Vocal Delivery and Ritual Epic Performance in Central Himalayan Pandava Stories: Revisiting Genre Terminology and Oral Tradition

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Paṇḍwāṇī is a term used in some parts of India to refer to the oral rendition of *Mahābhārata* stories. There are particularly well-known traditions of *Paṇḍwāṇī* performance in the states of Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand, and scholarship and documentation are well developed for these regions.[1] The term *Paṇḍwāṇī* is related to the five brothers of the *Mahābhārata* story—the Pandavas. *Wāṇī* (also *vāṇī*) is a Hindi/Sanskrit term that means "voice," "speech," or "accent," and, thus, *Paṇḍwāṇī* can refer generically to an oral narration of Pandava stories.[2]

The Pandavas are the main protagonists of the *Mahābhārata* narrative, and a large portion of the epic is centered on their war with their cousins, the Kauravas. The story is multigenerational and frequently begins with the rule of King Shantanu, who is the great-grandfather of both sides of the family. Characters and story elements begin to take shape as a result of conflict and drama within the royal family from Shantanu's time onwards. Another key element of the story is the fact that the Pandavas marry a common bride, Draupadi, who is a critical figure of the epic. In Garhwal, as well as in some other parts of India, Draupadi's persona merges with that of Kali, and she is worshipped in both her forms. Each of the brothers also has other wives or liaisons, and therefore stories associated with offspring from these other wives or liaisons are also a part of the narrative. Of further significance to the epic is Krishna, who sides with the Pandavas and provides them with advice and assistance throughout. The *Bhagwati Gītā*, a book in its own right, contains Krishna's advice to Arjuna before he and his brothers engage in the main battle of the epic.

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[1] Notable works of scholarship on traditions from eastern India include Flueckiger 2011, Mahawar 2013, and Das 2015, amongst others. In Garhwal, Sax 2002 remains the seminal text on the topic, whilst a variety of other local writers are noted elsewhere in this paper.

[2] In Chhattisgarh, the term is used to label a performance genre that is somewhat iconic to the region. In Garhwal, the term is applied less to a genre of performance than to the recitation of the *Mahābhārata* story by invited officiants within broader ritual entertainment. In Chhattisgarh, singers are well known, and some have even been recognized through national, state-sponsored awards. Written as well as oral sources impact the way different performance styles are portrayed (for instance, see Ramaswami and Khan 2019). As Das (2015:78) writes, Bhima is often the central figure of the Chhattisgarhi *Paṇḍvāṇī*. By contrast, individual singers in Garhwal are not well recognized publicly, though they appear to hold a more significant role within specific segments of broader rituals. In addition, while Bhima is significant in Garhwal, he is no more central than other characters in the epic.

This paper is focused on *Paṇḍwāṇī* recitation and singing from Uttarakhand. The opportunity to reconsider and compare numerous different rendition styles results from the commencement of an analogue-digital conversion project associated with the extensive private collection of recordings made in Garhwal (western Uttarakhand) in the 1980s and 1990s by one of the authors of this paper—Dr. D. R. Purohit. Organizing metadata for sound files from numerous different villages raises a number of issues related to genre terminology and individual performance contexts.

The paper considers the broader ritual contexts of *Mahābhārata* performances in Garhwal, and uses these contexts to explore more thoroughly how the oral delivery of texts is shaped by ritual action, and in turn how ritual contexts influence vocal delivery styles and musical performance. In addition, the paper examines terminology associated with repertoire categorization to understand a further layer of discursive practice associated with orality.

We analyze three *Paṇḍwāṇī* recordings from the Purohit collection as our entry-point into the topic. The selection has been made to demonstrate a variety of vocal delivery styles, as well as to highlight the wider set of oral elements that exist within ritual contexts. Concurrently, the analysis points to the value of the collection as a source for future research.[3] In addition, our examples allow us to reconsider terminology used to describe elements of ritual *Mahābhārata* performance. Listeners and performers are immersed in the story as a result of projected sounds within ritual action. Concurrently, other sounds of ritual action including drumming, dancing, and trumpeting create a further level of sonic context that embeds the performances in the sacred world of ritual/epic performance. Analysis of orally delivered texts as well as genre categories in the Garhwali context do not simply demonstrate an oral sensibility. They reveal a uniquely shaped orality that is influenced by Hindu metaphysical explanations of sound, language, and music.

Fieldwork Contexts

Though our commentary on Garhwali *Paṇḍwāṇī* is based on the analysis of archival material, some discussion of the original circumstances of fieldwork is worth undertaking to identify the singers and to acknowledge the trajectories of postcolonial scholarship and folkloric promotion of which our description is a part. Even while we choose to emphasize the special condition of orality and oral theory, we acknowledge a breadth of contexts and scholarly histories that influence the motivation and circumstances of recording and analysis. The excerpts are referred to by the village and performers' names to emphasize the identity of performers as located within geographies of practice.

The three examples presented below are transcribed from recordings of performers who come from different caste groups and with different performative or ritual roles. All three are from the Central Uttarakhand higher-altitude districts of Rudraprayag or Chamoli. The recordings from Bhenti and Khumera villages were made in 1992/1993 and stem from fieldwork

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[3] The collection comprises over fifty hours of recordings. These will be deposited at the Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology (ARCE-AIIS) once the process of digitization is complete.

undertaken for a project funded by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), a government institution set up for the promotion of Indian arts and culture. The project was designed to investigate and document folk theater in the Garhwal area and was carried out by a team of researchers led by one of the authors for this paper, D. R. Purohit, under the auspices of a local society (*sansthā*) set up for the promotion and creation of theater in contemporary formats.

Examples 1(a) and 1(b) are from the village of Bhenti in Chamoli district, which lies to the east of the Alakananda River near the town of Nandaprayag. A number of prominent festivals and pilgrimage sites and routes are in the vicinity of Bhenti; this particular recording was made during the festival of *Dwārī Devī*. The festival is unique in its inclusion of rituals and performances of different stories and dramatic performances in different formats. In the early 1990s when these recordings were made, evening performances comprised various masked dances, while daytime performances comprised between seven and nine episodes (Pandava stories) from the *Mahābhārata*. Stories at the time included "The Poisoning of Bhima by Duryodhana," "The Oxen Fight" that was held in the forest between the respective herds of the Pandavas and Kauravas, and the episode of the "Kalangiri Daṇu" demon. The excerpt shown in Example 1(a) is sung by Galli Ram as he directs the initial procession of characters while they move through the village to the central performance square.

Galli Ram was a performer whose role in rituals and festivals is referred to as *bhān*. His role was somewhat similar to that of a choreographer or director in that he was responsible for preparing ritual actors for the dances they subsequently enacted. He also sang texts as part of the performances/rituals in which dancers performed. Thus, the recording was undertaken during the procession of the Pandavas on one day of a festival that also included other performances and ritual events. As a *bhān*, it was Galli Ram's responsibility to train the characters in the choreography of the dances that occurred during each day of the festival. He could play the large drum called *ḍhol* that often accompanies these performances, though generally, the role of drum playing is given to vocational caste drummers, or Aujis. *Paṇḍava Līlā*s, which are enacted in many villages throughout the higher-altitude regions of Garhwal, include dancing accompanied by Auji drummers. *Paṇḍava Līlā*s have been, and continue to be, performed in Bhenti at times separate from the *Dwārī Devī* Festival. Significantly, however, the Pandava stories that were presented as part of the *Dwārī Devī* festival of 1993 were related to *but not the same as* those normally presented in other festivals and villages. In this sense they represent a broader tradition of Pandava stories that extends the repertoire of *Pāṇḍava Līlā* rituals even though both are linked through a common heritage associated with the *Mahābhārata*.

Examples 2(a) and 2(b) shown below are of a performance sung by Kedar Singh of Khumera village, which lies in the mountains to the west of the Mandakini River at about one day's journey from Bhenti. It was also completed during 1992/1993 as part of the folk theater project funded by the IGNCA. Kedar Singh had been identified as a well-known singer of Pandava stories and was therefore invited to the house of D. R. Purohit to record his stories. Thus, unlike the recording from Bhenti, Kedar Singh's performance was made outside of any ritual occasion. Nonetheless, it represents the kind of story recitation he would undertake when invited by local villages to participate in *Pāṇḍava Līlā* rituals. Normally, Kedar Singh would present his rendition as part of either a solo narrative or in a duo with a partner who "sings" his questions, to which Kedar Singh sings his responses. The full length of the recording from which

Examples 2(a) and 2(b) are taken is contained on two cassette tapes and comprises just over two hours of singing.

Examples 3(a) and 3(b) shown below are by Indra Dutt Semwal of Jakhwari, a village which lies still farther to the west of Khumera. The two villages are in fact about five hours' distance from each other by road even though they are in adjacent valleys. More significantly, the recordings of Semwal were undertaken in 1998 during a second project associated with folk epic performance and therefore not under the funding of the IGNCA. At the time, D. R. Purohit had gone to the village of Kalyan near Jakhwari to record Giri Raj, a well-known singer of folk epics from the region. Giri Raj was from the entertainment caste group called Baddi,[4] and the majority of his repertoire was not associated with Pandava stories. Although Purohit established a more lengthy association with Giri Raj in association with folk theater performance over the next decade, Giri Raj never made any recordings of Pandava stories.[5] Coincidentally, while staying in the village of Jakhwari near Kalyan, Purohit was introduced to Indra Dutt Semwal. Thus, Semwal was invited by Purohit to record *Paṇḍwāṇī* segments at Semwal's house in the village of Jakhwari.

General Terms for *Mahābhārata* Performances in Garhwal

Various terms are used in Garhwal for aspects of a broader tradition of *Mahābhārata* performance and ritual action. These include *Pāṇḍava Līlā*, "play/theater of the Pandavas," or *Pāṇḍava Nṛtya*, "dance of the Pandavas." *Pāṇḍava Līlā* and *Pāṇḍava Nṛtya* are somewhat synonymous Hindi terms that refer to ritualized dramatic danced performances of the story held over several weeks. More locally, the Garhwali term *Paṇḍauṅ* or *Paṇḍauṅ Nāchṇā* is also used to refer to the whole of these rituals. Sax's *Dancing the Self: Personhood and Performance in the* Pāṇḍav Līlā *of Garhwal* (2002) remains the most comprehensive description and analysis of the ritual to date. He outlines a number of comparable terms used for *Mahābhārata* performances elsewhere in India, many with the prefix *paṇḍ*, that reflect similar etymologies associated with the five protagonists of the story (2002:20, n. 1). He also mentions *Paṇvāṇī* as a special name for a designated day/segment within the *Pāṇḍava Līlā* ritual. During this day the complete story of the epic "up to the great war" is rendered as a special event, while other days and sessions of a *Pāṇḍava Līlā* are focused more on ritual, entertainment, and/or various episodes from the story (33-34).

How "the" *Mahābhārata* might be understood in the context of these different modes of performance and ritual events remains complex. Pandava stories are told, sung, and danced, and these multi-sited performances, including recitation of texts in various forms, contribute to the epic as a whole. The *Mahābhārata* is epic in many dimensions. It is lengthy, it is episodic, and it influences other stories which interact with and/or reinvent its characters in new forms. It presents themes and dilemmas that test the moral stances of readers, listeners, and audiences. It is

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[4] See Fiol 2010, who outlines the unique and liminal status of Baddi performers in considerable detail.

[5] See Fiol 2010 for valuable information on Giri Raj, his wife Darshan Dei, and their role as entertainers whose identities have been mediated through film- and music-industry projects in Garhwal.

multi-generational, and its great war stands in for great conflicts throughout time. It may be sung, told, danced, and/or acted. It may be coopted as an adjective for grandness. Commentaries and scholarship that tap into the epic world of the *Mahābhārata* are no less epic in number. Within these, oral tradition, oral consciousness, and oral performance have proved fruitful frames for understanding its performance—both as performed text and as performed story (amongst others, see Blackburn et al. 1989; Flueckiger and Sears 1991).

While renditions of Pandava stories in Garhwal are linked to features of a pan-Hindu understanding of the *Mahābhārata* epic in numerous performative and literary traditions, they are also understood as a local tradition. As Sax (2001:43-44) points out, many locations in the region are associated with critical episodes and places in the storyline where events are said to have taken place. Furthermore, the Pandavas are considered to be the patron gods of domestic animals and function as presiding deities over many villages. Most significantly, their spirits, as exemplified through their *vāṇa* (attributes), rule as real agents over many worldly affairs of their devotees. Consequently, the Pandavas as well as other characters in the story are understood to be deified heroes and sacred personalities with firm local connections. The singing of their stories by various performers and officiates in numerous rituals and festivals throughout the region points to numerous ongoing traditions of oral practice directed to different functional purposes. Significantly, many other ritual practices suggest that theological experience is frequently sonic (see Alter 2020), and thus there would be a significant and nuanced way in which oral consciousness and orality might influence conceptions of epic material—material that is both narrative and sacred in nature.

Implications of Oral Theory for Sonorities of Sacred Texts and Ritual Contexts in Epic Performance

In his introduction to the commemorative volume *John Miles Foley's World of Oralities: Text, Tradition, and Contemporary Oral Theory*, Mark Amodio summarizes the trajectory of scholarship associated with oral theory and states (2020:2-3):

> The widespread adoption of the Parry-Lord theory [of oral-formulaic composition] by scholars in many fields, and its productive application to the verbal art produced over the course of many centuries by cultures spread throughout the world testify eloquently to the theory's foundational role in shaping the way we understand the creation and dissemination of traditional oral verbal art.

Notwithstanding the breadth of Amodio's statement, texts—and particularly "oral" texts—have frequently been analyzed as a product of historical investigation. Such investigations presume the likelihood that many epic texts, and similar stories from the past, were generated first through oral delivery and then written down. Thereafter, analysis of present-day published versions may reveal a deeply embedded oral consciousness—a consciousness that is markedly distinct from texts created in literary traditions of printed publications. Orally constructed texts provide uniquely constructed themes, elements, and language that offer a fruitful arena for the

"productive application" of the theory of oral-formulaic composition (for recent examples, see Degl'Innocenti et al. 2016).

As Amodio (ibid.) and Haymes (2020:95) both further point out, early scholarship from the mid-twentieth century tended to analyze texts with the presumption of a binary distinction between literate and oral practices. Such an emphatic distinction no longer guides research in the field today.[6] Research and analysis of many texts demonstrates that "relationships between the oral and the literate and between their respective expressive economies were *not* mutually exclusive but were rather intertwined and interdependent" (Amodio 2020:3).

The examination of epic performance that we present in this paper is clearly influenced by the extensive scholarly lineages of oral theory. In our examination we are not so interested in the texts that are shown in our examples, though of course words and meanings are central to any recitation of the stories. Rather, these texts, albeit limited in scope, are part of a more broadly enacted set of ritual actions that are more fruitfully understood as ritual performance events— and those events have sonic qualities that are particularly relevant to the way texts are presented, understood, and labeled.

Music's inherent aurality suggests a logical space of interaction between oral theory, performance studies, and musical analysis. However, after some early interest amongst musicologists in the 1980s and 1990s, theoretical frames of orality have been applied to musicological analysis in only limited circumstances.[7] While not completely absent, by and large, oral theory appears to have faded from musicological interest. Perhaps, the emphasis on textual analysis and composition are less applicable to the musical realm? Perhaps, music's inherent aurality means that oral composition as a frame for musical analysis is largely redundant? Perhaps, as Reynolds (1994/1995:53) points out, the musical aspects of oral epic singing frequently reveal the use of limited melodic and rhythmic formulae. In any case, there has been a paucity of musical analysis and musicological investigation into music and orality since about the turn of the twenty-first century.

Consequently, we propose a reconsideration of this connection, not to examine formulae of oral composition within texts or to investigate further connections between oral and literate thought, but to consider the nature of sonic space and music in oral tradition more deeply. Ritual and conceptual contexts for the performance of Garhwali Pandava stories reveal an approach to sound that goes beyond simple structures of oral composition to a wholistic world in which text structures, ritual sounds, *and* the discourse for their discussion reveal an understanding of the world as sonically created. We suggest that the substance of sound permeates rituals in significant ways and the presumption of sound's significance may be seen in several locations: namely, in the structure of texts, in the application of musical formulae to the singing of texts, *and* also in the patterns of labeling for genre categorization. It is the sonic substance of oral ritual, including the recitation of epic stories, that creates a sacred substance in the present. In the Central Himalaya, orality is not simply a condition of consciousness that influences textual

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[6] Amodio (2020) credits Ruth Finnegan (1988) as the main scholar to change scholarly perspectives on this.

[7] Examples of the application of theories of orality to musical situations from the period include Sheehan 1986 and 1987; Levy 1990; Reynolds 1994/1995; Gillespie 1996; Widdess 1996; and Medeiros 2001.

structures, story lines, and episodic material within a verbal artistic tradition. Rather, orality is itself conditioned by a sacred sonority through deeper metaphysical explanation.

Performance Contexts in Garhwal

Sax outlines the *Pāṇḍava Līlā* as both ritual and performance and suggests that it represents a dynamic space within which identities of characters from the story reinforce the caste identity and dominant authority of the main sponsors of such rituals: Rajputs (see, further, Sax 2002:93-133).[8] Villages that celebrate a *Pāṇḍava Līlā* may choose to do so at intervals of between three or more years (2002:34). Such celebrations normally take place in the late autumn or early winter and can last up to three weeks with regular performances on each afternoon and evening. Specially designated villagers take on the roles of specific characters and become possessed by those characters' spirits as they reenact episodes from the epic. Characters themselves rarely recite lines of text from the epic. Rather, they dance—either as a group to begin proceedings and to bring on a state of trance, or in uniquely choreographed movements with other performers to demonstrate an episode from the epic (see, for instance, Sax 2002:20-33; Alter 2020). Thus, Hanuman might dance with Bhima in a performance that demonstrates their contest for superior strength (Sax 2002:28, n. 11). In other episodes Draupadi and Kunti dance (and are worshipped) demonstrating their dual personalities as chaste wife/mother or fierce forms of Kali (134-56). Alternatively, the whole group might reenact a specific moment from the maze battle between the two opposing sides—the Pandavas and Kauravas—an episode referred to as the *Chakravyuha* (see also Purohit 2005). Over three weeks of ritual performance, numerous scenes from the *Mahābhārata* may be portrayed in this way. Through such portrayals, villagers get to see their epic enacted by leading Rajputs of their village.

"Folk," "Heroic," and "Theological" Epics in Garhwal: Discursive Constructions and Categorization

The *Mahābhārata* is not the only epic performed in Uttarakhand. Just what constitutes a folktale, story, or ballad as compared to an epic is perhaps a forced distinction brought on by a scholarly urge to create clearly delineated categories. Similarly, subcategories of "folk," "heroic," or "theological" epics are frequently imprecise and/or overlapping.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century in Uttarakhand, a few colonial writers formed unique alliances with upper-caste local interlocutors to begin the process of designation and codification in published form. As Fiol (2017:25-72) documents in considerable detail, the folkloric concept initially emerged as part of the colonial project and then was subsequently promoted through institutions and cultural projects designed to create particular national and

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[8] The Rajput caste group is the largest caste group in Uttarakhand. They comprise a number of sub-castes who, by and large, are a landowning group that maintain a high and politically powerful status within Uttarakhand society. Rajputs are also referred to as Kshatriyas.

regional identities after India's independence in 1947. Epics and folktales were a significant part of this early folkloric creation.[9]

Gāthā is the most commonly used term to identify epic repertoire in the region, as it is in many other parts of North India. Etymologically, the term, which is related to the Hindi/Sanskrit *gānā* (lit., "to sing"), makes reference to the sung delivery of the repertoire.[10] The most comprehensive documentation of Garhwali epics in published form is Govind Chatak's *Gaḍhwālī Lok Gāthāeṅ* (*Garhwali Folk Epics*), originally published in 1958, with a revised edition appearing in 1996 (Chatak 1996 [1958]). Chatak's publication presents texts of forty-seven epics organized within four subcategories—*Jāgar-Vārtā* (ritual awakening epics), *Chaitī Gāthāeṅ* (epics of spring), *Pawāṛā* (heroic stories), and *Praṇaya Gāthāeṅ* (epic love stories). These texts are introduced and then presented—first in the language of Garhwali and then followed by a Hindi translation.

Vārtā, as Chatak's category labels suggest, is also a term associated with ritual epic repertoire. Here, too, the term has etymological connections to the sounds of the repertoire and the meaning inherent in sound. In Hindi, *vārtā* means "advice," "information," "talk," or "speech." In the context of genre labels, there is a clear sense for how the term relates to the verbalization of words. In Garhwal, the term is most commonly understood to refer to the utterance of words by drummers as part of their performance to awaken deities and bring on possession.

Chatak's commentary on epic repertoire appears in an introduction to the whole of his volume, as well as in introductions to each section. In this way, he clarifies the category of *Jāgar-Vārtā* as religious epics through which gods and goddesses are made to dance, a ritual enactment that helps validate belief in those deities (1996 [1958]:4).[11] Significantly for this paper, Chatak's heading of *Jāgar-Vārtā* includes two epic texts associated with the *Mahābhārata*, and these are labeled as *Pāṇḍava Vārtā* and *Muni Rūp Paṇḍauūṅ* (120-48). Chatak comments (14):

> The theatrical aspect of folk epics is most evident in *Jāgar*s that incorporate the dancing of deities at indoor séances or outdoor celebrations. For instance, in the *Jāgar* of Krishna as Lord of the Snakes, as the priests sing with instruments to begin the drama, the medium dances in this style. The same occurs in the *Pāṇḍava Vārtā*s [in which] [s]upernatural spirits also show their bravery through dancing. In the Rawain-Jaunpur-Jaunsar area, dancing and spectacle go hand in hand with the singing of heroic songs called "*Harūl*."

Similar in publication style to Chatak's *Gaḍhwālī Lok Gāthāeṅ* is Prayag Joshi's *Kumauni Lok Gāthāeṅ* (*Folk Epics of Kumaun*), published in three volumes (Joshi 1991, 1993 and 1994). In Volume 3, Joshi also presents some texts under the heading *Jāgar Vārtā*, though

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[9] In many ways these local epics resemble traditions of epic performance found elsewhere in India, particularly those of *Pābūjī* and *Dholā* in western Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (see, further, Blackburn et al. 1989; Wadley 2004).

[10] The term *kathā* (lit., "spoken story") is also applied to some repertoire. In Uttarakhand, however, its use is far less frequent than *gāthā*.

[11] Further details of the *Jāgarṇ* ceremony may be found in Fangar 1990 and Alter 2008:42-43.

none are related to the *Mahābhārata*. Of further significance in Joshi's publication is the acknowledgment he gives to the five singers from whom he collected his original texts (1994:240).

Shivanand Nautiyal's *Gaḍhwāl ke Loknṛtya-Gīt* (*Folk-Dance Songs of Garhwal*) also lists numerous songs within genre taxonomies that are relevant here. While not overtly listing epics as a category in his documentation of folk-dance songs, he makes reference to several aspects of repertoire inspired by characters and themes from the *Mahābhārata*. Though his publication does not contain more lengthy texts like those of Chatak and Joshi, he does provide some short excerpts of texts for songs associated with the different characters of the *Mahābhārata* (Nautiyal 1981:127-48). He makes almost no reference to this repertoire as an "epic"-type repertoire and instead maintains the emphasis of his overarching thesis, namely, that dance types may be documented through the song genre with which they are associated. Thus, he refers to *Mahābhārata* repertoire as *Pāṇḍava nṛtya-gīt* ("Pandava-dance songs"), a label that acknowledges a body of songs with thematic links to the epic rather than a tradition of epic performance.

Virendra Singh Bartwal's 2014 work, *Gaḍhwālī Gāthāoṅ meṅ Lok aur Devtā* (*People and Deities in Garhwali Epics*), is a rare recent publication on the topic of epics in the Hindi language. Amongst other valuable information, Bartwal (2014:311-16) provides the most comprehensive currently available list of Hindi publications on epics in Garhwal—a literature review that is largely absent from other publications. In addition, he provides an excellent summary of the classification systems adopted by numerous previous authors, including Gumar (n.d.), Satyendra (n.d.), Babulkar (1964), Shailesh (1976), and Chatak (1996 [1958]). In particular, Bartwal notes the ambiguity and overlap that exists between the various systems of genre names and categorization types adopted by earlier authors (Bartwal 2014:53). Significantly, he notes Chatak's inclusion of all his texts under the label of *lok-gāthāeṅ* ("folk epics"), in contrast to other authors, such as Babulkar, who make a distinction between *lok-gāthāeṅ* ("folk epics") and *dev-gāthāeṅ* ("theological epics"). The point, as is highlighted by Bartwal and insinuated by Chatak in his commentary, is that a distinction between deified heroes and heroic deities is not always obvious, which limits the value of categories like *lok-gāthā* and *dev-gāthā*.

Noteworthy in this regard is the publication of, and research into, epics in the region of Kumaun lying immediately to the east of Garhwal. Notwithstanding the various epic texts documented and contained within Joshi's three Hindi/Kumauni publications, the central place of the epic of *Rajula and Malushahi* provides an interesting case study in the interaction of literate and oral practitioners through folkloric re-versioning. As Pande notes, a detailed documentation of the epic of *Rajula and Malushahi* as sung by a low-caste musician, Gopi Das, was undertaken by Konrad Meissner possibly in the 1960s or shortly thereafter and then published in 1985 (2018:155). The same singer was a major source for the folkloric work undertaken by Mohan Upreti (1980), who adapted the Rajula-Malushahi story into a musical drama in the language of Kumauni. As Pande (155) notes further, the centrality of Rajula-Malushahi to Kumauni identity resulted from a lengthy history of intellectual engagement with the Kumauni language that had its origins in colonial systems of administrative design. Systems of language designation were coopted by local literati who sought to establish a unique Kumauni identity.

Upreti's centrality to the emergence of a folk culture within the broader national projects of a modern India during the 1950s and 1960s is well documented by Fiol (2017:51-72). As he notes, ideas of what constituted folkloric practice in Kumaun and Garhwal—and now in the state of Uttarakhand, which was formed in 2000—were heavily influenced by early writers like Upreti, as well as by national institutions like All-India Radio (AIR). In particular All-India Radio established a local broadcasting arm for the hill regions from the 1950s onwards. As Fiol notes, "Taken together, these programs [on AIR] popularized genre categories and markers of stylistic authenticity that would be used to identify and evaluate the folk music of the region" (2017:64). The performance of epics, including the stories of the Pandavas, amongst different strata of Garhwali and Kumauni society became a subject of interest for local identity politics throughout the twentieth century. Expressions of these stories at the end of the twentieth century —whether in written or performed form—were of interest to wider audiences on the national stage. As the analysis below demonstrates, performance of Pandava stories, while clearly linked to a pan-Hindu *Mahābhārata*, is more fractured and multifaceted when recited, sung, or danced.

The summary of scholarship above highlights the regular use of four terms associated with epic repertoire—*gāthā*, *jāgar, vārtā*, and *pawāṙā*. By contrast, the term *paṇḍwāṇī*, which is also a term for epic performance, is used with more specific connotations of a repertoire limited to Pandava stories. In one sense, these terms, as well as the English word "epic," simply refer to lengthy stories with numerous characters, complex multi-generational plots, and conflict on a grand scale. It is also worth reemphasizing, however, that all five Hindi/Garhwali terms are etymologically associated with terms that emphasize the aural character of epic narration. *Gāthā* and *paṇḍwāṇī* both reference the aural delivery of stories; *gāthā* suggests the singing of tales, while *paṇḍwāṇī* suggests the narration of stories—narration that is normally sung. *Vārtā* also carries the connotations of verbalized renditions of lengthy stories, frequently of a theological nature. *Jāgar* is not dissimilar, as it is associated with the verb "to awaken"—*jāgnā*. In *jāgrṇ* ceremonies, deities are normally awoken through the recitation of their stories and/or through ritual drumming. Many ceremonies are held throughout the night, and in such cases the term also refers to the wakeful state of participants.

In contrast to the first four terms, the exact root of the term *Pawāṙā* is not so clear. A folk etymology that is commonly used to explain its origin links the term to stories of the Paṅwār dynasty who ruled the Garhwal kingdom for several centuries in medieval India.

Ultimately, what these genre terms highlight is that epic repertoire is understood to exist largely as sounded texts. Narration, singing, and utterance are essential in ritual and entertainment contexts where text recitation and/or singing moves deities between different worlds of existence. Audiences are surrounded not only by the spectacle of ritual action but also by sung stories, drumming, and other sounds. Ritual sounds are numerous and immersive. In this way, the sense in which sound surrounds participants in a ritual context underscores the significance of sound for oral tradition. Pandava stories are part of this ritual epic repertoire. The oral character of their performance is as much a ritual event as it is an instance of sonic storytelling.

Immersive Sounds

The sounds of a festival, procession, or ritual are numerous, often placed in motion, and frequently part of shifting layers that are heard differently by different listeners at different vantage points. Text recitation in these situations is often just one amongst many strands of sonic layering, and this layering may be concurrent or sequential as various ritual moments unfold with different emphases.

Sound itself is considered auspicious in contrast to silence, which is inauspicious (see Tingey 1994:4; Alter 2008:216). In particularly, there is a lengthy history of scholarship that emphasizes the beneficent nature of sounded text as well as music. Beck (1993) highlights a deep connection between Hindu ritual practice and the sounding of texts. In Garhwal, drummers regularly speak of the auspicious nature of their drumming in ways that point to deeper levels of meaning within the sounds of drums and the sounds of language (see Dabral 1989). Furthermore, as Wilke and Moebus discuss, the organization of language by early Sanskritic grammarians like *Pāṇini* illustrates a conception of language being closely knitted to its aural production: "Strictly speaking, the 'alphabet' consists not of 'letters,' but of an acoustically structured series of sounds of the Sanskrit language, whose system becomes apparent via hearing and not via seeing" (2011:227). As Wilke and Moebus outline in relation to numerous other Sanskritic sources, recitation is a key aspect of language expression. The words of recited texts are meaningful not only lexically but also spiritually as iterations within a theologically experienced world (see also Beck 1993; Alter 2019). The recitation of epic material is the sounding of texts through which ritual space is sanctified.

Not surprisingly, grammatical structures, vocabularies, and tonal qualities of texts as they are sounded within ritual circumstances are a significant part of their character. While the language of Garhwali is the overarching linguistic framework within which texts are constructed, elements of Sanskritic practice can be coopted to create a macaronic context that lends authority to a text. For instance, as Dabral (1989) points out, a local text on drumming, referred to as the *Ḍhol Sāgar*, incorporates Sanskrit-like sounds, including the frequent use of a final nasal [ṁ] or a final *h* [ː] (see also Alter 2003). In ritual contexts, when Sanskrit texts themselves may be recited for special purposes, slippage into the use of Sanskrit-like sounds in otherwise Garhwali texts is not surprising. Such sonic references clearly invoke the broader worlds of Hindu rituals and texts even while presenting stories of local significance.

Other sounds that are critical for the sacred aural atmosphere of ritual events are those of drums and instruments. While the musical examples presented in this paper are focused on text recitation, it must be acknowledged that they are delivered as parts of more lengthy ritual occasions, in which other sounds contribute to the sanctification of space. In particular, different drum patterns are used for different danced segments of the ritual. In many of these, the attributes of particular characters are visually projected through stylized dance choreographies and character interaction. Danced episodes do not present a linear narrative so much as a visual expression of a character's persona through repetitive choreographic patterns in association with drum patterns. Since all the characters in the *Mahābhārata* are deities, audiences gain theological insight through viewing and hearing the deity's characterization. Segments of dance/drumming are labeled episodically, representing either a character or an event. Thus, *A Chauṅwārā* is a

dance at the beginning of a ritual when all dancers move from the ordinary world into states of possession so as to portray the attributes of the possessing deities in subsequent dances (see Alter 2020). *Riṅgoṇḍ* is a dance in which the Pandavas display their weaponry and symbolic implements while entering the arena with twirling movements and short steps. *Vīr* is the dance presented by *Bhīma* as he displays his brute strength and courage. *Nagloki* is the dance in which Arjuna and Nagarjuna are pitted against each other.[12] Terminology is used with reference to the episode portrayed and as a label for the drum rhythms associated with that episode.

 Paṇḍwāṇī are therefore not simply narratives of stories from the *Mahābhārata*. They are orally delivered performances of the stories whose sounds and meanings enhance other ritual action. They sanctify a ritual space that is emphatically sonic through the successive and complementary iteration of words that symbolically represent ritual action through textual sounding in association with ritual dancing. Ritual actors, onlookers, and worshippers are all immersed in the sound of the narrative which is projected through different modes of presentation.

Three *Paṇḍwāṇī* Excerpts: Variable Practice in the Vocal Delivery of Pandava Stories

 Excerpts from three Pandava story renditions are discussed below, each illustrated by a pair of examples: a short notated passage of the singing, marked (a), followed by a text version marked (b). In each case the notated example (a) provides a more detailed indication for the melodic design and rhythmic pace of the first segment of the rendition. Part (b) provides a more lengthy transliteration of the text in two columns. The left-hand column is grammatically more correct in order to indicate the meaning of the text. The right-hand column is an expanded transliteration showing performative elements and vocable additions. The notation, transliteration, and translation are provided to give some sense for the character of the original performance, as well as to demonstrate the kind of variation that is possible in *Pāṇḍwāṇī* renditions. Overall, the examples provide a means to analyze aspects of the performances that highlight the sonic qualities of the vocal delivery.

Bhenti—Galli Ram

 Galli Ram begins each line of his performance by himself with two assistants joining in to complete each line. The rhythm in the excerpt shown is not strictly maintained, although it creates a somewhat regular pulse that gives the sense for an underlying triplet subdivision as shown with beamed note values. The main pulse is designed to coordinate with the movements of the Pandavas as they process forward in the ritual. Each line ends with an elongated final vowel on the tonic (*sa*) pitch followed by a simple/even drum roll with *manjīrā* cymbals. These instruments are not used to lend a metric pulse to the performance. Rather, they are beaten as a punctuation between each text line.

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[12] See Sax 2002:74 for further details of this story.

Each line of the text either begins on the tonic (*sa*) or at a fourth below (*pa*) which then moves quickly to *sa*. Each line has an arch-like shape, beginning and ending on *sa* with the flattened third (*komal ga*), fourth (*ma*), and upper fifth (*pa*) used as shown. Frequently, the flattened seventh (*komal ni*) is intoned as a leading note just before and below the final *sa*. Short melismas are regularly added to allow the text to fit the rhythmic pulse of the delivery, and these require either the change of a short vowel (*a* or *u*) to a long vowel (*ā* or *ū*) or the change of the vowel *a* to *ī*. Sometimes the voiced palatal *y* is added before the melisma as a device to emphasize the beginning of the vowel sound. For instance, this occurs with the word *asnān* (as in the verb "to bathe"), which, when combined with a final lengthened long vowel, becomes *yasīnanā*. These and other devices are regular ways in which the vowel sounds of the text are altered (or expanded) to allow for more lengthy intonations and melismas, all of which show how an expanded set of vocal techniques are used to enhance the musicality of the delivery.

The construction of the text itself is also noteworthy for the way it emerges from a strategy of repetitive iteration that is indicative of the structures of an oral delivery. Various repetitive elements, as well as the regular reiteration of collocations, are not surprising and confirm many aspects of oral-formulaic composition. For instance, the Pandavas are frequently the "five Pandava brothers" (*pāñch bhai Pāṇḍava*); *Maheśwar* (*Śiva*) is frequently *Īśwar Maheśwar* ("Lord Śiva"). Similar structures are heard regularly elsewhere throughout the recording.

From a performative perspective, such oral delivery might also be described as emerging from an iterative sequencing that highlights the improvisatory aspects of musical performance. This iterative sequencing occurs because syllables, words, phrases, and themes—once they have been sounded—become the fragments from which subsequent iterations are built. The process might best be understood as a modular structuration in which modular components within either musical and/or text statements become the basis for development of subsequent phrases. The words *dewo* ("god" or "goddess"), *byūṅjā* or *byūṅje* ("awake"), and *tab* ("then") are illustrative of this point.
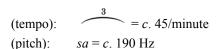
The word *tab* ("then") in particular provides a useful example from 1b below. *Tab* is frequently extended with a long vowel at the end (*tabā*), which is always sung on the final, weakest beat of a triplet. In the example shown, the first syllable of *Laṅkā* comes immediately after *tabā,* and falls on a strong beat at the beginning of the second half of the line. The rhythmic placement of *tabā* on a weak beat, much like an anacrusis, naturally links the two halves of the line, with the second half emerging out of the meaning of the first half. The regular iteration of *tabā* on anacrusis beats like this creates a forward drive for the meaning of the text that is matched by forward movement in the procession.

Tabā is used in all fourteen lines shown, and in seven of these it is preceded by *dewo*. The additional word *byūṅjā* and the grammatical variant *byūṅje* may be heard in eight of the lines, and this is also hardly surprising. However, the variable placement of the words *dewo* and *byūṅjā*/*e* – even when this placement is grammatically unconventional – allows the three words to convey a fairly obvious meaning, which refers to beseeching numerous deities (*dewo*) to awaken (*byūṅjā*) in some kind of succession (*tab*). At the same time that numerous deities are summoned to the ritual stage, sixty thousand *ṛśī*s (mystics) add to the sense of a sacred sphere crowded with spiritual significance. Textually, the repetition of *tabā* conforms to oral formulaic

theory. That is, the redundant repetition of the word is used as a formulaic stem for the listing of a series of related subjects. Ritually, the construction allows for the regular reiteration of the names of numerous deities—an aural act that, through its proliferation, enhances an auspicious environment for the event.

The pitches used for the excerpt sung at Bhenti outline a pentatonic scale that resembles the pitches of *Rāg Mālkauṅs*. This is one of the most common modal scale structures used for music throughout the state of Uttarakhand.[13] Notable within the modal character of this and many other songs is the directional pull inherent in the early move to the fifth (*pa*). This sets up the "need" to return to the tonic (*sa*), a return that frequently occurs through a gradual descent *as well as* the brief iteration of the subtonic (*ni*) before the final return to *sa*. On the one hand the repetitive iteration of the melodic elements for each line are simply the application of a melodic formula to a repetitive recitation of text lines. The tonal structures of the formula, however, create a musical pull to the end of each line that complements whatever narrative pull the text and its meaning might exert.

Music Example 1a: Notated excerpt of the first two lines of a *Paṇḍwāṇī* rendition in the village of Bhenti

(tempo):   ⌢3 = *c*. 45/minute
(pitch):   *sa* = *c*. 190 Hz

Music Example 1b: Transliteration[14] and translation of an excerpt from a *Paṇḍwāṇī* rendition in the village of Bhenti

Garhwali text	Sounded text *leader in italic* group singing in roman **added syllabic elements in bold**

He dewo tab Laṅkā ta Rāwaṇ
Byūṅje dewo tab Īśwar Meśwar
Īśwar Meśwar byūjā tab gaurā Gaṇpatī
Cchatyā sau ṛshi byūjā byūjyaṅ tab pāṅch
    bhai Pāṇḍav
Hoṅ aī gaicchā dewo tab asnān bailā
Paṅchnām dewo byūṅjā tab Śakunā Kurūṛī
Dewo
Śakunā kurūṛī byūṅje dewo tab ko bhūlī bīsar
Nauwā Nāg byūṅje tab Payal mātā ga
Hāṅ re hwege cchā dewo tab asnān berā
Hāth par ghore tailā tab soban kī gāṛū
Hāṅ re hwege cchā dewo tab asnān berā
Hāṅ re Āgāś byege tab geṇyū cchāy lege
Byūṅjī jānā byūṅjī dewo tab he ta Hīt kī chelyo
Helī chelī byūjā tab dhārā kī marūṛayo
	He rāṇā – ā – kyoṅ jī dewo tabā Laṅkā ta Rāwaṇā - - - -
	Taba jī ā – **nā** byūṅje dewo tabā Īśw**ora** - Me - śwarā - - - -
	Orā Me - **he** - śwarā byūjā tabā gaurā Gaṇ**ā**patī - - - -
	Cchatyā saurū - **ū - kora** byūjāṅ tabā pāṅchā bhai
	    pā - **āṅ**dawā - - - -
	Āri we - ai - gecchā dewo tabā asī - nānā **dewo** - - - -
	Paṅchā nāmā dewo byūṅjā tabā Śaṅkunā Kurūṛī Dewo - - - -
	Śakunā - **ā** - byūṅje dewo tabā ko bhūlā bīsarā - - - -
	Nauwā Nāg byūṅjā tabā Payā - la mā - tā gā - - - -
	Hāṅ re hwe - **e** - ge cchā dewo tabā **yāsī** - nānā bero - - - -
	Hāth par ghore - **e** - tailā tabā soban**o** kī gāṛā - - - -
	Hāṅ re hwe - **e** - ge cchā dewo tabā **yāsī** - nānā berā - - - -
	Hāṅ re Āgāś dewo byege tab geṇyū cchāy lege - - - -
	Byūṅjī jānā byūṅjī dewo tabā he ta Hit kā chailyo - - - -
	Helī **gai** chail**yo** byūṅjī tabā dhārā kī **muṅ hwailyo** - - - -

Translation

    Awoken then is Rāwaṇ of Laṅkā
    Awoken then are Īśwar and Maheśwar
    As Īśwar and Maheśwar awaken, then Gaurā and Gaṇpatī
    As 60,000 ṛshis awaken, then wake the five Pāṇḍav brothers
    Yes, then is the auspicious moment for the sacred bath
    As the five principal deities awaken, then the deities of good grace
    Deities of grace and all known and unknown deities awaken
    Mauka Nāsha wakens in the Payāl sphere
    Yes then it was time to take the sacred bath
    In his hand he lifted the golden vessel
    Yes deities, then is the time for sacred bathing
    Yes, the sky opened and the stars cast down their light
    Awaken, O awaken then you the disciples of Hīt
    Salutations to Mother Draupadī, you have been born from Agnikuṅḍ

Kedar Singh of Khumera Village

    Figures 2a and 2b (shown below) represent a short segment of a recorded performance by Kedar Singh. The excerpt is at the beginning of the story and relates the activities of King Shantanu and his children.

    In this recording Kedar Singh sings by himself. His style of singing is consistent and demonstrates a melodic uniformity with most lines beginning on either the tonic (*sa*) or the minor third (*komal ga*). No matter which way a line begins, both *sa* and (*ga*) are the primary
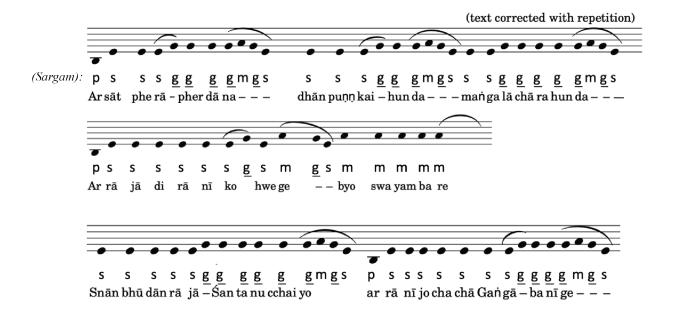
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[14] Standard diacritical symbols for transliteration from Devanāgarī/Sanskrit to Roman are largely used.

pitches for recitation in a manner similar to that shown in the first line of Figure 2a. Lines that primarily use *sa* as the recitation pitch sometimes begin with a quick anacrusis-like inflection of the lower fifth (*pa*).

The tonal structure of Kedar Singh's performance resembles that of the recording from Bhenti and therefore uses the pitches that most closely replicate those of *Rāg Mālkauṅs*. Most lines end with a simple ornamental melisma (*ga ma ga sa*). Aside from this, the majority of the text is delivered at a regular and natural syllabic pace. Consequently, of the three recitations considered here, Kedar Singh's vocal delivery changes the text the least from what a normal spoken version might be. The final short vowel (mostly *a*, but also occasionally *e* and *i*) is lengthened at the end of all lines. Other textual alterations are few in number. Also notable is Kedar Singh's occasional inclusion of a final *h* [:] sound for some words that imply a Sanskrit-like construction (for instance, see lines 9, 10, 15 and 17). These are simply subtle textual additions on words like *putra:* ("son"), *cchana:* ("was"), or *karīka:* ("did") that lend the overall recitation a Sanskrit-like feel. Much more noticeable, however, is the periodic elongation of the vowel at the end of some lines with the fourth degree of the scale, the pitch *ma*. Although there is no metric pulse to Kedar Singh's delivery, this use of an elongated final syllable on the particular pitch of *ma* appears to be an unmetered pacing device through which segmentation (but not pulse) is created. This is shown in Example 2b with an asterisk on the final syllable of *swayambare* (line 2), *maho* (line 13), *hwai* (line 18), and *jabwāle* (line 23).

Music Example 2a: Notated excerpt of the first two lines of a *Paṇḍwāṇī* rendition by Kedar Singh of Khumera Village

(pitch):   *sa* = *c*. 155 Hz

Music Example 2b: Transliteration and translation of an excerpt from a *Paṇḍwāṇī* rendition by Kedar Singh of Khumera Village

Garhwali text	Sounded text **added vowels and syllabic elements in bold** * lengthy held note on the pitch 'ma' <u>underline</u> begins on lower 'pa' recitation pitch
Ar sāt pherā pher dān, dānpuṇṇ kai hund maṅgalāchār (text is repeated for correction) *hund*	<u>*Ar sāt pherā pher dā**nā -**, dānpuṇṇ kai hund**a -** maṅgalāchār*</u> (text is repeated for correction*) hund**a - - -***
Ar rājā dī rāṇī ko hwaige byo swayambare	<u>*Ar rājā dī rāṇī ko hwaig**e - - -** byo swayambare - - - ***</u>
Snān bhūdān Rājā Śantānu cchayo	*Snān bhūdān Rājā Śantānu cchayo - - -*
Ar rāṇī jo chā Gaṅgā banīge	<u>*Ar rāṇī jo **cha**chā Gaṅgā banīge - - -*</u>
Pailo putra paidā hwīge rājā bolaile,	*Pailo putra paidā hwīge raja bolaile - - -*
Rājā rāṇī kā āwās aud	*Rājā rāṇī kā āwās **ae - - -***
'Kyā dukh hwaige merā wāstā?'	*Kyā dukha hwaige merā wāstā - - -*
'Yo putra pakaṙī Gaṅgāsaraṇ karan	<u>*Yo putra pakaṙī Gaṅgāsaraṇ karan**a** - - -*</u>
'Yo Santakumāroṅ kā śrād cchana:.'	*He Santakumāroṅ kā śrād cchana - - -*
Rājā tai putra pakaṙī Gaṅgāsaraṇ kad:.	*Rājā tai putra pakaṙī Gaṅgāsaraṇ kar - **ao -***
Ar tanī tanī cchai putra jo cha janī rājā kā hwain	<u>*Ar tanī tanī cchai putra jo cha janī rājā kā hwain**ā** - - -*</u>
Gaṅgā mai nah Gaṅgāsaraṇ kain.	*Gaṅgā mai na Gaṅgāsaraṇ kain**a** - - -*
Ar ab hwaige – (text correction 'sāthoṅ to āṭhūṅ) *āṭhūṅ putraih e Biśam Pitā maho*	*Ar ab hwaige –* (text correction *'sāthoṅ to āthūṅ'*) *āṭhūṅ putraih e - - - Biśam Pitā maho - - - ***
Ar Rājā Śaṅtanu ju rānī kā pās chalī gaye	<u>*Ar Rājā Śaṅtanu ju rānī kā pās chalī gaye*</u>
(short break in taping)	(short break in taping)
Jab Rājā Śantanu kā sāt putra: hwain Gaṅgā mātā n Gaṅgāsaraṇ karīn	*Jab Rājā Śantanu kā **ae - -** sāt putrah hwai **na - - -** Gaṅgā mātā n Gaṅgāsaraṇ karawai**na - - -***
Sāt bachcho jo cchā,	*Sāt bachcho **- -** jo cchā **na - - -**,*
Ar Gaṅgā mātā kā garbhdhān karīk: baikuṇḍ mā pauṅcchī gain bhāyo	<u>*Ar Gaṅgā mātā kā garbhdhān karīk**a** baikuṇḍ mā pauṅcchī gain**a - - -** bhāyo*</u>
Ar tab āṭhwāṅ hwen Bīśam Pitā mahe	*Ar tab āṭhwāṅ hwen**e - - -** Bīśam Pitā ma hwai **- - - ***
Ar Rājā Śantanu kī jawānī jo cha ar jawānī nikali ka vrid awasthā a aye thaī	*Rājā Śantanu kī jawānī jo cha **- - -**, ar jawānī nikali ka vrid awasthā a aye thaī*
Sīṅ jhūlaṇī jhūladā bhāī bandhu pūchchadā	***Aye thanī** Sīṅ jhūlaṇī jhūladā - - - bhāī bandhu pūchchadā*
Rājā wa jīrū pūcchadā: ki yīṅ, 'Rāṇī kā sāth mā aṭhāra: aśwamedh karīn yagya karīn	*Rājā wa jīrū pūcchadāh <u>ki</u> yīṅ, 'Rāṇī kā sāth mā aṭhārah aśwamedh karīn Yagya karī**na - - -***
'Jawānī bīti gaige ar thīṅ rāṇī na sabhī putra Gaṅgāsaraṇ karwai dīn	*'Jawānī bīti gaige <u>ar</u> thīṅ rāṇī na sabhī putra Gaṅgāsaraṇ karwai le**ṇā - - -***
'Ar kwe bhī ne rakhe rāṇī twen rachcchī rakhwālo bastī ko jagwalo	*'Ar kwe bhī ne rakhe rāṇī twen **e - - -** rachcchī rakhwālo bastī ko jabwāl**e - - - ***
'Ar āṭhwoṅ putra jo cha so rājā nā bhīkh māṅgī godā par dharī Gaṅgā mātā se māṅgale	*'Ar āṭhwoṅ putra jo cha **- - -** so rājā nā bhīkh māṅgī **- - -** godā par dharī Gaṅgā mātā se māṅgale **- - -***
'Ar so bhauṅj sāmrājya kī apanī parī awsarāoṅ se chchipaile	*<u>'Ar</u> so bhauṅj sāmrājya kī apanī parī awsarāoṅ se cchipaile **- -***
Ar bhāt dūdh kī madmewā pakawān dī ka jai saraiṅ kā pās alop karavaile	*Ar bhāt <u>dūdh</u> kī madmewā pakawān dī ka **- - -** jai saraiṅ kā pās alop karavaile **- - -***
Aphū Gaṅgā ghāṭ kā pās jaike nahīṅ dhoye kai Gaṅgājal ko loṭā le ka aigai	*Aphū Gaṅgā ghāṭ kā pās jaike nahīṅ dhoye kai **ge - - -** Gaṅgājal ko loṭā le ka aigai **- - -***

Garwhali text (continued)	Sounded text (continued)
He ji Gaṅgā māyi jo cha syā bilkul ābiśwās hwaige *Rājā twaiṅ nyūto lege, 'Rājā taiṅ bulāwā'* *Ar sabhī sahelī jecha rājā tai bulaika rāṇī kā sāmaṇī lainā* *'Ki suṇ sūṇ Rājā, āj twen dāl māṅ kālo kaile* *'Āj ko ashṭawasu jo cha twen Gaṅgāsaraṇ ni kare.'* *Ab rājā uwāch rājā bunauṅcha kilai twe taiṅ kyā mālum twa Gaṅgāsaraṇ ni kare?* *Tab Gaṅgā Mātā uwāch 'ki hwe astanoṅ ko dūdh nī sukhadah, dayā ko bhaṇḍār jo cha so nirdayā chā na hond.'*	<u>*He*</u> *ji Gaṅgā māyi jo cha - - - syā bilkul ābiśwās hwaige - - -* *Rājā twaiṅ nyūto lege - - - 'Rājā taiṅ bulāwā ā - - -'* <u>*Ar*</u> *sabhī sahelī jecha rājā tai bulaika rāṇī kā sāmaṇī lainā -* *'Ki suṇ suṇ Rājā, āj twena - - - dāl māṅ kālo kaile - - -* *'Āj ko ashṭawamu no cha twen Gaṅgāsaraṇ ni kare - - -.'* <u>*Ab*</u> *rājā uwācha rājā bunauṅcha - - - kilai twe taiṅ kyā mālum twa Gaṅgāsaraṇ ni kare - - -?* *Tab Gaṅgā Mātā uwācha - - - 'ki hwe astanoṅ ko dūdh nī sukhada - - - dayā ko bhaṇḍār jo cha so nirdayā chā na honda - - -*

Translation

And they take seven rounds of the sacred fire; they do good deeds and sing auspicious songs
And the queen had chosen the king as her groom
The ritual bathing and land grants to the Brahmans were made, Śantānu was the king
And Gaṅgā was the queen
As the queen felt her first labour pains
The king was summoned to the palace
'What would you have me do?'
'Take your son and drown him in the river
'His birth is a curse from the Santkumārs.'
The king takes the son and drowns him in the river.
And in this way the next six sons born to the king
were drowned in the river all because of Mother Gaṅgā.
And now it happened the eighth son, Biśam Pitā, was born
And King Śaṅtanu went to the queen

(short break in taping)

When the seven sons born to Shantanu were thrown into the River Ganga
The seven children who descended
From Mother Gaṅgā's womb went back to the seat of heaven
And then the eighth, Biśam Pitā, was born
And the youthful days of King Shantanu were over and he was of an old age
Trembling he went to seek counsel from his people
The king asked his ministers, 'I have performed 18 Ashwamedh ganna with her as consort
'Youth has now gone and this queen has drowned all my sons in the river.
'And the queen has spared none as guards to the palace, none as watchmen to the colony
'But the eighth son that the king asked from Mother Gaṅgā
'He held him in his lap and hid him from the fairies
And feeding him on milk and rice he hid him secretly with his loyal guards
By himself he went to the banks of the Ganga, there he bathed and returned with a vessel of sacred water
And hey, Mother Gaṅgā couldn't believe it
She summoned the king saying, 'Call him here.'
All the friends of the queen took the king to the queen and she said,
'Listen oh King, today you have upset the apple cart
'The Ashtvasu born today has not been immersed in the river.'
Now the king replied saying, 'How do you know I haven't done so?'
Then Mother Gaṅgā said, 'Until the milk of my breasts does not dry up, the attraction I have for my child will not cease.'

Indra Dutt Semwal of Jakhwari Village

There is an acknowledgement amongst singers of the region that different recitation styles for Pandava stories do exist even though descriptions of stylistic differences are not precise. Thus, some styles are thought to have more variation in melodic contour when compared to others that remain closer to a single recitation tone with more formulaic cadential formulae. The examples shown in Figures 3a and 3b, sung by Indra Dutt Semwal, are referred to as *Chhaṛī* and are thought to have more melodic variation than other styles. Several aspects of Semwal's delivery demonstrate a different stylistic approach that uses more ornamentation, occasional inclusion of poetic/rhythmic elements, and a more varied tonal palette.

Semwal was from the Brahman caste group and sang his *Paṇḍwāṇī* numerous times in various villages in the vicinity of his own during this lifetime. As a Brahman, his contribution to *Pāṇḍava Līlā*s was not as one who "took on" characters for dancing. Nor would he have played drums for the ceremony as done by caste musicians. Rather, he would be invited to a *Pāṇḍava Līlā* in order to perform during a particular daily ritual and to present his individual rendition of Pandava stories. His rendition resembles the kind of *Paṇḍwāṇī* identified by Sax (2002: 33-34) in which the whole or a large portion of the *Mahābhārata* is presented.

Semwal's *Paṇḍwāṇī* is recorded on one cassette and lasts approximately 51 minutes. The recording is therefore an excerpt of the story, and significantly shorter than what he would normally perform. Unlike the group singing at Bhenti, Semwal sings on his own since the recording was made in his home and not during any ritual activity. The excerpt includes a lengthy invocation, such as might be used in various ritual situations. During this invocation he honors each Pandava one by one, and briefly refers to their charismatic nature and special attributes. He then begins to describe how Draupadi, wife of the Pandavas, was born to King Drupad.

Figure 3a presents a notated excerpt of the first portion of Semwal's performance, beginning approximately nine minutes into the recording. The performance differs significantly in character from that of Galli Ram, and partly from that of Bhenti. This is not surprising given the differences in the recording situations, as well as the differences in their caste affiliations and the consequently different dynamics of their performances.
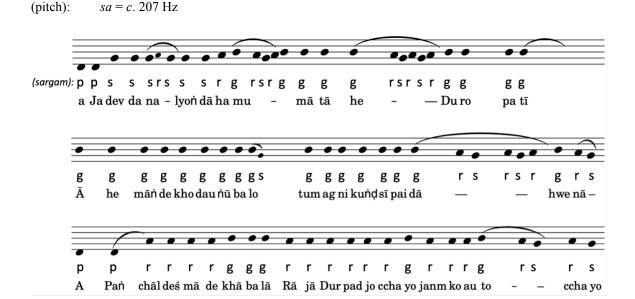
Even though all singers in Examples 1, 2, and 3 largely remain in the lower half of their respective scales, the tonal structure of Semwal's performance (Ex. 3) differs significantly from that of the Bhenti (Ex. 1) and Khumera (Ex. 2) performances. Firstly, Semwal's tonic pitch in this particular recording is higher than that of the other examples. Secondly, the third (*ga*) above the tonic (*sa*) is *shudh* (natural or "major") not *komal* (flattened) like the third degree pitches of the other singers. Semwal establishes his tonal center pitch at the beginning of line 1 before moving up to intone the natural third degree of the scale with the iteration of "Mātā Duropatī." This natural third then remains the primary note for recitation in the second line of his text. Thereafter, the third line is delivered largely on the pitch *re* before returning to the pitch *sa* as a cadential close. Most lines of Semwal's performance are structured this way. Occasionally, Semwal raises the pitch of the recitation to notes in the upper half of the scale even though the majority of his delivery remains on *ga* and *re*. For instance, on the line *Dekh dauṅ hamun ye*

rāajpāṭ ko kyā kannā the fifth (*pa*) is used for about half the line before *ga* again becomes the main recitation pitch.

All the lines contain lengthy melismas at or near line-end as a regular cadential element. In about half the lines this melisma is on the final vowel of the penultimate word, which then prepares for the quick cadential return to *sa* at the end of the final word. At other times the final word itself is lengthened with a longer vowel to finish the line.

There is also an absence of regular pulse throughout most of Semwal's performance. Occasionally, however, a sense for regular pulse is introduced. For instance, in the line *Binā putra gati kaun kare* ("How can one survive without children") a pulsation is hinted at through the addition of accentuation and additional short melismatic fragments. The sense of pulse continues in the subsequent line before a return to a more standard unmetered delivery. The two lines therefore emerge much like a memorized couplet within the overarching theme of lamenting a childless marriage. These lines prepare the audience to understand Draupadi's eventual birth—an event that is crucial to the story—as a miraculous avoidance of a near catastrophe: childlessness.

Music Example 3a: Notated excerpt of the first three lines of a *Paṇḍwāṇī* rendition by Indra Dutt Semwal of Jakhwari Village

(pitch):   *sa = c*. 207 Hz

Music Example 3b: Transliteration and translation of an excerpt from a *Paṇḍwāṇī* rendition by by Indra Dutt Semwal of Jakhwari Village

Garhwali text	Sounded text **added vowels and syllabic elements in bold**
Auṁ Jadeū lyoṅḍā hamu mātā he Duropadī	***A Jadev dana** lyoṅḍā hamu - - mātā he - - - Duropa**tī** - - -*
He māṅ dekho dauṅū tum agnikuṅḍ se paidā hwen	*Ā he māṅ dekho dauṅū **balo** tum agnikuṅḍ **sī** paidā - - - hwen**ā***
Paṅchāl deś mā dekhā Rājā Durapad jo chhayo janm ko auto cchayo	*A Paṅchāl deś mā dekhā **balā** Rājā Durpad jo chhayo janm ko auto - - - cchayo*
Ar tamām Āhutiyoṅ se tain devatoṅ kī tirapati kare	*Ar **āya babān** tamām Āhutiyoṅ **sī** tain **dekh ā balo**, devatoṅ kī tirapati - - - kare*
Ar kardabān āhutiyoṅ se karī tain pitaroṅ kī tirupati	*Ar kardabān āhutiyoṅ se kare tain**ā** pitar**ū** - - - kī tir**u** - - - pati*
He Īśwar paramātmā devatoṅ nau tain maṅdiroṅ kī pūjā karī	*He Īśwar paramātm**ā** - - - devatoṅ nau tain maṅdiroṅ kī pūj**ā** - - - karī*
Ar devatoṅ kā nau kare tain gāyoṅ kī pūjā	*Ar devatoṅ kā nau kare tai na **Gaṅ**gāe **āyo** kī pūjā - - -*
Ar kitanā dekhā dhauṅ bal tai na karyā dharm kā kāj	*Ar kitanā dekhā dhauṅ bal**o** tai na kāry**ā** dhārm**ik** kāry**ā** - - - **karyā***
Ar rājā Durapad kī bal tab bhī saṅtān nī hweye	*Ar rājā Durapad kī bal**ā** tab bhī saṅtā - - - **n** nī **hoī***
Ar he Īśwar paramātmā ek din kī bāt ini hwe	*Ar he Īśwar paramātm**ā** - - - ek din kī bāt ini hwe*
Ardharātri kā ṭaim par rājā rānī ko nyūlī se bilāp paṙe	*Ardharātri kā ṭaim par rājā rānī ko nyūlī **sī** bilā**p** - - - paṙe*
Ar rānī rājā bokārṇ karī roṇ laigīn	*Ar rānī rājā bokārṇ karī roṇ l**ai** - - - **ginā***
Aur strī ko śarīr cchoṭo hoṅd, rājā durapād ma bonn bai gaī	*Aur **istrī** ko śarīr cchoṭo hoṅd**u**, rājā durapād mā bonn bai gaī*
'Dekh dauṅ hamun ye rāajpāṭ ko kyā kann?	*Dekh dauṅ hamun ye rāajpāṭ ko kyā kan**nā**?*
'Ar jauṅkā ghar ma aulād nī hoṅdī	*Ar jauṅkā ghar ma aulād**ā** nī - - - hoṅd**e***
'Sī ghar hoṅdā bhāyoṅ bhūtoṅ kā samān	***Ar** sī ghar hoṅdā bhāyoṅ bhūt**ū** - - - kā s**ā** - - - mān**a** - - -*
'Binā putra gati kaun kare?	*Bin**ā** - - p**u** - tra gati - - kaun kar**e** - - -*
'Raghunāth binā prabhu dukh kaun hare'	*Raghunāth**a** - bin**ā** - prabhu duk**hā** kaun har**e** - - -*
Rānī dekho dhau tab Rājā Durapād kā pās tab bon lage na	*Rānī dekho dhau tab Rājā Durapād kā pās tab bon l**e** - - - ge na*
'Ar he Rājā Durapad dekh dhauṅ lā	*Ar he Rājā Durapād dekh dhau **lā** - - -*
'Saṅsār ma kwī gate ne cha.	*Saṅsār mā kwī gate n**ī** - - - kad**ā***

Translation

Salutations Mother Draupadī
Hey Mother, look, you were born from the sacred spring
King Drupad of Paṅchāl was destined to be childless
Through all kinds of ritual oblations he beseeched the gods
And he enacted special kardabān rituals to please his ancestors
O God of gods see how he made prayers in all the temples
And in the name of all gods he worshipped the cows
And look how he performed so many good deeds
And still Raja Drupad had no children
O Lord of Lords it happened like this one day
In the middle of the night in sadness, the king and queen cried out like the mountain barbet
And as the queen and king called out they began to cry
A woman's heart is always weak. So she told Rājā Drupad,
'Look Rājā, what shall we do with this kingdom?

Translation (continued)

> 'And in the house of he who has no children
> 'It is as if their house is full of ghosts
> 'Without children who will perform the last rites?
> 'Who else but Raghunāth will take away your suffering?'
> The queen came closer to the king and again began to speak,
> 'And hey King Drupad, those without children
> 'In this world they have nothing.'

The Narration of Oral Epics: Discursive Constructions and a Sacred Repertoire

Though the region of Garhwal is relatively small, it is remarkable that performance traditions for Pandava stories (*Paṇḍwāṇī*) include considerable variation in style. While traditional labels for different styles, such as *Chhaṙī,* are not numerous, they do reflect local acknowledgement of this variability in practice. Individual stylistic practices may not, on the surface, seem dramatically different from each other musically. Nonetheless, such differences do exist and suggest a level of individualism that emerges from different functional purposes within ritual contexts as well as different styles of performance.

Two of the musical examples presented here are from recordings made outside ritual contexts. Nonetheless, as recordings they document oral renditions of texts by performers who otherwise regularly participated in ritual events during the time of their recording. As is obviously the case for Kedar Singh (Examples 2a and 2b) the text and its presentation would be significantly altered in a situation where a partner was asking questions as a prompt for the delivery of the story. Any printing of text should undoubtedly acknowledge the variable nature of the performance context. By contrast, the text presented by Semwal would be less variable, since he normally sang his stories on his own during designated moments of broader ritual action. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to presume that texts from different performance locations and times would exhibit variation of different kinds.

The absence of a regular pulse in Kedar Singh's and Semwal's performances as compared to Galli Ram's is an obvious difference that clearly emerges from different ritual purposes. Galli Ram's singing accompanies processional activity and therefore it is not surprising that a rhythmic pulse is heard. Kedar Singh's and Semwal's renditions have a primarily narrative function and therefore no pulsation is needed to match ritual action. However, even within the brief segment of Semwal's performance presented here (Examples 3a and 3b), hints of moments of more poetic delivery as well as the slight suggestion of pulse point to a broader palette of performative elements. These could well come to the fore during ritual performances even while direct rhythm is not matched to particular ritual action.

All three renditions use a lengthened vowel at the end of each line, a pacing device that segments the delivery and tonalizes the performances around particular pitches. Semwal's delivery reveals a more ordered use of different ending pitches as well as extended ornamental melismas within lines of text that exhibit a subtle stylistic distinction—one that appears to demonstrate the kinds of stylistic variation that exist between different performers in different villages.

The three excerpts considered above highlight the ambiguous distinctions between words like "song" and "story," "recitation" and "singing," or "narration" and "plot." In many ways they confirm the kinds of dilemmas that have faced researchers of epics since at least the middle of the last century. The terms "oral tradition," "oral consciousness," and "oral performance" continue to provide useful frames for discussing the words that label presentations of epic traditions. What the examples above add to this discussion is a sense for the nature of epic as an "immersive" sacred activity—one in which epic worlds are created through a sonic delivery that surrounds earthly participants with the substance of sound and taps into visions of the past, as well as the world of deities. Spectacle and ritual in this context are never distinct, if indeed they ever were. Unsurprisingly, local terminology further emphasizes the oral nature of epic performance. *Paṇḍwāṇī* are orally delivered recitations of stories from the *Mahābhārata*. *Pāḍava Nṛtya* are dances in which deities may arrive to symbolically represent episodes from the whole of the epic. Both may occur within a lengthy and segmented ritual occasion labelled *Pāṇḍava Līlā*. *Pāṇḍava Vārtā* are renditions that draw on the world of drummers who act as ritual specialists on other occasions. All of these, in turn, involve the singing of tales (*Gāthā*s) in which the sonic texture of vocal delivery surrounds audiences and awakens deities through the singing of stories and episodes, dancing, drumming, and spectacle. Oral tradition makes the sacred palpable through the immersive quality of sound.

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