

Acoustic Narratives: An Analysis of Folk Music and the Discursive Construction of Regional Identity in Odisha

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the role of folk music in Odisha in discursively constructing regional identity through the use of folk music as a cultural and semiotic source of expression. It aims to know how folk traditions of acoustic storytelling express collective memory, societal values, and localised systems of knowledge and thus define a sense of belonging together. The research uses a qualitative interpretive approach that is based on the theory of cultural identity and representation, which is developed by Stuart Hall, and the notion of discourse, developed by Michel Foucault. The paper examines the negotiation of meaning through close textual analysis of the lyrics in the chosen folk songs and ethnographic analysis of performance situations within particular cultural contexts. It is a hybrid theoretical perspective that allows a critical analysis of folk music as a representational and a discursive practice. The results demonstrate that folk music in Odisha functions as an essential cultural text that encompasses historical awareness, ecological links and socio-cultural stratifications. Such songs are not only a way to maintain indigenous epistemologies, but also to create regional identity by strengthening symbols, rituals, and histories of belonging. Furthermore, the paper reveals the dynamic tension between continuity and change, especially with the folk traditions adjusting to the new media and new socio-economic realities. The paper will conclude that folk music is a living archive and a discursive place that regional identity is constructed and reimagined. It highlights the role of working with vernacular forms of expressiveness in cultural studies in order to gain more insight into the multidimensional aspects of identity construction in the regional contexts.

Keywords: Folk Music; Regional Identity; Discourse; Cultural Identity; Odisha; Representation.

Introduction

Folk music is an important expressive mode where communities are able to express their pasts, beliefs and identities. Considering Odisha, a region with a high degree of cultural diversity and tradition-based traditions, folk music seems to be a prominent way of cultural narration and

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identity constructions. The current paper, *Acoustic Narratives: An Analysis of Folk Music and the Discursive Construction of Regional Identity in Odisha* is an investigation of the role of these musical traditions not only as aesthetic forms, but as discursive practices, which constitute and reproduce regional consciousness. Folk songs tend to be performed in ritualistic, agrarian and communal contexts, and encode collective memory, ecological associations and socio-cultural ideals that help in the construction of identity (Dorson 1972; Dundes 1980). The study predicts the contribution of these songs to the meaning-making of a given cultural context by analyzing them as an acoustic narrative.

There are four major objectives guiding the study. First, it will examine folk music as a cultural text that represents and maintains the social-cultural realities of Odisha. Second, it aims to analyze how the folk songs can be discussed as discursive practices creating regional identity by using language, symbols and performance. Third, it aims to investigate the connection between folk music and collective memory and especially the role of oral traditions as a source of indigenous knowledge (Assmann 2011). Fourth, the paper explores how modernity, media and socio-economic changes affect the continuity and transformation of these traditions. All these goals can be used to place folk music in the context of the larger cultural studies and discourse analysis.

Of particular interest is the topicality of the topic to the modern world. With the globalization process and homogenization of culture, folk music and other traditional forms of expressiveness are threatened to be relegated to the periphery. Simultaneously, these forms also exhibit resilience in their ability to adapt to the new media and changing audience circumstances. Cultural identity according to Stuart Hall is not predetermined, but is continually created in the form of representation (Hall 1997). In a like manner, the concept of discourse introduced by Michel Foucault brings out the influence of systems of knowledge in social realities and identities (Foucault 1972). It is possible to consider folk music in Odisha within the context of discursive space where identity is negotiated, contested and rearticulated. The paper, therefore, makes contribution to the current discussions on cultural preservation, identity politics and intangible cultural heritage.

To scholars, this study has a great interdisciplinary potential. It reimagines folk music as an epistemic production, instead of a folkloric object, and invites scholars to consider vernacular traditions as important sources of knowledge (Bauman 1984). The combination of theoretical insights into the cultural studies, anthropology, and discourse analysis is a step to unlock the possibilities of new research on the formation of identity and the use of culture as a means of expression. Moreover, it criticizes text-based methods by prefiguring oral and performative practices as valid subjects of research. Finally, the study highlights the significance of the critical approach to folk music as a living and changing cultural phenomenon that still continues to influence the regional consciousness in the modern world.

Review of Literature

Folk music as a field of cultural studies has developed as an interdisciplinary field of study in folklore, anthropology, performance theory, and discourse analysis. Formative early literature like that of Dorson (1972) or Dundes (1980) frames folklore as a store of shared traditions and

folklore as a system of conserving cultural values and social norms. These works preempt folk expressions as community activities which pass knowledge across generations, thus creating a foundation of folk music as cultural text. Expanding on this Bauman (1984) brings in the aspect of performance and says that the verbal art, such as folk songs, should be considered in its performative context, meaning should be built dynamically as the performer interacts with the audience.

Cultural memory scholars have extended this discussion by looking at the role of oral traditions as storage of shared memory. Assmann (2011) also emphasizes the importance of cultural memory in identity formation by using symbolic forms, implying that such performative traditions as folk music help to maintain common histories and cultural continuity. This school of thought is similar to that of Connerton (1989), who suggests that bodily practices and performances are very important in recalling the past, thus strengthening communal identities. These methods are of special interest to Odisha where folk music is inherent to ritualistic and daily activities.

Cultural studies have also been useful in the theoretical contributions to understand folk music as a place of identity formation. Stuart Hall focuses on the fact that identity is not an inborn state of being but rather a process of becoming which is determined by the process of representation (Hall 1997). This knowledge is complemented by the concept of discourse by Michel Foucault; the concept places the cultural expressions in terms of power and knowledge systems that generate meaning (Foucault 1972). All of these frameworks allow the critical reading of folk music as a discursive practice which creates and negotiates regional identity.

Vatsyayan (1980), Kapila and A.K. Ramanujan (1999) are among scholars who have made significant contributions to the interpretation of folk traditions as part and parcel of cultural and literary discourse, in the Indian context. Ramanujan (1999) emphasizes plurality and contextuality of oral traditions whereas Vatsyayan (1980) emphasizes their connection to ritual, performance and life within a community. More current works, such as by Behera (2013) and Mohanty (2018), address Odishan folk traditions in particular, with a view to how Odishan folk traditions have been used to express regional identity and cultural persistence amid modernization.

Nevertheless, it is evident that the study of folk music in Odisha using a mixed approach of discourse and cultural identity is still missing. This work attempts to fill this gap by combining theoretical perspectives with the local cultural activities, and thus providing a subtle idea of the acoustic narratives as dynamic places of identity formation.

Study Objectives.

- i. To study folk music in Odisha as a cultural text, captures and maintains the socio-cultural practices and beliefs, and experiences of the local communities.
- ii. To examine the use of folk music as a discursive practice in the formation and negotiation of regional identity by language, symbolism and performance.
- iii. To understand how folk music and collective memory relate to each other, especially how it can be used to pass indigenous knowledge and cultural continuum to the next generation.

- iv. To examine how modernity, media and socio-economic changes affect the survival, adaptation, and transformation of folk music traditions in Odisha.

Research Questions

- i. What is the role of folk music in Odisha as cultural text, which reflects the socio-cultural reality of communities in the state?
- ii. How is folk music a discursive tool to construct regional identity in Odisha?
- iii. What role do folk songs play in maintaining and passing on collective memory and indigenous knowledge systems?
- iv. How does modernization and the media influence the continuity and change of folk music tradition in Odisha?

Methodology

It is a qualitative, interpretive research methodology that the study takes the position of exploring folk music in Odisha as a discursive and cultural practice that creates regional identity. The research, based on cultural studies and ethnographic research, incorporates textual analysis, performance analysis and contextual interpretation to examine the role of folk traditions in generating and distributing meaning. This method is especially appropriate in the analysis of oral and performative manifestations, in which knowledge is enshrined in action, symbolism and social relation (Geertz 1973). The theoretical construct of the research is based on the notion of cultural identity and representation by Stuart Hall and the theory of discourse by Michel Foucault. The identity can be viewed through the prism of Hall in the sense of a fluid and constructed process that is created through representational practices (Hall 1997), whereas the concept of discourse introduced by Foucault can be used to view how the systems of knowledge and power are used to create meanings in cultural texts (Foucault 1972). These frameworks in combination shape the way to understand folk music as a discursive place where identity has to be negotiated and rearticulated.

The main data of this research will be the chosen folk songs of various parts of Odisha such as ritual songs, labor songs and performances in the form of festivals. The songs are obtained through written collections, field records and secondary ethnographic reports. The use of purposive selection is made so that only the songs that explicitly demonstrate the themes of identity, community, ecology and cultural continuity are selected. Besides textual data, performance contexts, such as settings, participants, and delivery modes are also considered, as it is identified that meaning in folk traditions cannot be separated out of performance (Bauman 1984). The analytical approach is close reading of the text of the song lyrics with discourse analysis. Textual analysis dwells on the linguistic characteristics, metaphors, symbols and narrative frameworks that help in building meaning. Informed by Foucault, discourse analysis looks at the ways in which these aspects are involved in larger systems of representations and identity formation. This two-sided approach enables to perceive folk music as a cultural artifact as well as a dynamic process of signification (Fairclough 1995). Moreover, the paper also takes the elements of interpretive anthropology, especially the idea of thick description developed by Geertz (1973) as the means of placing songs into their socio-cultural and ritual contexts.

To achieve analytical rigor, the research uses triangulation whereby the textual interpretations have been cross-referenced with the pre-existing scholarly literature and ethnographic results (Denzin 1978). This increases the validity of analysis and places the research in existing academic discourse. Ethical considerations are also taken into consideration especially in the representation of indigenous and community-based traditions with sensitivity and respect to cultural contexts. On the whole, this methodological framework allows exploring folk music in a comprehensive way as an acoustic narrative which reflects the cultural memory, social values, and identity. The combination of theoretical knowledge and qualitative analysis gives a subtle but detailed perspective of how the regional identity in Odisha has been discursively formed by folk traditions.

Discussion

Encoding Memory and Everyday Life Folk Music as Cultural Text.

Odishi folk music is a cultural text that captures the experienced life, beliefs, and the environmental relationship of people. With the help of the interpretive anthropology, especially the concept of the thick description introduced by Geertz, these songs may be interpreted as multiple stories which mirror social patterns and cultural definitions (Geertz 1973). Textual analysis reveals recurring motifs of land, labor, and seasonal cycles to be central in the statement of identity.

An example of a simple agrarian folk song is:

“Dhana re dhana, mati ra mana,

Ama jeevana ei mati re gana.”

(“O paddy, soul of the soil,

Our lives are taken within this earth.)

This song captures a strong ecological awareness in which land is not just a resource but a living being in which identity is interwoven with land. The symbol of mati (soil) denotes the belonging and continuity and supports the concept of Assmann (2011) of the cultural memory of symbolic forms.

Another song also ciphers agrarian life:

barsha asila, kheta hasila,

Chasi ra swapni phulani phutila.

(The rains come, the fields smile,

The dreams of the farmer start to flower (.")

Seasonal cycles and agriculture optimism are core to this and symbolize the interdependence of human beings and nature. Such representations through discourse analysis can identify how identity is made by the use of shared ecological and cultural signifiers.

In addition, the songs also serve as archives of native knowledge systems, as they uphold agricultural activities, seasons, and shared values. Folklores as Dundes (1980) hints are the reflections of culture and they carry continuity as well as change. Folk songs, therefore, in Odisha serve as a mnemonic mechanism of preserving collective memory and, at the same time, contribute to the strengthening of regional consciousness.

The Regional Identity in Discourse through Performance.

Odishi folk music is not only cultural, but also actively builds regional identity by discursive processes within the performance. The songs can be seen through the prism of Michel Foucault and interpreted as a system of knowledge that creates and controls meanings of identity (Foucault 1972). These discourses are negotiated and acted in performance contexts, which include festivals, rituals, and communal gatherings.

Take an example of a ritual song in connection with village festivals:

“Ama gaan, ama parba,

Eithi rahichi ama garba.

(Our village, our festival,

This is our pride here, herein.)

Here, a sense of belonging to place and tradition is clearly expressed in this song. The repetition of ama (our) is a discursive marker of inclusivity, which creates a common identity between the participants. According to Stuart Hall, it is through representation that identity is created and the identity is constantly a process (Hall 1997).

The other performative song strengthens the cohesion of the group:

“Nacha gita re samaste eka,

Ama ama sanskruti thika.

(In song and dance we both are one,

We belong to our culture and that is our home.)

This song brings out the contribution by the collective within the folk performances such that identity is played through the shared artistic expression. Performance theory also implies that meaning is created as a result of performer and audience interaction (Bauman 1984). These songs become an experience that is lived by the community, and identity is consolidated by repetition and embodiment (Connerton 1989).

Negotiating Modernity: Change and Stability in Folk Traditions.

In the modern times, folk music is experiencing a drastic change in Odisha owing to modernization, the impact of media as well as socio-economic factors. Nevertheless, these traditions do not disappear, but transform and restructure themselves in new cultural systems. This process may be explained by discourse analysis as a bargaining between the tradition and modernity.

A modern variation of a folk theme can be observed in the songs that are played on online platforms:

puraana sura, nua dhara,
Ama sanskrutirhu rhu tara.
(Old music, new waters,
May our culture forever shine.)

The song is a direct result of an attempt to maintain tradition, yet welcome change. The opposition of the terms purana (old) and nua (new) means a dialogic interaction of the past and the present.

A modern manifestation of this change is:

“Mobile re suna puruna gita,
Nua pidi jane purba katha.
Through the mobile phones, the old songs play,
The education of the new generation is the education of the past.)

The case in point underlines how digital media can be used to pass folk traditions to younger generations. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse is dynamic because it changes with the varying conditions in the society and so is the cultural forms. Researchers like Behera (2013) and Mohanty (2018) note that mediation does not only change form but also makes the dissemination broader.

Nonetheless, the main aspects of identity, the community, memory, and belonging are still enshrined in these shifting stories. This echoes the concept of identity Hall (1997) shares, where identity is a process of becoming that is constantly influenced by historical and cultural factors. Therefore, folk music in Odisha illustrates the capacity to endure by balancing the contemporary pressures and still fulfilling its functions as a discursive locus of local identity.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed folk music in Odisha as an acoustic and discursive practice that is vital in creating regional identity. The study shows that folk songs are not only artistic expressions but they are dynamic meaning-making sites by examining folk songs as cultural texts and performance. The study has revealed through the cultural theory and discourse analysis how folk music codes the collective memory, ecological consciousness and socio-cultural values thus leading to the production of identity as an on-going process (Assmann 2011; Dundes 1980). Using the framework of representation proposed by Stuart Hall, the paper identifies that the identity of regions in Odisha is not predetermined but in a continuous process of creation via common narratives of cultural practices (Hall 1997). In the same vein, the idea of discourse proposed by Michel Foucault allows viewing folk music as a body of knowledge that constructs and controls the meanings of belonging (Foucault 1972). The examination of both text and performance situations in songs indicates that identity is created using repetitions

of symbols, linguistic patterns, and communal engagement, which supports a feeling of cultural continuity.

Simultaneously, the work highlights the dynamic quality of folk traditions in modernity and technological transformation. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse changes with the changing social conditions, and folk music in Odisha is no exception, as it tries to compromise between tradition and innovation. Although the new media platforms change the processes of transmission, it also creates the possibility of preservation and spreading of these traditions (Behera 2013). To sum up, folk music in Odisha serves as a living archive which perpetuates and restructures regional consciousness. It constitutes a dialogic connection between the past and the present, which will make cultural identity dynamic and relevant. This work is an addition to cultural studies, highlighting the significance of vernacular expressive forms as an epistemic production site. It also demands the further scholarly involvement with folk traditions to gain a more accurate idea of their contribution to the development of identity in an ever-globalized world.

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