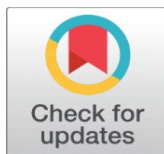# THEORIZING FOLKLORE IN CULTURE AND MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT

Folklore provides a vital lens for which cultural identity, collective memory and societal ideologies are preserved and determined. It preserves and reflects the evolving beliefs, values and structures of societies worldwide. Traditional narratives such as myths, folktales, proverbs and rituals serve as repositories of cultural heritage, encapsulating the essence of human experience across generations. Theoretical frameworks including Structuralist, Marxist and Feminist perspectives have been instrumental in analyzing the complex relationships between folklore and culture. These approaches highlight how folklore articulates established social norms, perpetuates power dynamics and amplifies marginalized voices. Structuralist scholars examine the universal patterns and structures within traditional narratives, while Marxist and Feminist critiques explore themes of class struggle, gender roles and resistance embedded in folklore. This paper also investigates the contemporary relevance of folklore by emphasizing on how it adapts to new forms of media and technology, such as the digital platforms and graphic novels, among others as it ensures its continuity amidst globalization and reveals how folklore serves not only as a repository of tradition, but also as a dynamic force as it shapes and reflects upon modern culture. By examining the intersection of folklore and contemporary media, this study underscores the enduring significance of traditional narratives in addressing societal change and maintaining cultural identity in a rapidly evolving world.

Keywords: Folklore, Cultural Identity, Collective Memory, Traditional Narratives, Digital Platforms

1. INTRODUCTION

Folk narratives, generally oral in nature, are the relative predecessors of folk literature or textual/written traditions and have distinctive roots in the past of any culture and tradition. In general terms by and large, the term folk narrative may be generally identified as a broad array of tales of the oral tradition of a culture or subculture reflective of their tradition, feelings and beliefs, and even their actions and practices but in a broader sense, folk narratives encompass a much wider scope than mere oral narrated tales or songs as it seemingly suggests but is deeply rooted in a culture's tradition and resulting practices and activities that render it definitive of its folk or cultural tradition. Their origins are as old as the culture itself with the significant notion that the narrative and the oral tradition are inseparable terms with their order of succession being closely intertwined. Of the bounteous array of tradition and culture of which folk literature is part, we can include folk songs, ballads, folk and fairy tales, proverbs, drama, riddles, charms and legends. Mirroring beliefs, values and traditions of a society, folklore reflects and encapsulates the essence of cultural identity as

it functions as both a repository of history and a living tradition. Through folklore, as culture is interpreted, there is a revelation of how collective memories and ideologies of a culture shape societies as adaptation over time occurs and persists across generations. In this sense, the relationship between culture and folklore is complex and profound.

2. MANIFESTATIONS OF FOLKLORE: DEFINITION AND THEORIES

A dictionary definition of folklore is that of traditional beliefs, customs and stories of a community, passed through the generations by word of mouth. It encapsulates myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, songs and ritual of the folk, this "folk" being a community and society having its own culture and mannerisms. Folklore is inherently dynamic and constantly shifting, as folklore scholar Alan Dundes states how folklore instead of being stagnant, evolves with society, thus reflecting upon the ever-changing dynamics of folk culture. It acts as a tool for cultural transmission as it offers insight into the collective psyche of a society.

By applying relevant theoretical frameworks, how folklore is manifested can be clearly observed. An instance can be stated by example in how folklore and myths are significant in revealing cosmological values, while folktales also have capacity to highlight moral values. In "Morphology of Folktale," Vadimir Propp structurally analyzes folktales by demonstrating how recurring motifs and structures convey universal patterns, thereby revealing the underlying cultural framework of storytelling (15). Structuralist theories, especially those proposed by Claude Levi-Strauss, view folklore as a universal language comprising of myths which reveal binary oppositions like life/death, nature/culture, and good/evil. He posits that myths are a society's way of reconciling contradictions within its cultural framework, placing binaries alongside each other for effective expression and representation of ideologies. A notable example can be made in tribal folklore, such as that of Native Americans whose creation myths often juxtapose humans and animals to explore the relationships between culture and the natural world. These stories not only explain cosmology, but also embed ecological ethics into cultural narrative.

Through Marxist ideologies, folklore has another tendency to be reinterpreted, as Marxism becomes a tool to assess how cultural artifacts serve as tools of ideology and class struggle and disparities in accordance with Marxist theory. A prominent critic of Marxist ideology, Antonio Gramsci who propounded the concept of cultural hegemony elucidates how dominant groups maintain power by embedding their ideologies into cultural narratives. Viewing folklore from such angle by observing disparities between class and power structures and how they intersect with each other enables one to see how many instances of folktales occur with themes of social mobility and resistance against structures of oppression. This parallels real-life class disparities as in many folk and fairy tales, we see instances of main characters or protagonists who are of lower working classes, sometimes conforming to domination from the higher or more powerful classes in control, such as lords and kings and even chieftains. Bearing in mind how folklore is prominent in serving as a tool to critique societal norms and power structures, James C. Scott, in Weapons of the Weak, portrays how folk narratives often encode subtle forms of resistance to dominant ideologies. A relevant example from world folklore may be Robin Hood, written possibly to reflect the grievances of oppressed peasants against feudal systems, while simultaneously championing the redistribution of wealth and justice for the marginalized.

Another important factor of note in folklore is how it is often created to reinforce patriarchal norms, as most settings in these tales accordingly reflect the presence of a male-dominated society. At the same time however, feminist reinterpretations have also been found to unveil marginalized voices, as in her work "From the Beast to the Blonde," Marina Warner examines the role of women in fairy tales, revealing how these stories serve both as a reflection of and resistance to societal expectations (62). The tale of Cinderella, for instance, can be interpreted as both a critique of domestic labor and a reinforcement of idealized femininity as the female figure not only conforms to patriarchal norms of domesticity and beauty but is also at the same time found to have the ideal conclusion to her tale where she is rewarded and not found to be submitting to oppression that she had previously faced due to her gender and class.

In post-colonial societies, folklore is a repository of resistance to cultural erasure. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in "Decolonizing the Mind," highlights how oral literature preserves indigenous cultures against colonial dominance. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of the subaltern illuminates how folklore serves as a voice for marginalized groups (296). Through these observations, we can see that folklore preserves and communicates the collective identity of a community and society, encompassing minority and such voices against the greater cultural strata as it encapsulates traditions and social norms passed down through generations. Further emphasis is made by Dorson upon the importance of folklore in cultural preservation by stating that folklore binds a community together and provide continuity in a

rapidly changing world. William Bascom also writes that folklore transmits moral values and defines societal roles, enforcing cultural norms and reflect upon its relevance in shaping and reinforcing cultural values in societies. Folklore also fosters social cohesion by reinforcing shared beliefs and rituals. Émile Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence explains how communal participation in rituals and folklore are pivotal to strengthen societal bonds. Festivals, songs and dances often incorporate traditional folklore and serve as both a celebration of cultural heritage, and a medium for communal identity.

In his theory of collective unconscious, Carl Jung states that archetypes in folklore are resonating across cultures as pivotal means to reflect shared human experiences. In his work, "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious," Jung observes that myths and folktales are psychological projections of the collective unconscious and are therefore part of a recollective memory shared by a larger group, revealing universal truths about human nature. Joseph Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces states the archetype of Hero's Journey and how this troupe has been a recurring presence in folktales worldwide. As a result, a connection is established through recurrence of these symbols and motifs to the universal human experience, while simultaneously reflecting upon a contextual socio-cultural motive.

3. FOLKLORE IN A MODERN CONTEMPORARY SETTING:

As we further consider folklore as a contemporary element, a recurring factor lies in how cultural identities are continuously shaped through the preservation and transformation of narratives even in the modern age. Richard Bauman argues that folklore is liable to adapt to new media, and thus its relevance in the digital age is indicated. For example, as indigenous myths are retold through films and graphic novels, traditional stories are reintroduced both globally, and to a new generation, fostering cross-cultural understanding. With the evolution of societies, folklore has adapted to new contexts and maintain its own relevance, while at the same time preserving its roots of tradition and inherent culture. According to Bauman, folklore is not a relic of the past, but a dynamic form of cultural expression which tends to be reshaped with each generation in accordance with their own concerns and needs.

In the digital age, folklore has undergone significant transformation through Internet technology and social media. Digital folk culture is a modern manifestation of shared narratives, practices and communal art forms in a cyber-setting as it is facilitated by platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. Digital folklore, which has a distinctive feature of its own, includes memes, viral trends, digital storytelling and participatory art forms, and unlike traditional folk culture has become more dynamic and globalized. In the digital age, a polyphonic discourse is formed by memes, comments and participatory content and this shape narratives for a modernized context. Henry Jenkins has also propounded a theory of Participatory Culture, which is highly relevant for modern digitized folklore because users are not mere consumers, but active contributors. Other relevant manifestations like the concept of Global Village and Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality is also relevantly applicable in modern digital folk culture, as the internet collapses spatial barriers creating a shared cultural sphere, which has now blurred lines between reality and simulation, creating hyperreal narratives, as in the instance of memes and how they decontextualize real events to reconstruct them into layered and symbolic content.

4. MANIFESTATIONS OF DIGITAL FOLK CULTURE:

A quintessential example of digital folk culture is memes, which, like traditional folktales encapsulate shared experiences, humor and societal commentary and reflect the collective emotions of a whole culture. Social mdia challenges such as TikTok dances are also representative of modern day rituals as they mirror traditional communal activities and shared purpose, becoming reinforcements of cultural identity in a digital setting. Many social media platforms have also become organs for digital storytelling as they adapt traditional folk motifs into modern contexts. Similarly, fan fiction, fan art and remix culture are integral to digital folk traditions where existing stories are re-imagined and derivations are created, which also aligns with Jenkins' concept of participatory culture.

In this way, modernization and digitization have democratized folk culture and lore, fostering diverse narratives and voices. An inconvenience however maybe due to the fact that cultural misrepresentation or appropriation has become a high possibility as traditional practices may tend to become decontextualized or commodified, losing their original significance.

5. CONCLUSION

To interpret a culture through its folklore reveals its power as a living, dynamic tradition that preserves the past while shaping the future. As folklore of any given community evolves, it continues to serve as a vital medium for cultural expression, resistance, and adaptation for the specified community and sub-groups it focuses upon. This cross-interpretation allows us to uncover the foundations of collective identity, morality, and social dynamics. By analyzing its forms and functions, we gain a deeper understanding of how societies construct meaning, adapt to change, and critique their realities. Lastly, the inter-relation between culture and folklore can be stated in the remarks of Alan Dundes, who states that "to understand a culture's folklore is to understand its soul".

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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