

A BRIEF ANALYSIS ABOUT FOLKLORE CULTURE OF KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

Folklores, as the word suggests, are lore of the folks or stories of the people. These myths are traditional, ancient, and have a moral aspect to them. These stories are told by natives of a culture who would narrate them spontaneously as if they came directly from the heart. They have strong and loud messages for the people. They come from a place of experience into existence purely intending to assimilate values, wisdom, and culture, especially for the next generation. Besides stories, cultures all over the world have composed poems and ballads, all culminating in contributing to the history of the native people. Folklores offer a glimpse back in time, unveiling the history, lifestyles, and traditions of the ancestors of that setting. Nearly every cultural practice that is imbibed in a particular society has classical roots that can be credited to stories, songs, and poems. Be it to induce fear and morality in children or to keep the criminals of a village in check or even to synergize a harmonious society. Folklores were narrated, some based on real-life instances and some based on myths. South India is no stranger to this traditional conception. Growing up in South India meant hearing stories about 'goggayya', a night wanderer whose face was masked from the world. He had a famed reputation as someone who kidnaped children who refused to sleep on time and took them somewhere far away from their parents and grandparents. I always imagined this man as the Indian version of The Babadook. Karnataka has a rich folklore repository, such as ballads, riddles, legends, stories, proverbs, dance forms, customs, cuisines, festivals, sports, and medicinal remedies. *Janapada Loka* is another such museum that encourages folklore culture by showcasing artifacts and antiques. The artefacts include agricultural hunting and fishing implements, weapons, household gadgets, masks, dolls, and shadow puppets. This museum also gives guests a taste of traditional food and a glimpse into the rural culture. As a means of entertainment, reconstruction of regional history, and rediscovery of lost words in a language and knowledge of traditional cuisine, sports, medicine, and sciences, folklore has contributed passionately to the formation of today's Karnataka.

KEYWORDS-FOLKLORE, JANAPADA, KARADIKUNITA, KOLATA, MALE MAHADEVA. RANGOLI, SUGGIHADU. YAKSHAGANA, BAYALATA.

INTRODUCTION

We humans have an innate tendency to **fabricate stories, poetry,** and art and acquaint them on to another person who then would pass them on to the next generation, and so on. This idea of unfolding art and revamping it over time to recount it to people has contrived our society since before humans learned to articulate language. This formed the folklore culture. Early Indigenous people, as early as 44,000 years ago, spoke stories through cave art. Archeologists have discovered a cave wall in Indonesia that depicts the earliest story known to humankind. A red pigment on the cave wall shows supernatural beings hunting wild animals and humans with animal heads.



A human figure with an animal head in a cave. Credits: www.independent.co.uk

Stories are societal staples that explain our existence on this planet. There are stories that have descended solely by word of mouth for centuries before they were committed to paper. These are folklores. The word folk has an amass of connotations. While in some cultures it is implied to be traditional and rural, or native, and in others, it often means outpourings of the heart. The Folklore culture includes stories, poems, ballads, and any other form of prose that are narrated (not words that were transcribed while composing) characterizing the folks (or people) inhabiting a particular culture.

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Folklore Culture in Karnataka



A depiction of art.

Folk-Theatre



Yakshagana being performed. Credits: indiaartreview.com.

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Today, many of these folklores have been defined on paper as ‘Janapada’ or words of the people. Musicians have composed tunes for the ballads, artists have curated theatre performances called *Yakshagana* – incorporating dance, music, dialogue, costume, make-up, and stage techniques with a unique style and form. This is how culture in Karnataka has prevailed for over two millennia. *Yakshagana* literally means dance of the Demi-gods. Apart from Yakshagana, Karnataka is famous for its *gombe atta*, which is puppetry. Puppetry is a major aspect of theatre that is still practiced in some parts of the state, and performances are usually seen during festivals.

Folk-Dance



A folk dance being performed by a group of dancers.

Yakshagana is an art form that combines art, theatre and dance. However, dance, by itself, is a distinct form of folklore. In folk dances, Karnataka has dance variants like *Karadi kunita*, *Kamsale*, *Kolata*, *Veeragaase*, *Nandidwaja kunita*, etc. Among these, *Kolata*, which means playing with

sticks, is a form of folk dance that is prevalent, not only in Karnataka but also other South Indian states like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Kolatta is usually performed in folk-festivals to a relevant folk song, where performers are clad in casual wear – like white kurtas and pyjamas with a coloured cloth wrapped around the waist. During festivals like *Kannada Rajyotsava* (also known as the day Karnataka was formed), this dance can be seen in almost every cultural performance.

Folk-Art



Rangoli being drawn at a folk festival.

Folk art is uncommonly spoken about, but designers use the art that was created by the native folk inadvertently today. However, we cannot give due credit to these creators because the source is unknown. Art that emerged then, is suspected to be the work of women who drew *Rangoli* in front of their houses. *Rangoli* is a traditional Indian decoration and patterns that were made using ground rice initially, but today, people draw Rangoli using colours too. They are typically drawn at the doorstep or sometimes, during festivals, inside the house as well.

Folktales

People formulated stories mainly for children. To shape a child into a righteous, valued adult. Stories were also narrated to teach morality and values, and finally, to instigate emotions in them to make them compassionate and empathetic humans. Education was sporadic during that age and nearly obsolete in rural areas. Naturally, soft skills and moral principles were esteemed more than formal education. This led to the making of new storytellers, those inspired by real-life incidents and those who cherished the stories they had heard a lifetime ago.

These stories had some popular protagonists, like grandmothers and characters from fables. Some stories that are re-told in the Southern Part of India correspond with stories told in other parts of the country. If there is one popular story that every child is familiar with in Karnataka, it is the folktale of '*punyakoti*'. *Punya* means merit accrued due to good deeds, and *koti* means a crore. This story was told over 3000 years ago.

The story revolves around an honest cow called '*Punyakoti*', who gets predated by a starving tiger while she is grazing on a patch of land. The cow then pleads with the tiger to let her go home to feed her calf and say goodbye to her calf and other cow friends. After convincing him and promising to come back, the tiger reluctantly lets her go. She runs home to feed her calf and tells everyone about the promise she has made to the tiger and calmly explains that she has to go back. Her friends cry and plead with her to stay and she does not have to sacrifice herself.

Her calf hugs her tightly and says, "Amma, how can I live without you here? You gave me a life. It is not fair that you have to sacrifice yourself." *Punyakoti* nuzzles her face and licks her calf affectionately and teaches her that a promise is a promise, and no matter what happens in your life. Backing out of a promise and leading a dishonest life is sinful. She then begins to depart and asks her other friends to take care of her child and to never make her feel like she is motherless.

Meanwhile, the tiger, feeling foolish about letting his meal go, wonders why an animal, free from captivity, would come back just to be eaten. He growls for a while, feeling frustrated and miserable. Just as he was about to leave, *Punyakoti* approached him and says, "I have come back for you *Huli Raya* (Sir, Tiger). You can eat me now and satisfy your hunger. As you can see, I have kept my promise to you." The integrity and righteousness the cow showed baffled the tiger.

He feels guilty and moved by the incident, and wonders how he can prey on her now. Sensing a transformation within him, he tells the cow to go home to her calf and to never come back to the forest. Punyakoti, now that she's free, runs home to her calf, only to stay with her for the rest of her life.

This version of the story is told to the children. However, in other versions, the tiger jumps off a cliff to meet his death after experiencing the notion of purity for himself.

Folk Music

Apart from artists bringing cultural tales to life, poems and ballads have been concerted into tunes and melodies. Singers from South India have performed these '*bhaavageetegalu*' which literally means emotional poetry or hymns. Otherwise, they are commonly considered music from the folk's soul. Music that was composed was momentary magic, usually about a person, a loved one, or an incident from the composer's life. Words about beauty or words of the wonder that the world so proudly exhibits,

Maybe a tribute to the divine. Or simply an outpour of words that made sense of themselves just as they flowed out of the artist's mouth. These poets weaved words without knowing the rules of thumb or grammatical structure and even the rhyme scheme was a tool rarely used.

Here is an example: A stanza from the poem, **Mallige Hoovagi**, (roughly translated: Blooming Jasmine) recently tuned by artist and composer **C. Ashwath** is a devotional folk song written for **Lord Mandappa**, which is another name for the Hindu deity **Lord Shiva**. Roughly translated here, the devotees express their admiration for their god.

Madappa plays with the jasmine flowers, which are scattered beautifully just for him. When Madappa arrives, his surroundings emit a sweet fragrance. Garike (a pious type of grass used for worship) springs up everywhere. In the east, mother nature showers lands with rain and prosperity.

On a sturdy stone, he makes a glorious tiger sit. Madappa sits on the tiger and tightens its reins. He reigns supreme. Even though it's dusk, I will come to your temple. O Lord, please keep your temple doors adorned with gems open.

The people who composed these were uneducated, domestic workers. They did not experience the glamour that is considered city life. Their occupations ranged from being agriculturalists to second sector workers at the best. They had little to no exposure to the English language or mainstream media. Their lives entirely revolved around Kannada, and besides the little best Kannada entertainment, such as plays or cinema carts that arrived in villages once a year, their furlough from their tedious labor was constructing folk entertainment.

Folk Fairs & Celebration of the Folklore Culture



Bangalore folk buy groundnuts at the fair.

Karnataka celebrates several folk fairs every year with a lot of verve, like the **Kadalekaayi Parishe**, and **kadalekaayi** literally means groundnuts. It is a two-day fair held in the state – capital, Bangalore, every year to sell groundnuts, mainly, but also accessories such as bangles and other trinkets usually brought in from smaller towns, traditional toys and henna stalls. **Karaga, Annamma, Maramma, Male Madeshwara, Harohara, Junjappa** are other such fairs that are hosted every year in different parts of the state. These traditions date back to over 500 years.

The folklore tradition, today, also has a large audience. Every season, there is an extravaganza that is celebrated in different parts of the state. Maybe folk dances and a folk-songs concert. Or a performance. However, folklore is not restricted to just entertainment. Although now, this method has fewer users, especially among those living in cities. During one era, folk- medicine was the only means of treatment that was used. **Naati Aushadhi** is a medicine that is used in the rural areas for various ailments for both human beings and domesticated animals.

Conclusion



Items being sold at the Kadlekaayi Parishe.

The folklore culture became a rampant tradition that began in villages as a pass-time and eventually spread to other parts of Karnataka, even the prospering cities. Each culture has its own version of folklore and folk history. India alone has over an uncountable number of cultures and communities, and folklores are a single cultural means that brings every society, irrespective of caste and religion, together, united. Similar values were taught to children across the country using the same story that was translated into the native one.

In Karnataka, there are people working and pouring their hard-earned money to contribute to the preservation of this folk culture in this fast-moving world. Artists and scholars aid in building and promoting cultural and research centres for the same. Indian colleges, too, offer full-fledged courses in folk studies. The government of Karnataka established the Karnataka Janapada and Yakshagana Academy in 1980. In 2008, a separate academy for Yakshagana was opened, and the Janapada Academy was solely dedicated to promoting folklore activities. Organizing folk festivals, symposiums, training school and college children in reciting folk songs. Publishing books related to folk studies are some of the activities the academy promotes.

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