

## Role of Folklore in Safeguarding Cultural Identity

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In an age shaped by globalisation, digital media and cultural homogenization, folklore remains one of the most powerful instruments for preserving cultural identity. Folklore, including folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, songs and oral traditions, operates as entertainment and also as a living archive of a community's collective memory, moral values and historical consciousness. Across civilizations, folklore has safeguarded languages, traditions and social norms that formal historical records habitually neglect. It acts as a bridge between generations, ensuring cultural continuity in periods of political upheaval, colonization and social

transformation.

Historically, oral traditions played a foundational role in preserving societies long before the emergence of written literature. In ancient Greece, Homer's Iliad and Odyssey were transmitted orally for centuries before being documented in written form. These epics preserved Greek ideals of heroism and honour. African societies relied heavily on griots, who were traditional storytellers and historians who memorized genealogies, historical events and tribal customs. In the absence of written archives, these oral narratives became the primary source of cultural preservation and social cohesion.

Folklore has also functioned as a form of resistance against cultural erasure. During colonial rule in South Asia, indigenous folktales and regional storytelling traditions preserved local identities threatened by imperial domination. Punjabi folk romances such as Heer Ranjha, narrated by Waris Shah in the eighteenth century, embodied themes of love and tragedy and also reflected the social realities, linguistic richness and rural culture of Punjab. The tale became a symbol of Punjabi identity and emotional resistance against external political and cultural control. In Ireland during British rule, Celtic myths and Gaelic folklore played a crucial role in reviving Irish nationalism and preserving linguistic heritage.

Folklore embodies the ethical and philosophical worldview of a society. Traditional Japanese

folktales demonstrate discipline, humility and harmony with nature, values deeply rooted in Japanese culture. Native American folklore transmits ecological wisdom and spiritual relationships with the natural world, which unveil indigenous perspectives on environmental stewardship centuries before modern ecological discourse emerged.

The preservation of folklore also contributes to linguistic survival. Languages facing extinction repeatedly survive through oral storytelling traditions. UNESCO has repeatedly said that intangible cultural heritage, particularly folklore, is essential for protecting endangered languages and identities. In many rural communities, proverbs, riddles and folk songs continue to function as repositories of local dialects and historical memory. Without such traditions, cultural identity risks becoming detached from its linguistic roots.

Modernisation poses significant challenges to folklore preservation. Urbanization, mass media and the dominance of global popular culture have reduced intergenerational storytelling practices. Many younger generations increasingly consume digital entertainment rather than traditional narratives. Yet folklore has demonstrated remarkable adaptability. Contemporary literature, cinema and digital platforms now reinterpret traditional stories for modern audiences. Folklore is far more than a collection of old stories. It is a dynamic cultural institution that preserves historical memory, reinforces communal values, protects linguistic heritage and resists

cultural assimilation. Societies that neglect their folklore risk losing not only their traditions but also the deeper sense of identity that binds generations together.