

# A Lifeline for Language: 'Pahru' Magazine's Role in the Revitalization of Kumauni Culture and Education

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## Abstract

This research paper examines the role of 'Pahru' magazine in revitalizing the Kumauni language and culture through its editorial insights and strategic initiatives. 'Pahru,' founded by Dr. Hayat Singh Rawat under the NGO 'Kumauni Bhasha, Sahitya Aewam Sanskriti Prachaar Samiti' in 2008, is the oldest and largest circulating monthly magazine in the Kumauni language in India. The magazine's primary objective is to promote the Kumauni language, introduce new literary genres, and advocate for its inclusion in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution and the school curriculum in Uttarakhand.

The study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on an in-depth interview with Dr. Rawat, the editor, to explore the historical and cultural significance of 'Pahru,' its contemporary challenges, and future visions. Dr. Rawat's extensive educational background and contributions to Hindi and Kumauni literature underscore his commitment to preserving and promoting the Kumauni language. Through his editorial strategies, 'Pahru' publishes diverse genres, standardizes the language while maintaining its dialectical nuances, and nurtures local literary talent.

The findings reveal that 'Pahru' has significantly impacted its readers, fostering a sense of belonging and revitalising their connection to Kumauni heritage. However, the magazine faces financial sustainability challenges, primarily relying on decreasing advertisement revenue. Dr. Rawat's efforts to secure funding through innovative strategies such as custodian memberships and reader appeals are highlighted. The study emphasizes the critical role of regional language publications like 'Pahru' in cultural preservation, community engagement, and educational advocacy.

By exploring themes of language revitalization, community engagement, and financial sustainability, the research contributes to the understanding of regional media's role in promoting cultural heritage and linguistic vitality. The insights from Dr. Rawat offer a rich foundation for ongoing research into the societal and educational impacts of regional language publications.

**Keywords:** Kumauni culture, Language revitalization, Cultural preservation, Community engagement, Regional publications, Educational advocacy, 'Pahru' magazine, Kumauni language, Magazine, Journalism, Media studies

## 1. Introduction

In India, print media has historically been a catalyst for public discourse and social change. The advent of

newspapers during the colonial era provided a critical platform for nationalist movements and political activism. The launch of The Bengal Gazette by James Augustus Hicky in 1780 marked the inception of newspaper publishing in India, setting the stage for a vibrant industry that played a pivotal role in India's struggle for independence<sup>[1]</sup>. This early press laid the foundation for the Indian public sphere, where issues of national importance were debated and disseminated.

The subsequent emergence of magazines further enriched the print media landscape, offering a diverse array of content and perspectives. The publication of The Asiatic Miscellany in 1785 is often regarded as an early example of magazine publishing in India, though it is sometimes mistakenly attributed to William Carey<sup>[2]</sup>. This period witnessed the proliferation of literary and intellectual magazines, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which played a significant role in shaping cultural and intellectual thought in India.

Following India's independence, large-scale magazines such as The Illustrated Weekly of India and The Statesman became prominent, influencing public opinion and cultural discourse<sup>[3]</sup>. These publications served as essential forums for debate, art, and literature, reflecting the nation's evolving identity. Furthermore, vernacular magazines such as Anandamela in Bengali, Saras Salil in Hindi, and Kumudam in Tamil became integral to Indian households. These magazines not only provided a platform for regional writers and artists but also acted as vehicles for social reform and the revival of cultural heritage<sup>[4]</sup>.

The Kumauni language, a Central Pahari language primarily spoken in the Kumaun region of Uttarakhand, India, boasts a rich linguistic heritage. As a member of the Indo-Aryan language family, it has evolved through centuries, absorbing elements from Sanskrit, Prakrit, and various regional dialects. Historically, Kumauni has served as a vital medium for the expression of the cultural and social life of its speakers, with a robust oral tradition comprising folk songs, stories, and proverbs<sup>[5]</sup>.

The history of magazines in Uttarakhand reflects the broader socio-cultural and literary developments within the region. The emergence of print media here dates back to the colonial era, catering initially to the educated class and intellectual elite. One of the earliest magazines, Uttar Pradesh Kesari, launched in 1896 by Ganesh Dutt Joshi, was instrumental in fostering literary and cultural awareness among the people of Uttarakhand<sup>[6]</sup>.

## Pahru Magazine

'Pahru' magazine was first published in November 2008. It is the oldest continuously running & largest (*in terms of readership and circulation*) monthly Kumauni magazine in India. Since its inception, it has been released monthly without missing any editions. The term 'Pahru' translates to 'Guardian' or 'प्रहरी/रक्षक' in Hindi, symbolizing the magazine's role as a protector and promoter of the Kumauni language.

Figure 1- First Edition of 'Pahru' Magazine Including Cover Page, Front Page, Editorial



The magazine was founded by Dr. Hayat Singh Rawat, an esteemed figure in Kumauni literature and social work. Dr. Rawat initiated 'Pahru' under the NGO 'Kumauni Bhasha, Sahitya Aewam Sanskriti Prachaar Samiti, Kasardevi, Almora' (कुमाऊनी भाषा साहित्य एवं संस्कृति प्रचार समिति, कसारदेवी अल्मोडा), established in 2004. The primary motivation behind starting the magazine was to promote and develop the Kumauni language, fostering a culture of reading and writing in Kumauni. The magazine aimed to introduce new genres in Kumauni literature and advocate for the recognition of Kumauni in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution, and its inclusion in the school curriculum in Uttarakhand.

**Figure 2- 'Our Mission' Section of the First Edition of 'Pahru'**



## 2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of the editorial insights of 'Pahru' magazine through an in-depth interview with its editor. Utilizing purposive sampling, the research specifically focuses on the editor due to their unique insights and pivotal role in the magazine's production and direction. The interview was conducted in two phases: the first phase addressed the historical and cultural significance of the magazine, while the second phase explored contemporary challenges and future visions for 'Pahru.' This phased approach ensures a thorough understanding of the editor's perspectives and strategies.

## 3. Interview with the editor

Dr. Hayat Singh Rawat, the esteemed editor of 'Pahru' magazine. Dr. Rawat, born on October 11, 1955, in Lamgara, Almora, has made significant contributions to Hindi and Kumauni literature, social work, and journalism. His educational journey includes completing his high school in 1971, intermediate in literature in 1973, and obtaining a B.T.C. in 1974. He graduated with a B.A. from Kumaun University in 1976, followed by an M.A. in 1978 from the same institution. Dr. Rawat further pursued a B.Ed. in 1980, an L.L.B. in 1996, and earned a Ph.D. in Hindi Literature in 2005. In addition to his academic achievements, Dr. Rawat has been deeply involved in social work. He established the Ram Singh Dhoni Vidhyapeeth in 1974 and founded the 'Malla Salam Sangharsh Samiti' in 1992. His journalism career began with the establishment of the weekly newspaper 'Hilans' on January 26, 1978, while he was still in intermediate school. As a passionate advocate for the Kumauni language, Dr. Rawat founded the NGO Kumauni Bhasha, Sahitya Ewam Sanskriti Prachaar Samiti in 2004, which has published over 50 books in Kumauni.

Notable works include ‘Kweed,’ the first Kumauni essay collection in 2000, and ‘Bodhan,’ a story collection in 2005. Dr. Rawat's contributions have been recognized with numerous awards, including the Ram Nawali Lok Bhasha Samman (2011), Hilans Award (2013), Sahitya Saraswati Ratna Award (2014), Mohan Upreti Samiti Award (2021), Kumauni Bhasha Sewa Samman (2022), and Devbhoomi Lok Samman (2022).



**Figure 3- Portrait of Dr. Hayat Singh Rawat**



**Figure 4- ‘Hilans’ (हिलॉस) Newspaper Started by Dr. Rawat**

The section is structured to present the interview questions and responses, followed by a thematic analysis, discussion, and conclusion. Through two in-depth interviews conducted on April 20, 2024, and June 15, 2024, Dr. Rawat provides a comprehensive view of his role and responsibilities, the editorial process, and the challenges and achievements in promoting and preserving the Kumauni language through ‘Pahru’ magazine.

### Interview Questions and Responses

This section presents the detailed questions and responses from the interviews conducted with Dr. Hayat Singh Rawat, providing in-depth insights into his experiences, views, and contributions as the editor of 'Pahru' magazine.

#### **Question 1:** *Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities as the editor of 'Pahru' magazine?*

**Response:** Dr. Rawat's role as the editor is comprehensive and multifaceted. He explained, "My first responsibility is to regularly communicate with the audience about what they want and respect their feelings." In addition, he focuses on the development of the Kumauni language by incorporating various genres of writing into the magazine. This involves constant interaction with writers to gather content, aiming to produce books in different genres of Kumauni. "With these efforts, we now have almost books in all genres," he noted. Furthermore, Dr. Rawat seeks individuals who can initiate memorial awards, and he handles crucial tasks such as content selection, proofreading, and editing.

#### **Question 2:** *How often do you interact with contributors and readers to gather feedback or content for the magazine?*

**Response:** Interaction with writers occurs every one or two months in an ongoing process. Dr. Rawat highlighted a shift in communication with readers, noting, "For readers, it was continuous before, but now it is less due to the increase in the number of readers (7500+) and also because of my old age." Despite this, readers frequently reach out, viewing the magazine as part of a larger movement. Regarding those involved in memorial awards, he mentioned, "I talk to them every two to three months." Seminars also play a crucial role, allowing Dr. Rawat to meet numerous readers and writers, who contribute significantly to the magazine's development.

#### **Question 3:** *Can you explain the editorial process from the submission of an article to its publication?*

**Response:** The editorial process starts with the fixed columns in the magazine, such as essays, stories, write-ups, and poems. Writers submit content based on these categories, and the magazine also receives a substantial amount of material from writing awards, resulting in a current stockpile sufficient for a year. Dr. Rawat elaborated, "Only for special editions are writers asked to write." After content selection, proofreading is conducted to make necessary corrections and standardize the language, making it accessible to all readers. Despite the different dialects in Kumauni, unique terms specific to each dialect are preserved, while grammar is corrected. Addressing criticisms about writing quality, he said, "We want to increase the number of Kumauni writers first." After proofreading, the content is sent to the designer for layout.

#### **Question 4:** *What motivated you to become the editor of 'Pahru' magazine?*

**Response:** Dr. Rawat cited the development of the Kumauni language as his primary motivation, aiming to elevate it to a literary standard comparable to other languages like Hindi. "It has also become a social responsibility now for me," he stated. The enthusiasm and anticipation of readers for each issue further inspire him to continue his work.

**Question 5:** *How do you perceive the role of 'Pahru' in promoting and preserving the Kumauni language and culture?*

**Response:** Dr. Rawat emphasized that 'Pahru' plays a crucial role in creating an environment conducive to Kumauni literature. He observed, "Since the origin of 'Pahru,' there is much acknowledgement of the Kumauni language, and people also show respect to their language." The magazine helps people feel connected to their linguistic heritage, and the Uttarakhand government has even started using Kumauni to promote its policies. "Pahru is giving space to Kumauni writing and preserving it by publishing various columns," he added. The magazine also secures lost Kumauni words, with a dedicated section called 'Bhasha Gyan' explaining the meanings of Kumauni words in Hindi.

**Question 6:** *Can you share any specific instances where the magazine has made a significant impact on the community or individual readers?*

**Response:** Dr. Rawat shared several impactful stories. One reader from Lucknow expressed how 'Pahru' improved his mental and physical health, stating, "There was no one of my native people with me here and I couldn't speak or listen to Kumauni. After subscribing to 'Pahru' magazine, my mental and physical health improved by reading 'Pahru.'" Another example involved a member of the 'Kumauni People Organization' in Faridabad, who described how 'Pahru' instilled a sense of pride and self-respect by allowing him to showcase a Kumauni language magazine to his Bengali friends, similar to how they shared their Bengali magazine.

**Question 7:** *How does 'Pahru' differentiate itself from other Kumauni language publications?*

**Response:** According to Dr. Rawat, 'Pahru' distinguishes itself through a strong focus on clarity, thorough proofreading, and high-quality design and layout, aspiring to match the standards of national dailies. "We prioritize our writers by including their biodata, photos, and by-lines with their write-ups," he explained. This approach helps in establishing them as recognized writers.

**Question 8:** *What are some of the major challenges you have faced while editing 'Pahru' magazine?*

**Response:** The biggest challenge identified by Dr. Rawat is the financial crisis. "The monthly cost of running the magazine is approximately 50,000 INR, which requires continuous efforts to secure funding, often relying on advertisements that have decreased over time," he noted.

**Question 9:** *How do you address the financial challenges associated with running the magazine?*

**Response:** To address financial challenges, Dr. Rawat explained that they identify potential custodian members who can provide substantial contributions, appeal to readers for advertisements, receive ad support from writers for special editions and festivals, and rely on single donors who sometimes sponsor entire editions.

**Question 10:** *Can you discuss any difficulties related to maintaining the quality and authenticity of content?*

**Response:** Dr. Rawat stated that to maintain quality, new writers are not immediately included. "We try to give space to good writers whose feedback from readers is positive for each edition to maintain balance," he said.

**Question 11:** *How do you handle the balance between traditional content and contemporary issues in the magazine?*

**Response:** As a cultural magazine, 'Pahru' prioritizes traditional content while developing the Kumauni language across all genres. Contemporary issues are included but are given less prominence compared to traditional content. "We aim to develop the Kumauni language in all genres," he stated.

**Question 12:** *What strategies have you employed to increase readership and engagement, especially among younger generations?*

**Response:** Dr. Rawat mentioned that content appealing to a broad audience, such as local temples, famous local personalities, and local fairs, is included. "Memorial competitions are organized for young writers, and a section called 'Gufav,' meaning blooming flower, is dedicated to youth," he elaborated. Despite these efforts, attracting a younger readership remains challenging, and the team is still working on identifying their interests.

**Question 13:** *What are your long-term goals for 'Pahru' magazine?*

**Response:** The long-term goals for 'Pahru' include promoting the inclusion of the Kumauni language in Schedule 8 of the Indian Constitution, advocating for its teaching in Uttarakhand schools, and ensuring that 'Pahru' plays a significant role in achieving these objectives.

**Question 14:** *How do you plan to adapt the magazine to the changing media landscape, particularly with digitalization?*

**Response:** Currently, there are no plans to fully digitize the magazine. Dr. Rawat emphasized, "We will continue to print 'Pahru,' as printed literature serves as an important heritage and preserves content for the long term."

**Question 15:** *Are there any new sections or themes you would like to introduce in future editions?*

**Response:** Dr. Rawat mentioned that new columns on national and international issues, current topics like family values, education, unemployment, science-based articles, political analysis, and technological write-ups might be introduced in future editions.

**Question 16:** *How do you envision the magazine's role in promoting Kumauni language education and its inclusion in the school curriculum?*

**Response:** 'Pahru' will contribute by providing content for the Kumauni curriculum, ensuring ample material is available when the government needs it. Dr. Rawat explained, "The magazine is currently developing this content to support future educational initiatives."

**Question 17:** *What do you consider to be the most rewarding aspect of being the editor of 'Pahru'?*

**Response:** The most rewarding aspect, according to Dr. Rawat, is the respect he receives for promoting the Kumauni language, the awards, and the personal satisfaction. "This magazine is being run by a team of non-salaried individuals, which helps in saving costs. However, this model may need to change in the future to ensure sustainability," he noted. On the downside, he mentioned that his work for 'Pahru' leaves him little time to write for himself.

**Question 18:** *How do you see the future of Kumauni language and culture in light of your work with ‘Pahru’?*

**Response:** Dr. Rawat expressed optimism about the future of the Kumauni language, stating, "The future of the language is bright, as more people are becoming interested in their linguistic heritage." He believes that the new education policy will likely enhance the scope of Kumauni being taught in schools, helping to preserve the language.

**Question 19:** *What message would you like to convey to the readers and contributors of ‘Pahru’?*

**Response:** Dr. Rawat conveyed a heartfelt message: "I encourage everyone to read, write, and speak our mother tongue, Kumauni, and to give it the respect it deserves."



**Figure 5- Dr. Hayat Singh Rawat, Editor of ‘Pahru’ Magazine, During The Interview**

#### **4. Discussion**

Dr. Hayat Singh Rawat emphasized the critical role of ‘Pahru’ magazine in promoting and preserving the Kumauni language. He noted that the magazine serves as a crucial platform for Kumauni literature, offering space for various genres of writing. This contribution is vital for the development of the language, as it helps secure lost Kumauni words and fosters linguistic pride. Dr. Rawat stated, “Pahru is giving space to Kumauni writing and preserving it by publishing various columns,” illustrating the magazine’s commitment to the language’s preservation and growth. The interviews revealed a significant impact on the community and high reader engagement facilitated by ‘Pahru.’ Dr. Rawat shared personal anecdotes



from readers who expressed deep emotional connections to the magazine, noting improvements in their mental and physical well-being from reading in their native language. He mentioned, “Readers often view the magazine as part of a larger movement and actively reach out to express their appreciation and share personal stories of revitalization.” This engagement highlights the magazine’s role in strengthening cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging among its readers.

Financial challenges were a prominent theme in the interviews. Dr. Rawat discussed the ongoing struggle to secure funding, which is primarily reliant on advertisements that have decreased over time. He acknowledged the magazine’s monthly operational costs and outlined various strategies to address these financial challenges, such as appealing to readers and establishing custodian memberships. The magazine’s financial sustainability remains a critical issue, with Dr. Rawat emphasizing the need for innovative funding strategies to ensure its continuity. The interviews underscored ‘Pahru’s’ advocacy for including the Kumauni language in formal education and cultural preservation efforts. Dr. Rawat articulated long-term goals for the magazine, including lobbying for Kumauni to be included in Schedule 8 of the Indian Constitution and integrated into Uttarakhand’s school curriculum. He emphasized, “Pahru aims to provide educational content that supports the development of Kumauni language education.” This advocacy role is crucial for the magazine’s mission to promote and preserve the Kumauni language and culture.

Dr. Rawat’s commitment to developing the Kumauni language is evident through Pahru’s editorial processes and content selection. The magazine publishes diverse genres and standardizes the language while preserving its dialectical nuances. Dr. Rawat highlighted a strategic focus on nurturing local literary talent to enrich Kumauni literature, stating, “We want to increase the number of Kumauni writers first.” The profound impact of ‘Pahru’ on its readers was further highlighted through testimonials where readers credited the magazine for revitalizing their connection to Kumauni heritage. Dr. Rawat mentioned, “Readers often view the magazine as a lifeline, especially those living away from their native regions.” He shared heartfelt letters from readers describing how ‘Pahru’ has transformed their lives by reconnecting them with their roots, showcasing the magazine’s emotional resonance and cultural significance.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings from the interviews with Dr. Hayat Singh Rawat align closely with the research questions regarding the role of regional language publications in cultural preservation and educational advocacy. Existing literature on language revitalization and community engagement supports the significance of initiatives like ‘Pahru’ in fostering linguistic pride and preserving cultural heritage. Financial sustainability challenges identified in the interviews reflect broader issues faced by regional publications globally, highlighting the need for innovative funding models to ensure their continuity. The findings contribute significantly to the understanding of regional language publications’ role in cultural preservation and community empowerment. By exploring themes of language revitalization, community engagement, and financial sustainability, the study enhances scholarly knowledge on the dynamics of regional media in promoting cultural heritage. The interviews with Dr. Rawat offer a rich foundation for ongoing research into the societal and educational roles of regional language publications in fostering cultural diversity and linguistic vitality.

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