

# Folklore and Mass media in Kashmir: A Quantitative Analysis

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**Abstract:** Kashmir is known for its rich cultural essence since ages- its geographical location, food and art is unmatched .The traditional folk forms of Kashmir have more than a thousand years of history where Music, Dance and Theatre are the core elements in promoting culture at a broad spectrum. The folk forms of Kashmir are rich in their history and content, making them an area of interest for tourists and scholars since ages. There have been different folk forms from dance, storytelling, music, to songs like Rouf , Bhand Pather , Dhamil , Lari Shah, Bhand Jashn, Chakir, Vanvun, Bache Nagma and Hikkat as a daily dose of entertainment and education for the people in Kashmir. But due to the lack of patronage, economical barriers and acceptance from the masses folk forms are on the brink of extinction and to send the linkage about the rich cultural past to the future generation the intervention of mass media and some small efforts by government and non- government organizations are into play. In the present times the forms of communication are instant, diverse and interactive. We are in a time where information and entertainment are just a click or a touch away. There is something for everyone to quench the thirst of information, education and entertainment. This paper will discuss about the space occupied by the folk media in the twenty first century where faster means of communication are available and the information about the cultural history in terms of folk media among the youth in Kashmir.

**Index Terms :** Folk media, Kashmir, Bhand Pather, Traditional media, folklore, Mass media, Youth, New media

## 1.INTRODUCTION

Folklore is as old as the human civilization. A. Taylor has defined folklore as "Folklore is the material that is handed over on by tradition, either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folk songs, folk tales, riddles, proverbs or other materials preserved in words, it may be traditional tools and physical objects like fences or knots, hot cross buns or Easter eggs, traditional ornamentation like the walls of Troy, or traditional symbols like the Swastik. It may be traditional procedures like throwing salt over ones shoulder or knocking on wood. It may be traditional beliefs like notion that elder is good for the ailments of the eye. All of these are folklore".[1] They are indigenous forms of communication representing the unique elements of the society to which they belong. Folk forms are oral and performative ways of narrating the history and passing it on from generation to generation. Folk media is closer to the hearts as it reflects the cultural ethos without linguistic barrier and has a high acceptance among masses because of common interest, interpretation, perception and frame of mind about the issues being dealt with in the performances. It has been playing an important role as a medium of education and entertainment since ages. With the advent of the technology driven media, folk media is battling for its survival. Digital media has given a new definition to entertainment where the channels of communication cater to the individual tastes of the audience. Global exposure to the mediums has made world a small place where flow of information, education and entertainment is continuous and wide in range. In this era of speed when every second brings in a new wave of information folk media is losing its strength among the people and is dying a slow death.

## Types of Folklore:

**Ghost stories/Anecdotes/ Fairy Tales:** These are the stories mostly for children which include stories of supernatural powers and win of good over bad. The stories are narrated primarily to kill the boredom usually describing fictional characters in the most fascinating ways. These are the traditional narratives which transmit from generation to generation and are often in the form of lessons to be inculcated in children.

**Folk Dance:** This is a dance form which belongs to a particular culture and remains a key element in their celebrations. This is usually an informal dance which passes on to the generations. These dances don't have any specific style, structure or steps, but they are the random steps often combined with the local language lyrics and music.

**Folk Songs and Rhymes:** These are the songs written in local language and belong to a community or group from where it is originated. These songs are often sung by people at the time of festivals and weddings often combined with the folk music and are learned and passed down from one age band to another. On the other hand folk rhymes are the words combined in a rhythmic tone for the enjoyment of children.

**Riddles:** Riddle is a confusing statement or a question which is presented in a cloaked way. They form an integral part of the customs and folklore of a place. Written without any influence of modern words, these phrases are knitted with sheer local language and script. Having a significant psychosomatic point of view riddles are used as brain teasers for children and are often regarded as a test of wit and cleverness as they demand a lot of brain work to solve the amalgam of words combined.

**Folk Poetry:** Is a poetry that is embedded as a part of society's folklore. People since ages have been involved into the philosophical narrative due to their engagement with spirituality, religion, art and culture giving birth to a poet in them. They would use magic of words to make the impact long lasting and reverberating and people would often sing these poetic quotes in a tune. Folk poetry involves words that

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praise the Kings of the times, social fabric of a place to which it belongs to, wars, festivals, pleasures and miseries related to that group of people. It can be humorous or intense in its context.

**Folk Theatre:** Is a vivid presentation enacted by the artists usually in a rough and loosely scripted format. It encompasses music, dance, strong use of dialogue delivery and body language, religious rituals and stories. Its roots are indigenous to the culture where from it has originated and is used as a strong medium to express the issues in a more direct way. Folk theatre is often performed in an open air arrangement where there is more personalized contact with the masses thus serving the double purpose of enjoyment and information. Theatre is the most enjoyed form of folklore as the artists and the audience shares the same frame of mind about the issues being dealt with in the performances.

### 1.1. Folk Media in Kashmir

Folk media is a true representation of the culture of any place and is represented by dance, music theatre, storytelling and songs. Every place has its unique folklore which differentiates it from the rest of the world and Kashmir apart from its natural beauty has been rich in terms of its cultural legacy. Folklore in Kashmir has many forms from dance, music to open air theatre with a history of more than thousand years. The various forms of folklore are described below.

**Rouf:** It is the traditional dance form of Kashmir which is performed by women in groups mostly at the time of religious festivals and weddings. The women entertain themselves by standing in two rows opposite to each other with slight body movements and the arms around each other's waist with the forward and backward movement of the legs singing rhythmic songs in different seasons of the year, Eid and the last days of Ramzan as a farewell to the holy month.. Kashmiri weddings are incomplete without this folk dance and even today all the cultural school festivals and government organized festivals have Rouf as a main source of entertainment to promote the culture of Kashmir. It has been an inseparable part of the Kashmiri weddings and still continues to be so.

**Dhamil:** This dance is mostly performed by the Wattal community (low caste) in Kashmir where the dancers perform in a circle wearing colorful clothes and cone shaped caps. Drums are beaten with the sticks and the dancers dance to the tune of these drums. This dance form is the most energetic performance as the dancers do a lot of body movements.

**Chakir:** is the folk music of Kashmir sung by the singer along with the chorus using musical instruments like swarnai, rabab, harmonium, tumbakhaer (a bottle neck earthen drum closed with stretched animal skin on one end and open at other end), nout (an earthen pot) which narrates stories in a rhythmic way. At the time of weddings a Bach Kot (mostly a third gender) dancer dances to the tunes of Chakir.

**Hikkat:** is a dance mostly performed by young girls in a playful way on the occasion of marriages and festivals. The hands are cross locked; the body and the heads are leaned

backwards. The girls in a group of two go round and round without any music, giggling and singing in an informal way.

**Lari Shah:** is a sarcastic-cum-comic form of singing where a singer usually wearing a Pheran (traditional cultural dress) in a rhythmic way talks about various social issues, current affairs and daily matters of Kashmiri society. He starts the performance by sound of the rod with metal discs on in and says "As salaam u alaikum Lari shah Aaw" which means "Peace be upon you, here the Lari Shah has come" and then he goes on singing. The singer moves from place to place during the season of harvesting singing the comic yet satirical lyrics and entertaining the people with words full of information also.

**Bhand Pather:** is the earliest theatre of the subcontinent though there are not much archival evidences of this folk form. But its traces can be found in 6th century. Before the Muslim Rule in Kashmir the theatre was performed on the days of religious importance, but with the Muslim Sultunate in Kashmir the Bhand Pather continued but the place of performance shifted from Temples to shrines and khankas. The Bhand Pather demonstrates Kashmiriyat by showing similar cultural aspects between Hinduism and Islam and elaborates differences as well. And in spite of all the differences it's not difficult to live together. The Bhands have enjoyed a very respectful status in the society. At the time of any natural calamity Bhands were requested to pray for the people of the land at the shrines of sufi saints (Bhand Doikhar as it is said in Kashmiri language). Even at the time of harvest people used to keep a share for Bhands not as a matter of favor but considering it as their right. Bhand Pather is the combination of two Sanskrit words Bhand and Pather, Bhand means –Jester and Pather means –dramatic personnel. It is a loosely scripted performance about the social, cultural, political and religious scenario of Kashmir. The Bhands receive training from their family heads and the traits of art are transmitted from generations. There are about ten types of Pathers the basic structure is somehow similar but the themes dealt with are different for different Pathers. Wattal Pather is considered to be oldest and Angrez Pather to be the latest. Each Pather deals with a theme from pollution, contemporary social issues, political loopholes to lifestyles of different sections of society. Bhand Pather is a versatile folk form incorporating every issue in the society thus making it fit even for the contemporary times. Some of the Pathers are as:-

**Dard Pather:** The play depicts the tyrant Dards -Afghan rulers and portrays their atrocities on Kashmiris. It also depicts the lavish life style, epicurean philosophy of the rulers and effects of alcohol on humans. The languages used are Persian, Kashmiri, Urdu, and Hindi.

**Gosaine Pather:** The Pather focuses on the religious faith of Kashmiris and ridicules the people who use religion as a tool to befool people. The Pather mostly uses Kashmiri language apart from some expression from Hindi and Sanskrit language.

**Buhir/Bata Pather:** This Pather portrays the characteristics of Pandit community. It uses an element of humor to communicate how the common man is punished for no crime

and the administration applauds the convict. There is a use of Kashmiri and Sanskrit Language.

**Shikargah Pather:** This is the only Pather where animal masks are used and Bhands talk about ecological balance, messages like deforestation, soil erosion, environmental pollution and wild life conservation are dealt with. The languages used are Kashmiri, Urdu and Persian.

**Raaze Pather:** Raaze- meaning King talks about the bad memories of Afghan rule and its oppression on people of Kashmir and portrays the ill effect of other cultures on Kashmiri society. The languages used are Kashmiri, Persian and bit of Punjabi.

**Aarem Pather:** The Pather talks about the life style of the Farmer section of the Kashmiri Society. Their marriages used to be different from the conventional one where the bride goes to grooms house here the situation was vice versa. It also deals with the issue of child marriage and forced labor. The languages used are Kashmiri, Dogri, and Hindi.

**Waatal Pather:** Depicting the lifestyle of the Waatal tribe and the issues like polygamy, child marriage, breach of trust, abusive language and promise breaking are the themes this Pather works on. The language used is Kashmiri.

**Bakarwal Pather:** Depicts the life of backward class Bakarwals and their exploitation from the merchants. The languages used are Kashmiri, Pahari and Urdu.

**Angrez Pather:** The Pather talks about the oppression of English and the resentment of Kashmiris to talk in English and showing their love for the native language. The languages used are English and Kashmiri. (Fayaz, 2008)

## 2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

### Objective of the Study

- To understand the relevance of folk media in the promotion and preservation of culture.
- To study the challenges faced by folk media in the presence of other forms of mass communication in the twenty first century.
- To find out the interest and understanding of different folk forms among the students of Kashmir University.

### 2.1. Methodology

- For the literary study data available in the books, research papers, articles and websites was taken into consideration.
- Through purposive sampling technique a sample of 200 respondents was selected from Kashmir University with an equal proportion of male and female respondents ( 100 males and 100 females)
- Sampling universe: Post graduate students of Kashmir University
- Demographic Profile of the Respondents: Post graduate students of sociology, Mass Communication and Kashmiri streams, Age group (20-25) years, from lower middle class,

middle class, upper middle class and high income groups, and closed ended questionnaires were distributed.

- The reason behind selecting Kashmir university students: the folks forms being talked about in the paper are localised in approach because of the regional language and the respondents were well equipped with this language. This age group of students are the users of all the twenty first century mediums of communication.

### 2.2. Theoretical Framework

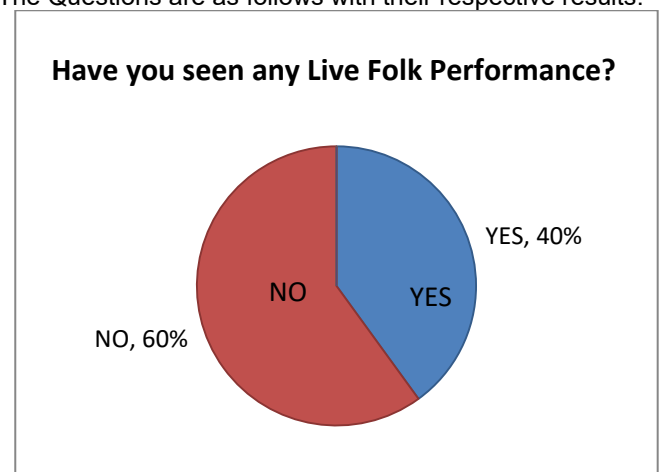
Uses and Gratification theory is applied which talks about the media preference of the audience and choosing one channel of communication over the other to gratify ones need of information. The basic assumption of this theory is:

- Media and content choice is generally rational and directed towards certain specific goals and satisfaction (thus the audience is active and audience formation can be logically explained).
- Audience members are conscious of the media-related needs which arise in personal (individual) and social (shared) circumstances and can voice these in terms of motivations.
- Broadly speaking, personal utility is a more significant determinant of audience formation than aesthetic or cultural factors.[2]

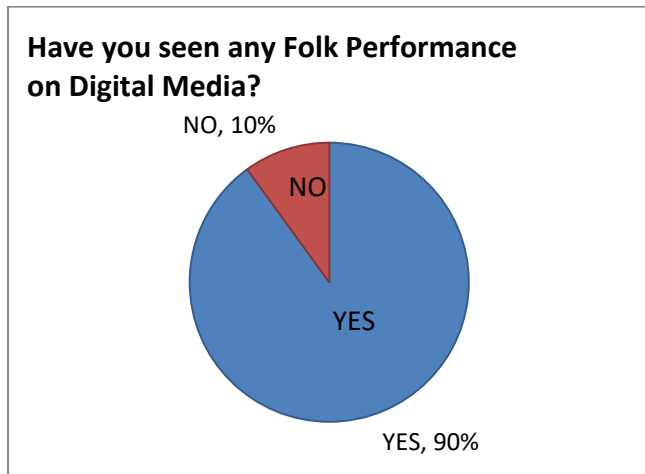
Today the channels of communication are numerous and people have more choices available and hence the medium which will cater to the individual need will be preferred and faster channels of communication become a choice over a more passive and time bound medium

## 3. RESULTS

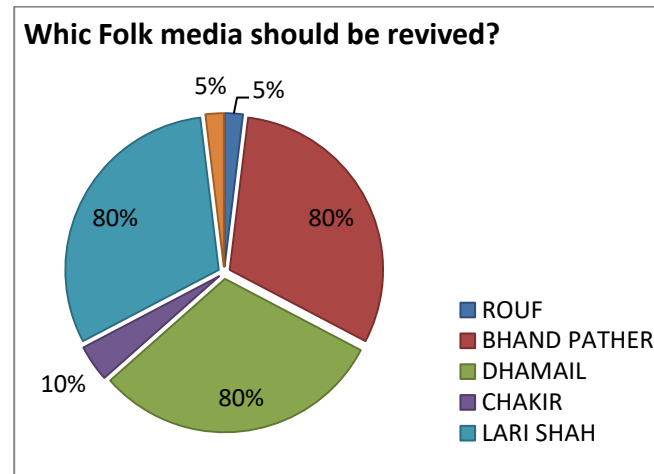
The Questions are as follows with their respective results.



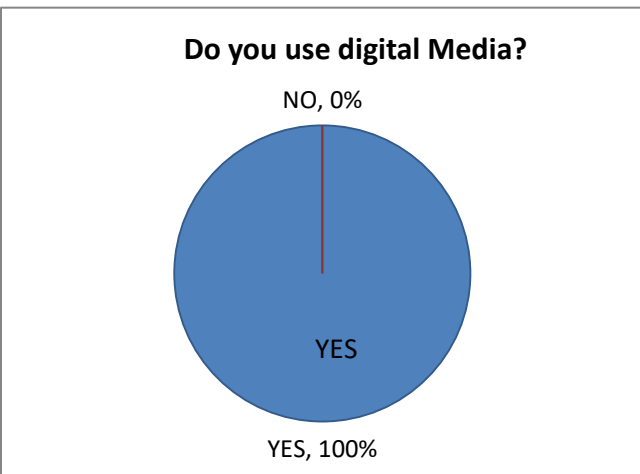
**Fig 1:** Percentage of respondents who have seen any folk performance live either in open air or some auditorium.



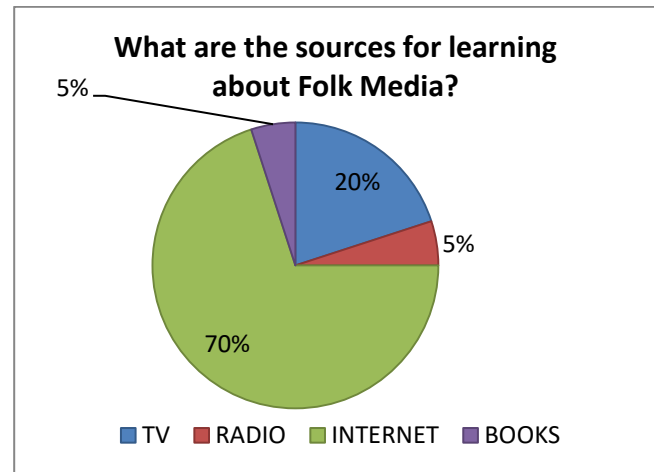
**Fig 2:** Percentage of respondents who have seen Folk media performances in any form on Digital media.



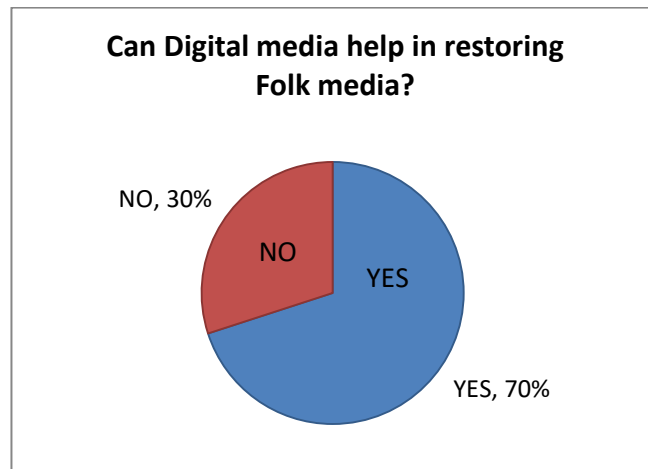
**Fig 5:** Respondents interest in reviving the folk media of their choice.



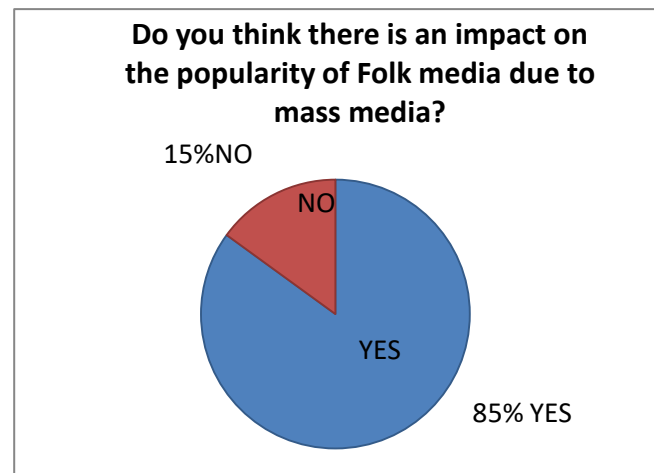
**Fig 3:** Use of digital media by respondents on daily basis-TV, Radio or Internet.



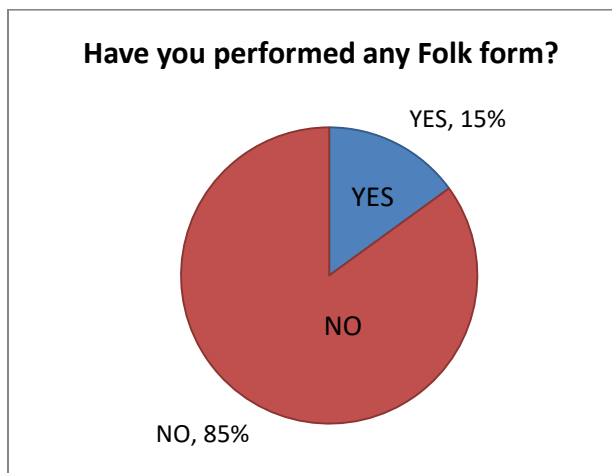
**Fig 6:** Most feasible source for learning about folk media.



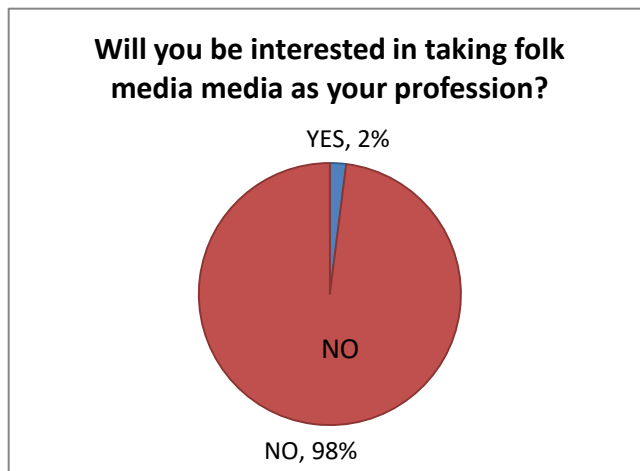
**Fig 4:** Percentage of respondents who believe that digital media can be used in restoring Folk.



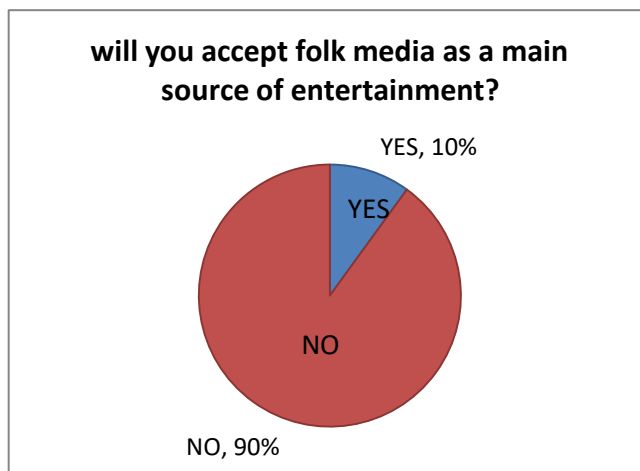
**Fig 7:** Impact of Mass media on the popularity of Folk Media.



**Fig 8:** Percentage of respondents who have performed any type of folk form.



**Fig 9:** Percentage of respondents who want to take folk media as their profession.



**Fig 10:** Percentage of respondents who believe that only folk media can be used as a main source of entertainment.

#### 4.CONCLUSION

Digital media being flexible, glamorous and flooded with the variety of content and entertainment has cast a spell of dominance on folk media. There is a global investment in the digital media with targets, deadlines and continuous competition to make it stronger and crisp and folk media is getting diluted in this transition of time and technology. The study reveals that the youth who have encounters with folk media are from the festivals, rituals or celebrations and that too on the very subconscious level, as these activities take place due to cultural rooting of their elders. The new generation has a faint idea and will soon be a part of history. Though Folk media still holds a special space among the youth in Kashmir because of the sentimental attachment to ones culture and many of them are interested in its revival. But while the digital media was getting stronger and popular among masses, the folk media stayed in the same raw form for ages and today when everything is short lived and due to the thrilling content available through mass media that too with a single click, it will not only take a fortune to make folk media main stream but a lot of selfless dedication of artists, academicians, media and NGOs. Youth are not ready to take up folk media as their Profession and are not willing to be involved as they are seeking to invest in anything which promises growth, security and modern outlook. There are audience for the folk forms but the change in the script , themes and treatment to fit in the contemporary times and tastes is what can make this medium live again Folk media needs to meet technology as the reach of folk media is very limited and the shelf life is very less. Freelance artists can play a vital role in the revival of folk media by experimenting, keeping in the view that it is for the audience who are not too keen as of now but, if the digital capsules of folk media content are easily accessible for the young generation this will lead to inception and acceptance. There is a scope for the revival of age old traditions of folklores but without its integration with the mass media these folk forms will become a passé.

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