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Relevance of folk songs of Kangra Valley of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Behind every song there is an untold story. It adds emotion to the moment and give words to emotions. Folk songs may seem simple, repetitive and ordinary but they are magical as they connect us to the past and help in shaping up our future. They spark memories and spread fragrance of the culture. When sung by women they reflect not only their socio- cultural status but also give voice to their perceptions, angst, fantasy, repression and resistance). Famous folklorist Alan Dundes argues, 'folklore is an autobiographical ethnography— that is, it is a people's own description of themselves' (1969: 471). Through the study of folklore one can see another culture 'from the inside out', instead of looking at it 'from the outside in' (See Dundes 1966; 1969; 1997). It also provides them a cathartic space in a patriarchal setup. Folk music can play an important role in the social construction of identities so these songs can't be suspended as insignificant voices. Rather these are strong feminine voices that register protest and anguish though in a subtle way. The objectives of this research paper is to investigate and interpret voices of women that are subjugated, ignored and unheard. Folk songs become vehicle of their expression for the innermost desires. With this viewpoint, some very popular folk songs of Kangra valley are selected and critiqued. This research article concludes that through these songs women convey their thoughts, angst, fear and protest which she otherwise would not be able to speak up but in subtle nuanced ways also reinforcing stereotypical roles of women. This also reflects on the gender hierarchy where women are considered to be inferior beings.

Keywords

Folk songs,
Kangra valley,
socio- cultural status,
stereotypical roles.

Introduction

Folksongs are the most inclusive category of folklore. Indeed, Folklorists and sociologists have identified folksongs as reservoirs of women's said and unsaid expressions (see Narayan 1986, 1993; Gold 2003; Raheja and Gold 1996). Alan Dundes argues, 'folklore is an autobiographical ethnography— that is, it is a people's own description of themselves' (1969: 471). Through the study of folklore one can see another culture 'from the inside out', instead of looking at it 'from the outside in' (See Dundes 1966; 1969; 1997). Women on the margins find these folksongs as the best form of expression for their emotions. Punia & Punia (2004) confirmed that folksongs not only help in understanding the socio – cultural and religious life of the community but also human psychology and the adjustment of an individual to his/her culturally constituted world. Unfortunately, it often goes unnoticed by the academic literature and marginalization process of female gender too remains unnoticed. This paper focuses on gender representations complemented by the translated and critiqued texts of songs. To examine multiple layers of these marginalized voices and to know whether they can be considered independent feminist voices or manipulated, conditioned and socially constructed feminine voices. Carol Gilligan's work on "different voice" has had considerable impact on the development of feminist theory and has also led me to wonder over the complexity and quality of how women's voices are heard especially in context of folksongs. Narayan's (1986a) study of Kangra village (India) on Rajput women analyzes folk songs sung by women in their socio-cultural context. She infers that these songs are not only sung for entertainment purposes, but reveal a socio-cultural context of patriarchal community in which these women live. Like most folklore forms, women's songs in Kangra are learned, shared, and transmitted within small groups, and thus are public and since they are sung and transmitted by individuals also they can be considered private expressions. Kangra lies at the base of the Dhauladhar ("White Bearing") Himalayan mountains that tower roughly twelve

to fifteen thousand feet above the valley floor. Once governed by Katoch dynasty it came under Mughal rule in the mid-sixteenth century, submitted to Sikh domination in 1809, and became part of the British colonial state in 1846. Kangra remained an administrative district of Punjab under British rule and for almost two decades following Indian Independence. When post-independence in 1966 Kangra merged with the northern hill state of Himachal Pradesh (Parry 1979:11-14). The linguistic mixture in women's songs reflects much of this history, with the local dialect mingling freely with Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Dogri.

Methodology

The proposed research selectively draws on some folksongs from different genres like Pakhru (songs of love, separation and accusation) Barsati (seasonal songs with theme of discrimination based on caste and gender), Dholru (tales of women suffering) Galiya (songs of jest, sarcasm and humor) Sanskar and Janeau geet (celebrating birth of male child) Suhag geet (love and hope) from feministic viewpoint. Songs were randomly selected that were considered helpful in bringing out and giving meaning to the topic of study. The contents of the songs were analyzed in relation to the message they are meant to portray. The songs were also translated and critiqued for wider audience consumption.

Songs that support the writers' claims

Content and textual analysis of Song one.

Domestic Violence and suppression

Women express every mood in songs whether happiness, sadness, pain, joy or even for consolation. Songs of love and separation like Pakharu is the genre specifically sung for and by women experiencing difficulties in their married lives to narrate the oppression, resistance, female longings. The torture they face at the hands of their in laws family especially in the absence of their husband who is away for employment is

very poignant and heart touching. Submission in the name of care and responsibility in relationships is easily perceptible. They sing their pains but underneath there are strong feminine voices that resist oppression and put forth their expectations from the partner. Here is one such song that depicts pain of a daughter in law facing domestic violence in her husband's family. Lachhi the daughter in law returns a bit late after filling water from the well. Reaching home, she is suspected and interrogated by her mother in law. Her mother in law is angered so much that she beats the poor daughter in law and finally killing her.

Derani jethani dono paniye jo chalii,lachhi challi sardar..

Bharya ghadelu lachhiya sare per dharyan,ghare jo balle balle aayi

Ghare je sass puchna laggi aidi der kiyen layin

Bharya ghadelu sassu minni pe dharya chukki ni dinda paappi koi

Sach keh ni boldi bo lachhiye kuni ditti gale di jugni

Amma ta ditti minjo gale di jugni baapue ditta chauser haar

Latta di maari mukke di maari, podiyan radkayi lahua de baggi gaye ne naal

Cheeyen mahina da balak chuttya kudi chutti mutyarJaliyan paaniyan wo lachiyyan!

English Translation

Both Co-sisters went for bringing water

Lachhi filled up her pitcher and came happily to her home taking the lead

Reaching home her mother in law questioned her being late

No one helped me in lifting up my pitcher full of water so I came slowly

Tell me truly O lachhi! who gave you this ring and necklace?

My mother gave me the ring and my father gave me the necklace

Beaten and kicked by mother in law lachhi fell off stairs and bled severely

She died leaving behind her six-month baby and a young girl

Poor lachhi lost her life just for petty water!

The implication of this song is that a woman has to be obedient and respectful towards elders especially her husband's family in every situation. But domestic violence goes a long way in destroying relationships in families and society since the most vulnerable in society such as women and children are dehumanized, brutalized and killed (Odinye and Okey-Umeh, 2016). This type of conflict is succinctly explained by Gluckman (1965, p.59-60) by saying that the success and happiness of a marriage does not depend so much upon the couple but also upon his parents and other relatives that they live with.

Content and textual analysis of Song Two.

Sacrifice is the virtue of a woman

This song is based on a historical tale like Ruhllu di kull. When the kingdom of King Rana faced a severe drought he prayed to his family deity and requested to find a solution. The first option given by the Deity was to sacrifice his son. Horrified, the king pleaded that his lineage would end. The second option he got was to sacrifice a cat. Denying, he said he didn't want to go to hell by killing an animal. The third option was to sacrifice a broom. He refused saying that broom is symbolic of Laxami and he didn't afford to lose his wealth. Ultimately, the fourth option was to sacrifice his daughter -in -law to which he readily agrees. He immediately summoned his daughter -in -law and ordered to bury her alive in a wall. The poignant tale is sung through ages by women glorifying sacrificial role of a daughter -in -law for ending drought in the area. Though the sacrifice is not willing and is forced upon her. Glorifying her as Goddess in the songs there is a subtle attempt to give a message that only good women are those who can even sacrifice their lives for the sake of family.

Sute je rane jo supna je hoye rullah di kullah mangdi bali wo

Aadhi aadhi ratti raje Likakhya parwan saure nooye je pehajya

Diye di loyi gauriya kagaj padhya Royi wo chum chum se..

Latta bhi chiniyo lakke bhi chinyo munde ni lande
thor wo
Issa batta mere mapaya ne jaana tina jo dikhi
lengi mei

English Translation

Sleeping king dreamt of family deity asking for
sacrifice for ending drought
In the dead of midnight, he summoned his
daughter-in-law
In the light of a lamp she read the summons and
cried inconsolably
When you bury me alive please bury my feet but
leave my waist
When you bury me alive please bury my waist but
leave my face
For whenever my parents go this way I will see
them.

It is heart wrenching to see that how a woman's
existence is not even as valuable as that of a cat or
a broom. It reflects upon her very low status in the
society. Her existence is worth nothing and she is
at the mercy of patriarchal society. Ironically
women are cheerfully singing such songs Why
strong headed women could not be glorified and
taken as role models? Is it a subtle attempt to stop
them for standing up, rebel, transgress and have
flaws? Why they are expected to cater to
patriarchal needs of the society? These songs
bring up these debatable issues and lay bare the
duality of voices of women who have been
singing such songs and internalizing these
subservient virtues.

Content and textual analysis of Song Three.

Double marginalized in patriarchal society

Folksongs based on folktales like Dhoban paniye
jo challi is another very popular song that
narrates painful story of a married low caste
laundress who falls in love with a king .She is
forcefully taken as wife to the palace wherein she
is not welcomed by other queens who are of
higher caste. Ultimately she is poisoned and
washed away in the river only to be found by her
ex-husband who is heartbroken to see her in that

state. This folksong has been sung for ages on
different occasions only to bring out deep rooted
discrimination based on gender and caste in the
society.

Kaali ghagrii payi ke ODhoban paniye jo challi
ye meri so
Pahliya paudi je utri raja bah phadi leyi hei meri
so
Appu bethi palke rani dhoban pandi per bathiye
hei meri so
Pehli pinni kayi dhoban marri mukki gayi hei firi
paniye chi rudai hei teri so.

English translation

Wearing black long skirt O! laundress goes for
bringing water ;I swear
On the very first step the king held her arm and
took her to the palace; I swear
While the queen sits on the bed and makes
laundress sit on the floor: I swear
Eating first sweets offered by the queen she
immediately dies; I swear
And is washed away in a river to be found by her
husband in the end I swear on you!

The song implies that no low caste woman should
even think of marrying someone from higher
caste else she is doomed to die. This also shows
that transgression is allowed for males. They
have the liberty of having extra- marital affairs
but for women parameters are totally different.
There are numerous other songs like Rani Suhi,
Rani Kandi, Gaddan, Bijlo Kandu that bring out
the plight of the women in the society.

Preference for a male child

Songs of religious and devotional content sung on
birth and marriage rituals like sanskar geet,
pakshik, sohar, suhadiyan etc also highlight
preference of the society for a male baby .These
songs also subtly touch upon various
discriminations and tortures that women have to
go through if they do not give birth to a male heir.
They are either abandoned by the husband or
forced to accept their husband's second marriage.

Family pressure and mental harassment is what they go through and can be felt easily in the songs. Songs of ceremonies like sehra, janeu, ghor, sehra, suhag celebrate male rites. This also brings to the light the discrimination prevalent in the society.

Content and textual analysis of Song Four

Love and Hope

This song is a beautiful conversation between mother and daughter, wherein daughter is expressing her pain of separation and the mother is consoling her. This song is extremely popular with women of contemporary times as well as it offers hope and strength to every heart in pain.

Mother asks her daughter that why she is so restless and becoming skinny day by day. Daughter then opens up her heart and is consoled by mother by telling her to be optimistic and hopeful in life.

Amma puchdi sun dihye meri
Dubli itni tu kiya bhali kiya hoi ho
Parli baniya moor je bolyea o ammaji inni meri
nindar gawai ho
Sud le banduko jo sud le shikari joeh moor maari
mukana hoKuthu janda chanrama
Kuthu jande tare ho ho ammaji kuthu jande dila
de sahare ho
Chuppi janda chadrma chuppi jande tare ho o
dhiye lukki jande dila de sahare ho.

English Translation

Mother asks her daughter listen O! my daughter!
Why have you become so skinny ?This peacock
hooting on the hill has disturbed my sleep
Call hunter and we will get this peacock killed
No! we will put it in a cage O Mother!
Why do stars and moon disappear like our loved
ones O mother?
They never disappear they remain in our heart
forever, O my dear daughter!

The song speaks of the love and bonding between mother and daughter. It also speaks of the loneliness and pain of a woman who loses her loved one or deserted by her loved ones. Alone she finds solace in the lap of her mother or mother nature. The song reflects on close bonding of women with the nature.

Content and textual analysis of Song Five

Liberty and Freedom through Songs of Jest and Humor:

In Kangra, a certain types of songs are sung on occasions of marriages when the bridegrooms family arrives at bride's place which is called GALIYAN. Interestingly, this genre of songs provides full liberty and space to women to sing even abusive language to the bridegroom's family in a lighter way. They are called various names by the bride's family and nobody minds it at all. This is an interesting feature where women are provided liberty to give a vent to their pent-up

feelings. Same way when the bridegroom's family is gone as Barat to bride's family there are women who are left behind. These women take full liberty and sing all types of sexually assertive songs claiming liberty and individuality. This may happen in a limited sphere for a limited time but it does provide space and voice to women in a patriarchal society.

Conclusion

These song are a straightforward reflections of social, mental and familial conditions, a point that is sometimes ignored academically. Folksongs are not just cultural truths but strong feminine texts conveying message to the society. The writer condemns women suppression, domestic violence in every ramification. These are not to be treated as mere ethnographic artifacts but stake out an arena of cultural representation from gendered, female perspectives Having a social space set apart from male surveillance appears to have fostered an arena in

which women create and sustain self-representations that privilege women's points of view. Gender based discrimination against the female children is pervasive across the world which is a topic of sociological significance. The best cure to stop all the injustices in the society is to question the mindset of the traditional, patriarchal society and change the age old suppressive, subjugating traditions and rituals of the society. After all this is the first step towards equitable society.

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