

**FOLKLORE OF KASHMIR; THE REFLECTION OF GLORIOUS AND RICH CULTURAL LEGACY**

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**Abstract:**

Kashmir – land of Incredible beauty have been recognized as, "Heaven on Earth" and "Switzerland of East". It has been widely embraced for its captivating natural beauty. Kashmir is widely known as "Peer Waer" "Resh Waer" as it is Alcove of Reshies, Saints, Peers etc. This place is breathtakingly beautiful. Kashmir has been land of unparalleled knowledge base and the seat of learning that has influenced the Scholar, Intellectuals across the length and breadth and driven them to this land of ethereal beauty. As far as folklore is concerned, Folklore is the expressive body of culture shared by a particular group of people; it encompasses the traditions common to that culture, sub culture or group. These include oral traditions, such as tales, proverbs, saying, Pathers etc. However, the folklore of Kashmir is rich and varied. The Kashmiris resident of snow clad region having unique and diverse folk literature, which represents its culture and tradition in a glorious way. Through this medium we rediscover our past and the legacy of this beautiful land. The folklore of Kashmir form an important part of Kashmiri culture. It portrays social traditions, cultural ethnicity, customs and living pattern. This paper is an attempt to enumerate how Folklore reflects and rediscovers past and rich cultural legacy of Kashmir.

**Key Words:** Alcove, Cultural Legacy Encompasses, Incredible, Rediscover & Unparalleled Knowledge

**Introduction:**

The valley of Kashmir has been bestowed with incredible beauty. Its huge calm lakes, serpentine rivers, rivulets, mighty waterfalls, lush green landscapes, verdant hills, lofty snow covered Himalayan ranges. Its exquisite scenery, superb sights, combine to add to the grandeur of this god gifted paradise on earth. There is such a lyric charm about it with its softness, its gentleness, and its dream like quality that it is hard to believe that such a place exists in this mundane world. It is Nature's grand finale of beauty. Kashmir throughout the ages has remained another name for paradise. Cradled in the lap of majestic mountains of the Himalayas, the nature here gives more peace of mind and the positive energy in oneself; it makes us feel fresh to be in this masterpiece of nature. A nature lover's wonderland. Kashmir is a theme well worthy of a poet. Kashmir a land of unimaginable beauty. Its climate is one more blessing which is rich and perfect. Kashmir is multi-faceted diamond, changing its hues with the seasons-always extravagantly beautiful. Ravishing beauty of this land makes one wonderstruck. This piece of earth consists of wonderful people which appear to be the product of their environment. Kashmir has been the abode of saints, rishis, pirs, and sages. A home of deities and bounties. The people of Kashmir are fond of learning and are very much cultured and do possess hospitality at its best. Tamil nadu governor Banwarilal Purohit once quoted "Kashmir has been a spiritual clearing house, a laboratory to nourish and shape new thoughts and a place where scholars used to converse, analyse to develop the thinking process, language, logic, aesthetics, religions, philosophies, music, dance etc. He said that Kashmir was a great seat of learning and higher education in the past." Kashmir has a wonderful culture which has played an important role in earning accolades from it across the world. Kashmiris have made remarkable contributions to the arts of storytelling and mystic poetry, the shaiva philosophy, grammar, and the sciences. The artistic and cultural genius of the people of Kashmir is evident in their folk lore. Nature has left an indelible mark on the folk performances of Kashmir as they are intimately interlined with the moods and movements of the seasons. In this masterpiece of earths creation, seasons in strong individuality vie with one another in putting up exquisite patterns of charm and loveliness

**Main Body:**

Kashmir has an inexhaustible fund of folktales –the popular component of the "literature of the people" as folklore has been aptly characterized. It was the famous German philosopher John Gottfried Von Herder who used the term folklore in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The English term folklore was coined in 1846 by Thomas and it meant all those customs, tales, proverbs, sayings, riddles and art forms that were preserved orally or through practices in a community that had a history in a certain geographical terrain. In Kashmir too, the study in folklore was initiated by European scholars for their enthusiastic quest for the universals in folklore through comparative study. It may be that, by understanding Kashmiri folklore they aimed at understanding the psyche of the people and by understanding their psyche they could propagate their belief. It is interesting to note that the founder of the study was the famous missionary of the time, namely J. Hinton Knowles, the compiler of the folktales of Kashmir. When his English translation was published from London in 1887, scholars of different disciplines evinced great interest in Kashmiri folk literature and folklore. The most remarkable contribution to this field is that of Sir Auriel Stein, the author of Hatim's tales, William Crook (the author of folklore and folk religion of north India), George Abraham Grierson (grammarian, lexicographer, and translator and author of many books), Dr. Arthur Neaves and many others. All these folklorists were astounded by the diversity, plenty, and quality of Kashmiri folk literature and folklore and their studies preserved many facets of this rich cultural legacy. A commendable work has been done by the local authors also in salvaging this precious bequest from oblivion when they compiled, whatever they could get from the folk memory. Yet much needs to be done in preserving it in its pristine form for onward transmission to the progeny. All that has been done is entirely bookish in nature when we know that folklore like Proteus continuously changes its form with the inexorable flux of society. The oral tradition of Kashmiri language is highly colorful and complex in nature. It consists of various folk forms and its folk literature is the most representative form. It was from Kashmir that Somadeva collected various forms of stories with varied motifs for his universally acknowledged Kathasarit Sagar of 11th century AD. Kashmiri language has not only preserved its folk tradition but also has

enriched and modified it in every age. It represents many aspects of social change, behavior patterns, hopes, repressed wishes, creative thoughts, unconscious yearnings and collective dreams. The folk literature analyses the social drama in the geographical frame and with reference to the historical compulsions. For its beauty, diversity and complexity of interpretation. Kashmiri folk literature has received the attention of various scholars of different fields of learning. Hinton Knowles, compiler of the first anthology of Kashmiri folk tales writes, "Kashmir as a field of folk literature is perhaps not surpassed in fertility by any other country in the world." The folk literature in Kashmir mainly exists in four forms;

- ✓ Folk stories (Kath, daleel)
- ✓ Folk song (Baith, Manzilbaith, Ladishah, Rouf, Wanwun, Nyendebaith, Khaandarbaith)
- ✓ Folk drama
- ✓ Proverbs and sayings.

The folklore of Kashmir has an important place in the 'literature of the people' of India which has expressed and collective urges and experience of the folk from time immemorial. The oldest extant collection of the folk stories in the Panchtantra, which was written in the first century and Kashmiri, the major language of province, spoken by more than three million people, is an offshoot of the Indo-Aryan or Sanskrit language. It was enriched by Persian diction during Muslim rule, and later by Urdu. Its rich literature lives in its songs and ballads. Folk songs in Kashmir preserve the myths, customs, traditions and legends of by gone. These are the living monuments of Kashmiri poetic glory. Kashmiri folk songs present considerable variety of theme, content and form. They can be broadly classified into opera and dance songs, pastoral lore, romantic ballads, play songs, semi mystic songs etc. Then there are songs sung during particular seasons or in accompaniment to certain occupations, also sung are lullabies, wedding songs, dirges etc. The region has a great fund of folktales. They are as old as the hills. Many of them like 'Zohar khaton and Haya bund' 'Bumber and Lolar' and Heemal Nagraai are purely Kashmiri in origin. Wazir Mal and Lal mal are the two famous collections of fairy tales in pure Kashmiri dialect which the villagers cherish as their treasured possessions. These have been rendered into Kashmiri and Persian verse. Others whose variants constitute the large majority are the popular tales of the east and the west. Folktale of the valley is rich and is very original. People enjoy the tales and songs. The folklore of Jammu Kashmir is very interesting and enchanting. It has a rich historical significance.

Kashmir has a rich tradition of folk drama which is entertaining the people over centuries. However, interest was shown by some people in stage and literal drama. Nund Lal Koul, Tara Chand Bismil, and Ghulam Nabi Dilsoz were the first to take steps in this direction. While the story element is definitely a fascinating one in our folklore, its characterization is possessed of an intriguing nature. The folklore reveals a vividness of imagination and loveliness of conception. It also reveals the social and historical conditions, of that era in which it was being created. Religious Science and Artistic expressions became the fountain head of the (Asian and later European). Tale Treasures and the most quoted evidence to support this notion is famous Panchtantra-a collection of fables supposed to have been composed in Kashmir.<sup>1</sup> The valley of Kashmir has been a famous seat of learning (shardha peetha), besides being known as 'Paradise on Earth'. Prof Dharmendra Nath pal (1904), has been of the opinion that "the particular area in Asia which covers Kashmir and the Tibet tableau was the cradle of human race. Adelson, the Father of comparative philosophy, also, rendered Kashmir as "the cradle of humanity. In ancient times. Kashmir had, at least two big universities –one at sarda, another at chakdar (bijbehara). The first collection of Kashmiri folk tales in English was brought out by the late John Hinton Knowles towards the end of the last century. Sometimes later, a renowned scholar, the late Auriel Stein, published another collection of this kind, Hatim's tales, as this latter is called is a collection of tales in verse and prose recited in Kashmiri for the savant by one Hatim who was an oilman by profession. These two works can by no means be said to exhaust the harvest of tales garnered in the fertile minds of the people.

Tales, myths, sagas and other narratives comprise perhaps the most interesting part of the literature named 'folklore' a term coined in 1846 by W.J Thomas to designate the traditional learning of the uncultured classes of civilized nations. Folktales comprise a respectable volume of literature in all languages which is being explored with increasing interest everywhere. The earliest tales of this kind are traced to about 2800 b.c in Egypt. However the tales portray a large variety of men and women, both individuals and types and project people's beliefs, customs, ideals, preferences, and prejudices in all their rich variety as few other literary forms can do. As a matter of fact they impart meaning and substance to culture as it is crystallized in our day to day living. Kashmiri Folk Theatre comprise of many Pathars. The main ones are Darzi Pather, Bati pathar, Raazi pathar, haanz pathir, Gosain Pather etc. However these Catharsis are not originally written rather, they have striking resemblances. The study of Kashmiri proverbs and sayings shows social conflicts, psychological contradictions, economic compulsions as well as linguistic beauties. These sayings show how some aspects of the cultural destiny of the people have been shaped. Kashmiri folk songs are actually rich in depicting emotions, dreams, miseries, and desires of the Kashmiri women. The urgency to preserve the folk tradition was felt long back by some European scholars. They contacted various story tellers and a good number of folk tales, proverbs and sayings were collected. The pioneers in this context are J. H. Knowles, Auriel Stein and G. A Grierson. In 1887 Knowles compiled folk tales of Kashmir, a dictionary of Kashmiri proverbs and sayings. Nand Lal Chatta and C. L. Hakhoo brought out folk tales collection in Hindi entitled as "Kashmir Ki Lok Kathayain". S. N. Dhars tales of Kashmir is also a fruitful step towards it. Kashmiri folk literature is a treasure of unwritten history. It depicts life in various colors and moods.

It is the reflection of society and social perspective of Kashmiris. However, one not only comes to know about the social life of the community through Ladishah and various band patharis but also feel the revolting spirit of the common people who use folk forms to express their displeasure and disapproval of political and economic exploitation. Folk literature is the medium through which we can peep into the lives of people in all terms, so is the Kashmiri folklore, which reflects the aspects of life and society in wider perspective that too in simpler terms.

**Conclusion:**

In this modern era, with the inclusion of technology and internet we are coming increasingly closer to each other as a result of globalization. Every part of the world is getting more inter linked, international, as a result national identities are increasingly vanishing. However it has not been always like this. In many parts of the world folklore and folk art had a dominant role, where local symbolism expressed your identity and defined who you are. Despite the fact that our world is becoming more homogeneous, it is clear that local tradition do prevail. Folklore have a broad appeal. However, we can't deny this fact that folk art and literature fades away with the passage of time and in some terms have only remnants of folkloric heritage left. However younger generation looked down upon folklore as something anchored in past and there is nothing new and modern element which remains appealing during present times. Folklore traditions are mainly perceived as the impersonation of that unaltered, stable and desirable "lost world" that are documented and deposited in archives in their authentic original form.

A good advantage of folklore is they inspire simple and logical thinking. Since folk tales are about relations of man to nature; this education will make students environment conscious, which is very important in present times. Folktales and folklores provide a greater and deeper insight to life and living. These Tales have strong messages of ethics and values because they are enriched with lucid and simple explanations. Folklore can produce a feeling and a strong sentiment towards culture and unity, which is need of the hour. The reason is that folklore is about common human values and they signify universal characteristics of mankind. Folktales were often employed to share a common history, to reinforce cultural values or highlight important traditions. Folktales by their nature celebrate diversity. Through it we can learn about diverse cultural legacy, contended traditions, as we cannot only broaden our horizon to peep into the world, but we can also develop a greater appreciation of our own heritage which is very rich and glorious.

In this contemporary society, we are constantly struggling to go back to our own roots and to maintain our ethnic identities. As a matter of fact we are living in such an unpredictable position where we are enforced to rethink, redefine and elucidate our identities to different social institutions. The very notion of "folk" conjures up the feeling that it belongs to the field of illiterate and marginalized people. Somehow people could not decipher the implicit meanings in the stories, proverbs, jokes and riddles. Folklore studies can also be taken as a way to raise ones awareness of the culture that one is coming from. Orality is often considered a symbol of culture and identity. Oral tradition has been preserved through ages. Folklore study, is all inclusive as it includes all the genres of our culture both spiritual and material aspects and it has been used as a mechanism to reconstruct ancient beliefs, customs and rituals. One important aspect of folklore studies is that it helps us to understand the rich folklore and mystic tradition of our ancestors. By understanding and appreciating the folklore of our ancestors we can develop an understanding of our culture from where we sprung. It is all about human sufferings and pains which are transmitted in the forms of folk narrative, material, culture, social, folk customs and performing folk arts. The tradition renders communities to share some common elements like folktales, folksongs, folk customs, folk arts and so on and this facilitates to generate a shared identity for the groups. It is the turn of we youngsters to disseminate our knowledge further so that our rooms remain intact with us and we could raise our head high. Folklore is an important genre which is very much our own and closer to our own culture and naivety. By preserving and nourishing it, we as a society can flourish at its best and our coming generation would come to know about their beautiful and glorious past, which can make them to understand that Kashmir is not only been considered as "Switzerland of Asia" but also land which owes phenomenal cultural legacy and beautiful traditions which makes this place indeed a masterpiece.

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