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Article

Khuded, Songs of Separation: Affective Unmaking of the Stoic Soldier in Kumaoni Military Folklore

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Abstract: Challenging the dominant narratives found in official military literature- such as regimental histories and handbooks, battle monographs, official auto/biographies, heroic tales (*veer gathas*), and doctrinal texts- this paper turns to the vernacular, folkloric tradition of Kumaoni *Khuded* songs. It argues that these oral performances form an affective counter-archive that preserves the intimate and often overlooked dimension of war. The paper explores the spaces of absence, longing, and kinship ties that bind mountain communities to the figure of the soldier. Primarily, the study examines *Khuded* (separation) genre of Kumaoni folksongs with four key songs- "*Ghughuti Na Basa*" by Gopal Babu Goswami which voices a wife's yearning for her absent soldier-husband; "*Tak Taka Tak Kamala*" and "*Kashmiri Border Pyari*" by Fouji Lalit Mohan Joshi, that renders the affective embodied presence of the soldier in service, and "*Door Badi Door Barfilo Daan*" where a younger sibling prays for his brother's safety. These selected songs foreground the layered ways in which gender, devotion, and memory shape the cultural imagination of war. Drawing on affect theory and subaltern memory studies, the analysis reveals how these compositions resist the homogenising image of the stoic, nationalised soldier. Instead, *Khuded,* a military genre of Kumaon, articulates an alternative military literary tradition that privileges vulnerability, emotional endurance, spiritual invocation, and 'affective economies' that reveal the entanglement of the personal and the political. In doing so, Kumaoni military folk songs extend the discourse of war beyond the battlefield, inscribing the soldier not merely as an emblem of the nation but as a son, husband, brother, and devotee. This research argues that such songs constitute a vital counter-narrative within cultural memory, offering a more nuanced understanding of how communities internalize and remember war.

Keywords: Kumaoni folklore; *Khuded* songs; affect theory; subaltern memory; military literature; Indian soldier

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Introduction

The Indian sepoys formed the backbone of the British Indian Army, enabling Britain to treat India as "an inexhaustible reservoir of military manpower" for two centuries. This immense force- drawn from a colonized population- was the key instrument of Imperialism, allowing the British Empire, comprising less than one percent of the world's population, to dominate millions (Rathee 3). The structural privileges of the Global North and the enduring disadvantages of the Global South are a direct legacy of this colonial exploitation, which plundered not only India's resources but also the very blood of its people. In this way, the loyal *sipahi* (sepoy) became the crucial mechanism of war that propelled a small European island into the world's foremost imperial power.

The colonial British administration's production of martial race theory was meticulously engineered to reinforce their doctrine of divide and rule within the Indian subcontinent's diverse social fabric. Their ethnographic studies and regimental handbooks manufactured a complete racial epistemology that scientifically legitimized and facilitated the Empire's hegemony. Indian soldiers, already reductively portrayed through racialized "colonial negatives", were subjected to a further, deeply divisive categorization. This was not a simple division but a hierarchical schism between those groups invented as "martial races"- such as the Dogras, Pathans, Gurkhas, Sikhs, etc, and all others relegated to the inferior status of "non-martial".

The martial ideal was explicitly defined by its perceived proximity to European physiognomy and character, encompassing traits like aquiline noses, fair complexions, and tall, robust builds. In stark opposition, the non-martial races were constructed as the antithetical 'Other': savage, uncivilized, and defined by a darker complexion. This institutionalized racism is critically examined by Gajendra Singh in *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy* (2014), where he rightly argues that "the martialization of soldiers becomes contiguous to the wholesale objectification and dehumanization of the Indian under colonisation" (15). Such a fabricated understanding catalysed a process of "granting pseudo-British qualities to *sipahis*," a form of ideological coercion that the military institution internalized so completely that British masculinity became the exclusive fantasy and paradigmatic ideal for martial conduct. Consequently, this colonial logic and its legacy lived on, transmuted into the postcolonial era's dominant ideology of the soldier as a stoic, unfeeling nationalist hero.

However, from an indigenous Indian perspective, a military vocation was a desired and respected profession long before the advent of colonialism. This is essentially because the Indian caste system reserves military duty for the *Kshatriya* caste, which literally translates to the "warrior caste" who occupy the upper echelons of Indian society. Additionally, the moral universe of the Indian soldier was built on an affective economy of ideals like *Izzat*, *Dharma*, and *Shahidi*, which codified a distinct military ethic and pride. Thus, the contemporary military service emerged not from a single source, but from a complex amalgamation of religion, colonial influence, economic necessity, gendered expectations, and cultural values.

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Within this framework, the soldier's identity is multifaceted. A soldier exists as a *yogi*- a renouncer of all worldly attachments, pursuing the path of righteousness. He is an employee whose loyalty is a "sacred obligation", and he is also a protector of religion, bonded by the conduct rules of warriors (Singh 80-82). While leadership, honour, bravery, and service were British masculine ideals imposed upon the military structure, they found a potent and parallel expression within these existing Indian frameworks. This fusion shaped a specific archetype of the military hero: defined by personal bravery and fearlessness of death, a figure disciplined to serve the nation while rigorously trained to suppress any outward sign of weakness or private emotion. Consequently, upon entering the military institution, an individual undergoes a fundamental transformation, compelled to leave behind or severely suppress the core identity markers of family, community, and friendship.

To map an affective counter-archive and dismantle the monolithic image of the soldier, this research turns to affect theory, focusing specifically on the vernacular folkloric tradition of Kumaoni *Khuded* songs rather than conventional literary texts. It examines the official state narrative of militarism and stoic masculinity, embodied in institutional doctrines and *veer gathas* (tales of valour), in order to establish the dominant discourse from which the folk tradition departs. My analysis also explores how *Khuded* songs articulate a form of vernacular resistance, giving voice to the intimate longings of soldiers and their families. Ultimately, this study argues that these songs produce a potent form of subaltern knowledge, one that theorizes war through embodied idioms of vulnerability, memory, and love, thereby enacting a decolonization of military masculinity itself.

Challenging the Stoic Ideal: *Khuded* as Affective Counter-Archive

In this paper, the term 'military literature' refers specifically to the canonical, often state-sanctioned body of written works that shape the official narrative of war. This includes (sub)genres such as regimental histories and handbooks, official auto/biographies, battle monographs, popular heroic poetry (*veer gathas*), and doctrinal inscriptions that collectively idealize the nationalist soldier. In contrast to this written corpus, my analysis focuses on the oral and folklore tradition of *Khuded* songs from Kumaon. This vernacular tradition, performed and preserved outside formal literary channels, offers a subaltern perspective that challenges the official narratives of war, masculinity, and nationalism.

The military culture of war mostly memorializes heroism, victory, and the achievements of medals for a stoic soldier devoid of vulnerability. Official military literature largely comprises veer-gathas (tales of valour) about heroes who, against all odds, sacrifice and struggle to serve the nation. This selfless service is epitomized by the Chetwode Hall inscription at the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in Dehradun, which reads:

> The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time. The honour, welfare, and comfort of the men you command come next.

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> Your own ease, comfort, and safety come last, always and every time. (Field Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode, 10 December 1932)

Such a locus of militarism and masculinity makes it impossible to conceive of any emotion or affect beyond duty, honour, country, or the military character of *Naam, Namak, Nishan* (translated as "Name, Salt, Flag"). However, from the Himalayan voices of Kumaon, we hear the hums of military life and its impact on soldiers, spouses, siblings, and kin. Kumaonis have been extensively recruited into the military since the British colonial era, a practice driven by the imposition of the "martial race" theory.

However, their military tradition far predates this colonial categorization, dating back to the *Katyuri* dynasty (700 CE–1065 CE) and later the *Chand* dynasty (1019CE–1790 CE), whose rulers maintained powerful armies to defend their Himalayan kingdoms. The region's rugged terrain and strategic proximity to Tibet and Nepal fostered a deeply ingrained culture of resilience and combat readiness, traits that would come to define the Kumaoni soldier. The Kumaon Regiment, formally established in 1813, draws directly from these centuries of local martial tradition. From the World Wars and Indo-Pak conflicts to modern UN peacekeeping missions, Kumaonis continue to form a significant portion of the Indian Army's recruits, with military service representing a cornerstone of livelihood and family tradition.

To focus on Kumaon is to focus on the heartland of the military's effective economy. The region's modern identity remains shaped by its colonial designation as a "martial race," a classification that transformed soldiering into a primary social vocation. This history has etched the rhythms of army life- the leaving, the waiting, the returning, the grieving- into the very core of its cultural expression. Analysing Kumaoni *Khuded* songs provides a critical lens into how a community, living with the long-term legacy of militarization, uses cultural forms to navigate the enduring tension between state duty and human vulnerability.

In this research, Kumaoni folklore is employed to chart a counter-archive of war that weaves absence into melody and unmakes the figure of the stoic soldier by presenting the lived entanglement of identity. The Kumaoni folklore tradition of *Khuded Geet*, or songs of separation, is mostly sung by women who are either homesick for their maternal home or longing for an absent husband or lover. Etymologically, *Khuded* means crying, and since crying or singing songs of longing and separation are universal emotions, the genre is not limited to women, with many songs expressing a male perspective, too.

The *Khuded* songs analysed in this study- "*Ghughuti Na Basa*", "*Door Badi Door Barfilo Daan*", "*Tak Taka Tak Kamala*", and "*Kashmiri Border Pyari*"- were selected for their thematic centrality to the experience of military separation and their enduring resonance within Kumaoni folk culture. These songs are not isolated texts but form a core part of a living oral tradition, repeatedly performed and recognized across generations. Their selection is driven by their capacity to represent a spectrum of gendered perspectives- from a soldier's longing and the lament of a wife to the yearning of a brother- thereby illuminating the collective, familial nature of wartime affect. As

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primary sources, these songs are treated as vernacular theoretical texts in their own right, capable of articulating a subaltern knowledge of war that exists outside the written archive.

Recent scholarship in affect theory has dismantled the Cartesian divide between mind and body, revealing how power operates through visceral, pre-linguistic intensities (Massumi 88-89). The study attempts to position Kumaoni *Khuded* songs as an 'affective' archive that documents the unspeakable costs of war not through official records but through embodied practices of longing ("*Ghughuti Na Basa*"), devotion ("*Door Badi Door Barfilo Daan*"), and labour ("*Tak Taka Tak Kamala*" and "*Kashmiri Border Pyari*"). War is an embodied experience- through bodies and between bodies. Hence, war lives on in bodies that are both directly and indirectly present on the battlefield. War is as alive in the soldier who longs for home and its loving safety as it is in the bodies of those left behind- the wives who hum under their breath, the siblings who whisper prayers into the wind, the parents who religiously count days of absence. Building on Sara Ahmed's affective economy and Laura Berlant's cruel optimism, my study extends the discourse of war beyond the battlefield, inscribing the soldier not merely as an emblem of the nation but as a son, husband, brother, and devotee.

Affective economy argues that emotions are not merely personal but have social and cultural capital attached to them. They are not just private but function as a form of currency that binds communities, identities, and social hierarchies. They circulate between bodies and objects, gaining value and forging collective attachments and an economy of emotions or affect (Ahmed 44-45). Drawing on affect theory, I use *Khuded* songs as sites to uncover the marginalized experience of war and the cultural politics of emotions that are routinely suppressed and deemed peripheral or irrelevant to the official war narratives. These songs resist the statist construction of the 'stoic soldier' by privileging vulnerability and what Lauren Berlant might call the 'cruel optimism' of military masculinity, duty, and honour.

Cruel optimism is a painful relation of attachment to a desired object or fantasy (such as national duty, romantic reunion, or stability) that actually works against one's well-being, perpetuating the very conditions of suffering it promises to resolve (Berlant 1-2). The soldier's fantasy in "*Tak Taka Tak Kamala*" of building a home with his wife on the border, for instance, materializes the cruel promise of togetherness in a space designed for separation. At the same time, the younger sibling's performance of domestic rituals in "*Door Badi Door Barfilo Daan*" maps devotional affect onto geopolitical absence (Massumi 27). Moreover, because these folk songs are passed down through generations, they do not just reflect emotion- they shape how whole communities remember war.

Unmaking the Soldier: *Khuded* in Fouji Lalit Mohan Joshi's Songs

Fouji Lalit Mohan Joshi, as his title suggests, is a *fauji* (army personnel) celebrated for his simple yet heartfelt songs that uncover the emotional turmoil of soldiers living in service, away from family, home, and homeland. Hailing from the Munsyari Tehsil of the Pithoragarh district in Uttarakhand, he joined the Indian Army

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in 1999 and debuted as a folklorist with his Kumaoni album *Teri Bholi Anwara* in 2001. His famed song, *"Tak Taka Tak Kamla"*, stands as one of the most popular Kumaoni songs and is also an international hit. Joshi is a significant voice in Kumaoni music, focusing persistently on themes of military life and regional identity.

"Tak Taka Tak Kamla" is a lover's lament from the perspective of a soldier husband/lover, stationed away from home on military border duty. The words "Tak Taka Tak" are an onomatopoeia for hiccups, and "Kamala" is the name of his wife/ lover, for whom the narrator sings of his yearning. The song begins with the physical sensation of hiccups experienced by the soldier. In Indian culture, hiccups are associated with the belief that if a person gets them, someone is missing or remembering them intensely. In this folksong, the soldier interprets his hiccups as a sign that his wife/lover, in his distant homeland, is thinking of him. This triggers a flood of memories and an aching longing for her presence. As the song follows:

Tak Tak Tak
Tak taka tak Kamla, batuli lagaye,
Pardesh muluk main ghar bulaaye.

Jab aali dagada pardes ghumulo,
Maya ki jaal mein ghar baar banulo.
Tak taka tak kamla batuli lagaye,
Pardesh muluk main ghar bulaaye.
Akeli na soche dagado banulo,
Kamla pardesh ma saath ghumulo.

Tak taka tak kamla batuli lagaye,
Pardesh muluk main ghar bulaaye
Mahen din hego na chitthi pattar,
Aisi maya diye meri duty border.
Tak taka tak kamla batuli lagaye...

(English Translation)

Tak Tak Tak,
Tak Taka Tak Kamala, I feel the hiccups,
In strange lands, my home calls me back.

Next time, do accompany me to this land,
In the web of this illusory world, we will build our home together.

Tak Taka Tak Kamala, I feel your hiccups,
Away from home, I feel you calling me back home.
Do not feel lonely! We will give company to each other,
Come, Kamala, in distant lands we will wander together.

Tak Taka Tak Kamala, I feel the hiccups,
In strange lands, my home calls me back.

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Months have passed since I last received your letter,
Oh, what an illusory state of living! For I am destined to the Border.
Tak Taka Tak Kamla, I feel the hiccups...*

The song unravels the stoic facade of the soldier by giving melody to his internal monologue. Hiccups, here, are the central metaphor, a cultural symbol that articulates the emotional and physical toll of a soldier's separation. The narrator interprets his own bodily sensation as an empathetic echo of Kamla's longing, creating a tangible, mystical link across the distance that separates them. Such is the affective economy of war, where love and memory become a currency for survival against the isolating backdrop of "strange lands" and the "illusory world" of border duty. The hiccups are no longer just a superstition but the core emotional mechanism. It becomes a bodily connection (a physical link between two separated bodies) and a shared experience (for the physical sensation in his body is the emphatic echo of his wife).

The themes of distance and belonging are evoked by the word '*pardesh*', meaning a foreign/strange land. *Pardesh* is later described as Maya- the illusory world, as the military positing for the soldier is not just a distant location but also a state of unreality. The consciousness of this *Maya* highlights the absurdity and pain of the soldier's situation. His life of duty at the border feels like a fleeting illusion, while the enduring reality is his love for Kamala. Thus, the juxtaposition of two worlds- home and border- elevates the song from a simple lament to a philosophical commentary on the disorienting nature of a soldier's life. However, the soldier does not drown in sadness; he actively uses his imagination to cope. In order to counter his loneliness, he imagines them (Kamala and him) building a home and wandering the distant lands as a couple. This fantasy is his attempt to gain agency and control over a situation (his posting) where he has none. The final resignation at the end of the song underscores his powerlessness.

"*Aisi maya diye meri duty border*" (Oh what an illusory state of living! For I am destined to the Border) is not a fantasy but a final sigh of resigned acceptance. It is the breaking of the stoic soldier. His vulnerability is left exposed with this line. Despite the immense personal cost, the sense of duty and destiny ultimately contain his lament. This aptly captures the central conflict- the "cruel optimism" of being devoted to a duty which is the very source of personal pain. This makes the song a coherent vernacular theorization of war, foregrounding the subaltern memory of emotional cost that official histories silence.

In contrast to the vulnerable interiority of "*Tak Taka Tak Kamala*", Fouji Lalit Mohan Joshi's composition titled "*Kashmiri Border Pyari*" presents a complex performance of stoic reassurance. This popular folksong is a direct address that sits at the intersection of official, stoic military narrative and the private, vulnerable interiority of the soldier. It does not express longing; it actively negotiates it through a speech-act designed to comfort an anxious wife.

Kashmiri border pyari, Mei aafi ladlu lah,
Na hoye udasa pyari, Jiteh ghar ullah

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Pitha mei pithawa meri, Kani mei riffle lah
Kamar mei goli samani, Dushmana ho lah
Myar dagarh Kumaon ki, Lagi re cha fauj
Pyar dagarh ghar huni, mei karni mauz
Ucha Dana Kumaon ki, Rangilo Pahadh
Ghar ma dil lagae, na hoe kinara.

Ghar ma cha Devi esthana, Diyo jaala diye
Tu mero namaha ke pyari, Path padh diye
Pitha mei pithawa meri, Kani mei riffle lah
Kamar mei goli samani, Dushmana ho lah

(English Translation:

At the Kashmir border, O lover, I fight alone;
Please do not be sad, for I will win and return home.
Heavy Sack on my back, Riffle charged near my ear;
Bullets around my waist-belt, I sight the Enemy in front of me.
With me, the Kumaon Regiments stand strong;
For love, I will come back home and be ecstatic!
On the high mountains of Kumaon, the colourful highland.
Stay happy at home, Beloved, do not isolate yourself;
At home, next to the Goddess temple, light a lamp!
In my name, O Lover! Do pray.
Heavy Sack on my back, Riffle charged near my ear;
I carry ammunition around my waist-belt, as I sight the Enemy in front of me.)*

The opening of this folksong presents a soldier performing the role of the confident, capable warrior, a figure straight out of the *veer-gatha*. This performance is a form of emotional labour. He knows his absence creates a vacuum of fear at home, but his primary duty is to fill it with reassurances of his strength and inevitable return. The meticulous inventory of his gear powerfully reinforces this: "*Pitha mei pithawa meri, Kani mei riffle lah / Kamar mei goli samani, Dushmana ho lah*". Here, the soldier is not boasting about his army war bag. Rather, he uses a rhetorical strategy to demonstrate his preparedness and control visually. He further embeds this image with the collective presence of the Kumaon Regiment that stands strong with him. The institution might guarantee his safety. This is the idealized, state-sanctioned soldier- brave, patriotic, and assured in his victory. However, beneath this performance, an affective economy is present in the form of undercurrent anxiety and tenderness. The song's central tension is that his commands to his wife are a direct reflection of his own fears. He is not just describing his reality; he is desperately trying to manage hers. Every instruction is a mirror of his worry: "*Na hoye udasa pyari*" (Do not be sad), "*Ghar ma dil lagae, na hoe kinara*" (Stay happy at home, Beloved, do not isolate yourself), and "*Ghar ma cha Devi esthana, Diyo jaala diye*" (At home, next to the Goddess temple, light a lamp!) are his transmitted worries about his absence at home, his own loneliness at distant lands, and his safety, which is out of his hand.

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By asking his wife to pray for his safety, the soldier places his safety in her spiritual labour. He is trading his performance of strength for her performance of devotion. His identity splinters into two roles- one is the employee fulfilling his loyalty (sacred obligation) to the army/nation at Kashmir, and the other is the devotee who is reliant on his wife's spiritual performance in Kumaon. The home is not just a place of return; it is an active, spiritual headquarters for his survival. Her prayers are as crucial to his mission as his ammunition. Thus, this folklore is a sophisticated counter-narrative that wears a cloak of the confident military anthem over dependence, fear, and the emotional toll of separation. It is a perfect illustration of how the figure of the soldier is 'unmade' not through outright rejection of duty, but through the intimate, vernacular language of care, instruction, and loving.

The Unseen Front: The Emotional Toll on Those Who Wait

Gopal Babu Goswami (1941–1996), a pioneering folk singer from Uttarakhand, India, remains an enduring voice in Kumaoni and Garhwali musical traditions. Born into a humble family in Chaukhutiya Tehsil, Almora District, his work profoundly shaped the preservation and popularization of Himalayan folk culture. His debut song, *"Kele Baji Murali O Bena,"* is a poignant example of the *Khuded* genre- voicing the longing of a woman whose husband is away for work. Through recurring themes of separation, devotion to Goddess Bhawani, and lyrical celebrations of Uttarakhand's natural beauty, Goswami wove the emotional and cultural fabric of his homeland into folksongs. The 'affective economy' of war is most poignant in his famous folklore titled "*Ghughuti Na Basa,*" where the natural world is not just a backdrop but an active, painful participant in the military wife's emotional state. It is a direct address, not to the absent husband, but to a bird (the *Ghughuti* or Spotted Dove), transforming the creature into a silent companion and a vessel for the wife's projected anguish.

Ghughuti na basa
Am ki dai ma,
ghughuti na basa.
Teri ghuru-ghuru suni, mee lago udasa
Swami mero perdesa barfilo ladaka
Ghughuti na basa
Ritu aigye bhangi-bhangi, garmi chetey ki
Yad muke bhotey agye, apna patti kei
Ghughuti na basa
Tero jeso milley huno
Udibey janoo
Swami ke mukade ka ne jeebaree dekhuno
Ghughuti na basa
Udija O ghughuti, neh ja ladhaka
Haal mero bata diya, mero Swami pasa
Ghughuti na basa

(English Translation:

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O *Ghughuti* do not sit here,
On top of the Mango tree branch;
Ghughuti, do not sit nearby,
Hearing your melody, my sadness grows.
My husband is away in the distant land of snowy Ladak,
O *Ghughuti* do not sit here.
The new season is unfolding, the hot summer.
It reminds me of my husband, for I miss him dearly.
Ghughuti, do not sit nearby,
If I were you,
I would have flown away!
To see my lover's face till my heart is full.
Ghughuti do not live here,
Fly away! Oh *Ghughuti*, bid away to Ladak
With news of my well-being to my dear Swami,
Ghughuti, do not sit here.[*]

Ghughuti, in this folklore, is a symbol of tormenting memory. The central device of the song is a plea to the bird to fly away. Such an interpretation is an inversion of the dominant trope of a bird being a welcome messenger. Here, the bird's song is not a pleasing melody but a trigger for sadness. The cooing bird reminds the military wife of her husband's absence and her own trapped, static existence. *Ghughuti* is free to fly wherever it wishes. However, the wife is powerless, and this is evident in the song's emotional climax, where she desperately wishes to metamorphose into a bird, imagining an agency she does not possess. Thus, the bird embodies everything she cannot be.

In the final stanza, the military wife shifts her helplessness to a fragile hope of using the bird to send her message: "*Udija O ghughuti, neh ja ladhaka / Haal mero bata diya, mero Swami pasa"* (Fly away! Oh *Ghughuti*, bid away to Ladak / With news of my well-being to my Swami dear). This is a heartbreaking moment for her as she performs her emotional labour of reassuring her husband of her state. This fantasy of communication is 'cruel optimism' because it is impossible, yet it is the only form of agency available to her. This song is a potent artifact of gendered labour. While the husband is engaged in the physical labour of soldiering, the wife is engaged in the affective labour of waiting, worrying, and maintaining the emotional bond. Her work is to keep the home fires burning and the memory alive, a task that is itself exhausting and isolating. No military record would log this wife's solitary pain under the mango tree. The song, therefore, acts as a counter-archive, preserving the subaltern memory of those left behind, whose battle is fought not with bullets but with memories, prayers, and songs of piercing loneliness.

Similarly, another Kumaoni folklore titled "*Door Badi Door Barfilo Dana*" by Fouji Lalit Mohan Singh is a crucial contribution to the counter-archive of war, as it introduces a voice of the younger sibling of the soldier. This folksong expands the

'affective economy' of war beyond the conjugal (wife-husband) to the fraternal bond (brother-brother), revealing a different set of emotional responsibilities and anxieties.

Door Badi Door Barfilo Dana
Leh Ladakkha, Ladai Lagyo
Mera Daaju Bachi Raya
Ek Thali Me Pan Supari
Ek Thali Me Kheer Daju
Chhuti Laiya Gher Ayaa
Bees Dina Feer Daaju
Ghughuti Ki Ghoor Ghoora
Koyala Ki Boli Daaju
Dushmana Ladain Aala
Maari Diya Goli Daaju
Pitaliya Jaam Daaju
Bhur Paako Aam Daaju
Maya Lagaye Door Baithi
Teri Oo Chhii Faam (yaad) Daju
Lauta Ka Daanu Me Daaju
Bharata Ki Fauj Chhana
Ladai Laagi Re Daaju
Ansu Auni Chhan Chhan
Door Badi Door Barfilo Dana
Leh Ladakkha, Ladai Lagyo
Mera Daaju Bachi Raya

(English Translation:

Far, far away, at a snowy mountain-top;
At Leh, Ladakh, there is war.
My big brother, I pray for you, stay safe!
In one plate, I place *pan-supari* (betel leaf and areca nut) for you,
In another, I keep *Kheer* (rice pudding), O brother!
Take leave and come home soon,
For some twenty days or so, brother.
Ghughuti sings,
Oh brother! So does the Koel bird.
Return after you fight the enemy
Oh, brother, kill with the bullet!
Drink the *jaam* (wine), brother,
The fields are ready to harvest, and so are the ripe mangoes.
I sit far away and yearn for you,
OH, memories pang my heart, brother!
At Ladak top, big brother
The army of India stands tall.
War tears the land there, oh brother!

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Tears roll down my face, too.
Far, far away at a snowy mountain top;
At Leh, Ladakh, you fight bravely in the war
My big brother, I pray for you.*

Unlike the *Khuded* songs of lovers and spouses, this song is not romantic longing but a mixture of admiration, fear, and domestic concerns. The younger sibling attempts to bridge the distance between him and his *Daju* or big brother through domestic ritual and food. His offering of *pan-supari* (betel leaf and areca nut) and *kheer* (rice pudding) is an act of care. By preparing a plate for *Daju*, the sibling is willing his safety and his safe return into existence. It is an attempt to exert control over a situation where they have none. This act parallels the wife lighting a lamp in the "*Kashmiri Border Pyari*"; both are forms of spiritual and emotional labour performed by those left behind.

With the lines, "*Maari Diya Goli Daaju"* (Oh brother, kill with the bullet!) and "*Pitaliya Jaam Daaju*" (Come drink the *jaam*(wine) brother), the violence of the battlefield is contrasted with the domestic image of sharing a drink. Following this, the speaker makes a heartbreaking connection between the violence on the frontier and the tears at home: "*Ladai Laagi Re Daaju / Ansu Auni Chhan Chhan*" (War tears the land there, oh brother! / Tears roll down my eyes too). These lines explicitly state that the trauma of war is not contained on the battlefield. It ripples outward. Here, the sibling's tears are a direct reflection of the conflict's violence. Thus, the land and the body become parallel sites of suffering.

"*Door Bari Door Barfilo Dana*" is an important folklore because it broadens the scope of subaltern war memory. It proves that the stoic soldier archetype is 'unmade' not only by romantic love but also by fraternal love. The soldier is not just a husband; he is a big brother, a role laden with its own set of expectations and emotional bonds. The younger sibling's voice adds a layer of innocence and honesty to the affective economy. Their love is possessive, direct, and uncomplicated by the complexities of marital duty. It is a pure, desperate desire for the return of a protector and a playmate. This song argues that war's cost is paid not just by soldiers and their spouses, but by entire families, whose lives are put on hold.

Conclusion

This research paper has argued that the vernacular folklore of Kumaon, specifically the *Khuded* genre of separation folksongs, constitutes a vital counter-archive that challenges the monolithic narrative of the stoic, nationalist soldier. By moving beyond the battlefield and into the domestic and emotional landscapes of those who serve and those who wait, these songs perform a crucial act of theoretical and historical work. They unmake the idealized martial figure by giving voice to the vulnerability, longing, and emotional labour that militarization seeks to suppress. In the raw lament of a wife pleading with a *Ghughuti*, in the soldier's longing for his beloved, in a younger sibling's ritual plate of offerings, we find a theorization of conflict that official histories and *veer-gathas* deliberately silence. The selected songs map the affective economy of militarism, where the currency is not just bullets and sacrifice, but also the spiritual

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labour of lighting lamps, the emotional management of reassurance, and the visceral pangs of separation that tear at the home front as violently as war tears the frontier. Such vernacular articulation of a soldier's vulnerability fundamentally subverts the coloniality of British martial masculinity, which was built on stoic emotional suppression and racial hierarchy. By centring on an indigenous masculinity woven from affective bonds, embodied longing, and relational duty- *izzat* earned through connection, not conquest- it does not just counter the imperial gaze, but unravels it, enacting a decolonization of the very soul.

The soldier is re-inscribed not as a monolithic hero, but as a vulnerable body: a husband, a brother, a devotee, whose identity is entangled in a web of duty, love, and cruel optimism. This is not a rejection of military duty, but a demand for a more honest accounting of its human cost. The Himalayan voices from Kumaon, thus, ensure that this subaltern memory- of those who fight and those who are left behind to stitch their lives around the silence- continue to hum and remind war's true, embodied price. In listening to these *Khuded* songs, we learn that a complete history of conflict is written not only in official dispatches and medals but also in the hiccups of a soldier, the plate set by a sibling, and the desperate plea to a bird to fly away.

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