

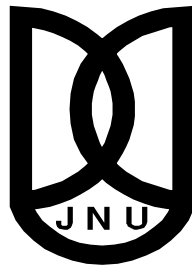
**Women and Agency:
A Study of Folk-Songs from South Haryana**

Thesis submitted to
Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Certificate

This thesis titled “Women and Agency: A Study of Folk-Songs from South Haryana” submitted by Sangeeta Kumari, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree, diploma of any university or institution.

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Declaration by the Candidate

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Acknowledgements

The thesis is an outcome of my love for the folk-songs which I heard from my mother and her sister. The duo own a rich treasure of songs suitable to all situations which made me awestruck. Their aging made me worried (they have started forgetting these songs) which resulted in the decision to work on the topic. Without thanking them and other singers of the songs the task will remain incomplete.

I owe my heartfelt gratitude to my Supervisor Prof. Saugata Bhaduri who allowed me to work on this so called 'non-literary' topic. I am indebted to him for his valuable guidance, encouragement, constructive suggestions and moral support which helped me to complete this task on time. He will always be a source of inspiration, hard work and perfection.

I would like to thank all the teachers of the Centre for English Studies whose valuable suggestions during coursework helped me to evolve as a researcher.

Innumerable thanks are due to Vinay Kumar Singh who always encouraged me and motivated me. His belief in me made me achieve what I have today.

I am thankful to the library staff of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, SAA-JNU, Delnet, JNU, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

This note of thanks would be incomplete without mentioning the name of Dinesh Kumar who always cheered me up whenever I was stressed. He always stood with me through all the stages of my research.

Last but not the least I am thankful to my family members. I acknowledge my debt to my mother Chandro Devi and my father Ramesh Chander for their constant support and belief in me. My siblings Sneh Lata, Dr. Snehsata, Pooja, Rahul and Jyoti and my brother-in-law Anil Kumar had always been my pillars of strength. Without their love and support it wouldn't have been possible for me to complete the task.

(Sangeeta Kumari)

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Introduction

Before proceeding further the researcher would like to clarify the title of the research. By using a seemingly homogenous term ‘folksongs from south Haryana’ the researcher does not want to generalize things by blurring regional, class, caste, gender, and age differences. Such a term is used just for the purpose of simplification as well as for the purpose of differentiating the language of south Haryana from other regions. South Haryana which shares its boundaries with Rajasthan in the south and Delhi in the east is more culturally and linguistically closer to Rajasthan. Grierson, an administrator in the British government conducted the first ever *Linguistic Survey of India* and discovered the language spoken in South Haryana – Ahirwati. The language is spoken in the areas of Mahendergarh, Narnaul, Rewari, Nahar and some parts of Gurgaon. Kallu Bhaat, a folk poet of the area recognizes the villages where the language is spoken through a ragni;

Ahirwal is incredible o brothers, where gods reside

Listen to me o brothers, Kosli, Kanina khas

Dairoli and Nangal, Garhi Kothasi Saharanwas

Gandrala, Behror, Aasiya and Pitharwas

Joria, Nasipur, Neerpur and Rewari (Sudheer Sharma 28).

Ahirwati is named after the dominant caste of the speakers of the area – Ahirs. Grierson considered Ahirwati as a dialect of Rajasthani. Dr. Shivkumar Khandelwal agrees with Grierson upon the naming of the language but finds it closer to Haryanvi. “The area of Ahirwati includes the district of Mahendergarh, the district of Gurgaon, Tehsils of Ballabgarh and Palwal and South part of Jhajjar tehsil of District Rohtak. It is influenced by

Braj in the east and Rajasthani in the west; but from a linguistic perspective it has more characteristics of Haryanvi” (Khandelwal 22). He has divided Haryana into four parts on the basis of language – 1) Bangru and Kauravi 2) Bangru and Punjabi 3) Bangru and Rajasthani 4) Bangru and Braj (ibid 27-33). For him, all languages spoken across Haryana are dialects of Bangru (language spoken in the central Haryana) only. Likewise, modern day linguists too consider Ahirwati as a dialect of Haryanvi. The *People’s Linguistic Survey of India* has called it a dialect of Haryanvi onl

Devi Shankar Prabhar divides it into 8 parts – 1) Bangar 2) Nardak 3) Khadar 4) Bagad 5) Ahirwati 6) Mewat 7) Paar and 8) Delhi Pradesh (Prabhakar 12). Dr. Harisharan Varma elaborates the same and writes, “Paar means the area beyond Yamuna and, Delhi Pradesh already has its own existence. If we remove both these areas from the list, then it seems right to divide Haryana (on the basis of geography and dialects) into six parts” (14).

The concern of the research is not to fix the position of Ahirwati within a particular language community but to study its folksongs. Whether the language has more similarities with Haryanvi or Rajasthani, folksongs sung in the language are much similar to the folksongs sung throughout India. To understand the culture of any country it is important to understand the language of that country as ‘cultural meanings’ exist in the language. But in the context of India the task becomes a difficult one as we do not share one common language. In a situation like this folklore or oral traditions work as a thread or a unifying factor. Though there are differences on the level of geography, rituals, customs etc., the oral traditions follow the same underlying pattern and represent the beliefs of people.

Discussing about folk drama, Habib Tanvir writes,

They all have an epic approach to story-telling in the theatre. Nearly all of them abound in songs, dances, pantomime, improvised repartees, imaginative movement, slapstick comedy, and stylized acting, even acrobatics. Almost all of them usually cover a large canvas in their stories and denote change of location by movement and word of mouth rather than by a change of sets and decor. They often have a sort of stage manager, a comic character, who opens and establishes the play and provides the link scenes (Tanvir 37).

It is next to impossible to trace the origin of folk performance as it has been handed down from one generation to another. It is as old as mankind itself. Bharat Muni has defined drama (literature) as “the pancham Veda (fifth Veda), created by god himself in order to impart instruction in religious behavior to the members of the lower classes who were not allowed access to the other Veda” (quoted in Vatuk 15). But even this fifth Veda was kept out of the reach of the commoners or the lower classes. It was written in Sanskrit which was the language of the so called upper caste elites. So commoners devised their own forms of entertainment which was given the name of folklore or folk narratives. Folksongs are these folk narratives which are performed all over India by its practitioners as “it is an ancient and effective means, perhaps much more than the written tradition, of acquiring, storing and retrieving cultural articulations and a primary source of shared understanding, shared wisdom, shared cognition and world view” (Handoo 67).

Going to the etymological definition, the term ‘folk’ is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word *folc* meaning a people or nation. It is thought to have connections with the Lithuanian word

pulkas meaning multitude or crowd. Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines it as the "great proportion of the members of a people that determines the group character and that tends to preserve its characteristic form of civilization and its customs, arts and crafts, legends, traditions etc. from generation to generation". Similarly New Webster's Dictionary defines it as "people in general, a separate class of people, people as the preservers of culture, especially the large proportion of the members of a society which represents its composite customs, traditions, and mores". Dr. K.D. Upadhyaya defines folk as the so called uneducated and uncultured people away from modern civilization, living in their natural environment and whose living and thinking are controlled by traditional rules (1992: 11).

All these definitions refer towards the "tradition" of uneducated and illiterate people. The research on the folklore was started in the later half of the eighteenth century when philosophers like Johann Gottfried Herder felt the need to collect the folksongs and to study them. He called for volunteers to collect the 'songs of the people'. The Grimm brothers responded to the call and began collecting the folklore of Germany. They just restricted folksongs to past and illiterate people. William Wells Newell echoed the very same European concepts restricting folklore to past, illiterate, and oral. Only with the new turns in the folklore the focus was shifted from antiquity of folk to its contemporaneity (Dorson 1972). Indian folklorist A K Ramanujan also targeted exoticism and romanticism and the idea of folk belonging to the past. While defining folklore Coomaraswamy (1936) traces that folk and classical share a common tradition. A.K. Ramanujan too discusses about the psychological and thematic continuation between classical and folk (1986). For him the distinction between Marga (classical) and Desi (folk) or between great traditions of the reflective many and little traditions of an unreflective and anonymous lot is futile and

unnecessary. Ramanujan writes, “We need to modify terms such as ‘great tradition’ and ‘little tradition’, and to see all these cultural performances as transitive series, a ‘scale of forms’ responding to another, engaged in continuous and dynamic dialogic relations” (1994: 96). It refers towards the intertextual nature of literature where texts become contexts and pretexts for other texts. It brings the classical, the folk and the popular in continuous interaction with each other. Ramanujan argues, “In a largely non-literate culture, everyone—whether rich or poor, high caste or low, professor, pundit or ignoramus, engineer or street hawker—has inside him a largely non-literate subcontinent” (1991: xviii).

Nineteenth century folklore research was marked by extravagant and wild theories of European folklorists which were replaced by a much cautious and restrained mood in 20th century. Dorson (1963) discusses about five schools/ theories of folklore research:

1. Migrational or Comparative Folklore theory emerged from Benfey’s school, which operated with diffusionist assumptions. It believes that the folklore of the world is more or less similar. Everywhere the same motifs are used with certain cultural variations.
2. Anthropological theories were in the beginning preoccupied with evolutionist assumptions. Frazer, Andrew Lang, and Tylor were pioneers who strengthened the theory of polygenesis, putting Victorian England at the acme of civilization. Later anthropological inroads in the domain of folklore could be made possible furthermore due to interests of Franz Boas. Disciples of Boas, such as Ruth Benedict, Alfred Kroeber, Paul Radin and others continued this. M Herskovits and his student Wilham Bascom operated with Malinowski’s anthropological insights

5. Structural school consists of the syntagmatic structural theory of the Russian folklorist Vladimir J. Propp and the paradigmatic structural theory of the French Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. The syntagmatic theory aims at the morphology of folklore. In morphology, structure is described in terms of component parts, their mutual relation and relation with the whole. Propp thus lays emphasis on the description of the phenomena rather than on the discovery of the origin. To do this, components of folklores are put on the linear sequence as constants and variables. Propp's analysis is like grammatical study of a poem rather than aesthetic study of hidden meanings and beauty. Levi-Strauss' paradigmatic analysis is concerned with the latent content for which the linguistic theory of de Saussure is applied. Myth, for Levi-Strauss, is a linguistic code. To decipher it, linguistic theory is a prerequisite. In this scheme, the hidden predominates the apparent, as the method is preoccupied with the latent rather than the manifest.

In India the interest in folklore or folk life was revived by Britishers as an outcome of administrative requirements. At present times the process is a result of new shifts in studies where the well set definitions have got a set back from emerging theories like post modernism and postcolonialism etc. To know the past has become equally important to understanding the present in a better way as "tradition is about the pastness and not just about the past" (Handoo 1). So the definition of folk representing the past or the dead past has been questioned.

Haryana has always been in news for so many wrong reasons like skewed sex ratio, female foeticide, honour killings etc. All these present a very patriarchal picture of Haryana where women are given no voice or choice. But this proposed research tries to present a different

picture of Haryana where within dominant patriarchal culture there exists a subculture where women not only have a voice but they enjoy a private, sub-cultural space, their own world where entry of males is banned, where they not only negotiate with patriarchy but even resist patriarchy or try to subvert it. This is the world of folk-songs.

K.R. Sandhya Reddy in her essay “Women in Indian Folktales” talks about the same sub cultural space and writes “Women have their own songs, customs and rituals in which they have expressed their feelings, emotions, protests, aspirations and desires” (40).

Michel Foucault in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* has written “where there is power, there is resistance” (1978: 95-96). For Foucault power is not something which always works negatively but “what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression” (1980: 119). This assertion seems to be true in the context of Haryanvi women too as the same power which represses them also gives them the agency to express “emotions that are taboo topics in everyday conversations” (Narayan 1986: 56). They express their sexuality, make fun of masculinity and the social structure which is highly patriarchal in nature. The songs not only present a realistic picture of women’s life but also about what it ought to be as most of the times the songs are sung in subjunctive mood. Folk songs are not just about strong “cultural heroes” as is the case with ragni but are also about “strong cultural heroines”. The heroes often eulogized and adored by the mainstream literature get a setback in folk literature where they are not only opposed but questioned as well. These folk-songs show the performative power of gender which defies

social norms and social relations. To counter patriarchy they are not required to fight a battle with arms because the repression is not always direct but ideological. To fight a hegemonic repression they need counter-hegemony and folksongs sung collectively, represent that ideology of women in general.

Indian folk-songs have been studied by literary scholars, historians and anthropologists till date making it a significant part of studies on Folklore. However folk-songs from Haryana or specifically from South Haryana have not been able to attract the attention of literary scholars or anthropologists. The reason behind it could be the representation of Haryana as a patriarchal, uneducated, agricultural state which lacks any serious scholarship. Nowadays scholars have started working on Haryana in the fields of History, Sociology and Politics etc, but in the field of literary studies Haryana still lacks behind. This work tries to trace the rich oral literary heritage of Haryana in the form of folk-songs which were passed from one generation to another.

So much literary work has been done by scholars from a feminist perspective where they try to trace the voice of women's resistance or women's agency in biographies, poems, diaries and other forms of written expression by individual women. These works have undermined the value of voices of ordinary, illiterate women.

I.A. Srivastava who has worked on the portrayal of women in North Indian folksongs has presented a survey of the work being done on folksongs and finds the portrayal of women untouched in folksongs. Mishra (1959) has, admittedly, touched upon women's conditions, but only briefly, and has left many aspects related to women's emotions untouched. Bonnie Wade who has worked on the folksongs by collecting some data from the villages of

Gurgaon district (1971) has emphasized only the wedding songs and the rituals women partake in. Chauhan (1972) and Srivastava (1982), on the other hand, have studied folk songs only in an anthropological and cultural context. Kuldeep (1972) and Upadhyaya (1978) have given only a general view of folk songs and have not dealt with them from the women's point of view. Henry (1976) mentions the names of a few types of women's songs, but he does not give any texts or discuss women's feelings as expressed in these songs. Jain's work (1980) is almost exclusively centered on caiti songs, which are mostly composed by men, even though the text usually describes women's feelings and predicaments. Tewari (1974, 1988) has given some folk songs of women, but he focuses mainly upon those that describe domestic rituals and traditions. Avasthi (1985) gives a good variety of women's folk songs, but his contribution remains restricted to anthologising the songs.. Singh (1983) has made a comprehensive study of Awadhi folk songs, and Tripathi (1962) has done Bhojpuri songs, but they have not studied them from the specific point of women.

Anjali Capila in a conversation with Parsad Bahuguna, the representative of the NGO Parvatiya Jan Kalyan Samiti in Garhwal, when informed him of her intention of working on folksongs of Garhwali women, he replied, "Women are the backbone of Garhwal. Any work on their songs would be truly representative of their lives" (27).

It is clear from the above statement that women's songs and performances are intertwined with their lives. The assertion is true not only of Garhwali songs but songs sung throughout India. These folksongs create a rupture in our system of knowledge, which is made up of historical facts. Folksongs create counter history as they are based on anecdotes and not facts. So many cultures exist simultaneously and folksongs are a means to peep into those

cultures. They show the cultural continuity as “oral/verbal traditions no longer stand in isolation” (Capila 45).

The present study contributes to the literary turn of current academics, by studying the narratives of those who were never heard before by giving them a place in the narratives of resistance. It will help in conserving and preserving the culture which is dying because of urbanization. Apart from this the study also takes folksongs beyond their cultural and religious value and discusses about the potential of these songs to bring change in the society like any other literature. Haryana’s representation as a patriarchal state never allowed scholars to look at the feminist aspect and the subversive roles played by women. Haryanvi women have always been looked down as meek, docile and obedient. Because of Haryanvi language’s status as a non-scheduled language nobody has tried his or her hands on it. Dr.Shankarlal Yadav credits Grierson and calls the recognition of Haryanvi language (Jaatu and Ahiri) “an incredible discovery” (84) but he criticizes Grierson for having a step-brotherly attitude towards the language. “The linguistic survey of Dr. Grierson too has neglected the language. Neither the grammar of the language has been studied properly nor the vocabulary is prepared with serious scholarship” (85). The present study tries to fill the same gap where an attempt is being made to collect the songs to decipher the different dynamics of these narratives so as to theoretically place them in the lineage of universal folk narratives by making them known through translation and analysis.

Working on a non-scheduled language has its own challenges as scholars have to compromise on many levels. It is not possible to find equivalent words in the target language so the researcher faced the inability to put the knowledge of the folk in the target language. The work is a compromise as translation can never provide an exact medium to transmit the

knowledge which exists in a particular language. But like the surf excel advertisement tagline – if stains can bring something good then stains are good – some compromises are well placed as it is the only way to say the unsaid which otherwise will always remain unheard. The subaltern has the voice but how he or she will make it heard to others if not through translation? Also, this work is an antithesis to the age-old prejudiced notion that folksongs are mere sweet melodies of illiterate people signifying the ritualistic aspect of tribal or non-civilized societies. Even revolutionaries like Antonio Gramsci dismissed the folk as mere representations of the unscientific nature of the rural or non-developed societies.

To this effect, the present study translates and analyses folk songs from Haryanvi (Ahirwati) into English. This analysis has been done while keeping the following objectives in mind:

- How folksongs work as a source material to understand women's lives.
- How a sub-culture exists within a dominant culture which provides women the agency to criticize the society and its norms.
- How folksongs pose a threat to the dominant culture as they are subversive in nature.
- Theorizing the humorous aspect of these songs and to recognise the social relevance of these songs within feminism as a theory.
- To look at the changing aspect of these songs and to study what happens to these songs when they come in contact with commercialisation or culture industry and are produced at mass level.

The methodology used to attain the objectives was collecting the songs from the field and to analyze the kind of literary devices used such as metaphors, imagery and symbols to demonstrate how patriarchy is looked upon by women and how they express themselves with

a specific kind of language in the absence of men, how sexuality, which they are not allowed to express otherwise, becomes an open point of discussion. Moreover the study has also involved a comparative analysis of songs sung by women on different occasions, ragnis sung by both males and females, and folksongs recorded in cassettes and produced by the culture industry. An effort has been made by the researcher to trace the transformation of space from folk to popular. Not only this, questions like does the transformation give birth to hybrid cultural forms or does the folk rejuvenate itself by the cassette industry or dies, does the folk welcome the songs recorded on the tapes as their own etc. are at the heart of the research. The work focuses on folk philosophy and not on folk wisdom, which puts the folk in the category of other thinking genres capable of bringing social change and to criticize the society. It not only represents the folk world of women's lives but shows how it also has the capacity to bring change in the existing world view. The efforts of the researcher are to problematize the definitions of great/small traditions and to put folk in the category of mainstream literature.

Two broader areas are discernible as far as research in this field is concerned. Area one includes works being done on performative power /agency of gender and area second is the analysis of folksongs. But my research is a combination of both the areas where I have looked at folk songs from a feminist/ gender perspective. A.K. Ramanujan's translation of a folktale into English titled "The Flowering Tree" has inspired me to use the term 'agency' in the title. A brief summary of the chapters would suggest how the work overrules the traditional model of folk being "repetitive refrains" of "unthinking minds" and counters the reductive approaches to folklore.

Chapter 1: Folksongs as Narratives of Resistance

The chapter investigates the works dealing with the subversive power of performances across cultures and societies. It questions the tendency of ignoring the voices of uneducated, illiterate, lower class, lower caste, and village women and tries to bring their voices in the ambit of resistance literature. If their voices were so unimportant and apolitical what was need for the so called tolerant social reformers like Swami Dyanand and others to silence them?

Chapter 2: Women and Agency: A Study of Folksongs from South Haryana

Laura M. Ahearn's two essays "Agency" (2000) and "Language and Agency" (2001) have been very helpful to make me understand the meaning of agency where she has defined it as a "socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (2001: 112). She has also presented the survey of the work being done on agency which has helped me to understand how different scholars have used the term differently. So much work has been done by scholars on folksongs from across India, but I focus primarily on 'agency' in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Women and/in ragni

The third chapter is based on ragnis which are sung by both males and females and it analyses how women are treated/ mistreated in ragnis, how they are represented and whom they are sung for, i.e. who can be an audience during the performance of these ragnis.

Chapter 4: Folksongs in the market

Richard M. Dorson's book *Folklore and Fakelore* (1976) has proved really insightful while writing the third chapter of this research. This work talks about the human value of folklore and attacks the growing popularization, commercialisation and resulting distortion of folk

materials. It draws a distinction between properly documented oral folklore collected directly in the fields from the singers of the songs and the re-written versions of 'fakelore'. Fakelore is defined as "a synthetic product claiming to be authentic oral tradition but actually tailored for mass edification" (5). This chapter will engage with the question of cross-medium representation, what happens to folksongs when they come out of its original space? It will enquire about the modifications and mutations undergone by folk culture in the industrialised and urbanised world.

Chapter 1

Folksongs as Narratives of Resistance

What is the question here, as I have already said, is the ability to ‘hear’ that which we have not heard before, and to transgress in situating the text or the ‘fragment’ differently. (Pandey 2000: 285).

These unheard melodies are the folksongs which are sung throughout India. Though scholarly work on folksongs was started much earlier in the colonial time period but it never gained so much political importance as it has gained in present times.

Writing about the history of 19th century Britain, Crosby states, “man was constituted as subject of historical processes, whereas questions about women were framed in terms of their nature, which was, by definition, unchanging, and hence to extent ahistorical” (Roy 1) Not only women but their art forms too were considered to be ahistorical and unchanging. Challenging the notion of non-historicity of primitive or tribal societies, Romila Thapar writes, “Every society has a concept of its past and therefore no society can be called ahistorical” (quoted in Jain 1).

What Romila Thapar has said about history in general seems is true about women in particular. If a society can’t exist without having a concept of its past, how could women be labelled ahistorical, who are part and parcel of the same society or to say it otherwise, who form half of the same society? There is a need to break the myth surrounding the non-historicity and unchanging nature of women and their art forms. Folksongs – one such art form – are always considered to be the property of women representing the unchanging nature of their lives. They are considered to be a part of the tradition which is always static

and fixed in time. But there is a need to understand that “tradition is not a positive discourse but a reflective and reflexive one. In it, and through it, societies explore the limits of their histories, and replay the points of tension in these histories. It is a meta-discourse, which allows the past to cease to be a “scarce resource” and allows it to become ...a renewable resource. Tradition is another zone of contestation though not about selves (as with gender) or about forms (as with genre), but about temporal boundaries themselves” (quoted in Appadurai, Korom and Margaret J. Mills: 22). So there is a need to bring folksongs out of the fixity and to understand their importance in day to day life as well as in changed social scenario. They not only work as mirror to the society but are also capable of bringing change to the society and its meta-narratives.

As the songs are carriers of culture or vantage points to a particular culture, they help us to understand the idea of society and its structures, social relations, the idea of maleness, femaleness etc. Though the songs are part of culture and abide by the norms of culture yet they provide resistance to the dominant culture. “The same songs suggest how dominant ideologies are not merely complied with, accommodated, and reinforced but also resisted and interrogated” (Jassal 2012: 2)

Discussing about folksongs as harbinger of social change Bascom writes, “Despite the fact that verbal art serves to continue and stabilize culture, it has also been used for the purpose of political propaganda and social change” (Quoted in Handoo 79). But this use of folklore for political propaganda was not recognized until 1960’s. Bascom further elaborates, “The function of verbal art as an instrument of social and political change...was apparently not discovered until 1961” (ibid). He is right as Richard Dorson for the first time highlighted the political use of verbal arts in 1960’s.

Dorson in his study elaborates upon the trend of associating folk with terms like ‘bygones’, ‘popular antiquities’, ‘survivals’, ‘unspoiled’, ‘simple’, ‘pastoral’, ‘close to nature’ and pejorative terms like ‘superstitious’, ‘illiterate’, ‘backward’, ‘primitive’ etc. (1976: 33). The assertion gets verified when we study writers like Hartland, Alfred Nutt and James Child and Cecil Sharp who defined folksong as “the science of tradition” (Hartland) “product of the countryside” and “remoteness, isolation, poverty and the nobility of heart engendered by a life close to the earth” (quoted in Dorson 1976: 36)

Taking these definitions as final would be an injustice to writers who have studied folk not as object belonging to the past but as a living and vigorous tradition. Donald Mckelvie is one such writer for whom folk is a “living activity of a given community” and “not as a body of knowledge fixed in time, or as a corpus of survivals which doesn’t become folklore until it has reached a certain degree of antiquity” (quoted in Dorson 1976:49). He has studied the ‘here’ and ‘now’ of folklore. Mehta has warned us of the dangers of considering folk to be belonging to the past and asserted “let us not consider folk-songs as wild cry or a pseudo-expression of the rustic muse, it is an energizing force, equally useful in times of war and peace” (Mehta 51)

Similarly Victor Turner doesn’t study performance in its fixity. He doesn’t go by Milton Singer’s idea of performance merely casting light on the ways cultural themes and values are communicated but for him cultural performances are active agencies of change “representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting designs for living” (24). His work is an enquiry into the performative power of gender. It tells how “performance is not just a reflection or expression of the social system or the cultural configuration, but also a critique,

direct or veiled, of the social life it grows out of, an evaluation (with lively possibilities of rejection) of the way society handles history” (22). It advocates the idea of performance having an active agency to change.

Sherry Ortner’s argument “human beings make society just as society makes them” (Quoted in Jassal, 15) is much similar to Turner’s idea. The relationship of songs and society is reciprocal. So “whether admired or despised, the folk represented a world different from the centers of power, wealth, progress, industry and intellectual and political activity in the metropolis” (Dorson 1976: 33).

So the task of modern day scholars working on folklore is unique as Dorson has rightly stated, “Historians write history of the elite, the successful, the visible, literary scholars study elitist writings and the critics of the art confine their attention to the fine arts. But the folklorist, almost alone among his or her scholarly brethren, is talking to the non-elite, folk. His perspective is directed to the contemporaneity rather than the obsolescence of folklore, to the conception that folklore reflects the ethos of its own ways, not of an era long past” (1976:117).

Though scholars abroad engaged themselves with the contemporaneity and political use of folklore yet scholars in India busied themselves with tracing the rich cultural heritage through folklore. Folksongs sung by women were considered to be an unconscious act of singing having some cultural and religious values and nothing else. The present chapter tries to study the resistance inherent in folksongs. It tries to present a different picture of society where these unconscious acts of singing are placed within the mainstream literature which is capable of bringing social and political change.

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* proposes the theory of fluidity of gender where power lies in the performance. She devises ways for women to protest and contest within a given framework. She writes, “If gender itself is naturalized through grammatical norms, as Monique Wittig has argued, then the alteration of gender at the most fundamental epistemic level will be conducted, in part, through contesting the grammar in which gender is given” (xix). That’s what women in general and Haryanvi women in particular do through folksongs. They contest the gender on the level of language by composing songs which only women could understand.

“Just as metaphors lose their metaphoricity as they congeal through time into concepts, so subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening cliches through their repetition and, most importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where “subversion” carries market value” (Butler xxi). Folksongs too face the same problem when they become part of market. It’s better to keep them within the context.

Raheja and Gold, who have studied the folksongs of Rajasthan very minutely, observe that songs and laughter disrupt the stereotypes of female subjectivity based on an unrelieved victimhood. They find women’s oral traditions stressing “the desirability of disrupting patrilineal unity in favour of a stress on conjugality” (1994: 20). So the stereotypes and gender norms which consider women submissive and controlled are at stake in folksongs. They further argue that women’s songs from north India or especially from Rajasthan not only do away with the patriarchal construct of rural Indian women as meek and silent but also discuss the complexity in the patriarchal social structure. The duo establishes how the inherent ambivalence/ambiguity in the women’s songs is, arguably, strategic on the part of women.

Kandiyoti too discusses about the same strategic contestation when “women strategize within a set of concrete constraints” which is called “patriarchal bargain” – “the set of rules and scripts regulating gender relations, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined and renegotiated” (1988: 275). Similarly Bennett defines these strategies used by women as “woman’s own political motivation” (quoted in Derne 1994a: 220). Feminists might find problems with women behaving politely and in a docile manner in front of their husbands but Bennett considers it a means to bargain with patriarchy. Women use “sex, as a means to have children and as a means to influence their husbands in their favour” (ibid 219). Women who otherwise have very less say in decision making, through these strategies make themselves heard. As I have mentioned elsewhere that the domination is not coercive but hegemonic in nature so they need counter hegemony. These strategies work as counter-hegemony for women.

Taking the idea of resistance further, Neema Caughran discusses about the subcultural space of *kathas* and rituals. “Special rituals are *kathas* and become important and rare occasions for women to come together to share expressive genres of story and song. These expressions, although upholding the dominant ideologies about marriage, paradoxically may allow storyteller and her audience to communicate other messages” (1999:516). These other messages could be available in euphemism, innuendo, and anonymity which require decoding. Where oppression occurs, those who are subordinate have need of such communication which is not recognized by the powerful. Radner and Lanser state that the “monocultural” or dominant groups assume that their own interpretations are the only possible ones. Such arrogance makes them unable to read ambivalent coding in the texts (Caughran 1999:516-17). The “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1990) help women to form

camaraderie to fight oppression. Even if they are not able to bring substantial change, at least they come together and vent out their anger. She also emphasises on the need to read these texts within a particular context. Women singing the stories of Shiva and Parvati may have different connotations than men. So there is a need to decode the songs and the performance and to look at the hidden meaning of the transcripts. Once the decoding is done, folksongs become the most important narratives of resistance.

The idea of ambivalence is further elaborated by Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser in the essay “The Feminist Voice: Strategies of Coding in Folklore and Literature” where they discuss about the coding techniques. The essay has two purposes, “to offer a particular model that may illuminate certain aspects of women’s productions, and to create a discussion between disciplines in order to evolve feminist theories that account for both literary and folkloristic texts” (413). To elaborate upon the point they write, “It is evident that in the creations and performances of women-and indeed of other oppressed groups-one can often find covert expressions ideas, beliefs, experiences, feelings and attitudes that the dominant culture – and perhaps even the oppressed group itself – would find disturbing or threatening if expressed in more overt forms” (ibid). That’s why most of the times the vocabulary used by women is not understood by men.

The writers offer a provisional typology of formal strategies of coding in women’s culture, illustrating these with examples from both folklore and literature. Although they have described these strategies separately and sequentially, yet many instances of coding combine two or more of them (Radner & Lanser 415). Appropriation: the term refers to “coding strategies that involve adapting to feminist purposes forms or materials normally associated with male culture” (ibid). In Haryana one such art form is ragni which is associated with

males. There is a need to appropriate the ragni for feminist purposes. Unfortunately the opposite is seen to be happening since the advent of culture industry where female performers of ragni become the objects of male gaze and even the folksongs of women are appropriated by males. Parody could be another way of appropriation. Parody of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* could be seen in folksongs or folk practices or performances.

Juxtaposition: The writers elaborate the meaning of juxtaposition through the example of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* where Buddy Willard's mother braids a rug out of strips of wool from Mr. Willard's old suits and uses it as a kitchen mat. The writer understands the intention behind the decision and writes, "And I knew that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to flatten out underneath his feet like Mrs. Willard's kitchen mat" (quoted in Radner & Lanser 417). Mrs. Willard has not only appropriated man's cultural objects (husband's suits) for her own use (kitchen mat) but has also juxtaposed the desire of husband to oppress the wife. A woman who has no doubt devoted much time and care to cleaning her husband's clothes is now free to grind them (and, symbolically, him) into the muck under her feet" (ibid).

The husband would never be able to understand the encoded message behind his wife's decision to utilize the rag of his clothes as kitchen mat. In fact he would be happy and praise her for saving some money. "Because context can powerfully affect interpretation, the ironic arrangement of texts, artifacts, or performances is a major technique of feminist coding. An item that seems unremarkable or unambiguous in one environment may develop quite tendentious levels of meaning in another" (Radner & Lanser 416). The performance is meaningless without the context, the context whose vocabulary only women can understand.

Distraction: The term is used to “describe strategies that drown out or draw attention away from the subversive power of a feminist message” (417). “Usually distraction involves creating some kind of “noise” interference, or obscurity that will keep the message from being heard except by those who listen very carefully or suspect the message is there” (418). This distraction could be seen in folksongs as well where women start laughing or speaking in between the song as they themselves know it but create disturbance for others so they can’t hear it.

Indirection: It includes “many ways in which, as Emily Dickinson put it, one can “tell all the truth but tell it slant” (quoted 419). The writers further divide indirection into three categories – “metaphor, impersonation, and hedging” (419). Metaphor is an important aspect of oral literature. For example while performing *khodiya* in one of the songs, women use the metaphor of big iron needle which stands for penis. Similarly Lila Abu Lughod (discussed elsewhere) speaks of Bedouin women who use the metaphor of finger for male penis. Impersonation and substitution is the very breath of folklore. Folksongs, most of the times are sung in the third person narrative. Since folksongs are nobody’s personal composition so they use the third person narrative to represent the common wishes, desires and struggles of women. Sometimes particular characters like Ragbir, Phulam Dey, Bimla, etc. are used by women in their folk songs across Haryana.

A third kind of indirection is called hedging which “encompasses a range of strategies, most common in verbal texts, for equivocating about or weakening a message: ellipses, litotes, passive constructions, euphemisms, qualifiers” (420). Some linguists have called them as “women's language” or “language of the powerless” (ibid).

Trivialization: Trivialization is that mode or genre which is considered to be insignificant or trivial by the dominant culture. What could be more trivial for the educated males than the genre of folksongs itself? For them it is just mindless giggling of some women. When I told my father about my research ideas he undermined it and said wasn't there anything else I could have worked on. He thought a student of my caliber is simply wasting the precious time by getting engaged with such a research topic. May be women themselves are responsible for the trivial status of folksongs? Whenever they are asked about their expressive genres they simply dismiss them by saying "Oh, we're just gossiping" or "That was only woman-talk" (421). That could be a strategy of women to continue participating in such genres and to keep it unpolluted from male interference. Once they proclaim it trivial or unimportant, men stop taking interest in it as it makes them effeminate to care about women's genres. Humour too is an important form of trivialization. By calling some songs humorous women want men to overlook the subversive potential of those songs.

Incompetence: Some women use incompetence as an excuse to escape household chores. "Examples abound of women who simply do not cook, sew, knit, and so forth, on the grounds of inability. The upshot may be outsiders' pity or scorn, but incompetence is usually not regarded as culpable" (421). Women in folksongs from Haryana use this technique a lot. In one of the songs, the husband asks the woman to bring the food in the fields. She refuses on the account of not knowing the way to the fields.

I am going the fields o darling; bring the food in the fields

Neither do I know your fields, nor do I know the way, come home and have food.

The ambiguity/ambivalence not only lies in the text of these songs but is very much part of the performative space. Though most of the times these song performances take place at a safe distance from the dominating and controlling male gaze, yet they are addressed to men. Prem Chowdhry writes, "Occupying an almost autonomous space outside the male presence, most of them are not to be heard or viewed by them. Yet often they are sung addressing the men and in close proximity to men. The lurking presence of men in the periphery is not obvious or acknowledged by either of them. This ambiguity in relationship to the male presence, or rather private-public space allows a full and frank expression of women's desires and I would venture to suggest perhaps affords them greater pleasure" (2005:113).

Lila Abu Lughod's article "Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women" talks about the relationship between power and resistance which helps us to understand the ideological or hegemonic structure of patriarchy, and talks about how unlikely forms of resistance, like folksongs, are helpful in subverting the power relations. She discusses different means of resistance used by Bedouin women to counter patriarchy (1990: 43);

1). Sexually segregated women's world where women enact all sorts of minor defiance on daily basis, of the restrictions imposed on them by the elders or males of the family. Though this segregation is discriminatory yet they use it as a means to form female bonding. They often collude to hide knowledge from men like secret trips to healers or visits to friends and relatives. They even smoke secretly. In a way they have a "room of their own" which is unknown to men.

these forms of resistance indicate that one way power is exercised in relation to women is through a range of prohibitions and restrictions which they both embrace, in their support for the system of sexual segregation, and resist, as suggested by the fact that they fiercely protect the inviolability of their separate sphere, that sphere where the defiance takes place (1990: 43).

The space which is provided to them by patriarchy is used against patriarchy.

- 2). Bedouin girl's and women's resistance to marriage – Though it is the affair of the male members of the family to arrange marriages yet actual marriage arrangements involve mothers and female relatives. Sometimes mothers cancel the marriages fixed for their daughters, yet such cases are witnessed very rarely. It doesn't mean that women remain silent and accept the fate of their daughters. They sing songs of resistance at the time of wedding, songs which taunt the boy's family with the suggestion that their daughter was more worthy of an officer than that person. Even unmarried girls don't remain silent about their feelings regarding marriage.
- 3). Sexually irreverent discourse – women make fun of men and mankind. They seem only too glad when men fail to live up to the ideals of autonomy and manhood, the ideals on which their alleged moral superiority and social precedence are based, especially if they fail as a result of sexual desire. To strengthen her argument, Abu Lughod narrates a folktale where a man is cuckolded by the younger wife but foolishly rewards her and punishes the obedient, senior wife. The tale told here suggests that men are fools whose desires (sexual) override their piety and undermine their overt demands that women be proper and chaste. The tale attempts to subvert the idea of male's control over female's

sexuality. Such resistances also show irreverence towards mark of manhood or masculinity.

Abu Lughod cites another reference where the birth of a girl is celebrated over a boy. When she interviewed one pregnant woman and asked about her preference for the child, the woman replied “You see, the male has no womb. He has nothing but a little penis, just like this figure of mine (laughingly wiggling her finger in contemptuous gesture). The male has no compassion. The female is tender and compassionate” (1990: 46). It is interesting to see how male genitals are represented as a sign of ‘lack’ the lack of womb. The biological difference which makes them the “second sex” in the eyes of males, actually empowers them or their position.

4). Oral lyric poetry – Abu Lughod considers it to be the most important of the subversive means. Women express, through this poetry or songs, the sentiments radically different from their day to day language conversations. This poetry carries the sentiments that violate the codes of morality, honour and modesty.

To conclude, Abu Lughod writes, “We should learn to read in various local and everyday resistances the existence of a range of specific strategies and structures of power. Attention to the forms of resistance in particular societies can help us become critical of partial or reductionist theories of power” (1990: 53).

Kuumba who has worked on African-American women’s resistance finds cultural performances capable of social change. Culture which is a ‘way of life or living’ represents the power dynamics and social hierarchies of a society so “cultural is political” (112). “A society’s cultural symbols, performance traditions and expressive arts can be used as tools

through which subjugated groups exert political agency, especially when other forms of activism and movement participation are blocked” (Kuumba 116).

African women’s consciousness is not just a by product of the patriarchal system but of racism as well. In such extreme situations they utilize culture and its expressions “as a progressive force in their efforts to facilitate liberation from various forces of oppression. African and African diasporan women’s resistance cultures have structural and symbolic components that have lasted through generations and continue to oppose structures and processes of racist, patriarchal, classist and heterosexist domination” (Kuumba 120).

Scholars like Max Luthi and Zipes too have talked about the transformative power of folklore. Zipes writes, “while representing a monarchial, patriarchal and feudal society, the magic and miraculous serve to rupture the feudal confines and represent the conscious and unconscious desire of lower classes to seize power” (quoted in Handoo 79).

So the folk, which is a repository of people belonging to the lower strata, is not just a means of entertainment but of opposition as well. The performance gives people power to perform the characters of authority with sarcasm. Dario Fo, an Italian playwright and performer, wrote his plays in the form of the folk tradition of Italy – Commedia del arte. In *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* he uses farce to create the carnivalesque impact of folk. Through the character of madman he can criticize each and every authorial figure of the society, be it church, police, doctors or journalists. Similarly in the folk performance of *Ramayana – Ramlila*, the character of Nakli is given the voice to pass judgments on the godliness of Ram and others. Dr. Subhash Chander discusses how lower caste people used ragni as a means to empower themselves. “Art provided respect to those people who otherwise were discarded by the

society. The artists who were sidelined in real life became heroes on the stage. The so called big chaudaries, in the darkness of night, came to see these performances and couldn't stop themselves from dancing on these ragnis" (11).

Huizinga talks about the element of "play" in the folksongs where play is defined as "an activity outside of ordinary life that is not serious despite the player's intense involvement, that takes place in a delimited area or space where non-players are kept at a distance and serves as a mechanism for social groupings" (1995:13). The non-players are not just males, it could be women as well. In modern times educated women too have kept themselves away from these performances which have resulted into lack of social groupings. Earlier all women leaving aside their social status (mother-in-law, daughter-in-law) would participate in the singing which formed camaraderie, even if for a limited time.

The gendered spaces provided to women through folksongs empower them to develop their own rituals, to have, as it were, a "room of one's own" (Woolf 1929). These rituals or the gendered spaces further help women to formulate a theory of resistance. I. Srivastava too laments over the dearth of work available in English on the portrayal of women in north Indian folksongs. "How a woman is portrayed in women's songs and what desires, wishes, and aspirations she cherishes, what frustrations and injustices she suffers, is a subject that has received little or no attention in the literature" (Srivastava, I. 271).

To fill the gap his study focuses on the songs that depict women's wishes, feelings, emotions, unfulfilled desires, and reactions (271). His work is a "critical analysis of the folk songs that deal with women's common wishes, unexpressed emotions, unfulfilled desires, hopes, disappointments, and their reactions to their social environment. The portrait of woman as

depicted in these songs is often at variance with the conventional stereo- type of an obedient, acquiescent, and conformist woman that is conjured up in one's mind" (269).

Based on women's emotions Srivastava divides the songs into four categories (272).

1. Songs of the female deities
2. Ceremonial songs related to birth and wedding ceremonies
3. Seasonal and festive songs
4. Songs connected with chores

On any occasion the number of songs sung for female deities is anytime higher than the songs sung for male deities. The reason could be that the goddess being female can understand women's position in a better way. In these songs women express their wishes in the hope that these will be granted by the goddess, and with that their lives would be fulfilled. These songs are sung on all auspicious occasions before any other songs.

It is very ironical that one woman asks the other female to give her many male members. A woman can't imagine her life without males in society. Brother is more important than the husband. Prem Chowdhry too discusses about the importance a brother has been assigned in the society. A woman without a brother is considered a burden on the society and her condition is worse than a widow's.

Rand te va jis ke marjan bhai,

Khasam te aur bhi ker le (Chowdhry 1990: 270).

The word *rand* here stands for two things – a widow and a prostitute. A woman whose husband has died is called by the same name. It means that a widow is no better than a prostitute as there is a possibility of her having relations with other men. The above saying refutes the claims of a widow being called a *rand* (widow) because there is a possibility of her getting married again. Husbands could be replaced with other husbands but not brothers.

I.A. Srivastava further elaborates upon the songs sung at the time of marriage. The songs sung in the girl's house are called *banni*, *banri* or *bandadi*, and the songs sung in the boy's house are called *banna*, *bara* or *bandada*. The songs are not just about the ceremonies and preparations of the marriage but they are also about the journey of the girl and the boy from childhood to adulthood. The songs sung in the girl's house register the pain caused by separation. In one of the songs "the mother woefully asks herself how she will bear the pain of separation from the daughter whom she has brought up with tender and loving care. She reminisces how she used to feed her daughter with fresh milk and grapes. She is now sad because her daughter is going away to another family, and she worries who will now take care of her daughter. Had she known before how painful this separation would be, she would have eaten the poisonous seeds of *dhatura* (the thorn apple) in order to kill herself, or would have had an abortion done to avoid this pain" (277).

In the songs a girl is not represented as docile, meek and submissive but a bold woman having her own voice. Though she doesn't have any say in choosing a husband for herself but if she doesn't like the boy she can blame her parents and express her displeasure. In south Haryana too such songs are in abundance.

In one of the songs she complains to her grandfather, father, uncle and others, why they have chosen a dark husband for her? In another song the girl wants to meet her future husband before marriage, and all the family members suggest her different ways.

For I.A. Srivastava women's folk songs are a kind of safety valve meant to provide an outlet through which they can express their resentment against the social order. "Anything, however unacceptable it may be in real life, finds an acceptable outlet in the folk songs. It is through folk songs that women give vent to their passions, their frustrations, their anger, and their love. It is through them that they voice their grievances and show their hurt" (283).

Smita Tiwari Jassal, who too has worked on the folksongs of UttarPradesh, has dealt with the issue of gender and agency in folksongs. Her work is the first of its kind which presents a very theoretical understanding of women's issues and their representation in folk songs. The work being an ethnographic study of folksongs sung primarily by lower caste women formulates the complexity of gender and power relations. For Jassal, what makes the songs so significant is not their direct addressal to issues but rather their hinting and suggesting at themes. The songs offered the ethnographer an entry into the everyday cultures of marginalized groups who have rarely been the focus of systematic analytical enquiry. Chandra Talpade Mohanty finds the book very informative offering insights into caste, gender and the workings of power in agrarian political economies of North India.

Not only this the book classifies songs into different types on the basis of occasion on which they are sung, and investigates how humour is used in folksongs to subvert patriarchy, how marriage becomes a war between 'wife givers' and 'wife takers' how abusive/satirical language is used in songs at marriage time for taking the daughter away from her parent's

house. The book also gives information about the folksongs where women claim equal shares in the parental property and when they are not given the same, they criticize them.

The book has presented songs of rituals, of ceremonies, of labourers working in the field or women doing household chores. The issues discussed largely in the book are caste, gender, labour, agrarian relations and the complex workings of power which are not only strengthened but questioned through folksongs (Jassal 4). The following song recorded and documented by her is an example of the same:

This neem seed was a spirited one, beloved.

When the seed began to grow,

Father-in-law was my protector.

When the neem seed began to fruit,

Senior brother-in-law became my caretaker.

When the neem seed began to ripen,

Younger brother-in-law took charge.

When the neem seed was ready to drop,

Husband dear took control (Jassal 9).

For her, songs not only reflect women's "subaltern consciousness" (ibid) but also provide space "for the emergence of women's critical consciousness" (9) which empowers them to question the status quo.

Why did you get me married?

Dumped me here in Buxar.

Handed me like a cow, to be tied up, why did you, O Father?

First, a groom so aged.

Then, a home so impoverished.

Third, a magician you found for me, why did you, O Father? (Jassal 5)

When a girl is given into marriage, she is not just married to the boy but to the entire family of the boy. This practice of giving a girl into marriage to a whole family makes her subordinate not just to the males of the house but to elderly women as well (especially mother-in-law and sister-in-law).

This subordination of women makes them voiceless but slowly they learn how to bargain with patriarchy. Steve Derne rightly observes, “while culture is a process of domination, it is not uncontested. While the powerful are often able to transform their power into status and esteem, subordinates are sometimes able to challenge the dominant culture” (1994a: 218). The customs and traditions do not go uncontested. Though migration of women after marriage is a custom which is not questioned by everyone, yet women through their songs question the arbitrariness of the custom. The *gali* songs, sung during wedding ceremonies are an example of the same. When the daughter is given into marriage, the “wife-givers” (Jassal 1) sing abusive songs “calculated to assault the ears of the wife-takers” (ibid). The songs are not sung just to create a humorous effect but they are much political in nature. By abusing the males they criticize patriarchy and male behaviour. They can’t say or do much, so through songs they vent out their anger and frustration. Jassal writes, “Veiled animosity toward the extended family for taking away a beloved daughter pours forth in finely orchestrated ritual abuse” (ibid).

Kirin Narayan discusses about the necessity to study the relationship between folklore and social change, which was earlier laid down by Ramanujan and Blackburn in *Another Harmony*. They have stated, “If...folklore must be studied in all its forms, we should not neglect the most contemporary. How does it respond to the urbanization, mechanization, and cash economy that are reshaping Indian society (or at least large segments of it)?” (quoted in Narayan 1993:177) Similarly Narayan questions the colonial tendency of equating folk with “bounded, authentic and unchanging materials” (1993: 197). Hence there is a need to view songs in the context to measure their relevance for both the performer as well as the interpreter (ibid). The context will help to understand how folklore is revived to speak to changing social realities in India.

Folklore even in the most ordinary way, records social change, both positively as well as negatively. The words like train, steamers, money etc. are used much in the folk songs. “The song reflects on the changes colonization has accentuated, but rather than using “experience distant” (Geertz 1983) “capitalism,” “world system,” or “exploitation,” the impact forces is painfully localized in lived experience” (Narayan 1993:191. Songs also depict the positive aspect of social change like education, westernization, technological advancement, women’s wish to participate in politics, etc. Women express how they don’t want to be married to an illiterate farmer but an educated man who would allow them to roam around the world in a motor car. Indira Gandhi, who became a role model for most of the women, became a subject matter of the songs of Haryanvi women (discussed in detail in chapter 2). So folk is not just about the past and the pastness. It is a language, an expression of the lived reality. Whenever the experience or the lived reality changes, folksongs too change.

Narayan agrees with other scholars on folksongs being capable of social change but she warns us against going into easy conclusions. To say women have an agency which they express through folksongs would be an easier way of saying it. So there is a need to investigate the limits of the agency, in whose presence they can exercise it and who really can exercise it. “The political impact of folklore cannot be considered just through texts, but must involve a careful consideration of the social location and subjectivities of its performers” (1993:81) There is a need “to pay closer attention to the subject positions associated with particular forms of folklore, whether in the village, the town, or the city” (ibid: 199). “To unproblematically associate “the folk” with “resistance” is to deny the ambiguity and complexity of actual people and situations” (ibid).

On similar grounds David Hopkin traces the development of folklore and finds modern folklore more performance based than being object-oriented. Folk narratives stand in opposition to the “single-stranded narrative emanating from the “hegemonic centres of knowledge”, such as universities and schools” (221). If we don’t consider the performative aspect of folklore then the song (whether it is sung in the courtyard of the house or in the presence of mainly men) won’t make any difference. The material of the folk almost remains the same, only the space changes.

Rachelle H. Saltzman discusses about the strategic exclusion of women from folklore theory as it has always “tended to privilege male informants and masculine forms of expressive culture, even when women and their lore are examined” (548). In states like Haryana (which has a rich history of women’s folklore) the only recognized form of folklore which is known to others is ragni. The reason behind this exclusion and silencing of women’s voice is the same patriarchal thinking where masculine forms of expressive culture are considered to be

more authentic. Women's genres are assigned low cultural status for their simplicity and easy narrative technique. Female lives are often considered to be unpolitical and self-referential lacking any serious world-view and unworthy of serious academic attention.

Rosan A. Jordan and F. A. de Caro too discuss about folklore having "a dearth of interest in women and their lives until recently" (501). Claire Farrer comments: "The general trend... has been to rely on data from women for information about health, some charms, some games, and various beliefs and customs but in other areas to use women informants only when men informants were unavailable... When a collector had a choice between stories told by a man or as told by a woman, the man's version was chosen" (quoted in Jordan and de Caro 501). Women were never considered to be a political category whose folklore could bring some change in the current social status.

However, modern times have witnessed the shift from women's folksongs being unworthy of attention to they constituting an important literary genre. "In recent years there has been a more profound realization that there is indeed much women's folklore, that women may use the same folklore that men use in quite different ways, and that women may use and transmit folklore in contexts very different from those of the male members of the same cultural groups, though in the past folklorists have been more likely to observe the male contexts. This realization has a potentially powerful impact for folklore studies generally in calling greater attention to the significance of contextual factors in folklore usage" (509).

Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, after doing extensive research on the condition of North Indian women, reach the conclusion that life conditions of rural women are very bad. This is so ironic that around 80 percent of Indian population lives in villages but the dominant

viewpoint is that of urban, educated women. Nobody cared to know what the larger part of population thought. While tracing the history of women's question and representation in the late 19th and early 20th century, the upper caste woman or the "bhadramahila" is most written about. She is differentiated from the "common woman" or the "peasant woman" through a series of dichotomies (Jassal 9-10). The common women are unpaid labourers (household work as well as work in the fields) where they have no control over their production. So their issues revolve around the same household concerns like what to cook, whether to cook or not and how to run the family etc.? All these concerns are well placed in their songs as well. They could be uneducated but they don't lack a view point.

Madhu Kishwar's work "Yes to Sītā, No to Ram: The Continuing Hold of Sītā on Popular Imagination in India" discusses about the use of Sita in songs as a subversive means to resist patriarchy. Kishwar writes, "It has taken me a long time to understand that Indian women are not endorsing female slavery when they mention Sita as their ideal, Sita is not perceived as being a mindless creature who meekly suffers maltreatment at the hands of her husband without complaining. Sita as an ideal doesn't mean endorsing a husband's right to behave unreasonably and a wife's duty to bear insults graciously. She is seen as a person whose sense of Dharma is superior to and more awe inspiring than that of Rama – someone who puts even *maryada purushottam* Rama – the most perfect of men to shame" (26).

Linda Hess's article "Rejecting Sita" another work on appropriation of the character of Sita is an inevitable flow of time and change where people manage both to cling to norms and to alter them. It talks about the retelling of Sita's story in folksongs from female perspectives. How Rama, the perfect lord becomes a traitor in female's folksongs. She writes "if patriarchy has used the Sita myth to silence the women, the village women have picked up the sita myth

to give themselves a voice. They have found a suitable mask in the myth of Sita, a persona under which they can speak up themselves, speak of the day to day problems and critique patriarchy in their own fashion” (22). Hess further talks about the observation made by Manushi in Uttar Pradesh, “Though women have often been excluded from the tradition of written literature, their works devalued or deliberately lost; they have always been chief though anonymous participants in a very rich oral tradition, expressing their experience and point of view through songs and stories... thus representing a collective creativity” (quoted in Hess 20).

To add to the observation, it is not just their collective creativity but their collective understanding of things as well. They retell stories differently than men. Though Sita is not a rebel in their retelling, yet she could speak of her suffering. Her Rama is not an ideal husband but a traitor.

Anjali Capila who has worked on the folksongs of Garhwal Himalayas writes, “A very important function often is to provide an outlet for suppressed emotions and desires which cannot be expressed in prose, in ordinary language. For example, whenever there is injustice and oppression, the victims find some solace in expressing anguish in the form of folk songs. In this way songs not only reflect an expressive music form but also are indicators of changing socio-political variables” (31).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett finds folklore as a discipline on the verge of disappearance as folklorists find it more catchy to associate themselves with allied disciplines. “We are experiencing “topic drift” (folklore and computers, urban folklore, folklore and television) as

the gap widens between the name of the field and what it now signifies” (282). Further she discusses about the transformations folklore has gone through.

Eighteenth-century statistics produced what Uli Linke calls “administrative folklorists,” who “sought to enhance the governing power of single German states” by surveying regions and producing “detailed ethnographic studies of whole communities” (Linke 1990:119). In contrast, philology produced the “romantic folklorists,” with whom we have tended to identify the history of the discipline in the United States. They collected and interpreted texts identified with a lost and recovered national heritage in the service of a politically unified nation (286).

In India folklore started with the same “administrative folklorists” (Britishers) who used it to make a dictionary of local language and culture so they could rule them in a better way. In response to that “romantic folklorists” used the same folk to decolonize themselves and to unite people (as was done by Rabindranath Tagore). So the early disciplinary formation of folklore was used “as an ideological tool of either social reform or resistance to foreign domination, and as a practical instrument of administration at home and abroad” (286).

The author also discusses how folklore, when it is part of one culture, is criticized by the people, given the name of vulgarity and shame etc. In 19th century India the reform movements tried to “sanitize the janana” (Charu Gupta) by censoring certain genres of women songs as “they were unworthy of being sung by ‘chaste’ Hindu women” (Jassal 4). The new ways of life were given priority over the folk ways of life. In the context of India we see how folk performances are replaced by ladies’ sangeet – a more modern way of celebration. But after a point of time the same vulgarity is missed by people where they find the new ways artless, artificial and formal. What is responsible behind this approach is not

only people's fascination with new ways of living but controlling the subversive means of performances at a given time. It was men only who discouraged their daughters from participating in women's gatherings (under the name of illiteracy, obscenity or what not). Now also the same men find problems with ladies' sangeet and other ceremonies. The problem is not with the performance but with the space. Any space which consists only of women poses a threat to their position. What men are afraid of is not songs but women getting together, singing and laughing.

Paul Douglas offers a way out to face the crisis – by looking at folklore from the grassroots and from the “Top-down questions” (83) where the concern is about how other disciplines look at folklore? How the editors of good journals look at folklore and many more like this. Most of the times it is looked upon as an unacademic and nonsensical subject requiring no serious scholarship. Robert Baron quoting Halpert wrote “though folklore is officially on friendly terms with literature, music and anthropology, its position is only that of a tolerated stepchild” (quoted in Baron 1993:236).

The need of the hour is to engage students and general public in the dialogue emphasizing the political relevance of folklore. Losing folklore is not just losing means of entertainment but an entire culture as “folklore possesses the only theoretical construct that is capable of decoding and interpreting the shifting balance of social, economic, historical, spiritual, vocational, and psychological factors that come together in any individual performance or work of art” (Bill Ivey 8).

William A. Wilson treats folklore as the most important aspect of humanities. He quotes P. Gardner who defined the subjects of humanities as “connecting us to our past, linking us to

what other human beings have thought and felt and believed and suffered in the process of finding their own humanity. But the humanities not only connect us to our cultural heritage; they also hold out the potential of connecting everything in our experience. ... They offer us the experience of wholeness because they touch us at the deepest levels of mind and personality. They are inclusive disciplines, helping us to create larger and more comprehensive meaning out of the fragmentariness of everyday life. In the broadest sense, they are devoted to the task, as one scholar puts it, of “discovering what it means to be human” (quoted in Wilson 157).

For the author what could be more connecting to the past than the folklore? Wilson elaborates it further and writes, “no other discipline is more concerned with linking us to the cultural heritage from the past than is folklore; no other discipline is more concerned with revealing the interrelationships of different cultural expressions than is folklore; and no other discipline is more concerned, or no other discipline should be more concerned, with discovering what it means to be human” (157).

If folklore is so essential why is it facing the crisis? Wilson’s answer to the question is “the tendency to treat folklore as handmaiden to other disciplines and thus to undermine its own intrinsic worth, the tendency to be preoccupied with the past at the expense of the present, and the tendency to pay more attention to individual folk groups than to the broader humanity they share” (158). So the reasons are external as well as internal. What is required on the part of the scholars to win “academic credibility” for folklore “is not more studies of folklore in literature, but rather careful analyses of folklore as literature” (160). Why are scholars so much obsessed with finding folklore in different arts like literature, music, etc. and not with finding the literary and musical value of folklore?

Wilson himself has written somewhere “What missionaries share with others is not so much common stories or common practices but rather common reasons for performing them—common means of achieving these ends” (quoted 166).

Throughout the thesis I have associated the term hegemony and counter-hegemony with folksongs, yet Gramsci, who coined the term ‘hegemony’, had serious objections with folklore as he believed “folklore helped undergird the dominant regime” (Gencarella 223). For Gramsci folklore was synonymous with “superstitions, magic, alchemy, witchcraft, beliefs in spirits, popular moralities, proverbs, fables, and certain motifs (including foresight of the blind or the restored noble hero) or conceptions associated with particular worldviews (including *lex naturalis*) (Gencarella 225). In other words, anything non scientific and primitive was folklore. It is the “lowest level of popular culture” (quoted in Gencarella 226) which became “a veritable prison for those who understand the world only through its veil” (226). Gramsci considers folklore as a singular dialect which “may limit access to other conceptions and thereby curtail opportunities to participate in political and cultural movements” (Gencarella 229). Gramsci’s opinion is too limited as he denies the universal power of folklore which though differs linguistically and dialectally but remains the same. It is political in itself.

Gramsci could be right to some extent but he failed to look at the revolutionary aspect of folksongs. Indians during colonialism used folklore as a means to fight against the common enemy – the Britishers. In the twentieth century Gandhi began appearing in folk traditions; his actions were compared to those of heroic deities. In Bengal *Jatra* was used by Tagore as a means to reach the masses.

So “for obvious reasons Gramsci could not see the potential benefit of folkloric expressions for the labor and feminist movements, nor did he envision the role religion could play in advancing civil rights” (Gencarella 225).

Ruth Benedict an anthropological folklorist believed in the Freudian postulation of folklore “serving as a safety valve for the expression of socially unacceptable impulses in socially acceptable form” (Briscoe 453). These socially acceptable forms are humorous songs (*gali, sithana*) which form important part of women’s folk culture. They are not just means of entertainment but of subversion as well.

Humour has been understood differently by different writers. Bergson takes humour as a field where intuition is more superior to reason, life to mechanism. It is behaviour in a non-mechanized way like an automaton going out of control and having no intelligent control. He further writes, “Humor consists in perceiving something mechanical encrusted on something living” (quoted in Mary Douglas 363).

The irony is that humour and women have often been considered to be contrary to each other. Women have no right to be funny. To say, such and such woman has a good sense of humour is considered to be a joke in itself. Barbara Welter calls “the cult of true womanhood,” which dictates that “women lack, or if they are true women, ought to lack the capacity for wit and humor” (quoted in Caliskan 51). Sevda Caliskan speaks about the need to conceptualize women’s humour. “Because humor has been defined as a masculine realm for such a long time, it is necessary to conceptualize “women humorists” (52). The reason behind keeping women away from the joke tradition is its subversive nature. “To be funny is to be assertive, aggressive, and forceful; that is, everything a “good girl” is not supposed to be” (ibid)

Sigmund Freud relates humour with the unconscious. The socially accepted behaviour is always under the monitoring system, always controlled, but joke or humour breaks this control, so it is like a holiday. The unconscious, for a moment, bubbles up without constraint; hence one feels the sense of enjoyment and freedom. For Bergson and Freud humour functions differently. For Bergson it is lifeless encrustation which is attacked in the joke, for Freud the joke or humor lies in the release from control. But both have a common approach where something formal is attacked by something informal, something organized and controlled by something vital, energetic; an upsurge of life for Bergson, of libido for Freud.

The theory of humour presented both by Bergson and Freud could be applied on the folksongs sung by women. These songs are a release of their unconscious, a threat to the social authority (patriarchy). The gali songs (Jassal) or sithana sung by women at the time of marriage is one such example. Women abuse all the male members of the boy's family. They not only criticize the idea of girl being taken away by her in-laws but also the customs where the girl's family has to spend much money on food and other things. In one song they call all the males as glutton and criticize them for their mannerism:

Walk slowly o son-in-law¹

The rabdi² will overflow.

Your stomach's capacity is of nine mana³

But you had drunk ten mana.

In another song girl's sisters and friends sing together and make fun of their brother-in-law.

¹ One by one they take names of all male members of the boy's family.

² Rabdi is like porridge, made up of barley/ wheat flour and buttermilk. It is cooked in summer time.

³ One mana is equal to forty kilograms.

Look at the brother-in-law,
He is leaving, filling his pockets with rice.

When the boy visits the girl's house after marriage again he is welcomed with abusive songs. In the following song the girl's husband is compared with her brother. The brother is efficient in everything and the brother-in-law is unable to do anything properly.

Green tree with one or two leaves
Brother and brother-in-law go to take bath,
The brother-in-law doesn't know how to bathe and falls in the mud,
His brother-in-law in smart gives him punches four times.
Don't beat me o brother-in-law, I will marry off my four sisters to you!
I won't marry them, your family is lousy
Marry her please, we have no other option.

Now the question arises if the contestation is always going on in the society between males and females, where patriarchy always gets a setback from females in the form of folksongs why still women are subordinated? Mary Douglas answers this question by saying that joke or humour is a play upon form which brings into relation disparate elements in such a way that one accepted pattern is challenged by the appearance of another. It is an image of relaxation of conscious control in favour of the unconscious. But this unconscious is momentary, it doesn't take over the control system. Its excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experiences may be arbitrary and subjective. It is frivolous in that it produces no real alternative, only an exhilarating sense of freedom from form in general. It

is exactly like what Derrida had to say about structure. There is always a play in the structure but the aim of this play is not to subvert the authority but to suspend it for some time.

Rao's observation seems to be apt when she states "Perhaps value of the songs consists precisely in the absence of conscious protest. The women who sing these songs have not sought to overthrow the male-dominated family structure; they would rather work within it. They have no interest in direct confrontation with authority, their interest, rather, is in making room for themselves to move. It is the internal freedom that these songs seem to cherish. Only when such freedom is threatened by a power exercised by the head of the household do the women speak up against him, even when subverting his authority rather than fighting openly against it" (1991:133).

Apart from this, to be feminist doesn't mean to hate men or to fight them. It is about two sexes living together in society with equality and respect. "The varied history of Indian women makes it clear that feminism is not necessarily an ideology of resistance to patriarchal control but a movement that seeks integration of the public and the private space and the collapsing of the divisions between two different kinds of sexuality and moral values. It is expressive of the need to be heard, to have a choice as well as the freedom to act in accordance with that choice" (Jain 4).

Women through folksongs rewrite the scripts of their lives. "Whatever character the performing space assumes, it is a space women must enter to succumb to it at times and to overcome it at other times and whenever possible to alter the space with subtle words and bodies or with bodies that grow as if in cosmic form to surprise and shake out of their slumber people who have forgotten what women's bodies are about" (**Anita Singh:**)

It's time to wake from the slumber and to include women's art forms into the mainstream. Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* concludes that since "our mothers" were not writing literature, they offered nothing to which the woman writer could turn (quoted in Radner and Lasner 414). But when Alice Walker asks the same question, "what her mothers were doing, she finds that they were creating, but in other media: gardens, songs, quilts" (ibid). What Walker wants to suggest is right as what one finds important has direct relation with one's birth and upbringing. Since Woolf was an upper class white woman, for her literature meant only writing and reading. Women's household works and other womanly things were of no importance to her but for Walker, being black and poor, all these things were revolutionary. In African society literary revival for men too was a distant dream in the 19th century; one could imagine the condition of women, with the so called non-artistic and womanly activities women indulged with or had to do with the economy and the culture. They were not knitting or quilting for the sake of pleasure but for necessity. Similarly in Haryana, literary revival for women came much later. But it doesn't mean that they didn't partake in artistic activities. Their art forms can't be dismissed as unimportant and non-significant. Silence is not always associated with passivity and powerlessness but in some case it becomes a means to resist.

Chapter 2

Women and Agency: Folksongs Sung by Women in South Haryana

1

Postmodernist and poststructuralist critiques have called into question impersonal master narratives that leave no room for tensions, contradictions, or oppositional actions on the part of individuals and collectivities (Ahearn 2001: 110). These theories have brought into light not only the hitherto ignored, suppressed and down trodden groups but also their ways to resist which were equally neglected and ignored. So the hitherto silenced voices of uneducated women expressed through folksongs became a field of enquiry for scholars.

The uneducated women didn't have access to pen and paper; so they narrated their stories orally in the form of these songs. Women as performing bodies become the text of these narratives. "The body becomes the site of power, and a site where power can be questioned and explored. The body can be used as an analytical strategy or vantage point" (Colnroy 5). It means one can enter into a culture through body as there is a close relationship between performance and culture. So the hitherto neglected narratives become synonyms of cultural expressions like other expressive forms.

The space of folk serves as a carnivalesque site providing locale for political, feminist and social protests. In other words what was just dismissed as a non-space, the folk space today competes with other privileged forms of literature. So folklore which not long ago was supposed to be the nonsense of some uneducated and illiterate women now gathers respectability not only as a suitable literary subject for academic study but also as a site of protest, as a form of historical, social and cultural consciousness.

Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* has used folk extensively to prove the cultural validity of Africans and to regain the dignity which Africans have lost during colonization. The nonsensical idea of Africans having no culture and civilization is contested while giving examples of a society following its folk rituals and customs.

The bodies and their movements which were non-existent till the 20th century emerged as political bodies imprinted with multiple meanings. Foucault discussing about body, calls it a discourse, “Discourse is a system of language use that carries with it the operations of power by seeming to represent a particular set of ideas... the boundaries of the discourse determine the ways in which the world can be thought about and analyzed. The discourse sets the rules for linguistic representation through concepts such as disciplinary boundaries and notions of truth and proof” (1978:31). The way society constructed the bodies, bodies too carried many discourses with themselves.

So much literary work has been done by scholars from a feminist perspective where they try to trace the voice of women’s resistance or women’s agency in biographies, poems, diaries and other forms of written expression by individual woman. But nobody cared to talk about ordinary and uneducated women. Ruth Bottigheimer writes “historians... have long recreated the past in the image of their masculinised present and in doing so have overlooked women’s contributions and have thus excluded them from the social-historical and scientific canon of intellectual achievement and social accomplishment” (3) Women are always considered to be the other of the men. All feminist movements tried to question the idea of otherness by engaging themselves with female agency of the gentle woman or the *bhadramahila* as it was their viewpoint which was always considered to be the superior. The uneducated, illiterate, lower class, lower caste, village woman became the non-existent other.

As historians suffered from “selective amnesia” (ibid) and neglected or silenced women’s voice in history, the same is done by feminist scholars as well. They neglected the oral articulations of generations of women “perhaps simply because what they have to say was not of interest to the privileged.” (Jassal10).

Works like *Women Writing in India* by Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha and some other feminist works are no doubt honest attempts to trace women’s voice in history but they have undermined the value of voices of ordinary, illiterate women. The chapter is an attempt to understand the voice of these women who come from very patriarchal and economically, socially and educationally backward strata of the society. It shows how these songs and performances have allowed these women “to articulate, acknowledge and affirm shared impressions” (Jassal5).

Indira Gandhi in the Foreword to the book *Women in Indian Folklore* has written “In the epics one finds women who were examples of courage and doing. In classical literature they became more decorative and even anaemic and were assigned the place of conservers, not innovators. But in folk-literature one finds them full of life” (xiv). She is right as folksongs have given voice to women and their agency. They express “women's common wishes, their unexpressed emotions, un-fulfilled desires, hopes, and disappointments, and their reactions to their social environment” (Srivastava, I. 270) through folksongs.

Agency which is defined by Laura M.Ahearn as “socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (2001: 112) is very much visible in the folksongs of women. Time to time the agency of women is studied by different scholars where they perpetuate the same idea that women are

not always passive victims of gender stratification, but often are active agents in perpetuating or abolishing it (Atkinson 1982; Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988).

The interest in culture studies made the scholars to consider the everyday cultural behaviour worthy of study. Lila Abu Lughod discusses how scholars nowadays are more concerned with “unlikely forms of resistance, subversions rather than large -scale collective insurrections, small or local resistances not tied to the overthrow of the systems or even ideologies of emancipation” (1990:41). For her the reason behind this is a growing dissatisfaction with the ways people understood power. Power has always been understood as regressive exercising direct domination to exploit. But power is not just so. It runs through all arenas of life. Power could be seen in the form of ideology where it converts individuals into subjects. Such kind of subjectifications could be fought with the help of counter ideologies. Folksongs as “the unlikely form of resistance” present this counter ideology.

Resistance and agency are interconnected to each other. Agency could be seen in the form of resistance. But the question arises which act is an act of resistance? Is it important for an act of resistance to be recognized by others? The same question arises when we talk of folksongs having an agency or as narratives of resistance. Much attention has been paid by scholars on the use of the term resistance. WAeitz writes, “the term resistance remains loosely defined, allowing some scholars to see it almost everywhere and others almost nowhere” (2001: 669). The complexity of the term lies in the acts of resistance not being monolithic, as mostly scholars understand them to be.

Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner who have studied the term extensively discuss about the problems one faces while defining resistance. “Scholars have used the term

resistance to describe a wide variety of actions and behaviours at all levels of human social life (individual, collective and institutional) and in a number of different settings, including political systems, entertainment and literature and the workplace. Indeed everything from revolutions (Goldstone, 1991; Scott, 1985; Skocpol, 1979) to hairstyles (Kuumba and Ajanaku, 1988; Weitz, 2001) has been described as resistance” (534).The term is defined variously as, for example “acting autonomously in “one’s” own interests”, “active efforts to oppose, fight, and refuse to cooperate with or submit to ... abusive behavior and ... control”, “engaging in behaviors despite oppositions”, “questioning and objecting” (534).

It is clear there is no common consensus among scholars on the definition of the term resistance yet mostly definitions follow some similarities on two levels. Mostly authors “seem to agree that resistance is not a quality of an actor or a state of being, but involves some active behavior, whether verbal, cognitive, or physical” (Hollander 538.)

Few example:

- expressive behaviour that inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or prevents alternatives to cultural codes.
- actions that not only reject subordination but do so by challenging the ideologies that support that subordination.
- either any kind of organized, collective opposition or any subversive action directly intended to damage and/or disrupt the functioning of an organization.
- actions involving consciousness, collective action, and direct challenges to structures of power. (ibid)

All the above mentioned resistance theories involve some kind of action or active behaviour. The second common theme is “a sense of opposition” (Hollander 538).

- conscious questioning of the existing structure of domestic roles and a rethinking of how these roles may be structured.
- deliberate rejection of values that sustain existing power relations.
- actively saying “No, this is not acceptable, this is wrong and I do not want it to happen” in numerous individual and collective ways.
- any behavior or discourse, that countered or disrupted the dominant bureaucratic discourse.

So what is required for an act to be called an act of resistance is an actor or agent and an object. Both the common elements share a reciprocal relationship as the writers write, “of course resistance includes activity, and of course that activity occurs in opposition to someone or something else” (Hollander 539).

As there are common grounds of agreement among scholars similarly there are common grounds of disagreement – “recognition and intent” (Hollander 539).

The theory of resistance having a conscious intention behind the act and the essentiality of the act to be recognized by the object is challenged by James Scott. He finds direct confrontation standing in opposition to “everyday resistance”. For him “powerless people rarely have the resources or opportunity to resist openly against their subordinates and, thus massive protest movements are ‘flashes in the pan’” (quoted in Hollander 539). On the other hand “Everyday acts of resistance make no headlines”. (539). Though less explicitly confrontational than, say, an armed peasant revolt, Scott argues that “everyday” acts still

qualify as resistance, to the extent that they “deny or mitigate claims made by appropriating classes” (Hollander 539). These “low-profile techniques” can go unnoticed by the powerful, which helps protect the powerless from repression by masking the resistant nature of their activities. (Hollander 539).

The same “everyday acts” or practices are practiced by women through folksongs. Folksongs which are part and parcel of their lives never pose a threat to the authority, and that’s why they go unnoticed by the authority. The humour used by women in these songs is, though subversive, never observed in that way by the authority as Scott writes, “the use of humor can be a way for those in lower status positions to covertly express resistance to the more powerful” (quoted in Hollander 540).

As the intent behind the act depends on the goal of the performer or the resister so does the recognition. “Some resistance is intended to be recognized, while other resistance is purposefully concealed or obfuscated.” (540).

The same recognition is a matter of debate among scholars where scholars like Scott, Mccan and March don’t find it necessary for resistance to be recognized, other scholars (Rubin) consider recognition main thing for a behavior to be recognized as resistance. For him “the term should be reserved for visible, collective acts that result in social change, and not “everyday acts... that chip away at power in almost imperceptible ways” (Hollander 541).

But the important thing is not the act or the behaviour but the intent behind that behaviour. It is not always necessary for resistance to bring desired outcome. Leblanc writes, “Accounts of resistance must detail not only resistant acts, but the subjective intent motivating these as well. In this conceptualization of resistance, an attribution of any type requires three distinct

moments: a subjective account of oppression (real or imagined), an express desire to counter that oppression, and an action (broadly defined as word, thought, or deed) intended specifically to counter that oppression...It is crucial that the first two conditions hold before any observational account can be deemed resistant. That is, the person engaging in resistant acts must do so consciously and be able to relate that consciousness and intent. (Leblanc, 1999:18)” (quoted in Hollander 542).

A third group of scholars find it faulty to understand the intention of an action for understanding resistance. There are cases where the performers or actors are not even consciously aware of their intentions. “Hebdige’s semiotic analysis of styles (e.g. style of dress) as a form of resistance doesn’t consider the intent behind such acts; according to him, resistance can occur “at a level beneath the consciousness” of an actor” (Hollander 543).

On the surface level it looks that women who sing songs are not even aware of the meanings of the songs. Singing seems to be an unconscious act. But a serious and deeper study reveals that women are conscious of their choices. While performing *khodiya* they use such obscene language which they otherwise will never use. So they know the difference between good and bad and resistance and non resistance. Their non-acceptance of folk having political relevance could be a strategic decision.

The authors of the work have presented a typology which recognizes 6 types of resistance:

- 1) Covert resistance - behaviour which is recognized by both the targets and the observers – a Social movements, revolutions as well as individual acts of refusal come under this category. All scholars agree on this type of behaviour being called resistance.

- 2) Overt resistance - “acts that are intentional yet go unnoticed (and, therefore, unpunished) by their targets, although they are recognized as resistance by other, culturally aware observers” (545). Gossip, bitching, acts of withdrawal etc. come under this category.
- 3) Unwitting resistance - not recognized or intended as resistance by the actor yet considered to be threatening by the targets and other observers. Though there are no targets of such behaviours as they are not intended yet some people find it threatening. These people become the self defined “targets”. Such kind of behaviour is called “target defined resistance” (545).
- 4) Externally defined resistance - neither the actors intend nor the targets recognize it as resistance, only the third party i.e. observers recognize it so. Eg. “ women who watch soap operas may not see this activity as resistance, nor may others in their social environments, yet some scholars have described this behavior as resistance to traditional gender expectations” (545).
- 5) Missed resistance - intentional acts recognized by the target but unrecognized by the third party as they are cultural specific.
- 6) Attempted resistance - intentional behavior which goes unnoticed by both the target as well as third party.

“Acknowledging different types of resistance can therefore help move social scientists beyond these debates and on to other enquiries, such as examining the conditions under which actors choose one type of resistance over another resistance, the conditions (or, in the case of unintentional acts of resistance , the conditions under which certain types of resistance emerge)” (546). So what is important to understand resistance is to understand the

relationship or interaction between the actor/ performer/ resister, target and the observers? No act is naturally or essentially an act of resistance as “the concept of resistance is socially constructed” (Hollander 548). Targets, actors, researchers are all part of this process of construction. No individual is powerful or powerless purely as “there are multiple systems of hierarchy, and individuals can be simultaneously powerful and powerless within different systems” (550). The study has shown how women (mothers-in-law) who themselves are victims of patriarchy internalize patriarchy and enjoy a powerful position with their daughters-in-law. No act is an act of pure resistance as “Individuals may also resist in some situations but choose not to resist in others. Often these choices are linked to the web of relationships in which any individual is embedded; some of these relationships may sustain resistance, while others may not” (549).

Saba Mahmood defines agency as the capacity to subvert norms. The multiplicities of life can't be reduced to a flat narrative of either surrendering to or opposing relations of power. Values associated with women such as shyness, modesty, humility can't always be equated with passivity and inaction (Mahmood 206). There is a need to look beyond the definition of the term and to study the social conditions which give birth to different strategies of resistance. Agency should be looked upon not simply as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable (Jassal 15).

Only by moving away from the traditional definitions of domination and resistance can one understand “the subtle and ambivalent ways women may be negotiating at the margins of power, sometimes constrained by but also resisting and even undermining asymmetrical

power relations” (Hollander 550). Limiting agency to the agents and their actions obscures how structures of gender, class, caste, and race shape the possibilities for agency (Jassal 13).

II

Before starting the research the researcher was of the opinion that only some songs fall under the category of resistance narratives. But during field work, to the amazement of the researcher almost all songs were showing some kind of resistance or other. The importance and power of these songs lie in the very efforts taken by social reformers from time to time to ban these songs and to censor them. Some of the women songs were considered to be obscene like *sithana*, *gali* songs. Charu Gupta discusses about the reformers who argued that *galis* promoted women’s confrontational behaviour and aggression and prompted women to transgress boundaries and challenge familial relationships (2001: 93). It is very clear that the songs posed a threat to patriarchy so there was a need to ban them. The censorship was an effort to limit women’s accessibility to public spheres and to suppress their sexuality by effacing the erotic from their lives. “Songs considered corrupting and indecent were thus to be expunged from the repertoires of the new Hindu woman the social reformers hoped to shape” (Jassal 10).

The erotic and obscene songs were replaced by religious *bhajans*. These *bhajans* too were used by women as an expression of their struggles.

Doors wide apart, I have to go to satsang¹,

To find moksha (salvation) I need a guru or teacher

What to do with these sons, they will just increase the neighbourhood.

¹A spiritual discourse or sacred gathering.

They won't even speak from mouth; I will just burn my blood,
What to do with these daughters-in-law, they are like the jail of Rohtak,
Handcuffs in hands, chains in feet and mouth locked.
What to do with these daughters, they are other's belonging
Come sons-in-law, will take them away,
I will stand, looking helplessly.
What to do with this old man, making life difficult to live
Fighting unnecessarily I am just passing the time.

The song hints towards the difficulties of a married woman's life. It suggests to women not to get married, which in itself is defiance of the norms.

In South Haryana women have songs from child-birth to death. No festivals and rituals are complete without the singing of songs. Most popular among these songs are *jakari* songs. There is no specific time to sing *jakari* songs. These songs are related to day to day life explaining man-woman relationship. Women after completing the household chores would sit together and sing these songs. The songs discuss about a woman's position with relation to other family members. The relations of mother and daughter, brother and sister, mother and son, mother-in-law and daughter in-law, wives of brothers, husband's younger brother and elder brother's wife, husband's sister and brother's wife, husband's elder brother and younger brother's wife all find vivid expressions in the songs. When songs are passed on from one generation to another, they are not simply utterances but a medium to transmit societal values, warning and preparing women for the life to come. They prepare women for the "hardships of married life, and spelling out the limits of transgression, the nature of punishments, and the rewards for compliance" (Jassal 34).

The songs of sorrow find an important place in these songs. Death as a symbol is used again and again:

Maroon suit of mine, I wore for the first time,
Dressed in the suit I went to fetch water,
On the way was lying a snake,
O snake don't bite me, my husband has gone on duty
I will bite you only, sister, it is god's order
The snake bit my finger and I fell on the ground
Elder brother in law saw me from the fields and came running to help
Tearing sister-in-law's cloth he tied it on my finger
Brother-in-law held me in his arms and sister-in-law prepared bed for me.
Mother-in-law asks me whom do I want to meet?
Mother-in-law please call your son, my life is for two days.
Daughter-in-law I won't call my son whether you live for half a day.
Mother in law I will die, let me talk to him.
Daughter in law you die today, my son will get another wife.
Mother in law, you will have enough daughters-in-law, but my mother won't get another daughter.
Mother in law your house will brighten, my mother's life will be filled with darkness.

In another song the girl is killed by her husband and his brother. There is abundance of such songs in South Haryana where the girl is either killed by her husband or his family members. These songs become spokesperson of women who are mistreated in their marital home for different reasons (be it dowry or not producing a male heir). In the following song

the name of the village *Ninghana* represents all the villages where women became victims in the hands of their in-laws.

Wheat in the fields have grown so long they have fallen

Reaping the fields, me and my sister-in-law's brother.

Elder brother-in-law brought the food,

And conspired his brother to kill me.

Murdered me pitilessly

And threw my body in the river.

Train came of my brother who recognized my dead body

Whose daughter are you? Where have you been married?

I am Rohtak's daughter, married in the village Ninghana.

Cursed is the village Ninghana, where women are slaughtered overnight.

Most of the songs show the pathetic condition of women, particularly in the marital house that is no less than living a diasporic life where neither can they forget the home land and nor can they embrace the new (foreign) land. These women always remain the displaced 'other' but still nobody cares to listen to their agony. The songs deal with the problems which women face on mundane level – love, dreams, hopes, sorrows etc.

My mother dreamed, her daughter is ill treated

Dawn came, I saw my elder brother coming.

O sister tell me the truth, how do you do?

Brother I wear the black sari and fly the crows of the palace.

Don't tell it to the mother, she will die of sadness

Don't tell it to the father, he will be concerned day night

Don't tell it to the sister; she will sit among the friends with sadness

Don't tell it to the sister-in-law, she will tell it to everyone.

Tell it to the elder brother; he will take me out of the jail

Tell him if only you are able to help me, otherwise let it remain a secret.

The song only narrates the hardships of a married woman's life but also her love towards her family members. The relationship of mother and daughter is so strong where the mother gets the intuition of her daughter's hardships. Still the girl is not concerned about herself but her family members. She doesn't want to sadden her parents who have become old. Her only strength is her elder brother. That's why brother is given more importance than husband in Haryanvi society (also discussed earlier).

In one of the songs, like her mother the girl too gets intuition of something bad happening in her father's house.

The lamp is burning dimly, my family members remember me firmly,

Just wait for tonight o married one, will bring the news in the morning.

O sisters I went to the house in the morning,

My father sitting alone in the hut, my brother's chair shattered.

Tell me the truth o father, when the brother will come home?

O daughter we have been deceived, your brother has died.

O father I will marry my son, who will come as a bhati²

O daughter get your son married, your father will come as a bhati

O father look at my life, it is not worth living.

² Discussed elsewhere.

When a girl is given into marriage, she is not just married to the boy but to the entire family of the boy. We have heard the same saying in so many Hindi movies where they say, marriage is not between the boy and the girl but between two families. This practice of giving a girl into marriage to the entire family makes her subordinate not just to the males of the house but to elderly women as well (especially mother-in-law and sister-in-law). In a situation like this she expresses herself through folksongs. These songs not only narrate the story of loneliness and migration but also of suffering. The new land or sasural is not at all welcoming where the girl has to fight even for the basic needs such as food and clothing.

O Ragbir brother come to the 'gher'³ your mausi fights everyday

O sister tell me the truth, why she fights with you?

O brother, she abuses my brethren and my body burns.

O mausi tell me the truth why do you fight?

O son, she doesn't drink the day's milk

Fresh pure milk is the reason of fighting.

O mausi give her just one glass, she works hard for your house,

O son, my son is in the army, why to feed the bull in the house?

O mausi, brother-in-law is in the army, who will listen to my sister?

This is a common situation in the villages of Haryana where the mother-in-law has total control over the kitchen. When husbands are not staying with the wives their condition becomes worse. They are ill-treated by other family members. Meanwhile women are left behind with their emotional and sexual frustrations. They also have the fear of husbands having extra marital affairs or bringing mistresses home. In a way these songs work as an

³ An exterior part of the house.

agency for women to express their unfulfilled desires and fears. The following song is an example of the same.

Mother-in-law I am Berry's (Name of a village) daughter, if your son is not home
why did you bring me?

Daughter in-law my son doesn't listen to me.

Make him understand, there are enough jobs at home.

Darling stay for some time or I will jump in the well,

I will jump in the well, you light my funeral.

Throwing away the bedding, husband kept the bag in the almirah.

The song refers to the strategic bargain of the woman where she uses suicide as an excuse to convince her husband. She didn't require any weapons to stop the husband from going, leaving her all alone. If the snake gets killed without breaking the stick, it is better than killing it. Women not only bargain with their husbands but with mother-in-law as well. After marriage they have to seek permission even to visit their natal home.

Oh mother-in-law, teej has come, make me a swing in the champa garden,

O daughter-in-law, we have no champa garden, go and ask your father.

Oh mother-in-law, sawan teej has come, send me to my father's house

Who has come to take you? With whose permission you will go to your father's house?

My younger brother has come to take me; with your permission I will go to my father's house.

Who will wash your head o daughter-in-law, who will make your 'kothli'⁴
Barber's daughter will wash my head; elder sister-in-law will make my 'kothli'
We have a lot of work to do in the fields and lot of wheat to grind,
Burn your fields o mother-in-law, throw your wheat in the street,
Listen to your wife o son, speaking like a woman of low birth.
What should I do o mother? Should I leave her or send her to her father's home?
Why to leave her o son or why to send her to her father's house
She will give birth to sons and your father's clan will flourish,
She will give birth to daughters and darling sons-in-law will make this house
auspicious.

Along with this women use other strategies which are sometimes called superstitious by the rational people. In fact they don't refer towards the superstitious nature of women but their techniques to bargain. In the following song the woman tries to stop her husband from going to the war by asking him not to go on a Wednesday as it is considered to be unauspicious to go on Wednesdays. But not always these strategies bring desired outcome.

Husband I have brought the jug full of milk, please drink it I am waiting so long
Keep the jug on the table o darling
Let's sit and talk, tomorrow I will leave.
Dear husband why to go tomorrow, tomorrow is Wednesday,
The ones separated on Wednesday never meet again.
Darling, distribute sweets for Wednesday and roat for Tuesday.
My husband preparing his bedding my eyes filled with water,

⁴ A preparation of sweets and some home made dishes to be sent with the daughter-in-law.

Who knows when to meet once separated on Wednesday?

O son look behind, your wife is crying!

O mother you console her/ embrace her, I am a foreigner⁵

Will come back winning the battle.

In the absence of husbands women are not only ill-treated but sometimes sexually abused as well by the male members (elder brother-in-law and father-in-law) of the family. Since they are not allowed to speak publically about such issues due to societal pressure, folksongs become a medium to express which otherwise is prohibited.

In the midnight, comes elder brother-in-law with jalebi

Neither do I have kids nor do I have children, for whom have you brought jalebi?

Neither do you have kids nor do you have children, I have brought it for you.

I made thin chapatis and cooked potato curry

My mother-in-law prepared the food and I served it.

While serving him, he twisted my hand,

He twisted my hand, my whole body burned

My whole body burned I could do nothing.

Lashing him with belan⁶ and chakla⁷, while running I threw the patila (pot)

Crying and sobbing he went to his brother

Leaving aside everything his brother came to beat me

You have listened to him, listen to me as well

⁵ The term used here is pardesi.

⁶ Rolling pin

⁷ Rolling board

Look at the irony. The woman who is the victim doesn't go to the husband to complain against the brother-in-law, but the brother-in-law only complains against her. It shows the patriarchal nature of the society where men are easily believed by other men. Without even thinking twice the husband gets ready to beat the wife. In situations like this women use their agency as she dares the husband not to touch her without listening to her story. She narrates the entire story and the husband had only one thing to say;

Well done, o well behaved darling, why didn't you hit him with tawa⁸?

Hitting him with tawa not only suggests beating but disrespect as well. It metaphorically means blackening of the face implying intense disgrace/shame or loss of honour resulting in metaphorical defacing.

Prem Chowdhry too discusses about one such song where in the absence of the husband the elder brother-in-law tries to make advances on his brother's wife.

Jeth: Enticed I am to your abode by your beauty.

B: Your overtures don't befit a father figure.

J: Your life is barren with my brother away.

B: Proposition me not, you rascal, he'll soon be back.

J: You are like ripened fruits, taste I must.

B: Poisonous are these ripened fruits, touch not.

J: A lover must possess his beloved.

B: Punished are those who covet someone else's woman.

J: Come to me, my sweet one, be mine.

⁸An iron pan on which bread is baked

B: I shall beat you soundly, you scoundrel.

J: Beat me or humiliate me or hang me, possess you I must.

B: Don't mock, someone else's woman can be a venomous viper. (1990: 66).

Haryana is a patriarchal society where women are treated badly. Most of the women are beaten up by their husbands and in the absence of husbands they are beaten up by other male members of the family.

O husband, going on duty, bring me maroon sandals,

Sandal I will bring for sure, don't forget to send food for my brother in the fields.

I went to the fields with food, burdened with food; the enemy brother-in-law didn't help me

Thinking for a while, I threw the food on the ground

The fodder for bulls fell on the ground; his food became one with sand.

Leaving the bulls behind, he thrashed me in the fields,

Witnessed the friends of army man (husband) and said

'Some are beaten at home some are thrashed in the fields'.

The song doesn't end here. On the one hand it presents the real picture of the condition of Haryanvi women on the other hand it gives voice to women's desire of taking revenge with the perpetrators of violence. The woman goes home and complains to her husband about the brother-in-law. The husband hands him over to the police. She not only wants to take revenge but also taunts the sister-in-law (jethani) for not speaking against the brother-in-law.

Go and get him released o shautan (sister-in-law) your husband is in jail,

Why to cry now, o my shautan, sometimes beaten in the home sometimes in the fields.

When all bargain strategies fail and it becomes difficult for the woman to survive in a joint family, she tries to convince the husband to live separately.

I will live separately o husband

Your mother fights with me day night.

I can't bear it anymore, I will live separately.

One sq meter land is enough, baithak⁹ yours will be ready, my room will be ready

And my son's crade too will fit.

I will live separately o husband.

250 gms flour is enough for us.

Your roti will be ready, my fulka will be prepared and

My son will get his churma¹⁰

I need 250 gms of milk

Kheer for you, tea for me and my son's bottle will be filled.

Generally there is a notion in Haryana that daughter-in-law seems to share illicit relationship with their younger brothers-in-law. But actually that is not the case. The relationship of a brother-in-law and sister-in-law is like a brother and sister. Most of the times the younger brother-in-law is of the same age, as their own children. In the situations of trouble, they saved women from beating.

He brought a thin mango in the paper,

⁹ A bigger room where men sit.

¹⁰ A very popular sweet dish in Haryana which is made up of roti, ghee and jaggery.

O sister in law, your brother.
Mango I ate and made a ticket of paper,
Ticket I took and watched *Chandrawal*¹¹
Father-in-law advocated for beating
Brother-in-law blamed my family,
Mother-in-law asked her son to ditch me.
Elder sister-in-law always ready to bring another marriage proposal.
Younger sister-in-law, a child, cried in her room,
Came younger brother-in-law and intervened
Don't kill somebody else's daughter.
Milk brings shine on the lips,
Bless the brother-in-law who saved me from dying

There could be two reasons for sexualizing the relationship of a sister-in-law and brother-in-law. Younger brother-in-law is the only male member of the family from whom a woman doesn't cover her face, so their relationship was always suspected. So a kind of rumor was created which sexualized the relationship. It was another way to suppress a woman's desires and her freedom. But such kind of rumours in a way paved the way for real relationships. In such situations how the wife of the younger brother-in-law feels.

Oh my young (child) husband is enchanted by my elder sister-in-law
He is sleeping with the sister in law in the skies while I sleep here alone
He chats with the sister-in-law for the whole night, I cry lying on my bed.
Head burdened with wheat, standing in the street I try to make sense with him

¹¹A very famous Haryanvi movie

Oh husband I pray to you with folded hands, please leave the sister-in-law.
I will slap you four times; I can't leave my loving sister-in-law
Head burdened with dung, standing in the street I try to make sense with him
Oh husband I pray to you with folded hands, please leave the sister-in-law
I will hit you on your back; I can't leave my heart's desire.
Being driven by young strength, I threw him in the bitoda¹²
Oh darling, with folded hands I promise, I will leave the sister-in-law
Oh husband, why do you fold the hands now, keep the lovely sister-in-law.

The other reason is widow remarriage. If a woman's husband died, she became the inheritor of the property. Parents couldn't see a woman taking away their property so the *kaleva* system came into practice. The *kaleva* system was a woman's remarriage to her younger brother-in-law to keep the property in the family. That became another reason to sexualize the relationship to make it look natural for both of them. The same stands true of *jija-sali* relationship as well.

Apart from sister-in-law getting married to brother-in-law, there are references of father-in-law having relations with their daughters-in-law. E.A. Joseph writes "certain villages which need not be named, have the evil reputation of deliberately getting girls older than their boy husbands in order that the father of the latter may have illicit enjoyment of them" (1911:19). That could be reason for the existence of songs where the mother-in-law is suspicious of her daughter-in-law having an affair with the father-in-law. Women were not allowed to criticize such practices so they used folksongs as means to do so.

¹² A storage for dung cake

Singers of these songs are mostly illiterate women but that doesn't mean they are not aware of what is happening on the political front. Indira Gandhi is very popular among women. There are many songs on Indira from her marriage to her becoming the prime minister of the country.

Dark nights don't stay forever, the moon is brightening,
Indira Gandhi sits on the throne, witnessed by everyone.
It's your father's throne Indira, come and adorn it,
Shastri has resigned so you have to handle it.
Jawaharlal is like a pearl in the ring,
But Shastri's regime was all about hard work.
All the nearby kings have come to support you,
It has become the news of the newspapers.
Look at a woman's luck, who won all the elections,
All girls be happy, after all a woman is ruling.

The following song of Indira's marriage strengthens the idea of patriarchy where she is criticized for marrying a Muslim (actually she marries a Parsi, but to the common folk, that he is not a Hindu is enough to equate him with a Muslim). Her decision to marry a man from another religion is equated with 'Love-Jehad'. What if she is the prime minister of the country, after all she is a woman only who could easily be enchanted.

Letter has come from far away country to marry the daughter,
If you don't marry, we will abduct her.
O daughter get ready hurriedly, you will get me killed!

Muslims have come to conquer.

Wait for a moment o father; let me call my friends,

All friends getting together and shaking hands,

Meeting for the last time.

Some will die, some will perform sati,

All your money will be left behind; they will just take their sufferings with themselves.

Though the song strengthens patriarchy yet at the same time it poses threat to it. Indira Gandhi's decision to call her friends to meet them for the last time refers towards the harsh realities of a woman's life. The song not only criticizes patriarchy but Hinduism as well where women had to perform Sati till just a couple of centuries back. At least she will be spared of all this, in the case of widowhood.

As discussed earlier songs not only talk about what it is but what it ought to be. Grinding on the millstone was an important aspect of women's life. It was a tiring exercise which lasted for hours.

Oh husband, your mother (witch) asks me to grind hundred kilograms of wheat,

My sweetheart you adorn the coat I will grind it on my own.

My mother-in-law came running listening the grinding,

Looking through the window she found some other movie in the cinema hall!

She came down thudding and conspired with my father-in-law,

Your daughter-in-law is healthy (clever) who asks your son to grind.

You run away from here, o ill woman, why do you want to break the house?

Whether your daughter-in-law grinds or your son, you get flour ready on time.

Fathers-in-law are presented in a better light in these songs. The reason could be the status of relationship. As mother-in-law and daughter-in-law share the same space of the house so there are chances of more confrontation, father-in-law has no clue.

Took two pitchers and went to bring water, I saw my husband coming from army,

Filled water, came back home, mother conspired with the son,

Eats more than 2 kgs per day, just fills two pitchers,

Short blouse, tight brassier, she shows/exhibits her belly,

Wearing blue dupatta she comes home laughing,

Goes to the fields for weeding but sleeps under the tree

Makes army man to stop their train without station,

Removing the ruler from the hanger the husband comes to beat me.

Comes father in law from outside, why do you beat her o son?

Grinds ten kgs of corn everyday and brings two pitchers

Short blouse, tight brassier, the whole world wears.

Blue duppatta, the whole world wears; she doesn't make it at home

Send her to fields she finishes the whole work,

Government makes the army man to stop their train.

Women want their husbands to help them in the household chores. If that does not take place in reality, they imagine it through songs. The song also refers to gender identity and its construction. It questions the division of labour based on gender. Another song also interrogates the same societal construction of gender. The rationale behind the division of

labour makes it look natural for women to participate in household as their husbands are engaged outside, earning money. But what about women who work outside and earn more than their husbands?

I am a landlord's daughter married in Rajasthan

When I came for the second time, my mother-in-law asked me to grind

O mother-in-law, I know not of how to grind the stonemill.

You are a landlord's daughter, why didn't you bring maids?

Maids I could have brought four, your son is a real fool

I am B.A. pass your son is 10th failed

I teach college girls, your son drives the truck.

I earn 700 a month, your son rupees one hundred and fifty.

Coming home once in a week still you ask me to grind

Your son comes everyday still you pamper him.

Mismatched marriages are a common phenomenon in Haryana. Parents marry their daughters to far off areas just to evade their share in the parental property. Sometimes educated girls are married to illiterate men and sometimes the vice-versa. Women have problems with both the types of marriages.

My family educated me till B.A. but married me to a farmer, look at my plight

My quarrelsome mother-in-law sent me to the fields with food, I feel hot in the sun.

Oh farmer come and eat food, why do you delay, I have to go the college

Keep the food, wait for some time, and let me finish one more row.

Keeping the food I walked towards college, the farmer looks at me.

Come evening, mother conspired with her son

“She is not a daughter-in-law, she is thunderbolt”

Taking the stick he warned me to be ready to get thrashed.

Farmer! be in your limits, stay away from me, I am a college going girl!

Throwing the stick away, embracing me and cursing the mothers and fathers

Who conspire with their sons to beat the daughter-in-law?

Uneducated or illiterate women don't want to be married to educated men either. They want a relationship of equality.

O sister don't marry a college going boy

What if he fails? You will regret.

Don't marry an army man

No vacations even for marriage and festivals

You will cry in hiding.

Don't marry a clerk o sister

Speaking English now and then you will look at him helplessly.

Marry a farmer and live happily

Coming home in the afternoon he will bring sugarcane for you

Treated as the queen of the house he will ask you of your heart.

Whatever is there to eat in the house, he will leave half for you.

In another song the girl requests her mother not to marry her to an army man. The song not only expresses her agony of living alone but other struggles too which she will have to face in day to day life.

With folded hands I report to you o mother
Don't send me with this army man.
An army man leaves and doesn't come back till one year
Sister-in-law will taunt at me, I can't bear it
To whom should I say, my blood dries up?
Don't send me with this army man o mother.
Get me married to a farmer, I will become the queen of the house
Coming back after ploughing he will talk to me of my heart.
Don't send me o mother with an army man.
He will speak in English, I have to study
Speaking wrongly, he will beat me showing red eyes.
Don't send me o mother with an army man.

The next song describes the difficulties faced by army man in their day to day life.

What to tell o friend, the husband has sent me a letter
No vacation he will get, the fight has started.
Husband has asked me to be happy
As he too is healthy and happy.
Tea, biscuit, and almond to eat, cold water they get to drink.
But the truth is something else of friend,
There is no revelry in army,

Bullets and guns everywhere, husband poor dies everyday.

Mother-in-law conspired with father-in-law

The daughter-in-law doesn't dress up well.

Everybody's daughter-in-law plays holi

Ours doesn't even come out of the house.

How to play holi o mother-in-law

My husband plays with bullets o mother-in-law.

The idea of nationalism and patriotism gets a setback in these songs. In Mahendergarh district most of the men are in the army. Women don't want to be married to army men as it makes life difficult for them.

Karela (bitter gourd) is the garden

My husband is in service, I face so many problems.

O daughter-in-law come out and see whose motor is it?

My husband's name is Suresh and the motor belongs to him.

He made me to sit in the motor, and started it.

Speaking of going to Meerut but stopped the motor in Singapur.

Bulletts were raining everywhere, some from far, and some from near.

My thin husband was trembling with fear.

Hey I stopped the bullet with my veil.

Whose wife is she who has stopped the bullet?

She is wife of the one with whom she is standing.

My thin husband was trembling with fear.

Don't fear o husband, the battle is won.

The song starts with the hardships of a woman whose husband is in the army but ends with suggesting the entry of women in army. The husband is in the army simply because he is a male. But in fact the wife is more courageous than the man.

The songs also record social change. Family planning and electrification of villages (schemes started by the government) attracted the attention of women. The following song speaks of the problems attached with over population.

The sharp spade, cutting the fields, cutting all.

The earth will produce gold.

Made thin chapattis and cooked potato curry,

Along with food went to the fields, found husband sleeping under the tree.

Trying to awake him, he looked at me angrily.

You go away from here o quarrelsome woman,

Your elder brother has come; you go with him to your home.

Came home crying, filled with shame.

Went to the room and started crying.

Nobody came to console me.

Elder sister-in-law is my own sister who consoled me.

Tell me the truth o sister, what ails you?

I am exploited by my husband, who doesn't let me sleep

And himself sleeps under the tree.

16 acres of land, only one hard working ploughman,

16 children eat up everything and the farmer is left without food.

You get up, and go for operation¹³.

Why to be tempted by goond, ajwain¹⁴

The earth will produce gold.

In the similar manner the next song supports the family planning campaign started by Indira government. The song also hints towards the fact that men are responsible for over population.

All streets have got poles, spread the wires carefully,

O government what will you get by ruining this country?

All the houses will be counted and numbered,

Use of lamps will be stopped, new bulbs will be used.

All the elders will be counted, they will be punished for scandal mongering against their sons and daughter-in-laws and will be shown the way out.

¹³ Female sterilization.

¹⁴ The terms goond and ajwain refer towards sweet dishes given to women during and after pregnancy.

All the boys and girls will be counted; husbands and wives having more than two children will be thrashed.

Wives are innocent, only husbands will be thrashed.

Why did they marry them, their ears will be twisted.

There are songs of women complaining about drunkard husbands. Some of these songs are sung in humorous manner while others are sung with a pensive mood. Fetching water from the well, have a look at the drunkard's wife.

He happy, the whole world happy, the only one unhappy is the drunkard's wife.

Came from my home, brought enough money

My family is reputed, who gave me everything.

From plate to roller pin to platter to picture.

My husband is drunkard who has sold out everything.

Even the agricultural land is kept on lease.

It's already midnight, still he is not home,

Crying I went out, found him lying in the sewer.

Covered with dirt, his body turned pale

I thought him dead and didn't say anything.

No flour in the house, he roams around idly

Empty stomach for two days, still he roams around idly.

The next song is sung in a humorous tone where the woman's drunkard husband is beaten up by the neighbours but she doesn't try to save him.

Embroidered bangles, pinching me in the nerves
My husband is a drunkard, gets beaten by everyone.
Mother-in-law saves him, saves him the sister-in-law
Even my thumb doesn't bother, he gets beaten by everyone.

Along with jakari songs there are songs sung on different occasions. These songs too represent the life conditions of women. *Holika* is an important festival in South Haryana. Though it is named after *Holika*, yet what is revered is Prahalad and Vishnu. Holika is burnt at night time so Prahalad could be saved. But what is interesting to note here is that women don't witness holika dahan. It is entirely a man's affairs. They worship *holika* at day time. She is like a mother to wome- *holi mata*. The song which is sung while worshipping holika speaks a lot about their mind state.

What are you so proud of oh father?

Why do you feel so happy looking at your sons?

Your sons will become your neighbours and will build a wall between,

What are you so proud of oh mother?

Why do you feel so happy looking at your daughters?

Your daughters will be taken away by son-in-laws

You will become all alone

What are you so proud of oh mother holika

Why do you feel so happy looking at so many people?

They will burn you and will go away.

Women don't leave a chance to express themselves, be it a social gathering or religious. Apart from these songs *khodiya* is another folk performance showcasing women's agency. *Khodiya*, a folk performance, is an all-night drama performed by Haryanvi women on the day of marriage when all the male members of the boy's family go to the girl's house (baarat). As it is a customary in Haryana not to take women in baarat so all the women who are left behind at the boy's house perform *Khodiya* where they enact the whole marriage scene and other rituals which take place at the girl's house. Apart from this they perform other plays and songs as well.

Dr. Purnachandra Sharma defines *khodiya* as a "folk-ritual played on the occasion of marriage in the groom's house" (quoted in Harisharan Varma 177). If we look at the etymology of the word, the common assumption says that it has come from the vernacular word *khod* or *khool* which means to put a mask. (ibid) As women cross dress themselves and play different roles, it means that they are putting masks on their faces. Another interpretation says that the word *khool* means to open. (ibid) So women, in the absence of men open up themselves and break all the restrictions. As it is the game of role-playing and also an open expression of sexuality, so both the interpretations seem to be true.

Purnachandra Sharma talks about seven plays which are performed on the *khodiya* night. They are- 1. Bokada, 2. Byah, 3. Bawla Beta, 4. Gadrin, 5. Sharabi, 6. Babu-Sahab, and 7. Jachha-Bachha. If we translate them into English then they become- 1. Marriage, 2. The game of lamb and goat, 3. Stupid Son, 4. Ironsmith and his Wife, 5. A Drunkard Person, 6.

Gentleman, and 7. Mother-Child. But in fact *khodiya* doesn't follow any pre defined structure. Women perform whatever they feel like performing.

Anita Singh in the foreword of her book *Gender, Space and Resistance: Women and Theatre in India* writes, "The performing space, whether it is the proscenium stage or a raised platform in a village or the fields or the street, lies silent and quiescent like a sleeping snake. Then come bodies, movements and words. And the stage acquires a character. It becomes entertaining, engaging, enthralling, maudlin, vulgar, and crass and thought-provoking depending on who is occupying it" (v).

In the first performance women enact a pseudo-marriage and play the role of the bride, groom, pandit and other members of the society. They perform all the marriage rituals as well. This pseudo-marriage is followed by another performance *bokada* where the newly wedded (imaginary) bride comes to the groom's (imaginary) house. The same woman will perform both the roles of bride and groom simultaneously. This performance talks about the future which awaits the bride in the groom's house. It shows how different attitude is shown towards the son and the daughter-in-law. When one woman asks where the bride will sleep, what she will eat and what she will wear, other women reply that she will eat stale food, she will sleep on the broken cot and she will wear tattered clothes. When the same questions are asked regarding the groom, they reply that he will eat sweets; he will sleep on bed and he will wear coat pant. So the performance is a comment on the double standards of the society.

In the same manner other performances also criticise the society and make fun of its norms. In *Ironsmith and his Wife* they make fun of masculinity and male genitals. A woman playing the ironsmith comes to the bride's house where all other women are also present. The

ironsmith asks the woman to buy big iron needles, filtering nets etc. from him and give grass for his goat in return. Women take his iron needles as phallic symbols and make fun of him by saying that they are shorter in size, so we don't need them. In a way they make fun of male sexuality and its lack.

Whoever has talked about *khodiya* they have discussed three main purposes behind playing it, which are:

- For the well being of Baarat and Baaratis
- To celebrate the marriage ritual with other women
- As all the male members of the house are away, so there is a danger of thieves. Women entertain themselves to keep awake and safeguard the house.

So the general belief among writers is that the ritual has religious as well as entertainment purpose. Hazariprasad Dwivedi writes, "These *khodiya* songs sung on the occasion of marriage are not just the medium of entertainment. It is believed that they are sung to please the gods and to keep the evil away from the newly wedded couple" (quoted in Varma 177).

He is right in saying that the main aim of these performances is not entertainment. But nobody has dared to talk about the most important aspect of these songs i.e. to subvert the authority. This folk performance is an effort, if not to transform, then to question the gender norms. By cross-dressing as males they defy social constructions and show how meaning is produced by society and how body becomes a victim in the hands of the society.

No doubt the subversion is not real, but at least it is on the level of language and performance. Jean Genet has written somewhere that "theatre is not for entertainment. It doesn't even offer solutions to problems pertaining to real life. In theatre, resolutions are

possible only at the plane of imagination, at the level of metaphor, gesture, language and poetic action” (quoted in B. Mangalam: 19). *Khodiya* is also the same platform which doesn’t provide solutions to women’s problems but at least recognizes them and resists them. This resistance could be seen in the open expression of female sexuality and desires, in making fun of masculinity etc. This folk ritual shows the performative power of gender which defies social norms and relations.

This ritual is also an effort to understand male psychology that’s why they cross dress themselves like males. As dress defines gender roles so they make fun of that process through which gender is constructed because “as a social category gender provides the pre-defined and pre-ordained spheres of activity, modes of dress, forms of difference, expectations about behaviour and even parameters of design, for even architecture is subject to fundamental division of space into gender defined roles” (Bottigheimer 1).

They try to subvert those roles and redefine gender as “process of gender construction is a life-long process of interaction where gender is evolved and confirmed in relation to several set of norms. These set of norms are relatively stable but not static. Individuals are not merely reproducing norms of gender but transforming them and producing new ones. In other words, we are influenced by, and we also influence the gender roles” (Meurling: 25).

Apart from this desire to redefine gender roles, this cross dressing shows that desire of women where they want to do away with males. To take revenge on males, for not taking them in the baarat, they perform a pseudo marriage where they don’t even need males. They can perform the role of everyone. They themselves can be the husbands, fathers, fathers-in-law etc. *Khodiya*, a space free from the coercive domination of men, becomes the place

where women themselves are the producers and the consumers. It's not like the patriarchal society where "some are given the role of producing and exchanging subjects, while others are assigned the role of productive earth and goods." (Irigaray: 260). Body here is not an object of desire but a means of emancipation and liberation.

These women through this performance seem to be supporting that Utopian idea of Luce Irigaray "where nature would spend itself without exhaustion, trade without labour, give of itself- protected from masculine transactions- for nothing: there would be free enjoyment, well- being without suffering, pleasure without possession." (Irigaray: 263).

Genet defines theatre as a "place for displaying and dismantling the power of images." (Mangalam: 41) Likewise, this women's theatre also displays and dismantles the images of women being meek and docile and males being powerful. Here the ultimate power is in the hands of the women, they are the writers, producers and directors, so they can treat masculinity the way they want to. They want to show that if "male homosexuality is practised in language then why not female homosexuality" (Irigaray 261). In cultures that do not openly discuss inner emotional states "songs are the shared tradition through which emotions are expressed, thus providing a medium for the expression of what might be taboo in everyday conversation" (Narayan 1986: 56). So this performance is an urge to "return to red blood" (Irigaray 260). It shows what will really happen "when the goods get together" (ibid).

Chapter 3

Women in/and Ragni

All folklore is explicitly or implicitly concerned with the issues of gender, sex, and power. Ironically these very issues are often absent from the folklore scholarship. In Haryana the situation is the worst. No real questions of gender, sex, domination, power structure are raised by practitioners of folklore research. Even when scholars are engaged with research on folklore, they explored male genres like ragni. Rachelle H. Saltzman rightly observes how folklore “tended to privilege male informants and masculine forms of expressive culture, even when women and their lore are examined” (548). One could imagine how untouched the issue of women would have been in male genres.

The research in this chapter is undertaken to focus on the representation of women in male genres. The questions asked are like what happens to a male genre when it is appropriated by women? Is the agency which is at the heart of women’s folklore intact or lost? It also traces the transformation of ragni from being part *sang* to individual performances. Greene and Kahn write, “Feminist scholarship undertakes the dual task of deconstructing predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience in an effort to change the tradition that has silenced and marginalized us” (1985: 1) (quoted in Babcock 391). This chapter takes into consideration the male folk genre – ragni – and deconstructs it. It not only studies the representation of women in ragni but also undertakes the process through which they become objectified in ragni. The female body from being an active agent of change gets converted into “a site on which masculine meanings get spoken and masculine desires enacted?” (Ruthven 45)

The boundaries of song, dance and drama are very much blurred in any folk literature as the element of performance plays an important role in folklore. *Sang* – the popular folk drama of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh is a mixture of dance, drama and music and *ragni* is its backbone. To understand *ragni*, it becomes mandatory for the researchers to understand *sang* as *ragni* in Haryana has developed through *sang*.

Sang is generally performed in an open area, under a tree near the village boundary so that it can accommodate more people. The simple stage is made up of five or six wooden cots or beds covered with a heavy cloth. People sit around it on three sides. A corner of the stage is set aside for the instrumentalists and the actors who are waiting for their turn. Instrumentalists also work as chorus. The dialogues are composed in verse form called *ragni*. For religious occasions the stories are taken from Ramayana and Mahabharata and for other occasions mostly love stories are chosen. These love stories are narrated in a different form of *ragni* called “*duchasmi* – meaning two eyed” (Vatuk 24). These types of *ragnis* are mostly erotic, vulgar and obscene in form.

There is a debate among folklorists about the origin of *Sang*. Some writers call it the ludicrous or obscene form of *sangeet* only and others give the credit of its origin to *mujra* and *nakal*. Shri Ramnarayan Aggarwal writes, “One dramatic form of *Swang* developed in medieval times which was known as *Khyal* in North and Central India, and *khyal* in Punjab, *Turra Kalgi* in Rajasthan...and *Sang* in Meerut and Haryana” (quoted in Puranchand Sharma: 10). Suresh Awasthi seems to be agreeing with Aggarwal when he writes, “This drama is known with many names like *Sangeet*, *Nautanki*, *Bhagat*, *Nihalde* and *Swang*” (ibid).

Raja Ram Shastri credits the origin of Sang to Mujra and Nakal. Sometimes the prostitutes would come in a group and perform story, music and dance altogether. Since Mujra was performed by prostitutes it was not considered to be a good thing for the civil society. So, people thought a need to replace this obscene means of entertainment with something more social and appropriate. Female performers were replaced by male performers and blending of dance, music and story took the form of Sang.

The debate is around the origin of sang and not about the time-period. Almost all folklorists believe Kishanlal Bhaat to be the first sangi who popularized the drama in Western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Dr. Nagendra Ojha considers medieval period as the beginning of sang and writes, “In the middle ages, a famous poet named Sadulla composed many folk songs and folk dramas. It prepared the way for the development of later day folk-drama” (84).

While tracing the development of Sang one finds many similarities between British drama and sang. Sang went through the same phases of development as British drama went. The themes of initial sangs were taken from *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Purana* etc. The performance revolved around the theme of the battle between the good and the evil or dharma and adharma. The characters too were Ram, Krishna, Vishnu, Yamraj etc. Women never participated in these performances neither as audiences nor as performers. Female roles were played by male counterparts. Women as characters were the backbone of these performances but real women never showed up in these performances.

With the passage of time folk drama became more secular and day to day life issues started taking place in it. The impact of religion was still there but more secular themes were included. The battle of good and bad was the main issue but it was shown on the part of the

individuals and not gods and goddesses. Kishan Lal Bhaat, Bansilal, Alibaksh, Baalak Ram, Pandit Netram, Pandit Dipchand, Baje Bhagat, Lakhmichand are the famous sangis of Haryana. Raja Ram gives the credit of Sang in its present form to Kishan Lal Bhaat. R.C. Temple translated the sangs of Bansilal in his book *The Legends of the Punjab*. Though most of the sangis belonged to Sonipat and Rohtak belt of Haryana yet it was popular in South Haryana as well. Sangs of Alibaksh were famous in Rewari during 1854-1899 (Puranchand Sharma 4). His contemporaries in north-east Haryana were Yogesh, Balak Ram, Krishan Swami, Pandit Shankar Lal and Ahmed Baksh etc. Balak Ram seemed to have composed sangs like Puran Bhagat, Raja Gopichand, and Shilande etc. (ibid). But since there is no clarity as to who composed which Sang, we can't simply take it as the reality as different sources provide different information. Puranchand Sharma gives the credit of composing these sangs to Lakhmichand.

Baje Bhagat too was a popular sangi of Haryana but soon his popularity was replaced by Lakhmichand who seemed to have rejuvenated the folk drama. Ramnarayan Aggarwal writes, "Among these Sangis Lakhmichand was the most talented one. It won't be an exaggeration to call him the father of modern day ragni. Like Kabir, he represented the wisdom of Vedant and the aspect of love and youth in common man's language" (Sharma, P. 16). He is called the Kalidas or Shakespeare of Haryana. The sang tradition follows the guru tradition. Like other sangis Lakhmichand too revered his guru Mansingh.

What made him popular was his efforts towards secularization of sang. People were bored with the preachings of religious and didactic songs of earlier sangis. Lakhmichand freed Sang from the confines of religion. He made it more life like where the themes of love and life were given more importance. For the first time religion and eroticism were combined

together in sang as he took his themes from religious scriptures but presented them with a fervour of eroticism (sringar rasa). Ahmed Baksh was the most renowned among all these sangis. He was a storyteller who later became a sangi. He is among the well-known practitioners of Sang. His contemporaries are Pandit Sarupchand, Mansingh Jogi, Hardeva Swami, Baje Naai, Bharatu, Nihal, SurajbhanVerma, Hukamchand, Dhansingh Jaat, Amarsingh Naai and Chatru Luhar (Sharma, P. 15).

One could see that these sangis were not just performers but performers belonging to particular castes. These performers used their caste names as surnames to be popular among the audiences of a particular caste. Dr. Subhash Chander in his book *Haryanvi Lokdhara: Pratinidhi Ragnian* discusses about the same caste based discrimination and writes, “In the public gatherings, people would sing the songs of a particular caste which dominated the gathering” (16).

The problem of authorship is an old problem associated with ragni. The trend of claiming authorship on somebody else’s work is as old as the emergence of ragni itself. Since the ragnis were available only in oral forms so writers sang them with few changes and claimed them to be their own creation. That’s why one sang is associated with many sangis. Dr. Subhash Chander quotes Rajender Badgujjar who expressed his helplessness and said “What to do? Without mentioning the names of Lakhmichand and Mehar Singh, nobody pays us” (ibid). Lakhmichand and Mehar Singh both belonged to upper castes, Brahman and Jat respectively. So for the lower caste and less renowned performers it became important either to sing the same ragnis or to include the name of these sangis in their ragnis. The casteist and patriarchal nature of the society could be seen in the themes of the ragnis as well. Folklore is reflective of the collective unconsciousness of any society and even in that collective

unconsciousness people couldn't move away from the caste consciousness. The popularity of ballad *Harish Chander* refers towards the same fact which not only appropriates caste system but considers it the responsibility of the individuals to preserve it. Harishchander is praised by everyone for not leaving the path of Dharma. Dharma here means to abide by the caste norms and patriarchal norms- selling his wife and not allowing his son to be cremated.

This trend of eulogizing and idolizing a particular caste could be seen in present day ragni and sang as well. Songs like *Jaatan ka Chhora*, *Chhora Jaat ka*, *Lala ji ki chhori fan ho gyi jaat ki*, *Chhore gujjar ke gadar macha dyange*, *Royal Jaat*, *Jaatn ke thath*, *Jaatgelyanyari*, *choreyjaatsaan*, *Tu backbone jatt di* etc. are examples of the same. The way these songs were sung in the beginning was to establish the authority of a particular caste. The dominant castes tried to patronize and legitimize themselves through these sangs.

Earlier women never participated in the performances, so roles of women were played by men only. In the all-night dramas like *nautanki* and *sang* male performers used to cross-dress themselves to portray women characters. It was not done for the purpose of understanding feminine psyche and to connect with it (as is the case with female cross-dressing themselves as males in *khodiya*) but to restrict women from performing in public. Puranchand Sharma discusses about an important anecdote associated with Lakhmichand. Once performing *Rajabhoj*, Lakhmichand became Sarande (female lead) and Kundawala (his enemy) became Rajabhoj (male lead). That was the last time Lakhmichand performed any female character. This decision of Lakhmichand to not to perform female roles any longer speaks a lot about the typical male mentality of Haryanvi men where women are considered to be inferior and playing female characters becomes a symbol of impotency. Apart from this the roles given to female characters are not of as much importance as the roles given to male characters. If

Lakhmichand himself believes that his female characters are much refined in decision making and practical knowledge as compared to men then why did he refuse to play the female characters? Though Lakhmichand defends cross-dressing and celebrates femininity but he does so with a limited vision.

What is the sin in cross-dressing?

First you are born out of a woman only

Her menstrual blood formed you.

Nine months she kept you in the womb

Afterwards you wore her clothes only.

After some time you got married and became her slave

Losing control over your mind and body, what are you so proud of?

(Sharma, P. 5)

Marriage for men in Haryana is considered to be equivalent to becoming slave of woman. Even the husband-wife jokes too perpetuate the same idea. But the reality is entirely opposite to this. Haryana being a patriarchal state gives ample freedom to men to exercise their power over the women. In the man-woman relationship man always enjoys a better position. Whenever a woman tries to assert herself and her identity she is treated otherwise. Their husbands become a means of ridicule where others make fun of them for becoming the slave of women (*joru ka gulam*). Apart from this the last two lines (having no control over mind and body) suggest the effects of sexual relationship where the woman has power over the man or she can control a man by using her sexuality or by arousing desires in the male. But that is not true. Women have no control over their own bodies and minds; how can they

control others' bodies and minds? It shows the attitude of the society where men are ready to lose everything in return for sexual favours from the woman.

Lakhmichand's refusal to perform female characters did something good to women as others might have followed his footsteps which might have paved the way for women's inclusion in sang as performers. For some women's entry in sangs opened the gates for eroticism and vulgarity as ragni departed from storytelling and became more independent. But in my opinion this inclusion of the obscene was not a result of ragni's departure from storytelling. It speaks about the taste of the public. From outside they might oppose it but deep within their hearts they want such kind of performances to take place. Had that not been the case, ragni wouldn't have been so popular. Dr. Subhash Chander writes, "The so called big chaudharies, in the darkness of night, came to see these performances and couldn't stop themselves from dancing on these ragnis" (11)

Arya Samaj, a reformist movement, opposed all kinds of folk performances in the beginning but later on they used the same medium to spread their ideology. So art is not obscene by nature; it is determined by the users. The taste they want is served to them by the performers. The aspect of eroticism and vulgarity was always imbedded in ragni. Dr. Puranchand Sharma writes, "Cross-dressed as a female on the open stage, wherever the male performer goes the environment becomes frolicsome" (9). He further elaborates, "From behind the veil, licking the lip with the tongue, the satirical gestures of the performers wound the hearts of the audiences. The thudding fantastic dance of the performers with heavy bodily movements, make the audience go crazy... all of this is a proof that Haryanvi men are flirty" (9).

So what everybody is concerned about is Haryanvi men and their sexuality. Even Puran Chand Sharma takes pride in saying that Haryanvi men are flirty. What about Haryanvi women? Is it okay if they too are flirty? While women are asked to read *Bhagvad Gita* and *Hanuman Chalisa*, men go and showcase their masculinity in flirting with male performers who have cross-dressed themselves as females. Now just imagine the condition where female roles are no longer played by males but females themselves. What would happen to their sexual fantasies if the “plastic boobs” are replaced by the real ones? *To seek the answer, just open the Youtube in the laptop and search any Haryanvi ragni.*

Puran Chand Sharma is all praises for Lakhmichand but what makes Lakhmicand so popular is not his handling of the issues of gender, caste, class etc. any differently than his forefathers but his understanding of human psyche. He got the nerve of young and the old alike. He combined the secular and the religious together. One such example is seen in *Mirabai* where the mother is asking Mira to read the scriptures.

Spontaneous, clever and intelligent you are

Keep the scriptures in your lap and read them aloud o daughter

Read thousand names of Vishnu, read *Hanuman Chalisa*

Read four *Vedas* and *Shastras*, how many times should I tell you? (Sharma, P. 6).

What is interesting to note here is that women in Haryana are not allowed to read *Hanuman Chalisa* but Meera’s mother is asking her to do so. A worshiper of Hanuman is equivalent to a Brahmachari. Brahmacharya is considered to be men’s terrain and not women’s. If women decide to become brahmachari, they fail to perform their duty i.e. procreation. The sang *Mirabai* celebrates the idea of a dutiful daughter and not brahmacharya. Mirabai represents

the apt picture of a daughter and lover. Her love is celebrated simply because the devotion was towards Krishna and not a real man. Had she dared to love a real man her fate would have been that of modern lovers in Haryana who are killed for the sake of honour.

Be it Mirabai or any any other female character, they are represented in a very traditional manner. Either they are treated as whores or goddesses. They are always represented as adamant, lustful, demonic, house-breakers, witches, man-eaters etc. Dr. Subhash Chander writes, “women are given different names like quarrelsome, bull, venomous like snake (female snake) etc” (18). The study of the the following songs of Lakhmichand compiled by Puranchand Sharma will prove the point further.

The first sang of Lakhmichand Nautanki discusses the idea of love where the lover leaves everything to find Nautanki. The depiction of love in these songs is very much Petrarchan where the lover is infatuated by the woman so much that he leaves everything for the woman. What is interesting to note here is that it’s always the man in search of the woman and never vice versa. In the Sang *Chander Kiran* the love-sick hero Madansen is madly in love with Chander Kiran. The woman is represented as the most beautiful creature. She is compared with different cultural objects.

Toned breasts, slender belly and eyes like a deer

Sharp nose, beautiful face and lips red with paan

O beauty extraordinary, you are death to man (Sharma, P. 20).

If we look at the representation of the woman then she is just represented as an object. Her beauty brings death to onlookers. The reason for the narrator to fall in love with her is her beauty and nothing else. In a way the ragni is giving the message that only beautiful women

are to be loved and the sole responsibility of a woman is to please others with her beauty. The description also gives fitness goals to women – they should have a perfect figure and beautiful face.

The ballad is an apt representation of women in Haryana and Devar-Bhabhi relationship. In Haryana younger brother-in-law always calls her sister-in-law by name. She is never called as bhabhi. Interestingly Bhabhi as a character in the ballad is not given any name but just called bhabhi only. When Phool Singh, coming back from hunting, asks her to serve him with some water, she refuses and says I am not your wife. The conversation goes like this;

Phool Singh: Have pity on me, I am very thirsty, give me some water

Hungry and thirsty since the morning my body has become weaker.

Bhabhi: Why to order me. I am not your wife

Stretch your legs as much as much is the quilt.

Phoolsingh: I am too tired, have some shame

Give me some water, don't play game

Bhabhi: Go away from here or get yourself pierced

Why to sit on my head as a burden?

Phool Singh: What game do you want to play?

What do you want, why not directly say?

Bhabhi: Scared for no reason...

PhoolSingh: Be in your senses, stop making fancies.

Otherwise you will melt like a sand dune (Sharma, P. 98)

While analyzing the conversation one has to remember that Phool Singh was gone for hunting (his own entertainment). What right he has to complain about his thirst and hunger? It's not that he was working hard in the fields and the woman was sitting at home. It was not his sister-in-law who told him to go hunting without eating and drinking. He has no right to order her to bring water for him.

If we go deeper one realizes that the performer too is of the opinion that the sister-in-law is at fault for refusing to give water to her brother-in-law. Though Lakhmichand has given agency by refusing to give water to brother-in-law but the agency is limited. She doesn't refuse since he commanded her, but because he is not her husband. Is it justified for the husband to command the wife?

He doesn't stop here but goes further and blames her for being the cause of fighting between two brothers. He calls her a characterless woman and says:

Neither respecting the guests, nor keeping the veil
Debating with husband and brother-in-law without any shame
Roaming around without any control, she is the one without tame
Fighting, gossiping, stealing doing much more
Going astray with no norms
Calling names to husband and abusing sons and daughters
Such are women of low birth and characterless (Sharma, P. 101).

The moment the woman opens her mouth she is labelled as characterless. Further the characteristics of good women are also discussed;

Wearing shame as the garment, the daughters and wives of high birth

Showing respect to guests and others without any mirth

Making the parents and in-law's proud

Such are the women of good birth (ibid).

While complaining to his brother against his sister-in-law, Phool Singh uses terms like scoundrel, rascal and khagadi (female bull). He also uses another term Jhotadi – a buffalo which has just delivered the calf. Such buffaloes are always ready to hit anyone going near them as they always think anyone coming near them would be dangerous to the newly born calf. The term is also suggestive of a healthy woman. The husband considers the complain made to him by his brother and shows his wife her real place;

What did you think to throw my brother out of the house?

Did you bring it from your father's home, the wealth you use?

It is not for the calf to eat the wealth of the butcher.

How to believe these women?

House breakers they are, who make brothers to fight

Man-eaters they are who can get their husbands killed.

You be ruined, may worms eat your dead body (Sharma, P. 106).

He further adds:

The wealth we have earned, you have slurped it all

What is your use if you say no to water?

A woman like you is not needed at all

Go back to your father's house and do whatever you want (ibid)

The only agency expressed by her is her helplessness. Her answer to them:

How can I fight with you men?

You be happy that I am a woman.

I just teased him, he couldn't afford

My heart is pure there is no fraud (Sharma, P.107).

In the sang *Nunade and Puran Mal*, the sympathies of the listeners lie with Puranmal who became a victim of his stepmother's sexual hunger. Puranmal is called the Bhagat who couldn't be moved from the path of righteousness. Nobody cares about Nunade and her questions. She is represented as an evil and treacherous woman who doesn't even hesitate to get Puranmal killed, when he didn't satisfy her desires. She is made responsible for the death of Puranmal. But what about the king who, being blinded by the sexual passion, kills his own son? Do only men have desires? Why nobody questions him for marrying another woman when he was already married? What about Nunade's questions where she asks the need for the king to marry her if he was not able to satisfy her. The ragni also refers towards the mismatched marriages where the man is much older than the woman.

King Saleman had two wives – Ichharde and Nunade. None of them had any kids. He might have married for the second time as the first wife was unable to bear a child. Even the second was not able to bear any heir. Due to Gorakh Nath the elder wife finally produced a child – Puranmal. It means the king himself was infertile but nobody asks these questions.

Puranmal, who is a follower of Gorakh Nath after completing his education, refuses his father's request to get married. He goes to meet his step mother Nunade who gets distracted by his beauty. Instead of calling her son she tries to convince him to marry her.

I am a young beauty

Look at my age; I am not your mother

Go and call her the mother, the one who kept you in the womb.

Shameless were the parents who married me off to an old man (Sharma, P. 457)

To that Puranmal replies,

The duty of a virtuous woman

Is to serve her man

Husband is equal to god

Who will help you to sail through the tide (Sharma, P. 460).

When she is unable to convince him she goes to her husband and complains against Puranmal. To that Rupeshah (king's soldier) replies;

If Puranmal is found guilty I will cut his head

Don't you know what women are like?

In Hastinapur the battle was fought

Due to a woman, many died and rot.

Kurukshetra and Lanka, the cities vanished due to women

Nobody listens to the man, woman speaks the only truth

Many died due to them, I can count numberless homes

Sometimes Indrani, sometimes Brahmani, Sometimes virtuous

Sometimes Lakshmi, Sometimes witch, look at their different forms

Men get killed in their trap, Brahma, Vishnu, Shivaji all have been duped

(Sharma, P. 479).

Raja Harish Chander, the virtuous among men is revered like god. He is never questioned for selling his wife and not allowing his wife to cremate his own son but is always praised for keeping well on the path of dharma. After being robed by the gods he sells his wife to a Brahman and becomes a slave in a bhangi's house.

After facing many difficulties when finally Harish Chander passes the test, he says to Madnavat:

Many women followed the path of Dharma

What is so new that you did do?

The strength of virtuous woman, never brings anything wrong in her mind

Suniti from Uttanpaad was dejected by the husband

If you have remained virtuous what is so new in it?

Virtuous Ansuia stayed in the jungle for 14 years

She spent half of her life praying to god

If you have taken Ram's name what is so new in it?

Shivaji sliced 108 heads for Shakti

If you have been sliced once, then what is so new in it?

Krishna left Radha wandering, loving Kubja and leaving Radha aside

Having being separated once what is so new that you did do? (Sharma, P.571).

With every refrain the question what is so new in it, is rightly asked by Harish Chander as Indian mythology has a long history of women being dejected by their husbands and lovers. They are supposed to be okay with it. Women are convinced to accept their situation by giving examples from mythology. If they don't, they are not virtuous enough.

The sang *Chapsingh* is important in many ways. It not only talks about the secondary position of women and their trials to prove their chastity but also about the enmity between Hindus (Rajput) and Muslims. Though the confrontation between Hindus and Muslims is never clear in Haryana as in day to day life religion is not an issue but caste is. But what is interesting to note here is that unconsciously people are very racial where the Hindus have enmity and hatred towards Muslims. The trend could be seen in women's folksongs as well where Indira's marriage to Firoz is described as kidnapping and abduction. Her decision to choose a Parsi husband is represented like *Love-Jehad*. She is not shown as the daughter of the prime minister but an ordinary girl who could be entangled easily:

Letter has come from far away country to marry the daughter,

If you don't marry, we will abduct her.

O daughter get ready hurriedly or you will get me killed.

Muslims have come to conquer.

Firoz is not only shown as a Muslim but a person belonging to another country. The idea of India for Hindus is well played here.

In the sang *Chapsingh* too the same stereotypical image of Muslims is represented. The narrative is about Chapsingh – the commander in Shah Jahan's army, his wife Somwati and Sherkhan (the name itself speaks a lot), another commander in Shah Jahan's army. Chapsingh bets with Sherkhan about the loyalty of his wife. Shersingh, like the evil Iago in *Othello* somehow manages to convince Chapsingh to believe that his wife is adulterous. The composer of the sang instead of questioning the existing trend where women have to go through the trial to prove their chastity, praises Rajputs for their courage and strength. Like in

Ramayana Ravan becomes the real villain while Ram is not even questioned for throwing his wife away. Woman here is represented as meek, docile and chaste who can go to any extent not only to save her dignity but also to prove her chastity. Husbands have every right to suspect their wives and the only way out for a wife is to prove that suspicion wrong. It's like the Iranian movie *Stoning of Soraya* – a movie on the derogatory practice of stoning a woman to death, prevalent in Iran, where a woman will be stoned to death if she is found guilty of adultery. Whether it's the woman filing the case of adultery against the husband or the vice-versa, in both the cases woman has to defend herself or offend the other.

If a woman doesn't abide by the norms of the society she is called buffalo, cow, (sandani) and mare. This dehumanization of women characters speaks a lot about their position in the society.

You are of no use to me, why do you welcome me?

O sinful woman who slept with Sherkhan.

Musalman are impure who hate pigs but can eat goat and lamb!

They marry their own sisters (cousins)

To taste your chastity, I have called upon my own death.

Leave Ganga-Jamna and other religious places, start going to mosque.

Bowing down and looking in the left (a comment on namaz reading)

Churidar in the legs, Bali in the ears and partition in the hair

Leave vegetarian food and start eating meat and sand (Sharma, P. 351).

Sherkhan is represented as the evil for plotting and convincing Chapsingh that Somwati has slept with him. Who has given Chapsingh the authority to send another man to his house to test his wife's chastity?

Guru Mansingh washes the scars left on the heart

Women are bad characters paving the way for man's downfall (ibid).

He doesn't even hesitate to push her in the well and like Maryada-purushottam Ram threatens her to cut her nose and hair, "cutting your nose and braid, I would have thrown you in the well" (352).

The husband rejects the wife (*duhaag*) and orders her to fly the crows from the palace¹. The wife, without any fault of hers, accepts the command and starts living like a widow and becomes a human scarecrow. In the folksong where she is harassed by the elder brother-in-law, she warns the husband not to touch her without listening to her part of the story. But here she accepts the husband's command without any complain. Not only this, after losing the bet with Shersingh, when the husband is to be executed, being a chaste and dutiful woman she decides to save him. She never questioned the husband for dejecting her but has the courage to question Shersingh.

You wanted to get us hanged, o wicked *Pathan*!

You just know how to ransack.

You wanted to test us, chaste women don't break.

What do you know of a dutiful wife (*pativarta*) who marry their own cousins,

¹The woman becomes a human scare crow. In the folklore of Haryana whenever a woman is suspected to have deviated from the path of dharma she is ordered by the husband to be a human scare crow. Mind it - only women are given the duty.

Whom would you care for, not even brothers to your own sisters?

We have seen the world, tested so many like you.

Time has come for you to be vanished from the earth (Sharma, P. 361).

The restriction of women and their reach from public places is strengthened in the sang *Cheer-Parva*. When Draupadi was commanded by the Kauravas to be present in the assembly, she says:

In the assembly of males how Draupadi will speak

You, who have lost faith in each other, get ready to be ruined.

Woman going in the assembly will bring an earthquake.

When the daughter-in-law will be called in the assembly

She will think of committing suicide (Sharma, P. 371).

Instead of giving voice to Draupadi to question Yudhishtir's decision of putting her on stake, the composer finds problems with a woman to be called in the assembly. In *ViratParva* Lakhmichand indirectly hints that Draupadi instigated Pandavas to take revenge on Kauravas. After the completion of *Agyaatvas* and Abhimanyu's marriage with Uttara, when Pandavas were ready to go home, Draupadi taunted them;

You shameless Kshatriyas

Where will you take Uttara you have no house in Hastinapura?

Your faces have become dull, enmity has made you thin

Karna and Duryodhan have said foul words

They have wounded my heart, you want to put salt?

If you are Kshatriya enough, go and kill Duryodhana

So I can tie my hair.

She further says;

You are players of dice, you will play it again for sure

Last time it was Draupadi on stake

This time it will be Uttara's fate.

Her father gave you food, how will you take away the daughter

Eating someone else's leftover; dogs have better life than you

Doomed are the women whose husbands are eunuchs

Running away the battlefield, people laugh on them

You have made me somebody's slave; daughters-in-law can't be slaves

What do you know of sixteen years old's dreams?

You will make her dance in the assembly

She is young enough to be treated badly

Marrying the son in poverty is not a good thing to be done

Everybody laughs at you, are you Brahman or Bhangi?

Will you make Uttara to sit on Duryodhan's lap and dance? (Sharma, P. 407-08).

Women's sexuality is a matter of concern for everyone. In *Nal-Damyanti*, Damyanti's mother is worried about her grown up daughter's behavior. She tells her husband;

Your Damyanti is lost in herself

She had stopped talking to us.

Immature was she earlier, knew nothing of love and desires

Young woman (16 years) she has become now,

Troubled by desires her heart has become love-sick.

Her situation makes me worried.

Daughters should be loved than life, should be kept on the path of dharma

To keep mature daughter unmarried

Is a loss to virtue and dharma (Sharma, P. 415).

She doesn't stop here but goes further and speaks about the importance of marriage for a woman. She considers it the prime responsibility of the father to marry the daughter.

There is no shame it

This is the way of the world.

Fathers get the daughters married, daughters feel thankful to father

The way Yayati went to paradise, daughters should go to another house

To say the righteous thing how many troubles do you face

Keeping unmarried daughter at home is an issue of shame (Sharma, P. 416).

What Damyanti's mother is worried about is not her desires but how the desires will get them into trouble. A woman with desires can't be left free. The best solution is to get her married. It not only sexualizes the mother-daughter relationship but also refers towards child marriage. In another individual ragni Lakhmichand seems to be endorsing the idea of child marriage.

When Brahmacharis get married at the age of twenty- nine and thirty

Finding a woman of ten or twelve years old (Sharma, P. 744).

Nowhere do we find mention of husbands taking wives home and becoming their slaves afterwards. It is the woman's responsibility to be loyal to her husband and to obey him like a slave does. Damyanti says,

I will follow your saying; will respect him full and fine

Will take away his grief, by becoming his slave (Sharma, P. 414).

The folk arts which could have been used to raise voice against social evils were in fact used to glorify the same. Child marriage, polygamy, casteism etc are glorified in most raginis.

The sang *Padmavat* too endorses the importance of marriage for women. Padmavat has decided not to get married as she doesn't believe men, to which her friends convince her:

Break your vow and get ready to be married

You are mature enough o shameless woman

One cannot live without a man

Sisters and daughters don't stay home

They have to be married off (Sharma, P. 666)

Padmavat doesn't pay any heed towards these warnings. She replies;

These man are too bad

They will love you only when they need

When in trouble will leave you alone.

How cruel was Ravan!

Gautam's wife was fooled by Inder,

Ram threw sita out, Shiv destroyed Gora's life.

Harishchander called Tara a witch

Shameless these men are, what do you think? (Sharma, P. 671).

She further says

Just let it be o my friends

Don't force me to dig the secrets

These men don't understand other's grief

I am well aware of their deceit

Will speak sweet but can cut your throat.

What Nal did to Damyanti?

Left her sleeping all alone in the jungle

Mother Sita dejected by Ram in the jungle

When Kauravas were disrespecting Draupadi

All Pandavas stood there helplessly.

Draupadi was disrobed in front of the entire assembly

Still she went to the jungle along with the pandava family (Sharma, P. 673).

Watching Padmavat performed on the satge anyone could be bewildered by the courage Padmavat showcases. One finds her full of life and agency who can even question the ways of god. But the next scene itself changes the entire narrative. No doubt she is given the agency but the moment the male protagonist enters her agency becomes nullified. Ranbir who was listening to Padmavat answers her back;

Why to be pleased by singing your own praises

Didn't you run away from here yesterday?

Nal came back to his senses when the bad time was over,
Ram left Sita not for himself but for virtue
Otherwise who would have called her mother, Janak's daughter.
Kauravas were dishonest; Pandavas didn't want to leave dharma
Weren't they killed in the battle of Mahabharata?
Didn't speak in the assembly, thought of reacting in the situation (Sharma, P. 673)

He doesn't stop here. After defending all the wrongdoings of the gods and god like characters he turns towards women and defines them as evil and treacherous.

Gets man killed without their time, such is woman
Man's troubles, woman is the reason
Sixteen sringaars and 32 dresses she wears
Fools get killed when she opens her veil
She is like a dog, who scratches his own skin
Though they say man and woman are like ghee and shakkar²
But actually she is poison in nector.
Speaking sweeter than cuckoo
But actually she is a crow.
Woman is the vein of poison, don't touch its fruit
When time comes, can cheats well (Sharma, P. 676-677).

Sometimes through the characters like Ranbir and sometimes in their voice these sangis endorsed the stereotypical images of women. Instead of blaming the perpetrators they

²Ghee and shakkar mix well together. They become inseparable.

blamed the victims themselves for their fate. In the following individual ragni Lakhmichand paints all women, young or old, with the same brush.

Another's woman and female snakes bite you the same

Anyone in their company has been paid off well

Ravan fell for Sita and got his share

Sage Uddhalak Jamdagni and sage Durvasa

Menka too broke the virtue of sage Viswamitra

...

Wicked, evil, dishonest, lame, lula, and blind

Woman is worse than all these man (Sharma, P. 779).

He further elaborates;

What is friendship with pimps?

What is woman the creature?

When in need, they leave you alone

Happy with their own praise.

Busy in wasting and eating

Thiefs, pimps and dishonest man

They serve them secretly

Quarreling in the house, ready to sleep with any stranger

They can leave the kings and palaces, to be with the wanderers.

Types are many and many their forms

What old and what young, all are poisonous and venomous

Anyone beyond twelve, whether married or unmarried,
Equal to witch, demon or snake.

Doing black magic and roaming around the entire night

O god why did you make all women as trouble?

A daughter makes you proud, a daughter gets you down (Sharma, P.781).

Though the songs sung by women too establish some norms of social behavior and duties for women but the patriarchal norms of the society don't go unquestioned in these songs. Women, who find Sita as their ideal, also address the plight of Sita through these songs. They even question the Agni-Pariksha. Though Sita is the embodiment of the dutiful and truthful wife but Ram doesn't deserve her. In the ragnis Sita is replaced by Savitri (the dutiful and pious wife who brought her husband back from Yamraj). She is represented as the ideal wife, a role model, who should be followed by all the other women.

The taboo topics not allowed inside the walls of the house became the subject matter of these ragnis. But these topics were not included to provide sex education. They further deteriorated the position of women. Women in the ragnis became objects of desire and nothing else. They didn't have any control over their sexuality. Opposite to this in the folksongs sung by women the open display of sexuality gave women agency to express their desires.

As discussed earlier, later day ragni became independent from story telling. Day to day life incidents became the subject matter of ragni. India's freedom struggle too paved the way for independent ragni where people thought the need to use ragni as a means to bring awareness among public. After the freedom struggle so many people joined the army. Leaving their families behind, they felt so lonely. They found a medium in ragni to express their

homesickness, separation from wives etc. Meharsingh Fauji, Dayachand Mayna, Krishan chand etc. were all army men (Chander 24) who composed independent ragnis. Meharsingh is known for including new themes in ragni. He wrote about the plight of army men's wives. His sensibility lies with women. Dr. Subhash Chander writes, "The moment ragni got departed from storytelling, its form was changed. On the one hand it became free from the bondage of religion by becoming more real or life-like, on the other hand freedom from storytelling allowed it to include cheap, erotic and obscene means of entertainment" (9). He is right to some extent but that is not the only reality. Ragni was not only a means of entertainment but also of livelihood. So only those themes were selected which were popular among the public. That's why time and again women are being told to perform their duties and caste system is appreciated. But folklore which is part of tradition never remains the same. Jawaharlal Handoo discussing about the tradition writes:

Tradition is not a positive discourse but a reflective and reflexive one. In it, and through it, societies explore the limits of their histories, and replay the points of tension in these histories. It is a meta-discourse, which allows the past to cease to be a "scarce resource" and allows it to become ...a renewable resource. Tradition is another zone of contestation though not about selves (as with gender) or about forms (as with genre), but about temporal boundaries themselves (quoted in Appadurai, Korom and Margaret J. Mills: 22).

The same alteration of tradition could be seen in later day ragnis where the subject matter is changed to suit the changed socio-political conditions. Ragni was used as a means to bring awareness in the public about issues like child marriage, female foeticide, illiteracy, honour killing etc. I was shocked to find a number of ragnis on these issues. But these ragnis never

became popular among the public. The reason could be the acceptance of these evils in the society as status quo or as social practices which people are not ashamed of. As I have discussed in the above paragraph that ragni was not just a means of entertainment but also of livelihood so the practitioners of ragni included only those themes which fetched larger public to their performances.

After becoming free from the clutches of sang, ragni became more independent. Dayachand Mayna's ragnis put light on the changing picture of the society. His ragnis are not just a reflection of the society and its norms but they show anger towards the inequalities prevalent in the society. He believes in what Marx said, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it" (Nayar 123). He too used ragni as a means to change the society. After independence ragni took a new turn and became more political. Its practitioners started questioning the status quo and inequalities prevalent in society. Ranbir Singh asks the performers to come out of the mythical world and to focus on real problems. Though he himself used the same mythical world, but it was not done to strengthen the norms of the society and to eulogize the mythical heroes but to question them.

Singing of Nal and Damyanti, when will you sing of your own?

Nal left Damyanti all alone, how far will you go along?

LakhmiChand, Baje, Dhanpat, why everyone sang of Damyanti and Nal?

Why did they sing of Puranmal?

Singing their greatness with pride, why nobody told the secret of leaving their wives aside?

Draupadi's stripping off was sung by all, why our dignity (women) is nobody's concern?

Thousands are disrobed every day, why nobody's pen forces to slay.

Sing of nationalism and awaken the people from their slumber

Sing of the struggles of peasants and farmers.

Just listen to me, when will you call me to join the army? (Chander 179).

This ragni is not only a comment on the present scenario but also on earlier practitioners of ragni who neglected the real issues. They romanticized the fictional heroes and heroines and never cared to talk about real human beings.

Women are always blamed for whatever wrong happens with them. In the similar manner Draupadi is blamed for her disrobing as she insulted Duryodhan, Sita for her abduction as she crossed the Lakshmanrekha etc. Maybe Draupadi insulted Duryodhan but is disrobing the revenge of that. Had that been the case why Rama had not been raped by Ravan for disrespecting Surpankha, why Yudhishtir had not been disrobed for putting Draupadi at stake? Why rape for women and death for men? Haryanvi ragnis seem to be suggesting the same thing where women are blamed for their misfortune. They are represented as Eve who forced Adam to taste the forbidden apple. But *Janvaadi ragni* or pro-people ragni questioned such representation of women. Ranbir Singh Dahiya has even given voice to characters like Urmila, wife of Lakshman, who were never represented in history or literature. Questioning the stereotypical representation of women who forced men to leave the path of Dharma, he presents a counter narrative. He blames the accused and not the victim.

Kichak – the brother-in-law of king Virat

Draupadi – the maid became victim of his ill intent.

The grandson of sage Pulast (Ravan) blinded by his own passion and pride

Abducted Sita – Rama’s bride.

Why she became the blot and the washer man’s word the truth.

What about Urmila’s sacrifice?

Why for the false pride, the truthful were put on trial? (Dr. Chander177)

Another ragni by Mukesh Yadav narrates the plight of women in free India. She problematizes the entire narrative of freedom struggles and writes,

Look at me, listen to my agony,

Half-life is past, now I have got the reasoning

The country is free then why am I still a slave?

Meritorious till matriculation, why am now detained?

Treated like shit (dustbin) why my life is hell?

Doing all the household chores

Still nobody eats of my hard work, where does it really go? (Chander 36)

She doesn’t stop here but further elaborates upon the difficulties faced by women after marriage. Since women are given no right in the property, they visit the maternal house like guests. However rich or poor the father is, the property is the privilege of the son only. Though the constitution has given women right over the property but the same right is taken away by the society. She gives away her right over the property in return of few visits of brothers on a few occasions. The rituals and customs have made women so vulnerable that they can’t exercise their rights over the property. If they do so they are not only ridiculed by the society but also the doors of the paternal house are shut for them.

Sending Sandara³ and Kothli⁴, fulfilling their duties

Sending Chhuchhak⁵ twice or thrice, they oblige me with their visits

Coming to Bhaat⁶ makes them angry.

Had I not given away my land, you wouldn't have to do these favours

The land worth of millions, given to brothers in return of some rites and rituals!

What did I get? A dress and some gifts! (Chander 36).

The anger of the girl is represented here so aptly who leaves everything behind just to get the love of parental home in return. But even visiting the girl on such customary occasions becomes so difficult for brothers. It is so funny to see how an effort is being made by the society to buy love for money. Can *Bhaat* and *Chhuchhak* equate the worth of land?

Baje Bhagat whose popularity was replaced by Lakhmichand too tried to give voice to injustice borne by women in history.

Truth, my friend (sakhi) is the cause of quarrel

Men are deceptive, they are cruel.

Believe them and make yourself a fool.

Sati colored herself in love

Stood always with her husband, in times good or bad.

Look what Nal did to Damyanti?

³ There is no equivalent of *sandara* or *sindhara* in English. It is a kind of gift given to the daughter on the occasion of the festival of Teej. The gift includes some clothes, sweets and other things.

⁴ Kothli is gifts sent to daughter's house on different occasions like Holi, Diwali, Makar Sankranti, Teej etc.

⁵ All these things are different forms of dowry system. When the daughter gives birth to a child (especially male child) her parents and brothers are supposed to bring gifts and clothes for herself, the child and everyone else in the family.

⁶ Bhaat is an important ritual in Haryana. It is the responsibility of the brother to go to her sister's place at the time of her children's wedding, with gifts, money and other things.

Left her alone in the jungle with no shame,
Friend my heart fills with anger, men are darkness in daylight.
Living in jungle for fourteen years, sita never stopped loving Ram
Still Ram threw her out, Sita- the truthful of all.
We know these men very well
Pride makes them dumb and dull (Chander 59).

In the ragnis of Dayachand Mayna (1915-1993) women are not just for decoration or objectification; they are revolutionaries who walk hand in hand with men. His most famous ragni is:

Bose bring me a saree, which takes away all sorrows
If you don't bring me the saree, you are man of no use
Saree painted with the blood of mankind (Chander 97)

Apart from this he composed many ragnis on caste inequalities and gender inequalities. Like Baje Bhagat he too tried to present a counter narrative of history and mythology.

Always cruel and treacherous, this is not a new trend
Listen to me, Men are nobody's friend
Truthful Yudhishtir, the dice player, put Draupadi on stake.
Bhola too rejected Parvati,
Truthful Sita banished from the house, Ramchander crossed all limits
Madnavat was called the witch by her husband the truthful Harishchander.
What do they know of love, who don't consider wives as human?
Dushyant refused to recognize Shankuntala when the time came

Even after showing the ring which he himself gave?
Doings of Pawan⁷were no less
Leaving Anjana with no cash.
King Nal too left his wife, without even thinking how she will survive.
Listening to these stories, my heart is done with men
Betrayers of the high order, ill-intended all of them.
Rupani too was sent to jungle by her own Jodhanath
Died in the forest itself, he never came to take her back (103-4).

The question to be asked here is that he composed many ragnis but why only *Paniaali pani pya de* (o water fetcher, please give me water) became so popular. That itself speaks a lot about the cassette industry or culture industry. As the industry is money minded their only concern is to earn money. That is possible only by reproducing something which can fetch lots of audiences.

Harichand composed ragnis revolving around the issues of women.

From birth to death, living like hell
Not respected anywhere, living in the well.
Dagger is always on the neck, even before you are born.
Murdered in the womb or killed on the roads
What do you think, this is the truth.
When we are born, everybody mourns
Sadness fills the house with the wording, alas! Daughter is born.

⁷ In the mythology Pawan is lord Hanuman's father.

Which happiness, which love, even filling the stomach is a struggle.
Our youth becomes a burden, somebody's responsibility or liability
Neither educated nor liberated, we are the difficulty.
Only worth is to be somebody's bride
Sell us with dowry and feel pride.
Entire life, somebody's wife, no existence of our own
With abuses and beating entire life to be gone
Asks Harichand, why on earth, a daughter is born? (Chander 165).

Habib Bharti quoting the scriptures gives the examples of women choosing their own husbands. He questions the society for not allowing the woman to have any say in the questions of marriage – whom to marry, when to marry, how to marry? The following sang also discusses the mother-daughter relationship.

The ones who are thought to be meek, the entire world treats them weak
When to marry, whom to marry, the questions are not to be seek.
My parents will find the boy and fix my match
Putting the rope around my neck, I have to be ready like a cow to be fetch.
The function of my life becomes to obey
O my friend this house is my own, the new one will be territory unknown.
Stay with your mother as long as you can.
Savitri herself chose the man of her life, Satyawana being Savitri's choice
Swayamvara was held for Sita, that's how she became Rama's bride.
Draupadi and Damyanti too married the men of their choice.
Being king's daughters, they got what they wanted

Girls like us have no such fortune granted.
Some call us clever, beautiful, tall and white
For others we become black, dull and ugly to become a bride.
They call us penniless what if their houses are full of money white.
Taking advantage of other's helplessness
Look at this this country and its uniqueness.
Always dressed in rags and tatters at father's house
Treated as belonging to someone else.
Blessed are they considered, die whose daughters!
I just want to ask, 'who has made this country and its norms?'
Have you ever seen a child being born without a mother? (Chander 196-197).

The issue of honour killing and khap panchyats find mention in the ragni of Ramphal Singh Jakhmi. Since the decision of the khap becomes the decision of the society, the time has come for the girls to fight their injustice.

Why are you still indoors?
Come out and open the door.
Panchayat has decided to kill, No lies do I tell.
The one sided decision of theirs, burnt my body and my whole.
Peace of mind is gone forever my nights have become sleepless and longer
The time has come for all, break the doors and come out all
Men and women, young and old, take weapons in the hands
The khap has given its edict, kill the girl, that's everybody's verdict
Man, woman, old and young, became dishonoured all alike

Nobody listened, that's the plight
They say, it's the girl who is at fault.
All are ready to get you killed
Nobody will listen; being a woman you have no rights.
To tell you the truth, go somewhere and hide
They say, as you sow, so shall you reap.
You be strong and get ready for the game
Four, five friends, you take along.
Sharpen the knife and get ready to fight
Hire a lawyer and fight for your rights
Many have died, now it's Jakhmi's turn to fight (Chander 208-09).

The next ragni shows the after effects of a woman's decision to fight the draconian khaps.
Not only the village panchayat, but also the policemen too have joined hands with the khaps.

How dare you to come to the police station to file the complaint?
Panchayats are just, who are you to challenge their judgment?
Khap is the law of the land, don't you know so?
They will get me transferred; no one can afford to be their foe.
Their torture is so harsh, go and check the bodies of the men they tortured.
Who will stop them, you tell me, from the unwalled roofs?
Fighting with power, which has horse's hoofs! (Chander 211)

Jakhmi problematizes the narrative of independence and democracy. He also blames the writers and historians for the condition of women.

If the country is free, why women are enslaved?
The moment daughter is born, everybody becomes sad and full of mourn.
Mother, father, grandfather, grandmother all alike
Make faces and curse their fate and its like.
Treated like the shit and called other's property
Always concerned about other people's commentary
That's what matters in this country.
Be it liquor or the walls of hotel
Woman's photo is printed everywhere.
Always been the sufferer, even no solace in literature.
Poets called her sorcerer or the evil
That's how she is treated
In this free country!
...
Saangis, singers, composers, treated her alike
She became the poisonous, the betrayer or the sinner
Fallen are the men, but women get the blame
Says Ramphal Singh, auctioned are the women, in this free country! (Chander 209-10).

The following song is sung in the voice of women. He asks women to throw away the attributes of shame and honour.

Tear away the chunari⁸ of silence, o my sisters
Reason of suffocation for all our brethren
Sometimes for the parents or for the husband
Tear it away, o my sisters, the veil of silence.
Tortured us and seized our hands
Got us beaten, this bloody veil
Tear it away...
The veil became the husband and burnt us alive
All stood together, nobody came to our rescue (Chander 216).

Mangsatram Shastri asks us to leave the dead tradition behind and work towards a better tomorrow. Women who been oppressed under the name of tradition and customs, have to question them.

New is for nine days, old is for lifetime
Heard of the idiom and the rhyme.
Not all old is always gold and lasts long
Come together and listen to the new song.
Old music is appreciated by all
Songs of love, songs of separation are played in every hall.
Why listen to the songs which are not so real?
Why the ballads of king and queens are still so ideal?
Time is new, lets have new songs
Not all idioms are good and well

⁸ A cloth to cover the head. In Haryana, they not only cover the head but also the face.

They say women are of foul birth,
In it there is no truth.
Calling women waste material, is not a small thing
Truth is not one, it has many versions.
As you sow, so shall you reap
It has become an idiom cheap
Such is the world, where liars are rewarded and
Honest are punished.
Not all old are good and new are bad
Caste, gotra and khaps are customs very odd.
Customs based on power and inequality should be thrown
Spreading hatred on the name of religion, lets make it bygone.
Why to worry, change is the only permanence.
Rotten paan, without changing the waters
Should never be eaten.
Be happy and embrace the change without any hesitation.
All new things need old manure
Says MangatRam, taking responsibility is the only cure (Chander 235).

The next song:

Nobody is safe here, o my friend
Whom to believe o sister, no hope is left.
Gardeners crushing the flowers
Everywhere people with the jaws carnivorous.

Protectors have become the devourers
Scavenging the human flesh.
Beating the drum of honour, they are the ones who dishonour
On occasions killed alive, on occasions killed in the womb
Killing them alive and worshipping the tomb!
Beaten to death or locked behind the doors
Without no light and no thought.
Guru is god that's what they say
Where to go when the grill eats the fields/wall?
How long can it go like this?
Come forward and fight the battle
Nobody will come, be your own savior
Mangat Ram is with you, that's the promise (Chander 236).

Rajesh Dalal not only gives voice to the issues of women but also criticizes the double-standards of the society. On the one hand singers like Rafi are liked by everyone, movies on love earn in crores, still the idea of love brings disgrace to the society.

Heer-Ranjha, Laila-Majnu, songs of love play in the balcony
The sword of justice is killing lovers, that's the irony.
The ballads of love are sung by all
Gadar, Devdaas, Veer-Zara, all earned money in crores.
Songs of Rafi are sung by all.
What a life without love? Just imagine!
Still lovers are killed in the regime.

Darkness has spread in the land of Geeta

Laila is left without any brother

Majnus are found here and there.

Love is god but lovers can't be born

Where is Krishna? Why he has no concern

Must be busy with Gopis and her known.

...

Lovers are hanged to save the honour

Raping girls on roads, killing daughters in womb! Doesn't it bring dishonour!

Where is the Panchayat and their verdict?

Why the assembly passes no comment? (Chander 273)

The next song is sung in the form of a ragni competition.

News of your birth brought a tide

For poor and rich all alike.

The doctor was bought to decide your future

Bribing him with picture of Gandhi printed on paper

Who would hear my cries when educated and illiterate are all just lies

Educated they call themselves but are worse than donkeys

Goddesses are worshipped but daughters are killed

Look at the world and its standards.

Let bygone be bygone

The cruel family and society would have made your life hell

I remember the time your sister was born

They beat me blatantly, my hair gone
Had you been born, through the same you have gone
Competition with boys might have brought you misfortune
However hard you might have worked
Nobody would have given you good.
Giving you the contradictory constitution
Where your solace would have lied in *kanyadan*
Giving you in marriage to man who would be totally unknown
The new house soon would become the graveyard
Newspapers coloured with blood
You would have become news in the paper.
Sometimes killed in hiding, sometimes killed openly
All desires would have left in heart, nowhere to go
Young and old all alike are the victims of their lust
Still they call the system very just
Says Rajesh, answer this song, I welcome you all (Chander 275-76).

The writer is trying to seek answers with this ragni. Earlier ragnis were part of the competitions, in the form of questions and answers. To answer one ragni another composer will compose another ragni. Rajesh is giving a challenge to people like Prime Minister Narendra Modi's fitness challenge. He would be happy if somebody accepts his challenge. When nobody accepted his challenge, he took it himself and composed another ragni. The last ragni was about the helplessness of the mother and justification of female feticide. This time the mother is no longer helplessness. She can't let her daughter get killed.

All have decided to kill you daughter

I can't let you get slaughtered (Chander 277).

Even in the age of market produced economy, some of the ragnis performed on stage are sung in interrogative tone. But these ragnis hardly ever touch upon the real issues. They are content with cheap entertainment. For example there is a famous ragni where a man's jeep has been broken down on the way. The wayfarer asks him to remove the car. The ragni is full of sexual innuendos where the jeep is used for the penis and the car for the vagina. The jeep has been broken so he wants to do a *tochen* ('tow chain') with the car.

Mukesh Yadav is the only woman in janvadi ragni. That itself speaks a lot about the genre how it is dominated by men. She finds the solution of all the problems in education and economic independence. She doesn't take her themes and characters from mythology. Issues discussed by her are the issues faced by real women.

O friends come together and change the state of Haryana

Casteism is an evil; throw it away from your heart

All men are equal, tell everybody the fact.

Inferiority and superiority is a matter of few votes

Why to vote these leaders without any thoughts?

Liquor shops everywhere, all houses have one drunkard

Cigar, weed, opium, marijuana, smack

Troubles are manifold

Some are unhappy due to inflation; some are due to man drunkard.

Make Haryana drug free, drink milk and eat curd.

Number of girls has decreased, matter is of grave concern

Number one in sports and studies, still they are killed now and then.

Start taking your share from parental property

Stop treating girls like liability.

Say no to dowry and gifts

Says Mukesh, speak for your rights; there is no shame in it (Chander 257).

The next ragni reflects the patriarchal mindset of the society where a daughter is considered to be a burden.

Sleep didn't come to me, night spent in anxiety

Everywhere enemies, who call me liability.

The day I was conceived everybody cried

To check my sex, ultrasound was tried

All became sad and decided to kill me

My mother's stubbornness saved me from the enemy

The real test began after being born

Restrictions on speaking, laughing and thinking of my own

Expected to be silent and to be patient.

Treated like shit and like debt

The world can't run without us, still we are unwanted.

Rape and teasing has become the law of the land

Some swallow poison, some are burn alive

How many are killed for honour, who will do the counting?

Killing becomes the personal matter, says the panchayat.

Most burdened we are, still given food at the last

Hard work we do, still we get only blast

Come together o my sisters

As I saw, so I said, says Mukesh the narrator (Chander 257-58).

Atleast janwadi ragni gave voice to the issues of women even if there are less female performers. With the proliferation of industry produced folk is voice of these janwadi performers is lost in the wilderness. The industry produced ragni is just a click away from us. There is bombardment of songs and performances not giving the consumers the time to think. Industry not only produces but also creates a taste in the consumers. Since the industry is money oriented more women have started participating in ragni. Yet there representation is very objectified where there are supposed to laugh at themselves. Lisa Merrill writes, “Traditionally women have been expected to identify with comedy which insults us” (2000: 274). Merrill is right, as certain performances are reserved for males only (as is the case of standup comedy and ragni). Merrill further writes “It radically disempowers the female spectator by obliging her to participate in her objectification and victimization as the butt of the joke, if she is to participate at all” (275). Throughout the world women have been suppressed and they were denied the right to be funny or humorous. As if to laugh or to be laughed is the right of man. It is so ironic how even the biological function was denied to women. “Traditional literary theories of humor and comedy, social prejudices against joke-making as an aggressive and “unfeminine” behavior, and the processes by which cultural expression is disseminated in a patriarchal culture all create obstacles for the comic woman and the woman comic” (Auslander 109).

Reginald Blith has defined women as “the unlaughing at which men laugh” (quoted in Barreca 1988:4). Male dominated culture has never recognized the female humor or dismissed it as trivial. Anne Beatts, the comedy writer has studied the reasons behind the non acceptance of female humor and writes, “there is a women’s culture that men just don’t know about. So when they say, ‘Hey, that joke’s not funny,’ it’s sometimes because they don’t understand the vocabulary” (quoted in Auslander 109).

The problem could be solved by doing what Kate Clinton, a stand up comedian, did. She brought revolution in the field of performance theory by performing primarily for female audiences. “Clinton’s humor implies a spectator who is neither male nor heterosexual; by constructing her audience as lesbian she creates a community of spectators ... which liberates its occupants from uniformity to general norms, however temporarily” (ibid).

Lauren Berlant calls such practices as efforts to create a feminist public sphere, “ a theatrical space in which women might see, experience, live and rebel against their oppression en masse, freed from the oppressor’s forbidding or disapproving gaze” (1988: 238)

This effort to create a feminist public sphere is done by women in almost all of the performances, be it khodiya or sang. But when they become performers in front of the industry produced audiences this space ceases to exist. Males not only appropriate the space but also their songs.

Berlant also discusses about the limitations of these performances as they are unable to engage large stream audiences. They exemplify as “the imaginary sphere of public-feminist intimacy, which relies on a patriarchal fantasy of women’s sameness to herself to produce an adversarial politics” (240). She finds the solution in engaging the “female culture industry

with the patriarchal public sphere, the place where significant or momentous exchanges of power are perceived to take place” (ibid). She is right in saying so as change needs to be brought in the mindset of men. They need to know the dangers of female performances. Male gaze should be replaced by female gaze as is done by Anarkali in *Anarkali of Arrah*. One pre requisite condition for this is women’s participation in these performances as audiences along with men.

There is a need to appropriate the genre of ragni by female performers. There is a need to convert the space into a subversive feminist space like folklore. Women who use humour as a subversive practice in folksongs become a means of ridicule while performing ragni. The only means to liberate themselves is performing ragni for female spectators.

Helen Cixous writes “Culturally speaking, women have wept a great deal, but once the tears are shed, there will be endless laughter instead. Laughter that breaks out, overflows, a humor no one would expect to find in women which is nonetheless their greatest strength because it’s humor that sees man much farther away than he has ever been seen” (55).

Humour is not just to laugh at a situation but it could be subversive as well. “Feminist literary theory suggests that humor and comedy may be valuable as empowering “feminist tools” (Barreca 5) especially when motivated by the anger women need to express at the social and cultural limitations they confront” (Auslander 109)

But it is not just an issue of vocabulary but of cultural preferences and acceptances. As Pollio and Edgerly say, “women just do not attempt to be humorous in a mixed group setting and the reason seems to be that women are neither expected, nor trained, to joke in this culture. It seems reasonable to propose that attempting a witty remark is often an intrusive, disturbing

and aggressive act, and within this culture, probably unacceptable for a female” (quoted in Auslander 110). “They further say, “Responsive behaviors” such as laughing and smiling, however, are perfectly socially acceptable for a woman in our culture.” (Auslander 110)

There is a need to recreate or recuperate performance as Kate Clinton, a female standup comedian has done by performing primarily for a female audience. Lauren Barlent calls such practices as efforts to create a feminist public sphere “a theatrical space in which woman might see, experience, live and rebel against their oppression en masse, freed from the oppressors’ forbidding or disapproving gaze.” (Barlent: 238).

But the problem with such performances is that they are very limited and are unable to engage mainstream culture. They exemplify as “the imaginary sphere of public-feminist intimacy’ which relies on a patriarchal fantasy of woman’s sameness to produce an adversarial politics” (Barlent 240). Haryanvi ragni performances are the spaces where young and old alike come together to watch the performances. The space could be used to bring change in the society. The movie *Anarkali of Arrah* is an example of the same practice where the male space is appropriated by the female performer. Anarkali who is a performer, not a prostitute is abused by the principal of the college on stage. The space which made her a victim in the hands of patriarchy is used by her to take revenge.

Chapter 4

Folksongs in the Market

The chapter traces the transformation of folksong performances from being active agents of change to silent objects of male gaze. It is an attempt to study the plight of folksongs in an urbanized world. What happens to the songs when they become part of culture industry? Is the agency still intact? What happens to the folk space? Who become the audiences of these performances?

Hermann Bausinger writes, “We no longer believe that industrialization necessarily implies the end of a specific folk-culture, but rather we attempt to trace the modifications and mutations undergone by folk culture in the industrialized and urbanized world” (quoted in Dorson 1976:56).

What Bausinger has said is true to some extent but it would be really interesting to study the transformations. Though industrialization doesn't put an end to folk culture yet it puts an end to the “sub-cultural space of women” as folk performers. Once the songs come out of the sub cultural space, the singer is changed; the audience is changed so their meaning too gets changed. Performance doesn't have a meaning in isolation; there is no text without context. Hence the meaning of songs gets changed with a change in the context.

Jawaharlal Handoo defines mass culture as “mass produced artifacts, a kind of industrial renewal of old traditions shared and circulated in an industrialized society by written, oral and other means of mass communication” (9). Further he writes, “Mass culture or folklorismus is the industrial renewal of folklore. It is the process of channeling the

traditional folk themes, metaphors, motifs, ideas and beliefs into the mass produced industrial-commercial products, mass media and other forms of mass communication” (10).

Richard M. Dorson (1976) warns the scholars to be careful of fakelore as a “synthetic product claiming to be authentic oral tradition but actually tailored for mass edification” (5).

What is an industrial renewal of folk for Handoo is actually commercialization and distortion of folk materials for Dorson. As the folk material is tailored for mass edification so the real fervour of folk is lost. The idea of tradition and originality associated with folklore is distorted through chauvinistic fakelore. The agency used by women is manipulated here and the songs are presented to make maximum profit by making the maximum population happy. Who is this maximum population? Now the question arises, this maximum population stands for whom? Who are the masses? Are they part of the production process as well or simply the mindless consumers? To answer these questions there is a need to understand the historical process of production.

The term ‘culture industry’ was first used by Adorno and Horkheimer, both cultural theorists belonging to the Frankfurt School, in their path-breaking book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The book is an evaluation of the positive character of popular culture. Distinguishing between mass culture and culture industry, Adorno writes, they have replaced that expression (mass culture) with culture industry in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that it is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves (1991: 85). Fiske too has defined popular culture in the similar manner. “Popular culture in industrial societies is contradictory to its core. On the one hand it is industrialized—its commodities produced and distributed by a profit-motivated industry that follows only its own economic interests. But on the other hand, it is

of the people” (23). The need to replace mass culture with Culture Industry was the outcome of the way culture industry produces its own culture for the people. Culture which was a lived reality of people, is now produced by the capitalist forces (industry) on a large scale rendering the masses into passive consumers. All the forms of popular culture produced through the industry are market driven ensuring the obedience of the masses to market interests.

Though the industry claims to work for the betterment of the masses yet the reality is that it makes them consumers of its products by making them desire accordingly. In the essay “Free Will” Adorno discusses how the individuals are robbed of their choices by the industry. Even the smallest decision of going on vacation will be taken by the influence of the industry.

Folksongs, when they come in the influence of industry, change not only their body but the soul as well. The realistic element of songs is replaced by the erotic. What is interesting to note is that on the one hand society criticizes the erotic but on the other hand that is the most popular genre in the industry. If it is depised culturally, how it could become so popular in the art? Whatever be the fact, it is acceptable that it is the psychological drive of the human mind to be inclined to sex. Sex appeals to all, young and old alike. Culture Industry has got the nerve of the society.

Peter Manuel in his book *Cassette Culture* (1993) underlines the advent of Cassette industry and its impacts on the society. He tries to understand “the salient effects of cassette technology upon the production, dissemination, stylistic development and general cultural meaning of North Indian popular music” (189). Further he also talks about the effects of cassette industry on folk music and how it commercialized the latter. Cassette was invented

as a reaction against the dominant culture of recording and gramophone. The purpose of cassette was to maximize its reach to the masses. “Popular music has been well described as a site of negotiation, where often contradictory social ideologies and aesthetics are mediated, dramatized and contested” (Manuel 1991: 203). The advent of cassette technology goes as far back to 1970’s. Though in India it reached a bit late but its influence became widespread by 1980’s. It replaced the phonographic records and influenced the masses in the developing world through its extensive reach.

Cassettes have served to decentralise and democratise production and consumption, thereby counterbalancing the previous tendency toward oligopolisation of international commercial recording industries (Manuel 1991: 189)

The songs sung in the film industry (Bollywood) lacked the stylistic variations of folk music so they were hardly ever representative of “the variety of north Indian folk music” (Manuel 1991: 190). Thematically they just revolved around the escapist romantic setting (negative capability) and never cared to talk about the real picture. As Manuel writes, “however, they were suited to the romantic and fundamentally escapist Indian movies themselves, which studiously avoided realistic portrayals grinding poverty and class antagonisms so basic to Indian society” (1991: 190).

Contrary to that folksongs were all about the personal experiences and social problems. They were about the day to day life. The “affirmation of a sense of community” (Manuel 1991: 190) which lacked in film music was essential to folksongs “which celebrate collective community values through shared, albeit specific performance norms and contexts, musical style, textual references and language” (ibid).

This monopoly of film music and recorded music was replaced by cassette industry which presented not just filmi music, but regional folk songs, non-filmi music, devotional songs etc.

The cassette revolution had definitively ended the unchallenged hegemony of GramCo, of the corporate music industry in general, of film music, of the Lata-Mukesh vocal style and of the uniform aesthetic of the Bombay film music producers which had been superimposed on a few hundred million music listeners over the preceding forty years (Manuel 1991: 191).

So “the little traditions” or “mini narratives” which were neglected by the industry got a voice in cassette industry. “As a result, the average, non-elite Indian is now, as never before, offered the voices of his own community as mass-mediated alternatives to His Master's Voice” (ibid).

It's not that cassette industry undermined the importance of film music (in fact they disseminated it more widely than ever before) but they made other voices to be heard. In fact “cassettes have served as vehicles for a set of heterogeneous genres which provide, on an unprecedented level, stylistic alternatives to film music, and to which listeners have responded to the tune of some \$million annually” (Manuel 1991: 193).

The producers often borrowed melodies from regional folksongs and translated them into Hindi or vice versa. George Grierson, an official in the British civil service and a linguistic researching on North Indian folk music culture, wrote, “In the country districts, I have never heard of a new tune being invented. There seems to be a certain stock of melodies readymade, to which the words of every new song must be fitted” (quoted in Marcus 98-99).

A remake of existing songs was made in different languages which not only ended the

monopoly of Bollywood music but also of Hindi language. “The advent of cassettes and the decentralisation of the music scene enabled this process to occur on an unprecedented scale and in reverse” (Manuel 1991: 198). These parodies helped in promoting the linguistic diversity as they were recorded in different regional languages (breaking away from the hegemony of Hindi-Urdu). The boom in cassette industry paved the way for recordings in regional languages.

Even more dramatic is the vogue of commercial cassettes in regional languages which had been essentially ignored by the record and film industries. For instance, Garhwal, Haryana and the Braj region, all within 150 miles of Delhi, have come to constitute lively markets for cassettes in their own languages, several producers, large and small, issuing new releases each month. Most of tapes consist of either traditional folk songs, or more often, new compositions more or less traditional style. Needless to say, while film music sought to homogenise its audience's aesthetics, the cassette-based regional musics are able to celebrate regional cultures and affirm a local sense of community. Unlike film songs dealing exclusively amorphous sentimental love, regional song texts abound with references to local customs, lore, mores and even contemporary socio-political events or issues (Manuel 1991: 199).

Though the reach of cassette industry went far beyond the reach of film music and it provided different aesthetics to the listeners yet it reinforced or strengthened the same tendencies as the latter did. “Accordingly, if film music can be accused of distorting consumers’ by superimposing values deriving from the inherent structure of the music industry, cassette-based music can be seen to perpetuate same tendencies” (Manuel 1991:

200). The non-democratic nature of film industry appealed to a homogenous mass market, but it proved to be as escapist as the “cinematic fantasies it was embedded in” (190).

From being a voice of the voiceless, it started producing only those genres which proved to be profitable. Though it brought a revolution on the level of reach yet the subject matter always remained constrained. The revolutionary folksongs of women were produced in such a manner where the hegemony was not questioned but further strengthened. Women became objectified and victims of their own songs. The same songs which were used as a means of protest against patriarchy converted women into mere objects of male gaze.

Only the chosen few decide what would be produced. Their greatness lies in their ability to know what the masses desire. They have caught the right nerve of the masses. The industry is not just limited to cultural products like food etc. but its reach is phenomenal in the field of food and nutrition as well. Famous dieticians have stated saying the old wisdom is the best. Nobody can compare it. They have started prescribing only that food as part of their diet plans which was eaten by the uneducated, illiterate people of the villages.

oral tradition is an ancient and effective means, perhaps much more than the written tradition, of acquiring, storing and retrieving cultural articulations and a primary source of shared understanding, shared wisdom, shared cognition and world view (Handoo, 67).

Folklore was a means of entertainment in the villages as people didn't have access to other means of entertainment. With the advent of new entertainment means in the villages, folklore is mending its ways according to the new demands. There is an anecdote about Mehar Singh shared by Pooran Chand Sharma in his book *Lakhmichand Granthawali* that he was a

preacher. Once he was preaching but people suddenly started leaving the place. When asked by him, they replied that in the nearby area a saang performance is going on so they are going to see it. He was so much heart-broken that he decided to be a saangi since then onwards. Folklore too is facing the same crisis where it going through survival struggle. That's why it becomes obligatory for the performers to compose according to the taste.

Thus, while cassettes were able to offer incomparably greater regional and stylistic variety than did film music, there were limits to the degree of diversity they represented. They recorded music only in the languages which were popular or in huge demand. This is very much true in the context of songs sung in Ahirwati language. The cassettes may take the material from the traditional folk songs but they never record them in the same language as it is less popular dialect of Haryanvi.

Cassette industry also undermined the value of improvisation which is the soul of folk as Manuel stated, "The more a genre becomes dependent on the mass media, the less improvisation will be tolerated" (1991: 200). So the living and 'here' and "now" character of folk got fixed. Audience who were equal participants in the performances just remained passive listeners.

But not all songs faced the same fate. Manuel himself writes, "But I would argue that, by incorporating Bombay film melodies into their performances, biraha musicians succeeded in an act of empowerment, rather than an act of subjugation. The singers themselves become modern and up-to-date. They are not rural peasants singing quaint rustic songs. They are in sync with the latest trends and fashions" (1993: 108). Even that too puts an end to the character of folk.

The same can't be said of Haryanvi folksongs. Once they came out of their original space a battle of ownership was fought. Individual composers started composing them with few variations and by calling them their own. The idea of originality which was never the case with folk started taking place. Songs like "*Tanne badlungi bhartaar chandigarh mele me*" (I will exchange you, o husband in the fair of Chandigarh), "*Mera doll kuve mai latke sai*" (My picture hangs high in the well), "*Mera daaman sima de ho, ho nandi ke bira*" (Please get me stitched a petticoat, o my sister-in-law's brother), "*Kothe chadh lalkarun, dikhe vo mera daaman laaiye*" (Challenging from the roof, o bring me a petticoat), "*Mera sir pe banta-tokani, mera haath me nejju dor, mai patli si kaamni*" (Double picture on my head, rope in my hand, I am a slim woman), "*Chhod gya e gya e paltan pe*" (Leaving me all alone, my husband has joined the army) etc. are presented to the masses as new and belonging to the industry. Earlier the songs were sung by women but now males have total control over them. Even at the time of marriage women no longer sit together and sing but play recorded music and dance (Ladies' Sangeet). The name itself has become so modern. Manuel writes "Similarly, my urban Punjabi acquaintances insisted that despite the sales of wedding-song cassettes, and their occasional usage at marriages, there was little tendency for such tapes to replace live singing by women at weddings" (1991: 201). But actually that is not the case at present times.

In North India several scholars have worked on the well-documented decline of various folk music genres due to the influence of the mass media, and particularly cinema. A.K. Ramanujan and Blackburn in *Another Harmony* have studied the relationship between folklore and social change. They have stated "If ... folklore must be studied in all its forms, we should not neglect the most contemporary. How does it respond to the urbanization,

mechanization, and cash economy that are reshaping Indian society (or at least large segments of it?)” (quoted in Kirin Narayan 1993:177).

In an urbanized India where people have other means of entertainment folk is losing its value. The educated class no longer needs the folk. The culture industry in the garb of preserving the folk, chooses only those songs to be worthy of preservation which can attract the audience as well as earn money. That’s why they have started reproducing these songs in homogenized forms in a manner where eroticism is at its peak.

Once folk comes out of its original space, the singers and producers make changes to the language keeping in the mind the audience. They sing the songs out of the context and without much consideration of the erudite rules of literature. The modern age being ruled by electronic media and technology is busy disseminating and circulating a different kind of culture whose only aim is to convert the individuals into blind consumers and to extort money from the masses. The songs which were part of special occasions and settings can now be heard anywhere from Jeeps to buses to ploughing tractors. Ironically women who were the original singers of these songs are kept away from listening to these songs. It is not considered to be a good sign for women to listen to these songs. So Haryanvi folk songs have gone through many changes to be part of the industry. The most significant being the shift of power, agency and ownership. Folk has transformed from being the belonging of women to that of the industry. The ownership issue and the issue of copyright is another transformation. Now the industry buys all the rights from the singers. They are free to improvise it and reproduce it as many times as they want. Since in the industry-produced songs, the focus is on the performance, the producer is free to choreograph and select the performers of the song. This reproducing of cultural objects is studied by Adorno and Horkheimer and given

the name of “culture industry”, which is distinguished from “folk culture”. Of course, the culture reproduced and distributed by the culture industry is a mechanized and artificial culture, produced to be consumed by the masses, to distort money from them. It gives them the illusion of representing their roots but actually it’s the opposite. Reproduction of folk songs by culture industry is equal to vising Chokhi Dhani which boasts of representing Rajasthani folk culture and tradition but in fact is only a simulated replica of the same. The impact of culture industry is not just limited to cultural artefacts like song, dance and music but also food. The above mentioned things could be explained with the help of the following example. Nutrition and food has become an important aspect of present day lifestyle where everybody is running the race to be fit. Modern day dieticians are focusing so much on ancient foods and life styles. Earlier the culture industry set the parameters of eating and food by producing fast food on a large scale. Eating fast food became a symbol of class. But who could afford such food? Of course only the upper middle classes. After devouring the fast food they became obese and turned towards dieticians. Now the dieticians representing the same class suggest them to eat home-made food and other foods locally available. Irony of the fact is people who left behind their eating habits to be part of a different class have to buy their own food with extra money. The ancient wisdom which actually belongs to them is sold to them by the industry. Same is the case of folk songs.

The culture industry is extremely adroit in its working through various processes such as improvisation, standardization and pseudo-individualization. It is so inescapable that it converts all into passive consumers. Songs are presented in a manner where the illusion of pseudo-individualized and novelty is formed to capture the tastes of all consumers, whereas, in reality, nothing new or individual is produced. Adorno and Horkheimer write: “Marked

differentiations such as those of A and B films, or of stories in magazines in different price ranges, depend not so much on subject matter as on classifying, organizing and labelling consumers. Something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasized and extended. How formalized the procedure is can be seen when the mechanically differentiated products prove to be all alike in the end.” (1973: 123) A different kind of gratifying taste is created where the listeners all together reject anything new, not matching to the industry-created taste. In short, the industry makes them desire to consume what it produces. The changed dynamics of power has rendered them passive and reticent.

The songs when sung inside the walls of the house are considered to be of inferior quality, but the same song, when it becomes part of the industry tempts everyone to dance on it. Women’s bargain strategies, their encoded meanings, all get transformed in the process of homogenization.

The homogenization paves the way for the birth of double meaning (connotative), erotic songs. Earlier too songs had connotative meanings which required strategies to decode but the intended meaning was subversive in nature. It made women active agents of change and not passive recipients of male sexual desires and fantasies. Since the singer and the performer are different people the “representational power” is “residing in the hands of the folklorist, who constructs presentations that substantially alter traditional culture while limiting or denying the agency of practitioners” (quoted in Robert Baron 2010:63). It implies that the folk performer is dependent on the folklorist (pseudo) or the producer for the display of his or her agency. In most of the cases they are not allowed to showcase anything more than the thudding movements of their bodies. Handler and Prices believe that public display of folk performances is “objectification”. But Charis Cussins doesn’t see objectification as a

negative term creating hindrance in agency but rather “proposes a notion of agency not opposed by, but pursued in objectification” (quoted in Baron 2010: 64). Cussins gives the example of women undergoing invasive procedures in infertility centres who are happy to objectify themselves (scientifically) to become mothers. Though they seem to be happy but there is a need to study it more deeply. Why are they not happy with their infertile bodies? Why do they want to become pregnant? Isn’t it objectification of a different kind where their bodies can have value only if they are able to conceive? Their worth of being a woman is not complete until or unless they become mothers. Similarly Nussbaum “sees objectification as a multiple and slippery concept. She contends that “all types of objectification are not equally objectionable” and that the “evaluation of any of them requires a careful evaluation of content and circumstance” (quoted in Baron 2010: 66). She further writes “even in oppressive circumstances of objectification, agency may be exercised by the dominated, through such means as active or passive resistance and the advancement of long-term individual or collective interests” (ibid).

Even the word agency is too complex as it doesn’t have one comprehensive definition. Ahearn lists “oppositional agency, complicit agency, agency of power, and agency of intention” as differing kinds of agency and notes that “multiple types of agency are exercised in any given action” (Ahearn 2001:130). In that sense of the term, no human action is free of agency. One exercises agency even in the most objectified situations. The same argument is given by the critics when they discuss women’s agency in public performances. Sapna Chowdhary, Miss Pooja and Anu Kadiyan (female performers of Haryanvi folksongs) too have an agency as they dare to perform in a space which is occupied by males. They not only perform (singing) but express their sexuality with extensive use of their bodies. The

researcher totally agrees with the argument of them coming out and performing in the male space, but the real question is whose agency is more powerful? Since everybody has agency, the audiences too exercise their agency where they objectify the woman and her body. Her daring to perform within a male space turns herself into an object where the performance is not able to bring any change in her position. She is treated as a sex object who has value only if she has a beautiful face and nice figure. So it is clear that women are the object of display through words and performances. Earlier, it were women who composed the songs and sang for themselves. Now, it is the music industry which composes songs targeting women as objects of sexual innuendos.

What makes the industry-produced folk problematic is not the issue of originality and the copy. The issue of ownership was never the case with folk as it was passed down from one generation to another one. It didn't belong to anyone but to the entire community. The issue is that of representation. However, women, who were the composers, singers and performers of most of these songs in the rural societies are conspicuously absent from the stage. If they somehow manage to reach there, they are looked not as singers but as "female performers". The researcher has always thought Sapna Chaudhary the new face of Industry produced folk music of Haryana as a singer cum performer. But in fact she hasn't sung a single song. She is a performer. Since all the rights of the songs are bought by the industry, they take only those faces as performers who can fetch the larger audience.

The industry has also diminished the gap between women's folksongs and ragni. What industry produces is a mixture of ragni and women's songs. The songs which were sung within the particular context could be heard everywhere. The jakari (jakadi) songs which became spokesperson of women's issues are now performed on stage without the context. The songs

of mismatched marriages between the old and the young are replaced by the following type of songs;

You are healthy; I am thin, what is our match?

I vow to my brothers, you will kill me.

I will love you so much; you will become healthy in a month.

Don't cut the harvest which is not ripened yet

Don't walk towards me, it gives me shivers.

My glass like body will break into pieces

I vow to my brothers you will kill me. (Youtube)

The song is full of sexual innuendos. The real issue of mismatched marriages of old and young is replaced by the more sexually explicit imagery of the song to gratify the desires of the consumers. In a similar manner the industry has sexualized the relationship of *devar-bhabhi* as well. *Devar* who was represented as *bhabhi*'s trustworthy friend in the folksongs is given the ultimate freedom to tease the *bhabhi*. The joke has been taken to the level of obscenity. It has given the man free license not only to objectify women but to harass them.

There is a need to distinguish jokes from obscenity and vulgarity as there is a very thin line between them. Distinguishing the joke from the obscene, Mary Douglas writes "joke amuses and obscenity shocks" (371). The same thing could be a joke in a particular situation but vulgar in another. "Inevitably, the best way of stating the difference between joking and obscenity is by reference to the social context. The joke works only when it mirrors social forms; it exists by virtue of its congruence with the social structure. But the obscenity is identified by its opposition to the social structure, hence its offence" (Douglas, M. 372).

The song *Tanne badlungi bhartaar Chandigarh mele me* actually belongs to the folk space which is served to the public with new branding and label.

Never did you love me, never talked with happy face

I will exchange you o husband in the fair Chandigarh.

I will love you to your heart's desire, will talk happily,

Don't exchange me o woman, the man so smart

Never did you buy powder and cream, nor did you buy Punjabi suit for me

I will exchange you o husband in the fair of Chandigarh (Youtube).

In the folksong in the place of Chandigarh women use the name of any local fair. The reasons of exchanging the husband are not as trivial as shown in the song. There the woman wants to exchange the husband for not accompanying her to her natal home. Not accompanying the wife to her natal home could look very trivial to someone but it has serious social implications. The husband not visiting the wife at the house of her parents hints towards the power structures of the society.

Since cassette industry doesn't produce anything new, the song has another version as well.

In the other song the reason of exchanging the husband is his drinking habits.

When the clock strikes eight, going to the tubewell with his friends

You don't listen to me o husband, drinking in the fields.

I will exchange you o husband, you drink in the fields.

My friends came to meet me,

They also brought liquor and some chicken

My friends are so generous; party was arranged in the fields.

Sometimes whisky, sometimes vodka, you need quarter everyday.

You have fallen in love with drinking, I will exchange you husband (Youtube).

As compared to the other jakari songs of women on drunkard husbands, this song seems to celebrate drinking. In the jakari songs, women whose husbands are drunkards, start crying while singing those songs, but here everybody dances on it. So the industry has robbed women of their expressive genres.

The song *Mera daman sima de ho, o nanandi ke beer* is replaced by *kothe chadh lalkarun dikhe ho mera daman laaiye*.

Bring me the chunari, o sister-in-law's brother

I will keep you on my head, o sister-in-law's brother.

Get me the necklace, o sister-in-law's brother

I will keep you on my chest, o sister-in-law's brother

Get me stiched the petticoat, o sister-in-law's brother

I will keep you on hips, o sister-in-law's brother

Buy me an anklet, o sister-in-law's brother

I will keep you on my toe, o sister-in-law's brother.

The song has a subversive humour. The woman demands for different objects and accordingly rewards the husband. She starts from keeping him on the head and ends on bringing him on her toes or feet. But in the reproduced version of the song the humour and agency is lost.

I challenge you from the roof, bring me the petticoat

You ask for petticoat, I will buy you the jeans

The entire village be envious, will bring short shirt (youtube).

Even the female singers like Anu Kadyan, Ruchika Jangid, Monika Sharma, Sushila Thakhar etc. too have not been able to use the space to raise the genuine issues. In fact all their songs represent very stereotypical images of women. The lyrics of one of the songs of Anu Kadyan read like this;

Cleverer than boys in the matters of flirting,

Ninety out of hundred girls have been roaming around, flirting (Youtube).

The condition of women has not changed much in reality but these songs represent them in a different picture. The illiterate women imploring their mothers not to marry them to English speaking boys are replaced by English speaking city girls. The marriage of illiterate women to educated men made them subservient to their husbands. But here in the songs the boys are shown illiterate and the girls are shown educated, exercising power over the men, which is not the truth. If women are educated and have become aware of their rights, that too can't be accepted by the society.

Now the question arises if culture industry distorts the folklore, should it stop producing the folk? On the one hand there is a necessity of 'reviving' folk songs on the other hand it is required to ensure that it maintains its stylistic and cultural specificities. The need of the hour is not to discard popular culture. "As some feminist researchers acknowledged in the 1970s, it is not enough to dismiss popular culture as merely serving the complementary systems of capitalism and patriarchy" (quoted in Suheyla Kirca 101). It could be used "as a site where meanings are contested and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed" (ibid)

There is a need to change the language of the media as Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment have said “if the language of popular media changes in our direction, then maybe we can re-appropriate it for our own purposes” (quoted in Suheyla Kirca 106).

To illustrate the idea they cite the word ‘witch’ which was earlier used for women having supernatural powers, now stands for radical feminists. “The word “witch” has been used in the last five decades both in Europe and America to define (radical) feminists who were opposing and criticizing the traditional patriarchal values and norms. Historically, especially in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, a witch was mostly punished for her “supernatural” abilities, which were seen as a threat to male power” (ibid 104).

The objectification could be erased by bridging the gap between the presenter and the audience, by “drawing the participant visitors into close physical proximity with the performers” (Baron 2010:75) by removing the fourth wall, by making the audience to actively participate. The culture industry has made the audience passive recipients without any involvement on their part. In the folklore performances everybody was a participant so the question of objectification didn’t arise.

There is a need to look beyond the industry-produced culture. ‘Indian culture’ that is often appropriated by the Hindutva forces or Hindu nationalists who talk about ‘Indian tradition’ is nothing but a legacy of Brahminical cultural order which completely excludes the lower order indigenous folk cultures. Now, with the opening up of the global cultural economy, sindur, saari, mangalsutra etc. have become the cultural symbols of India’s oriental culture for the West. The occidental world totally misunderstands the so called ‘Indian culture’ as it is thoroughly misrepresented or partially presented. ‘Indian culture’ for instance, not only

embodies the upper layer elite culture of Indian society but also constitutes the lower order indigenous beliefs, practices, concerns and languages where sindur, saari and mangalsutra do not fit as prime locus of cultural symbolism (Islam 61).

Conclusion

P.B. Shelley in *A Defence of Poetry and Other Essays* called the poets the “unacknowledged legislators of the world”. Comparing women singing the folksongs won’t be an exaggeration as folklore is not just a singing practice; it brings together the shared values of the communities it represents. This thesis is a rebuttal to the assumptions which deny folklore’s potential to transform. The preceding chapters are written to establish the seriousness of folklore in terms of its capacities to give voice to women and their issues. The advent of theories like modernism and postmodernism blurred the gap between the classical and the folk which expanded the reach of folk beyond its immediate origin place. Historians now use it as a tool to understand historical processes; literary practitioners use it as a field to enquire the social structure, the postcolonial thinkers use it as a means of decolonization, and the subaltern school uses it as a means to hear the unheard and the unsaid. The songs presented in the thesis are “provocative interpretations of the singers themselves and their society” (quoted in Jassal 251). The songs present polyphonic and contrasting perspectives in opposition to linear flow of thoughts running in the society. They represent the dominant, residual and the emergent all at once. If we lend our ears to these songs we find them not just means of pastime or pleasure but both the “benefactor and beneficiary – an active agent of social change as well as an enthusiastic and lively receptor of changes taking place in the society” (Capila 48) “In addition to offering endless amusement and critiquing male dominance, they also serve to induce feelings of solidarity, to develop and nurture the skills of interrogation, and to sharpen women’s powers of negotiation” (Jassal 251).

Folklore in a broad sense not only consists traditions of the past but also the present and contemporary, not only the text but also context, not only cultural but also political, not only

continuity but also changes. It is not an unthinking and unconscious activity of non-literate, uncultured lot singing their own praises. It is everywhere in a dynamic relationship with the culture and its productions. “It is the everydayness of people’s lives which constitutes their being, forms their existence and in a way shaping the local and the folk” (Islam 55).

Despite having cultural, historical, literary and philosophical relevance, folklore never achieved what it deserved. The historian never considered it an authentic source, the philosophy of the folk was dismissed as cultural value and similarly step-brotherly attitude of literature departments towards folklore never allowed it to be part of mainstream literature. The sophistication required for a piece of work to be literary is said to be lacking in folk. But the literariness which makes literature to be worthy of reading is found in folklore more than anywhere else. The use of images, metaphors, decoding, encoding, rhetoric, dialogue, performance etc. find extensive use in folk.

Any literature, be it written or oral, can’t evade the ‘I’ of the composer or the writer. However hard does the writer try to be objective, he can’t escape the self. In a similar manner the folksongs, shared together by the women community, represent their ethos. The preceding chapters engaged with the range of women’s emotions and experiences expressed through folksongs. As emotions are cultural artefacts, the songs opened the door to enter into the ethnographic analysis of emotions, even allowing to explore the most suppressed ones (Jassal 252). The songs enriched our understanding of social structure which is complex and multi-layered. What Rao thinks of Telugu verses stands true for the songs discussed in the thesis: “Through the domain of desire, social commentary, the articulation of cultural values, and critical taste, these interlocking stanzas embody an entire education, an expressive vision of life and poetry” (Rao and Shulman 1998: 250). Being emotional discourses, the songs

offered insights into “the multiple, shifting and contested meanings possible in emotional utterances and interchanges” (Abu Lughod and Lutz 11).

The chapter entitled “Folksongs as Narratives of Resistance” has sought to identify the transformative potential of folksongs across cultures. The chapter has presented an overview of the studies undertaken across cultures seeking the subversive potential of folksongs. Efforts had been made to bring the folk out of the fixity and deadpan it has been associated with and to study the contemporaneity and here and now of folklore. Examples abound of folk being used as means of social change. In patriarchal societies, be it India or Africa, when other means of communication failed, women devised folk ways to make themselves heard.

The second chapter entitled “Women and Agency: Folk-Songs Sung by Women in South Haryana” has illustrated the songs of women sung in South Haryana. It presents a deep study of the songs demonstrating how emotions and emotional responses to situations are a result of larger power relations. The chapter has discussed different songs from jakari to bhajans to songs of rituals, ceremonies and political songs. Though all songs express women’s agency yet there is intrinsic ambivalence embedded in them. The ambivalence simultaneously generates legitimacy for a regime, and also constructs an ideology to subvert it. The ambivalence is strategic on the part of the women as they don’t have to fight the hegemonical patriarchal oppression through confrontation but through negotiation. Songs represent those “subtle and ambivalent ways” through which “women negotiate at the margins of power, sometimes constrained by but also resisting and even undermining asymmetrical power relations” (Lughod and Lutz 11). Subversion of authority is attained sometimes through negotiation or sometimes through humour. Along with folksongs, the chapter has illustrated the *khodiya* performance which is an open display of women’s sexuality.

Till recently, women had been absent from the pages of history both as writers and as subjects. The chapter titled “Women in/ and Ragni” traces the representation of women in a male dominated folk genre of Haryana. It presents a comparative study of the representation of women in this male dominated folk genre and the women dominated folk genre discussed in the previous chapter. Women who are active agents of change in the folksongs become merely decorative and non-existent in ragni performances. The chapter also traces the development of ragni from it being part of another folk musical form, Sang, to its independent performances produced or reproduced by the culture industry. It refutes the claims which attach the obscenity of ragni to the inclusion of women performers but instead relates it with the double standards of the society.

The last chapter entitled “Folksongs in the Market” has elaborated upon the impact of mechanical reproduction on the aesthetics of folklore. Reproduced by the culture industry when the songs have been taken out of their original space, what happens to them? The issues of male gaze, objectification of women’s body and gender stereotypes are discussed in detail. It has also discussed how folklore, once it comes out of its original context, loses its potential to change and just becomes a means of cheap entertainment.

The songs which used to be heard everywhere be it the fair, marriage, birth or funeral, are now produced through cassettes or other modes of recording. The cassette and digital recordings have made the songs fixed in time and grammar. Songs which never followed any well set grammatical rules and versions are now served to us in a single narrative emanating from the producers. The time has come to pay heed towards the dangers of losing one’s culture. The community which used to produce culture has been merely “reduced to the role of their consumers” (Rao and Shulman 197).

It is very unfortunate that the folk tradition is losing its charm because of industrialization and technical advancements. The advent of radio, t.v. and internet has brought alternative means of entertainment which has sidelined the value of folk traditions. It is our responsibility to preserve these traditions. A loss of these traditions is not just the loss of entertainment means but the loss of an entire culture. So there is an urgent need to preserve and revive these traditions. As Habib Tanvir has rightly asserted: “it must flow from a deep-rooted feeling that if the folk arts of india really represent the genuine fabric of the tapestry of indian culture, then rehabilitating and strengthening them will perhaps help the process of evolution of new and viable contemporary forms in theatre, distinctively indian and yet suitable as vehicles of communication in a technological age” (35).

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