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The Making of a 'Kumauni' Artifact: The Epic Malushahi

Vasudha Pande

This essay will look at the making of the social imaginary of Kumaun through the study of print media and the performance practice of a popular ballad from the region: Malushahi. During the last two centuries, this classic love story has seen various incarnations. It has been a part of many print versions in Kumauni, Garhwali, Hindi and English—as poetry, prose, a novel, plays, and stories for children. It has been included partially or in full in various folk collections of Kumaun. It has also generated a reasonable amount of discussion in academic circles. A definitive version of the text in Kumauni, Hindi and English, with notes and information about the singer Gopi Das, was produced by the anthropologist Konrad Meissner. Folklorists, historians, litterateurs, linguists, ethnomusicologists and anthropologists have paid great attention to both the form and content of its narrative.

It has also been sung and recorded in many versions for radio, video, film, CD, DVD, and VCD. Various versions are available on YouTube. Probably its most popular form is that of a musical written and directed by Mohan Upreti and performed regularly since the 1980s by the Parvatiya Kala Kendra, Delhi. The transformation of this ballad from the folk repertoire to a modern musical and part of the canon of Kumauni literature marks the emergence of a Kumauni identity.

Keywords: Kumaun, folk, literature, performance, public.

Introduction

This paper traces the emergence of a 'Kumauni public' in the early decades of the twentieth century in the Himalayan districts of present day Uttarakhand. The introduction of print and new educational institutions by the British produced an intelligentsia, which largely accepted Brahmanical versions of colonial history but contested an ethnography that emphasized the specificity of Kumaun custom. Intellectuals such as G.D. Upreti, a civil servant, collaborated with G.A. Grierson of the Linguistic Survey of India to establish 'Kumauni' with its various dialects as the language of the eastern districts of the Kumaun Division. From 1916-1926, the Kumaun Parishad, an organisation dedicated to the development of the region, mobilised the people against unjust colonial policies and produced an aware and responsive vernacular community. By 1932, the term 'Kumauni' was accepted at a public convention organized by three segments of Kumaun society: Brahmins, Rajputs and Shilpakars. Histories of Kumaun and a journal dedicated to Kumauni language and literature were published in this decade. Kumauni folklore was also translated into English and the first Kumauni version of Malushahi was published at this time. Though Malushahi was originally the tale of a Katyuri king sung by the bards (known as *Das*) accompanied by drummers (*Dholi*), a caste-conscious society produced numerous print versions which largely ignored its performative aspect. However, new institutions like radio and theatre encouraged performance. Socialist and left-minded intellectuals encouraged participation by traditional performers like Gopi Das. Organizations like the Lok Kalakar Sangh and Parvatiya Kala Kendra now used the folk repertoire to represent Kumaun culture. A classic example was Mohan Upreti's dance-drama, Malushahi. Konrad Meissner, an anthropologist, also chose to record Gopi Das's performance and publish it with a detailed text in Kumauni and English. In the 1980s, Upreti and Meissner linked local performers, artists, and intellectuals to produce a unique commodity—a 'Kumauni' artifact—Malushahi.

The emergence of a 'Kumauni' identity in the eastern districts of the Kumaun Division of the North-Western Provinces can be linked to the advent of British rule in this region in 1815. The development of a local print industry as well as the establishment of educational institutions created an intelligentsia that was deeply influenced by the taxonomies and categories applied by British administrators to the local context. New subjectivities emerged from both the acceptance and contestation of British categories of language, caste, religion, gender and community.

Summary of Malushahi

As a prelude to the discussion of its significance in Kumauni popular culture, I begin with an abbreviated summary of the Malushahi. The version presented here is based on that sung by Gopi Das to Mohan Upreti for his publication *Malushahi the Ballad of Kumaon* (n.d.) and to Konrad Meissner for his publication *Malushahi and Rajula* (1985).

The story begins with the journey of two childless couples who meet on a pilgrimage to Gaulighat, Mayapuri. They decide that if they have a son and daughter, the two children will be betrothed. Rajula (a girl) is born to the Shauka/Bhotiya couple of the Upper Himalayas and Chandra Bikhpal (a boy) is born to the Huniya chief further north in the trans-Himalayas. Rajula, the only child of the pastoral trader Sunapati, grows up to be a beautiful girl, enamoured by the stories of the Katyuri prince of Bairat whose palace is in the lush valley of Garur (middle Himalayas). When her father prepares for a journey to Bairat to trade salt, (from the trans-Himalayas), for rice, she insists that she will accompany him. They camp near the temple of Agniyari Devi. There, Malushahi, the Prince of Bairat, sees Rajula and mistakes her for the goddess of the temple, until she laughs. The next morning, Malushahi waits for her father to leave and visits her to profess undying love. These clandestine meetings continue until one day her father finds out and takes Rajula post-haste back home and she is married to Chandra Bikhpal. Rajula is not willing to accept this marriage and Bikhpal locks her in an iron cage. She then pretends that she does not know Malushahi and pleads that she be let out of the cage. As soon as the cage is opened, Rajula escapes. She decides to go to Bairat, rather than return home because her parents will forcibly send her back to Bikhpal.

The journey to Bairat is long, tedious and full of dangers for a young, unescorted and beautiful girl. She prays to the Lord Baganath (of Bageshwar) who also propositions her for marriage. She turns him down and proceeds to Phaya Rau where the *gana* (the people of big necks of Phayarau who are 12 times 20 in number) see her and begin fighting amongst themselves as to who would have her. She runs up a hill and they run after her but, tired by the steep chase, they eventually give up. She then goes to Chirapani, washes her feet, drinks water and is resting when Kalu Kahar notices her. He is an old *paik* (warrior), bent over with age, but he cannot resist Rajula. He holds her like a bird in his hand and takes her to his home in Kaharkot. When his sons see Rajula, they are dazed by her beauty and decide that they will have her and all of them beat up their father. In the pandemonium that follows, Rajula runs

away. Giving up all hope, Kalu Kahar becomes a mendicant in Rajula's name.

Near Doonagiri Mountain, a pasture owner, Panchuwa Dorial, gives her milk and curds and offers to marry her. Rajula accepts the food and suggests that if he impresses her with his dance, she might accept his proposal. Rajula then asks him to dance on his head, and while he is dancing, she covers a bush with her head cloth and runs away. When Panchuwa Dorial realizes this, he also smears himself with ashes and becomes a mendicant in Rajula's name. By this time, Rajula is near Giwar, close to Bairat. It is a hot and sultry day in the rainy season and Rajula stops next to the paddy fields of the Mahars who are watering their terraces with a *gul* (canal) taken from the river. Rajula puts her tired feet into the water, but her feet are so pretty that the water stops flowing and starts to caress her feet. When the water stops flowing in the canal, the Mahars send their serf to check, and cannot understand his report. They come to find out what is obstructing the channel. They are mesmerized by Rajula's beauty and suggest she choose one of them to marry. Rajula refuses, where upon they call the *chowkidar* (watchman), and ask him to divest her of clothes and ornaments. They then whip her and when she is unconscious they tell the watchman to dump her in the canal. When she recovers, she finds herself naked in the water.

Rajula hides herself in a cluster of bushes near the place where Malushahi's queens come to fetch water. The queens are surprised to see her and ask her how she has come to such a state. She says she was fleeing from her in-laws to her natal home when she was attacked and robbed. Feeling sorry for her, the queens give her a set of clothes. Although they are apprehensive that if Malushahi sees her he will be captivated by her beauty, Rajula promises them that she will leave immediately. Reassured, they leave her to her fate. That evening Rajula realizes that she is very close to the palace because she can hear the music and recognizes the various instruments of the ensemble. When the music subsides, she quietly enters Malushahi's palace. He thinks that she has come to him in a dream and is delighted to find that she is real. She narrates the story of her harrowing journey, and persuades an angry Malushahi not to punish the Mahars. They spend five nights and five days together, but Rajula realizes that her position is awkward and decides to leave while Malushahi is fast asleep. In the Meissner version of the story, she puts him through a test of fidelity, which he fails so she decides to leave (Meissner 1985: 145). She writes a letter to him saying that she has visited him, enduring much hardship, and now he should reciprocate and fetch her.

Malushahi decides to take up the challenge. His mother Dharma tries to dissuade him, but he does not relent; he lights a fire, smears himself with ashes and becomes a mendicant in the name of Rajula. Eventually, in despair, his mother seeks the advice of the Gurus, Kheki Das and Bheki Das. The Gurus promise that one of them will accompany Malushahi to Jalnar Desh. Yet the actual preparations are different from preparations for war. All those who are part of the enterprise are to dress as mendicants, and all martial dresses are changed to yellow or orange robes. All copper and iron utensils are melted and made into *chimtats* (tongs), *khappars* (begging bowls) and ear-rings. An army of mendicants sets off and the Guru who leads the army has *mantras* (spells) in his bag and plays a magical copper drum. The army is busy lighting fires, smoking hashish and chanting spells. This army crosses many rivers, villages and towns, and reaches Homdhura. The air of Homdhura is poisonous and the army falls unconscious and are revived by a magical spell.

After crossing the Hyunli Ganga, they reach Kankarikhal where they set up camp and decide to send a message to Rajula about their arrival. Though the army is advised not to consume any cooked food, they go from door to door with their *khappars* (begging bowls) for alms and information about Rajula. When Rajula receives news of their arrival, she goes to Kankarikhal and meets Malushahi, his Guru and the Katyuri army. They, Rajula and Malushahi, spend the entire day together, and in the evening she goes back to her father's house. The Guru then decides to send Malushahi to Rajula's apartments. A root is tied around his neck that turns him into a parrot. Malushahi goes to Rajula as a parrot, spends the night with her and comes back the next morning. Rajula then visits him in the camp and spends the day with him. It goes on like this until one day, Rajula comes with a piece of cloth and asks the Guru to stitch a blouse for her. While doing this, he pricks his finger with a needle. Rajula is very concerned, which makes Malushahi jealous. He is disrespectful towards the Guru, and this makes the Guru uneasy. When Malushahi visits Rajula's apartments, he finds he is unable to get back as a parrot.

Now Sunapati, Rajula's father, discovers Malushahi's presence in the house. The next day, when Rajula goes out of the palace to wash her clothes at Sujanghat, she warns Malushahi not to eat anything. Rajula's parents take advantage of her absence and persuade Malushahi that as their son-in-law he should accept breakfast. As soon as he consumes the food he dies and his body is thrown down the Black Precipice. When Rajula comes back, she searches for Malushahi, and her mother says he has departed for Kankrikhal. Rajula goes to Kankrikhal and does not find Malushahi there.

Six months pass without any news of Malushahi. One night, he appears to his mother in a dream saying that he has been poisoned and his body is at the Black Precipice. He asks her to please bring back his body and perform the last rites. She goes to her Guru, Bhekhi Das, father of Khekhi Das, and says that she will become a mendicant in her son's name and requests the Guru bring back the remains of Malushahi. The Guru takes herbs, spells and sets off. There, he meets his son, Khekhi Das, and asks the whereabouts of Malushahi. His son says: "Malushahi uttered unfair words about me, and since then he has been living with Rajula in her parent's home." Bhekhi Das tells his son that Malushahi has been poisoned and his body is lying in the Black Precipice. They go and find Malushahi's body. He has not suffered any decay, and the Guru uses herbs and chants to reduce the effects of the poison. Malushahi gets up, as if from a long sleep. Rajula receives the news and comes to Kankrikhal. She nurses the emaciated and pale Malushahi for ten days and then they all leave for Bairat. Bairat celebrates the return of their King and Queen and even the gods are envious of their happiness.

Print Culture and Construction of 'Kumauni'

Traditionally, the legend of Malushahi, a Katyuri king of the medieval period, was sung by bards over many days to audiences who knew the story and identified with the narrative. The advent of British rule changed these coordinates and over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Malushahi was published to represent a Kumauni identity, premised upon the Kumauni language—the language in which Malushahi was composed.

The takeover of Kumaun by the British ushered in many changes in social and intellectual life. As the Imperial order established itself, it dispensed with local-level rituals of representation, which relied on courtiers, poets, artists, genealogists, bards and musicians to make power audible/visible. As Bernard Cohn suggests, this restructuring of power and authority produced new 'instrumentalities' of rule for subject populations. The most critical of these was the 'Investigative Modality' that produced a vast array of information through reports, censuses and commissions, which were then ordered, classified and made usable for administrative purposes. The establishment of a colonial state entailed not only the conquest of a territory, but also required the conquest of "an epistemological space as well" (Cohn 1992: 4). This knowledge produced "factualised statements about reality" that affected both rulers and ruled (Ludden 1993: 250-78). The maze of procedures required to negotiate this system was bewildering and noted by a wandering minstrel in Kumaun who sang

couplets exhorting the peasants not to do anything without registering it on stamp paper (Pande 1910: 78-82). The imperial project ultimately required that local populations learn and adapt to the technologies of rule through educational institutions which would school them into the new ways. The intelligentsia that emerged from these educational institutions was marked and influenced by the colonial dispensation, and generated a "new political language, new power, new social groups, new desires and fears, new subjectivities" (Asad 1999: 322).

How did this play out in Kumaun? In the early years of the nineteenth century, vernacular schools were supported by the government. Even in 1848, the greatest part of the work of instruction was carried on by private individuals. In 1850, however, the London Missionary Society arrived in Almora and Reverend J.H. Budden with the support of Henry Ramsay, Commissioner of Kumaun, established the Mission School, later known as the Ramsay High School. By 1870, the Mission School had acquired a building and in 1874 it had 750 students on its rolls. By 1880, two generations of students had graduated. Government schools also registered high rates of enrolment, and in 1868 the Kumaun Division ranked highest in the percentage of educated citizens? to the total population. Even the Anglo-Vernacular schools performed well, and the *Halkabandi* schools, (supported by the local gentry), also registered an increase in enrolled students. During this time, there was an ever-growing demand for more primary, middle and upper level schools and for improvement of vernacular education (Pande 2015: 6-10).

The development of print and journalism was also linked to education. By the 1870s, English and Hindi newspapers started publications in Nainital and Almora.¹ The first local newspaper was the bi-monthly *Samai Vinod* which began publication in 1868. It sold 68 copies and was rated third amongst the newspapers published from the North-Western Provinces. Publishing was not lucrative because of the limited number of subscriptions. Nonetheless, journalism was considered highly respectable. Whereas the *Samai Vinod* was owned by Jai Dutt Joshi, the *Almora Akhbar* was collectively registered by the Debating Club of Almora (established by Buddhi Ballabh Pant in 1870). The Almora Debating Club began its activities as a series of meetings/discussions on topics such as cleanliness, anger, education, *Janmashtami* (a religious festival) and more. In 1871, the club decided to establish a Hindi newspaper that would cater to the entire community. The newspaper began as a bi-monthly, and by 1883 it had become a weekly. The club continued to publish the *Almora Akbar* until it was shut down by the government in 1918. The newspaper then changed its name to *Shakti* and is still in publication today.

Vernacular newspapers and journals reported important discussions held in Almora. A much reported event was Reverend Ram Chandra Basu's lecture on Christianity in 1879. This was publicly contested by a Brahmin pleader, Pt. B.D. Joshi. The argument left a deep impression on the young L.D. Joshi, a student at the Mission School (Pande 2014: 28). The debate was subsequently published in a bi-lingual Christian journal, *Arya* (ibid, 30). The repercussions of this were evident ten years later, when the conversion of a Brahmin student created a storm and led to an exodus of students from the Mission School, Almora, and resulted in the formation of a separate school by the local gentry (ibid, 23-36). To counter the *Almora Akhbar*, which reported this episode in detail, Commissioner Henry Ramsay encouraged the establishment of another paper: the *Kumaun Samachar Patrika*. This publication was established in 1895 by Lala Debi Dass. However, the *Kumaun Samachar Patrika* could not sustain itself, and after a year and a half it ceased publication. Other newspapers that were established such as *Jyoti* and *Kumaun Mitra* were also met the same fate.

An important intervention in the intellectual life of the Kumaun Division was the compilation and publication of the *Himalayan Gazetteer* by E. T. Atkinson in 1882. It provided a basic narrative for the history of the region (Atkinson 1882, Volume II, Part II: 267-698), and gave Kumaun a specific Himalayan identity. Significantly, Atkinson's approach explained social hierarchy in terms of successive waves of conquest by more 'evolved' ethnic groups. Atkinson argued that the earliest inhabitants were the aborigines of the lowest caste (Dalit) who at some point were subjugated by the *Khasas* (a tribal group speaking Indo Aryan). A later wave of migration by Brahmins and Kshatriyas from the North Indian plains created another level of social stratification. The narrative implied that the most recent arrivals—the British—had an entitlement to rule because of their technological superiority. Atkinson's *Gazetteer* was based primarily upon Sanskrit sources and did not refer to any vernacular texts or oral traditions, bypassing most local informants except for Pandit Rudra Dutt Pant. Atkinson provided the 'historiographic modality,' a template for the construction of categories, subsequently identities, that would acquire form in the next century as a *varna* (caste order). This is what Cohn suggests "as the construction of cultural categories and the process of that construction" (Cohn 1987: 47). The implicit hierarchy of this narrative and its acceptance by the intelligentsia would eventually generate tensions in the social life of early twentieth-century Kumaun.

The importance granted to Shastras and Sanskrit by British administrators found resonance in intellectual traditions articulated by the intelligentsia. The Debating Club of Almora started a Sanskrit school and expressed veneration for scribal culture and manuscripts. One such text was the *Manaskhand*, a manuscript referred to by Atkinson which describes the pilgrimage to Kailash Manasarovar (not published till 1989). Sanskrit manuscripts like the *Kurmanchal Kavya* or *Kalyanchandrodaya Kavya* and *Traivarnik Nyaya, Jagachandrika* were also referred to and discussed (Pande 1984: 352-68; Mishra 1984: 380-90). Writers like Chintamani Jyotishi (1874-1934) published *Durga Path Sar* in 1897 and translated *Satyanarayan Katha* and *Bhagvad Gita* into Kumauni. Jwala Dutt Joshi translated *Das Kumar Charitra* in 1892 and Leela Dhar Joshi translated *Meghadoot* in 1894 (Pandey 1977: 148).

Around the end of the nineteenth-century, as the Sanskrit roots of the regional tradition were celebrated, a restive intelligentsia was gradually asserting its role as an informant and as an active agent in the production of knowledge about the Himalayan Districts. By the 1890s, residents of the Kumaun Division had already participated in four (1865, 1871, 1881, 1891) census exercises. The recovery of a well-worked, hand-written compilation, imposed upon the 1881 Census from the Almora Record Room, provides interesting additional information about categories that the All India Census did not recognise. Clearly the new intelligentsia was bringing to the fore specific local details that recognised and interrogated colonial categories.²

The process of documentation begun by the Linguistic Survey may be understood in this context. Here we find an interesting change. Whereas Atkinson's native informant is a shadowy figure, Grierson's collaborator—Ganga Dutt Upreti—has a visible presence in the archive. He worked as a Deputy Collector, where he not only compiled information about the various dialects of Central Pahari but also published two texts entitled *Proverbs and Folklore in Kumaun and Garhwal* (Upreti 1894) and *Hill Dialects of the Kumaun Division* (Upreti 1900). As Javed Majeed suggests, compiling information about vernaculars was collaborative and raised issues of authorship (Majeed 2011: 19-39). Upreti was supported by Edmund White, Director of Public Instruction in this enterprise and Upreti's first book is dedicated to him. Not only was Upreti recognised as an author, he was also honoured and feted by British officialdom. A red Moroccan leather copy of *Proverbs and Folklore* is in the Royal Collection Trust, which states that it was presented to Queen Victoria by the author.³ G.D. Upreti was also given a certificate by King Edward VII,

Emperor of India in 1903, and in 1910 he was awarded the title of Rai Bahadur by Lord Minto.

Upreti noted the presence of eastern dialects of Gorkhali and Doti in his description (Kumaun Division) along with a separate dialect for the Doms. In 1914, Grierson recognised these dialects as Eastern Pahari of *Khasakura* origin, (based upon the Census of 1891), and argued for the distinctiveness of Central Pahari of the Kumaun Division (Grierson 1914: 142-51, 159-166). Eventually, in consonance with colonial administrative boundaries, the Linguistic Survey divided Pahari language into Eastern, Central and Western Pahari. Central Pahari consisted of Kumauni and Garhwali with their various dialects. Central Pahari clearly demarcated Kumaun from Western Nepal on the east and separated Garhwal from the western states (present day Himachal Pradesh). The Kumauni language was now considered congruent with the administrative districts of Almora and northern *pattis* (administrative units) of Nainital. Recent research questions the category of Central Pahari and argues that Pahari may be divided into Eastern and Western Pahari, and Eastern Pahari should include Garhwali, Kumauni and Nepali (Joshi and Negi 1994: 259-274). This perspective echoes David Lelyveld's dissatisfaction with the Linguistic Survey's policy of finding a correspondence for each linguistic entity with a demarcated geographic identity determined from administrative headquarters. (Lelyveld 1993: 198). In the context of the early twentieth-century, this matching of administrative boundaries with cultural communities produced two distinct and neat historical formations: Garhwal and Kumaun, (which would later merge to form Uttarakhand). The nascent Kumauni identity now rested upon Grierson's Linguistic Survey and Upreti's Hill Dialects of the Kumaun Division.

According to Grierson, the standard Kumauni dialect was accessible to all but spoken primarily by the gentry of Almora. The lower classes spoke *Khasaparajiya*, a 'less refined' speech. He lamented the fact that "Till the last few years Kumauni has received no literary cultivation" and noted, "Of late years several patriotic gentlemen of Almora have endeavoured to give their native language the honour of a literature by writing books in Kumauni" (Grierson 1916: 209). He also gave a list of eight authors and fourteen books (printed) as the total corpus of Kumauni literature. It is significant that he wrote about Krishna Pande, Gumani Pant and Shiva Dutt Sati Sarma—the three popular figures of early Kumauni literature. Grierson also referred to contemporary writers Gaurda, Ram Dutt Pant, Shyama Charan Pant and Chandra Lal Chaudhari (Grierson 1927: 150-69). However, it is surprising that Grierson made no mention of oral traditions, nor any reference to bards,

genealogies, *jaqar* (shamanic séances) or storytelling, though he did use a folk story for illustration. Why such silence? This matter will be addressed later in this article.

Familiarity with Hindi in the Devanagari script helped the Kumauni intelligentsia negotiate the wider world of the Empire. This included the pacification of the Tarai, better railway and road networks, and the introduction of the automobile-facilitated integration with North India. Yet the more Kumaunis ventured out of their mountain terrain, the greater the pull of the Himalayan hill identity. In the early decades of the twentieth-century, the *Almora Akhbar's* critique of British rule became more strident because forced labour and denial of access to forest produce aggravated the problems of the peasantry (*Almora Akhbar* 17 November 1913). The newspaper also stated that the people of Kumaun wanted recruitment in the army and required a college for higher education (*Almora Akhbar* 8 May 1916). The Kumaun Parishad, a regional organization formed in Nainital in 1916, was successful in mobilising people from all over Kumaun (*Almora Akhbar* 21 August 1916). In 1921, forced labour was abolished and a series of forest fires made the government sit up and listen to the grievances of the Kumauni people (Guha 1989: 110-20).

The Kumaun Parishad also wanted the abolition of special administrative and legal arrangements for the hills—the Scheduled Districts Act and Kumaun Customary Law. It argued that these marked Kumaun as a backward area. Regional mobilisation was successful in modifying the application of the Scheduled Districts Act to Kumaun.⁴ The issue of Kumaun Customary Law was a more difficult matter because it created an invidious distinction between upper castes and *khasas*. Its application was resisted by upwardly mobile caste groups who wanted to disassociate themselves from its pejorative connotations. L.D. Joshi's book entitled *Khasa Family Law* was one such critique which argued that its application to Kumaun was misconceived (Joshi 1929: 58). Around this time, the expression of 'caste' in public life became an area of concern. In 1932, the Kurmanchal Samaj Sammelan (a civil society convention) attempted to resolve these internal tensions (Private Collection No. 5 District Archives, Nainital). All members of Kumauni society were now ascribed a *varna* (caste order) status as the Sammelan recognised Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and *Shilpakarsm* a term for artisanal groups, which gained currency during the early decades of the twentieth-century (V. Pande 2013: 81) as separate segments of Kumauni society. The ubiquitous *khasa* (tribal group regarded as original inhabitants by some scholars) of Atkinson and Grierson was relegated to a remote, inaccessible past and Kumaun was now a region analogous to other regional vernacular communities (O'Hanlon

2012: 123-128), its stratification in consonance with the *varna* order (ibid, 83-4). Now only a history and a literary canon were required to give the final touches to the Kumauni identity.

The first nationalist history of Kumaun, in Hindi, was written in 1938. B.D. Pande's *Kumaun Ka Itihas* cites John Stuart Mill on the principle of nationality and argues that nations should be organized around the cardinal principles of racial or ethnic unity, political organization, common language, common state and the similarity of culture. Pande's *Itihas* refers to the *khasa* interregnum but, somewhat curiously, it does not refer to the Kumauni language or its literature (B. D. Pande [1938] 1990: 237, 545-632). A journal *Achal*, (only published in Kumauni), was also published for some years between 1938 and 1939 by Dharma Nand Pant, edited by Jivan Chandra Joshi and Tara Dutt Pande. Its contributors were primarily upper caste, and its construction of Kumaun culture was from a Brahmanical perspective (Pandey 1977: 37). The 'high' tradition of the Kumauni language was underlined, and it collated a Kumauni literary tradition by publishing local adages and proverbs. It also published transcripts of copper plate inscriptions and tried to develop a history of the language. Another historiographical strand placed emphasis on oral and folk traditions for constructing Kumauni histories. Badri Shah's *Kurmanchal Kanti*, a history of Kumaun, was also written in 1938. Shah's history suggested that details of the Katyuri dynasty could be gleaned from folk ballads and pointed out that ascetic groups played an important role *vis a vis* Tibet (Shah 1938: 29). Unfortunately, this book did not impact the popular imagination and has not been written about nor has it been reprinted (reviewed in *Kumaun Kumud* July 28, 1938 by Mathura Dutt Trivedi).

The first work on folk traditions and lore was a collaborative venture, by Tara Dutt Gairola, a civil servant, and E.S. Oakley, a Christian missionary. It was published by the Government Press from Allahabad in 1935 and was titled *Himalayan Folklore*. The book was a translation into English of abbreviated versions of Kumauni and Garhwali legends. Here, we find the first reference to Malushahi and Rajula in the legend of the heroes. Though the book provided information about local legends, it paid no attention to the informants—the singers of these ballads. Marc Gaborieau, a French anthropologist who worked in Kumaun and Western Nepal in the 1960s and who wrote an introduction to the reprint of *Himalayan Folklore*, writes that, "Gairola tells very little about the ethnographic context of these songs, although he proposes a historical construction based on the texts of the legends. He explains that bards called *hurkiya*, attached to royal families, had

the function of encouraging warriors on the battlefield and entertaining guests at the court. But he tells nothing about the performances of the bards in his own day" (Oakley and Gairola [1935] 1977: xiii). Gairola's silence about practitioners of folk traditions speaks volumes. Interested in the projection of a high cultural tradition, he also glossed over references to polyandry and other practices considered unfavourable.

In 1936, Nitya Nand Misra, a history teacher trained by J.C. Powell Price IES, published the first Kumauni version entitled *Malushahi* (A Romantic Poem of the Hills), with a translation in English, in the *Journal of the United Provinces Historical Society* (Misra 1936: 23-54). Misra's interest was primarily historical; he tried to date the story and to identify the locale, suggesting that it may belong to the fourteenth or fifteenth century. More interesting are his comments: "the poem is generally recited by a villager in musical tone to the accompaniment of a drum (called *mudaka*). On a certain winter night, villagers gather in the house or courtyard and round the log they sit... [T]here is a special class of untouchables, *Mudakiyas* (drummers), who preserve these songs. ... At present the poem has fallen into disuse (but) ... *It has come out of the pure and simple heart of a rustic.*" (ibid, 25 emphases added). Misra's comment creates a folkloric conception for the story, establishing it as a cultural product. He refuses to historicise it, as there is no mention of informants, village or any specific details.

Though the story of *Malushahi* had entered the world of print, it would take another half-century for it to acquire an epic form. It was in the post-independence period, around the 1950s and 1960s, that an interest in oral traditions manifested itself and the intelligentsia took to transcribing and publishing texts, (claiming authorship), as an addition to knowledge about Kumaun. Partly, it was linked to the educational system that chose to teach Kumauni language and literature. Trilochan Pandey's collection of folklore dates from this time period, 1954 to be precise. His project was inaugurated by an award given by the Agra University for a research paper on Kumauni tales and songs. Inspired by this recognition, he collected some 500 folksongs, 80 ballads, 70 folktales, 2000 proverbs, and 200 riddles as well as children's games from all parts of Kumaun. At this juncture, Indiana University established an Indian Folklore Institute in Allahabad and the Institute started a journal titled *Asian Folklore Studies*. In 1962, Trilochan Pandey, now a lecturer at the Almora Degree College, travelled to the United States to attend the Folklore Program at Indiana University (Dorson 1963: 367-81). The 1960s through the 1980s saw a steady stream of publications of folk stories and ballads, invariably in both Kumauni and Hindi. The

intelligentsia researched, catalogued, documented, and published Kumauni folk literature, and the Malushahi was included in all texts.⁵ Trilochan Pandey (1979: 159-66) painstakingly produced five versions and referred to Malushahi as Kumaun's richest and most popular tale. Even then, these publications did not consider it necessary to refer to performers, though some did mention names of their informants.

How does one explain the silence regarding music and performance in all these publications? I suggest that this is linked to emergent caste identities, which considered bards and their drummers 'impure' because of the use of animal hide for the drums. The denigration even of the Das, who were considered the repository of knowledge, both sacred and profane, was linked to the pervasiveness of this idea of purity and pollution (Sanwal 1976: 77-79). Groups seeking upward mobility disassociated themselves from ritual the performances of the bards. This is best illustrated by the story of Shailesh Matyani. An interest in folklore led Shailesh Matyani, originally Rajesh Matyani 'Shailesh,' to publish collections of folk tales of different regions of Kumaun in the 1950s. These were designed for children, but they were not always well-received. For instance, in 1955 an article in *Dharmayug* on Kumauni folklore by Matyani raised a storm in Almora because it was read as pejorative by the Shah community. Jeevan writes that members of the Shah community were incensed and made him, as the editor of the paper, write a letter of apology (Jeevan 2001: 126-28). Matyani became a controversial writer because he described local practices that did not necessarily conform to upper caste norms. According to Batrohi, a literary critic, people did not like his 'unaesthetic' depiction of Kumauni culture (Batrohi 2001: 202-207). Matters came to a head with a major conflagration in 1963 resulting in Matyani being forced to leave Almora (Yadav 2001: 164-71).

Mohan Upreti's scathing critique of the *jihad* (war) against *hurkas* (drums) and the philistinism of the Kumaun upper castes was probably prompted by this episode (1989: 3-4, 126-31). He notes that in the 1950s, when he was involved in the promotion of folk literature and music, he found the upper castes contemptuous of folk artists and local traditions (Upreti 2001: 197-204). Ideologically motivated intellectuals, like Mohan Upreti and P.C. Joshi (Secretary Communist Party of India), were critical of the Brahmanical sensibility and their dismissive attitude towards singers and performance. Their idea of Kumaun stressed the inclusion of all groups and focused on people and popular culture. The P.C. Joshi Archives at Jawahar Lal Nehru University are now a testimony to the left's commitment to the folk literatures of South Asia (Chakravarty 2007: vii).

Contestation in the 'Kumauni Public': Performing Malushahi

Parallel to the orally-based indigenous artisan traditions of Kumaun, a new tradition of cultural performance was emerging at the beginning of the twentieth-century. In 1938, Uday Shankar, a famous dancer from the national stage, started a cultural Academy in Almora: the Uday Shankar Indian Cultural Centre. With a cosmopolitan vision of aesthetics, he tried to integrate the vernacular cultural traditions of Kumaun into his repertoire. However, his inability to recognize caste and other social mores generated hostility in local circles. Eventually the project was abandoned, and the institution shut down in 1944. However, the seeds for a nationally-oriented cosmopolitan aesthetic germinating in the minds of a generation of Kumaunis, many of whom were inspired by socialist, or even Marxist, ideologies. Notable amongst these activists were Mohan Upreti, P.C. Joshi, Brajendra Lal Shah, and Tara Dutt Sati. They contested the elite formulation about the Kumauni regional identity and worked to foreground folk traditions and performative practices. They travelled to various fairs to perform and collect folk music and thereby generate new songs and plays. Though the upper castes remained largely aloof, the advent of All India Radio from the 1940s that were required to air songs for Kumauni listeners introduced a new dynamic. It not only implicitly recognized sub-regional formations, (in the Kumaun sub-division), but also produced a new breed of artists, including performers like Girish Tewari (Girda), Gopal Goswami and Kabutari Devi.

Kumaunis located in Allahabad and Lucknow now took the lead. By the 1950s, the famous poet, Sumitranandan Pant, was the Coordinator for Akashvani Allahabad and Ila Chand Joshi, novelist, playwright and poet was in charge of Akashvani Lucknow. Brajendra Lal Shah a student at Allahabad, was recruited for reading poetry and plays, and adapting music and songs for the radio. Brajendra Lal Shah met Rahul Sankrityayana, and composed music and song for Rahul's play *Parvatshri* adapted by Akashvani Allahabad. According to Kapilesh Bhoj, this was the first folk song to be aired on radio (Bhoj 2009: 27).

In his memoirs, Mohan Upreti described how during his early youth he learned classical music and looked down upon folk traditions (Upreti 2009: 53). However, his exposure to socialist ideas at the University of Allahabad changed this attitude. Mohan Upreti came back to Almora and became a member of the United Artists group in 1950. United Artists went on to establish the Almora Cultural Centre in 1952. At this time, the famous *Bedu Pako Bara Masa* (the signature song for Kumaun), was composed, put to music and sung for Radio Lucknow. Mohan Upreti

wrote about this performance and said that they had only a *hurka* (hour glass drum) and a flute, no other instrument (ibid, 62-63). As a Brahmin, Mohan Upreti was castigated for using the *hurka* (drum) made of animal skin. His photograph playing the Hurka is displayed whenever his name is invoked.⁶

Mohan Upreti could claim to be a 'legitimate folk artist' (Fiol 2017: 64), particularly after 1955 when the United Artists was renamed Lok Kalakar Sangh (Lok in recognition of its folk aspect). The Sangh were now regular performers at Akashvani Lucknow and at Sangeet Natak Akademi Delhi. As Assistant Project Officer for Rural Development, Brajendra Lal Shah continued with his commitment to collect folk music. He says that his first introduction to folk music was through his mother who sang for him the first lines of Rajula Malushahi (Shah 1992: 191-201). For both Mohan Upreti and Brajendra Lal Shah, 1955 was also a truly memorable year because it was when they first heard folk singer Mohan Singh of Rithagarhi. A large crowd of 10,000 people listened to Rithagarhi's rendering of Malushahi at the fair in Kapkot for four evenings in a row. It was that experience that made Brajendra Lal Shah acknowledge Mohan Singh Rithagarhi as his Guru, and persuaded Upreti to dedicate himself to folk music (Bhoj 2009: 52-57; Upreti n. d.: 66).

From 1957-1962, Brajendra Lal Shah was in charge of Cultural Development, which meant further exposure to folk traditions. He traveled to remote places, collected songs, recorded them and provided them to Mohan Upreti's team (Lok Kalakar Sangh) who performed them in Lucknow, Delhi, Almora, and Garhwal. He collected about 2000 folk songs and tried to memorize their music, which comprised about 200 tunes (Pahad 1992: 96).

The Indo-China war of 1962 made the border areas inaccessible for Brajendra Lal Shah and for Mohan Upreti. It even put Kumaun out of bounds for Upreti because he was a Communist. In the same year, Radio Lucknow started the Uttarayini program for the hill districts and Brajendra Lal Shah contributed to the program and popularized his collection of folk tales. He writes that when he was in Lucknow from 1968-1987, he introduced Gopal Goswami (who later became a famous singer) to the Akashvani establishment and successfully took many "*mati se manch*" (Kumauni songs of the earth to the stage) (ibid, 201).

In the early days of radio, they were owned by the Gram Panchayat. Individual ownership of radios began only after the 1970s (Fiol 2008). The problem of radio recordings in Delhi and Lucknow was that it was difficult to bring local performers to the city and expect them to perform in a

studio context, often with improvised music. Migrant Kumaunis filled this gap. Brajendra Lal Shah describes how in Lucknow he gave lessons to children and their elders to enable them to perform for the radio. Migrants who had settled in these cities saw themselves as the best representatives of their culture. Not actual performers in ritual contexts, they accepted the use of non-traditional instruments like the *tabla* (modern musical instrument consisting of two drums through which pitch can be varied) rather than the *dhol* (traditional double-sided Indian drum). They also expressed their nostalgia. Songs now included the motif of the wife pining for her migrant lover. Exceptional people, such as Kabutari Devi, (a Dalit woman), overcame prejudice and performed for Radio at Rampur, Lucknow, Najibabad and Churchgate Mumbai.⁷

The Lok Kalakar Sangh's emphasis on performance and its links to the world of Hindi theatre, poetry and film, gave it the confidence to cut through the resistance of upper caste elites. Brajendra Lal Shah and Mohan Upreti were well known for their contributions, not only for the song '*Bedu Pako*' but also the Hindi song '*Jag Raha Insaan*,' which was composed for Ramanand Sagar's play Gaura. One of the popular singers of this song was Alakh Nath Upreti (grandson of G.D. Upreti).⁸ It later became the signature song of the Lok Kalakar Sangh. Thanks to the radio Kumauni folk music was recognized outside Kumaun and the famous Bombay film director, Salil Chaudhari also approached Upreti for folk music to include in the film *Madhumati*. On the other hand radio audiences also learnt to enjoy film music and in 1961 Brajendra Lal Shah was disheartened to find his *Solitary Reaper* (refers to Wordsworth when he finds a Kumauni woman who earlier would only sing folk songs) singing a Bollywood song, but in spite of this he continued to collect Kumauni folk music with his usual fervor (ibid, 197). This linkage with the North Indian art world helped establish Kumauni folk traditions.

Stephan Fiol demonstrates how Upreti's cosmopolitanism, familiarity with classical music, experience with the Indian People's Theatre Association, knowledge of *hurkiya* (traditional drum) music and ballads along with support of central and state institutions helped him to popularise genre categories as markers of stylistic authenticity that would be used to identify and evaluate the folk music of the Kumaun region (Fiol 2017: 64).

The Parvatiya Kala Kendra brought to fruition Brajendra Lal Shah's and Mohan Upreti's encounter with the two famous singers of Malushahi—Mohan Singh Rithagarhi and Gopi Das. Mohan Singh's version was recorded and deposited with the Sangeet Natak Akademi Delhi by Mohan

Upreti in 1971 (Bhoj 2009: 53) and BrajendraLalShah's first meeting with the legendary Gopi Das in Kausani in 1958 is recorded in his memoirs. When he heard Gopi's rendition of the first *milan* (meeting) between Rajula and Malushahi, he found it very moving. He later realised that Gopi was singing about his own tragic affair with the woman who resided in his heart: his wife, from a different caste, who was no more (Shah 1992: 46-57). rajendraLal Shah's positive impression of Gopi Das's rendition is undoubtedly the reason he sent Konrad Meissner, the German anthropologist to Gopi Das for recording Malushahi.

The Lok Kalakar Sangh's collection of various versions of songs, legends and music, helped the Parvatiya Kala Kendra, Delhi build a repertoire of theatrical performances to represent Kumaun to its people and to the outside world. The dance drama/opera *Rajula Malushahi*, written by Brajendra Lal Shah with music composed by Mohan Upreti, was an important innovation. It was first performed at Kamani Auditorium in 1980, and shortly thereafter at the Trade Authority Pragati Maidan Delhi. A traditional performance of Malushahi could last seven days, but Shah's and Upreti's performance lasted only two and a half hours. Nonetheless, it had 80 songs and used 46 tunes (Bhoj 2009: 90). Mohan Upreti also published *Malushahi the Ballad of Kumaon* in English at this time, (the book published by Sangeet Natak Akademi is not dated), in which he writes about the historical context of the ballad, its music, and about his three informants—Mohan Singh, Gopi Das and Jogaram. But it is significant that he finds Gopi Das's rendering "the nearest to the original" (Upreti n.d.: 42).

What does the performance of Malushahi signify, how is it read and in what ways does it represent the people and culture of Kumaun? What was the poem's appeal to the Kumaunis of the 1980s? Can we identify a Kumauni sensibility? The location of the Malushahi story encompasses—three ecological zones, the trans-Himalayas, the upper Himalayas and the middle Himalayas. These regions have shared a lengthy history connected by pastoralist traders for over fifteen hundred years (Pande 2017: 68-78) This history helped imagine a community—the Kumauni. (It is worthwhile to note that the region of Johar did not speak Kumauni, of Indo-Aryan origin but Johari, of Tibeto-Burman origin).

The poem describes many journeys, and travel is integral to the story. These journeys, up and down mountains and valleys and through different regions, trace a variety of cultures. Rajula's journey to Bairat is significant because she is as an unescorted young woman who finds her beloved after surmounting numerous difficult situations. Many of these journeys are allegorical and may be read as such.⁹ The journeys may also be read metaphorically;

Rajula's travel from the *malla* (upper) to the *talla* (lower) is a harrowing journey, but it also spells a transformation for all those who come in touch with her: humans, animals, and nature. Her experience with the Mahar brothers where all appearances and form are peeled away, she is divested of clothes and jewellery, is also transformative for Rajula, who is not vengeful and who later dissuades Malushahi from punishing them. One interesting feature of the journey in some versions is the sighting of Bairat from a vantage point in the higher reaches. This depicts a mountain perspective and is significant because the megaliths of this region are all located at such critical points from where a panoramic view is possible.

Malushahi's love for Rajula also requires him to travel from the lower to the upper. Recognizing his love for Rajula, the Guru sends him as a parrot to meet her, but Malushahi's inability to control his jealousy jeopardizes his chances, all the more so because it shows a lack of faith in the Guru.

The descriptions, some in prose and some in poetry, conjure up a significant historical moment. The story is set during the rule of the legendary Katyuris and, according to M. C. Bhatt and Mohan Upreti, the Das were their Gurus, affiliated to the Nathpanth (Bhatt 1981; 80-82, and Upreti n.d.: 60-61). The story that *only* an army of *jogis*, (ascetics) with miracles and spells could defeat the Huniyas is well known (Shah 1938: 29; Upreti n.d.: 59-60). According to Trilochan Pandey, becoming a *jogi* to seek out your beloved along with a near death experience and revival by incantations are established motifs in Kumauni stories (Pandey 1977: 291).

It should be noted that the two protagonists belong to different linguistic traditions: the Tibeto-Burman and the Indo-Aryan, which are also considered different in terms of ethnicity. Consequently, it is significant for the construction of a unique Kumauni identity that the story identifies another linguistic tradition and refers to cultural exchange with it. Yet the story is not about the construction of difference, but about the understanding of internal diversity. The constant refrain is about the difference between people of *talla* (lower) and *malla* (upper) something that is deeply embedded in the Kumauni psyche (most villages and towns have *talla* and *malla*). This large canvas, across many sub -regions, provides a continuum rather than a break.

Like the romantics of Europe, Mohan Upreti finds the ballad, "[b]reathes the air of Kumaon...in its flow one can feel the movement of a whole people from its infancy to adulthood. In its rhythm one can hear the heartbeats of a highly emotional, self-respecting and virile community which has carved out its cultural contours under the shadow of the awe-inspiring Himalayas" (Upreti n.d.:

52). Thus, Mohan Upreti's Malushahi, a dance drama, "the artistic form for which he is best known as a theatre composer and performer" (Fiol 2017: 51), created a cultural artifact that could be reproduced as a representation of Kumaun by different actors and directors.

Malushahi as a Literary Artifact

Mohan Upreti's publication and performance of Malushahi has been reified through many other publications as well as many analog and digital media productions in Kumaun and Garhwal. Significant among these versions was Konrad Meissner's text. Konrad Meissner made Gopi Das, the author of an epic composition and *Malushahi and Rajula*, a part of the Kumauni literature canon.

Konrad Meissner's description of his first meeting with Gopal Ram or Gopi Das is full of pathos. He had read T. Pandey's version of Malushahi, and Brajendra Lal Shah had recommended he approach Gopi Das. In 1966, Gopi Das was working at Kausani as a *dholi* (tailor). He assumed that Konrad Meissner had come for tailoring work, and in the process showed him his hand which revealed that he was suffering from a skin disease. Konrad Meissner writes that he was shaken by this initial encounter, but he persevered and eventually recorded the 2200 lines of the ballad, transcribed and translated it, finally publishing it in conjunction with a recorded version of its performance.

Konrad Meissner states that Gopal Ram was born at the turn of the century (1900-1902) in the village Sakar into a Das family (tailors by profession, referred to as *Dholi*), and were well known for *Hurkiya Bol* (songs sung with hurka as accompaniment), *jagars* (ritual for invocation of gods) and for performances at life cycle ceremonies. His grandfather was committed to his profession and was constantly updating his repertoire. He hosted an upper-caste singer of Malushahi in his village for six months, and it was here at the age of eight that Gopal first learned his version of the Malushahi. In the Konrad Meissner version, caste is mentioned only once as *jat* when Malushahi asks Rajula to tell him about herself, and in his own introduction refers to himself as Katyuri (Meissner 1985: 45). This interpellation is important because the downgrading of the Das in the new dispensation clearly rankles with Gopal Ram/Gopi Das. In the interview published in Konrad Meissner, Gopi Das noted that, "Our caste was Das, before my time, until they made all one caste, all into Ram" (ibid, 221.) This was borne out by the Census records of 1891 and found in the Almora Record Room where the Das was a separate category (Pande 2014: 19-20). Gopi's crisis was that his title of Das was an honorific earned through hard work by Gopal Ram, it marked an enhanced status that did not register with a post-colonial public.

Upreti understood this as when he wrote that "the Das is treated with full honours" during a performance, but other patrons did not (Upreti n.d.: 60). Added to this was Gopi's tragic life experience, marriage with a higher caste woman, expulsion from his village and consequent penury that made him internalize a love story that he sang with such intensity.

Konrad Meissner's immersion in the text and song meant that he explored many facets of it. His understanding of the ballad's origin was that it was related to the legends around Gopichand, a Nath Siddha, (Briggs 1938: 206) who was also mentioned in the text (Meissner 1985: xvii-xviii). Like Gopichand who left his mother, kingdom and wives to follow Jalandhari, Malushahi leaves his mother, kingdom and wives to follow Rajula. Malushahi's mother's name, Dharma Mayeri, also raises questions about similarity with Mainavati. By raising these questions Meissner links the story to the broader context of eastern India and the connect of these regions with Tibet through ascetic organizations (ibid, xvi-xx).

Konrad Meissner's version helps us to get a feel of the 'literariness' of the text—its poetic sensibility. He says it took Gopi Das approximately nine and a half hours to sing the entire ballad. The ballad was mostly sung, but a smaller part was spoken, and some parts of the sung version were repeated as spoken and the spoken version was like contemporary Kumauni (ibid, xvi). The poem is full of metaphors about Himalayan life. It produces a rich tapestry of sub-cultures linked together by the heroine Rajula who flits through the landscape like a lighted lamp or butterfly. Rajula is as tender as the *palang* (spinach leaf) plant, she is a bird of the Himalaya, she runs like a flying banner, is as beautiful as the moon of *dooj* (second day of the new moon) and *punyu* (full moon). She is so captivating that the cows and goats keep looking in the direction that she is going and the water in the canal stops flowing to caress her feet. Rajula slips through the territory of powerful warriors, kings, and chiefs who then become *jogis* (mendicants) for Rajula. The name Malushahi was probably appropriate when it was a story of the Katyuris of Giwar, narrated by their bards. (ibid, 247). However, as early as Oakley and Gairola (1935) the story's name includes Rajula. As it spread and became a *bairagi* (renunciatory) story it was sung by other castes such as Mohan Singh Rithagarhi, (Upreti n.d.: 13-22) and Shrilal Pangrana (Chatak 1996: 511), Rajula then acquired a persona, and the love story became the dominant theme. It was after this that Rajula's name was added to the title (Chatak, 1996: 484-509; Babulkar 1964: 169-75; Alter 2014: 71).

Conclusion: Malushahi as a Kumauni artifact

The making of this strand of Kumauni literary culture took almost a century of print and performance. Malushahi came to represent Kumaun through metaphors derived from diverse cultural traditions, irrigated valleys, high altitudinal, trans-Himalayan habitats and pastures—all bound together through love and battle by peripatetic groups of traders and ascetic sects.

The story of Malushahi's modern incarnations cannot be complete without a discussion about Gopal Das. Unlike Mohan Singh and Mohan Upreti who integrated various versions and tunes of the epic into a beautiful blend, Gopi remained a purist and sang what he had learnt in his childhood without any dilution or embellishment. Gopi's firm faith in his story, of himself as a Das of the Katyuris and his rendition of Malushahi as sacred, a *jagar* (ritual for invocation of gods) (Meissner 1985: 219) reveals the embeddedness of the story in a cultural matrix, familiar to both performers and audience. Gopal Das asserts that he is happiest singing this *bairagi* (renunciator) song in his own village; he adds that he has sung the entire epic *only* in his village. Gopi Das appears uncomfortable performing for 'important' patrons (Meissner 1985: 214-249). His alienation with the 'new public' is expressed by singing only *fragments* for them. But thanks to Konrad Meissner's and Mohan Upreti's mediation, Gopal Das is the person through whom the tale transits from the 'representative publicness' of the earlier social formation to the 'modern public sphere' (Habermas 1995: 5-14). By granting authorship to Gopi Das, Konrad Meissner transformed his role as the bard of the Katyuri tradition into an individual performer, an artist in the modern public domain.

By the 1980s with the help of Gopi Das, Mohan Upreti and Konrad Meissner fashioned the ballad Malushahi into a cultural commodity for consumption by Kumauni and non-Kumauni publics. It became a Kumauni artifact with a life of its own, to be read, performed and interpreted by later generations.

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Endnotes

1. 1886, five printing presses at Nainital, Ranikhet and Almora, of which two were publishing in Hindi *Report of North Western Provinces 1886-1887*.
2. This was read in 1995 as part of research field work. Almora District 1891-Dasa-199; Nath-610; compiled.
3. Available at <[https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/search/site/Upreti?f\[0\]=im_field_search_type:93201](https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/search/site/Upreti?f[0]=im_field_search_type:93201)>. Accessed December 20, 2017.
4. Available at <<http://www.allahabadhighcourt.in/event/AHistoricalRetrospectAdministrationNDPant.pdf>>. Accessed December 20, 2017.
5. All available publications that carry the story of Malushahi are listed here: Babulkar (1964: 169-173; 1993: 87-91), Bhatt (1976: 227-238), Chatak (1996: 484-509), Joshi (1982: 68-76), Joshi (1991, 1993 and 1994, third vol: 187-236), Upadhyaya (1979: 146-84), Pandey (1979: 159-66), Pokharia and Tewar (1983: 65-68), Upreti Mohan (2001: 197-204).
6. D.D. Pant, another Brahmin who flouted this rule and was popularly known as Debiya Hurkiya.
7. Kashniyal. Kabutari's sad chant <<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090208/dplus1.htm>>. Accessed 26 August 2017.
8. Bajeli, Available at <<http://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/music/the-stirring-voice-is-still/article4221781.ece>>. Accessed December 21, 2017.
9. In Meissner (1985: 41, 59, 173) the refrain is sung again and again, 'the kapuva bird of the nest will become the parrot in the cage.'

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