

17. Folk Spatiality in the Digital Age: Virtual Platforms as Sites of Performance for Dislocated Folk Groups

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ABSTRACT

The tremendous growth of the digital world has led to reconceptualisation of 'place' as fluid. This becomes important for folkloristics where spatiality has been one of the key elements defining traditional folk identity. Members of a folk community dwell in close proximity, such as a village, leading to frequently shared narratives. These folk practices and narratives, in turn, depend on interaction and performance by members of folk groups for transmission and survival. Where such performance is hindered due to factors like dislocation, folk narratives move into oblivion and folk practices lapse. The digital world, however, now provides folk groups alternative sites for interaction and performance, rendering geographical location and distance immaterial and allowing dislocated folk groups to re-imagine lost homelands. Academics like Anjali Gera Roy have dwelt on these new 'free-flowing cartographies' of the digital world.

This paper uses the example of Sindhi and Punjabi folk communities to understand how the digital world is helping displayed communities reclaim lost narratives. The Indian Partition in 1947 divided the western half of the subcontinent- that had been a cultural continuum for ages - drawing a hard political boundary where none had existed. While Punjab was divided into Uddar (East) and Lehnda (West), Sindh went entirely to the newly created Pakistan. Many Sindhis, however, chose to come to the Indian side and were thus dislocated from their land forever. Similarly, many Punjabis from the Pakistan side chose to come to India and were relocated across the country, once again being cleaved from their land. This paper will attempt to look at how the members of the two communities are now using digital platforms to document, preserve, and disseminate their fading folk narratives.

Keywords: Digital folk, Digital Media, Sindhi, Punjabi, Folk Narratives

Introduction

The digital world has set off paradigmatic changes in the way people connect, interact and transact. In the academic sphere, it led to the emergence of the new interdisciplinary field of digital humanities that made room for use of digital methods to explore streams of humanities and arts. The digital world has created several new iterations of folkloristics – including digital vernacular and traditional folk narratives repositioned in the digital world. Folklorists have responded by taking into account both computational and qualitative studies of these.

The intersections between culture and technology have been a subject of much curiosity and critical inquiry. Discussing various approaches to digital folkloristics, Tolbert and Jhonson cite the different meanings related to digital scholarship – digital collection of information, tools for collection building, tools for analysis, generating new intellectual products, creating authoring tools, etc. (Tolbert, 329). Various scholars have approached digital ethnography in different ways. It is seen in terms of engagement with digital technologies in routine life (Pink 9), ethnographic study of online communication (Varis), and even study of virtual word products like gaming (Manning). Natalie Underberg tackles the question of how technology can be used to build documentation while also incorporating the folk group's vision of how to present these materials (301). She developed and studied the use of digital media projects to preserve and

represent folklore and cultural heritage, specialising in the literary side of cultural anthropology and the cultural studies side of literary theory (Underberg 4).

Another interesting dimension to this is Elaine Lawless' collaborative approach of reciprocal ethnography that advocated incorporating dialogue with observed individuals and communities (Lawless 304). Underberg rebranded this as reciprocal technology as a move away from mechanical digitization and encoding of cultural aspects. Lawless applied this in the East Mims Oral History Project where technology was used to build community and provide new avenues for cultural representation.

So on one hand digital world allows greater opportunity to involve folk communities in academic work conducted on them; on the other hand it also nudges such communities towards adaptation. According to folklorist Trevor J. Blank it is important to observe the ways in which folk culture has adapted to computer-mediated technologies. Blank, who has worked on hybridization of folk culture in the digital age, says that the new form of technology driven communication has become so organically linked to daily life that it has blurred the line between physical and virtual. (Owens). Blank argues that adoption of internet and digital technologies has fundamentally changed how people interact, hence preparing ground for hybridization of vernacular culture (Blank 106).

While the digital world has expanded the process of democratisation manifold, folk studies in the field have to be informed by efforts to ensure the process of digitisation has a mass base and not academic selectivism. After all, folk narratives at the core are a creation of the community and transference of the knowledge within such a community. Keeping the above interventions in digital folkloristics in mind, this paper attempts to look at efforts by members of displaced communities to preserve and pass on folk narratives through digital platforms.

Folk and Spatiality

Folk narratives have been inextricably tied to idea of identity linked to land, such as a village. For the longest time, this defined a folk group and explained the connection of people and culture to land. However, the concept of space has changed in an increasingly globalised world with deep technological imprint. It is now clear that folk narratives not only unfold in a given space but also create such as space in the process. Terry Gunnell uses the analogy of stage play to explain that unlike a two-dimensional text, folk narratives unfold within a space marked out by the performer. In view of audio visual and textual interaction supported by digital platforms it can be argued that the digital world manages to provide an even more multi-dimensional space for folk narratives to unfold.

In 1927, Swedish folklorist Carl Wilhelm von Sydow gave the concept of oicotypes to help understand the migration of folk tales (Sydow 344). He used the analogy of plants to explain how folktales adapt to their new environment and become slightly different from their previous version in the process. This conceptualisation has been widely used to derive new theoretical perspectives and can be applied to displaced populations that have to adapt their folk practices and narratives to survive in new lands. It also tells us of the adaptability of folk narratives and explains how the digital world may now be emerging as a site of performance for such folk narratives.

In the special issue of *Western Folklore* on space and place, Lisa Gabbert and Jordan-Smith gave an overview of approaches to relationship between culture and landscape (Gabbert and Jordan 218). They trace the evolution of ideas from defining of particular geographical regions

and cultural geography to regional consciousness and sense of place studies. The renewed emphasis on space over time as invoked by the term 'spatial turn' used by Edward W. Soja, also opened doors for inquiry into nature and conceptions of space. Marxist scholar Henri Lefebvre's approach also created room for multiple spaces that are not just a natural resource but a human creation shaped through interactions, social processes, conflicts, etc. Space, thus, transformed from a passive given to an essential element of social life. Folk narratives in turn have graduated from being regarded as static texts to performance where place and space can be entextualised like other folk forms. It led to scholars examining space in the context of coloniality, urbanisation, tourism and virtual reality. In this manner place emerges as a site of struggle, interaction, and assertion.

The virtual world comprising Internet, digital tools, and social media has proliferated over the last three decades as a new space for human interaction and social exchange. Digital platforms have provided a new and unrestricted space for folk exchange and performance. This space is particularly important for communities displaced from what was once home. Folklorist Robert Glenn Howard's observations are handy in this context. According to Howard, the participatory form of new media has led to the growth of network based folk culture. He says that technology based communication allows individuals to return to a network location and interact at a vernacular level. (Howard). In this manner, a separate site is created in the virtual world for performance of folk culture.

Displacement and Folk Narratives

Human migration is believed to be one of the primary reasons for creation of oicotypes and migration of folktales across communities and boundaries. Migration and displacement are as old as the human condition. They can be voluntary arising out of search for better opportunities and livelihood or they may be forced arising out of religious or political persecution, natural or manmade disasters, etc. In modern times, creation of hard national boundaries has also led to displacement of populations.

In post-Independence India, Partition led to unprecedented human displacement. National boundaries were drawn where none existed before. Moreover, the partition on religious lines divides communities that had coexisted with fluid identities for centuries. While the loss of human life was immense, loss of culture and language was even more. Partition theatres opened both in the east and west parts of the country. In the west, two communities affected the most by Partition were Sindhi and Punjabi. While Punjab was divided into *Ugda* (east, that came to India) and *Lehanda* (West, that went to Pakistan), Sindh went away whole to Pakistan. A large number of Sindhis were displaced out of their homeland and migrated to India, forever becoming a people cleaved from their homeland. Displaced Punjabis who moved to India after Partition were also cut-off from their roots. The displaced were settled in colonies across the country and folk networks dependent on geographical proximity became weak. The members of these communities had to face invisibility, hyphenated identities and loss of folk knowledge and cultural systems. For the purpose of this paper, the digital experience of these two groups has been studied.

The line of inquiry into folklore of displaced persons is not a new one. Bausinger wrote about its rise to almost the status of a discipline after the Second World War with Germans displaced from East Europe. Such research opened doors to "oldest retained forms" as well as the recent developments of the time. Bausinger cites the example of a folk play once performed in

Bukovina region (now Romania and Ukraine). The re-enactment of the play came to be organised by resettled member of the community in Stuttgart, Germany. Interestingly, while the younger generation did not show much interest in first attempts at re-enactment, the sound filming of the play ignited interest and garnered participation. Bausinger points out that a folklorist can focus on old elements of the play or take a wholistic view, including sense of survival, tussle between generations, and equation between the old and the new in the form of the content and technology (Bausinger, 124). This landmark research also led to the understanding of change in folk culture in the context of developments like urbanisation and industrialisation.

Lin Degh also conducted similar study on peasants from rural Europe, particularly Hungary, who migrated to the US. She observed the mix of old and new elements in the culture formed by this group. Their experience included sudden break from old life and adaptation of new. Degh says this presented a new scenario to folklorists who had so far dealt with organic and gradual progression. "This peculiar situation forced the immigrants to establish their own Ethnic communities, in which they developed a specific kind of national solidarity" (Degh 553).

This leads us to the understanding that the experience of displaced groups is unique to each context and justifies modifications in established approaches so as to capture the full scale and range of such an experience. At the same time, these examples help us put the Indian experience of displacement in global context and provide us a backdrop to explore its dimensions.

Several attempts have been made to capture the experience of disconnection from land. Amandeep Sandhu's work on Punjabi identity and Saaz Aggarwal's collection of Sindhi voices are examples of this. Sandhu's words echo a sentiment shared by many members of displaced communities: "Unlike people born in Panjab who have a direct connection with, and hence a memory of the land, I have no liminal or tangible marker of belonging to Panjab. While my family did hail from Panjab, I was neither born here, nor do I live here. I have no address, bank statement, Aadhaar card, and passport or land ownership to prove my connection with Panjab" (Sandhu).

In this context, Anjali Gera Roy's theorisation about the role of imagination in formulation of identity provides a valuable insight. She looks at Punjab in particular, and homeland in general, as ethno-cultural entho-spatial and ethno-linguistic construct that is produced not only by those who live there but also by those who have moved out of it and those who have become part of its new emerging narratives. She proposes the concept of "free-flowing cartographies" that create room for understanding homeland as a social construct and state of consciousness beside a geographical region. "The region is simultaneously imagined as a small place, a neighbourhood, a city and village but also as performative practices and a certain way of doing things" (Roy 12).

Sindhi Folk Narratives in the Digital World

After the Partition, Sindhi in India forever became a people without land. The Census Report of 1951 showed that a major chunk of Sindhis had settled in Bombay, Saurashtra, Kutch, Rajasthan, Ajmer, and Delhi (Thakur 34). Traumatized and uprooted from their land, the Sindhi immigrants in India organised themselves by creating new social networks. Victor Barnow tried to study the social structure in Sindhi refugee colonies in 1952. He observed that no

generalisation could be made as the settlements varied in their organization, affiliations, etc. He therefore, focused his study on the Pimpri refugee colony and observed that traditional affiliations had undergone a change. Social relationships were being formed along regional allegiances, ignoring the caste stratifications that existed before. Hence, regional and town identities became more important with people identifying closely with others from the same region or town in Sind (Barnow, 145). The new groupings led to creation of new local 'panchayats' that still exist and that helped people rebuild folk networks. Caste panchayats were slowly replaced by these regional panchayats (Anand, 638).

On one hand Sindhi folk culture has been absorbing elements from its changed surroundings; the easy availability of mass media has also ensured preservation and sharing of Sindhi practices that were fading from memory. So while Sindhis in Maharashtra have taken to local delicacies like puran-poli or pav-bhaji, mass media has taken Sindhi delicacies like dal-pakwan, koki or papad across the globe.

Over the years, the dislocated Sindhi community in India did rebuild life and home in India but they have been consistently marginalised and their conspicuous absence from Partition discourse is testimony to this. The voicelessness and cultural negation has even led to stray calls for deletion of 'Sindh' from the national anthem. There has been an increasing awareness within the community regarding loss of folk culture, narratives and identity. In recent years, the opening up of the digital world has seen the community extensively use digital tools to socialise, organise, and build networks. In this manner, the digital world has become the new ground for performance of folk culture and social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube have become thriving sites of folk performance for Sindhis. A selection of these has been discussed in this paper as examples:

Sindhi Sangat: This Facebook page has almost four lakh followers and is dedicated to "promoting and preserving Sindhi heritage and culture". Besides Sindhi language tutorials, the platform shares videos made by members on nursery rhymes, idioms and phrases, jokes, and enactment of common family interactions. The platform particularly focuses on children and rebuilding the chain of tradition. Animated versions of Sindhi folktales are prepared with support of tradition carriers and shared to reach out to children. Similarly, videographed enactments of interaction of children about Sindhi cultural practices and artefacts are shared to bridge gaps in transfer of traditional knowledge. Sindhi folk performances at events are live-streamed on the platform. Members are able to connect to the live performances in real time, leave comments and respond like a physical audience. Posts related to folk festivals, comprising songs, video enactment of legends and beliefs are also shared and appreciated by the members. Prominent members of the community interact with the Sindhi audiences across the globe through live interviews. Old videos of community elders and who have passed away are also shared on important days to inspire the members of the community. The key organisers of the group are based in Dubai and as a result most physical performances are Dubai based but live-streaming allows all community members regardless of their geographical location to connect.

Super Sindhi: This Facebook page has 1.5 million followers and describes its target as making comedy videos "on things that happen in our homes and lives". The content is purely video based where actors present common scenes from Sindhi household with a comic twist. The

producer and director of the platform is Pune-based Umang Athwani. Among the actors are his family members including his father, mother, brother and grandmother. The genre imbibes elements of traditional Sindhi folk forms like *saang* where domestic and family scenes were used as subject matter of dramatic presentations. Most videos on this page show simple middle-class family situations involving parents and children. The actors show daily scenes like mother haggling at local groceries stores, fight between husband and wife, parents teaching children a lesson etc. A number of videos revolve around business and finances such as zealous account keeping, being pinchpenny, shopkeeper dealing with tedious customers etc. Important to note is that a majority of Sindhis traditionally belonged to trading castes and the community members are well-known even today for their business acumen. The Athwani family also runs the outlet ‘Karachi Sweets’ in Pune that is often featured in the videos. The language used in the videos is Hindi, which is an example of the impact of acculturation of the community after Partition. The videos show significant viewer engagement with community members leaving comments and connecting.

Sindhionism: This YouTube channel, operational since 2014, boasts of 1.66 lakh subscribers. Its owner is Dirven Hazari promises “clean, funny content in Sindhi” and claims to have followers from as many as 170 countries. The content is in Sindhi and focused on situations from modern everyday life. The videos are spoofs spanning topics like Sindhi personality sketches –types of salespersons, types of customers, general stores, people at weddings, etc. The channel also claims to have made the world’s first Sindhi web series. The first season of this series has the story of four men planning a trip together. The series reflects a cross-section of Sindhi society with all four men engaged in business or entrepreneurial activities. The four joke about common Sindhi themes like family ties, business sense, food habits, etc. The language is common Sindhi laced with vernacular idioms, phrases and an occasional word of English as used in everyday interaction. The videos are shot at common locales and streets and the script imitates everyday life scenarios. Over the pandemic period, several humorous videos also addressed the lockdown situation. Business interests remain a key theme on this channel also with videos on start-ups, business ideas, small retailers etc. Family matters like weddings, domestic quarrels also form the subject of many videos. The videos on this channel generate significant viewer engagement with comments, appreciation and interactions.

Sindhi- memer: This Instagram account boasts of having over 25 thousand followers. The account uses Sindhi language in Roman script and encourages users to leave comments in Sindhi. The account uses simple humour on subjects like food, digestion, domestic finance, siblings, technology etc. The account also shares posts on Sindhi festivals like Cheti Chand using meme forms to express the excitement and build up to celebrations. Popular Sindhi folk songs are used in Gifs and short animated videos much to the appreciation of the community that is familiar with these. Short sketches such as new Sindhi daughter-in-law, older women at Sindhi wedding, women gossiping about husbands are shared on the account. These are in the style of Sindhi *saang* where such themes were used to create humour. The account reposts from other Instagrammers who post interesting content related to Sindhi culture and folk life.

Sindhi Randhino: This Instagram account has over 10 thousand followers and focuses on Sindhi food and memes. The memes are in Hindi, English as well as Sindhi; often an everyday mix of the languages close to the vernacular spoken idiom is presented. Reference to Sindhi foods like dal-pakwan, koki, papad is made through trending videos and memes presenting an organic and gripping mix of old and new. The videos feature the young generation enjoying and engaging with Sindhi folk culture. The memes and videos thus become the site of folk performance where folk tradition and its codes are passed on and relished. The account also reposts from other Instagrammers who create content related to Sindhi folk life, culture and beliefs, thus providing community members a platform to share folk knowledge and creativity. Many more such accounts and channels exist across digital platforms where individuals perform, share and connect through folk practices. WhatsApp is another technological tool that is widely used to connect. Sindhi groups on Whatsapp alert members to events, functions, TV shows, and online shows that may be of common interest. Members share their knowledge allowing for transmission and practice of this knowledge. Facebook also has such groups, for example, ‘**Sindhi Community Official**’ that has 28 thousand members who post news and content of interest to other members. The posts include matrimonial, intimations about important festivals and community dates, Sindhi songs, dance and art, live feed of events from local cultural centres like Lal Sai Mandir, Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi, Lal Sai Mandir, Janak Puri, etc. The groups function like the central platform of a village with members sharing matters of concern and interest moderated by senior or influential members. Thus, the use of virtual platforms is extensive and wide spread within the community allowing members to build networks and socialise besides retelling and practicing folk narratives.

Punjabi Folk Narratives in Digital World

The Partition in 1947 tore apart Punjab. It led to large-scale forced migration creating an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The impact of Partition was such that it changed the essential constitution of the Punjabi society right from its demography to village life, shared memories to narratives. On the demographic front, not only did Partition lead to a massive loss of lives but it also led to huge homogenization of the district population by religion. (Hill et al. 11). According to the study conducted by Hill and others, “only four districts in 1941- Kangra, Karnal, Rohtak and Simla had more than two-thirds Hindu population; in 12 districts the population was more than two-thirds Moslem: no district was majority Sikh. In 1941, only three districts of the Punjab had less than 28 percent Moslem population. In 1951, eight districts were more than two-thirds Hindu; all 15 of the districts that became part of Pakistan were more than 90 percent Moslem; three districts were majority Sikh” (12).

The impact of Partition reached deep inside Punjabi villages as it disturbed social harmony and demographic. Migration of artisans and folk artistes caused folk traditions that developed organically over centuries to be uprooted overnight. Where as earlier, each part of Punjab had its unique variant of folk practices; the abrupt redivision of population caused this uniqueness to vanish. In the years the followed Partition, cultural preservation efforts reduced the region specificity of folk art variants. Dance types and art forms earlier popular in West Punjab came to be practiced in East Punjab as well, and vice versa. A large component of dislocated Punjabis was resettled in far off parts of India and eventually many migrated abroad too. Gradually a global community of Punjabis began to emerge with the digital world providing

unlimited space to them to interact and network. Punjabi folk communities are very popular across social media and digital platforms some of which have been discussed here.

Punjabi Status, Punjabi Pariwar: Both these are private groups on Facebook with 87 thousand and 20 thousand members, respectively, drawn not only from various districts of Punjab but also different Parts of India and diaspora. Members of Punjabi Status share videos, photos, text based content, memes, jokes etc. Content is shared in Punjabi, Hindi and English languages. Members also use the platform to announce birth of child, wedding, anniversary, death etc. Posts related to folk cultural elements like food, clothes, festive days, folk art are commonly shared. Members also share their own photos and videos while engaged in performative folk culture dressed up in folk attire, showing of farm lands and activities, wedding and other ceremonies, etc.

Members of Punjabi Pariwar share videos of religious and cultural centres, intimation of cultural events comprising important days, anniversaries of known figures in the community, jokes and tips about family life, etc. Feed from local religious sites like Chintpurni, Jwalaji, Mansa Devi, Naina Devi etc are shared besides devotional videos like gurbani, bhajan etc.

Troll Punjabi: This is a Facebook page of eponymous entertainment website curated for Punjabis. The page has almost 7 lakh likes and has been operational since 2012. The page features engaging memes and posts on issues concerning Punjabis. ILETS exam required for finding job abroad is one of the subjects of memes as in a community with common aspiration is to move overseas passing this exam is a common household aspiration. Similarly, memes and jokes abound on politics, food, sports, festivals, etc. The language used is mostly Punjabi but written in Roman script.

Several such pages and groups exist on Facebook that give platform for performance of Punjabi folk narratives. Niche platforms exist on the basis of region, age groups, purpose— such as matrimony, retail, real estate, etc.

The Punjab Club, Jive Punjab, and Brownjattsiyape: These Instagram accounts have over 31 thousand, 14 thousand and 24 thousand followers, respectively. The Punjab cub describes itself as a “kaleidoscopic view of Punjab, to connect people across the orders for the love of Punjab.” The account features old recordings of Punjabi folk songs and folk life. Posts include photos and short videos of activities associated with Punjabi folk life such as pickle making, animal and bird rearing, farming, kite making, portraits like farmwomen, milkman, folk artistes, etc. The account provides excellent documentation and dissemination of folk narratives of Punjab while also giving a platform to folk artistes and carriers of form tradition to perform. Jive Punjab describes itself as an initiative to “keep Punjabi folk arts alive”. The account has a YouTube channel as well and provides platform to folk singers and musicians. The account also hosts live concerns about which followers are informed and encouraged to attend.

The Jammu-based Brownjattsiyape account has youthful appeal and features posts related to Punjabi music and artistes such as Sidhu Moosewala. A majority of posts are in the form of Twitter posts poking fun at everyday concerns and issues.

Malwa Punjabi Cultural Live: This is the YouTube channel of Malwa TV. It serves as an example of regional media platforms functioning as anchors of transmission and performance of folk culture and narratives. The channel live casts regional cultural events featuring folk

singers, dancers, dramatic performers, sport persons, etc. The channel has been functional since 2014 and has 1.30 million subscribers. Performances marking festivals like Vaishakhi, Lohri, Teej, besides folk fairs and folk deities are featured on the channel. It also includes mimicry performances in the style of *Nakal*— a popular imitation based folk drama form of Punjab. Small gatherings at the level of districts and villages where folk artistes perform are also streamed on this channel. These performances reflect folk sentiments such as familial ties, relationships, duties, rites and rituals, local beliefs, legends and tales, etc. In one of the performances, for example, the folk artistes sing of what is the test of character for a man, woman, son and daughter. Similarly, other performances involve a typical Punjabi folk mix of couplets, song, and dialogue by the artistes.

Sada Punjab, the Punjab: These YouTube channels with nearly 6 lakh subscribers each started in 2018 and 2016, respectively. The channels feature family video content on common folk themes like difficult mother-in-law, fight between sisters-in-law, aunt's share in family property, son-in-law, weddings, daughter-in-law's jewellery etc. Episodes features ceremonies and beliefs around festivals are also featured. Videos are shot in simple family set ups that viewers easily relate to. The videos have high engagement with viewership in millions.

All social media and digital platforms have niche Punjabi content comprising folk cooking, rural practices, styling, cultural history, folk wisdom, etc. Besides these several community efforts are also being made at building digital archives to preserve and document folk narratives.

Punjab Digital Library is an example of one such account on Facebook account. The content shared from the account includes old photos of the folk cultural life of Punjab, nuggets about historical sites and the folk narratives associated with them, besides digitised versions of old and rare books, documents and material folk artefacts. Examples include maps of old mud houses, lithographs, pamphlets, etc.

The website **Folk Punjab** (folkpunjab.org) is another example of archive where folk narratives including Punjabi proverbs, riddles and songs find home. While archives are crowd-sourced pursuits of academic temperament, they do provide the important function of documentation, translation and preservation of folk narratives that can be accessed by all. This is particularly important in the context of displaced communities where carriers of folk tradition have been lost over time. The presence of such digital archives is scarce in Sindhi where such efforts have been started more recently under the ambit of National Sindhi Academy.

Observations

The Sindhi and Punjabi sites discussed in the preceding sections are only some examples out of the vast and unbridled digital landscape. These sites are either the collective work of community members or the result of initiative by some entrepreneurial members as opposed to institutional or governmental efforts at conservation. Unlike the latter, that turn folk narratives into artefacts for display or study, the former represent folk narratives in their live form and carry them into the future.

Folk narratives are hard to pin down and identify due to their constantly shifting forms. Punjabi and Sindhi communities are effectively using digital platforms to build folk networks and regroup along lines of identity. The pre-partition folk narratives were built along the lines of village networks, caste identities, family lines, language variations, and regional locations, among other factors. The newer folk narratives now visible on digital platforms retain some of these elements though to a much lesser degree – like past regional affiliations, caste, and

language. The new nodes of folk ties include presence on digital platforms and engagement with such content, ability to create and understand digital content like shorts, memes, status updates, etc. Folk community groups in the digital world are also sub-divided on the lines of age groups, interests (food, travel, and music), business or livelihood; in this they cut across harder boundaries of caste and region and draw upon a larger folk set.

The study of a cross section of folk narratives on digital platforms also reveals a slow evolution of old narratives in new forms. Folk artistes, for example, can be seen incorporating new materials and responding to contemporary issues. They also display awareness of new technology and attempt to use it to their advantage. The old format of folk performance on a slightly raised *teer-kamani* (bow-arrow shaped) platform with audience seated on the ground in a semi-circle is now replaced with fully-elevated stage with amplifiers, event posters, sometimes even digital screens. The audience includes those physically present and video-graphing the performance, as well as those watching live digital feeds from far off areas. Traditional practices like audience members handing money to performers with requests still continues and artistes liberally announce the names of donors to encourage others – an age-old practice.

Performative folk culture involving festivals, weddings, births, etc. also finds unique place on digital platforms. Besides sharing of related live feeds, videos, photos and texts, these are also organically integrated into dramatisations that are widely watched. The platforms feature dramatisations involving ordinary family scenes and the subject matter of these takes into account time relevant factors like seasons, festivals, wedding, etc. Appropriate folk traditions are depicted in these dramatisations along with any social messaging required.

Conclusion

Modern digital technology has hence altered perception of folk spatiatlity. The digital world, unbound by limitations of physical distance, has provided a tool to folk communities to expand their reach. This has been particularly relevant for folk communities that have been dislocated due to various factors. A more in-depth study of folk narratives and practices over digital platforms taking into its ambit a wider set of folk communities could help us understand this and arrive at theorisations relevant for study of Indian folkloristics.

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