



Impacts of Folk Music in the Rural Life of India

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Abstract

Folk music has forever been an integral aspect of rural India and has been imbued into its social, cultural and economic structures. This research article is intended as an overview of the multidimensional role that folk music takes in defining the lives of rural people. Songs and the instruments used are just not for the sake of entertainment, but they communicate values, express culture and they document a decent spiritual life and are even a form of social reforms. Using field observation, literary analysis, the study shows how folk music continues to correlate and exist with modernity. The study raises a number of disturbing issues for folk traditions and suggests how they can be preserved and even rejuvenated in Modern India.

Keywords: Folk music, rural development, modernity, tradition, culture, social life, oral history, livelihood a community identity, music preservation

Introduction

In the villages of India, folk music embodies far more than entertainment, it is a way of life. It is sung at harvests, hummed softly when comforting children to sleep and chanted in celebrations and yet, sorrowful moments, such as weddings and funerals. Also, it reflects the everyday emotions and beliefs of the people and preserves the traditions that link generations together and communities. Folk songs are oral traditions, effectively storehouses of local history and through performance these songs bind the memories of generations together, ultimately serving as sources of social cohesion. The villages of India have many forms of folk music like Bihu in Assam, Baul in Bengal, Lavani in Maharashtra and Naatupura Paatu in Tamil Nadu etc. are being sung while doing work of household. Also, folk songs communicate temporal rhythms such as the seasons of the year, registration of spiritual independence and even protest music as is the case for the Bhim Geet in dalit communities. Folk music was and often still is, a means of education especially in areas with low literacy rates. Folk music communicates values, responsible farming practices and myths. It offers emotional support as well as a shared cultural identity.

However, modernization, including migration and digital media are threatening the lives of folk music. Many folk singers are struggling to pass on their craft to a younger generation as youth are disengaging from these musical traditions and contemporary modern songs are replacing local oral songs. This research will explore how folk music today exists in the rural social domain, the challenges folk music is facing and the possible preservation in today's world.

Objectives of The Study

- To investigate the importance of folk music in the daily lives of rural communities in the diverse geographic areas of India.
- To recognize the cultural, emotional, social, and economic meanings of folk music in rural communities.
- To explore how folk music connects community identity, oral traditions, and communication from one generation to another.

- To identify barriers of modernization, migration, and media which hinder the preservation of folk music traditions.

To think of ways to sustain folk music in environmentally changing times so it may continue with future generations.

Methodology

This article is intended to follow a qualitative design and takes a constructive approach to understand the cultural significance of the various manifestations of folk music in rural India. Through the array of various sources, the idea is to obtain a holistic view of the lived experiences of folk music culturally.

Field Visits

Fieldwork was undertaken in selected villages across three states that are culturally rich, mainly Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and West Bengal; each with their own folk traditions.

Interviews

Informal conversations which refer to a relaxed, natural and easy exchange of dialogues were conducted with a range of individuals like:

- Older singers and oral storytellers who are keepers of traditional songs.
- Women who are engaged in household singing and involved in singing various ritual based folk songs.
- Local teachers who frequently introduce folk music in the classroom.
- Traditional musicians who are performing in public or at community events.
- Youth who are developing different attitudes towards folk traditions.

Observations

The primary method of observation was through active participation. To capture the natural occurrence and essence of music in everyday village life the following festivals, rituals and special occasions were witnessed:

- **Festivals:** Holi, Diwali and festivals related to local harvests.

- **Weddings:** Observing pre-wedding rituals and marriage processions.
- **Agriculture:** Sowing and harvesting where work songs were a frequent occurrence.

These moments demonstrated how music enhances emotional connection, marks social occasions and develops community participation.

Review of Literature

A comprehensive study and review of the literature was completed to better understand the academic context of folk music in India. This review included:

- Books and journal articles related to ethnomusicology, rural sociology and cultural anthropology.
- Government and NGO reports related to the preservation and promotion of folk music traditions.
- Digital archives and documentation from cultural institutions like Sangeet Natak Academy (SNA) and IGNCA.

Audio-Video Documentation and Field Notes

Audio and video recordings of folk songs and performances were taken wherever possible. The recordings made it possible to perform thematic analysis as well as compare the songs to one another. Field notes were also maintained that captured the observations, song lyrics, participant quotes and reflections.

Data Analysis

All qualitative data including interview transcripts, field notes and recordings were thoroughly analyzed using thematic coding. Folk music is crucial for the preservation of India's rich cultural heritage. It brings people together, strengthens social bonds and draws a broader cultural landscape. The role of women is utmost important in preserving the oral traditions of folk music and transmitting it to future generation resulting cultural continuity.

Literature Review

The cultural significance of Indian folk music has always been acknowledged by a wide range of scholars. In a seminal article Ashok Ranade (1990) ^[1] discusses how Indian folk music retains collective memory and indicates the events of life in terms of birth, marriage, and the harvest.

Kapila Vatsyayan (1992) ^[2] discusses the use of folk songs as an informal means for learning in oral societies.

Dr S.A.K. Durga (1988) ^[3] explores how spirituality and folk music are united in tribal and rural customs. She points out that sounds and rhythms are capable of representing meanings that go beyond verbal expression. Folk music often encapsulates both cultural significance and context, thus providing us insight into the values and beliefs of the communities in question.

Noted anthropologists and music scholars such as Bruno Nettl and John Blacking maintain that music is best studied in its local social context and culture, as opposed to a universal concept of art. For this reason, we need to understand Indian folk music as behavior embedded in the context of daily village life.

More recently, the issue of commercialization has been brought to the fore. Anna Morcom raised concerns regarding folk music when she focused on the potential threat presented by the commercialization of music when it is removed from its

social context for the purposes of tourism or the media. Reclassifying such practices as 'professional' performances makes it impossible to claim a sense of 'folkness.' Performance can become a catalogued moment with no continuity.

Most studies conducted about Indian folk music appear to either be type-based cultural studies or specific theoretical analysis. Only a handful have sought to understand music in our daily life within rural Indian communities. This study intends to fill these important gaps using field-notes, semi-structured interviews with community members, and participation in community-led events to understand and think about the continuous relevance of folk music within the lives of individuals and their communities today.

The Social Function of Folk Music

In rural India, music is part of life, not solely formal performance. Music in life includes song for:

- **Birth and Childhood:** Lullabies and naming ceremony songs.
- **Marriage:** Songs representing joy, grief and advice for brides.
- **Agriculture:** Rhythm songs sung while sowing, ploughing and harvesting.
- **Festivals:** each festival has its unique musical traditions.
- **Religion and devotion:** bhajans and kirtans sung in temples and at homes.

These are social adhesives that bring people together. They provide a shared platform for expressing human emotions and safe space for women where she can express herself, illustrate moral lessons without preaching. It is a mark towards her identity and social belonging.

Folk Music as a mean to Transfer Knowledge

Folk music is a form of informal education for communities with low literacy. Songs help to convey historical accounts, ethical codes, agricultural practices, and even local medicinal knowledge. In Bundelkhand, for example, certain ballads speak of which plants to use in cases of fever or snakebites. In this sense, folk music becomes an oral archive. Children learn songs in bandhs by listening and performing the songs and verses during community gatherings. Such participatory learning aids in the transferring of language, dialects and community identity.

Folk Music as a Source of Livelihood

For many traditional artists, music is their livelihood, not simply a hobby. Musicians receive invitations to perform at weddings, fairs, religious events and harvest festivals. In places like Rajasthan, the Manganiyars and the Langas are hereditary musicians and earn a living via music by singing. However, the income is often seasonal and sporadic. Over the last twenty-five years, many non-government organizations and cultural organizations have recognized the plight of folk artists and began initiatives to support artists through festivals and recordings. But once in the commercial arts, it seems any old context or authenticity is lost in new renditions.

threats to folk and folk music in rural society

Despite its worth, folk music in villages can also encounter challenges. There are several challenges to folk music:

- **Urbanization and Migration:** Young adults leaving for the city often are not connected to their native traditions anymore.

- **Recording:** Most songs are passed orally to others and if not documented, they may be lost forever.
- **Mass Media:** Television and the internet have brought Bollywood and pop music to even the most remote village, losing interest in folk forms even when they exist.
- **Economic Burdens:** Many folk performers give up music for day jobs to pay for their basic needs.
- **Gender Limitations:** Women's opportunities for public songs or performance are often severely restricted, as are female musical traditions.

New Initiatives and Resurrections

The efforts currently being made to recreate an interest in folk traditions are few:

- Folk music is being presented in school programs in some states. E.g. SPIC MACAY programs.
- Folk music is also promoted in cultural programs, such as Rajasthan's "Lok Utsav" and other festivals, like "Rangilo Rajasthan", that embrace traditional music.
- NGOs, such as Dastkar and Sangeet Natak Academy have provided money and facilities to village artists.
- Digital archiving and YouTube channels are aiding documentation of songs that have been long forgotten.

There is still an urgent need for initiatives that will take place at the grassroots level where villagers are involved in the preservation process.

Recommendations and Future Directions

- **Community Archives:** Organizations such as local schools and panchayats can record and catalogue or archive folk songs.
- **Workshops and Music Circles:** We can engage the community through musical circles and workshops of varying durations and instill participation of youth.
- **Government Schemes:** There can be dedicated funds for rural artists with pensions and a health plan.
- **Collaboration:** Musicians, researchers and villagers can cooperate to form multilingual folk music libraries.
- **Inclusive Programs:** to increase the participation of women in musical leadership and to pass on songs to younger generations, the encourage the role of women in this historically sexist practice of women singers and leaders.

Conclusion

In rural India, folk music is not only a means of traditional expression, it is part of the lived experience of everyday life. It expresses feelings, advocates value, captures history and cultivates community. Folk music is sung while harvesting in the fields, at community festivals, or during spiritual rituals. Songs like this thread across the social life and cultural practice in village life. It has been shown in the study that folk music is used as a tool for emotional expression, oral education, spiritual engagement and community identity. The study results showed that folk music plays an important role for women and typically marginalized and disadvantaged community members to continue to express themselves through realms where other modes and platforms are absent. Nevertheless, modernization, migration and mass media

conspire to make folk music and tradition an endangered culture. Young people have also shown a tremendous disinterest and disengagement with their own regional folk music and soon after the older generations are gone the unwritten knowledge that they held will be gone with them forever.

However, hope remains, and with community initiatives, school-based programs, outreach communities and digital tools, culture is being recorded in new ways and folk traditions are experiencing a rebirth. But for that to be meaningful, preservation and revival must come from within community, it must be valued as heritage, and shared and celebrated with ancestors, in community pride.

Ultimately, folk music is not simply melodies and emotion but memories, identity and sense of belonging. The sharing of folk traditions and culture is crucial to the cultural and memory- heritage of the community, but also for the emotional and social life of rural India.

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