



ANALYTICAL STUDY OF CHANGING FORMS IN VISUALS OF KUMAONI FREEDOM FIGHTERS

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Abstract

This paper explores how the visual portrayals of Kumaoni freedom fighters have changed over time, focusing on shifts in style, form, and symbolism across print, photography, folk art, and public art from the late 1800s to today's commemorative practices. Using methods from visual semiotics, iconographic analysis, and archival research, the study looks at a diverse range of materials—such as newspaper engravings, both studio and candid photographs, hand-painted posters, murals by hill communities, and more recent memorial sculptures and digital images. It highlights common visual themes, artistic strategies, and the broader social and political factors that influenced these representations.

The paper takes a close look at when and how these images were made and received, and it interprets changes in artistic style as responses to new technologies and political pressures. It also draws on oral histories and local archives to bring forward stories and images that might otherwise have been forgotten or overlooked. The findings show how local identity, artistic traditions, and political goals have all worked together to shape these images. This research adds to wider discussions about how visual art have played a part in anti-colonial movements.

Key Words: *Kumaon, Visual Culture, Freedom Fighters, Iconography, Visual Art.*

Introduction

Kumaon, a culturally distinct region in today's Uttarakhand, played an important role in India's fight for independence. People from Kumaon led movements like the Coolie-Begar protests, resistance to Forest Laws, and other local campaigns inspired by national leaders. Many Kumaoni freedom fighters—such as Govind Ballabh Pant, Badri Dutt Pandey, Hargobind Pande, and others—made significant contributions, but for a long time, there wasn't much visual documentation of their efforts. This study looks at how their portrayals—through portraits, posters, folk art, monuments, and digital reinterpretations—have changed over time, reflecting bigger shifts in politics, culture, and technology. This arises the question - How have the ways Kumaoni freedom fighters are depicted visually changed through the years?

Research Design

In this research, the objective is to study the changing forms in visuals of Kumaoni Freedom fighters. This paper constitutes both primary research and secondary research. Primary research in context to the collection of data about the main subject whereas secondary research based upon the newspapers, articles, books etc. as they help to analyse and interpret. Overall, this paper includes surveys, interviews, observations, the use of secondary data which form qualitative methods in data collection. The important aspects are equivalently covered and the descriptive and analytical method of research is considered.

Discussions

In order to see the changing visuals, further we will look towards the various visuals of freedom fighters from Kumaon region.

The sculpture of Govind Ballabh Pant in Bhimtal depicts him holding a book in one hand and a stick in the other. The artist has rendered the sculpture with a high degree of realism, evident in the detailed representation of the veins in Pant's hands. This work is considered among the most skilfully executed sculptures of Pant. Beneath the figure, his birth and death dates are inscribed, alongside notable quotations and a record of the prominent positions he held and the respective years of his appointments. The bronze sculpture, painted in a brown hue, commemorates his significant contributions to both the state and the nation.



Fig 1. G.B Pant's sculpture, Bhimtal

The portrait sculpture of Badri Datt Pandey represents the freedom fighter as he appears in other iconographic sources, adorned with a scarf, spectacles, and a Gandhian cap, with an intense facial expression that underscores his resolute character. Pandit Badri Datt Pandey was an Indian historian, freedom fighter, social reformer, and subsequently served as a Member of Parliament from Almora following India's independence. This sculpture, also rendered in brown, captures the likeness and ethos of the freedom fighter.



Fig 2. Badri Datt Pandey, Bageshwar

According to reports, the statue of Govardhan Tiwari was installed at Base Hospital, Almora, in 2009. The sculpture is currently in a deteriorated state, highlighting the necessity for regular maintenance and conservation, given the influence of environmental factors and the finite lifespan of such works. The

statue serves as a visual testament to the contributions of freedom fighters and artists, underscoring the importance of their preservation. Govardhan Tiwari, originating from Almora, Uttarakhand, was an active participant in the Indian independence movement. Despite enduring imprisonment and hardship under British colonial rule, he made significant contributions to the cause, which are commemorated through this statue as an acknowledgment of his dedication and selflessness.



Fig 3. Govardhan Tiwari, Base Hospital, Almora

Another sculpture of G.B. Pant is prominently displayed in Nainital, located in a busy area near the Naina Devi Temple. The bronze figure, depicted holding a stick in his right hand, serves as a symbol of Pant's enduring contributions.



Fig 4. G.B Pant sculpture, Nainital

Similarly, a portrait sculpture of Pant is situated in Ranikhet. The expression on the sculpture conveys a sense of innocence, and a pen is visibly placed in the pocket. Another representation of the freedom fighter in the region appears to be carved from stone.



Fig 5. Govind Ballabh Pant, Ranikhet

The full-length sculpture of Ram Sumer Shukla, located in Rudrapur in the Udham Singh Nagar district, depicts him wearing traditional attire consisting of a dhoti and kurta. The bronze sculpture faithfully renders his facial features and physical attributes. Installed in 2007 at Government Medical College, the figure's expression conveys gravitas and commemorates Shukla's significant contributions to the Tarai region of Kumaon.



Fig 7. Pandit Ram Sumer Shukla

Another sculpture represents Vishwanath Ray, depicted in traditional attire including a dhoti, kurta, and waistcoat. It is situated adjacent to the Sanskriti Vibhag in Uttarakhand. The sculpture, characterized by round spectacles, presents a faithful likeness. An inscription beneath the figure features a quotation attributed to Ray, along with relevant biographical details.



Fig 6. Vishwanath Ray, Rudrapur

A sculpture of G.B. Pant was installed in the village of Khunt, adjacent to the remnants of his birthplace. Erected on September 10, 1987, in commemoration of his centenary, the sculpture's surface exhibits a somewhat rough texture. This work represents another finely crafted depiction of G.B. Pant within the state. The inscription "Ram V. Sutr 587" is carved behind the sculpture, referencing the renowned sculptor also credited with the creation of the Statue of Unity, the tallest statue in the world. The figure is attired in the same manner as other representations, and the three-dimensional rendering effectively captures Pant's likeness as a freedom fighter. Behind the sculpture, two plaques document his genealogy and major life events, paralleling the displays found in the G.B. Pant Museum. Additionally, a photograph from the 1950s, showing Pant at work, is exhibited with the corresponding year, alongside another image from the same decade with Ho Chi Minh. Selected quotations by Pant are also engraved beneath the sculpture.



Fig 8. Govind Ballabh Pant, Khunt, Almora

The portraits of Bishni Devi Shah and Kunti Devi Verma, created by Geeta Tewari, depict the likenesses of these two women freedom fighters. Both individuals made notable contributions to India's



independence, demonstrating courage and a determination to challenge prevailing societal norms regarding women. The portrait of Bishni Devi Shah, rendered in charcoal and graphite pencil on paper, closely replicates a widely circulated photograph of her. Reflecting her modest lifestyle, the portrait presents her in a saree, with one ear visible and the other concealed by the garment. Bishni Devi Shah is regarded as the first woman freedom fighter from Uttarakhand, and her life, marked by hardship and adversity, served to strengthen her resolve. Although the original photograph was produced using less advanced photographic techniques, the artist's skillful execution results in a clearer representation of her facial features. In October 2021, the postal department released a special cover in her honor (indianculture.gov.in). Despite her passing in 1972, technological limitations, particularly in the hilly regions, mean that most available images of her are black-and-white photographs from a single source.



Fig 9 and 10, Bishni Devi Shah, charcoal and pencil on paper (left) Kunti Devi Verma, Dry pastels on paper(right), Geeta Tewari, 2025

The photograph captures G.B. Pant delivering a speech, offering valuable insights into his appearance as well as those of fellow freedom fighters. The image documents the assembly of individuals characteristic of that historical period and provides contextual details about the environment. Such visual evidence underscores the importance of imagery in deepening our understanding of history.

Numerous photographs housed in the G.B. Pant Museum predate 1947, chronologically documenting the life of the freedom fighter from his childhood through to his final days. One image, depicting Pant at the age of five, is notably lacking in clarity, yet still conveys key aspects of his facial features. The museum also exhibits photographs of other independence activists. In addition to visual materials, the museum hosts correspondence to and from G.B. Pant. These documents, including a letter related to the celebration of Gandhi Day addressed to political figures, reference the boycott of British goods, the organization of political gatherings, and the transfer of gold overseas, dated February 3, 1932.

The museum displays photographs of G.B. Pant with prominent leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari, and Dr. Radhakrishnan, as well as images featuring his family. Centrally situated within the museum is the principal exhibit: a portrait sculpture of G.B. Pant, portrayed with a slight stoop suggestive of his later years. The sculpture exemplifies modern artistic techniques, featuring a textured black stone surface and finely detailed facial features, including a meticulously styled moustache. This piece stands as the foremost example among the visual representations of freedom fighters in the museum, distinguished by its expressive craftsmanship and the admiration it evokes.



Fig 11. Glimpses of G.B Museum, Almora

Final Discussions

This study examines how evolving visual depictions of Kumaoni freedom fighters serve not only to preserve but also to communicate the region's stories of resistance. By tracing the portrayals of figures such as Govind Ballabh Pant, Badri Dutt Pandey, etc, the research reveals that these individuals have been represented in increasingly diverse and expressive ways—across paintings, sculptures, posters, memorials, educational materials, and digital media—making their stories more accessible and emotionally resonant to contemporary audiences.

The study finds that earlier representations were primarily documentary and formal, aiming for straightforward identification within the broader narrative of India's independence. These images tended to overlook regional identity and personal nuance. In contrast, more recent portrayals employ varied artistic styles, symbolic details, and cultural references—such as traditional Kumaoni clothing, familiar landscapes, and shared community values—bringing to life the unique backgrounds and personalities of these freedom fighters and forging a deeper emotional connection with viewers.

By analyzing the symbols and visual languages used, this research demonstrates how changes in artistic approach mirror shifting social and political concerns. Greater regional consciousness, cultural revitalization, and new digital outlets have helped make these figures more visible and relevant. Today's images not only honor the achievements of Kumaoni freedom fighters but also foster community pride and help younger people see themselves as part of this ongoing story.

Ultimately, this study highlights how visual culture keeps historical memory alive. The evolving images of Kumaoni freedom fighters serve as vivid reminders of shared identity, connecting past generations with the present. By recording and interpreting these changing portrayals, the research deepens our understanding of the interplay between art and history, helping make sure the courage and stories of Kumaon's heroes continue to inspire and resonate with people today.



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