

Research article

Influencing identity-based political resistance: a comparative study on traditional poetics of Ireland and Telangana

Influencia en la resistencia política basada en la identidad: un estudio comparativo sobre la poética tradicional de Irlanda y Telangana

Mekala Chiranjeevi¹: SR university, India.

chiranjeevimekala@gmail.com

Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal: SR University, India.

surajdhumal89@gmail.com

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Abstract

Introduction: This study explores the role of folk songs as catalysts for identity-based political resistance movements through a comparative discourse analysis of traditional poetics from Ireland and Telangana, India. It begins from the premise that such cultural expressions are central to constructing collective identity and political mobilization. **Methodology:** Using critical discourse analysis, the study compares two key resistance songs: *The West's Asleep* by Thomas Davis and a folk resistance song performed by Gaddar in Telangana. The analysis identifies rhetorical turns and symbolic modalities that operate similarly across distinct cultural contexts. **Results:** Both songs employ comparable narrative strategies, such as appeals to regional geography, historical memory, and calls for collective action, revealing a shared

¹ Corresponding author: Mekala Chiranjeevi, SR university (India).

structure of discursive resistance. **Discussion:** Folk songs function as powerful tools of resistance by articulating emotional narratives that legitimize struggle, build a shared sense of identity, and historicize oppression. Despite differing geographic and cultural origins, these art forms reveal parallel mechanisms of political expression. **Conclusions:** The study underscores the importance of regionally rooted artistic forms as drivers of political resistance and offers valuable theoretical insights into the connections between culture, identity, and mobilization.

Keywords: Folk songs; Political resistance; Cultural identity; Thomas Davis; Gaddar; Ireland; Telangana; Social movements.

Resumen

Introducción: Este estudio examina el papel de las canciones populares como detonantes de movimientos de resistencia política basados en la identidad, mediante el análisis comparativo del discurso poético tradicional de Irlanda y Telangana, India. Se parte de la premisa de que estas expresiones culturales desempeñan un papel clave en la construcción de identidad colectiva y la movilización política. **Metodología:** A través de un análisis crítico del discurso, se comparan dos canciones de resistencia: *The West's Asleep* de Thomas Davis, y una canción popular interpretada por Gaddar en Telangana. El enfoque permite identificar giros retóricos y modalidades simbólicas compartidas en contextos culturales distintos. **Resultados:** Ambas canciones utilizan estrategias narrativas similares, como la apelación al territorio regional, la memoria histórica y la llamada a la acción colectiva, lo que demuestra una estructura común de resistencia discursiva. **Discusión:** Las canciones populares actúan como herramientas eficaces de resistencia al articular narrativas emocionales que legitiman la lucha, construyen una identidad compartida e inscriben la opresión en una dimensión histórica. A pesar de sus diferencias geográficas y culturales, estas formas artísticas muestran mecanismos paralelos de expresión política. **Conclusiones:** El estudio subraya el valor de los géneros artísticos regionales como catalizadores de resistencia y ofrece aportes teóricos relevantes para comprender los vínculos entre cultura, identidad y movilización política.

Palabras clave: Canciones populares; Resistencia política; Identidad cultural; Thomas Davis; Gaddar; Irlanda; Telangana; Movimientos sociales.

1. Introduction

Folk song have traditionally been potent tools for conveying political resistance, especially in situations where communities resist perceived oppression, colonization, or marginalization. Such cultural symbols do more than amuse; they define collective identities, give historical context to grievances, and mobilize communities towards political action (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998). As Seeger (2004, p. 115) states, “songs can say things that cannot be said in ordinary discourse, and they can preserve memories that might otherwise be lost”.

That ability renders folksongs highly meaningful where there are limits on official political utterance or where peoples need to put words to their identities in conflict with dominant storylines. This study analyzes the connection between folk songs and identity-based resistance in a comparative context of two important yet under-researched contexts: 19th-century Irish nationalist movement and Telangana movement in south India. The study focuses specifically on Thomas Davis's “The West's Asleep” (1843) and Gummadi Vittal Rao's (popularly known as Gaddar) Telangana resistance song “Is it time to run on an emerging horizon?”.

These artistic works, despite emerging from distinctly different historical and cultural contexts, demonstrate remarkable similarities in their utilization of poetic devices, symbolic frameworks, and rhetorical strategies aimed at cultural preservation and political mobilization. By analyzing these two case studies, this research addresses a significant gap in the literature on political resistance and cultural expression. While substantial scholarly attention has been given to protest music in Western contexts (particularly American civil rights songs and anti-Vietnam War music), comparative analyses of non-Western traditions and historical movements have been relatively limited (Peddie, 2012).

As Street, Hague, and Savigny (2008, p. 273) argue, “The relationship between music and politics has been surprisingly neglected within political science”, with cross-cultural studies being particularly scarce. This study contributes to this field by identifying cross-cultural patterns in how folk songs articulate resistance and examining how regional cultural particularities shape these expressions.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic interest. As regional identities continue to assert themselves against centralizing political forces globally, understanding the cultural dimensions of these movements becomes increasingly important. Folk traditions, often dismissed as artifacts of the past, frequently serve as powerful resources for contemporary political movements (Connell & Gibson, 2003).

By examining how folk songs operate within resistance movements across distinct cultural contexts, this research contributes to both scholarly understanding and practical approaches to cultural preservation and political expression. This study is guided by several key research questions: How do folk songs articulate collective identities in service of political resistance? What rhetorical strategies and symbolic frameworks do they employ to mobilize audiences? How do they represent historical grievances and future aspirations? What similarities and differences can be identified across culturally distinct contexts? By addressing these questions through a comparative analysis, this research aims to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between cultural expression and political resistance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Folk Songs and Political Mobilization

The relationship between music and political movements has been extensively documented across various disciplines. Denisoff (1983) established a foundational framework for understanding how “songs of persuasion” function within social movements, identifying six key functions: soliciting support, reinforcing values, creating solidarity, inducing action, spreading propaganda, and highlighting grievances. Building on this work, Eyerman and Jamison (1998) proposed that music serves as a “cognitive praxis” within social movements, providing spaces where collective identities are formed and articulated.

More recently, scholars have emphasized the emotional dimensions of protest music. Jasper (2011) argues that effective political mobilization requires “moral emotions” that transform objective grievances into felt injustices that demand collective action. Folk songs, with their emotional resonance and cultural familiarity, are particularly effective at generating these emotions (Street, 2012). As DeNora (2000, p. 129) observes, music provides “a material that actors use to elaborate, to fill out and fill in, to themselves and to others, modes of aesthetic agency and, with it, subjective stances and identities”.

This emotional dimension makes music a particularly potent resource for political movements seeking to generate collective identity and action. The specific role of folk songs within this broader relationship between music and politics has received significant attention. Bohlman (1988, p. 14) defines folk music as “music that lives in communities, represents them, and provides an ongoing basis for performance within them”. This communal dimension makes folk songs particularly effective at articulating collective identities and grievances. As McDonald (2013, p. 18) notes in his analysis of Palestinian resistance songs, folk traditions provide “ready-made cultural resources that can be mobilized for contemporary political purposes”.

However, as Roy (2010) argues in his analysis of American folk music and social movements, the relationship between folk traditions and political resistance is not static or natural but historically constructed. Folk traditions become politicized through specific historical processes and strategic choices by cultural and political actors. This insight underscores the importance of analyzing folk songs within their specific historical and cultural contexts while remaining attentive to how these traditions are actively mobilized and transformed for political purposes.

2.2 Regional Identity and Anti-Colonial Resistance

The relationship between regional identity and resistance to colonial or hegemonic power has been theorized extensively. Chatterjee (1993) argues that anti-colonial nationalism operates through a two-fold process: creating a “spiritual” domain of cultural sovereignty while contesting the “material” domain of political and economic power. Folk music often plays a crucial role in establishing this cultural sovereignty by articulating authentic indigenous identities (Turino, 2008). In his influential work on the role of cultural nationalism in anti-colonial movements, Anderson (1983) emphasizes how shared cultural artifacts—including songs, poems, and literature—help construct “imagined communities” that form the basis for nationalist movements.

These cultural forms provide what he describes as “unisonality”, the feeling of simultaneous consumption which creates a feeling of shared identification among scattered groups. Folk song, which is capable of collective performance and consumption, is especially well-suited to creating the feeling of community identity. In the Irish context, Hutchinson (2017) has illustrated how cultural nationalism led and facilitated political nationalism, literary and musical revivals furnishing the bases for resistance to British rule. Cleary (2012, p. 73) continues to hold the position that Irish cultural nationalism was “not simply a response to British imperialism but a reaction to a more general crisis of traditional society and identity occasioned by modernization”. This means that folk revivals within struggles of resistance address not only concrete political oppression but also wide social and cultural change.

In the same vein, Kaviraj (2010) has demonstrated how Indian regional identities have been culturally specific in the construction of themselves against colonial power and post-colonial centralizing states. Chibber (2013) also argues that postcolonial nationalist movements often use cultural forms that both resist colonial domination and challenge domestic social hierarchies. The double positioning here makes folk songs especially rich sources, as they can express many layers of resistance at once.

Dirks (2001, p. 9) notes that colonial domination acts not just in terms of political and economic control but also in terms of “cultural technologies of rule” that reshape how colonized populations perceive their own histories and identities. Resistance movements must therefore contest not only political arrangements but also dominant cultural narratives. Folk songs, which often preserve alternative historical narratives and indigenous knowledge systems, serve as powerful counter-hegemonic resources in these contexts (Abu-Lughod, 1990).

2.3 Comparative Studies of Folk Resistance Traditions

While comparative studies of folk resistance traditions remain relatively limited, scholars have increasingly recognized the value of such approaches. Pratt (2009) demonstrates how comparative analysis can reveal shared patterns across seemingly disparate contexts while highlighting culturally specific adaptations. Weintraub and Barendregt (2017) argue that comparative studies of music and politics can avoid Eurocentric bias by placing non-Western traditions in dialogue with Western ones on equal terms.

Regev (2013, p. 3) proposes the concept of “aesthetic cosmopolitanism” to describe how musical traditions increasingly engage in “cross-cultural borrowing, adaptation, and fusion” while maintaining locally specific meanings and functions. This perspective challenges simplistic binary oppositions between “traditional” and “modern” or “local” and “global,” suggesting instead that contemporary cultural expressions often navigate complex relationships between multiple referents.

McDonald (2013, p. 114) argues that comparative analysis can reveal how “seemingly similar performance practices may articulate quite different political positions in different contexts”. This insight highlights the importance of attending to the specific historical, political, and cultural contexts in which folk traditions operate while also identifying shared patterns and processes across contexts.

In their cross-cultural study of music and resistance movements in Latin America and the Caribbean, Averill and Yih (2000) illustrate how folk culture is a repository of historical memory to be used for political ends in the present. They make the argument that folk songs retain what Scott (1990) calls “hidden transcripts” accounts of resistance that cannot be uttered openly under domination but are stored in cultural performance.

This research draws on these findings by contrasting Irish and Telangana folk traditions contexts infrequently examined in tandem to determine both universal tendencies and culturally unique uses of folk music in political resistance. By setting these traditions into conversation, the research seeks to construct a more sophisticated understanding of how folk songs operate within resistance movements in culturally diverse contexts.

2.4. Theoretical Frameworks for Analyzing Folk Resistance

A number of theoretical models provide useful tools with which to study the way in which folk song functions in political resistance movements. Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony implies that power works not simply through direct force but also through cultural leadership in which consent is obtained for power structures as they are. Here, folk songs can be conceptualized as forms of counter-hegemony where dominant cultural narrative is contested and alternative understandings of social relationships are presented.

Bourdieu's (1977) theory of "symbolic capital" is another helpful approach, in which cultural performances are viewed as a form of resources that actors invoke in particular "fields" of relations of power. Folk songs are types of symbolic capital available to subordinated groups to be deployed, thereby establishing cultural distinction and legitimacy against hegemonic powers (Prior, 2011). Bakhtin's (1981) theory of the "dialogic imagination" highlights how cultural expressions tend to be polyphonic, with many voices and viewpoints involved, including frequently subversive or resistant viewpoints even in overtly conventional form.

This makes it easier to understand how folk songs can hide resistance in seemingly harmless cultural forms, enabling the kind of "infrapolitics" (Scott, 1990) – resistance short of direct political confrontation. More recently, Butler's (2015) "performative assembly" proposes that collective gatherings such as musical performances are political acts in themselves by rendering visible populations that otherwise remain invisible or on the margins. This understanding explains why folk performances tend to be targets of repression exactly because the very fact of collective cultural expression subverts dominant power structures.

These theoretical perspectives offer useful means for examining the role of folk songs in political resistance movements within varied cultural settings. Through the comparative study of Irish and Telangana folk cultures using these frameworks, this study seeks to further refine our comprehension of the connection between political resistance and cultural expression.

3. Methodology

This study applies qualitative comparative research of two people's songs: Thomas Davis's "The West's Asleep" and the Telangana resistance song by Gaddar. The comparative analysis is undertaken using a mixed-methods study integrating:

Textual analysis: Close reading of lyrics in relation to rhetorical strategy, symbolic structures, and narrative style. This analysis borrows from techniques in literary studies and critical discourse analysis, with regard to both semantic meaning and poetic form (Fairclough, 2013). **Historical contextualization:** Situating each song within its specific historical, political, and cultural context through analysis of secondary historical sources and relevant scholarship.

Performance analysis: Consideration of performance contexts, including how the songs were delivered, received, and circulated within their respective movements.

Comparative framework: Identifying patterns, similarities, and differences between the two traditions through systematic comparison of textual features, contextual factors, and performance practices.

The research is guided by four primary research questions:

How do these folk songs articulate collective identity in service of political resistance?

What rhetorical strategies do they employ to mobilize audiences toward political action?

How do they represent historical grievances and future aspirations?

What similarities and differences can be identified across these culturally distinct contexts?

Primary texts (the song lyrics) are supplemented by historical documentation and scholarly literature on each movement. The comparative analysis focuses on thematic content, rhetorical strategies, symbolic frameworks, and performative contexts. The methodological approach draws on Ragin's (2014) framework for qualitative comparative analysis, which emphasizes identifying causal patterns across a limited number of cases through in-depth analysis.

The selection of these specific case studies is based on several criteria. First, both songs emerge from contexts where regional identity formed the basis for political resistance against perceived external domination. Second, both songs have achieved canonical status within their respective resistance traditions, making them representative of broader cultural patterns. Finally, despite their geographic and temporal distance, both songs employ remarkably similar rhetorical strategies and symbolic frameworks, making them suitable for comparative analysis.

This methodological approach has several limitations. First, the analysis of Gaddar's song relies on translation, potentially losing nuances present in the original Telugu. Second, the limited number of cases restricts generalizability, though this is balanced by the depth of analysis possible through close reading. Finally, the historical distance between the cases (mid-19th century Ireland versus late 20th century India) introduces variables that complicate direct comparison. These limitations are acknowledged throughout the analysis.

4. Historical Contexts

4.1. *The Young Ireland Movement and Thomas Davis*

Thomas Davis (1814-1845) was a central figure in the Young Ireland movement, a 19th-century Irish nationalist movement that emerged in response to British colonial rule (Molony, 2007). Through the newspaper *The Nation*, which Davis co-founded in 1842, Young Ireland advocated for Irish cultural distinctiveness and political sovereignty. Davis's poetry, including "The West's Asleep", sought to awaken national consciousness by invoking Ireland's historical resistance to British rule and calling for renewed political action (Lloyd, 2005).

Young Ireland arose at a time of great social and political upheaval in Ireland, after Catholic Emancipation (1829) but before the catastrophic Great Famine (1845-1852). Young Ireland was a break with previous expressions of Irish nationalism linked with Daniel O'Connell that came from legal and constitutional reform. Young Ireland called for cultural nationalism to be the basis for political sovereignty, highlighting the recovery of Irish language, literature, and history (Hutchinson, 2017). Dunne (2016, p. 78) contends that Young Ireland was "a new type of nationalism which attempted to go beyond sectarian divisions by building a non-sectarian national identity". This strategy was an expression of Davis's Protestant heritage and his vision for Irish nationalism to bring Catholics and Protestants together on the basis of a common cultural heritage.

As Cleary (2012, p. 81) points out, this was "an attempt to imagine Ireland not as a colony but as a nation with its own distinctive cultural inheritance". Young Ireland's focus on cultural nationalism—the revival of Irish language, literature, and music—was a bid to establish a consistent national identity that political sovereignty could rest upon. Arguing that, "The Nation attempted to create a public sphere in which Irishness could be articulated and debated", Connolly (2012, p. 45). This cultural nationalism would later influence the Gaelic Revival of the late 19th century and the revolutionary nationalism of the early 20th century, demonstrating the enduring impact of Young Ireland's approach (Foster, 2014).

Davis's "The West's Asleep" exemplifies this cultural nationalist approach. Published in *The Nation* in 1843, the poem invokes Ireland's western province of Connacht as a synecdoche for Ireland itself, emphasizing historical resistance to British rule and calling for renewed political consciousness. The poem's emphasis on awakening from sleep metaphorically represents the transformation of cultural consciousness into political action that Young Ireland sought to achieve (Lloyd, 2005).

4.2. The Telangana Movement and Gaddar

The Telangana movement represents a long struggle for regional autonomy within India, culminating in the formation of Telangana state in 2014 (Kannabiran et al., 2010). The movement emerged from perceptions of regional marginalization within the state of Andhra Pradesh, with grievances centered on resource allocation, cultural dignity, and political representation. The roots of the Telangana movement extend to the immediate post-independence period when the region, previously part of the Nizam's princely state of Hyderabad, was merged with the Telugu-speaking regions of the Madras Presidency to form Andhra Pradesh in 1956 (Thirumali, 2013). From the beginning, this arrangement generated tensions, with Telangana residents perceiving that resources, particularly water from the Krishna and Godavari rivers, were diverted to the more developed coastal regions (Srinivasulu, 2002).

The movement went through several phases, from the initial agitation of the 1950s to the armed struggle of the 1980s associated with Naxalite movements, to the mass mobilization of the early 2000s that ultimately led to statehood (Kumar, 2013). During these stages, cultural expression, especially folk performance traditions, played a significant role in expressing Telangana's unique identity and political ambitions. Gummadi Vittal Rao, popularly referred to as Gaddar, became an important cultural icon in this movement. Originally aligned with radical left politics through the Jana Natya Mandali (People's Theater Group), Gaddar's folk performances expressed Telangana's unique cultural identity and political demands (Thirumali, 2013). His acts borrowed from classical folk forms but added modern political messages, serving as sites of cultural preservation and political mobilization.

Kumar (2013, p. 137) contends that the importance of Gaddar is in his capacity to "transform traditional folk forms into powerful vehicles for contemporary political expression." In transforming the traditional forms of performance used by rural communities, especially Dalit and other marginalized communities, Gaddar's performances legitimized these cultural forms and orchestrated them for political use. As Karamcheti (2018, p. 624) indicates, "Gaddar's performances provided sites where Telangana's unique cultural identity could be expressed and celebrated in opposition to hegemonic Telugu cultural forms identified with coastal Andhra".

The song studied here, "Is it time to run on an emerging horizon?", is a good example of Gaddar's method. Combining traditional folk rhythms with explicit political messaging, the song articulates Telangana's distinct identity through references to regional geography, historical grievances, and calls for collective action. The song circulated widely through live performances, recordings, and eventually digital media, becoming an anthem for the Telangana movement (Thirumavalavan, 2011).

5. Analysis

5.1. Geographic Imagination and Regional Identity

Both songs employ geographic imagery to construct distinct regional identities that serve as foundations for political resistance. In “The West's Asleep”, Davis focuses specifically on Connacht (western Ireland), describing it as a place where “lakes and plains smile fair and free, 'Mid rocks their guardian chivalry.” This geographic specificity serves multiple functions: it counters colonial depictions of Ireland as barren and primitive, constructs a bounded sense of place that can be defended, and emphasizes regional distinctiveness within the broader Irish struggle (Morash, 2010).

The poem's emphasis on Connacht's natural features—lakes, plains, rocks—constructs what Cosgrove (2008, p. 15) terms a “symbolic landscape” that serves as a physical embodiment of national identity. As Whelan (2013, p. 187) argues, such geographic imagery creates “a territorial dimension to national identity that transforms abstract political claims into embodied experience”. By describing Connacht as “fair and free” with “guardian chivalry”, Davis attributes moral qualities to the landscape itself, suggesting that the land demands political freedom by its very nature. Similarly, Gaddar's song constructs Telangana's geographic identity through references to its natural features: “Amma Godavari lives in your womb / Livelihood of crores of people / Amma Krishnamma is the smiling Krishnamma”.

By personifying the Godavari and Krishna rivers as mothers, the song establishes an intimate relationship between the people and their land, suggesting that the region itself has an inherent identity that precedes and justifies political claims (Kannabiran et al., 2010). As Ramaswamy (2001, p. 112) observes in her analysis of geographic personification in Indian nationalism, such imagery creates “a territorially bounded space transformed into a maternal body whose children are the citizens of the nation”.

This maternal imagery is particularly significant in the Telangana context, where water rights—specifically access to the Krishna and Godavari rivers—were central to regional grievances (Kumar, 2013). This geographic imagination serves a critical political function in both contexts by establishing what Agnew (2011) terms “territorial legitimacy”—the idea that a particular people rightfully belong to a specific territory. Both songs assert that the land itself demands freedom, with Davis declaring that “That chainless wave and lovely land / Freedom and nationhood demand” and Gaddar proclaiming “Ha, our lands are ours / Bala Bala Bala Bala Bala / Do we sing that our land belongs to us?”

However, the songs differ significantly in their geographic scale and specificity. Davis employs what Whelan (2013) terms “synecdochic nationalism”, using Connacht as a part that represents the whole of Ireland. This approach reflects Young Ireland's attempt to construct a unified national identity that transcended regional differences (Lloyd, 2005). In contrast, Gaddar's song emphasizes Telangana's distinctiveness within India and specifically in opposition to coastal Andhra regions, reflecting the movement's sub-national, regional focus (Kumar, 2013).

5.2. Historical Memory and Narrative Construction

Both songs engage in strategic deployment of historical memory, selecting and emphasizing historical moments that construct narratives of resistance, betrayal, and potential redemption. Davis invokes specific historical references to past Irish resistance, noting how “in O'Connor's van / To triumph dashed each Connacht clan” and referencing battles at “Aughrim's slopes and Shannon's waves”.

These references create what Zerubavel (2003) describes as a “mnemonic community” – a group united by shared historical memory that creates continuity between past, present, and future resistance. As Beiner (2013, p. 67) observes in his analysis of historical memory in Irish political movements, such references function as “usable pasts” that “provide templates for understanding current conflicts and justifying contemporary political action”. Davis's references to O'Connor (likely referring to Roderic O'Connor, the last High King of Ireland) and the Battle of Aughrim (1691) establish historical precedent for resistance while suggesting that contemporary Irish nationalists continue an unbroken tradition of struggle against foreign domination.

Gaddar's song employs a more generalized historical narrative, referring to “kings and nobles” who are “immigrants” and the “bloody wound on the royal sword”. This narrative emphasizes historical injustice and oppression while constructing an indigenous identity for Telangana people in opposition to outsiders who “destroyed” the “earth, water, life and everything” (Thirumali, 2013). By characterizing rulers as “immigrants”, the song establishes a claim to territorial precedence that delegitimizes external control.

As Prakash (1994, p. 1482) argues in his analysis of subaltern history in postcolonial India, such generalized historical narratives often reflect “the impossibility of representing subaltern consciousness directly” due to the absence of written historical records for marginalized communities. Instead, resistance narratives employ what Guha (1982) terms “counter-insurgent” readings of dominant historical narratives, inverting power relations to center marginalized perspectives.

Both songs utilize what Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) term “invented traditions” – selectively constructing historical narratives that serve present political needs. These narratives establish historical continuity for resistance movements and legitimize present political claims by grounding them in historical precedent. As Connerton (1989, p. 3) observes, “Our experiences of the present largely depend upon our knowledge of the past, and our images of the past commonly serve to legitimize a present social order”.

However, the songs differ significantly in their approach to historical specificity. Davis employs what McBride (2001) terms “antiquarian nationalism”, drawing on specific historical events and figures to establish a continuous national narrative. This approach reflects the availability of written historical sources and the Young Ireland movement's emphasis on historical scholarship as a foundation for national identity (Dunne, 2016). In contrast, Gaddar's more generalized historical references reflect what Rao (2009) describes as “folk history” – oral traditions that preserve collective memory in contexts where written historical records are dominated by elite perspectives.

5.3. *Metaphors of Sleep, Awakening, and Movement*

Perhaps the most striking similarity between the two songs is their shared use of sleep/awakening and stillness/movement metaphors. Davis's refrain "The West's asleep, the West's asleep" characterizes political inaction as a form of slumber, concluding with the triumphant declaration "But, hark! A voice like thunder spake / The West's awake! The West's awake!".

This metaphor frames political consciousness as an awakening from passive slumber to active resistance (Lloyd, 2005). As Wheatley (2009, p. 42) observes in his analysis of metaphor in Irish nationalist poetry, the sleep/awakening metaphor serves a dual function: it "suggests both the dormancy of national consciousness and the potential for its revival". This metaphoric framework implies that national identity exists prior to political mobilization, needing only to be awakened rather than created.

As Dunne (2016, p. 92) argues, this reflects Young Ireland's conception of nationalism as "the recovery of an authentic identity rather than the construction of a new one." Gaddar employs a comparable metaphoric framework, repeatedly asking "Is it time to run on an emerging horizon?" and declaring "He who walks with time will be moved". The emphasis on movement—running, walking, emerging—similarly frames political action as motion contrasted with stillness.

As Karamcheti (2018, p. 628) observes, this movement imagery reflects the "processual nature of political consciousness" in Gaddar's work, emphasizing that "political liberation requires continuous movement rather than a single moment of awakening". Both metaphoric frameworks share what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identify as underlying conceptual metaphors: POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IS AWAKENING and POLITICAL ACTION IS MOVEMENT. These conceptual metaphors structure how resistance is understood and experienced in both contexts. As Kövecses (2015, p. 2) argues, such metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but "conceptual tools that provide access to abstract concepts through more concrete domains of experience".

These metaphors serve crucial functions in both resistance movements. First, they provide accessible frameworks for understanding abstract political concepts through embodied experience. Second, they frame political action as natural and inevitable—as natural as waking from sleep or breaking into motion. Finally, they create a sense of urgency by suggesting that the moment of awakening/movement has arrived or is imminent.

However, the metaphors differ in their temporal orientation. Davis's sleep/awakening metaphor suggests a singular moment of transformation—the moment of awakening—after which political action naturally follows. This reflects what Anderson (1983) describes as the "simultaneity" of nationalist awakening, where a community experiences collective transformation. In contrast, Gaddar's movement metaphors emphasize ongoing process and continuous action, reflecting what Rao (2009) identifies as the "durational" nature of subaltern resistance, which requires sustained effort rather than a single transformative moment.

5.4. *Voice, Agency, and Collective Identity*

Both songs construct collective identities through strategic use of voice and agency, though they employ different approaches. Davis's poem shifts between descriptive third-person narration ("The West's asleep") and first-person plural declarations ("We'll watch till death for Erin's sake"). This shifting perspective creates what Bakhtin (1981) terms "double-voicing", allowing the poem to simultaneously describe the community's condition and speak for it. As Lloyd (2005, p. 76) observes, this approach reflects the complex position of the Young Ireland movement, whose largely middle-class Protestant leadership sought to speak for and to a predominantly Catholic population.

The poem's shift from third-person description to first-person declarations dramatizes the transformation of the passive community described in the opening ("The West's asleep") into the active collective agent of the conclusion ("We'll watch till death"). Gaddar's song, in contrast, consistently employs the first-person plural voice ("our lands are ours"), establishing collective agency from the beginning. This approach reflects what Spivak (1988) terms "strategic essentialism"—the adoption of a unified collective voice for political purposes despite internal differences within the community. As Kumar (2013, p. 142) argues, this consistent first-person plural voice reflects Gaddar's position as an organic intellectual emerging from the community he represents rather than speaking for it from outside.

Both songs employ call-and-response structures that invite audience participation, though these function differently in their respective performance contexts. Davis's poem, designed to be recited or sung at nationalist gatherings, alternates between descriptive verses and the repeated refrain "The West's asleep, the West's asleep", inviting collective affirmation of the community's condition (Beiner, 2013). Gaddar's song, performed within public gatherings, includes the repeated phrase "Bale Bale Bale Bale Bale Ha Ha Ha", which functions as a rhythmic affirmation that audiences would join in pronouncing (Karamcheti, 2018). As Butler (2015, p. 18) argues in her analysis of collective assemblies, such participatory structures transform audiences from passive recipients to active participants, creating what she terms "embodied performatives" that enact the very collective identity they describe. Through participation in recitation or singing, audiences physically enact the collective identity articulated in the songs.

However, the songs construct different types of collective identity. Davis's poem articulates what Hroch (1985) identifies as "national" identity, defined by shared territory, history, and cultural traditions within a bounded political community. In contrast, Gaddar's song articulates what Tarrow (2011) terms "movement" identity, defined by shared grievances and political objectives rather than pre-existing cultural commonalities. This difference reflects the distinct political contexts of the two movements: Young Ireland's nationalism versus Telangana's regionalism.

5.5. *Sacrifice, Martyrdom, and Resistance*

Both songs emphasize sacrifice and martyrdom as central to resistance identity. Davis honors those who "died their land to save", while Gaddar repeatedly invokes sacrifice: "Mother, you are the mother of sacrifices, the symbol of sacrifices" and "Blooming flowers are symbols of sacrifices". This emphasis on martyrdom serves several functions identified by Peteet (1994): it sacralizes the resistance movement, creates moral debts that demand continued struggle, and transforms defeat into moral victory.

As Feldman (1991, p. 19) observes in his analysis of political violence in Northern Ireland, martyrdom narratives transform death from "a terminal event into a transitional event," converting apparent defeat into moral victory and creating continuity between past, present, and future resistance. By honoring sacrifices made by previous generations, both songs create what Yerushalmi (1982) terms an "ethical imperative" to continue resistance in the present. Both songs employ natural imagery to represent sacrifice and renewal. Davis compares Ireland to a "home so grand" that "the great God never planned / For slumbering slaves," suggesting divine sanction for resistance. Gaddar employs agricultural metaphors, describing "branches from which the mother's children sprout" and "blooming flowers" as "symbols of sacrifices".

These natural metaphors suggest that resistance and renewal are natural processes, as inevitable as seasonal cycles of death and rebirth. As Rao (2009, p. 224) argues, such natural metaphors are particularly significant in agrarian societies, where they draw on "everyday experiences of cultivation and harvest to make abstract political concepts tangible and immediate". By embedding political resistance within natural cycles, these metaphors naturalize political struggle and suggest its inevitable success. However, the songs differ significantly in their treatment of sacrifice.

Davis's references remain historical and commemorative, honoring past sacrifices as inspiration for present action. Gaddar's treatment is more immediate and ongoing, suggesting that sacrifice continues in the present struggle with references to "A Martyr's Dream A Burning Orb A Martyr's Dream". This difference reflects the contemporary nature of the Telangana struggle at the time of the song's composition, contrasted with the historical frame of Davis's 19th-century work (Karamcheti, 2018).

The songs also differ in their representation of violence. Davis's poem includes explicit references to military conflict, noting how "fleet as deer the Normans ran / Through Corslieve Pass and Ardahan" and referencing battles at "Aughrim's slopes and Shannon's waves". These martial references reflect what Hutchinson (2017) identifies as the "military nationalism" that often-characterized 19th-century national movements. In contrast, Gaddar's song employs more ambiguous references to conflict, describing "a clash between the swords" and "a clash of knives", without explicitly advocating violence. This ambiguity reflects what Scott (1990) terms the "hidden transcript" of resistance—encoding potentially subversive messages in ways that avoid direct confrontation with authorities.

5.6. Performance Context and Reception

While textual analysis provides important insights, understanding these songs requires consideration of their performance contexts. Davis's poems were published in *The Nation* and intended to be recited or sung in nationalist gatherings. They functioned within what Anderson (1983) terms "print capitalism", helping construct an "imagined community" of Irish nationalists through shared textual experience. As Morash (2010, p. 142) notes, Davis's poems were often set to traditional Irish airs and performed at nationalist gatherings, creating what he terms "embodied nationalism" through collective performance.

These gatherings typically occurred in urban settings among relatively educated audiences, reflecting the Young Ireland movement's base among the educated middle-class nationalist elite. While these performances were participatory, they remained structured within the conventions of literary nationalism. In contrast, Gaddar's performances took place in open public spaces, including village squares, labor camps, and political rallies, making them accessible to a wider, often illiterate audience (Kannabiran et al., 2010).

These performances were characterized by high levels of audience interaction, including call-and-response structures, rhythmic clapping, and collective chanting. As Karamcheti (2018, p. 630) argues, “Gaddar’s performances created a space where the audience was not merely a passive recipient of political messages but an active participant in the construction of collective identity”.

The differences in performance context also shaped the songs’ modes of circulation. Davis’s poem gained prominence through print media and formalized song adaptations, aligning with the 19th-century nationalist reliance on newspapers and literary societies for mobilization (Foster, 2014). In contrast, Gaddar’s song circulated orally, through live performances, cassette tapes, and later digital media, reflecting the continued importance of oral tradition in Telangana’s cultural activism (Thirumali, 2013).

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that folk songs function as powerful tools of political resistance by articulating collective identity, historicizing oppression, and mobilizing audiences toward political action. Despite emerging from different cultural and historical contexts, Thomas Davis’s “The West’s Asleep” and Gaddar’s Telangana resistance song exhibit striking similarities in their use of geographic imagery, historical memory, metaphors of awakening and movement, and narratives of sacrifice. The comparative analysis highlights both shared rhetorical strategies and culturally specific adaptations.

Davis’s poem constructs an inclusive nationalist identity using historical references and literary nationalism, whereas Gaddar’s song emphasizes regional identity and direct participation through oral tradition and performance. While both employ themes of awakening, Davis presents it as a singular transformative moment, whereas Gaddar frames it as an ongoing process.

Similarly, both invoke sacrifice as a legitimizing force, though Davis historicizes past resistance while Gaddar emphasizes ongoing struggle. These findings contribute to broader discussions on the role of folk traditions in political movements. The study supports the argument that folk songs are not merely reflections of resistance but active instruments that shape and sustain movements. By invoking collective memory and shared suffering, they transform individual grievances into communal identities, making political struggles more tangible and emotionally resonant.

Future research could expand this comparative framework by including additional case studies from other resistance movements, such as African anti-colonial struggles or Latin American protest music. Furthermore, exploring the impact of digital media on the circulation and reception of folk resistance songs could provide valuable insights into how these traditions evolve in contemporary political landscapes. Ultimately, this study underscores the enduring power of folk music as a vehicle for political expression and collective resistance.

As regional and cultural identities continue to assert themselves against dominant forces, folk traditions remain crucial sites for articulating alternative narratives and mobilizing political action. The voices of Davis and Gaddar, though separated by time and space, echo the universal truth that cultural expression remains central to struggles for justice and identity.

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Contributions of the Authors:

Conceptualization: Chiranjevi Mekala; Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal; **Software:** Chiranjevi Mekala; Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal; **Validation:** Chiranjevi Mekala; Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal; **Formal Analysis:** Chiranjevi Mekala; Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal; **Data curation:** Chiranjevi Mekala; Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal; **Writing-Preparation of the original draft:** Chiranjevi Mekala; Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal; **Drafting-Revision and Editing:** Chiranjevi Mekala; Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal; **Visualization:** Chiranjevi Mekala; Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal; **Supervision:** Chiranjevi Mekala; Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal; **Project Administration:** Chiranjevi Mekala; Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal; **All Authors have read and accepted the published version of the manuscript:** Chiranjevi Mekala; Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal;

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AUTHORS

Mekala Chiranjevi
SR university, India.

Mekala Chiranjevi is pursuing a Ph.D. in English with a focus on Folk Literature, Digital Humanities, and Dalit Studies. His research explores the role of Telangana folk songs in political mobilization, identity formation, and cultural resistance. He has completed his Bachelor's degree from Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Master's degree from Kakatiya University, and PGCTE from the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU). He has published several articles in peer-reviewed and UGC CARE-listed journals, He has also contributed book chapters in reputed IIP series and participated in national seminars at HCU and NIT Warangal.

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0000-7329-1839>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=en&user=7ERGKjIAAAAJ>

ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mekala-Chiranjevi?ev=hdr_xprf

Suraj Nand Kumar Dhumal

SR University, India.

Dr. Suraj Nandkumar Dhumal holds a Ph.D. in English Language Education from the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. With over nine years of teaching experience across graduate, postgraduate, and doctoral levels, his research interests include English Language Teaching, language assessment, academic writing, and curriculum design. He has published widely in reputed journals, including *The IUP Journal of English Studies*, and contributed to books and edited volumes. He has presented research papers at several national and international conferences and delivered invited lectures and workshops on communication skills, academic writing, and research methodologies. He is also the editor of forthcoming volumes in the area of oral narratives and cultural discourse with Springer publication.

surajdhumal89@gmail.com

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7302-1908>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=O4N5PRMAAAAJ&hl=en>

Scopus: <https://publons.com/researcher/5062384/suraj-dhumal/>