

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



Impact Factor 6.4

Vol. 11 Issue 3 June 2025

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

www.expressionjournal.com

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 6.4)

www.expressionjournal.com ISSN: 2395-4132



Voices of Women from Hills: A Study of Folk Literature of Uttarakhand

Saumitra Sahai

**Research Scholar, Department of English
Gurukula Kangri (Deemed to be University)
Haridwar**

Abstract

Folk literature includes oral traditions, myths, and many other cultural elements passed from generation to generation orally within a community. It is preserved by rural and indigenous people who are usually uneducated. It is performed in group not individually. It highlights the hidden importance of culture of a community. It plays a vital role in teaching ethical values and keeping aboriginal culture intact. Folklores are usually there in local dialect. Folk literature of Uttarakhand highlights the struggle of women against patriarchal society. Their contribution is always undervalued. The folk literature gives insights into folk songs (Nyoli, Chancheri, Chapeli and Bhagnol), nature worship, deification of women. Folk literature of Uttarakhand provides a base for the voice of women highlighting their struggle, resilience and strength. This paper highlights ecofeminism as well through the forgotten struggle of Gauri Devi and Tilu Rauteliin Uttarakhand. This paper also attempts to explore societal expectations of patriarchy from women and its effect in their lives.

Keywords

Folk Literature, Folk Songs, Folklores, Ecofeminism, Chipko Movement.

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 6.4)

www.expressionjournal.com ISSN: 2395-4132



Voices of Women from Hills: A Study of Folk Literature of Uttarakhand

Saumitra Sahai

**Research Scholar, Department of English
Gurukula Kangri (Deemed to be University)
Haridwar**



Introduction

The term *folk* refers to a group of people who share common characteristics and culture which they transmit orally. Alan Dundes broadens the traditional view of the term *folk*, stating that “a folk or peasant society is but one example of a ‘folk’ in the folkloristic sense. Any group of people sharing a common linking factor, e.g., an urban group such as a labor union, can and does have folklore. ‘Folk’ is a flexible concept which can refer to a nation as in American folklore or to a single family” (“Alan Dundes”).

The landscape of Uttarakhand is an exuberant entwining of language, art, craft and various folklores. The region of Uttarakhand is divided into Kumaon (Almoda, Bageshwar, Champawat, Nainital, Pithoragarh and Udham Singh Nagar) and Garhwal (Chamoli, Dehradun, Haridwar, Pauri Garhwal, Rudraprayag, Tehri Garhwal and Uttarkashi.). It was separated from UP in 2000. Its myths, proverbs, and oral traditions make it a unique and rich cultural heritage. Folklores such as Jagar, Mangal, Chhopati and Nyoli and many others reveal spiritual beliefs and their way of living. The festivals of Uttarakhand reveal that the people have deep connect with nature and agriculture. Art forms Aipan (Kumaoni rangoli) add beauty to this state. Women play an important role in protecting culture. They often display their ecstasy, pain and misery through folk performance. According to Dr. Mohan Babulkar, Garhwali folk songs are “traditionally ballad in nature and not of written form ... created by women ... [and] communicate the struggle or lacking something in life but don’t mark or count the lacking in life” (Babulkar 11). It can be seen in Chipko Movement which was led by Gauri Devi. The folklores embody faith and their deep rooted connection with nature. It is passed from generation to generation orally.

Spiritual beliefs form the foundation of folklores. Tales of god, goddess, evil spirits and local deities like Nanda Devi and Golu Devta reveal providential power. The representation of women in folklores is heterogeneous. They are interpreted as symbol of strength, courage and providence. The folk tradition gives voice to the voiceless women who are subaltern. Their contribution to the society is always undervalued. The reflection of women folk literature gives light on gender inequality due to societal expectations and desire. Postcolonial feminism

Vol. 11 Issue 3 (June 2025)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh

identifies the norms imposed on culture from the outside. It describes how they are molded into hilly areas due to patriarchy, indigenous culture and socio-economic disparity. It questions the concern of unpaid and underpaid labour due to male migration from village to the city for better income. Postcolonial feminism aims to decolonize feminist thought and aims to listen the voice of women from their lived experience through folklores of Uttarakhand. Colonial Gaze has not been successful in getting the knowledge of community and their resistance embedded in folklores.

Struggle against Patriarchal Norms

Patriarchy is a situation where everything is controlled by men. Women are considered inferior to men as they are complaisant and subservient. Men usually take decisions and women obey. Sometimes, women are less paid for their work. Generally, folktales of Uttarakhand depict women who fly in the face of patriarchal norms. They fight against injustice. Jaggar is a famous folk performance which narrates the bravery of women. It is a performance that honours warriors. In this performance, the role of women is attached to protection of their land and natural resources. Tilu Rauteli can be taken as an example who was a Garhwali Rajput warrior and participated in 7 battles. Her participation in seven battles clearly shows courage in male dominated society. She started fighting battles at the tender age of 15 and got martyred at 22. The bravery of Tilu Rauteli can be linked with Jaagar.

Chanchari songs are sung during Phool Dei and Harella. It depicts women as central to bravery of hilly areas. They are shown as important assets in protecting their communities and natural resources. In Chipko Movement, women like Gauri Devi participated for the protection of forests. This song can be linked with ecofeminism. "The philosophical neglect of second sex is related I think to another to another feature (or nonfeature as the case may be) of the critical reception of Beauvoir by any number of feminists and other readers- namely its tone which despite universal acknowledgement of Beauvoir's leading role in provoking the world to confront the scandal of systematic sexism is very often one of condescension even among her most ardent admirers" (Bauer 11).

In folk literature, women are guardian, custodian and last resort for culture. Folk literatures of Uttarakhand reflect female protagonists like mothers, sisters wives and daughters who embody valour resilience, courage and strength. Tilu Rauteli is known for her bravery and martyrdom at a very young age.

Nyoli: It is a song sung by women who miss their husbands. Their husbands have to leave hilly areas to earn money. Males have to migrate out of poverty. There is no opportunity in hilly areas to earn money.

Mangal: It is sung during auspicious occasions like marriage, child birth and housewarming. Females are central in this song. They often express their concern sarcastically on the pressure of patriarchy and dowry.

Chhopati: It is dialogue based folk singing. It is sung during auspicious occasion. It challenges gender hierarchy. It attempts to break stereotypes where women are shown submissive.

Jaagar: It is a spiritual folk song which exposed the paradox how women are shown as divine and powerful in mythology and how they are actually treated and trained to be submissive and demure since their childhood.

Ecofeminism attempts to explore how women and nature are exploited by patriarchal expectations. Women have close relationship with natural environments as they act as guardian and custodian of the forests. Gauri Devi had ecofeminist ideology through her lived experience. To her and every women, forest was super most which helped to get natural

resource. Their prudential action in response to the cutting of forest shows that women were tied to nature.

Naturopathy Treatment in Hilly Areas

Yoga and naturopathy hospitals are healthcare institutions rooted in India's traditional system of medicine, with an emphasis on holistic, non-invasive, and drug therapies. These hospitals are recognized under Ayush systems of healthcare (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) and operate under the regulatory oversight of the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India. (Tewani and Bansal 1)

Naturopathy treatment is an approach to heal people through natural resource. It attempts to eradicate illness rather than preventing or treating. It combines old traditional healing practices with advanced scientific methods as well. Folklores reveal how Tulsi, Giloy and many other resources help in curing the health. Pure air of mountain helps in keeping the body fit. In this way, it can be said that the natural resources are naturopathic in essence. Majority of population in hilly areas of Uttarakhand is dependent upon naturopathy treatment. During the time of Covid pandemic, it was seen that immunity of indigenous people of hilly areas was much better. The pandemic could not affect the life of hilly areas. Naturopathy treatment was used all over the world for the treatment of Covid. In keeping naturopathy treatment intact, women played an important role. They pass on traditions from one generation to another generation.

Conclusion

Folklores contain the soul of community. Deeply rooted in oral tradition, it protects ecological landscape of Uttarakhand. It focuses on the pain, sorrow and suffering of women of Uttarakhand. Theme of migration, mournful loss, valour and unspoken voice of subaltern is highlighted in folklores. Tilu Rauteli, a teenage warrior who fought against traditional roles and societal expectations, is also highlighted in folk songs. In this way, folklore also becomes a medium of female resistance. Western feminism generalizes the condition of non western women as victim of patriarchal expectations. The story of Tilu Rauteli refutes the theory of western feminism. It shows that the women are powerful and symbol of strength. Folk literature has more significant and aesthetic value as compared to information gathered from research paper and books. Folk literature of hilly areas cannot be understood by outsiders as it is in regional language and dialect. It gives us an insight into culture which is the result of experience of past. It gives unique identity to indigenous people. "Folk literature is well accepted in Indian literature. Folk literature is the age old literature which is naturally derived from tradition" (Saxena).

Works Cited

- "Alan Dundes." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 27 July 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Dundes.
- "Gaura Devi." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, last edited 3 April 2025, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaura_Devi. Accessed 5 July 2025.
- "Tilu Rauteli." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, last edited 25 July 2024, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tilu_Rauteli. Accessed 5 July 2025.
- Awasthi, Suchitra. *Human and Nature Relationships in Kumaoni Folk Literature: A Feminist Perspective of Kumaoni Folk Songs*. 2020.
- Babulkar, Mohan. *Garhwali Lok Sahitya ka Vivechanatmak Adhyayan*. e-Magazine of Uttarakhand, 2009, <https://e-magazineofuttarakhand.blogspot.com/2009/08>.
- Bauer, Nancy. *Simone De Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism*. Columbia UP, 2001.

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 6.4)

www.expressionjournal.com ISSN: 2395-4132

- Bisht, Shersingh. *Kumaoni*. Sahitya Akademi, 2010.
- Gupta, A. *Gender and Folklore in Himalayan Culture: Narratives of Women's Agency*. *Mountain Research and Development Journal*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2019.
- Gururani, Shubhra. "Geographies That Make Resistance': Remapping the Politics of Gender and Place in Uttarakhand, India." *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2014, Article 12. <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol34/iss1/12>.
- Hajela, Sudheer Chandra. *Indian Folk Literature: Forms, Perspectives and Appropriations*. 1st ed., Yking Books, 2021.
- Joshi, M. C. *The Role of Women in Sustaining Oral Traditions in Kumaon and Garhwal*. *South Asian Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2016.
- Negi, Pallavi. "Women's Representation in Folk Literature of Uttarakhand." *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, vol. 3, no. 2, July–Dec. 2022, pp. 1050–1056, doi:10.29121/shodhkosh.v3.i2.2022.3995.
- Pant, R. *Changing Narratives: Women in Folk and Contemporary Literature of Uttarakhand*. *Indian Journal of Literature Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2021.
- Rawat, S. *Ecological Wisdom and Women in Uttarakhand Folklore: A Study of Ecofeminism*. *Environmental Humanities Journal*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2020.
- Saxena, Vikash. "Uttarakhand Folk Literature and Youth." **The Literary Mirror**, 10 Dec. 2019, <https://theliterarymirror.in/uttarakhand-folk-literature-and-youth/>.
- Sharma, P. *Voices of Resistance: Feminist Themes in Uttarakhand's Folk Songs*. *Journal of Feminist Studies in South Asia*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2018.
- Tewani, Gulab Rai, and Bhavit Bansal. *Standard Operating Procedures: A complete handbook for yoga and naturopathy hospital operations*. Blue Rose Publishers, 2025.