

Exploring Traditional Garhwali Lullabies and Their Significance in Caregiver-Child Bonding

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ABSTRACT: The present study, titled ‘Exploring Traditional Garhwali Lullabies and Their Significance in Caregiver-Child Bonding,’ emphasis on the use of traditional lullabies in the daily lives of caregivers and examined how they strengthen caregiver–child relationships. The study further explored their importance in forming a strong relationship between caregivers and children.

A mixed-methods research design was used for this study. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, personal stories, documentation of lullabies, and non-participant observation. The total of 50 participants, including mothers, fathers, and grandparents from both rural and urban areas of Uttarakhand, were selected, using purposive and convenience sampling methods. The data were analysed using thematic and content analysis techniques.

The findings show that lullabies are an important part of childhood memories and are used in daily caregiving practices. Many participants shared that children became calm, smiled, or felt relaxed when lullabies were sung to them, which helped to create emotional closeness between them. It was also found that lullabies are primarily learned within families, and mothers were identified as the primary singers. However, the study noticed a decline in the practice of singing lullabies due to various factors like migration, the growth of nuclear families, busy lifestyles, and the increasing use of digital media.

The study concluded that Garhwali lullabies continue to hold cultural and emotional importance in strengthening caregiver–child bonds. The study further concluded the need to preserve and promote lullabies tradition in changing social and technological conditions.

KEYWORDS: Garhwali lullabies, caregiver–child bonding, traditional lullabies, emotional development, cultural preservation, caregiving practices, Uttarakhand, folk culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Across culturally worldwide, lullabies are among the earliest forms of musical interaction between caregivers and young children. Lullabies are characterized as soft, repetitive melodies designed to calm young children and facilitate to sleep. These songs play significant roles that go beyond purely providing comfort. Research recommends that lullabies contribute significantly to emotional bonding, language development, and social development during early childhood years (Creighton et al., 2013; de la Rosa, 2024). Their repetitive tunes, and steady rhythmic designs, make a calm young child that helps relaxation take hold. Lullabies facilitate early conversation between caregivers and children, providing a natural and meaningful context for verbal communication and exchange of emotions. Researches further indicate that it is evident that lullabies constitute a unique point of intersection between music, parenting practices, and culture (Aubinet, 2024). The caregiver communicates care, reassurance, and even expectations for their offspring’s future during lullabies, which further builds the emotional bond, as well as provides a sense of security (Aubinet, 2024). Thus, contemporary researchers have come to view lullabies not only as means of to induce sleep but also as developmental and cultural tools.

Researches have consistently demonstrated the importance of lullabies during early childhood development. Specifically, studies have shown that children who grows up while listening lullabies exhibit improved regulation of emotions, lower levels of distress, and even higher levels of attention (Sharman et al., 2023). The soothing nature of lullabies facilitates predictability and contributes to foster a sense of security in the young children, which are essential for healthy emotional development.

Moreover, lullabies play a generous role in cognitive and language development. The repetitive exposure to melodies and rhythms helps to improve vocabulary development, pronunciation, and memorization. In addition, Nandakumara (2021) proposes that repetitive elements of lullabies promote phonological awareness and help young learners identify patterns of sounds which

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constitute the foundation for language development. Another line of research shows that young children actively engage in musical interaction through vocal imitation, eye contact, and rhythmic movements (Lense et al., 2022).

Social development represents another significant outcome associated with lullabies. The musical interaction between caregiver and child fosters responsiveness, empathy, and socialization. Through these interactions children develop social skills and acquire a sense of belongingness within both their family and cultural surroundings (Shukla & Mehar, 2025).

Besides their physiological advantages, lullabies serve as important mediums of cultural transmission. Across cultures lullabies have been used to inculcate values, beliefs, social norms, and collective memories from one generation to the next. As oral cultural traditions, lullabies contribute to preserve local languages, cultural knowledge and historical narratives (sagas), thereby supporting continuity of cultural heritage (Aghaei, 2025).

Researches on lullabies as a folk genre has been focused on their functions as an instrument of moral and cultural education. Such themes as love, safety, spirituality, relations within the family, and social norms have been observed in the lyrics of lullabies, allowing children to become familiar with culturally significant concepts and norms of behaviour at an early age (Belho & Luikham, 2025).

Particularly, the significance of lullabies as cultural artifacts can be seen in those societies where a strong tradition of oral culture prevails. As a result of being transmitted orally through generations within families and communities, lullabies become carriers of information about the surrounding world that might not be preserved through written records.

In the Indian scenario, lullabies play a crucial role in the tradition of folklore. Not only do lullabies reflect cultural practices, languages, family systems, and values in India, but they also convey maternal love and care to their young children (Chawla, 2020). The elements incorporated by Indian lullabies include imagery related to nature, religion, and ordinary things to familiarize children with the world around them. Research conducted on regional traditions like Assamese lullabies indicates that lullabies depict local landscapes and family bonds along with cultural values (Rajkhowa, 2020).

The research clearly shows that lullabies can be a critical factor in developing strong bond between caregivers and children. The act of singing helps establish a strong emotional relationship, leading to responsive caregiving and attachment formation (Esposito, 2018). Infants form trustful relationships based on the soothing voice of the caregivers.

Additionally, researches demonstrated that singing lullabies is also helpful for the well-being of caregivers. According to the study by Persico et al. (2017), mothers who often sang to their infants were found to experience lower levels of anxiety and greater attachment. Therefore, musical interactions help to alleviate stress as well as foster the confidence and well-being of both parents and child.

The folk traditions of the Garhwali community form an integral part of the cultural heritage of Uttarakhand. Garhwali communities preserve their histories, social values, and cultural identity through music, storytelling, and traditional narratives. The rich folklore reflects the essence of everyday life, including local practices and the close relationship between the human and natural environment.

Although the Garhwali community is rich in folklore, not much scholarly work has been done focusing on the Garhwali lullabies specifically. Most studies on Garhwali folklore have been general on nature and biodiversity, rarely focusing on folk songs related to child care and early childhood development. Advancements in technology have changed, how lullabies are now accessed and delivered. Lullabies recorded on television shows, streaming services, and mobile apps have gained popularity among families today (Brooks, 2016). Despite being more accessible due to modern technologies, lullabies recorded using through media are not the same replicate the experience and emotional connections created through a live caregiver signing. Studies revealed that lullabies recorded for children, fail to provide the emotional interaction and personal involvement provided in an interpersonal musical exchange. Although modern technologies can be used to preserve and promote traditional songs, it is impossible to replicate the developmental, relational and emotional benefits associated with the live singing by a caregiver. Therefore, experts stress the necessity of combining both technological methods and social activities, educational programs, and familial transmission of lullabies to maintain their vitality (Liu et al., 2024).

The objectives of the present study are to explore traditional lullabies of Uttarakhand and examine how caregivers experience and interpret emotional bonding through the practice of singing these lullabies.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of lullaby practices and their cultural and emotional significance among caregivers in Uttarakhand. The total of 50 participants were selected in the study, comprising 25 individuals (caregiver) from rural areas and 25 from urban areas of Uttarakhand. Rural participants were recruited from the villages of Kotapinjoli, Bhandrikhet, and Jamriya, while urban participants were drawn from Dehradun.

The rural sample consisted of 7 grandmothers, 3 grandfathers, 10 mothers, and 5 fathers. The urban sample included 6 grandmothers, 4 grandfathers, 11 mothers, and 4 fathers. Among the participants, 28 belonged to joint families and 22 to nuclear families. Participants ranged in age from 26 to 72 years and were caregivers of children aged between 6 months and 6 years.

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Data were collected using two complementary methods of study:

- Semi-structured interviews to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices related to lullabies.
- Personal narrative prompts to elicit memories, emotions, and caregiving experiences associated with lullaby singing.

The consent was obtained for the data documentation and audio recordings of lullabies that were sung or recalled by participants. Observations of the natural settings of caregiver and child interaction process during the use of lullabies were recorded.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis and content analysis. Interviews, observations, narratives and lullabies were also coded to identifying emerging common themes or patterns. These emerging themes were then interpreted in light of the research objectives and illustrated through examples from the participants interviews.

3. RESULTS

The findings chapter have been categorized based on the four major themes that emerged in the data analysis process: lullaby transmission through generations, cultural and linguistic features of Garhwali lullabies, their importance in building emotional bonds between care providers and children, and changes in the lullabying practices due to modern-day developments.

a) **Intergenerational Transmission of Lullaby Traditions:** The participants in both the rural and urban areas had shared positive childhood experiences associated to lullabies. These experiences were primarily associated with a feeling of comfort, safe, and loved. The experiences also related to the comforting nature of caregivers, especially grandmothers. The finding indicated that participants in the rural areas were more likely to have experienced lullabies than their counterparts in the urban areas, owing to have greater preservation of traditional cultural practices in the rural areas.

Lullabies were primarily conveyed orally in families. The finding also indicated that grandmothers as one of caregivers were identified as the primary custodian of lullabies, followed by mothers-in-law and mothers. Although fathers and grandfathers were also involved but their participation was comparatively limited. In the study participants clearly indicated that lullabies were not typically taught through formal means, rather, they were acquired through continuous exposure within family environments.

b) **Cultural and Linguistic Characteristics of Garhwali Lullabies:** The identified lullabies indicated the cultural context and expressed the lived experiences of Garhwali communities. The characters and imagery of lullabies associated with moon, birds, animals, water bodies, cultivation, and village life were some of the recurrent references found in these lullabies. Themes of Care, nurturing, protecting, and motherly love were common identified in these lullabies.

The findings indicated that participants sang these lullabies exclusively in the Garhwali language, especially those who were residing in the rural regions. In urban areas, it was observed that lullabies were often sung with mixture of Garhwali and Hindi languages. Some participants from urban areas were reported singing lullabies using exclusively Hindi language. Participants also expressed their concern that the decline in the use of Garhwali language while interacting with younger generation, could lead to loss of the essence of the Garhwali language and appeal for Garhwali lullabies. The findings of the study also suggest that cultural preservation is also linked to the language preservation.

One key characteristic associated with using these lullabies is their flexibility. The participants had adapted the lyrics, incorporated locally relevant elements, and even modulated sounds to sustain children's interest and engagement during the singing process.

c) **Lullabies as a Medium of Emotional Bonding:** Lullabies were not seen as a practice limited exclusively to sleep. Instead, the participants described it as a form of caring throughout the whole day. They sang lullabies while feeding children, completing household chores, working in agricultural fields, comforting crying children, and engaging in play and interaction with them.

Participants stated that they have witnessed a positive reaction from children when they sang lullabies. Few examples of the children's responses were calming, smiling, falling asleep, longing for closeness. Older children's also attempts to replicating the melody and lyrics of lullabies like adults. Age differences were also noted since infants tended to respond mostly by relaxing, toddlers by longing for closeness and imitating the singing, and older children by taking active participation in singing the lullabies.

However, participants were revealed that lullaby singing proved to be an emotionally valuable process not only for the children but for them too. They reported that singing brought them feelings of serenity, joyfulness, kindness, and happiness to them. Furthermore, many participants fondly remembered the family members, who sang lullabies to them when they were children. As a result, singing of traditional lullabies became a source of emotional continuity for many of them.

d) **Changing Patterns of Lullaby Practice:** Although lullabies have great emotional and cultural importance, though participants reported that there was a decline in their use in contemporary time. Although all participants agreed that they were exposed to lullabies regularly during childhood. Participants indicated that they currently sang lullabies on a daily basis at present to their children but their number are comparatively low. This approach was more commonly remarked with the families living in urban areas.

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According to participants, this trend attributed by several factors. One of the reasons mentioned frequently was the transition from joint to nuclear families, which has reduced the involvement of grandparents in child care, resulting a decline in singing of lullabies. Another factor noted by participants was the movement of families from rural settings to urban areas, which they believed has influenced the practices of singing lullabies. Technology emerged as another significant factor influencing the process under study. A significant number of participants observed that mobile phones and various digital media platforms are increasingly replacing live lullabies. Although the recorded songs may be convenient, the participants emphasised that the live signing facilitate the development of a unique bond between the caregiver and child. Participants noted that children tend to respond to a caregiver's voice through eye contact, create as emotional bond, and foster a sense of closeness, which cannot be replicate fully through the digital (recorded) media.

4. CONCLUSION

This present research examined the significance of traditional Garhwali lullabies and their contribution to building relationships between caregivers and child. The results have concluded that lullabies however play a significant part of the process of child care and nurturing practices. Lullabies contributes far more than to facilitate sleep in children, lullabies considered as a means of comforting, entertaining, communicating with, and engaging with their charges, which foster an emotional bond between them. The research further concluded that traditional Garhwali lullabies are important instruments for the intergenerational transfer of culture because they exposed children were to the Garhwali language and cultural values from a very young age. Simultaneously, the study noticed a considerable decrease in lullaby singing, especially within families who have moved in urban area. Changes in family structures, migration, lack of time, and the increased prevalence of electronic gadgets (digital/recorded media) have made it increasingly difficult for the lullaby tradition to be passed from one generation to next. Nevertheless, participants emphasized the emotional bond shaped by singing lullabies can hardly be reproduced using digital/recorded media way of singing lullabies. In conclusion the study demonstrates two important aspects of Garhwali lullabies. Firstly, they serve as a valuable means of strengthening the caregiver-child relationships. Secondly, lullabies represent an important element of intangible cultural heritage. Thus, the documentation, preservation, and encouragement of the singing of lullabies might not benefits children but also contributing to the preservation of Garhwali culture. Garhwali lullabies remain an integral medium of cultural transmission and the development of emotional bonds between caregivers and child. However, significant challenges, including changing family structures, language shifts, and the growing influence of technology, continue to threaten the continuity of this tradition. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that the cultural and emotional benefits of Garhwali lullabies are preserved for future generations.

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