees. The lyrics also reference the approaching monsoon clouds, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, known for its "Umad Ghumad Badal" (the gathering clouds). The *Papiha* (peacock), considered a symbol of love and an ally to women in Indian culture, is another prominent figure in *Kajri* songs.

Folk music, especially in rural areas, is primarily performed by villagers and plays an important role in shaping communication. Through music, new vocabulary is learned, and it becomes a tool for expressing emotions, thoughts, and societal values. Because it is in the vernacular, folk music resonates deeply with listeners, making it accessible to everyone, transcending barriers.

Kajri music, in particular, serves as an expressive outlet for village women, offering a platform through which they can convey feelings of love, hope, sorrow, and joy. Music, as a form of communication, has the power to influence society both socially and emotionally. It serves as a means of conveying profound feelings, ranging from peace to passion. (Singh D. 2022) ^[3] The lyrical melodies of Kajri can evoke

deep emotional responses, whether they express happiness, longing, or a sense of unity. In this way, music becomes a reflection of societal values and individual experiences, capturing a wide array of emotions.

Instruments of traditional Folk music

Musical instruments – These traditional folk songs are accompanied by the Dholak and spoon on the Dholak and some people also play the thick stick from behind the tree in between the Dholak. Harmonium, Dhangru, Manjira etc. are used as the main instruments. Some people also clap spontaneously while singing and dancing. People who do not know how to play harmonium sing bhajans only on dholak. Some people sing by playing Naal instead of dholak. On various festivals and special occasions, the programme of singing these folk songs goes on continuously for three to four hours. The sound of the vowels in folk songs is so melodious, melodious and spiritual that artificiality is not even found in them. Similarly, folk songs have their own unique features; like – pun ravabhritta, question-answer system, refrain etc. Bhajans help in memorizing the song, in the expression of the voice and in the expansion of the song. In folk music, the act of changing the rhythm and taking the refrain is very entertaining. There is a world of restrictions and singing has its own special way of reaching its climax. Folk songs reflect the eternity of folk life. The influence of the civilization and culture of the time is also reflected in folk songs (Himani Pande, 2000) ^[1]

Singing folk songs is a natural thing. By singing them, we get to know about the expansion of the culture of our country.

Features of folk songs

The features of folk songs are as follows

- Ordinary folk songs are found in only four to five notes, which can be sung easily.
- Folk songs are rhythmic.
- Many folk songs are sung in the same note.
- Simplicity is usually found in folk songs.
- Folk songs are in the folk language.
- Folk songs are not sung in a slow rhythm. This reduces the enjoyment.
- Seven pure notes, Komal, Gandhar and Komal Bhaanshad are used extensively in the notes of folk songs.
- Mostly notes of the upper part of the octave are used in folk songs. In folk songs, solo notes are not as beautiful as choruses.
- Folk songs are more rhythmic than melody.

The aim of folk songs is to provide entertainment

Folk songs make us aware of the ancient culture, civilization and thoughts of a country. Their collection brings immense benefits to society and its literature. Through these folk songs, we identify the different customs, traditions, lifestyle, festivals etc. of our country and society. Through this identification, we can also improve our present life. Through folk songs, we identify ancient history, events, trends and contemporary sentiments. By collecting folk songs, we can succeed in bringing villages closer to cities.

The following benefits or importance are derived from their collection:

- Memorable literature can be written down and kept in the head. This makes the importance of the mind of women and men visible.
- These songs are of great benefit to the present-day poets. Complete songs provide an opportunity to refine the language.
- Through folk songs, we get to know about the different customs, traditions, lifestyle, festivals etc. of our country and society.
- Through folk songs, we get to know about ancient history, events, religious sentiments and contemporary sentiments.
- Through folk songs, we get to know about the sacred bond of affection between brothers and sisters, love and affection of parents, loving relationship between husband and wife, harmony in families, problems of domestic life etc.
- Through the collection of folk songs, we get an opportunity to strengthen our literature.
- Through the collection of folk songs, we succeed in bringing villages and cities closer.
- In the end it will be appropriate to say that folk songs are neither new nor old. They are like the trees of the forest whose roots have been laid in the past, but new branches, new leaves, new fruits and new flowers are born in it by its own natural process.

Music serves as a powerful channel of communication, offering a means for individuals to express their innermost emotions. It provides a unique avenue through which complex ideas and sentiments can be conveyed, often in subtle and nuanced ways, particularly by women. Through music, intricate emotional expressions and profound meanings can be communicated swiftly and effectively between individuals. Music is not only what we create for ourselves but also what we share with and for others. Its open and universal qualities make it a vital form of human connection, offering essential support in fostering cooperation and understanding within communities.

Conclusion

Music has always served as both a form of entertainment and a fundamental means of human expression, enabling individuals to communicate emotions, sentiments, and various aspects of life and their surroundings. It evolves alongside culture, regional traditions, and generations, adapting to different contexts such as celebrations, rituals, seasons, and communal events. Folk music, in particular, holds a significant place as a cultural heritage, reflecting the identity and ethos of a community.

The growth and evolution of music are closely tied to the advancement of human civilization. Some folk songs gained widespread popularity due to their intrinsic cultural value, their connection to social activities, and the beauty of their simple yet profound melodies. These qualities have attracted both audiences and classical musicians alike, leading to the incorporation of certain folk tunes into classical frameworks. This process of musical evolution allowed traditional folk songs, particularly *Kajri*, to secure a prominent position within the repertoire of semi-classical music. Over time, *Kajri* transcended regional boundaries to be performed at national and international platforms, showcasing its universal appeal and cultural significance.

Through this study, it has become evident that folk music and its associated cultural traditions require further exploration and promotion to ensure their preservation as invaluable components of our cultural heritage.

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