

**FOLK LITERATURE AND THE REPRESENTATION OF
REGION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SCOTTISH BALLADS
AND KACHCHHI LOKGEET**

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Objectives

The prime objective of this study is to examine the idea of folk, folk tradition and folk genres of ballad and lokgeet in terms of their characterization of region and society with relation to Scotland and Kachchh. It studies these folk forms of Scotland and Kachchh to understand folk literature as cultural artefacts used for the contemporary self-imagining of the region. In doing so, the study tries to investigate their role in constituting the character of the region.

Another objective of this study is to examine the way the performances of ballads and lokgeet function as a socio-cultural apparatus to invoke the cultural autonomy of the region and articulate the hegemony of monolithic culture.

Research Question

This study attempts to understand the politics behind the construction of an identity and imagining of a region. In doing so, it explores class and race in Scotland and caste in Kachchh, Gujarat, taking them as categories of analysis to read the ballads and *lokgeet* and examine their hegemonic role in constructing a monolithic singular identity. It explores these two regions and these two folk genres in a comparative mode and locates underpinned identity politics in the claims for autonomy in both regions.

Method and Methodology

Collecting antiquities and folklore in the West started in the eighteenth century. In India and Gujarat, it started relatively late, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Francis Childe, Robert Burns, and Walter Scott, among others, have collected and archived the different varieties of the folklore of Scotland in the mid to late eighteenth century. Whereas in Kachchh, since the first encounter of the British officials with Kachchh, the collection of folklore had begun only in the mid-nineteenth century. Several political agents and their companions made efforts to collect and publish the folklore. Later in the mid-twentieth century, L.F. Rashbrook and then Dularay Karani worked extensively on the collection and publication of the folklore of Kachchh. This study is based on these publications and archives that hold Scottish ballads and Kachchhi *lokgeet*. It extracts ballads and *lokgeet* from these archives dealing with the themes of respective regions and those who portray socio-cultural landscapes.

The research centrally uses the Textual Analysis method to build a body of local information which has then been used to build the central arguments of my thesis.

Considering folk, folklore, region, and identity as central epistemes of analysis, it draws on the following conceptualization: This study chiefly draws its terminology and theoretical conceptualization to define folk and *lok* and folk literature from the German Romantic thinkers

to William Thomas, Allan Dundee, Bauman and Briggs, Regina Bendix from the West, and Ranjitram V. Maheta, Zaverchand Meghani, Jaymalla Parmar, Balvant Jani, Hasu Yagnik, and Kanubhai Jani, among others, from Gujarat. This study tries to step further, taking these thinkers as a starting point of those who have analysed folk and *lok* from an upper-class/caste standpoint.

Folklore Studies: This study draws from the range of concepts of Folklore Studies to conceptualise and understand ideas of folk and folklore. The concepts of folk and *lok* have been variously defined by folklorists from across the globe, yet they seem incomplete. This study, while historically locating Western as well as Indian conceptualizations, tries to add a new dimension to the conception of folk and *lok* with intention of putting forward the voices of people at the periphery, which so far have been largely mis-conceptualised or neglected. Since the last century, the rapid mass mobilisation of people from far-removed rural and semi-rural spaces to urban spaces has complicated the understanding of the concept of folk and folklore. This study also takes up these emerging complications posed by twenty first century developments to enhance the understanding of folk and folk literature. In short, this study proposes to locate the historical trajectories of categories of folk and *Lok*, folk literature, and *Lok Sahitya*.

Cultural Studies: In order to understand the folklore and region/landscape portrayed by folks, this study draws from several theoretical frameworks from the field of Cultural Studies which looks at cultural artifacts as meaning-making systems. This study focuses on the literary text, that is, ballads and *lokgeet*, and their cultural signification. It also looks at other cultural texts bound to them as systems or socio-political and cultural discourse that imagine a land with local images in a way that may or may not go hand in hand with the political one. In order to read the cultural peculiarities of both regions, studies on identities, regions, power relations, etc. are taken into consideration; Florian Columns is an important reference point in this context (2010).

For the idea of the region in the context of Kachchh, this study has drawn on the conceptualization of region by Farhana Ibrahim in her seminal book *Settlers, Saints, and Sovereigns* where she argues that a region is an experienced category that is constructed from the activities of the people residing in it (Ibrahim10). She examines it from an ethnographic perspective. Postcolonial theories are used to understand and analyse the ideas of region and nation as political categories, which have been much debated in the post-colonial era. This study has relied on theoretical perspectives from postcolonial studies, especially those on

understanding the idea of nation and region by Benedict Anderson, Partha Chatterjee and Ashis Nandy.

Key Findings and Conclusion:

The first chapter is titled “Understanding Folk Literature, *Lok Sahitya* and Region”, which discusses the idea of folk, *lok*, folklore, and folk literature in detail. In this chapter, the Western and Indian ideas of folk, *lok* and folk literature are comparatively discussed. It argues that the Western understanding of folk and folklore has vividly influenced the Indian understanding of it. The difference between folk and *lok* is also discussed and how class and race in Scotland and Caste in Kachchh informed the understanding of the caste. In terms of folklore and literature, it is also argued that, in India, it has been defined against the classic literature or the literature of upper-caste/class communities. It also shown how folk or *lok* is defined against the civilized upper caste whereas folk literature is attributed to both the lower caste *folks* and upper caste society. The agency of caste in defining, collecting, and archiving folklore has been pivotal. However, the American understanding of folk has offered a dynamic understanding of folk (Ben-Amos xi).

The second chapter, titled “Ballads, Literary Imagination and Scotland as a Region”, is based on folk ballads and other folk songs and the idea of Scotland as a distinct region in the British Isles. It argues that how imagination Scotland is exclusive and limited to the royal families, aristocrats and white upper-class males and less often females. In doing so, it examines several folk ballads and other folk songs published in the book *The Rebel’s Ceilidh Songs Book* as well as online archives focusing on Scottish pride, nationalism and Scottish Independence. It concludes that the imagination of Scottish uniqueness in the wake of the revival of independence was highly class and race-conscious. Those socio-economically and politically at the margin were excluded from the imagination of the independent Scotland.

The third chapter, “*Lokgeet*, Literary Imagination, and the Idea of Kachchh”, similarly focuses on the idea of Kachchh as a region imagined through the *lokgeet*. Like Scotland, Kachchh has been a part of the colonial regime and is now part of its dominant neighbour. As mentioned earlier popular personalities were always centered in the literary imaginations across the globe. Folk and folklore have not been an exception from it. Rather, folk most often preserve the memories of popular imaginations and personalities and their deeds. However, *lokgeet* do focus on the geo-political landscape of Kachchh. The majority of the *lokgeet* are centered around any popular characters from the historical past which follow the histories of Kachchh as they are centered on the king, courts and upper-caste personalities. Nonetheless, this imagination of people of the past in grand larger than life characteristics drew from the popular memory of caste operation. It signifies how caste operated in Kachchh and has been dominating in imagination of Kachchh as a

region. The chapter concludes by establishing the way caste plays a crucial role in the imagining of Kachchh as a region.

The fourth chapter, titled “Folk Literature and the Articulation of Autonomy: The Case of Scotland and Kachchh, 1900 to 2023”, examines the articulation and the claims of autonomy in both Scotland and Kachchh since the twentieth century. It approaches the articulation in comparative mode and locates the similarities and differences in both cases of articulating autonomy with their cultural distinctness through the analysis of key ballads and *lokgeet*. It also attempts to locate the politics behind it and how class/race and caste work underneath the articulation of claims for autonomy in Scotland and Kachchh respectively.

The study, with the close reading of the ballads and *lokgeet* used as a representative of the portrayal of the cultural distinctiveness for articulating autonomy in both regions, concludes that the idea of class/race in Scotland and caste in Kachchh, Gujarat, significantly informs the articulations of autonomy in both regions.

Further:

- The idea of folk and *lok* in Kachchh and Gujarat is translated from the Western/German idea of *volks* or *volkskunde* or folk where the early German understanding of *volk(s)* was defined away from urban and civilized space. In the United States, folk and lore are defined in the contemporary context of race and globalization, whereas *lok* in Kachchh, Gujarat, is not contextualized in the reality of caste. The dominance of the upper caste in the field of folklore in the Indian context since the nineteenth century remained blind to the caste dimension of the category *lok*. In a similar way, the category folk needs to be aware of the significance of race and class to the category folk in the context of Scotland and in the United Kingdom, more broadly.
- In the context of Scotland, through the study of selected folk ballads, it is concluded that ballads brought into public by different modes of recording in the eighteenth and nineteenth century majorly focus on the symbols and imagery that were deemed to be nationalist. The ballads represent this idea of class and race of the leaders and warriors of the battles fought for Scottish independence. The identity that is constructed based on these ballads leads to a narrow and limited sense of identity of the society and nation as whole.
- In the context of Kachchh, folk literature is defined as *lok sahitya*, against the scriptures of the Vedic age in their oral and spoken (*smriti*) form. Upper castes have

never been defined as a *lok*. It has been found that the folklore that emerged in certain caste system cannot dodge the dogma and hierarchy. It comes in to underpin *lokgeet* in subtle ways. The conceptualization of folklore based on the western paradigms add layers to the meaning making processes of *lok sahitya* and to the understanding of the people, the *lok* and the region. These understandings of region based on the hierarchy would always remain different from the region discursively and experientially understood by the people, *lok*, who are making and shaping it.

- Through a comparative study of the Scottish ballad and Kachchhi *lokgeet*, I have found that the claims of autonomy in both regions, are connected with various realities and arrangements of power within and outside the region, and these claims are located in social, cultural and political ideologies. Social structures of division in both regions are also crucial in the making meaning of the folklore and the nationalist views read into them to assert a distinct socio-cultural identity while making the case for autonomy.

Finally, I have found that in Scotland, class and race, and caste in Kachchh have remained fundamental identitarian undercurrents that are structural to folklore.

Recommendation and Scope for the Future Research

The influence of the British rule on the anthropological and ethnographic quest to know and rule effectively the colony, folklore has remained and understood in terms of colonial understanding and frameworks in Kachchh, Gujarat as well as in Scotland. This needs to be decolonized to an extent to have voices from the people who are actually deemed to be considered as folks. The folklore of Kachchh is selectively archived and, therefore, selectively appropriated. Archives of folklore in Kachchh need to be rethought in terms of emerging cultural studies in the praxis of decoloniality. This would lead to a new definition of Kachchh as a region and its folk and lore.

The folklore in Kachchh is also a caste-specific folklore, often homogenised and considered as a representative of Kachchh as a region. Future research can be done focusing on the element of caste and particularly lower caste as the folklore and *lokgeet* examined in this thesis are often portrayals of only popular heroes and deeds revolving around the upper caste. This would broaden the idea of Kachchh in a cultural context and the making and unmaking of Kachchhi identity.

Kachchh and Scotland have been deeply affected by climate change. Folklore has woven the hardship of the people, surrounded by desert and sea. The folklore as an archive of the history of people and the region can be explored in the emerging context of the Anthropocene, sustainability and climate change.

Histories and historiography of Kachchh and Scotland are always sourced from the dominant narrative from the local historian in oral form, which were made into written books first by colonial rulers and writers and later by their upper caste/class allies. Folklore of marginal people can help to rewrite these histories. In addition, the performative aspect of the folklore of Kachchh and Scotland could be studied with an intent to unpack the relationship between performance, meaning making and folklore.

Limitation

This thesis examines the articulation and claims for autonomy through the close reading of ballads and *lokgeets* that portray the regions and are used for claims published from 1900 to 2023 in print, audio, and visual formats. It does not claim for autonomy rather it studies the articulation of claims for distinct cultural identity and therefore regional identity and the influence of class/race and caste in the claims only through the study of folklore and does not examine the intersections between folklore and other modes of cultural expression used in struggles for autonomy. It examines only selected ballads and *lokgeets* portraying the region and is often used as representative of the regions. It does not examine the performative aspect of ballads and *lokgeet* and the study has restricted itself to textual analysis

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Abstract

My attempt in this dissertation is to study the manifestation of the idea of region in the ballads of Scotland, Great Britain and the *lokgeet* of Kachchh, India. I do this as both Scotland and Kachchh have been making a case for the distinctive recognition of their region. Both these movements looked to their minstrel traditions to articulate and define cultural heritage.

The quest for autonomy and self-recognition have marked the recent histories of Scotland, Great Britain and Kachchh, Gujarat. This study is an exploration of these two regions in their interrelationship with folk genres, and argues that the ballads of Scotland, Great Britain, and the *lokgeet* of Kachchh, India play a similar and crucial role in making a case for the recognition of their respective regions in the contemporary context where these regions have laid a claim to cultural distinction. However, these trajectories are not linear and have undercurrents of politics and cultural dynamics.

This study attempts to understand the politics behind the construction of an identity and imagining of a region. In doing so it explores class and race in Scotland and caste in Kachchh, Gujarat taking them as categories of analysis to read the ballads and *lokgeet* and examine their hegemonic role in constructing a monolithic singular identity. It explores these two regions and these two folk genres in a comparative mode and locates underpinned identity politics in the claims for autonomy in both regions.

I have laid out my central arguments and background to the thesis in the Introduction. This is followed by the first chapter titled “Understanding Folk Literature, *Lok Sahitya* and Region” which discusses folk, *lok*, and region. The chapter consists of a review of literature in these conceptual areas and sets the field for an investigation into the folklore practices of Scotland and Kachchh. This chapter discusses two broad themes of folk and region and examines how they shape each other. It locates the historical emergence of folk as a concept in Europe and the USA, and then looks at the Indian context. Through this, the chapter will develop an understanding of the region through a primary investigation into the category folklore.

The next chapter, titled “Ballads, Literary Imagination and Scotland as a Region,” focuses on Scotland and its long history of claiming independence from England. This chapter explores Scotland, and the fashioning of its identity through the ballad. It attempts to examine the construction of the Scottish social and regional identity and the role played by folk forms such as the ballad in this construction. My close reading of selected ballads has led me to conclude that folk forms like the ballad remain as arenas where class/race superiority is expressed, shaped and consolidated.

The third chapter, titled “*Lokgeet*, Literary Imagination, and the Idea of Kachchh” following the framework of the previous chapter, examines the Kachchh as a region through the close analysis of the *lokgeet*. It attempts to understand the social, political and regional construction of identity of Kachchh. It locates the idea of caste in the imagining of the idea of Kachchh. It argues that the notion of caste plays an important role in the imagination of the region of Kachchh. “Folk Literature and the Articulation of Autonomy: The Case of Scotland and Kachchh, 1900 to 2023” is the fourth chapter. I unpack the history of the claims of autonomy by both the regions in the first section, and locate the politics of these claims for autonomy. It also compares and examines the structure as well as the themes that manifest regional identities of both regions in folk songs.

The fourth chapter is followed by a concluding chapter, in which key findings and conclusions drawn from the previous chapters are discussed. Although the ideas of identity and region are in constant flux, this chapter offers a set of open-ended conclusions.

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