

GENDER AND MUSIC

Performance, Identity and Agency among Ragini Singers of Haryana

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DECLARATION CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Gender and Music: Performance, Identity and Agency among Ragini Singers of Haryana**” submitted by me at Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** is my bonafide work. I further declare that it has not been previously submitted in part or full for any other degree of this, or any other University.

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We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of this University.

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To the women who inspire me,

My mother and my mother-in-law,

My Guru Mrs. Tripti Das,

Prof. Sushma Yadav and Prof. V. Sujatha,

For My Mentor Dr. Daisaku Ikeda and Mrs. Ikeda

Also for all the women singers of Haryana

&

For my children

Shreyas and Swara

=====

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Introduction

Choriyan bahar na jaya karein...ghanhi na bolya karein...arr jada na hasaan karein (*Girls do not go outside, do not talk too much and even do not laugh too much*) is a common statement that most of the girls grow up listening to, in Haryana. One of the faster-developing economies as compared to other states of India, Haryana has also been in the news for its rigid patriarchal norms and traditions; derogatory views and practices relating to women's interests, rights and freedom (Pal, 2018). It is a state with a large number of 'veiled women'¹ and the symbol of seclusion, *ghunghat*, or *purdah*, 'creates a spatial boundary between the private and the public domain' (Chowdhry, 1994). The latter being the exclusive preserve of men (ibid). The status of women in Haryana is very much clear from its poor sex ratio (876/1000)² despite claims of improvement.³

Haryanvi society clearly outlines the gender roles and spaces for men and women marked by the domestication of women in private space. Women are usually seen working either in the fields or inside *gher*.⁴ Women in Haryana across all the caste groups dominate in agricultural work (Chowdhry, 1993, p. A-137). Further, women's work in the fields and *gher* is considered an extension of their private space (Chowdhry, 1994). The last few decades have also witnessed women's participation in sports and

¹ Chowdhry, 1994.

² Second lowest in India and lowest in the age group of 0-6 i.e. 830/1000 as per National Health and Family Survey 2015-16 report.

³<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/sex-ratio-at-birth-in-haryana-rises-to-914-girls-per-1000-boys/printarticle/62488714.cms>, 13th January 2018.

⁴ A space considered as extension of house meant for keeping cattle like buffaloes, cows and for making and drying cow dung cakes.

performing arts apart from opting for government jobs. While the government jobs are seen as extension of the safe private space, and an important source of economic support and upliftment for the whole family given the declining returns from agriculture, women's participation in sports championships is often associated with the honour and pride of the village or nation⁵ an extension of family honour. V.Sujatha argues that "in the case of women in sports who made it to the Olympics from Haryana, we find that the honour of the family/village/caste is a crucial factor in motivating women to participate in the race" (Sujatha, 2017).

Being a patriarchal community, property transmission from one generation to the other is governed by patrilineal norms. The prevailing norms also include caste endogamy and territorial exogamy as 'land should not be alienated outside the group' and thus daughters and sisters are kept away from the inheritance rights. Another issue is the threat from women's choice in marriage which may become a potential source of introducing new blood into the descent line (Ahlawat, 2012, p. 16).

The public spaces are dominated by men who are usually seen sitting idle outside their houses and playing cards in *chaupals*. Prem Chowdhry reflects in her article (Chowdhry, 1993) on Haryana that "...men, who can be seen with ample leisure time on their hands, smoking their *hukkas*, playing cards or just hanging about, shows that work ethos apply only to women. This is ironical when it is accepted that men notionally are not idle beings but breadwinners" (Chowdhry,1993, p. A-142). Routinized life is woven around household chores for the women folk in the region⁶ leaving little scope for entertainment, leisure or learning to sing for them. An exception

⁵ <https://kafila.online/2017/04/10/scientism-familism-and-women-scientists-v-sujatha>

⁶ A woman respondent (aged 42) Sonapat.

is participation in life cycle rituals festivals and wedding processions and in spaces demarcated as ritually appropriate for women. A ‘woman has no presence or place in the public sphere’ of male-dominated Haryanvi society (Kaur, 2010, p.15).



Image 1:Woman working in *gher* adjacent to the fields **Image 2:** Men sitting idle and playing cards.**Source:** From the researcher’s fieldwork.

Singing in public spaces is a taboo for women in Haryana as it has the potential to defame the family of the girl. If women attempt to disobey these norms, their behaviour is vehemently and even violently condemned and dealt with (Chowdhry, 1993). Men predominantly occupy public space and this remains true even for the professional fields of arts, performance and sports. Seen as a masculine genre, sports in Haryana has been dominated by males⁷ (Sadadekar, 2016) in the yester years but is being transformed into a glamourized profession, even for women as depicted in the

⁷ Sports is seen as a masculine domain and it is more so with respect to the idea of wrestling. Entering an all-male preserve, Sakshi Malik, an Olympic winner wrestler from Haryana, shared in an interview that she had been taunted several times for entering an all-male game.

Bollywood movies (based on real-life stories) like *Dangal* and *Sultan* (SenGupta, 2016). In the last few years, Haryana has been in the headlines for a few women players like Sakshi Malik, and Geeta Phogat whose fame as sports champions shot up in the international arena. While trophies in competitive sports are tied to the pride and honour of the family, the village and the nation, public singing does not come under the same logic. It seems to be inversely related with honour such that, the family or clan whose women sing in public loses its respect. Hence an increase in the number of women claiming public spaces has led to the possibility of their being subjected to violence and crime (Ahlawat, 2012, p. 15). This applies specifically to women singers and commercial stage performers.

Despite their vulnerable situation in Haryana, women (excluding those from the dominant caste) nowadays are increasingly seen performing on public stage. This is an important dimension of change in a highly gendered musical culture of the region. This is also paradoxically connected with the fact that in the past few years, numerous cases of exploitation and murder of women performers and singers belonging to the field of *ragini* (folk) singing have surfaced in Haryana.⁸

⁸ Renowned Haryanvi ragini singer of 90s Passi Nayar was murdered in 2018. Harshita Dahiya was murdered in October 2017 and this year also began with yet another murder of a local folk singer Mamta Sharma. *Ragini* singer-dancer Ms. Aarti Bhoria has filed a case of receiving rape and murder threats. Prior to that she was publicly assaulted during a live performance (The Print, 19 Jan 2018). Sapna Chaudhary who is the most famous contemporary artist of Haryana, attempted suicide in 2016 after facing a controversy regarding making some casteist remarks in her song. Lalita Sharma was murdered in the year 2015. Menu (name changed) was allegedly assaulted publicly during a live performance and her Khap banned her for performing *ragini* as it was bringing bad name to the Jat Community. Binu Choudhary were also murdered in 2012.

Claiming space in public stands in contradiction to the defined ideal sphere for women⁹ and challenges the normative structure which gets reflected in growing patterns of violence against women including rapes, kidnapping, domestic violence, honour killings, etc. A mere glance at figures given by NCRB¹⁰ reports testifies the same. Till 31st January 2018, 9196 cases of crime against women were reported in Haryana, consisting of 2041 cases of molestation (reported ones) (Saini, 2018). The so-called custodians of honour and members of Khaps, desirous of maintaining their social status, issue diktats to control the sexuality of women by banning mobile and Jeans¹¹ for girls as well as pizza, chowmein and burger¹² which supposedly arouse sexual feelings amongst girls. Thus the old man in a turban would suggest ‘minimizing the marriageable age for girls to 16’¹³ (Ahlawat, 2012, p. 17) to check the increasing incidents of rape. The skewed sex ratio of Haryana has resulted in the practices of purchasing brides¹⁴ from the remote areas of West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, etc. A community practicing endogamy¹⁵ in a sacrosanct way for decades, avoiding *gotras* of grand-parents and parents, has become flexible in its caste practices, especially while fetching brides for the sons. However, they prefer marrying their daughters inside the

⁹ Home as the world of a woman.

¹⁰ National Crime Record Bureau, 2018.

¹¹<https://newsxind.com/national/no-jeans-mobile-phones-haryana-villages-2018-diktat-to-stop-girls-from-eloping-with-boys> (18th April 2018).

¹²<https://www.newsxind.com/national/no-jeans-mobile-phones-haryana-villages-2018-diktat-to-stop-girls-from-eloping-with-boys> (17th July 2014).

¹³<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Allow-girls-marriage-at-16-in-line-with-age-for-sexual-consent-Haryana-Khaps/articleshow/18998435.cms>

¹⁴<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/brides-purchased-then-exploited-in-haryana-punjab/article2400857.ece> (26th August 2011).

¹⁵ Janaki Abraham (2014) sees it as critical for caste and its reproduction.

same community. Caste norms, especially for their daughters and women remain so rigid that even married couples (intra-caste) are separated or made to tie *Rakhi* (the holy thread sisters tie on their brothers' hand in north India) and at times killed for honour if they were of the same gotras (Ahlawat, 2015, p. 93; Kaur, 2010, p. 15). Thus the honour of the family is closely tied to women and their behaviour. This validates the idea of caste patriarchy¹⁶ and the phenomena of 'shifting circle of endogamy' in Haryana.

Janaki Abraham (2014) argues that while endogamy is crucial for caste and its reproduction, a variation and violation is visible in many different forms throughout history in adherence to strict rules of endogamy. The shifts in the principle of endogamy have been primarily connected with maintenance of masculinity ideals and gendered hierarchies of power. These variations have been called a 'shifting circle of endogamy' (Abraham, 2014, p.56). Citing example from Haryana, the phenomenon of brides brought from different states on account of adverse sex ratio and scarcity of potential endogamous alliances is one exception which is not much objected to. At the same time, violations of endogamy and *gotra* norms have led to honour killings in this very context.

“Thus, the idea of the purity of the caste masks forms of power often played out in the local – in the domestic, the village, or caste. Endogamy is reproduced less as a value in itself and more as an ideal critically tied to power and forms of social status”, says Abraham (ibid., p.58).

Hence when it comes to subjecting women to rigid norms of surveillance, it can be concluded with Abraham that the idea of controlling women's sexuality is not just for

¹⁶ Caste practices are gendered as Janaki Abraham calls it caste patriarchy.

“purity of caste blood” but is about “maintaining privilege and power” and primarily for assertion of caste pride (ibid).

So strong is the entwinement of Haryanvi community with caste hierarchy and caste patriarchy that any deviation from established norms calls for social boycott and punishment for the offender. Seen as ‘gateway of caste’ (Abraham, 2014) the onus of transferring these customary norms to future generations lies on the shoulders of the ‘bonded labourers of caste’, i.e., women (daughters, the future daughters-in-law and the mothers). While exploring case studies of honour killing in selected villages of Haryana, Neerja Ahlawat points out that men are expected to regulate and guard the notion of honour whereas ‘women are responsible for keeping the *izzat* intact (Ahlawat, 2015, p. 96)’. Thus the same is mediated across the generations through women’s repressed agency, who are seen as the born preserve of traditional values.¹⁷The ‘repressed agency’¹⁸ of women is constructed through socialization and cultural practices so rigorously that their conscience does not even resist the exploitative structure of patriarchy. It is amidst this structure and context that I try to explore the relationship between gender and music in Haryana region.

Exploration of varied facets concerning women performers, located in gendered spaces calls for a detailed engagement with the context itself. Haryanvi caste society and its rural economy has a bearing on cultural practices, traditions and more specifically in the context of *ragini* singers in Haryana. The research problem thus is formulated in terms of the interface between a woman performer’s agency and the gendered musical cultures rooted in the rural, patriarchal society.

¹⁷ Respondernt (Housewife) aged 48, from Sonapat said during interview “*aurat hi sambhalei sei samaj ki riti-riwaaj ne arr apni aulad arr aan aalin pedhi ne bhi sikhavi*” (Women handles society’s traditions, customs and pass it on to her children and coming generations).

¹⁸ Repressed agency is the term I have used to refer to the submissive agency of women.

I. Caste Society and Transforming Rural Economy of Haryana

Haryana is an extremely stratified society ordered along caste-class-gender lines. The social hierarchy of caste and class prevails in the villages and becomes detrimental in segregating dominant caste from subordinate ones (Ahlawat, 2015, p. 91). Structured as per caste, houses in the villages are further divided into different *pannaahs* (clan/*kunhba*). Different castes in Haryana including Jats, Brahmins and OBCs could be seen living in different *panaahs* in a village. Dalits, however, are either in the outskirts with *kaccha makan* or in a segregated space within the village. One can easily differentiate as one enters a village as houses of upper and dominant castes are usually constructed and painted properly (except for the poor families) called *pakka makan* (concrete house) whereas houses of Dalits are not even generally cemented except a few.¹⁹

District	Castes (Percentage)						
	Jat	Rajput	Chamar	Brahmin	Bania	Meo	Ahir
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Hisar	28.48	16.82	9.55	5.62	7.46	0.07	1.36
Rohtak	36.80	7.10	9.15	9.67	5.95	0.02	2.68
Gurgaon	11.45	6.72	12.73	7.95	4.38	19.54	12.80
Karnal	15.20	13.22	9.00	8.58	6.32	0.08	0.27
Ambala	16.28	10.91	11.48	5.57	2.2	0.29	0.24

Source: Chowdhry, 1994, p. 37.

¹⁹ Though some difference may be noticed in urban living spaces of Haryana.

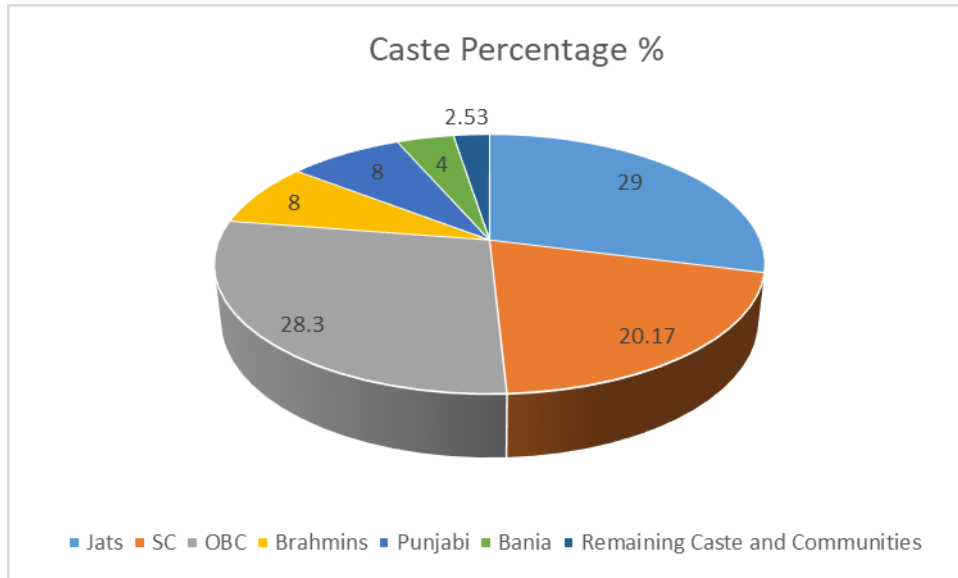


Figure 1: Caste wise population in Haryana²⁰

According to Census 2011, Jats constitute 29% of the total population of Haryana. Apart from this, 28.3% is of OBC²¹ and 20.17% are SC²². The percentage of both Brahmins and Punjabis is 8% each while the remaining includes 4% of Banias and 2.53% are remaining caste and communities²³ of the population as given in the pie chart below.

The dominant caste of the region, Jats constitute 29% (Joshi, 2017) of the total population in Haryana and are believed to own three-fourths of land and thus are known

²⁰ The data has been compiled from various sources including Handbook of Social Justice welfare report 2016 and from secondary data including newspaper articles and reports as mentioned in the footnotes.

²¹ Handbook on Social Welfare Statistics, Govt. of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Statistics Department, New Delhi, January, 2016.

<https://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/HANDBOOK%20Social%20Welfare%20Statistic%202016.pdf>

²² Ibid.

²³ Bharadwaj, Mukesh (2014) *Caste Constituency*, Indian Express, September 19, 2014. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/caste-constituency/>

as the conventional *zamindars* (landlords) of Haryana (Kaul, 2016).²⁴ As a caste that is placed socio-economically above the other castes and also not very low in the ritual hierarchy, the Jats of Haryana fulfill Srinivas's criteria for the 'dominant caste' (Judge, 2015, p. 57) in the region. The dominant caste status in Haryana is equated with the amount of land owned by a particular caste than by ritual status, and all the other castes are placed in the relation of servitude to the dominant caste i.e. Jats in this region (Chowdhry, 1994, p. 41). Chowdhry elucidates that due to lesser population, 'Brahmins were not able to forge a high caste Brahmanical identity in keeping with their status' in Haryana as well as in Punjab, unlike in other parts of India. She further argues that Brahmins "..... could certainly be sacerdotally superior yet socially he was described as the lowest of the low" (ibid., p.42).

Census reports of 1901 provide an interesting account of caste hierarchy in the region where even the *Jats* and *nai* wore *janeo* (the sacred thread) which symbolized twice-born caste. With the propagation of Arya Samaj beliefs in the region in the early 1920s, the role of Brahmins declined as even ceremonial feasting decreased and they were seen as dependent caste. The 'upper classes of agriculturalists' primarily Jats, says Chowdhry, see themselves in the position of givers (ibid., p. 43-44). She further states that:

"This weakness in the position of the Brahmin has had a severely restricting effect on the hold of the Brahmanical Hinduism and consequently, the spread and acceptance of its socio-cultural norms and attitudes. This region, therefore, was to evolve its own socio-cultural

²⁴ <https://www.equitymaster.com/diary/detail.asp?date=02/24/2016&story=4&title=Why-Jats-of-Haryana-Want-Reservation>

practices widely different from those prevailing in parts of India which were directly influenced by Brahmanical Hinduism. The weak position of Brahmins explains how caste groups like the Jats, though one of the many peasant castes all over India, ritually ranking after the Brahmin, the Rajput and the Khatri came to be the 'dominant caste' in the socio-cultural field. The remark in the 1901 census that there is no caste above the Jat retains its significance in the perception and reality of people's lives...This ubiquitous domination by a single caste (despite internal economic disparities) set the tone and shaped the customs and attitudes followed in rural Haryana. To this may be added the extensive political mobilization effected during the colonial period, helped greatly by the colonial policies, both legislative and administrative which gave the Jats an unassailable position and identified them as part of the ruling elite. The Jats, therefore, came to constitute the major reference group in Haryana in the same way as certain other dominant landowning castes elsewhere in India" (Chowdhry 1994, p. 44-45).

This is the reason Chowdhry uses the word Jat interchangeably with zamindar, a category constituting 'varied class and caste cluster' and thus the 'ideology of the dominant peasant class and caste groups became hegemonized' (ibid., p. 46). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sir Chhotu Ram²⁵ played a crucial role in enlisting this peasant community into the army; this is because he saw this as a means for promoting the community's economic well-being. Jats benefited from land reforms,

²⁵ Sir Chhotu Ram (1881-1945) was an Arya Samajist and a prominent Jat leader of the Unionist Party in Pre-Independence Punjab. He played an essential role in consolidating the Jat identity of the peasant community in Haryana. He was also editor of a weekly Urdu journal, *Jat Gazette* (1916-1980).

which started in the 1920s and continued after independence. Later, they also benefited from the introduction of green revolution in terms of increased productivity and thus increased income levels.

Thus with the identity acquired during the colonial regime as a major source of recruitment in the army, the Jats of the region consolidated their dominating presence with the help of Arya Samaj. This continued to give them a strong hold and say in the state of affairs even in post-colonial times. With land reforms as well as the coming of green revolution, the dominance of Jats became a defining feature of society in Haryana in post-independence times. This is also reflected in their widespread capture of political power in the state after its formation in 1966. A socio-historical overview of the circumstances since the advent of green revolution and subsequently the rise of market economy is going to help in grasping the ongoing transitions and crisis in contemporary rural economy of Haryana.

Green Revolution and its Zonal Consequences

Historically associated with Delhi Subha in Medieval times, Haryana has existed since times immemorial. Firstly, tagged with Bengal Presidency (1803-1833) by the British and later attached to North Western Province, Haryana became part of Undivided Punjab after the revolt of 1857. With Independence in the year 1947, it was carved out of the new state of East Punjab region to form an independent state in the year 1966. Haryana was referred to as the ‘dust-bowl’ state until the 60s due to the barren nature of its soil and lack of irrigation facilities in the region. As reflected in a *ragini* where

the artist sings *Banjar dharti hal kudke*²⁶ (Plough is digging a barren land). It was only in the 1970s, with the inception of the green revolution in North India, that it came to be called as the ‘grain bowl’ of India. Scholars attribute this transformation to Jat agriculturalists and cultivators and see it as an instrumental force in the emergence of *Jats* as a dominant caste in the region (Kumar, 2009, p. 13).

Largely, the Jats who led the green revolution belonged to the peasant category and had done well over the years as farmers (Singh, 2011). However, with the ascendance of the market after economic reforms, the green revolution model of input-intensive farming has made them more fragile to an increasingly uncertain market, and also caused increase in the cost of inputs, like, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, diesel for irrigation pumps, etc. for farmers.

Thus established as a separate state, Haryana witnessed a major socio-economic transformation with the coming of green revolution, a ‘techno-politic strategy’ (Shiva, 2016, p. 14) between 1968-78. Green Revolution introduced the high yielding variety (HYV) seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and new machines to the traditional farming patterns and thereby enhanced the agricultural productivity. Amongst the beneficiaries were the substantial landowners from the locally dominant caste that were traditionally landowners and cultivators.

Thus “the locally dominant castes consolidated their position in the regional power structure and acquired a new sense of confidence. The rise of dominant caste farmers in the 1970s also set in motion a phase of populist politics at the regional and national levels. The newly emerged

²⁶ *Banjar dharti hal kudke* (Plough is digging a barren land) by Suresh Gola. Available on www.youtube.com

agrarian elite did not speak only for his own caste or class. He spoke on behalf of the entire village. His identification with the village was not just political or that of a representative of a section of the village. He saw himself to be the natural spokesperson of the village” (Jodhka, 2014, p. 5).

Similarly, Vivek Kaul (2016) points out that green revolution “immensely benefited the big landlords, especially the *Jats* and have been the source of their economic and political clout” (Kaul, 2016).²⁷ However, Vandana Shiva (2016) argues that the green revolution disintegrated the asymmetric relations/obligations within the villages by bringing the cultivator directly in contact with fertilizers agencies, irrigation organizations, banks etc. and this agriculture-market dynamics changed the very structure of social and political relations (Shiva, 2016, p. 171). Women were also seen as an economic asset as they were seen as potential labour in the fields.

Women as an Economic Resource in Shadow Work

Unveiling transformation occurring in the women’s sphere around the same time, Prem Chowdhry puts forward critical insights concerning cultural devaluation of women with changing the rural economy in her analysis of women and work in rural Haryana. She opines that the role and nature of the women’s work underwent drastic change as the green revolution brought women in public. The public here is an extension of the private sphere as discussed earlier. However, increased women participation in agricultural work or animal husbandry could not defy the dominant socio-cultural and ideological

²⁷ <https://www.equitymaster.com/diary/detail.asp?date=02/24/2016&story=4&title=Why-Jats-of-Haryana-Want-Reservation>

factors which still considered and relegated their work to be 'inferior/secondary/supplementary to that of men'. She writes:

“The conspicuous emergence of dominant man in control, especially in the aftermath of not only the green revolution but also the white revolution has only strengthened their devaluation. This contradiction has had the effect of redefining gender equations in rural Haryana to the detriment of its women” (Chowdhry, 1993, p. A-135).

Though technological advancement in terms of tools and fertilizers relieved men of their heavy agricultural work, the workload for women became two-fold including agricultural work, cattle rearing and household chores. Women are believed to be incapable of acquiring mechanical skills, by the men who consider that '*aurat ki mat to guddi ke peechein ho sei* (a woman is brainless)' (ibid., p.A-145). Mechanization equipped men with tractors instead of the plough and oxen/ bullock cart (often women can be seen riding these days), but essential manual work like 'transplantation, weeding, sowing, thrashing, etc.' are still being performed by their family labour i.e. women. This is largely because of the categorization of such work as stereotypical and best suited for women as it did not require much skill. Thus technology helped men to shed off their hard work by facilitating them with the industrial equipment which made their work marginal than that of women.

Chowdhry categorizes women's labour as firstly, female family labour (mostly in landowning caste) and secondly, agricultural wage earners (landless cultivating caste). It is the second category of women's labour, she stresses, which is marginalized and paid less than what the fellow men get. The contribution of former is seen as a moral duty of women to work in the family's fields. Women themselves believe "*hamare ghar*

(khet) ka kaam sei kaisi sharamindgi (It is our own work, why shy away)” (Chowdhry, 1993, p. A-136). As stated by Chowdhry:

“the dominant cultural norms do not consider the participation of women in manual work outside the house as lowering to family prestige. However, this manual work must be in the fields of the family as those who work for themselves enjoy a higher status in rural society. Working for others is considered to bring about a lowering of this status” (Chowdhry, 1993, p. A-136).

Talking in similar context, Chiranjip and Gita Sen (1985), while studying various factors determining female labour force participation rate from NSS data of India, argue that ‘prevalent social structure emboldens control over women’s mobility and thus agricultural wage labour is placed lowest in the hierarchy of female labour whereas women performing domestic work are called moral duties having higher status’.

Lack of capital investment was covered up by freely employing women’s labour in the family whereas expenditure on the chemical fertilizers could not be avoided. Sheila Bhalla calls it ‘labour saving’ technologies and claims that increasing landholdings at time led to withdrawal of family from agricultural work either due to good income (Nayyar, 1987, p. 2214) or due to the requirements of a ‘large amount of agricultural processing work’ on the increased farm output as a consequence of green revolution. In such cases women’s work got shifted from field to ‘*ahata*’ (courtyard) as ‘extra cooking was required for the agricultural labourers’ under supervision of the women of the house (Chowdhry, 1993, p. A-145). This was not in case of women wage labourers from the Dalit community. Sheila Bhalla points out that the “initial phase of adoption of green revolution technology reduced women’s share in employment...by 1972-73,

the share of female labour days was inversely related to the proportion of area under HYV technology..' (Bhalla, 1989, p. WS-69).

Traditionally, Brahmins, Rajputs, Banias and Khatri in the region kept their women away from agricultural activities. However, women from landholding castes like Jats, Ahirs, Gujjars, Bishnois and Sainis women always worked in the fields. Women contribute to the rural economy of Haryana without actually laying a claim to it. Their effort becomes a shadow work and only men's work is considered as an income generating one even by the women. Prem Chowdhry raises her concern over unequal wages of women labourers. She concludes that a 'self-imposed subalternism under patriarchal norms.... such a self-image clearly stands in the way of forging a democratic movement to voice a united demand for better and equal wages' (Chowdhry, 1993, p.A-145).

It is indeed the context, in which women are located, which naturalizes the existing patterns and structures as given. As Chowdhry mentions, women consider men's work as 'harder and more strenuous' than their own and seemingly this is one of the reasons for self-withdrawal from the labour market (ibid). Women's contribution in the green revolution is more or less negated and remains marginalized even today, as Haryana saw a sharp decline in the female work participation rate as to 17.8% (World Bank Data, 2017) with only 22% of rural women participation in farming. The women are relegated to work that is not economically gainful and is also confined to inner precincts of the dominant caste household.



Image 3: Woman riding bullock cart while coming back from fields in Sonapat. **Source:** From the researcher's fieldwork.

Thus green revolution not only transformed the moral economy of the peasants, which until the mid-60s depended on subsistence but now it also got oriented towards market economy resulting in social polarization and conflicts. It did not cease there as S.R. Ahlawat (2008) mentions in his work on 'Economic Reforms and Social Transformation' that in the process, Haryana suffered a major setback due to deteriorating soil health and depleting sub-soil water, etc. It led to regional disparity as green revolution only benefited well-endowed areas and mostly big farmers in these villages.

Further economic reforms like LPG (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization) in the 1990s declined the productivity and marginalized the peasant community (Ahlawat, 2008). It did not leave much profit and margins for the farmers who were already

burdened with meeting the ends after coming of the green revolution. He further opines that due to

“government interventions in terms of an assured minimum support price, market & procurement, an element of complacency crept in, adversely affecting the quality of farm produce & failed to make it competitive. Thus, the agrarian economy of Haryana failed to embrace globalization, resulting in a plethora of problems, including wheat and paddy becoming a drain on government finances, unscientific storage, absence of diversification and agro-processing units, growing burden of debt, absence of community support in the villages” (Ahlawat , 2008)

All these factors together led to agrarian crisis in Haryana and thereby aggravated social inequalities in the wake of economic transformation in the state. Similarly, Jaffrelot and Kalaiyarasan A. (2019, p. 29) opine that “the dual processes²⁸ of market²⁹ and mandal³⁰ have partly dislodged Jats from their earlier economic and political position”.

Thus poor agrarian performance coupled with the emerging market economy, fragmented land and technology induced inequalities which enhanced marginalization have made agriculture a profession full of losses. It also impacted women across caste and class in the region. Thus men and women workers who were engaged in the fields earlier started venturing into non-agricultural professions. This could have compelled women to participate in generating income for the household leading to increased instances of women’s entry as well as a higher degree of visibility of women artists in public.

²⁸ Initiated in 1991 with liberal economy and Mandal commission, 1993.

²⁹ Economic liberalization.

³⁰ The implementation of reservations for OBCs following the Mandal Commission.

II. Recent Economic Transitions and the Jat Community: From Domination to Claims of Deprivation

In contemporary times, Haryana state is witnessing a new found frenzy for modern technological devices, luxury vehicles and consumption oriented ways of life among its members. The fragmented lands and declining security of agricultural income has resulted in the marginalization of the uneducated farmers who now have even resorted to selling their lands or looking for alternative livelihood options while also demanding reservation in jobs. The *Jat* community is also simultaneously facing higher rates of unemployment amongst its youth and thus the pull towards secure government jobs.

As rightly encapsulated by Ahlawat (2009) in an article on ‘Missing brides in rural Haryana’,

“It appears a crisis is penetrating deep inside the rural society of Haryana where forces of tradition and modernity are in conflict with each other. With fast-changing rural society, education and employment, particularly in the public sector and in the urban set-up, are the new indicators of the status of a boy and his family. Highly skewed child sex ratio in Haryana has led to acute shortage of marriageable girls leading to male marriage squeeze. As a result, many Haryanvi men bring brides from far away states such as Assam, West-Bengal, Orissa, and Kerala. On the contrary, there is complete control over the sexuality of the local girls who are married according to strict societal norms. There are cases where highly educated girls have been married to constables, conductors or peons; the criteria being public sector jobs, that is, lifetime security of the girl” (Ahlawat, 2009).

The violent inter-caste conflicts of stratified Haryanvi society during the protests for securing reservation for Jats in the year 2016 brought to forefront the embedded hatred amongst different castes on one hand and the dominant caste on the other. The clashes between these two sections brought the whole state to a standstill. A riot like situation erupted with the whole atmosphere engulfed in flames of destruction, sabotaging of the public and private property apart from causing a huge loss of innocent lives. Similar conflicts between Jats and Dalits in *Jhajjar* and Gohana were reported in 2002 and 2005, respectively. In 2005, almost 50 homes in *Balmiki basti*³¹ in Gohana were burnt in the violence between Dalits and the Jats.³² The atrocities against Dalits in Haryana have become a routine feature as one can see a pattern of crimes against Dalits. These incidents reflect the deep rooted caste structures along which the lives of Haryanvi people have been aligned.

Despite being categorized as dominant caste in the state, as far as numbers are concerned, the community is now asserting its identity, at times even in an aggressive manner. The question requires some serious deliberation. Having lived in the field for more than a decade as a sociologist, the researcher has taken up ground-level concrete research to see and understand the ongoing transition in their changing socio-economic, cultural as well as political challenges vis-à-vis the musical cultures in the region.

In the Indian context, affirmative action³³ was introduced with the enactment of the constitution to undo the historical injustices faced by the Scheduled Castes and the

³¹ A slum like colony of houses

³² Dalit Houses Burnt Down at Gohana in Haryana (*First published in September 2005*) A Preliminary Fact Finding Report by N. Paul Divakar, National Convener, NCDHR, Dr. Vimal Thorat, National Co-Convener, NCDHR, Ms. Shabnam Hashmi, ANHAD, Dr. Umakant, Secretary-Advocacy, NCDHR and Others.

³³ The concept of affirmative action is an old phenomenon and not unique to India. The philosophy behind affirmative action has been to favour members of certain groups who have suffered from discrimination. Around the world, affirmative action has been an essential part of welfare states policy to combat racial and gender discrimination, reducing inequalities in employment and pay, access to education, promoting diversity, and undoing the historical injustices.

Scheduled Tribes. Later in the 1990s, the reservation was extended to communities that were both socially and educationally backward. M.N. Srinivas (1995) defined these backward classes as ‘dominant castes’ which are numerically large and own relatively more land than others. The recent protests in the past years by the Jats and Patels for inclusion into the Other Backward Classes (OBC) raises questions about changing socio-economic realities in India. The present section looks at the recent economic, educational and social transition of Jats in Haryana.

Reservation for the ‘Dominant Caste’?



Image 4: Jat community members during their agitation for reservation in Haryana³⁴

Jats of Haryana are one of the prosperous agrarian castes of north India (Singh, 2011). As discussed in the previous section, Jats constitutes 29% of Haryana’s population³⁵and own three-fourths of land in Haryana.³⁶ Historically, Jats have not been zamindars, but

³⁴ **Source:** <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/jats-in-wonderland-quote-stir-jat-agitation-obc-status-haryana-employment>

³⁵ <https://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/why-jats-are-protesting-in-haryana-all-you-need-to-know/1/600890.html>

³⁶ This is according to media reports and there is no conclusive data on this.

land redistributions after independence helped Jats to be landowners (Jaffrelot, 2000). As Surinder S Jodhka points out in his work on 'Caste', after independence, Land Reform Legislations were introduced, as developmental initiative, which transferred 'ownership rights to the tillers of the land primarily to the middle caste groups such as Jats and Gujjars' and weakened the hold of the non-cultivating intermediaries (the so-called landlords). The legislation thus in a way helped Jats to become *zamindars* and "the Rajputs, traditionally upper-caste and the erstwhile landlords, possessed far less land after the Land Reforms than they had before" (Kaul, 2016). Moreover, with the allotment of land came the agricultural (green) revolution, discussed in the last section, which increased the crop yields and in the process led to the economic empowerment of the Jats.

Jats have also dominated the political system in the state as well and the fact that seven out of ten Haryana chief ministers have been Jats is a testimony to the same. The recent protests by Jats for reservation under OBC status are mainly due to declining agricultural incomes and correspondingly the challenges to social status of Jats in the state. In a way, Jats have been displaced from their positions of power at economic and social levels, if not at political levels. But, unfortunately, "the Jats still retain their self-conscious identity of peasant-sepoy. This sense of pride, however, rests uncomfortably with changed economic realities" (Damodaran, 2016)³⁷. Thus, as said earlier, demand for reservation by the Jats under the Other Backward Class (OBC) status raises questions about the economic transformation and the changing realities of Jat as a dominant caste in Haryana (Jaffrelot, 2016).

³⁷ <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/in-fact-jats-think-theyre-backward-theres-a-reason/>

Changing Economic Realities

Although economic liberalization in 1990s led to a higher growth rate for Haryana, the share of agriculture to GSDP (gross state domestic product) has declined. After liberalization, the GSDP growth rate for Haryana almost doubled from 4.8% in 1990-2000 to 9% in 2000-2010 (CSO). However, “the growth rate of agriculture (3.3 percent) has been three times less than that of industry (9.5 percent), and almost four times less than that of the services (11.8 percent) in the decade 2000-2010” (Jaffrelot & Kalaiyarasan, 2017). Overall, agriculture has become less and less remunerative in comparison to urban-based occupations that have grown at a much faster rate. On the one hand, the share of agriculture to GSDP reduced from 28.1% in 1980-90 to 8.9% in 2000-2010. In contrast, the share of the service sector to GSDP increased from 38.6% in 1980-90 to 61.4% in 2000-2010. Sub-sectors within services, i.e., banking and insurance; transport, storage, and communication; real estate and business services, etc. have also shown tremendous growth. For example, real estate sector grew from 4.1% in 1990-2000 to 14.7% in 2000-2010 (Central Statistical Organization).

Thus for more than a decade now, the structure of Haryana’s economy is moving away from agriculture, and the service sector is the new engine of growth. This has important implication for historically dominating agrarian castes like Jats, who are still engulfed in agriculture and land for their livelihood.

Fragmentation of Land Holdings

The community remains largely agrarian and is composed of small and marginal farmers, and at times, farm labour. The average land holdings have reduced, leaving small fragmented pieces of land for every farmer. According to the Agriculture Census of 2010-11, the average size of an individual holding in Haryana has fallen from 1.74

hectares in 1995-96 to 1.57 hectares in 2010, that is, the average land size has reduced approximately by 10%. Importantly, this is similar to the trend that prevails in the country (NSS 59th Round). As per Agriculture Census³⁸ of 2010-11, “the average size of holdings for all operational classes (small & marginal, medium and large) have declined over the years and for all classes put together it came down to 1.16 hectare in 2010-11 from 2.82 hectares in 1970-71” (Press Information Bureau, GOI, 2015).³⁹ The situation could have only gotten worse since then.

In terms of actual land cultivated, the figure shows a further distressed picture. Land holdings under cultivators in Haryana have reduced from 2 hectares in 1987-88 to 0.8 in 2011-12. Importantly, the share of landless farmers (less than 1 hectare) has gone up from 56.1% in 1987-88 to 73.4% in 2011-12 (NSS, several rounds on employment). This change in the distribution of landholding has significant effects on the Jats in the state. Therefore, in a way, liberalization of the 1990s has severely impacted their land holdings and the feeling of economic insecurity prevails.

Income Levels

The reduced land holdings and overdependence on agriculture leads to reduced levels of income, i.e., lower per capita income. Christophe Jaffrelot and Kalaiyaran (2017) in their article mention that:

“the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS), done by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in collaboration with the University of Maryland, shows that in 2011-12, the annual per capita mean income of the Jats of Haryana, Rs 59,182, was second only to the

³⁸ agcensus.nic.in/document/ac1011/reports/air2010-11complete.pdf

³⁹ <https://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=132799>

non-Brahmin forward castes, Rs 71,086 and the Brahmins, who are traditionally not very high in the social hierarchy of Haryana got only Rs 56,913”.⁴⁰

Although Jats’ income is much higher than the income of the OBCs (Rs 31,099) and the Scheduled Castes (Rs 20,158), importantly, there are class differences within the Jat community. They show that only 23.4 percent of the Jats accounts for 62.5 percent of the community’s income and in contrast, 21.5 percent of the Jats of Haryana do not earn more than 4 percent of the community’s income with a mean income of Rs. 11,191 — half the average income of the SCs. This signifies that it would perhaps be incorrect to see Jats of Haryana as a homogenous group and the data certainly demonstrates that Jats are now differentiated along class lines, where a small elite group within Jats accounts for major share of total income and wealth.

Lack of Human Capital and Unemployment

Economic liberalization has indeed led to growth but largely through the service sector. This has had effects on agriculture and it has lost its relevance as the driver of the growth in Haryana. Agriculture has become a losing proposition, leading to higher unemployment, disguised, or otherwise. In comparison, other sub-sectors of the service sector have become more attractive and profitable. Unfortunately, for this largely agrarian community (*Jats*), these are non-traditional areas to work in. According to the National Sample Survey,

“the growth rate of jobs in agriculture has been negative (-3 percent) between 2004-05 and 2011-12, whereas it has been slightly positive in

⁴⁰ <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/jats-in-wonderlessland-quote-stir-jat-agitation-obc-status-haryana-employment-4562573/>

other sectors. The only economic activity that has recruited much labour is construction (6 percent), but the Jats' sense of caste pride and dignity does not allow them to take to such jobs. This is only one of the handicaps of the Jats in the labour market" (Jaffrelot and Kalaiyarasan, 2017). "In addition, the difficulty for the Jats in diversifying economic activities is being attributed to strong entry barriers built by the traditional business communities. The Jats do not have the required skills and access to business networks. Even the upwardly mobile Jats could not enter businesses that are associated with agro-business such as trading grains and vegetables. Besides, real estate boom which benefited considerable sections within the Jats also led many to perceive that while they gained short term wealth by selling their land, they still have lost out to others who benefited from economic liberalization in the long run" (Kaul, 2016).

Unfortunately for Jats of Haryana, land is no longer the most important source of power. In the post-liberalization period, disinclination for education has made the economic realities even more painful for the Jat community. In the same context, Harish Damodaran (2016) opines that, "in the new economy, success is no longer determined by land and assets but by education and skills". Human capital (Becker, 1975) has become the most important source of power, that is, investment in skills, knowledge and values has become the most important source of power in the emerging cities or towns. The Jats, unlike many agrarian communities of southern India, have not made the transition from being a predominantly agrarian-based community confined to the romanticization of the village lifestyle. As Jaffrelot and Kalaiyarasan (2017) points out that:

“Like most of the dominant castes, many Jats have not been able to take advantage of new opportunities in non-agricultural sectors because of their lack of education and entry barriers to business erected by the traditional business communities. With an average of 5.90 years of education, Jats lag behind the forward castes. Certainly, this figure is higher than those of the OBCs and Dalits. However, OBCs have almost as many graduates (5.4 percent) as the Jats (5.8 percent) and, more importantly, OBCs and Dalits benefit from quotas. As a result, the Jats have the lowest percentage of salaried people in Haryana (11 percent) — and the highest percentage of people whose major source of income is cultivation (67 percent). Only 2.5 percent of the Jats have a government job — against 12.5 percent for the SCs. Whether it is mobility in education or employment, the data shows that the Brahmins and the non-Brahmin forward castes have benefited the most from economic liberalization, suggesting that Jats had not been able to compete with them in admission for universities and top-notch jobs in view of their educational backwardness” (ibid).

The lack of human capital among Jats has also been recognized by Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) in its report on Jats in 9 states of India and duly recognized by Supreme Court in its judgment in 2015.

Therefore the agrarian community of Jats has largely remained inward-looking, not progressing much beyond the peasant-sepoy identity. Jaffrelot and Kalaiyaran (2017) point out that:

“the Jats may not have suffered historical discrimination or exploitation, but they are by no means educationally advanced either. Besides, being a largely rural community puts them at a disadvantage in an economy where there is a large premium attached to the knowledge of English and technical education” (ibid).

This lag in education is also reflective from the fact that even after being an agrarian community their presence is negligible in trading of farm products. “The bulk of grain traders, commission agents, rice millers and dairy owners in Haryana are Baniyas, Khattris or Aroras” (Damodaran, 2016). Moreover, the Jats are largely working as small-town lawyers and property dealers etc. There are not too many people from the Jat community employed as class one officers or as professionals, including management executives, doctors or engineers, leave alone start-up entrepreneurs from their ranks (Damodaran, 2016). Perhaps, this reflects that the community was by and large content to hold land above everything else and assuming that it will maintain their domination in the society, as it did historically.

Social Hierarchy and Downward Mobility

Besides the above discussed economic and educational realities of Jats in Haryana, Jat leaders, like, Mahendra Singh Tikait, the leader of Bharatiya Kisan Union and Charan Singh, had inherited a sense of caste pride (or rather pride of being a martial race) and higher status in the social hierarchy. But with declining land holdings and economic position, caste pride and their position in the social hierarchy has also taken a hit; this is because both the notion of caste pride and social hierarchy are mainly linked to land holding and related economic position. Moreover, policy of affirmative action has helped in the upward mobility of the OBCs and Dalits in the heartland of Jats, leading

to the feeling of downward mobility within the social hierarchy or losing domination vis-à-vis OBCs and Dalits. A case of honour killing of a Jat boy by the Dalits over marrying a Dalit woman in Jind, Haryana illustrates the same (Pawariya, 2018).⁴¹

The Jats of Haryana perceive a threat to their hitherto domination in Haryana's society and economy. This is mainly because of the following reasons: firstly, the share of agriculture is declining with respect to other sectors. Secondly, their average size of land holdings is shrinking. Thirdly, because of lack of human capital, they are unable to compete with the groups that have benefitted from the economic liberalization and reservation under OBCs. Overall it can be said that for the Jats of Haryana, land (agriculture) is no longer the source of power as it once was, and the community has failed to keep up with the changing economic realities, which demands the acquisition of human capital for economic prosperity and social status. This is because the economic liberalization has shifted the power from land to human capital as the prime source of domination, whether economically or socially.

In response, as male occupation in agriculture dwindles, not only men, but women are also entering new professions. In the context of singing, which was earlier dominated by male artists, a transformational change is seen with the emergence of women artists. The access to public domain for women, which was considered unsafe once, is now seen as a means to economic upliftment. It is important to note that women are now seen as an important economic resource. Larger number of women singers are occupying public spaces dominated by male singers, more specifically *ragini* singers. However, due to structural constraints in different communities of Haryana, women are still devoid of economic independence and the same is true for women singers.

⁴¹ www.swarajyamag.com

III. Women and the Folk Genre of *Ragini*

Society in Haryana being a conservative one creates hindrances for its women to come out and perform on musical stages such as that of *ragini*. In the vernacular usage, the term '*bhand*'⁴² has been used for those who sing in public and the same draws a devaluing reference to cultures of music itself. Any art form is good for most people in Haryana as long as women from one's own family are not performing as the boundaries for women are decided by the private sphere of the home. This is more so for the dominant caste of *Jats*. In the case of *ragini*, notably, hardly any woman from the *Jat* community performs due to the taboo on singing for women. Especially, coming out in the open and singing in public will malign the image of the family and bring dishonor to their community.

One of the popular traditional sources of entertainment in Haryana, '*ragini*' is a musical narration of a 'story or string of incidents' also known as '*kissa*'⁴³ It is a prominent source of entertainment specifically for the Haryanvi *Jat* community. Since beginning of the twentieth century, *ragini* has been dominated by men as patrons, performers as well as audience.

Prevailing normative structures try to confine women to domestic spaces and discourage them from taking up singing as a profession. Within the dominating caste (*Jats*) ideas of honour and prestige act as severely debilitating factors for women to even harbour such dreams. As women are expected to be passive recipients of musical practices in public sphere but not as active contributor in any form (Cook & Tsou, 1994). However, women started entering the genre in the late twentieth century, but we

⁴² Looked down upon as clown.

⁴³ Mythological Stories

find that the singers are not usually Jat women but those from the lower or another caste as the Jat women are not generally allowed to sing and even be part of the audience.⁴⁴

So, what led to the entry of Haryanvi women into the public performance of *ragini*? Who were the women and what was their social background? The questions become crucial against the background of Jat caste identity and the restrictions on women in Haryana. This study is aimed at exploring the lives of female *ragini* singers in Haryana. It would be intriguing to look into how gender, caste and class mediate the musical performances and genres. Taking the prism of gender, the study will explore the interplay of caste and identity of the female *ragini* performers and further map the moment of change when the women singers of Haryana made their debut in the realm of public performance in the 1980s.

The category of Folk and Folklore

There are various musical genres in Haryan but this study explores the category of folk and particularly *raginis* and *geet* which are considered as part of folk music. Thus taking these two categories of folk music –*ragini* and *geet*, the study looks at the socio-cultural context behind gender divide in the musical genres of Haryana, i.e., *raginis* for males and *geet* for females. It is pertinent to mention here that though both *ragini* and *geet* are part of folk music but what differentiates each of them is their particular sphere of performance, i.e., *ragini* is publicly performed whereas *geet* are part of the private sphere.

A deeper understanding of the term ‘folk’, specifically in the rural context, calls upon a rigorous understanding of field and context itself (Ramanujan & Blackburn, 1986).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ As informed by women *ragini* singers.

⁴⁵ A.K.Ramanujan suggests that folklore should be approached as a context-sensitive system.

Folk is the ‘way of life of common people’, be it, in ways of thinking, relating to each other, perceiving, dressing, talking, dancing, singing or gestures etc. Every region has its own folkways, folk traditions and folk music. Reflecting specifically in the context of Haryana, folklores (*geet* as a genre) could be understood as ‘making meaning of life world’. However, this life world of women is central to *geet* as they are both performers and audience. The study focuses on *ragini* and analyzes *geet* in this context so as to understand how prevailing ideologies of gender, caste and class lead to segregation of musical forms and how actors like singers and musicians re-negotiate identities of performers and artists.

The term ‘folk’ is generally understood as reflecting ‘community life in which face to face relations predominate’ (Dudes, 1975; Chatterji, 2003, p. 567). Alan Dundes (1965) argues that rather than just being a bounded community, it refers to a social group which becomes ‘folk community’ when its members ‘share expressive tradition’ such as folklore. He says:

“The term folk can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is- it could be a common occupation, language, or religion- but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own. In theory, a group must consist of at least two persons, but generally, most groups consist of many individuals. A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group have a sense of group identity” (Dundes, 1965, p.2).

Roma Chatterji (2003) in her essay 'The Category of Folk' points out that the term 'folk' should not be simply looked as a descriptive or an "indicative term pointing to a particular morphological category" (Chatterji, 2003, p.567) as it may acquire different 'meanings depending on its usage within a theoretical perspective and context' (ibid). She illustrates that it is only in comparison to 'civilization' that the term 'folk' signals 'localization or boundedness while expansiveness and universalism get associated with the civilizational perspective' (ibid). However, when the term folk is used coterminous with 'tribe', it is done to indicate 'localization and marginality'. On the contrary, when both the terms are compared, the term folk loses its meaning, i.e., of boundedness and thereby becomes a 'relational term referring to a gradation in culture as the opposition folk versus classical would suggest' (ibid). Thus "the term folk is also used to characterize rural and peasant societies in opposition to tribal societies suggesting that the former are in a relationship of cultural continuity with a more universalistic cultural configuration" (ibid).

Chatterji attempts to understand the process whereby various communities internalize the category of folk as a symbol of 'self-assertion and self-description' (ibid). Thus she further examines the concept of folk which she argues, is configured in three different discourses of 'nationalism, art and religion'(ibid). She opines that:

“although the term folk is used self-consciously in the enterprise of identity construction it nevertheless acquires a specific inflection relative to the context of the usage Thus, in the nationalist discourse the term folk carries the connotation of primordial essence and is seen as the expression of unselfconscious and timeless community life. This is influenced, no doubt, by the nationalist imperative of constituting a new community (the nation) that must transcend all other community

allegiances-whether of family, caste or religion. Art, to the extent that it is often used to ground nationalist project in culture, shares its perspective on the folk to a large extent. Art is used in the project of cultural nationalism to create emotional bonding with parts of the newly emerging nation's own history that have been forgotten. However, the discourse on art also adds a cognitive or intellectual dimension to the relationship to the extent that folk art has served as a source of creative inspiration in modern art's search for an alternate aesthetic canon" (ibid., p.568).

In doing so, she begins to look at the role of 'folk' in the process of identity formation as a "bearer of cultural value and a site for authentic community identity" (ibid., p.569). She problematizes the very concept of community as 'culturally homogenous or representing plurality of cultures' and reflects upon the various ways the term 'folk' is used by the nation-state to forge nationhood. Adopting a Marxist stance, Chatterji argues that the appropriation of the term 'folk' by the nation-state removes it from the context of interactive communities and thus comes to represent a 'homogenized and bureaucratized domain' (ibid).

Folklore

The term folklore was originally propounded by William Thoms, a British antiquarian, in 1846. He defines 'folk-lore as the lore of the people.' However, Richard M. Dorson outlines four broad components of folklore and folk life including oral literature, material culture, social folk custom, and performing folk arts. Indian folklorists prefer calling folklore as '*lok varta*', *lok* refers to folk and *varta* connotes lore or wisdom of people (Pande, 2005; Saroha, 2016). Dundes further says that folklore is a not a sui

generis phenomenon and its existence depends on the social context, be it ethnic, linguistic, geographic so on so forth.

Deep Punia in his work on 'Social Values in Folklore', opines that folklore is an inherent aspect of culture which gives expression to 'people's socio-cultural systems, beliefs, values and attitudes through folksongs, folk-dance, folk-tales, proverbs, riddles, legends, ballads, fables' (Punia, 1993, p.11). Thus folklore is an integral part of the culture and is woven orally by a group of people. Rosan A. Jordan and F. A. de Caro (1986) in their study reflect upon the function of folklore and say that it is used to condition women to accept certain attitudes and sex roles. 'The tradition of having female singers at the life –cycle rites is still widespread in village India despite the strong social opposition to female performers, but the number of women involved is very small', opines Tingey (1993).

Folk Music

Folk music has been defined in diverse forms depending upon the contextual location and time period when it is being investigated. Ashok Ranade (1997) describes folk music as containing 'sustained and unbroken sounds' which can be hummed by common people in a community. The definition approved in 1954 by the International Folk Music Council says that "folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has evolved through the process of oral transmission" (Sharma, 2004, p.57). Manorma Sharma says that:

“the factors that shape tradition have a continuity which links the present with the past, variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group, and selection by the community which determines the form or forms in which the music survives. Implicit in

the definition is the vital dialectic of folk song creation, the perpetual struggle for synthesis between the collective and the individual, between tradition and innovation” (ibid).

As per Encyclopedia Britannica⁴⁶, folk songs are considered as primitive and spontaneously produced music but it does not mean that the folksongs were created in the years goneby. The process of composition, modulation, alteration, production and even re-structuring of folksongs is continuing process, says Sharma (2004). As Tokas also points out that “a folk song is neither new nor old, it is like a forest tree with its roots deeply buried in the past but which continually puts forth new branches, new leaves and new fruits” (Tokas 2009, p. 15). Sharma further says that “a folksong is interwoven with the aspirations, ethos and pathos of a primitive community. Cultural reflection of the wider group of people of a particular region is the main characteristic of folk song. It grows out of the folk community and is a reflection of philosophy of the folk community” (Sharma, 2004, p.57).

In the similar context, Ronald D. Cohen (2006, p. 1-2) says that in its traditional form, folk music has been attributed as originating from a particular culture or region that is traditionally performed by non-professionals and is orally transmitted. It is simply composed for communal sharing and performance, folk music, he says has historically shaped authorship which later may be identified and contested over decades.

Like Roma Chatterji, Ashok Da. Ranade (1997) also categorized folk music as a national expression connected to identity. Illustrating further, he explains that in India, every regional community formulates its own folk music. Every form of folk music can

⁴⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/art/music>

be understood as a medium of conveying the regional identity. As he says that “...folk music allocates meaning to both literature and language. Stories and songs are brought together and a unique phenomenon of song cycles or its variants assumes importance in the sum total corpus of folk music” (Ranade, 1997, p.8).

Exploring the various folk songs/*geet* sung on different occasions, I. Srivastava (1991) describes four categories of women’s folk songs, particularly those describing women’s emotions as ‘songs of the female deities, ceremonial songs related to birth and wedding ceremonies, seasonal and festive songs and songs connected with chores’ (ibid).



Image 5: Women singing *Shabd geet* in *Khanpur Kalan village* (Sonepat). **Source:** From the researcher’s fieldwork.

Across various castes, village women sing for life-cycle events (Image 5). A common response remains that women usually sing auspicious songs to express their happiness and moral duty, especially during festivals and life cycle celebrations. However for men, singing may not be socially prescribed at rituals (Henry, 1988, p.110-111). Giving

an interesting account of women singing in Kangra, K.Narayan (1995, p. 246) contends that:

“Women’s songs fall into several different-but by no means discrete-genres, primarily tied to the ceremonial context in which they are sung. In performance, one or two women who know a particular song usually lead the singing while the others follow along. Before plunging into a song, singers often confer in mutters and fragments of melody to plot out the words, the verse order, and the tune, thereby negotiating the different variants that they bring with them. Lines of text are usually repeated twice, and the melody is always repetitive. This means that even a woman hearing the song for the first time is able to join in, performance is open to all who care to sing”.

Thus folk music emerges out of the quest of people to communicate, share and express their feelings in a community. Haryana also has a rich tradition of folk music⁴⁷ that is validated by the name of the various villages that are kept after the various ‘*ragas*’ such as *dadri tehsil in Bhiwani district, Bhairavi, Bilawala, Sarangpur, Malakosha, , Jaishri, Jai Jai Vanti and Malavi in Jind district, etc.* Various social and cultural factors determine the structure of folk music in Haryana. Folk music of Haryana which contains primarily two strands. One is of *geet* and *bhajans* which are mostly sung as auspicious expressions of collective feeling usually on the spiritual occasions and during life cycle events. The other is of *swangs* and *raginis* which are primarily directed at entertainment and are publically performed.

⁴⁷ Music | Ethnic Haryana. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://haryanafolk.wordpress.com/music/>

Thus this study looks at two genres in particular, firstly, *ragini* which emerged from *swangs*⁴⁸ as a separate genre in second decade of twentieth century and was dominated by men in until early 1980s. Secondly, *geet* sung by women on various occasions such as celebrations of changing seasons, marriage, child birth, etc. *Geet* are sung predominately by women as it is a way to express their feelings through the compositions which are locally created by them mainly in spheres designated as private (Chowdhry, 2003). So is it the public-private divide which is at the origin of these two genre *raginis* and *geet*? If it is not so then why males and females are excluded from entering each other's genres and in case they do interfere, they are looked at in a degraded manner (especially the female singers who sing *raginis*).

These are some of the questions and areas my study delved with. The study shall explores how performance becomes gendered. What are the various cultural practices which lead to such a differentiation? This involves drawing insights on various aspects of Haryanvi Society, economy and polity even as it is transforming. In the following sections, we review the literature available on the relation between music and society.

IV. Review Of Literature

The present section in the firstly explores the relationship between music and society, looking at music as embedded in the social and the bearing it has on the art of musical performance and the lived experience of performer as well as the audience-performer relationship. It further delves into the theoretical underpinnings of the sociology of music. The next section deals with theoretical insights on the sub-themes of the study that are aligned with the research questions.

⁴⁸ Folk theatre of Haryana.

Music and Society

Music is an arrangement of various sounds and their “coordination according to a definite degree of production, balance and coherence” (Tokas, 2009, p.1) to create an innovative composition. As a language, it becomes a medium to express one’s emotions, feelings and ideas apart from being a source of gratification and status as well. It also becomes instrumental in the process of identity negotiation both for the artist and listener. Employing melody as a vehicle, “music travels through the time and space and establishes a bridge amongst people” (ibid). Music thereby moves beyond ‘a spontaneous outburst of melody’ and further conceptualizes the unity of life experiences cutting across caste, class, gender and ethnicity (ibid). However, a political scientist may see it as a vehicle of protest vis-à-vis a social anthropologist who would be interested in its social aspect and how it transforms the culture of a particular society.

According to Swami Prajnananda⁴⁹ (1979), the social significance of music is two-fold:

“firstly, it animates, adorns and intensifies the relation between the members of the community, and secondly, it helps to convey from individual to individual, and even age to age –these workings of the human spirit, which are at once penetrating and delicate, for crystallization into the spoken word. Through the art of music, men and women of the society realize not so much what they think or thought, but what is ever so much more significant and vital-what they feel or felt” (Prajnananda, 1979, p.19).

While reflecting upon the influence of the social structure on music, O.P. Joshi (1992)

⁴⁹ A musical historian and musicologist.

opines that “the strict divisions of society under the caste system, where rules of interaction and conduct govern the development and growth of each individual from birth to death have influenced music” (Joshi, 1992, p.74). It can be illustrated through various musical genres composed for occasion such as birth, marriage, death, seasonal changes, in happiness and in sadness, etc. However, the performance for death rituals are unlike that of birth, marriage and seasonal performances. Symbolizing happiness, celebration, preparation and sadness, music bears an intimate relation to emotions appropriate to lifecycle and natural rhythms.

Music is thus a reflection of a society and its people which include the musician as well as listener. It is embedded in society, and it exists because it has a functional necessity of harmonizing and uniting people in the society. As Ashok Da. Ranade⁵⁰ states that “music and its history are closely connected with the human society, so the sociological factors that exist behind the origin and gradual development of music should be accepted as a product of the people of the society” (Rannade, 1997).

It is the man himself who is guided by his/her inherent necessity of emotions and thereby willingly creates music based on one’s refined sense of intrinsic creativity (SenGupta, 1991, p. 51). Though musical experience may be ubiquitous, it is shaped and influenced by social relationships, their social history and epistemological traditions prevalent in society. Thus music is both a social as well as an inner aesthetic experience with both aspects influencing each other. It has a social value and significance to human beings as they are part and parcel of society. It forms an integral component of the ‘cultural sphere’ of a society and thereby also becomes an essential part of the social life as well.

⁵⁰ Musicologist and ethnomusicologist.

Musical performance is a 'social act' as it is a two-way interaction between the performer and the audience. It is both performed and composed by individuals placed in a social context. As every act of performance, including the composition of music to singing by the musicians or listening by the audience, is guided by social situations which surround them and are thereby socially bound by them. In my MPhil dissertation (Tokas, 2009), I examined how both the musician and the audience reflect their different social groups, caste, class, families and communities which influence their choice and tastes, for example, 'the acts of awarding and patronizing musical activities are socially determined' (Seth, 1996, p.7-10).

Tokas (2009, p. 2) explains that "Different social strata create different genres of music stemming from their social experience. Musical taste and choice develop over the years, starting from the socialization of an individual within the family". Society plays an essential role in determining the taste and decisions regarding choosing a *guru*⁵¹ or musical apprenticeship from a particular *gharana*⁵² or group is also indicative of the 'social' element in the 'musical action.' For example, many *ragini* singers prefer learning from musicians from their own community and caste.⁵³ Similarly, listeners may become selective regarding whom to listen to. The popularity or familiarity of the artist may influence their decision and tastes.

A musician always communicates with his/her audience through his musical voice or

⁵¹ The term *guru* has originated from a sanskrit term guru means teacher, mentor or guide.

⁵² The term *gharana* refers to 'ghar' i.e. house. Gharana is a group, which "in the era of hereditary musicianship represents a lineage which cultivated a distinctive style of rendering music over successive generations...As a stylistic lineage, a gharana is characterized by three critical features- (a) a long period of rigorous training and aesthetic indoctrination of each aspirant under an authorized guru of the lineage (b) acquisition of the art through aural transmission (c) a sworn loyalty of each member to the music to the music making philosophy and style of his mentor/ lineage" (Raja, 2005, p. 371).

⁵³ Many singers shared this belief and practise in the region.

music and thereby is always conscious of the composition of the audience, their taste and the occasion of performance while composing or selecting a song for any programme. The audience, in turn, appreciates and analyzes the musician's effort and provides an opportunity and scope of improvisation to the performer. As Deepak Raja (2005) rightly states that music evolves as a consequence of the 'interaction between musicians and their audiences' and thereby also reflects the 'quality of relationship they wish to forge between them' (2005, p.vi-vii).

Claiming music as a performing art, Sengupta (1991, p.62) argues that "music is a living, dynamic phenomenon which acts as a spiritual entrance to the higher world of human conscious which comprehends mankind". He further says that:

"it represents the inexhaustible magnificence of our creative spirit which spontaneously manifests itself in the style of composition or improvisation which is unique in its manner and universal in its appeal. It carries within itself its own criterion of excellence being the outcome of the spiritual realization of the 'Infinite within Humanity' which is illustrated through Indian music which has its own grammar in the sense that it is never whimsical; its grammar is oriented by the inherent discipline and harmony between human feeling and willing" (ibid).

So, music is a performance-oriented art form and at the same time is also a social performance. In a similar context, Lisa McCormick says that music as performance "means to see it as an irreducibly social phenomenon, even when only a single individual is involved" (McCormick, 2006, p.121-122).⁵⁴ She defines 'social performance as the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display

⁵⁴ Quotes Lisa from Cook, 2006.

for others the meaning of their social situation'. She considers effective performance as the one which thrives on blending six essential "elements of performance including systems of collective representations, actors, observer/audience, means of symbolic production, *mise-en-scène*⁵⁵, and social power" (ibid).

Shared and perceived by people collectively, music mediates memory and connects the past with the present. Musical performance can also be perceived as a subjective experience for everyone related to it in any form like musicians including the singer, the lyricist, the composer or even audience as listeners. Benjamin Britten rightly says that musical experience cannot be felt without the holy triangle of the composer, the performer and the listeners (McCormick 2006, p.126).

Sociology of Music

Study of music has been of interest to various social thinkers, cultural theorists, ethnomusicologists and musicologists. Ample number of researches have been conducted on the relationship between music and society. Scholars of related disciplines like cultural studies and economics have also been concerned with the study of music. Ethnomusicologists are primarily interested in understanding the music of varied ethnic communities and have explored the intersectionalities between music, women, and sexuality. Similar work has also been done in the context of South Indian music (Subramanian, 2008).

Sociology of music as a subfield falls mainly in the domain of sociology of culture. Like sociology of culture, sociology of music remained marginalized and scattered in encouraging scholarly work in the field until the late twentieth century. It would be

⁵⁵ It is a French term borrowed from theatre. It refers to putting the play or a scene on the stage.

intriguing to firstly grasp an understanding of the sociology of music followed by the relationship between gender and music.

At the root, 'sociology of music' is peculiarly European and a Eurocentric discipline (Turley, 2001). Germany, which was considered a 'nation of poets and philosophers' has made the maximum contribution to the field of musical philosophy. Its initial development has been highly influenced by the seminal sociological work of Max Weber and Theodor Adorno (Dowd, 2007). Sociology of music examines the function of music in society and how society influences the growth or development of music and the ways in which music both reflects society and influences it. As Adorno rightly describes 'knowledge of the relation between music and the socially organized individual who listens to it' constitutes sociology of music. (Etzkorn,1973, p.19).

Thus "characteristically, sociological subjects of investigation include the social and economic position of the musician, musical organizations and institution- including the role of technology, public musical life, taste and criticism, the social determination of style; the music for specifically social purpose and of lower strata (types often neglected by a stylistic orientation); the musical interaction of gender, the various strata of society and particular genres of music (ballet, opera, church music, military music) that are shaped considerably by social forces" (Tokas, 2009, p.19).

It also includes the study of 'sociology of mass recreation, public and mass communications' (Seth, 1996). Thus, the reciprocal influence of music and society upon each other constitutes the domain of sociology of music.

Quite as few scholars from varied disciplines have attempted an understanding of the relationship between music and society. According to the music encyclopedia⁵⁶

“the formal study of musical sociology, though anticipated much earlier, dates back to the beginning of the 20th century (for example in Hermann Abert’s studies of the relationship of the medieval church to popular music). Its most influential practitioner in the early 20th century was Max Weber (1864-1920), who, in *Die rationalen und soziologischen Grundlagen der Musik* (1921), discusses the relationship between social structures and technical aspects of Western music. Present-day musical sociology divides into three principal schools. One, empiricist or positivist, is concerned chiefly with the context and function of music within society, dealing with musical life and the music market and the relationship of different social groups to different types of music. Secondly, there is the school of Hegelian historical idealism, represented above all in the work of Theodor W. Adorno (1903-69), who developed a theory of the ‘musical standard’, according to which the most advanced music of a culture represents both the society itself and an aesthetic depiction of that society; it stresses the progressive character of music as a social indicator and draws social inferences from the nature of popular music. Thirdly, Marxism, or historical materialism, represented above all by the work of Hanns\ Eisler (1898-1962), sees changes in music as the result of changes in its economic and social role, and argues ‘that each new musical style does not arise from an

⁵⁶ As quoted in Tokas, 2009, p.19-20.

aesthetically new viewpoint, and thus does not represent a revolution in material, but that the alteration of the material is forcibly determined by historically necessary alteration of the function of music in society in general' (*Musik und Politik*, 1973)...thinking in the sociology of music has tended to explain individual works less according to their meaning or historical situation than in terms of social function (as the basis for the production and consumption of music) and social effect"⁵⁷

The functionalist perspective on music advocates that music exists in society to serve its needs and thus the functional necessity of society essentiated the birth of music. Herbert Spencer views 'music as a language of emotions and considers vocal music as an idealization of the natural language of passion' (Turner, 1987, p.42-43). He states that "all feelings are muscular stimuli and there is a connection between feeling and motion. The vocal peculiarities distinguishing song from ordinary speech are loudness, timbre, larger intervals and time. Recitation is intermediate between speech and song" (ibid).

Max Weber, on the other hand, sees music as a 'social action' and considers western music as an ideal type and rational. He considered rationalization of music as a "trend towards the smoothest utilization of the tonal material in terms of avoiding possible disharmonious interference of the musical overtones amongst each other" (Tokas, 2009, p. 21; Etzkorn, 1973, p.14). He further emphasized upon standardized instruments for effective music and called other locally constructed folk instruments as ineffective. He concluded that "technological developments affect the rationalization of tonal systems as they affect other spheres of social life as well" (ibid).

⁵⁷ Music Encyclopedia: Sociology of Music as quoted by Tokas, 2009, p.19-20.

Criticizing Weberian analysis as Eurocentric and loaded with imperialist propaganda, Vinayak Purohit (1992) opines that it is merely an assumption to consider Indian music as not based on harmony. He stressed that “music has to possess harmonic relations amongst its sounds in order to be perceived apart from noise...a sound becomes a note when it is harmonically related to other sounds and only when it is so related” (Joshi, 1992, p. 247).

Though influenced by the Weberian approach, Adorno applies critical perspective to the study of music to describe the impact of industrialization on music. He was interested in “the analyses of art music and its composers, of popular music, of radio and television music” (Etzkorn, 1979, p. 19). Adorno wanted to study the adverse impact of the ‘social institution of mass society on music’. He thought that rationalization under the capitalistic economic order led to the objectivation of music which alienated men from music (ibid). Adorno also spoke about the function of music, especially concerning the dwindling modern music and ‘criticized the role of fetishization and industrialization of music’ (Adorno, 1976). Outlining the negative impact of modernism on music, he says that:

“the change in the function of music involves the basic conditions of the relation between art and society. The more inexorably the principle of exchange value destroys use values for human beings, the more deeply does exchange value disguise itself as the object of enjoyment”⁵⁸

He says music simply exists, irrational and functionless as “in the functionless, truth and ideology entwined resulting in the autonomy of the work of art” (ibid). Thus Adorno suggests that music should be appreciated as an art form rather than just

⁵⁸ Adorno, 1976, p. 34.

merely considering it as a genre for entertainment.

The analysis of music taken up in Weberian and Neo-marxist perspectives primarily engaged with the relationship of music and progressive changes in social structure from an ideological, functionalist and ideal-typical standpoints. The appeal of music to the liberal human thought and its potential for upliftment of human consciousness was however not adequately addressed in these structural critiques. As theoretical perspectives evolved to incorporate gender studies and theories, a new turn was witnessed in the hitherto established ways of looking at the music and society relationship. This included not only the political potential inherent in the musical art forms but also the empowering expressions made possible through aesthetic solidarities achieved with the performance of music in contexts plagued with gender inequality. Thus it becomes imperative to take into account the interface between gender and music to further our understanding of the sociological aspects related to different musical cultures.

Gender and Music

“One’s social sexual identity, or gender, is a very central concept in music, linked with the interaction between the sexes” (Koskoff, 1988).

Ellen Koskoff (1987a) in her work on ‘Women and Music’ raises two central questions, first ‘to what degree does a society’s gender ideology and resulting gender related behaviours affect its musical thought and practice?’ Secondly, how does music function in a society to reflect or change gender relations? She advocates that in most societies, ‘a woman’s identity is believed to be embedded in her sexuality as she is seen primarily as a sexual partner, child bearer, and nurturer. Thus, one of the most common

associations between women and music links women's primary sexual identity and role with musical performance'. According to her, sexuality affects music performance in three important ways:

“(1) performance environments may provide a context for sexually explicit behaviour, such that music performance becomes a metaphor for sexual relations; (2) the actual or perceived loss of sexuality may change women's musical roles and/or statuses; and (3) cultural beliefs in women's inherent sexuality may motivate the separation of or restriction imposed upon women's musical activities” (ibid., p. 6).

However, she also adds that the females who do not fall in this category i.e. 'young girls, older women, homosexual and marginal women' may assume certain musical roles that deny or negate their sexuality because when women have lost their sexual potency, they get an opportunity to 'reverse the balance of a lifetime'(ibid).

Stacy Holman Jones (1999) opines that 'women's music is a political performance practice enacted in and through the body' (Jones, 1999, p. 217). Thus, in agreement with Koskoff's opinion Cook and Tsou (1994) opine that women's sexual identity determines their musical roles. They further say that 'females are expected to be passive recipients of musical practices in 'public sphere' but not as active contributors in any form' (Cook & Tsou, 1994).

Gerry Farrell, Jayeeta Bhowmick and Graham Welch (2005) in their work on 'South Asian Music in Britain' discuss that there exists a 'complicated sexual division of labour' in traditional music as “certain classical vocal genres like *dhrupad* have long been the province of men...*bhangra* has typically been male-dominated with a female

counterpart in *giddha*...There are complex historical, social, religious and cultural reasons for this division of labour” argues a singer, as quoted:

“Music is male-dominated... female on their own cannot do much. There are plenty of people to take advantage of you (female). So every female is presented by a male person, be it an organizer, be it a promoter, brother, husband, or it could be a mother as well as promoting her daughter. On their own, they have not any chance...As I said, the crowd is not literate (sic). So female fear for her dignity as well. For us, if we do a show, first we want to know what kind of crowd it is. Even today we are trying to hold on our culture, we want to teach our girls the way we do in India, protected, sheltered, whereas boys have the freedom to go out, girls do not. Parents would rather like the girls to learn Indian music, to be on the Indian side than go towards English music and be more westernized. That is how they will learn the language whereas boys come with a choice” (Gerry, Bhowmick, Graham 2005, p.122).

Norma McLeod and Marcia Herndon (1975, p.87) elaborates how Maltese concepts of women and music intersect, creating two basic categories: women who do not sing in public places and those who do, and by that very act are considered prostitutes. Similarly, Karin van Nieuwkerk, in her study on Egyptian female musicians and dancers, ‘A Trade Like Any Other’ points out that “despite their importance, entertainers are generally not honored or accorded much prestige” (Nieuwkerk, 2006, p.2).

The author questions whether “the low esteem of female performers is mainly related to the dishonor of the trade or to the prevailing gender ideology” (ibid). She further

elucidates the response of a female singer when she asked her about her feelings regarding the view of society about her profession, she emotionally replied, as Karin notes:

“Why do people talk about a woman who works (in this trade)? If they understood our circumstances, they would not talk like that. I support a house with this trade-I spend on my family. Why does society judge us so harshly? Entertainers want to live!” (ibid).

Nieuwkerk further states how in *hadith*, the female singer is discredited by a saying that “the voice of a woman is a shameful thing” (ibid., p.12) Imam-il-Ghazali explains it as following

“Music is allowed unless it is feared that the music might act as a temptation. The voice of a woman can seduce the listener. Looking at the female singer is always unlawful. Listening to the voices of concealed female performers is still forbidden if it evokes tempting images...so avoiding temptation is the rule which ought to be followed..., says Il Ghazali” (ibid).

Thus women are considered more enticing as compared to men and looking at them performing on a public stage can arouse more excitement than listening to men singers. So this study will investigate how the relation between social and cultural construction of gender affects the status of a performer, especially that of a woman. Inna Naroditskaya (2000) in her study of women musicians in Azerbaijan ‘Azerbaijani Female Musicians: Women's Voices Defying and Defining the Culture’ opines that

In Azerbaijan, “*haram*, applied to both music and women, makes women-musicians a double sin in the eyes of the followers of orthodox

Islam. Harem is an inner domestic territory or an enclosed private space to which women were attached by Islamic law and customs. Accordingly, both the practice of music and the de-territorialisation of women performing outside the enclosed space placed female musicians on the margins of traditional Muslim society. Working for money was an indication of status in a society where the woman's position was often measured by the support she received from her male patron, husband, or father. Specific types of work, such as the weaving of carpets, were a traditional woman's vocation because such work did not violate the sanctity of the harem walls. Musical performance, on the other hand, was removed from the harem structure and focused attention on a woman's physical appearance (even when it was only a voice stirring one's imagination), making the musician herself an object. Thus, although the question of sexual morality did not arise, since the female performer worked in women's company, the image of the woman entertainer was morally ambiguous. Consequently, the career of a woman musician suggested: (1) her family position with an absent or financially insecure and morally weak husband; (2) her low social status as one outside of the harem; and (3) her affiliation with musical entertainment for profit. Indeed, wailers claimed more respect because of the religious nature of their performance and its disassociation from music" (Naroditskaya, 2000, p. 240-241).

Shyamali Chakraborty (2005) argues that even in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the women musicians 'were not accepted in the so-called respectable society' (Chakraborty, 2005, p.71). Commenting on the women musicians or performers, she

further says that their talent was never recognized as compared to that of male artists and they have been deprived of honor or respect in society.

Similarly, Jennifer Post argues that throughout the history, the role of women in music has been suppressed mainly due to the 'very nature of their participation in society as musicians' (Post, 1988, p. 98). The female musician supposedly occupies a defined position in society with more social and educational freedom than any other women in India, says Post. However, their association with different musical styles and their assumed relationships with varied men makes society consider them as outcasts. She further argues that though these singers are considered as outcasts still since many generations, 'professional women's performance in literature and the arts revolved around their ability to please male patrons with their skills...as woman actively displayed her body and interpreted primarily the seductive gestures aspects of music and literature' (ibid., p.105). As Shyamali argues that the female artists were equated to a 'woman who earns her livelihood through her body' despite having a beautiful voice and talent. The middle class (*bhadralok*) of Calcutta believed that singing in public (for a woman) is like committing a sin (ibid., p.74).

However, in north India 'the system of hereditary musicians excluded women by not allowing them to be either *ustad* (teachers or *guru*) or true disciples of an *ustad*. The historical suppression of women's music was partly due to the very nature of their participation in society as musicians. For many generations, professional female musicians held a defined position in a society that allowed them more social or educational freedom than any other women in India' (Post, 1988, p. 6-7).

Post further adds that since the last 100 years, the domain of Indian classical music has been dominated by male professionals. However, even if few women singers did played

a crucial role in Indian classical music as recorded in history, they were seldom given any recognition for their work as the so-called 'great masters' overshadowed them. Thus 'women since the beginning have been recognized courtesans whose primary artistic contribution was in dance'.

Talking about the non-hereditary and non-professional musicians in the context of twentieth century, Post further says that the musicians from the non-professional background had to struggle a lot as 'they had to defy the wishes of family and friends and to deny their own social positions in many cases in order to pursue a musical career. Musically, their path has probably been more difficult than for women who were born into the tradition' (ibid., p.106). Reflecting upon the women's participation as audience, Chakraborty (2005) remarks that 'women from respectable families could watch the performance by the female performers sitting behind a curtain' (ibid). Thus not only were the females debarred from performing the music or opting for the profession of music but also were kept at a distance within the veil of the society even in listening to the women performer.

It was only from the twentieth century onwards that the professional musicians freed themselves from the 'socially stigmatized positions' and images that were connected with them by virtue of their professions and thereafter got an 'opportunity to perform and be recognized as talented individuals'(Post, 1988). However, due to significant social changes, women of the professional classes started withdrawing from the public and were replaced by the women not having hereditary background in music (ibid).

Performers today, both men and women, who wish to maintain their social standing as respectable have to walk a tightrope of expectations regarding their public persona, a balancing act that is particularly constraining for women. Thus not only musical

performances ‘reflect and symbolize the male-female roles/gender behaviour’ (Koskoff, 1988) but ‘society’s gender relations affect musical behaviour and practices’ as well (ibid).

The life of women in Haryana is intersected by caste and class. The question here is how do they negotiate with the constraints emerging from such a casting of their stigmatized identity as performers? As Chakravarti (2006) rightly puts it,

“certain benefits are available to women if they conform to the patriarchal codes of their families and communities. Compliance brings them gains, both material and symbolic. While deviance expels them from the material resources of the family, of which they can partake only on condition of good behaviour” (p. 144).

Thus throughout the ‘history of every civilization, women are the upholders of a tradition of society by conforming to them. However, men uphold tradition by enforcing them upon women than on themselves’ (ibid).

Gender, Caste and Musical Performance

Music is considered as an ‘auspicious’ (Tingey, 199, p.55) art form but throughout history it has been associated with dual meanings. As Janaki Bakhle (2005) points out that in India, on one hand, ‘it was considered sacred and an inherent part of all the social and religious festivals. But on the other hand, it was considered as immoral or at all events unfit for respectable persons of either sex’ (Bakhle, 2005, p.63). As the women who perform publicly are considered outside the purview of the familial sphere just the way *devadasis* were looked at. However, the association of public performance with the public women was overcome in south India when Brahmin women took to Carnatic music. As Lakshmi Subramanian points out that “while prejudice against the adoption

of the musical profession was marked in North India, the situation was different in the south where the higher branches of the profession were actually appropriated by Brahmins (Bhagavatars) or men of high caste” (Subramanian, 1999, p.44).

Citing the case study of devadasis, Kay K. Jordon (2003) argues that the:

“devadasis of India, devoutly served Hindu religious images by dancing or singing in the temples (Jordon, 2003, p.1).⁵⁹ These devadasis were considered lucky and were often also called in marriages to tie the bridal *tali* around the bride’s neck and this *tali* was made by these devadasis from their own beads because of their being ever-auspicious women who can never be widowed. The devadasis were not regarded as prostitutes by the Hindu *shastras*. It is also important to note that these devadasis were actually an occupational group rather than a caste” (ibid).

Thus not only gender but caste also impinges upon the musical performances in India (Rege, 2002). Throughout history, caste has been occupational and hierarchical, and every caste performs the prescribed occupations according to their place in the caste hierarchy. Similarly, the role of caste has also been inherent to the performance of *ragini* in Haryana as it relates to the status/identity of the performer.

The ‘*Natyashastra*’ reflects upon the ‘codes of sociality’ (Dutta & Munshi, 2010, p. 170) and social representation is an inherent goal of *Natya*, according to Bharata. Social divisions based on caste, classes, profession, and gender are reflected in the

⁵⁹ The women who were dedicated to God were married to the deities of the temple and were called “nityasumangli” that is ever-auspicious women who can never be widowed. He further opines that these girls were dedicated to the Gods by their parents to show an “expression of gratitude to a deity who wished to have conception or safe delivery of a child or for the recovery of a family member from serious illness” (Jordon, 2003, p.1).

representation (Pande, 1991, p. 83). Leela Dube (2001) argues that 'caste impinges on women's lives' and women play an essential role in maintaining caste boundaries. Uma Chakravarti (2006) makes a similar point as she explains that the high caste women are the main forbearers of the institution of caste in society. Caste is not only sustained in the private space, but it also reproduces itself as a system in the public domain, advocates Chakravarti. The honour of family and the community is lent upon the shoulders of women. The Jat landlords of Haryana are very strict about their women not crossing the boundaries of the community and against defiance of norms by anyone, especially girls as they are the upholders of their respect and traditions. Thus caste becomes instrumental in furthering the oppression and exploitation of women.

She further advocates that the axis of caste and gender is based on the ideology of patriarchy and has been naturalized by the upper and middle class in India. The ideology of caste system as seen in the practice of caste endogamy (prohibiting marriage outside the community) prohibits the mixing up of higher caste women with lower caste men and thereby eliminates threats to the Brahmanical supremacy. Through denial of knowledge (to lower caste and women) which is monopolized by the higher castes, occupational segregation is maintained not only between the higher and lower castes but also amongst women.

Thus, both caste and gender shape each other as women are crucial in maintaining the boundaries between the castes whereas 'patriarchal codes in this structure ensure the reproduction of the caste system abiding by the norm of endogamous marriage' (Chakravarti, 2006, p. 34). The sexuality of women is controlled in every caste group in accordance with its status in the caste hierarchy. Thus the caste hierarchy and gender inequality is maintained both by the consent and coercion of women in India.

Performance refers to conscious presentation of an art form like music, dance, drama, etc. by an individual or a group. From Bauman's point of view, performance could be understood

“as a mode of spoken verbal communication with an assumed responsibility towards the audience for a display of communicative competence that rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways and beyond its referential content. From the audience's point, performer's expression is marked as subject to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display of competence. Additionally, it is marked as available for the enhancement of experience, through the present enjoyment of the intrinsic qualities of the act of expression itself. Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expression and gives license to the audience to regard the act of expression and the performer with special intensity” (1984, p.11).

Speaking in a similar context of performance in Maharashtra, Sharmila Rege (2002) in her work on ‘Conceptualizing Popular Culture: Lavani and Powada’, explores two genres ‘lavani’ (for women of spiritual, devotional or erotic kind) and the ‘powada’ (for men - the ballad of bravery) as caste based forms of cultural labour and a platform for cultural and political struggles. The struggles over cultural meanings are inseparable from struggles for survival (Rege, 2002, p. 1041). Rege describes ‘*lavani*’ as an ‘expression of the everyday desire of the common people and was seen as provoking wealthy men into parting with their money’ (ibid). Thus the female body in the public performance of lavani (part of the tamasha or the folk theatre) was seen as arousing or satiating male desire. However, Powada is considered as part of the cultural practices

of the bards and genealogists, bhat communities includes the brave deeds of the Maratha heroes in battle.

She explains that the Brahmanical ideology uses gender ideology to legitimize not only structures of patriarchy but also the very organization of caste and (the way in which Brahmanical ideology) constructs participation in social labour in terms of controls over sexuality. The dichotomy of passive and pure wives as against wild and impure *lavani* dancers is underlined and the inability of lower caste men to control the sexuality of their women is reiterated thereby continuing to legitimize the hegemony of the dominant castes (ibid., p. 1044). Thus performance by ‘lower-caste cultural discourse is considered as representing an unbounded and noxious female sexuality’ (ibid). Sharmila Rege argues that this is a mechanism for “othering lower-caste female sexuality as wanton and indisciplined” (Naregal, 2010, p. 82). She further says that:

“the patriarchal caste ideology that orders the sexual division of labour also regulates the division of sexual labour. Thus the popular cultural forms of ‘Kasbi’ performing castes were framed as ‘kabnurkarin’ pigeon and were framed in the sphere of erotic (in the male gaze) and were denied familial spaces. On the other hand, the upper caste women whose reproductive and domestic labour is appropriated within the space of the familial were constructed as ghaarandaaz (pure and moral) and passive and thus denied the space of the erotic” (Rege, 2002, p.1044).

Veena Naregal (2010) in her work on ‘Performance, caste and aesthetics’ a study of Maharashtra, argues that genres like ‘lavani’ and ‘tamasha’ were considered as part of lower-caste performance and were marginalized from the cultural sphere by the upper caste. She further advocates that marginalization is not just exclusion, suppression or

elite triumphalism (what Sharmila Rege refers to) rather it is a complex and ‘ongoing positive process that produces enjoyment and pleasure’ (ibid):

Sharmila Rege (2006) in her work ‘Writing Caste/ Writing Gender’ argued for recognizing differences, power and connections of caste, class and community in transforming subjectivities. She says that an understanding of caste as an ideological system based on the irreconcilable opposition of the principles of purity and pollution stands challenged today, especially in the Dalit feminist articulations. She emphasizes the need to recognize caste as not just a retrograde past, but an oppressive past reproduced as forms of inequality in modern society, urging us to integrate questions of caste with those of class and gender. Indian sociology however in her opinion has ‘invited us to see caste only in villages, rituals, rites and so on and by doing so, seems to have suggested that caste had no active role in urban life’ (p. 2-3).

Rege has produced rich sociological literature by presenting before us the non-Brahmanical perspective in the form of narratives and autobiographies of Dalit women. These have addressed the disjuncture between academic knowledge systems and social practices of caste by attempting to reconstruct the memory of both the dalit as well as the feminist movement.

Gender, Space and the Question of Agency

Shilpa Phadke (2011) describes ‘space as being produced and constructed through the multi-layered contexts of perception, imagination, political economy, cultural norms, structures, institutional arrangements and the everyday actions of each one of us’. According to her ‘public space is defined by the binary of masculine and feminine’, which interact with each other in fluidity. She further says that ‘In the dialectical relationship between social structure and space, it is the body that becomes the medium

through which socio-spatial formations are not just experienced, but produced, reproduced, represented and transformed. Embodied performances are central to the constitution and (re)production of space' (2011).

Phadke further elucidates that labels like 'good' and 'bad' women are used to designate and maintain the distinction between the private and public sphere. She opines that:

“the binaries of private/ public and respectable/ non-respectable are among the fundamental divides that govern the ordering of public space and concomitantly, women’s access to it. The two categories are also inextricably linked, in that, respectability is often defined by the division between public and private women and public and private spaces. Being respectable, for women, means demonstrating linkages to private space even if they are in public space. Good women are expected to use public space in a fashion that underscores their respectability by demonstrating visible purpose. The public-private division of space decrees that the rightful place of respectable women is within their homes and not in public space and therefore when women access public spaces, they are expected to do so in ways that minimize their presence, not accentuate it. This minimalization is often reflected in women’s public body language where women tend to occupy as little space as possible, in bus seats for example, or tend to look either upward or downward but not stare directly at people, especially men. This public-private divide is used to separate ‘private’ (good) women, who are in their homes (especially after dark), from the sexually and socially transgressive ‘public’ (bad) women who refuse to know their place (inside)” (Phadke, 2011, p. 104).

However, Janaki Abraham (2010), in an interesting work on the private/ public dichotomy, sees gender and space being mutually produced and reproduced in everyday life. She looks at the practice of veiling in a town of Rajasthan–Bikaner and explores that the kinship ties of the woman’s family in the neighbourhood and any group define her space or access to a particular space. She says that the “practices of veiling are a part of public performance and while a woman negotiates the everyday practice, this practice is also critically tied to whoever else is present” (Abraham, 2010, p. 204). She critiques a priori categorization of space as private and public, as space is not ‘given’ or ‘fixed’ rather it is ‘produced or created’.

However, the boundaries of a defined space may vary according to caste, class, race and sexuality. She explicates that space must be understood in relation to social relationships, hierarchies and power, not in terms of presumed binaries which obstructs the process of understanding social and cultural construction of space as well as the subjective engagement with the same. Thus it becomes vital to take women’s narratives in order to explore how spaces are subjectively experienced by women (ibid., p. 192).

However, a somewhat different conception of how gender intersects with identity and social practices in different spaces is encountered in the writings of Seemanthini Niranjana. She attacks the tendency to analyze social reality in terms of a series of dichotomous schemes such as equality/inequality, male dominance/female subordination which forgets the variability and heterogeneity in the power relations. She argues that concepts of the person in India do not derive from a ‘core’ individual within a sovereign, unitary identity (as in the west) but is actually a result of identity that is other-directed as the perception of the self has fluid entity places the burden of self-definition on inter-personal relations with the other. This is so because sociality is symbiotically related to the fluid construction of identity. Sociality here refers to the

ways in which social relations between persons or the nature of social action itself is constituted. Niranjana says that this allows “an exploration of gender ideas, not as confined to the organization of relations between the sexes, but as also signifying the values and practices of a community, organizing its ideas about social space, work, sexuality, ritual, etc.” (Niranjana, 2001, p. 32).

In the same context, it would be right to conclude what Seemanthini Niranjana (2001) says that: “spatiality itself participates in the production of gendered bodies while also straddling its flip-side, namely, how such embodied persons negotiate their various social spaces” (ibid., p.39). She says that boundaries of the *olage/horage* (inside/outside) shift according to context and time (ibid., p.119). Niranjana further argues that it is the agency which delineates a space between public and private. She tries to understand women’s agency in the very space they are located in. Quoting Strathern (1981), Niranjana mentions:

“...creating a space for women becomes creating a space for the self, and experience becomes an instrument for knowing the self. Necessary to the construction of the feminist self, then, is a nonfeminist other. The other is most generally conceived as patriarchy, the institutions and persons who represent male domination, often simply concretized as men” (Strathern, 1987a, p. 288).⁶⁰

Thus Niranjana attempts at understanding agency as a form of resistance against exercise of power. She tries to read ‘resistance into women’s acts within the private sphere’ and defines women’s agency having ‘transformative capacity’ which becomes

⁶⁰ As cited in Niranjana 2001, p. 23-24.

meaningful within a 'politics of change' (Niranjana, 2001, p.88). Niranjana's work on 'gender and space' straddles between the domains of anthropology and gender studies and deals with the 'conjunction of space and gender in practices and discourses of femininity and sexuality' (Niranjana, 2001). She provides a detailed interpretation of the domains and activities of women, cultural perceptions and experiences of the female body, exploration of gender and ritual realm as well as propositions for framing a ground for female agency within a body-space matrix.

Thus body becomes important in the analysis of agency as Erving Goffman (1956, p. 34) points out that body is integral to agency and "body enables people to intervene in, and make a difference to the flow of daily life". However, he does not view embodied individuals as autonomous. Goffman further explains that the 'shared vocabularies of body idiom refer to the conventional form of non-verbal language' (ibid). It influences "people's perceptions of bodily appearances and performance and provides a sense of social constraint under which body controlling occurs. Thus body becomes important in identifying the links between people's self and social identities" (ibid). He further categorizes body as having three main features:

Firstly, "body as material property of individual" (ibid., p. 56). He opines that body exercises agency as "individuals usually have the ability to control and monitor their bodily performances in order to facilitate social interaction" (ibid., p.62). However, his view differs from that of Foucault's and posits that "the body is not actually produced by the social process" (ibid., p. 71) rather meaning is attributed by the 'shared vocabularies of body idiom' (ibid., p.33) controlled by individuals. Body idiom is a conventionalized non-verbal communication which constitutes an essential part of behaviour in public. Goffman employs it to refer to "dress, bearing, movement,

position, sound level, gestures like waving, facial decoration and emotional expressions and calls it techniques of the body in social relationships” (ibid., p.82). Lastly, he advocates that body plays an essential role in “mediating the relationship between people’s self-identity and their social identity” (ibid., p. 87). Thus Goffman considers agency as embodied with an inherent capacity to act, intervene and influence the flow of everyday life.

Agency has always been central to the feminist discourse. It can be understood as a universal capacity to act; socio-culturally mediated and thereby is contextually defined. Thus the “understanding of agency is contextual as each context comprises of the complex interaction between the local and a variety of wider global forces” (Maelstrom, 2012). As Lois McNay (2004) suggests that “the continual process of becoming a subject result from a complex interplay between the phenomenal nearness of lived experience and social structures of power and inequality” (Ibid). Thus she defines agency as a lived experience in relational terms. So feminists define ‘women’s agency as their personal capacity to feel, intend, reflect and act within the particular historical contexts and social relations in which they live their lives’ (McNay, 2004; Mahmood, 2005; Ortner, 2006).

In the present study, the question of agency of women *ragini* singers has been put to analysis in the backdrop of transitions achieved after their entry into the genre. As discussed above, the socio-political and cultural context plays a definitive role in the negotiation of performer’s agentic subjectivity with the unfolding of change in the art form. With reference to *ragini* performance, the last two decades witnessed widespread changes with the coming of globalization and new media technologies. The impact is not limited to *ragini* but extends to all kinds of folk genres including *geet*. However,

ragini has taken almost a new *avtar*⁶¹ under the influence of a new politics of media combined with technological innovations of the internet age. The next section deals with the interface of technology with folk music of Haryana.

Impact of Technology on Ragini and Geet

The social and political changes in the twentieth century influenced the cultural sphere of the Indian society which led to the formation of the different musical culture and sphere wherein the ways of perceiving and consuming music varied as compared to yester years. Thus apart from shifting of musical spaces from private to public, the styles of rendering folk songs were also modified (Tokas, 2009). With the introduction of a liberal economy, the socio-cultural and political landscape of Haryana also got transformed (Chowdhry, 1994). Its impact also echoed in the regional music (Manuel, 1993).

The inception of technology around the 1980s in Haryana socially re-contextualized its folk music in a new tech-savvy atmosphere with the exposure to mass media and altered the musical cultures of the region. Peter Manuel notes that before the recording technology ventured into the local regional musical cultures of North India, the music industry

“was distinguished, by global standards, by an extraordinary degree of concentration and monopolization, dominated as it was for some 40 years by a tiny handful of music producers and singers, embedded in the Bombay film industry and a single record company (the Gramophone Co. of India, with the logo His Master’s Voice). Secondly, the

⁶¹ rebirth

introduction of cassettes was delayed by state-imposed import restrictions, whose belated relaxation, in the early 1980s, had the effect of opening the floodgates to the new technology, whose advent was thus all the more precipitous” (Manuel, 2014, p. 390).

Similarly, with the inception of media technology, specifically after cassettes, the regional music industry bloomed in Haryana as well. The traditional instruments were upgraded, for example in *ragini* performance, instruments called *kaccha saaj* such as ones made from earthen pot etc. got replaced by the *pakka saaj* like piano or synthesizer, etc. This altered the earlier ways of listening, composing and performing music (Tokas, 2009, p. 57; Subramanian, 2001) and redefined the ways folk music was perceived and consumed by the members of society at large (Manuel, 2014; Kumar, 2009).

The technological inventions revolutionized the way music was appropriated as the listeners now controlled their experience of their kind of music in terms of having a choice of time and place regarding their engagement with it. The recording technology also led to ‘time-shifting’ of music, i.e., the audiences now could listen to music at their own convenient time. Through recordings technology, people could easily bring music to their homes and listen to it at any time. However, the means to buy this kind of technology were still a determinant of people’s access to music depending on their class and affordability.

With the media technology like radio, gramophone, cassette, television, etc. the earlier traditions of patronage gave way to new patterns of patronage and market consumption. Not only the expansion of cassette technology but portable music players like mp3 and iPod; VCD, DVD, Internet and YouTube channel, etc. have led to a shift in space too.

As now a listener can decide his/her own time and space for listening to music. Thus the listeners gain a felt control over the music that they can hear anytime or at any place (Dyck, 2008, p. 17-18). This seemingly transcends the 'time' dimension in music and also leads to the formation of a new 'musical space' and a new 'public sphere'.

Simultaneously it also changes an artist's orientation towards performance and even *ragini* singers have thus started working in tune with the prevalent styles and trends. As Ashok Da. Ranade pointed out that "musician on account of the enhancement of his social status tends to adopt changed techniques of creating and maintaining his own social image" (Ranade, 1984, p.106).

According to Bruno Deschenes, "the technological developments of the twentieth century profoundly modified the context in which music was enjoyed as compared to previous centuries" (Deschenes, 1998, p. 5-6). Elucidating upon the interaction between music and technology in context of India, Benjamin opines that "when art form comes in contact with technology, i.e., like reproducibility of music through the recording technology, the art form sustains damages despite its capacity of resilience and resourcefulness to the interaction between the tradition and technology" (Benjamin, 2005, p.201).

Adorno (1976) attributed this transformation to the changed function of music with the coming of technology and explains that the effect of modernism on music changed its function adversely. He says that "the change in the function of music involves the basic conditions of the relation between art and society. The more inexorably the principle of exchange value destroys use values for human beings, the more deeply does exchange value disguise itself as the object of enjoyment" (Adorno, 1976, p.34).

One must also acknowledge that the digitalization of folk music

“not only affected the functions of music but also led to the negotiation of identity and transformation of the homogeneous audience into the heterogeneous one (fragmented and stratified). The musical rationality is substituted by the technological one which has its emphasis more on the market principles, demands and pressures, and which certainly leads to the commodification of music at large scale in India ” (Tokas, 2009, p. 40).

In a similar context, Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma (2005) contends that the development in the last two decades of the twentieth century brought in the threat of consumerism and commoditization of music. As musicians no more aspire for rigorous training; instead, they focus on achieving a glamorous lifestyle and stardom. He further advocates that due to changes brought in music by the technological intervention “audiences have become larger, their profile has changed, their expectations from music have changed, and the media for exposure to music have grown in number and reach” (As cited in Raja, 2005, p. ix). Pointing out the two main aspects of this changed situation of music, he opines:

“Firstly, that music has changed much more because society has changed, not as much because the discerning audiences have been reduced to a small minority. Secondly, despite dramatic changes in the quality of music, which some regard as signs of decay, the musicians who enjoy stature along with popularity today exhibit the same values as those of the early twentieth century, whom we mention with reverence” (ibid).

Satyasheel Deshpande (2006) says that technology transformed every sphere of life, including that of the musical sphere. He states that

“technology that made the archive possible also gave us satellite TV, the internet and public amplification systems that could amplify our inherently intimate, chamber-concert music to thronging audiences of thousands. The market-oriented, public relations culture that this brought about has caused today's musicians to look at music as a product for mass consumption rather than the creative process that it is. Inadequately trained young singers are lured away from committing themselves to the study of music by the glamour of television, playback singing for films and overhyped music competition” (Deshpande, 2006, p. 74-80).

In an ethnographic account on the changing musical cultures of Haryana, Deepak Kumar (2009) points out that intervention of technology such as the cassette industry in the 1980s affected the cultural forms in diverse ways in Haryana. The flourishing cassette companies gave way to growing *ragini* competitions. It not only changed the networks of patronage but also reconfigured the ‘social and cultural significance of musical performance’ (ibid., p. 8). The shift in patronage simultaneously changed “the contexts of performances from village concerts to private studios to individual households, resulting in a spatial reorganization of the social relationship between the listener and performer” (ibid).

Citing Deepak Kadyan (2010), Manuel explains that during 1984–1994, the popular *ragini* singers preferred recording with Delhi based Max and Maina Cassettes. However, increasing trend of cassettes in the region could not replace the live

performances and instead stimulated night long –*ragini* competitions between singers and their parties. Such competitions rather increased ragini’s audience now ranging in thousands. However, Manuel (1991) has also pointed out elsewhere that:

“Indian popular music was remarkably deficient of affirmation of a sense of community, whether on the level of the region, caste, class, gender or ethnicity. It is such a sense of community that may be said to be the most vital and essential aspect of folk songs, which celebrate collective community values through shared, albeit specific performance norms and contexts, musical style, textual references and language. Insofar as film music succeeded in appealing to, if not creating, a homogeneous mass market, it did so only at the expense of this affirmation of community, thereby, it could be argued, becoming as ultimately alienating as the escapist cinematic fantasies it was embedded in” (Manuel, 1991, p.189-204).

Reviewing the musical cultures of Haryana, Peter Manuel points out that along with Bhojpuri folk music, Haryanvi music is also witnessing a musical boom. Though he says, Haryanvi music has never been celebrated by any other region, “being more commonly regarded as a land of sturdy Jat farmers” (Manuel, 2014, p. 402).

In the recent times, he further points out that:

“while the absolute number of commercial recordings may have attenuated somewhat, commercial DVDs abound, generally portraying dancers mouthing light, erotic devar-bhābhi songs in lip-sync, or else live or simulated footage of competitions. A YouTube search of ‘*ragini* competition’ will yield dozens of such clips. As with Bhojpuri music,

the vogue of Haryanvi vernacular music has played an important role in a resurgence of local pride, especially among the Jāts (a clan-derived community designation that comprises most Haryanvi farmers)” (ibid).

The recent explosion of new media technologies and the contemporary trend of musical blogs, YouTube channels, musical apps, internet, mobile apps, android and re-mix culture in rural and urban India has changed how folk music is being performed, produced, distributed, and shared (Kumar, Chauhan, S. Parikh, p. 2011). Effect of the latest technology has helped in the production and dissemination of folk music in Haryana in a new form for the larger audiences. Thus it has affected not only the listeners but also the folk artists whose voice can now be taken to millions of listeners. Once known as the famous *ragini* of Haryana ‘*tu raja ki raaj dulari*’⁶², ‘*Badal Uthiya*’⁶³ a hundred-year-old *swang*⁶⁴ and a *geet* ‘*banno tera swagger*’⁶⁵ reached the top charts of Bollywood music proving that the folk music of Haryana has something new to offer. This has been made possible because of the globalization as gone are the days when Haryanvi singers had to struggle even to perform at urban places or other important platforms beyond the conventional local gatherings.

Every state or region has its folk music which reflects its ethnic compositions and is a part of the way of life of a particular community. Folk music of Haryana also becomes an instrument of politicization for several political parties as they use *raginis* for their campaigning. So musicians in a way also serve the interests of political parties to get

⁶² *Ragini* in the Bollywood movie “*oye lucky, lucky oye*” (2010) and *Lalrang* (2016).

⁶³ *Ragini* in the Bollywood movie *Matru ki bijlee ka mandola* (2012).

⁶⁴ *Swang* is a folk theatre prevalent in Haryana. It narrates an incident or story through musical verses i.e. through *ragini*, thus *ragini* is a part of *saang*.

⁶⁵ Originally the song ‘*banno teri ankhiyan* (Oh Bride your eyes)’ has been taken from a Haryanvi *geet* sung during marriage rituals for the bride in the Bollywood movie ‘*Tanu weds Manu Returns*’ (2015).

more votes.

Apart from analyzing the gendered aspects of the Haryanvi folk music (comprising of *raginis and geet*), this study also explores the social status of women performers in Haryana and their contribution to these genres? How does women's participation affect the prestige of a cultural performance? How musical cultures get gendered? Further, it examines the interface between market and technology which has resulted in the creation of popular-folk music in Haryana. It is also an objective to look at the caste-class dynamics of the musicians, performers and the audience of *raginis*.

Thus as the study straddles around the concepts of folklore, gender, caste, economy, folk-popular music, identity, performance, space, agency, political culture and technology, it tries to connect these diverse aspects which cannot be studied and located fully within the boundaries of sociology of music, gender studies, performance studies, ethnomusicology or any other disciplinary field. An important part is the socio-historical mapping of the genre in the region. Therefore, the study develops concepts, ideas and theory from the field data itself.

V. Methodology, Method and Chapterization of the Thesis

Research questions

What is the social trajectory of *ragini* as a musical genre? How has it changed in the recent decades? When did women become performers of *ragini*? What were the factors that led to their entry into public performance and who were the first pioneering women singers? How did women manage to establish themselves in public singing in Haryana and what was the set up they found themselves in? How did the character of *ragini* get altered with the entry of women? What is the impact of technologies of recording,

storing and disseminating music and the role of the internet on *ragini* especially in connection with women? These are some of the questions that this study aimed to answer. Broadly speaking it is an attempt to understand how gender mediates the performance of music, which in turn is embedded in the social structure and cultural practices of a region? And further, how do women singers perform their agency through their voice and simultaneously negotiate with the identity of a stage singer vis-à-vis the patriarchal concepts of ideal womanhood?

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is an exploration of how society and cultural practices in Haryana have influenced music and vice-a-versa. The specific aim of the research is however to map the moment of change with women entering the performance of *ragini* in public and the resulting transitions both in the lives of these performers as well as the socio-cultural context of *ragini* performance vis-à-vis the change in genre itself. The study does not only look at the musical practices of Haryana from the lens of gender but also analyzes the caste-class nexus which plays a crucial role in different contexts of musical performance. The focus in understanding the linkages of gender, caste and class nexus is primarily to understand the dynamics of identity and agency as seen from the standpoint of women *ragini* singers and performers. The study also brings out an analysis of the impact of new technologies and changing political contexts of *ragini* performance in Haryana. The following questions thematically became the route to objectives.

- To explore gender and musical performance in the context of the Haryanvi society with Jats as the dominant community.

- To explore the processes by which musical categories navigate gender lines exemplified in *raginis* for men and *geet* for women? How do the notions of the private-public determine the genres and themes of performance in this society?
- How does the caste-class nexus influence local musical cultures in the context of *ragini* and *geet*?
- To map the moment of change when the women singers of Haryana entered the realm of public performance in the 1980s.
- Changing structure and contexts of *ragini* performance with the entry of women performers.
- Interplay of technology and politics with *ragini* dominated musical cultures.

The Field

The fieldwork of study comprised of live *ragini* performances and programmes as well as personal interviews of *ragini* singers. The study began with observing and studying live *ragini* programmes organized in Sonapat district of Haryana including the urban Sonapat and the Gohana regions as well as the village Khanpur Kalan and its neighbouring villages like Sargathal, Kasandi and Kasanda to understand the rural-urban connections in the context of the study. In total, forty live programmes including 20 *raginis*, 14 *geet* gatherings, 2 *shabad*, 2 *kirtan* and 2 Arya Samaj *bhajan updes* programmes were attended. This helped one to get connected with *ragini* singers of state and generating further sources to reach *ragini* singers (both women and men) all over the state especially the renowned ones. After this singers belonging to different regions of Haryana were personally contacted for detailed interviews. Apart from attending live performances, approximately 100 live and recorded *ragini* competitions telecasted by local TV cable channels and YouTube Channels were listened to while

the researcher stayed in the field. It consisted of twenty *ragini* programmes (fifteen in daytime and five in evening and at night only between 6:30 PM to 9:30 PM). It consisted of eleven live *ragini* programmes and competitions organized by the dominant caste people. These were for different purposes like raising fund for construction of a *gaushala* (cow shelter), on the occasion of some influential family's son's birthday or sponsored by local political leaders. Three *ragini* programmes were conducted by political parties during big political rallies in Gohana, Zind and Sonapat. Three *ragini* programmes conducted in the University campus of BPS Mahila Vishwavidyalaya, Khanpur Kalan were also attended. Three *ragini* programmes were organized by Dalit community in Khanpur Kalan village on the occasion of *Balmiki* Jayanti and Ambedkar Jayanti. Apart from these *ragini* programmes fourteen *geet* functions consisting of ten organized by upper and dominant caste households during marriage festivities and ceremonies on the occasion of a son's birth were attended. Four *geet* ceremonies of the Dalit community were also observed and attended. To also observe other prevalent musical genres in the region, two *shabd* programmes, two *kirtan* programmes and two *bhajan mandali updes* were also attended in Khanpur Kalan Village and Sonapat city. The *ragini* programmes were randomly chosen and attended as per convenience due to challenges encountered in the field.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Being a woman, entering the field was a challenging task for researcher as the venues would be dominated by mostly drunk (audience) men with few women. However, knowledge of Haryanvi dialect proved to be an advantage while interacting with singers behind the scene/stage. The researcher often wore veil to enter the gatherings of *ragini* programmes.

Sample and Methods of Data Collection

Being a qualitative and exploratory study, grounded theory⁶⁷ (Glaser & Strauss, 2006) was used for gaining a deeper understanding of the transition in the field. Available literature, cassettes, magazines, journals and newspapers were surveyed. Oral literature through collection of narratives was analyzed. In order to observe the contemporary trends of *ragini*, I also adopted the method of internet ethnography by visiting different YouTube channels consisting of audio-visual, CDs, musical sites and the musical blogs created by different individuals. Local cable channels' live telecasts of *ragini* programmes were also observed. Content analysis of *geet* and *ragini* songs collected from various sources like booklets, vernacular literature, media programmes, live performances and *ragini* singers own resources was also attempted. Detailed interviews were also conducted which primarily included those of women *ragini* singers as well as of women who sing *geet* and some very keen participants in both kinds of programmes.

Overall 110 interviews were conducted consisting of 50 performers (20 women *ragini* singers, 10 women *geet* singers and 10 men *ragini* singers, 10 male musicians) along with 50 audiences in the age group of 12 to 75 including men and women both. 10 composers and stake holders (like music company owners and managers) were also interviewed. Life histories of women *ragini* singers from different regions in the state and collected through interviews were analysed. Approximately ten biographies of renowned *Saangis* (available in print in Haryanvi dialect) of yesteryears were also reviewed.

⁶⁷ Grounded theory is an inductive methodology that systematically generates theory from research/field data. Grounded theory was developed by two eminent sociologists named Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the year 1967.

After collecting the data, coding of the narratives collected through in-depth interviews was done to generate concepts for formulating categories and sub-categories which provided the themes, sub-themes, concepts and theoretical formulations to take the study further.

Given the multidimensional aspect of the present study, taking a particular standpoint may have restricted the researcher from capturing the situational nuances in mapping the existential realities of the context. Thus the present research finds its expression through grounded theory. It seemed apt for understanding the transitions in the cultural context of the region for carrying out such an inter-disciplinary study. The work draws its insights largely from the sociological understanding of gender and music apart from perspectives and concepts from feminist ethnomusicology, gender studies, performance studies, culture studies, folklore and musicology which have been useful in bridging the interlinkages between the field data and various theoretical perspectives. Thus the present work attempts at understanding and simultaneously developing concepts and ideas which provide us a vantage point to interpret the social processes in the field of gender, music and performance in Haryana.

Theorizing from the field: Grounded Theory

Originally propounded by Glaser and Strauss (1965), grounded theory emerged initially in the 1960s as a counter product of the growing trend of ‘quantitative technique and methods of social research’ in Sociology in USA (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1075; Priya, 2016, p. 51). As an alternative to deductive logic, grounded theory is derived inductively from the data instead of testing a priori theory through a hypothesis. Thus stress was laid on developing ‘a middle range theory’⁶⁸ rooted in ‘interpretative understanding of social

⁶⁸ The theory of ‘middle-range’ was developed by Robert Merton in his work ‘Social Theory and Social Structure’ (1957) “to bridge the gap between the limited hypotheses of empiricist studies and grand

processes’ as against Parsons’ grand theory and ‘theoretical capitalists’ (Charmaz, 2007; Priya , 2016, p. 52). Grounded in data, grounded theory is derived from the very field it is embedded in. Some see it as a description of a set of conceptual categories and the relations among the categories (Romania, 2005) while others define it as an appropriate research methodology and method for developing a theory which is close to the reality of a given context (Strauss & Glaser, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus identified as one of the ‘strategies of inquiry’ or methodologies of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009), Charmaz (2014) argues:

“...grounded theory exports culture, a worldview, a way of viewing, relating to, and depicting studied life along with exporting its specific strategies. The very frame of a method constitutes a standpoint from which the research process flows. The specific content this frame generates can become separated from the frame and reified as truth”
(ibid., p. 1076).

However, questioning the epistemological position of Strauss and Glaser’s theory, Charmaz called it as ‘objectivist grounded theory’ in its initial phases of inception. She opined that believing that ‘data is external reality’ which researcher must fit in a theoretical frame was close to positivist approach. Thus taking a social constructivist approach, Kathy Charmaz (2014) points out that ‘methods develop within specific contexts rather than being context-free (1074)’ while considering grounded theory in a

abstract theory of the sort produced by Talcott Parsons. He describes middle-range theories as theories that lie between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance in day to day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop unified theory that will explain all the observed uniformities of social behaviour, organization and social change” (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/middle-range-theory>).

global perspective. Thus the researcher's own social and historical location becomes crucial in shaping her analytical skills, i.e. how they perceive or interpret a social phenomenon. Thus theory constructed through the grounded process becomes a 'co-construction between the researcher and participants, dependent on time, space and circumstances' (Charmaz, 2007; Priya, 2016). Charmaz says that 'the strategizes of grounded theory may at times collide with the cultural⁶⁹ practices', and hence researchers should be flexible enough in adopting methods as per the context while collecting data from the field, she opines.

Charmaz proposes a 'constructivist grounded theory' rejecting 'radical subjectivism and individual reductionism' and stresses upon recognizing social context, cultural traditions, interactional and situational nuances in the field. Charmaz opines that her theory 'aims to position the research relative to the social circumstances impinging on it' (Charmaz, 2009, p. 134; Priya, 2016). Influenced by the classic work of Berger and Luckmann (1967), Charmaz says⁷⁰:

“...the actor's view of the world is not constructed in a vacuum or in an arbitrary fashion. It is socially constructed formed through inter-subjective interactions within the historical and cultural settings of the participants. She also calls attention to Giddens' structuration theory wherein Giddens holds that 'the structure is both the medium and the outcome of the practices which constitute social systems' (Charmaz, 2007, p. 37-38). The task of a grounded theory researcher is to connect

⁶⁹ Culture is not static

⁷⁰ As cited in Priya, 2016, p.54.

the dots to bring forth the socially constructed reality while being aware of one's own presuppositions" (Priya, 2016, p. 54).

Reflecting on the social constructivists perspective, J.W. Creswell explicates that human beings continuously construct and interpret meanings (varied and multiple) while encountering and engaging with their subjective experiences in the world. However, the researchers should be capable of reflecting upon the 'complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings to a few categories or ideas (Creswell, 2009, p. 8).' Thus 'reflexivity'⁷¹ should be integral to the process of research without falling prey to 'reflexivity paralysis' and constantly comparing the data and categories (Charmaz, 2009, p. 140) emerged in the field so as to do away with any bias which may have crept in. Strauss and Corbin (2008) also later positioned their grounded theory in the 'philosophy of pragmatism'⁷² after being highly influenced by the symbolic interactionist school of thought.⁷³ They attempt to find 'the middle ground between positivism and social constructivism, but without compromising the basic tenet of interactionism and pragmatism that social reality is a construction of human agency as played out through the complex web of actions and interactions' (ibid., p. 55). After gaining an idea of the methodology, it becomes essential to look at the process of employing grounded theory in research which next section will highlight.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) say that the grounded theory in process derives from the 'systematically gathered data analyzed through the research process'. Glaser and Strauss (1967) pointed out four key components in developing grounded theory

⁷¹ Wherein the researcher constantly deliberates and critically reflects upon his/her social position, assumptions, opinions and biases and considers how these may impact the findings.

⁷² Levi Strauss was trained in the school of symbolic interactionism

⁷³ H. Blumer (1969), G.H. Mead (1967) and John Dewey (1929, 1938).

including theoretical sensitivity⁷⁴, constant comparison⁷⁵, theoretical sampling⁷⁶ and theoretical saturation⁷⁷. The eventual theory that emerges in the process stands in close relationship to the data collection and the analysis in the study (Strauss & Corbin 1998, p.12; Charmaz, 2014). The data is collected in multiple stages with continuous comparison and analysis. The principal tool and technique of data collection could range from open-ended questions, loosely structured interviews, focused group discussions and interviews, observation, audio-visuals documentary analysis and maintaining field notes or memos (Birks, 2011; Glaser & Strauss 1967). Finally, the data analysis and theory generation is executed in three stages through ‘coding’ which refers to “the analytic processes through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory” (Strauss & Corbin 1998, p. 3; Priya, 2016, p.61).

This dissertation is about the emergence of women as *ragini* singers in Haryana which as we shall see in the chapters to follow has been an ongoing and chequered process. It involved shifts in gender and caste of the performer as well as in the thematic content of the song, though with the same name, *ragini*. As mentioned earlier, the sociological study of *ragini* probes into the confluence of gender, music and caste in Haryana along with the unfolding political and technological developments at the moment. The topic is at once contemporary as *ragini* is very much a happening domain today but is also

⁷⁴ Ability of researcher to be analytic/investigative and familiarity with sociological theories and concepts.

⁷⁵ Involves continuous comparison of data with data, concept with categories, concepts with concepts so on so forth.

⁷⁶ Is the process where the “sample to be studied is not determined in advance and the sample strategy is suitably changed as the study progresses driven by the emerging theoretical frame at each level” (Priya, 2016, p.60).

⁷⁷ Refers to a stage when “no new concepts are emerging and the emergent theory is also further supported by the data further collected” (ibid).

something with deep historical moorings. Accordingly, the codes and themes in the study have been guided by the patterns in the data in order to retain the dynamism and authenticity of the genre.

Chapterization

The introductory chapter introduces the research problem and the methodological approach of the present study along with the broader socio-cultural and economic context of the region or the field where it is located. Second chapter provides the social history of the folk genre of *ragini* while explaining its role in constructing a community identity for the dominant caste alongside the discourses of Arya Samaj in the region. Third chapter looks at the processes which mediate the gendering of two major folk musical genres as well as the politics of identity and space involved therein. Further, the fourth chapter maps the moment of change and the resulting transitions with women's entry into the domain of public performance of *ragini* followed by an analysis of the lived realities of the women *ragini* singers. The last chapter looks at the political aspects associated with *ragini* and the interplay of different technological processes in reshaping of the genre. Finally, the conclusion presents the theoretical insights generated in a holistic manner.

Chapter One

Music and the Construction of Jat Masculine Identity

Social History of Arya Samaj after 1880s

The first section of the present chapter tries to gain a theoretical understanding of the role music plays in the construction of identities based on community. Further, it aims at exploring the social history of 'ragini' as it was entwined with the social history of Jats and Arya Samaj in Haryana. It looks at the role of folk music in the construction of a Jat Kshatriya identity alongside the religious ideology of Arya Samaj in Haryana after the 1880s. The chapter argues that not only ragini but the Arya Samajist bhajans also became instrumental in re-configuring the Jat Aryan identity alongside the establishment of notions of ideal womanhood in the region. Thus a new social order for the community was established which enabled Jats to socially mobilize and claim a higher status, i.e., of Kshatriya in the social hierarchy. The notion of identity here in this chapter is specific to the community under reference.

I. Music and Construction of Identity

“The first function of music, especially of folk music is to produce a feeling of security for the listener by voicing the particular quality of a land and the life of its people”

Alan Lomax (1960, p. xv).

Alan Lomax (1960) rightly points out that the primary function of folk music is to inculcate belongingness amongst its listeners to make its audience feel related to each other and bind them with a communal identity. Before one talks about construction of identity through

music in the context of Haryana, it is essential to look at the theoretical perspectives linking the two.

Identity could be understood in terms of two primary components, i.e. 'human agency' and 'a medium through which to express it' (Koskoff, 2005, p. 58). Construction of identity necessitates the presence of 'self' and 'other' (individual or collective, i.e. group). Susan C. Cook and others (1994) explain that 'identity' not only helps in proclaiming '*who* a group is and what it identifies itself as', but also 'expresses to someone an identification with' and basis of difference from the 'other'. Similarly, De Voss (1995, p.24) opines that identity of a group consists of the 'subjective, symbolic or emblematic uses of any aspect of culture, or a perceived separate origin and continuity in order to differentiate themselves from other groups'.

Contextualizing the origin of social identity, Timothy Rice (2007) places two arguments, 'essentialist' and 'constructivist' as crucial in understanding the construction of identity. An essentialist comprehends 'identity politics of nationalism', on the one hand, and of "opposition to the powerful from subaltern positions defined by ethnicity, race, class, and gender" (Rice, 2007, p.23), on the other. He explains that "Essentialists understand identity in terms of durable qualities and characteristics of the group that are thought to exist historically. Music's relationship with these stable identities is usually understood in terms of processes of reflection, symbolization, homology, and expression" (Rice, 2007, p. 23). However, the constructivist approach holds that:

"identities are always constructed from the cultural resources available at any given moment. Rather than being durable and stable, identities are

contingent, fragile, unstable, and changeable. The issue in this view of identity becomes whether, to what extent, and how music making and music listening participates in the construction of various forms of emerging and changing social identities” (ibid., p. 25). He further states that “Identity is conveyed through something perceivable: an object, an act, music, an art, language, a banner that serves as label, insignia, diacritic, or emblem. This tags a human group and, in the literal sense of identity as sameness or oneness, they, in turn, assume the identity of the group” (ibid., p. 58).

Alan Merriam (1964), an ethnomusicologist, stresses upon the symbolic aspect of music in the construction of Identity. A group or community /collectively shares music as a symbolic behaviour of fraternal bonding as Jats share *ragini* in Haryana. Construction of a community’s identity could be understood from its cultural life that inhabits its folk-ways in the form of folklore, folk songs, ballads, dance theatre, etc. and shape the day to day interactions of people residing there. Rice states that group or community identity could also be understood as “collective self-understanding as represented by various characteristics, activities, and customs, including music” (Rice, 2007, p. 23). For example, folk songs like *ragini* and *geet*, that form an essential part of the folklore of Haryana facilitate an understanding of the socio-cultural and religious life of the community and also about individual’s adjustment to her/his culturally constituted world. These folk songs are transmitted and circulated through generations in the form of an oral tradition that mirrors a community’s way of life and thinking patterns. Oral tradition influences people’s consciousness of ‘being’ and identity by conveying thoughts about a community’s

traditions, beliefs, rituals, social values, norms in simple local dialect and style and thereby become crucial in weaving a collective identity.

Reflecting upon the role folklore plays in constructing the ethnic identity, Hoppal (1981) argues that “folklore as a creative communicative process articulates different forms of ethnic symbolism, and being a fact of social reality, belongs to the mechanism of culture which reproduces the ethnic consciousness of the identity of the given people” (p. 6).

Purporting music as a process towards group identity, Simon Firth (1996) argues that historical engagement with music shapes ‘perception of music’ and, in turn, impacts identities. For him, music constructs a sense of identity through the experiences it enforces in the body, time and sociability and thereby enabling an imaginative cultural narrative (Firth, 1996, p.124-125). Moreover, according to G. Born (2000), music can construct new identities while reflecting simultaneously on the existing ones. Music also connects the shared communal pasts of groups of people located locally, thereby constructing a collective sense of identity and community (Whitely, Bennett, Hawkins, 2004, p.5). In the same context, reflecting upon the construction of identity through music, Cohen (1995) recalls her experience of immigrant Jews and shares that their rituals and traditional music help to unite them and construct a sense of belongingness and identity in a new locality.

She says:

“The consumption and production of music draw people together and symbolizes their sense of collectivity and place. For the immigrant Jews of Brownlow Hill, music (folk, religious, popular, and classical) played an important role in everyday life and the rituals, routines, and discourses that comprised it. Music was, in fact, the focus of many social gatherings,

helping to establish and strengthen the immigrants' relations with each other...and music also framed particular events such as wedding ceremonies and religious festivals, setting them apart from other daily activities, heightening their symbolic significance" (Cohen, 1995, p. 436).

However, viewing it differently from consumer culture, Adelaida Reyes (2005) and others see folk music as 'music with a long history outside consumer culture that contains the essence or seeds of a national cultural expression' (Reyes *et al.* p. 68). Similarly, Rice, a scholar of ethnomusicology, suggests that construction of identity through music could be seen in four ways. Firstly, music gives a symbolic shape to 'pre-existing or emergent identities' (Rice, 2007, p.35). Inherent in the structures of music is the 'iconic representation of elements of identity'. However, music's temporality may forge a temporal logic of identity, but it also indexes "multiple identities through the multiplicity of its formal properties (melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre and so forth)" (ibid). Secondly, Rice opines that "musical performance provides an opportunity for communities sharing an identity to see themselves in action and to imagine others who might share the same style of performance. Third, music may contribute to identity its feel or affective quality" (ibid., p. 40). Borrowing from Waterman's structuralist perspective, she further continues that "neo-traditional music enacts and disseminates the hegemonic identity which is grounded in the iconic representation of social relationships as sonic relationships" (ibid) and, performative or visual relationships.

Following constructivist approach she further says that "performances externalize these values and give them palpable form, however, music provides the identity with its interactive ethos or feel and emotional resonance: intensive, vibrant, buzzing, and fluid"

(Rice, 2007, p.40). Fourthly, Rice posits Peter Manuel's argument that music provides a 'positive valence' to identity, especially to a subaltern identity. He further advocates that the relationship between music and identity also needs a deeper engagement with the semiotic theories.

Thomas Turino (1999) argues that 'iconic quality of music as a sign becomes a source of emotional power. Musical iconicity, he further says resonate the structure by reflecting upon culture and shared behaviours leading to a collective understanding in Turino's term 'an emotionally satisfying sense that the identity being constructed through music is natural'. Thus music coalesces 'common experiences of a community and one has shared the social experience with that community' thereby strengthening 'emotional power of music'. Thus Rice concluded citing Thomas Turino's argument that "music integrates the affective and identity-forming potentials of both icons and indices in special ways and is thus a central resource in events and propaganda aimed at creating social unity, participation, and purpose" (Rice, 2007, p. 36).

However, Jansen opines that "folklore not only acts as a unifying force in terms of one group's identity but also as a divisive force in terms of moulding or confirming attitude towards another" (Jansen, 1965, p.44). Contemplating on the context of musical taste and identity, Bethany Bryson (1997), in her article 'What about the univores? Musical dislikes and group-based identity construction among Americans with low levels of education' re-affirms Peterson's 1992 theory of 'low-status cultural exclusiveness' that uneducated and lower class people or with low social standing, demonstrate musical tastes around race, ethnicity, religious conservatism and geographic region and construct identity on its basis (ibid). As she notes in her study:

“Peterson and Simkus...show that high status individuals have a wider, “omnivorous” range of musical taste and consumption than lower status “univores” who are believed to adhere to more specific sub-cultural spheres defined by race, age and region.....Focusing on the exclusive function of taste...musical dislikes are used to construct group boundaries based on racial, ethnic, religious and regional identity, especially at low levels of education” (Avdeeff, 2011, p. 142).

Therefore, the articulation that music, folk herein, leads to the social construction of a community’s identity seems somewhat complex phenomenon. It becomes all the more challengeable to explicate and understand the nexus between music, identity, caste-class, gender and social change through songs. Paul Friedrich (1996), an anthropologist and linguist, in his writing on Eskimos’ culture, explains that through songs and poems:

“one is often given the gist of the culture in a way that would be difficult or impossible to infer. These insights and intuitions are of singular value because they characteristically deal with and involve the emotions, the cultural experience as felt in addition to as understood-that is, in psychological terms, the phenomena of intention, identification, motivation, and affect that are often neglected in cultural analysis, including much of the recent research that combines an ideology of emotionality with practices that feature analytical instruments and objectivised data” (Friedrich, 1996, p.39).

Linked with ‘oral tradition’, folk songs are passed down from one generation to another through performance, rather than just formal transcription (Yarwood & Charlton, 2009). Every region has its musical styles and genres. Folk music plays a crucial role in the social construction of identity (Hudson, 2006; Smith, 2000). The traditional customs of a region through its art form, i.e., musical performances and compositions are linked with ‘national or regional identity’ (Chatterjee, 2005; Storey, 2001). Stokes (1994) reflects upon the potentiality which regional music has in evoking *identities* and thus is a “medium by which individuals develop personal attachments to a complex suite of emotions, experiences, and in many cases, places. Indeed, a glance at many people’s music collections reveals, the sheer profusion of identities and selves that we possess” (p. 3). Thus folk music has the potential to represent the lives, grievances and celebrations of those living in rural areas. Finally, listening (Morton, 2005), performing or dancing to (Revill, 2005, 2004) “music is a corporeal performance that has the potential to engage people with places in emotional ways” (Yarwood & Charlton, 2009).

II. The Swang Dominated Folk Traditions in Haryana

Popularly known as the country of Jats¹, the religious and cultural tradition of Haryanvi society are woven around the local cults, mythological tales and legends (of gods and kings, saints, Sufi traditions, *Gugga pirs*²), shrines and the history of the Arya Samaj. The folk culture of Haryana encompasses a wide range of performing genres including theatre, dance, mythological tale such as *swang* incorporating *kissas* and *ragini.*, *Arya Samaji*

¹Punjab Notes and Queries I, 1883-4, p.126.

² Folk deity worshipped in Haryana and other parts of North India

bhajans and geet covering a wide range of themes and contexts. For centuries, Jats have been carriers of ‘pluralist religious tradition through the rendition of *allahs, saang/kissas, kathas* argues a historian’ (Datta, 1999, p. 23). These genres reflect upon people’s values, ideas and norms that are interwoven in its tradition and customs, providing an insight into the psyche and perceptions of the community.

Ragini being widely appreciated and popular amongst all remains the central point of inquiry in the present study. Historically, ‘*ragini*’ emerged from the folk theatre of Haryana ‘*Swang*³’ as earlier it was an inherent part of it. *Swang* has been one of the vital source of entertainment since the second half of the eighteenth century in Haryana. Thus an understanding of *ragini* (which emerged as a prominent genre in the twentieth century) essentially calls for bringing *Saang* into this context.

Swang

The term ‘*swang*⁴’ means to impersonate, to stage or to perform, to act under a disguise or to imitate (Kumar, 2010; Vatuk, 1979). An age-old medium of entertainment in Haryana and perhaps the only source of leisure (Sharma, 2010), *swang* is argued to have emerged in the mid-eighteenth century (Punia, 1993; Kadyan, 2007). *Swang* tradition in India has travelled from medieval times in one form or another called with such names as *Tamasha*

³Swang is a term employed for a musically rendered dramatic act. The word saang, swang and svang as Ved Prakash and Sylvia Vatuk cite, derived from Sanskrit word *svanga* meaning “disguise”. Another word used for saang in written form is sangeet that could have derived from the Sanskrit sangita-musical an adjectival form of Sangeet. So it is a compound word from saang and geet (Sanskrit geet i.e. song) (Vatuk, 1979, p.30). Saang is a combined form of prose and verse but the latter is more prominent than the former. It consists of singing and dancing as well but this is done only by the female characters, though, performed by men as social customs do not allow women to appear in these saang groups even till now. (Kadyan, 2007).

⁴ Also pronounced as *saang* in local dialect of Haryana

in Maharashtra, *Nautanki* in U.P., *Bhawai* in Gujarat, *Khyal* in Rajasthan, *Videsia* in Bihar, *Maach* in Madhya Pradesh, *Jatra* in Bengal, *Bhand Pather* in Kashmir and *Theyyam* in Kerala (Mehra, 2013, p. 17; Kumar, 1996, p. 127). In a local dialect, artists define *swang* as ‘*ragini ke samuh ko saang⁵ kehte hai*’⁶ (*ragini* belongs to the group called *swang*). Orally transmitted from one generation to another, rare and less documented *saangs* are found till date. As origin of *swang* in Haryana is not exactly known, scholars believe *swang* used to be performed even around 1685 (Kumar, 2010, p.15). While some believe that eminent *Saangi* Kishan Lal Bhaat is credited to have laid the foundation of this folk theatre in Haryana around 1750 (Bhardwaj, 1992; Maitray, 2018), others claim that it was popularized much earlier by Bansi Lal and a poet called Saadullah in Rohtak-Hissar (Mathana, 1993, p.24; Bhardwaj, 1992, p. 127).⁷

The folk theatre, ‘*swang*’ entails a deeper moral message for society through stories from Indian mythologies, eminent personalities, folk tales, etc. *Swang* proceeds through musical proses called *raginis* and thus it becomes an inherent aspect of this art form. *Swang* (folk theatre) depicted the socio-cultural life of people and their morals that would guide their lives exemplifying through the mode of mythological tales narrated through *ragini* such as *Raja Harish Chandra*, *Raamlila*, *Krishna Janam*, *Mahabharata*, *Pingla Bharti*, *Chandrawal*, *Phool Badan*, *Mira*, etc.

It is also believed that the initial performers in *Swang* were ‘*tawaiifs* of Kilayat before men took over their roles of composers and performers’ (Datta, 1999, p.24). Haryana

⁵ In local Haryanvi dialect *Swang* is pronounced as *saang*.

⁶ An eminent *ragini* singer Gulag Singh said in his interview.

⁷ There existed three schools of *swangs* thought around 1740-50s in Haryana. These schools were named Brij School, Kurukshetra School and Rohtak school.

Government has now also employed troupes who perform at different places like in schools, colleges, Universities, villages, markets, etc. to spread awareness amongst people regarding hygiene, AIDS, literacy, women empowerment, etc.⁸ However, *swang* since the beginning has been performed only by males who also enacted women's role. Women are not appreciated if they participate in any form, i.e., neither as a performer nor as an audience. So most women observe from a distance or rooftop of their houses (Vatuk, 1979).

Ragini

As mentioned before, *ragini* is a beautiful blend of stories interwoven into *Swang* as a thread of music with dialogues in-between. *Ragini* should not be mistaken with *raga*⁹, which is supposedly the purest form of Hindustani classical music genre as O.C. Ganguli (1935) points out that *raginis* are also believed to be a class of melodies (feminine) different from *ragas* (Ganguli, 1935, p. 70). Further before getting into the question of how *ragini* becomes instrumental in different processes of identity construction, an overview of the social history of the *ragini* becomes essential.

Social History of 'ragini' in Haryana

For many, *ragini* is a musical way of narrating an incident or a story, i.e., *kissa/kahani* which is an integral part of *saang*. Others also see *ragini* as a *jawab* (answer)/*doha* (couplet) in *saang* (Vatuk, 1979). Maha Singh Punia said, '*raga par aadharit swar ko ragini kehte*

⁸ Shared by a *Saangi* who works in the troupe

⁹Raga is a "sonal composition of musical notes (svaras) having a sequence, form, or structure of a peculiar significance. Some of its component notes stand in a significant relationship to one another to give a character to the raga, e.g., the starting, or initial note (graha svara), the predominant or expressive note (amsa svara), and the terminating, or the final note (nyasa svara), has each a peculiar significance in the composition of a raga" (Ganguli, 1935, p. 1).

hai.¹⁰ A folk singer and faculty of music from Panipat, Haryana gave a good explanation that it cannot be ascertained that *ragini* came after *raga* and necessarily *ragini* has to be based on one or the other *raga*. He said:

When there were no formal institutions of musical training, people used to compose in their tunes and styles and they were called folk songs. When only seven notes were identified, musical notes were grouped to form various ragas. Ragini and folksongs existed since times immemorial and played an important role in inter-connecting common folk in the village.

So, ragini may or may not be based on *raag*.¹¹

Thus *ragini* (folk music) becomes functional in reinstating and maintaining the social order and hierarchy in the villages as well as strengthens the neighbourhood and community feelings at the same time. The renowned *Saangis* of Haryana were Bansi Lal, Ali Baksh, Krishan Lal Bhatt in the fourth, sixth and seventh decades of eighteenth-century respectively. Known as the Kalidas and Shakespeare of Haryana, Pt. Lakhmi Chand¹² is credited for introducing *ragini* in *saang*. It is believed that he ‘popularized *ragini* as a separate genre’ as the most important medium of rendition of art in Haryana during the

¹⁰ Director of Dharohar Museum in Kurukshetra University.

¹¹ Sh. Kamal, Music teacher. “*jab music ki paribhasha aur shiksha prachalit nahi thi tab log apni dhun bana kar gaatei honge jo lok geet kei naam par jaana jata hoga. Jab sat swaron ki pehchaan hui tabhi tho raga me swar bhandit huei tho usse pehle tho lok geet hote thei jo logo ko apni aam bhasha shelli aur logo se jodne ka kaam karti thi. Tho ragini raag par aadharit bhi ho sakti hai aur nahi bhi.*” (Respondent from Panipat, Haryana)

¹² Brahmin by caste, born in Janti Kalan in Sonapat district of Haryana on 15th July 1903. Pt. Lakhmi Chand composed 80 Updeshak bhajans (songs) 23 saangs consisting of 1004 *ragini* in his life. He died on 17.10.1945 due to alcohol addiction. (Biography of Pandit Lakhmi Chand (unknown source) Obtained from Janti Kalan Village through a respondent).

early decade of the twentieth century (Kumar, 2007). This belief could also be contested as a statement with an upper caste agenda as well as there were many other schools of *swangs* and *saangis* at that time (Bharadwaj, 1992, p.128). Performers belonging to other castes may not agree to this as they would call it a conspiracy of Brahmins to erase other communities' history and contribution in arts.¹³



Image 1: A troupe performing Swang. **Source:** Haryana Samvad, September 2009.

Most of the Haryanvi *raginis* are own compositions of individuals or a group of musicians and they also incorporate their names in the beginning or at the end of their compositions. This differentiates *ragini* from other song genres. To elaborate further on kinds of ragini singers and the associated categories, Ram Kanwar Bhardwaj (1992), a historian from Haryana classifies three main groups of *ragini* singers in Haryana:

¹³ Respondent, eminent artist of Haryana and former director of All India Radio, Rohtak, denied this and stressed that it seems to be an attempt valorizing the role of Brahmins.

The first one constituted *ragini* composed by legendary Saangi artists like Lakhmi Chand, Mehar Singh, etc. *Raginis* were primarily based on mythological stories and kisas which inculcated ‘values of truth, charity, devotion, dedication to husband’, etc. At times, political themes were also taken up depending on the sponsorship as well social issues like caste discrimination, the prohibition of alcohol, old age marriage, etc.

The second category of *ragini* singers were employed by some socio-religious organizations like Arya Samaj or political parties for their campaigns. These *ragini* troupes helped to pull a larger audience for political rallies. The singers stressed upon the social themes for popularizing and reinforcing the ‘programmes and leaders of their patron organization’. Being employed by social organization, themes would include raising social awareness amongst public, literacy, poverty, health education, family planning and social issues like dowry. Bhardwaj says, “The Congress Party and Arya Samaj, in particular, employed these singers to popularize their organizations and to attract big crowds to listen to their programmes (Bhardwaj, 1992, 119-120).

Third, the category of singers who are called modern singers and seen as motivated towards monetary gains by participating in specially organized *ragini* competitions. However, earlier these singers would sing in chaupals and common spaces of villages for the entertainment of their fans without any remuneration. They adopted Puranic themes as well and emphasized themes of love, beauty, romance, etc. (ibid).

III. Context, Content, Structure and Field of *Ragini*

Field of Performance

A *ragini* is performed in an open ground/space encircled by the audience. Stage is usually arranged in the centre using wooden cots, or *takhats*/tables and performance is done on this

raised platform. A *ragini mandali* has eight to ten people, whereas 15-16 artists form a *saang* troupe and there is no fixed notion of one director. The group has an egalitarian character about it and the performance depends on the response and demand of the audience. The *ragini* singer leads the troupe and just before the artist begins to sing, *sajinde* (team of instrumentalists) take a position on the stage and start playing music and after that *ragini* begins. The most commonly used instruments are *sarangi*, *harmonium*, *dholak*, *nagara*¹⁴, *matka*, *cimta* (tongs, pincers), *khartal*, *bansuri* (flute), etc. (Kumar, 2010).¹⁵ All of these constitute *pukka*¹⁶ saaj. These instruments are played by *sajinde*, who historically have been from *Mirasi* (Dalit) caste until partition and were a part of almost every *saangi bera*.¹⁷ They are also referred to as *tekia*, as they repeat *tek*. A *tek* is the initial two lines of any *ragini* about a specific *kissa* followed by *kali* which is further explanation of the context. There is no notion of a curtain in these performances, every artist sits on stage and plays his part while in between performing as a part of the chorus.

Context

The troupe performs on being invited by their village people or from adjacent villages. Since beginning, *swang/ragini* performances were considered functional for social causes in the villages. Thus the troupe also performs for generating funds. Such as for the construction of religious sites like a temple, or for building a well, educational institutions like schools or for *Gaushala* (Cattle space) and a village rest house. Such performances are called benefit performance (Vatuk, 1979). Mostly the invitation comes from the prominent

¹⁴ Musical instrument, big drum played with sticks.

¹⁵ Samvaad, Sept. Issue 2009, Haryana.

¹⁶ Well established instruments made up of metal and wood like Harmonium, Piano and Drums.

¹⁷ Swang Troupe.

Jat landlords and other wealthy families in the villages.¹⁸ Another occasion of performance may include marriage, birth or birthday of a son, or on the death rituals of elderly called *kaaj* (last ritual), political campaigns which are becoming a niche these days. However, when a private person invites the ragini troupe, the payment is decided in advance. As also mentioned above, *ragini* is very important in collecting funds for social purposes like *gaushala*, the temple well, ponds, schools and community centres. People contribute money for the purpose and also appreciate the work of performers by giving them cash prize ranging from rupees in ten to thousands. This is announced as ‘*enaam*’¹⁹ on the stage along with the name of the village and the antecedents of the donor. This is called *chamola*.



Image 2: Copy of invitation of a *ragini* programme received from a singer in Jind (Haryana)

During the performance, donations of money and clothing are given by the audience, local political party affiliates. An open invitation is sent and distributed in the form of a pamphlet in the village and the nearby villages to assure both large audiences as well as funds. Such

¹⁸ Informed by most of the performers.

¹⁹ Prize.

invitations are sent at least a month or 3 weeks before the programme. It also includes the list of various performers and troupes invited. A copy of the invitation is as above.

Content and Style of Performance

A *ragini* usually revolves around a theme or story called *kissa* and is musically narrated and conversed. It can be religious, based on myths, moral values, seasons, love or some incidents or on life –cycle rites. Another very important aspect of content is the language of *ragini*. It is highly syncretic with the influx of Persian, Urdu, English and Hindi and few words from Punjabi also find a place in *ragini* (ibid).

Ragini is followed either by a conversation between the characters or a summary of the conversation. The most difficult style is when there are multiple layers of dialogue within one *ragini*. Though it would be very easy to sing the already composed *ragini* but to compose new *ragini* of this genre would mean serious work. This kind of dialogue can be in the form of characters interacting through *kali*, that is one-character narrating one *kali* and the response in the succeeding *kali*. However, the toughest form is when the interaction is line by line and is simultaneously composed on stage and it is here that Lakhmi Chand excelled. To illustrate:

In the performance of *saang*, men perform female characters. In a male-dominated society, it is a matter of ridicule and assault. Lakhmi Chand composed a *ragini* reflecting this concern (Kadyan, 2007) within a *kissa*. It says:

*What is wrong in wearing women's clothes,
After all, your body has also emanated from a woman's body,
You have stayed in her womb for nine months,*

*And after marriage, you have become the slave of a woman*²⁰

Structure of Ragini and the Chorus

Apart from content and the performative aspect, the structural aspect of ragini is also of significance. A *ragini* consists of *doha* (rhyming couplet, which contains two lines), *qafiya* (rhyming syllable, containing three lines), *savaiya* (a Hindi quatrain of dactylic structure, containing four lines), *chaubola* (in the form of rhyme containing eight lines). All such kinds of structural divisions have further differentiation within them (Kadyan, 2007; Vatuk & Vatuk 1979). As stated earlier as well, most of the *ragini* singers in the chorus are male and recruitment to the *ragini* troupe does not follow the hereditary structure or caste lines. So the group contains members of different castes (except few Jats), i.e. the primacy is given to hierarchy of skill than caste hierarchy. However, the performer may not be of the same community as men dominate the genre since beginning.

Interestingly both *ragini* and *Arya Samaj bhajans* became instrumental in constructing Jat identity in Haryana. Nonica Datta's extensive work on Haryana 'Forming an Identity: A Social History of the Jats', proves to be a testimony of the process wherein she meticulously narrates the Quami narratives of influential Jat leaders and *Arya Samajist bhajans* which played a crucial role in fostering a misogynist Jat Arya Identity in Haryana. Simultaneously also dictated *Arya* values for Jat women for manifesting ideal womanhood. The coming section unfolds the role of *ragini* apart from *Arya Samaj* played as the additional protagonist in reinforcing the conventional spaces, virtues and conduct along the gender lines apart from facilitating a masculine Jat Aryan Identity to agricultural peasants.

²⁰ Appendix I, Song 1 (Free translation from Haryanvi dialect).

IV. *Ragini* and Construction of Jat (Kshatriya) Masculine Identity

Since colonial times *ragini* and *swangs* have been instrumental in shaping Jat Identities in the region, proving their dominance in Haryana. It was primarily due to the growing landholdings of Jats and their representation in the army, i.e., Jat regiment. Influence of Arya Samaj, during late nineteenth century to the twentieth century, on the one hand, empowered Jat peasants to assert themselves against Brahmans but on the other challenged their association with lower caste culture like *Swangs* and *raginis*. As Datta advocates that 1920s witnessed:

“growing sense of consciousness among Jats...thereafter they became more self-conscious and assertive. Their commitment to the community...defined their identity in more pronounced ways...In the long run, such a strong and explicit identification with the community, exemplified by the career of Chhotu Ram, sustained the collective identity of the Jats. Although they tended to lose their individuality in the process, their concept of a community as a localized village-based entity eventually broadened into an ideological construct. The Jats appropriated Arya Samajist teachings through their belief system that was primarily based on oral traditions. Their identity was thus defined by and rooted within their own cultural context and specificity...Jat identity, forged through cultural associations...gestures, symbols and myths...The essence of this identity, which remained virtually uncontested, rested on masculinity, territoriality, aggression and exclusivism. Jat politicians, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, drew upon these aspects to stake their claim in politics. They

combined with the publicists and the itinerant preachers to express the social and cultural aspirations of their community” (Datta, 1999, p.191-2).

Along with this social process, *raginis*, popular songs and *kissas* as well invoked the names of eminent Jat leaders like Chhotu Ram and Bhagat Phool Singh²¹ to endorse their Kshatriya Identity (ibid., p. 193). However, despite adherence to the Arya Samaj teachings, the movement remained unsuccessful in refraining Jats from being patrons of *swangs/ragini Jalsas*. Indeed, the relationship became much more entrenched as *ragini* became a popular folk genre in reinforcing higher status aspirations in Jats. Performers from lower caste and economically weak Brahmans performed for Jats, which gave them an upper hand and an additional ground for challenging the Brahmanical order. A *ragini* sung by Shri Dharambir Singh Saangi²² and valorizing ‘Kshatriya Identity for Jats,’ contains the following couplet:

The offsprings of Jats have always been called Kshatriyas
Half of the Kshatriyas are Jats and the rest imitate them,
They have defeated many famous warriors with their sturdy masculine qualities
The ploughman is the greatest of all gods,
Even saints have sung praises of Jats

The *ragini* – ‘*En Jaatan ki santan sadaan tei chattriay kehlaye sei*’ (Children of Jat community have always been called *Kshatriya*- Appendix I, song 2) as mentioned above articulates and reinforces their claim to *Kshatriya* identity apart from fortifying the ideology of ‘Jats as masculine and dominant caste’. This *ragini* asserts that Jats have

²¹ Social Reformer

²² Available on Youtube Channel.

always been known to be a warrior caste, however, it also says that only half the community of Jats are Kshatriya and the other castes imitate them because they are masculine as well as controllers of the plough and the agricultural land in Haryana. Thereby folk music in Haryana participates in navigating the established normative patterns of society.

*Jats are the most loving sons of mother India,
She prefers Jats over all others,
Whenever there is a crisis, the mother calls for him,
Jats are emissary of peace and nonviolence,
The real face of strength and valour is the devoted Jat²³*

Another *ragini* titled '*Jat ki Paribhasha*' (the meaning of being a Jat) encourages Jats to have macho traits as they are assumed to be the most dear sons of 'Mother India'. It conveys the major role and contribution of Jat battalion in the battles fought during the revolt of 1857, during the freedom struggle movement against colonial rule, Kargil war and many more. It thereby celebrates the physical aggression of Jats as strength and symbol of their power.

A poem idolizing Sir Chhotu Ram (1881-1945)²⁴ to God Krishna written by Bhimsingh Dalal (1986, p.37), published in local Journal (*Arya Samaj Gurukul Patrika*) *Samaj Sandesh* hints of his highly influential stature amongst Jat peasants. It became a common narrative of associating Jat identity with Sir Chhotu Ram. An excerpt is as follows:

²³Appendix I, song 3

²⁴ Sir Chhotu Ram (1881-1945) was an Arya Samajist and a prominent Jat leader of the Unionist Party in Pre-independence Punjab. He played an essential role in consolidating the Jat identity of the peasant community in Haryana. He was also editor of a weekly Urdu journal, *Jat Gazette* (1916-1980).

Gaddhi (Sampla)²⁵ is the birthplace, consider it as a shrine
Call him God Krishna or Chhotu Ram; they have the same name,
...Krishna helped Pandhavs to win while Chhotu Ram defeated the trading caste in
elections,
He helped farmers in raising their social status, they both did the same work
One taught the message of the Gita while the other woke up the ignorant farmers.
Chhotu Ram raised the dignity of farmers.²⁶

Other *ragini* on the history of Jats such as *Jaton Ka Ithihaas Raja Suraj Mal* (History of Jats Raja Suraj Mal of Bharatpur)²⁷, *Kisaano ka masiha Sir Chhotu Ram* (Leader of Farmers, Sir Chhotu Ram)²⁸, have been influential among the Jats as it embodies their claim to warrior status and as protector of land ‘*Bharat Mata*’ and the cow. Thus embedded in *raginis* are the symbolic codes that connect its audience to a different time and space, i.e., to their historical origins and aspirations. It inculcates a feeling of community and assertion that deepens their belongingness to their Jat identity.²⁹ Employing symbols like men as protectors of mother cow, used as a synonym for the country (India) as well as for women in general, instigated the spirit of nationalism and strengthened masculine attributes of being a protector and warrior as well.

On the one hand, *raginis* were portraying charismatic leaders like Sir Chhotu Ram and Raja Surajamal’s iconic figures of the Jat community and valorising their history. On the

²⁵ Village in Haryana.

²⁶ Appendix I, Song 4, (Free translation from Haryanvi dialect).

²⁷ Explored while surveying the available records of *raginis* on www.youtube.com

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Ragini* like *Ithihaason mei bana li pehchaan Jaat nei* (Jats have made an identity in the history) narrates the bravery of Jats in the battles fought.

other hand, they called for control over women's sexuality and warned men against their seductive nature. This was further supported by the Arya Samajists bhajans which not only assured Jats of upward mobility in the social hierarchy through a form of sanskritization but urged upon establishing practices upholding the concept of an ideal womanhood if Jats were to claim a higher social status as *Arya* people.

V. Evolution of Jat Arya Identity and Ideal Womanhood in Religious Paradigm of Arya Samaj³⁰

History of Jats and their affiliations with Indo-Scythians have been analyzed by many eminent historians and other intellectuals in the past and continues to be debated at present. Were they *Kshatriya* warriors? Or Shudra peasants, who became landlords? Or Aryans and belonged to *Dwija* Hindus? Social history of Jats and the influence of Arya Samaj movement (1880-1940) in Haryana since late nineteenth century certainly provides us an analytical basis to assert that *ragini* and *bhajans* played a critical role in the re-configuration of Jats' identity along with the religious paradigms.

Haryana remained largely unaffected by the numerous socio-religious movements until the 'Arya Samaj' permeated its social structure in the early 1880s. The dominance of Jats in the region did not affect the social hierarchy of the four-fold Varna. Even Brahmans were

³⁰ Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dayanand which led a profound influence on Haryana after second half of the nineteenth century towards 1880s, especially amongst Hindu. Based on the teachings of Vedic religion, Arya Samaj philosophy resisted the caste rigidity and advocated for "free movement from one caste to another based on gun (character), karam (action) and swabhava (nature)" (Mittal, 1986, p.67). The beginning of twentieth century saw Arya Samaj movement emerging as a vital force in the region. It also propagated widow re-marriage and condemned idolatry and social evils like child –marriage. It also made efforts to uplift the social status of untouchables and peasant community by encouraging them. Jats were highly influenced by the philosophy of Arya Samaj (Datta, 1999).

not rigid about it due to powerful Jat agricultural landlords in the region. Further, the ‘story of Jats’ in Satyarth Prakash (see chapter XI) influenced the community towards following its precepts. Jats found Arya Samaj philosophy quite close to their ideals of cow protection and vegetarianism apart from its role in giving them a strong foothold in the region in attaining a higher social status and identity (Mittal, 1986, p. 66-67).



Image 3: Arya Samaj *mandir* in Kasandi Village. **Source:** From the researcher’s fieldwork

Drawing upon Benedict Anderson’s work on ‘*Imagined Communities*’, Romila Thapar in her article, ‘Imagined Religious Communities’, argues that ‘representation of a religious community (i.e., Hindu) became a key source for gaining political power and economic resources’, during colonial period and further led to construction of identities (Thapar, 1989, p.2). Considering it as inadequate for understanding the formation of localized identity, Nonica Datta postulates the Jat identity as a consequence of ‘the historical process,

within the religious paradigm (sects) of Arya Samaj ideologies, of identity formation itself, shaped by the *quami*³¹ narratives by the social and political leaders during the colonial times' (Datta, 1999, p. 2). Her work brings forth interesting historical accounts of the heroes of Haryana who played a seminal role in the construction of Jat communitarian identity and of their followers who celebrated their ideas and personality traits for the assertion of a new masculine Jat identity. It primarily asserted upon endorsement of 'rationality, masculinity and virtuous conduct' (1999, p.51)³², particularly for Jat men.

Initially, emerged as a strong force to uplift the social condition of women and education, raising 'the socio-religious status of agricultural communities' was also an essential agenda of Arya Samaj in the region (Devi, 2015, p.37; Kishwar, 1986). Its main tenets were a ban on slaughtering of cattle (cows in particular) and consumption of alcohol, cow protection, *shuddhi*, and vegetarianism. It appealed the Jat peasants the most as they were already facing the brunt of a hierarchal social order and were often mistreated as shudras by the higher castes such as Brahmans and Banias. They were also not allowed to wear the sacred thread of twice-born (Datta, 1999, p. 53)³³ and it was primarily due to the former's ambiguous historical identity, associations and cultural practices. Arya Samaj felicitated social mobilization for pastoral and agricultural communities like Jats, Ahirs and Gujjars.

Thus Jats took to Arya Samaj as fish takes to the water and adhered to prescribed sets of values given by Arya Samaj such as the following vegetarianism, distancing themselves from practices like widow re-marriage, i.e., *karewa* and *gugga* worship which were seen as lower caste rituals. Jats were asked to abstain from any sect or cult worship and *karewa*

³¹Quami means community.

³² See Nonica Datta (1999) elaborates upon Arya Samaj and the Making of Jat Identity.

³³ Jat Varna Mimansa is a book authored by Pandit Amin Chandra Sharma in the year 1910.

(*latta udhana*³⁴) was renamed as *niyog* which had the Vedic sanction. Thus not only did Arya Samaj provided Jats with an opportunity for social mobility through cultural sanskritization in the ritualistic hierarchy but also in asserting a newly found Jat Arya identity.

Cow as an 'Icon of Mother' for Jat Aryans

In the early twentieth century, Haryana saw a massive influence of Arya Samaj philosophy (under the influence of its founder Dayanand Saraswati) which advocated the 'worship of cow and earth' as one's mother. So the cow was believed to be equivalent to the birth-giving mother. It (cow) became and is still considered to be representing the mother for all Hindus, Hindu identity and nationality which is in need of protection from Non-Hindus (Gupta, 2001, p.214). In a somewhat similar context, while reflecting on Dalit killings in Jhajjar district of Haryana in the year 2002 (Jodhka & Dhar, 2003) points out that since early twentieth century, Jats have been follower of Arya Samaj and "the local gurukuls and gaushalas that came up during that period did popularize cow as a symbol of an aggressive Jat Hindu identity" (ibid., p. 175). Implicit in this particular *ragini* '*Gaumata nu roh ke boli*' (The cow mother said crying) (Appendix I, Song 5)³⁵ are the defined duties of an Arya Jat who shall be and is masculine enough to protect his mother from the clutches of her slaughterers (Muslims) in this context.

Cow mother is crying and calling out for help,
You'll have tears in your eyes, listen to complete reality,
I have been caught by these butchers/ slaughterers,

³⁴ Re-marriage

³⁵ Appendix I, Song 5, Free translated from Haryanvi dialect.

don't know how they will behave with me,

Oh Hindus wake up, or else the Hindu Dharma will be finished

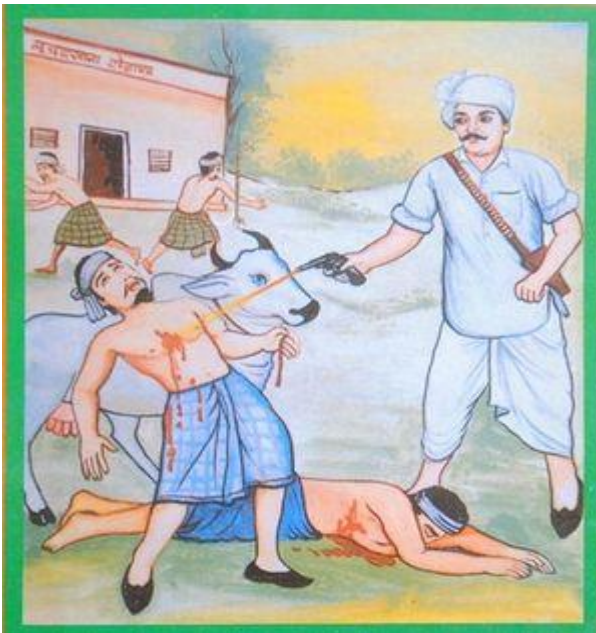
Charu Gupta (2008) in her article 'The Icon of the Mother' argues that the locally produced folk cultures, i.e., music and visuals play key role in reinforcing the ideology that 'cow was invested with the divine and thereby herself became a proto-nation and this new space of the cow-nation embodied a Hindu cosmology, with the sacred inscribed on her body' (ibid., 215).

It was during the late nineteenth century in Haryana as well as UP that 'new *sabhas* and *gaushalas* sprang up'. Funds and donations, especially for *gaushalas* in Haryana, are raised by organizing *ragini* programmes or competitions. Gupta opines that 'linking cow directly with building a strong nation,' Hindu men and sons were to be provided with pure milk and ghee for becoming masculine enough for becoming capable of protecting gaumata/nation. The upper-caste Hindu men having a supposed belongingness with Aryan race (Jats in context of Haryana) were called for the protection of cow as sons must arise in defiance of their mother (Gupta, 2001, p. 219-20). Another very interesting *ragini* on *Gautama* popularly sung in Haryana based on *Kissa Harphool*³⁶ *Jat Julani Ka (Incident of Harphool Jat from Julani)* Image 4, expresses it as:

There is no dearth of similar songs, for example, another famous song is '*mard unhi ko janen hum jo rakshak gau mata ke*' which means '*we consider as men only those who are*

³⁶ Born in a Jat family, Harphool was an influential Hindu *gaurakshak* (Cow protector) in the early decades of twentieth century before he was sentenced to death in 1936. He was convicted for killing several butchers and destroying slaughter houses in Haryana.

*protectors of the cow mother*³⁷. Seen as a ‘foster mother’, the cow became an integral part of the Indian family as a mother figure. Both the mother and the cow provided nourishment and livelihood. They have common features like ability to produce milk and occupy domestic space, invasion and penetration of which are intolerable. Thus both could be possessed and protected which forged an identity of Hindu men (a masculine identity formation by controlling and protecting women). So cow is also central to the agricultural and pastoral economy of Haryana.



*Kaun tha woh ‘marad’? jisne gau mata bacchai,
Arre Harphool Jat julani kei, ek Jatni ke issa
chhora jaamya tha, ekle ne ghane hathe todd diye
the*

Who was that strong man? ³⁸ who protected the mother cow, Listen Harphool Jat from Julani³⁹A Jat woman gave birth to such a child, he alone broke so many slaughter houses.

Image 4: Painting depicting kissa of Harphool Jat Julani ka,

Source: www.jatland.com

Further, it is important to remember that the absence of Hindu women and daughters, or their intentional obliteration from the movement, suggests the missing concern of women’s identity from the nationalist discourse itself. This led to a bent towards the construction of a virile masculine identity of men and portraying a woman as a helpless creature. Even if

³⁷ In U.P. *ragini* forms a popular form of entertainment (Gupta, 2001).

³⁸ Available at www.youtube.com (Free translation from Haryanvi dialect).

³⁹ Name of a village where Harphool lived.

the concern for women's place and identity is visible, it was articulated in such a manner so as to give way to a dominating identity of men. Perhaps the masculine identity was articulated in a similar way as in the west during the nineteenth century which consequently resulted in further deepening and reinforcement of the polarization of two 'castes' i.e., of 'men and women'. The movement in India also gained an 'attacking, aggressive, masculine language' on the one hand and 'feminizing' in its appeal, on the other hand through poems, bhajans, says Gupta (2001).

While Arya Samaj condemned caste hierarchies and challenged the Brahmanical notions of social hierarchy, it simultaneously propelled Jats to adopt Arya Samaj philosophy which will enable them to gain higher social status. Nonica Datta points out that most of the Jat leadership emerged from the ranks of Arya Samajist (Datta, 1999, p.51-84). However, political leaders like Sir Chhotu Ram criticized Arya Samaj for being a monopoly in the hands of Brahmans and Bania because Jats were never made part of the organizational structures of Arya Samaj while the higher castes kept the hold on important positions within themselves. He preached on being 'Jat Arya Samajist' than being simply an Arya Samajist and encouraged Jats to get recruited in British Army as that would not only be beneficial economically but could also help the 'Jats to articulate their Kshatriya identity' (Datta, 1999, p.93).

This, in turn, had critical ramifications for the cultural sphere of *swang* performance towards the first half of the twentieth century. As a history scholar points out that "1920s and 1930s witnessed appropriation of musical traditions" in Haryana and thereby as a

‘proselytizing sect’, *bhajan*⁴⁰ *mandalis* were constituted to propagate Arya Samaj ideals. Despite Arya Samaj’s sustained efforts through protest songs (*bhajans*) to get away from *swangs*, Jats continued to be the chief patrons for *swang* as a cultural form primarily to preserve this regional identity they have been associated with for a very long time. Thus *ragini* flourished as part of *swangs* and the relationship became more entrenched. Perhaps the *swangs* enabled an “implicit understanding at the popular cultural level which put *Jats* and *Brahmins* in a symbiotic relationship” (Kumar, 2007, p.75) and thus prevented the Jats from abandoning *swangs* after the invent of Arya Samaj. Thus, the Jat community preferred not to give up on many of its customs and traditions during the transition. *Swangs* and *ragini* were strongly condemned as cultural forms on moral grounds in orthodox Hinduism. This was considered to be vulgar (Singh, 1974, p. 11; Datta, 1999, p.56) for Arya Hindu (Jat) community and thereby harmful for their women. An Arya Samaji couplet reflects this belief:

*‘Since the drums of the saangis have been played in the street
All shame between father and daughter, sister and brother is gone,
Many wives and daughters have run away with the saangis’ (Vatuk, 1979, p.31).*

Another bhajan says:

*‘All the Standards of Lord Ram Krishan have been broken
The sister went to see swang and came back home two days later’ (ibid).*

Ved Prakash Vatuk (1979) in his Study ‘Ethnography of Saang’ argues that the reason behind Arya Samaj protest of *saang* was their staunch belief in orthodox Hindu value

⁴⁰ *Bhajan* refers to devotional song, but may also imply “any song written in the traditional style used for expressing devotion, regardless of actual subject matter” (Kumar, 2007, p. 75).

system that watching such plays undermined ‘the values of celibacy and chastity...in portraying scenes of love and desire...in disguising men as women..., it encourages similar behaviour in those who watch it’ (Vatuk, 1979, p.30). Further, it was believed that entertainment poses an opposition to ideals of Arya Samaj and Hinduism, i.e. ‘devotion to duty, conformity to the positive values of Hinduism, and active participation in social reform and thus entertainment for its own sake is disapproved’ (ibid., p.31).’

However, this did not demotivate them from disseminating their ideals through *bhajan mandalis* (led by *bhajnopedesak*) and perhaps one of the reasons behind adopting the structure and pattern, i.e., tune and rhythm, of *ragini* performance was that it was the most liked one. Brahman performers like Pandit Lakhmi Chand even incorporated Vedic themes in his *swangs* and dress code was also prescribed for Saangis in accordance with the Arya Samaj ideology.

Notions of Ideal Womanhood

Construction of Jat identity during this period also presents clear evidence of how the assertion of masculinized male identity was accompanied by a demeaning perception in the community towards its women. The ideals of Arya Samaj further changed their (Jats) notions of female sexuality, which proclaimed ‘woman body as lustful, full of foul secretions and excretions’ (Bharadwaja, 1882, p. 237). For example, in an *Arya Samaji bhajans* mentioned below, a woman (female body) is depicted as that of a seductress who is always inclined towards and has a lust for physical intimacy much more than a man. It is a strong belief that women have the power to seduce men by their charm which calls for strict control over the female body and this further reinforces male dominance in every sphere of life as reflected in these couplets of *ragini*:

*“Mere jovan ke ke aag lagave,
Mere uthe chis ishq ki jane ,
Nigore ikhre tane ghani satai re ”⁴¹*

Increasing the heat of my youth, this thorn of love is pricking again and again, Oh cane, you have troubled me a lot (Deswal, 2010).

Thus stress was laid upon controlling women’s sexuality through marriage and the need to channelize the libidinal character of woman’s reproductive body into motherhood (Datta, 1999, p.72). Jats blindly saw ‘Arya Samajist model of womanhood’ as a mirror to their own culture and strongly emphasized on the segregation of women from the public sphere and public roles. They appreciated the

“spiritual aspects of the wife and her power within the domestic household, combined the theme of motherhood with the perpetuation of the Arya race, and lent weight and wider acceptability to the notion of a new woman with her place in the domestic household” (ibid).

Thus Arya Samaj facilitated Jats to assert a new male identity by protecting, reforming and laying down rules for their women (ibid., p.73). Jat women, despite being oppressed equally participated in proclaiming Kshatriya lineage as is visible in the *geet* of Karia (as cited by Datta) on a rural Jat woman from Rohtak, who had sent her teenage son to join the army. The Karia says:

⁴¹ Excerpt of a *ragini* composed by Pandit Lakhmi Chand in the Swang titles ‘*Hoor-Maneka*’.

O sons of the Jat quam wake up, this is your karma (duty)

The duty of the Jat youth is to bring honour to the

name of their fathers and grandfathers,

You are the warriors who were wounded in the

battle of Kurukshetra while protecting your elders.

You did not worry about your well-being because

You believed in the immortality of the soul.

So, therefore, O brave children of the quam, if

You have drunk your mother's milk or the milk of the

Holy cow then you must kill Germans with the sword.

You will then bring honour and fame to your community.⁴²

Ironically, the proponents of widow re-marriage and critiques of child marriage, Arya Samajists provided 'strictures against female promiscuity' (Datta, 1999). They issued sets of moral codes and social norms, for men and women both, about education, private and public morality, the practice of *karewa* was not to be practiced outside the Jat community and also for protecting ideals of womanhood. 'Ideal and true womanhood', according to Samajist, must be kept separate and protected from the dangerous sexuality of the *randi*⁴³ and the 'evil eye' of the *nichli jati* (inferior communities).

Thus, Jat women were asked to stay away from bazaars or landowners' houses, cultivate 'refined emotions' and avoid wailing as it was seen as an act of sensuality. Women were

⁴²Jat Gazette, 8th October 1918.

⁴³Prostitute.

confined to the four walls of the private space and the ones who tried to deviate from the given moral conduct even slightly were looked down upon. Codes for dressing were given to women which included wearing of long-sleeved shirt without showing their midriff. Women were asked not to play the *baja* (musical instrument), sing at weddings or dance. Thus women's *khordiya*⁴⁴ (*geet*) singing was also discouraged as it was seen as symbolic of lower caste rituals.

On the one hand singing for women even within the domestic sphere was prohibited and on the other the Jats were encouraged to be part of this *bhajan updesh* which perpetuated the oppressive ideology for women. The *bhajniks* including Jat *bhajniks* also composed songs in Hindi, around 1913, one of which became the symbol of Jat identity and was sung as an anthem in the arya *pathshalas* and *gurukuls*. All these practices inculcated a communal feeling and were supplemented with construction of masculinity via physical exercises like yoga, wrestling and tug-of-war, etc. which would imbibe in them the virtues of manliness important for Jat self-assertion. The *Arya Samaji babas and gurus*, who at one juncture proposed for women's education at a superficial level, justified seclusion of women from the public sphere and for promoting Hindu orthodoxism and sexism, argued that 'the entry of women could lead to a decrease in male virility through the loss of semen' (Bharadwaj, 1918, p.289).

With public scrutiny and definitions of women's domestic virtues, Jats tried to valorize male moral authority and claimed a higher social status within Hindu society. Interestingly during the twentieth century in Haryana, Brahmins directed their women to stay away from

⁴⁴Geet sung by women in houses during wedding ceremonies after the departure of *baraat*.

singing and dancing to maintain their superior social status. However, regional variations could be found in south India, as Subramanian shares that

“while prejudice against the adoption of the musical profession was marked in north India, the situation was different in the south where the higher branches of the profession were actually appropriated by Brahmins (*Bhagavatars*) or men of high caste” (Subramanian, 1999, p.144).

Similarly, the *Bhadralok* Brahmins of Bengal, on the other hand considered training in classical music, *Rabindra Sangeet*, as a quality for girls or would be-daughter-in-law. *Rabindra Sangeet* became an important medium of identity construction and was considered a virtue in the *Bhadralok* middle-class women.

So, Brahmins encouraged the “middle-class housewives to play an active role in learning music to prevent their husbands from going to the brothels and the prostitutes. This movement not only changed the status of the musicians, especially that of the female but also changed the institutions of family and notions of public. It helped the women to break down the wall of their private spaces but at the same time stigma attached to the public performances immolate the image of the women musicians even if they were not the mistresses” (Tokas, 2009, p. 39; Bakhle, 2005, p.63).

Thus “the Brahmins were involved in singing, instrumental music, composing, and the construction of Carnatic musicology. The Brahmins, along with the royalty, used their positions of influence in temples and otherwise, to patronise and become the blessers of the form”.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Revisiting Caste Through Karnatic Music, *Indian Cultural Forum*, 05 Dec 2017

However, the influence of Arya Samaj in Haryana (late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century) led to modifications in many customs and traditions as per the teachings of Dayanand Saraswati. He saw the ‘syncretic *saang* tradition of Haryana as vulgar’ and the artists, i.e., *saangis* had to cope and adjust with the codes of Arya Samaj. *Dharu ka angia* (bodice) was replaced by long-sleeved *kurta* (shirt), and the *lehnga* (a voluminous skirt) gave way to *salwar*.(Shastri, 1984, p.23-24). This is also illustrated through the writings of many eminent *Saangis* and *ragini* singers like Lakhmi Chand popular for love songs later incorporating Vedic themes in their *saangs* and *ragini* (Sharma, 1981, p. 55). Thus even *saang* tradition, its tonality, lyrics and modulations had to go along the conventions and demands of *Arya Samaj*. This is the first transformation in *ragini*. The next stage in its transformation in contemporary times, will be dealt with in the next chapter.

The wave of Arya Samaj was so influential that the popular *cults* and *pirs* like ‘*gugga pir*’⁴⁶ lost their popular recognition soon after the intervention of Arya Samaj philosophy. Moreover, the *Allah in the chaupals* was replaced by *Vedic dharmic prachars*. In many villages, a weeklong *Vedic dharmic prachars* by *bhajniks* are organized around the time of Diwali festival. However, the style of singing is similar to that of *ragini* singing.⁴⁷ ‘Arya Samaji bhajniks’ also played a crucial role in the construction of Jat identity.

The *bhajniks* visited village schools, they sang *bhajans* and preached at Jat panchayats and *jalsas*. They performed the dual role of agents of cultural change and as well as of continuity (Datta 1999:67). Thus historically, music has played a crucial role in the

<https://www.newsclick.in/revisiting-caste-through-karnatic-music>

⁴⁶*Gugga Phir* is worshipped as a deity in the folklore in Northern States of India.

⁴⁷A Vedic dharma prachars was attended as part of the field work.

construction of Jat identity and vis-a vis this social change certainly had an implication on musical genres in Haryana. The image of women amongst Jats is implicit in the popular *lores* of the region. On one hand, Jats idealized woman as having a defiant character and on the other hand, her aggressive nature was considered as part of her potent sexuality. The *bhajniks* often reflected such ‘ideological beliefs about women’ in their composed bhajans such as in *Pakhand Khandani*:

*“You will not wash your soiled clothes; you will cry for two hours
You should torture your mother-in-law and sister-in-law, you should snub your husband
You should irritate your father-in-law and brother-in-law and should
show a rod to your younger brother-in-law
You should always disturb your neighbours and give dirty looks to Outsiders
Never talk to neighbour gently, and always return home late at night
Basti Ram, if you abstain from all this you will be rewarded”* (Sharma, 1989, p. 42).

The column reflected on the question of matrimony for women, it says:

*Getting married does not mean that you remain in the house wearing good clothes.
Treat your mother-in-law as your mother
And treat your father-in-law as your father
Treat your husband’s relatives with deference
Don’t be stubborn
Seek forgiveness for your in-laws, if you commit any mistake
Give comfort to your mother-in-law.⁴⁸*

⁴⁸Jat Gazette, 30 April 1918.

Another *Pakhand Khandani* -3 bhajan (an excerpt, Appendix I, Song 6)⁴⁹ by Ramniwas, says:

I listen to the stories of Veda

I am Daughter of Arya family and read 'The Light of Truth'

My brother studies in Gurukul,

My sister has passed her Vedic education,

I am a daughter of Arya family.

One can easily find many similar bhajans which encouraged women to follow Arya values and prohibited saang or cinema, which were considered to be a potential cause of their potent sexuality.

Similarly, another Arya Samajist named Nischal Das⁵⁰ emphasized on female malevolence in his celebrated work *Vichar Sagar* (Datta, 1999, p. 40).

He “expressed his views through Bharchu because he thought that the mere mention of a woman from his lips would contaminate his mind. According to Bharchu, women were *dharasht mada* (lustful), *kapat kut* (false and insincere), selfish with a stony heart, and a *mithi churi* (sweetened dagger). They came in the way of reading the Vedas and undermined *dharma or righteousness*” (as cited in Datta, p.40).

⁴⁹ Appendix I, Song 6, Free translation from Haryanvi dialect.

⁵⁰ Was a prominent representative of Dadupanthi sect (Jats from Hisar District in Haryana) and was highly influential during mid-nineteenth century.

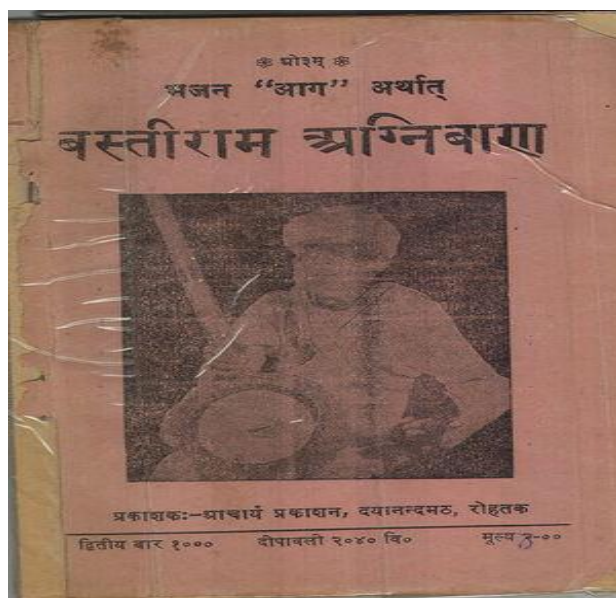


Image 5: A booklet of Dada Basti Ram bhajans, **Source:** From the researcher’s fieldwork.

Similarly, another arya samajist who was considered as an agent of social change in Haryana in the early twentieth century, Pandit Basti Ram was fondly called Dada Basti Ram (Image 5), *bhajnopedak* became an eminent *pracharak* and was widely applauded for his bhajans and other works like Pakhand Khandani, reinforcing arya values Jats were aspiring for.⁵¹

Thus Jats adopted Arya Samaj ideology to ascertain a higher social status for themselves. Accordingly, they followed the moral codes of conduct and behaviour prescribed by Arya Samaj, which they believed will associate them with a Kshatriyas lineage. Local newspapers during the twentieth century, like *Jat Gazette*, *Punjab Notes* and *Queries*, *Chattri*, *Haryana Tilak*, etc., became the concrete spaces of dialogue and protest for asserting newly found Jat identity. These newspapers thereby became instrumental in disseminating the Arya Jat ideologies throughout the state and constructed a *Quami*

⁵¹ Opposition was also shown against prostitutes dancing in marriage celebrations as well as other related singing practices (Mittal, 1986, p.67).

narrative (as discussed in the previous section) of the Jat communities across the state. So, the same got transmitted on the stages of folk performances in Haryana and thereby the platform of social change became gendered sites for disseminating ‘cultural ideologies/practices’.⁵²

This elaborates upon gendered segregation of musical genres entangling the lives of men and women by conventional patterns of society. It further reinforces the structure of discrimination and inequality in private as well as a public sphere. Thereby women were expected to be passive recipients of the oppressive practices of patriarchy, which had an agenda of producing and preserving imagery of ideal womanhood. Making women subservient by values of Arya Samaj, formed one of the crucial aspects that were essential for Jats if they were to gain a higher status in the *Varna hierarchy*.

Thus the colonial reign along with the Arya Samaj movement in Haryana in the twentieth Century instigated social processes that not only enabled the construction of a community-based identity, especially that of Jat Arya identity but also streamlined the spheres along gender lines. The same got translated in public and private spheres and intensified the existing binaries of spaces such as ragini as masculine and geet as feminine. Eventually, it redefined the social sphere and daily life of the region. As especially, for the Jat community, singing as a profession (and performers for that matter) came to be categorized as a polluting occupation and was thus considered as a hindrance in their social upliftment.

⁵²As we know, folk genres act as vehicle of cultural norms and traditions including ritual ceremonies, folklores such as folk opera-swang, stories, lores, *ragini*, geet, shabd, religious bhajans & Arya Samaji Bhajans etc.

So it was believed to be performed by lower caste than upper caste. The next section gives a historical overview of the prevailing gender-caste nexus which had intense implications on *ragini* and its performers in the region before we move into the gendering of genre and construction of gendered identities in the next chapter.

VI. Gender, Caste and Performers in Haryana: Historical Overview

To comprehend the dynamics of gender, caste and music, it is essential to locate it in historical context. Ever since the early twentieth century, the ‘sites of performances’, especially concerning folk theatre, *swang* and musical genre like *ragini* have been an ‘arena for the negotiation of upper-caste cultural dominance’ in Haryana. Thus having a history of more than 350 years (Kumar, 2010, p. 15)⁵³, this genre was considered as a favourite source of entertainment of the dominating caste, i.e., Jat men in Haryana.⁵⁴ Their dominance can be seen in the form of audience, as patrons, as controllers of the contents and lately is growing as singers as well, though mostly men. However, performed generally by the lower caste men of the region. Jat women, on the other hand, remain marginalized, in every way, as discussed in detail in coming sections. Perhaps, it would be right to claim ‘gender as caste’ because women remain at margins and thereby come to represent one caste.

Though mostly performed by the lower caste or weaker sections like *Chamar*, *Dalits*, *Balmiki* and also by *Brahmins*. However, as discussed elsewhere, Brahmins are considered as lower caste because even if an upper caste performs, they are compared with *doom*. As Prem Chowdhry (1989) rightly argues in her work ‘The Veiled Women’ in rural Haryana,

⁵³ As origination of *swang* is not known, scholars believe *swang* was also performed around 1685.

⁵⁴ Also shared by most of the respondents.

even if Brahmin consider themselves as ‘sacerdotally superior’ still they are considered as ‘the lowest of the low’ in social terms as the Jat landlords dominate the region (1989, p.304).

Simon Charsley (2006) recounts similar normative order, in her book on ‘Performers and their Arts’ in South India, where the Brahmins who are hereditary performers, i.e. *Kuchipudi* Brahmins among Telugu society are considered as lower caste than others. In a caste governed society like India, every work is assigned by caste norms. Therefore ‘performance as an art form’ and learning it has been linked to Brahmins though actual performance is assigned to those placed low in the hierarchy of caste (Charsley & Kadekar, 2006, p.14). So, if Brahmins perform, they are also seen in a similar light as members of the lower caste. The hereditary performers, in twentieth century, Charsley argues, were included in the category of untouchables and were officially named as Scheduled Caste, nowadays described as ‘Dalits’ (ibid). Juxtaposing the context of *Sarpam tullal*, a ‘ritualistic performance among the Pullavas’ of Kerala, Vayla Vasudevan Pillai advocates that, ‘low-caste performers played a significant role in the total structuring of Indian society and arts’ (ibid., p.30) despite the cultural conflict with the upper caste.

Similarly, in Haryana Jats acted as chief patrons and encouraged Brahmin performers more than other castes like Valmiki, Dalits, etc. However, it is crucial here to look at the caste-class nexus which placed Brahmins in a lower position than the Jats who have been claiming their *Kshatriya* identity, since colonial times and also with the influence of Arya Samaj. Interestingly when Brahmins performed for Jats, it placed them higher in the hierarchy of performers and artists in Haryana though the Jats have always seen performers as *dooms* (untouchable). Conventional beliefs in Haryana categorized singing and dancing

as derogatory occupation as is evident from the mistreatment of lower caste *ragini* singers (Chahal & Mithana, 2010).⁵⁵

Though folk genres are primarily seen as village cultural practices maintained by lower castes as a means to celebrate festivals, practice religion, and also protest against the oppressive conditions of untouchability, poverty, gender discrimination etc. (Appavoo, 1986; Green, 2000). The signs of resistance are relatively less visible in public performances as dominant caste is the chief patron of these shows. Resistance can be seen in small community gatherings of Dalits within their *mohallas* as they are reprimanded in public if they sing in a rebellious tone. Sh. Guram Singh⁵⁶, a renowned saangi and ragini singer, remarked that:

*'agar kuch apni baat kehde tho jaise Jat tok dein hai kei chup rehei chumar
kei, thik sei gaalei'*

(If one talks of unjust treatment or caste inequality, Jats interrupt and tell them to shut up. Hey you Dalit, sing correctly!).

*Har kein ghar sein ek aavein, yaadein jaat baantein jaan sein
Desa ki badmaas uuth batan, maanas ka kei bunda ho sein,
badei badei chalei gayein yahan sei, thari kya aukat rei⁵⁷*

*Everyone comes from God's house, here caste is being distributed
Crook of the country, tell, what is bad of human being?*

⁵⁵ It has been recorded in several biographies of *swangis* and *ragini* singers.

⁵⁶ Pseudonym have been used for concealing the privacy of the singers/respondents.

⁵⁷ Kajal, Ajmer as cited Badhgujar, 2011, p. 33

*Even the most influential of the province left the world, then what is your
status*

Even, historically the biographies of *ragini* singers, especially from the so-called lower castes, have recorded their struggle against the stratified ladder of caste. Amongst a few exceptions was Fauji Mehar Singh, who belonging to Jat community, entered the genre around 1930s but left it later because of the pressure from family and community (ibid). Caste-based occupation can be well grasped with Dumont's hierarchy of 'purity and pollution'. Fauji Mehar Singh reflected through his composed *ragini* that singing is not the occupation of Jats, rather *Dooms* (untouchables) are meant for it. He narrates that because of his singing, his family and community felt their image had been maligned and thus his father forced him to join the army so that he would leave singing *ragini*. He narrates in his one of the *ragini*:

Jats tell my father that I have become a doom,
Country, city, home, village are left behind, what type of song did one sing,
I went around looking throughout the world,
Did not find anyone who could heal my wounds,
My singing has destroyed everything,

Mehar Singh is born in a Jat home, singing cannot be his work (Chandra, 2012, p.13).⁵⁸

(On being forced to join the army, Mehar Singh says that with singing, everything got left behind. He is a Jat and people call him a 'doom' which influenced his father).

⁵⁸ Appendix 1, Song 7, Free translation from Haryanvi dialect.

Thus, in Haryana, caste determines the occupation of an individual and even slight deviation calls forth social stigma and singing is looked down upon as an occupation of 'doom' (untouchables), *Mirasi* and that of other lower castes. They are called '*bhaands*.' To name a few, eminent *saangis* and *ragini* singers like Baje Bhagat, Mange Ram, Dayachand Mayna, Dhanpat Singh Nidana, etc. were all from the lower castes. While Pt. Lakhmi Chand and Pt. Mange Ram were eminent *Saang* performers from Brahmin caste, they were thus looked down upon by the dominant caste, primarily due to their association with the singing profession. This concern is reflected in their compositions as well. To cite, the *ragini* below questions this societal perception and also addresses the question of the performer's identity, He wrote in one of his *ragini* (Appendix I, Song 8):

Lakhmi Chand earned a name for himself with dancing,

Who am I after all? When such extra ordinary ones also danced.⁵⁹

In this *ragini*, Pandit Lakhmi Chand questions the embedded conventional beliefs which stigmatize singing and dancing profession as a degrading act in Haryanvi society⁶⁰ both for women and men. Women singers experience it more due to the close association of singing with 'now-disrespectable courtesan tradition' (Zadeh, 2015, p. 349). However, as witnessed above, even the Jat men performers face the brunt of choosing music as a profession. It would be intriguing to further interrogate the categorization of the musical genres along with stereotypical gender roles in the normative social order (especially after the influence of Arya Samaj) which portray public performers as not having much dignity.

⁵⁹ Appendix I, Song 8, Free translation from Haryanvi dialect.

⁶⁰ As reflected in compositions of eminent saangis like Jat Mehar Singh and Pandit Lakhmi Chand.

Chapter Two

Gendering Genres: Spatial Encounters

Raginis for men and Geet for women

The present chapter begins with a conceptual understanding of the relationship between gender, genre and space and further explains the categorization of the musical genres along conventional gender lines, i.e., raginis for men and geet for women in Haryanvi society. The two genres of 'ragini' and 'geet' have been analyzed from a prism of gender through an investigation of stereotypes and content analysis. This helps in understanding the construction of gender identity in accordance with the prevalent ideologies of society as interwoven in these genres with the categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine'.

However, a running thread, throughout the chapter, is about unfolding whose identity is being constructed here while reflecting upon the missing consciousness of identity amongst women. The aim of analyzing these genres is not just to propose that gender discrimination exists in rural society and concluding the analysis there itself. The work stresses upon understanding how beneath these structures, the consciousness which has evolved over decades participates in the construction of a conventional feminine identity and thereby in sustaining the structure. However, almost simultaneously, the voices of resistance also emerge from within these very spaces.

Introduction

The established new social order during twentieth century Haryana under the influence of Arya Samaj instigated social processes that not only lead to the construction of Jat identity but also re-defined gendered spaces (the social sphere of women in particular).

We also explained how Arya Samaj movement in the name of social reform propagated control over women's sexuality by cleansing and sanitizing their social spaces and by discouraging singing and dancing both for men and women alike. Thus women were encouraged to imbibe traits matching with the notion of ideal womanhood as per the spiritual values of 'Arya Dharma' and were categorically discouraged from singing in any other form than those of *bhajans* and *geet*. Any other genre giving bodily vocal expression to their sexuality was perceived as a threat to the structure. Thus intensifying the boundaries of private-public spaces, the prevailing gender ideology led to an active segregation of musical genres along gender lines thereby reinforcing masculine and feminine identities. In the process, musical genres become social entities embodying gendered spaces. Space facilitates the performance of gender and also the manifestation of the accordingly aligned identities.

I. Gender and Genre

Gender as an analytical category takes a central position in the present study and the same has become increasingly central to social science research. Gender could be understood as the 'means or systems by which cultures and social groups create, display, transmit and enforce biological and sexual differences' (Koskoff, 2014). Gender is a socio-cultural and historical phenomenon which is constructed by various epochs of society and culture. V. Geetha, in her book 'Gender', explains that:

“Gender is an aspect of our everyday life, as well as a social, economic and cultural category that subsumes and re-writes the meaning of human sex, the fact of being masculine and feminine” (Geetha, 2002, p. 136).

Gender theory thereby explicates the role culture plays in making sense of what it means to be male and female. Thus gender as a social construct becomes an organizing principle in society and has implications for every aspect of life, including musical genres. Accordingly, the roles and duties of men and women are aligned along the spatial boundaries of public and private spaces/spheres. Further, the same is mediated through numerous cultural elements like folk music or folk genres. As Jennifer Live points out that “if gender is an aspect of culture rather than a biological fact, we can begin to see that folklore might play important roles in its expression and reinforcement” (Livesay, 1990, p.15).

Roma Chatterji defines genres as “self-conscious institutions mediating between individual intention and collective tradition” (Mishra, 2013, p. 6). Subsequently, as a social category, the musical genre is embedded in the social reality of a given group or community. Folk songs represent the collective consciousness of society in the Durkheimian sense. Bauman (2004), Flueckiger (1996) and Narayan (1995) see ‘genres as practices, as active cultural categories then static classificatory form’ (Eleonor, 2009, p. 23). Appadurai (1991) considers the folk genre as essential for gaining an understanding of the ‘local way of classifying expressions’. Valk (2003) elaborates that “a genre is a form of artistic expression and verbalization of a special worldview or a modality of verbal thinking” (Valk, 2003, p.140). As Smitha Jassal (2012) opines that:

“songs, as existing cultural codes of approved behaviour and norms, provide another window into women’s shared insights. These codes appear to equip women to manoeuvre and negotiate conditions that are often inherently disempowering. If the act of singing imparts

psychological strength to individual women and women's collectivities, then the underlying messages these songs transmit should offer us a range of clues about how the feminine gender is constructed" (ibid., 8). The same remains true for genres seen as masculine as well."

Eleonor Marcussen (2009) categorizes 'gender as a genre from within' and shares that 'genre is a process rather than a static category and similarly gender is also redefined continuously depending on the context' (ibid., p.25). Thus songs help us in understanding the daily negotiation within the private spaces. Similarly, women's oral tradition can be understood as an expression of their gendered positions (ibid., p.26-27). The boundaries of gender and genre are being constantly redefined as well as negotiated in practice. For example, *Khayal*¹ is considered as feminine and Dhrupad as a masculine genre.

Thus in Haryana, going by a similar analogy, women's songs are *geet* that are linked to domestic chores and life cycle rites and *raginis* as genealogical narratives of bravery are seen as appropriate for men. However, one should also keep in mind that the 'choice of a genre' or say a 'mode of expression' or emotions is embedded in the structural practices of a community or society at large (Narayan, 1986; Channa & Mishra, p. 6).

It is evident from the discussion above that gender and genre do not interact in a hollow sphere but do so within a social space. As Bourdieu's concept of habitus stresses upon 'spatial classification as fundamental to one's social and cognitive map' which in turn determines cultural patterns of dealing with everyday life and situations. So both space and gender participate in producing the structural binaries of feminine/masculine

¹ Musical genre

identities through musical genres as well. Further, before one delves into the specificities of spatially gendered Haryanvi musical genres, it becomes critical at this juncture to engage with the notion of space itself.

II. Situating Space in a Context

The term space (physical) is usually thought of as a tangible/constant (Cartesian notion), empty void or place which simultaneously gives meaning to the material objects located in its realm. In turn, the material objects are also being defined by the spaces they occupy (Niranjana, 2001). Rejecting the notion of space as a “pre-existing void, endowed with formal properties alone”, Lefebvre (1991), a social theorist categorizes ‘social space as a social product produced through human actions and intervention’ and refutes its absoluteness, i.e., seen as a receptacle to be filled with matter/bodies. Thus he says that endowed with a reality of its own, space attains an autonomous power, though socially produced and controlled. It “serves as a tool of thought and action...in addition to being a means of production, it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power...” (ibid., 26).

Lefebvre further suggested a triadic division of space: perceived space,² conceived³ one and the lived⁴ space corresponding to three dialectically interconnected dimensions instrumental in producing social space, i.e. ‘spatial practice, representation of spaces and representational spaces (ibid., 33).’ Thus while one contemplates upon the notion of space in the present context, one must do it keeping in mind that space is embodied as per

² Physical aspect of space

³ Mental aspect of space

⁴ Social aspect of space

cultural normativity and in turn body is also reproduced /re-shaped by space in the process.

Thus space is a social construct constituted through social relations and social practices and “gender and other social relations are constructed and negotiated spatially and are embedded in the spatial organization of places” (Niranjana, 2001, p. 37). Citing Ardener (1981), Niranjana further says that “societies generate their own culturally-determined rules for drawing boundaries in the real world, divisions that structure the given modes of perceptions and social interaction” (ibid). Thus such ground rules lead to the delineation of spaces into the political arenas or ritual spaces as public and private spaces within society (Niranjana, 2001; Ardener, 1981).

Niranjana defines space as that which is open and evokes an association with emptiness, as a void in itself which derives meaning only in relation to oppositional constituting entities and a ‘similar disposition embodies gender’ (Niranjana, 2001, p.15). Thus, gender acquires meaning when seen as a “quality or identity deriving its significance from a delineation against its opposite...” (ibid) i.e., female is to be non-male, ‘placing one arm of oppositional against other’ (ibid). Thus it leads to the formation of binary opposites, Niranjana mentions, Levi Strauss’ binary categories such as public/ private, culture/ nature, mind/ body, reason/ emotion, male/ female, temporality/ spatiality, where the former axis is being considered as superior and subordinating the other/latter. However, such a kind of understanding also suggests that gender acquires a new meaning as soon as it comes in contact with space, though it may vary in intensity depending on the context. Thus while Niranjana defines space and gender both as an oppositional and relational

category, Chatterji (2005) and Marcussen (2009) categorize folk, gender and genre as relational.

Niranjana further opines that both space and femininity/ womanhood are ‘devalued part of oppositional axis and are relegated to the domain of natural attributes, unlike, masculinity that is perceived as a cultural achievement’ (Niranjana, 2001, p.16). Thus in this wake, she argues that ‘body inhabits a space which becomes a medium through which female/femininity’ is constituted and the ‘socio-spatial parameter of this sexuality’, i.e. daily lived experience of women’s lives’ reflects upon the notion of *bhitr*⁵/*baahr*⁶, in context of Haryana. The spatial axis, in turn, orients the bodily practices and designates the acts as moral/ immoral or proper/improper, etc. (ibid).

Thus emphasizing on the ‘socio-spatial matrix’, i.e., ‘real’ material space, within geographical and social reality, Niranjana’s work lays stress on ‘cultural ideas of space that feed off and into the bodily practices of women’ (ibid., p.38-39). Edward Soja’s work on ‘Post-Modern Geographies’ (1989) provides a deeper understanding of the same:

“The generative sources for a materialist interpretation of spatiality is the recognition that spatiality is socially produced and, like society itself, exists in both substantial forms (concrete specialties) and as a set of relations between individuals and groups, an ‘embodiment’ and medium of social life itself” (Soja, 1989, p.120).⁷

⁵Inside

⁶Outside

⁷ Cited from Niranjana, 2001.

In the context of delineation of space and gender asymmetry, Partha Chatterjee (1989) argues that nationalist discourse ascribed the social and moral boundaries for/of women as per their understanding of ‘feminine’ (as an embodiment of the ‘spiritual values’) which further dichotomized material culture and spiritual culture. The former was seen as the locale of colonial domination, whereas as the latter as outside the colonial intervention (p. 242-43).

This undoubtedly led to the political demarcation between inner/outer home/world, spiritual/material, female/male and further facilitated the stereotypes related to ‘feminine virtues’ (ibid., p.247) of ‘ideal womanhood’ and relegated the onus of ‘spiritual trusteeship on the inner, i.e., female realm’ (Niranjana, 2001, p.40). Thus with the help of religious and spiritual activities, i.e., as part of festivals or celebrations, women become emblems of tradition, which help in reproducing the hierarchy and inequality. As Lalita Du Perron (2002) contends that ‘gendering of a genre reflects the societal pre-conceptions and prejudices of what constitutes masculinity and femininity, incorporating a hierarchical perspective’ (p.172).

III. Amidst the Tussles of Bhitr (Ghar)⁸/Baahr: Spatial Encounters in Haryanvi Society

The social organization of Haryanvi village communities reflects that gender is closely entwined with the notion of space. Mapping its social space brings forth the fundamental opposition between the domestic and public spaces. Informed by bodily practices, social space thereby becomes instrumental in the construction of gender role and identities

⁸House

(Ardner, 1981). Rosan Jordon (1986) comments that “women in a culture operate in a different sphere from that of men in terms of their everyday lives and in terms of the folkloric performance aspects of those lives” (p.509). Thus there exist sex-specific genres which may be considered as appropriate for members of only one sex to perform in many situations. Women’s genres, he further says, are expected to be less public, less dramatic and less obvious in contrast to that of men (ibid).

However, Channa and Mishra (2013) assert that as men and women have different ‘emotions and expressions’, which are embedded in the gendered structures of life world, they may choose different genres or themes to express (ibid., p. 7).

Talking of women’s songs, Susan Kalcik (1985) contends that women’s folklore flourishes within the ‘private domain’ and male-oriented genres grow in public. However, Kim Knott (2000) states ‘that diasporic Asian women have always played key roles in the community and domestic religious life but she emphasizes that this is usually in roles that are hidden from public view’ (Knott, 2000). Thus women in Haryana are usually confined to their affinal households (*ghar⁹ aur gher*) and strictly adhere to the social norm of segregation, i.e., separation of social and physical domains of men and women.

Spatiality is visible as an inherent aspect in the structuration of the villages. The lives of people in village clusters are strongly governed by spatial narratives (Niranjana, 2001). Lefebvre’s triadic notion of space comes alive in Haryana as one witnesses’ women’s bodies oscillating between perceived, conceived and lived spaces. While elaborating

⁹Home

upon this, one needs to mention that women use their body while performing their daily routine, i.e., actions and social activities. Thus the body (physical aspect) acts as space amidst these social roles/activities which act as the realm of the perceived.

Further, while carrying out these social practices, the body gets represented and influenced/shaped by the prevailing ideologies, social context and the relationships produced in the sphere. This represents conceived bodies. Lived space symbolizes the lived/bodily experiences dominated by the prevailing cultural norms/morality and traditions at large.

To illustrate further, the presence of men freely socializing in the public realm of villages and rural areas in Haryana is a known social fact. Women, on the other hand, remain largely marginalized from these spaces or are apprehensive in accessing the masculine spaces. Thus the social practice of masculine domination of the public space results in women being restricted to private spaces (*bhitr*). This represents a collectively accepted norm/conceived belief. Presence/ participation of women in public spheres like agricultural lands or fields is also considered as an extension of *ghar* (domestic sphere) with approval of men/community at large. The lived spaces, whereas completely refute an official representation of public space for women.

Thus women's body "is situated within the interplay of this triad of perceived (seen), conceived (thought), and lived (carried out). Therefore, as explained earlier, through this triad of perceived, conceived and lived, female bodies represent the socio-cultural space as seen in myths and reiterated through folk..." genres (Saroha, 2016, p.40).

Further, Philip E. Wegner (2002) defines the production of social space as “the space of the embodied individual’s cultural experiences and the signs, images, forms and symbols that constitute it . . .” (Wegner, 2002, p.182).

Employing the notion of power to see space as the site of control and praxis of power, Michael Foucault (1995) in one of his popular works ‘Discipline and Punish’, defines space as embodiments of power relations. He contextualizes ‘body’ in a spatially organized society and argues that control over the body is exerted through the surveillance as well as the mechanism of discipline. Discipline is established and reinforced by the organization of space, body, norms, values and behaviour of individuals which thereby gets socially codified.

Indeed, it is very rare to see a woman in villages after it gets dark as it symbolizes an unsafe time. Attribution of norms as per sex of an individual without any coercion brings in Gramsci’s idea of hegemony. He opines that hegemony is exercised over ideas, institutions and society as a whole. In Haryana, one can see that the ruling class (men) maintains hegemony over subordinate class (women) through an aura of morality, ideology & structure (patriarchy), knowledge, discourse, cultural symbols, spatial practices (binaries of private and public spaces), customs, rituals, folk music, etc.

To exemplify this in context of Haryana, men and women both have inherited and internalized normative order and values that an ideal woman wears a veil and abstains from public spaces or in evenings/dark. As Prem Chowdhry’s rightly advocates that the village streets and public spaces are all dominated by men while women are seen selectively negotiating these spheres (Chowdhry, 2014).

However, one also cannot negate the fact that ‘women’s response to the demarcated spaces may considerably differ across caste-class’ (Niranjana, 2001, p. 91). It is within these very structures of spaces that Seemanthini Niranjana locates the agency of women (ibid). Therefore, women can be largely seen as negotiating in the public realm which constitutes their lived experiences/spaces of interaction.

As Prem Chowdhry writes in the context of Haryana that

“Despite a strong patriarchal/ patrilineal system in Haryana where women hardly enjoy any worthwhile status, they, like other subordinate/subaltern groups, have only seemingly acquiesced to their being dominated in public. In private, they have shown enough resistance in their own subtle and not so subtle ways, and have not consented to the wielding of patriarchal authority” (Chowdhry, 2012, p.55).

Often when one crosses the agricultural spaces and fields in Haryana these days, one witnesses’ visibility of more women (though specifically either in mornings or afternoon till 5 pm) than men. Women could be seen working in the fields and streets, however, for a change one also witnesses women riding bullock carts to their fields.

Thus this little freedom which women get to transgress space boundaries while working in the fields and the very act of riding a cart becomes empowering and agentic for them. It also symbolizes a certain level of negotiation between partners in carrying out household chores. Simultaneously, gender relations get redefined in whatever little ways though.



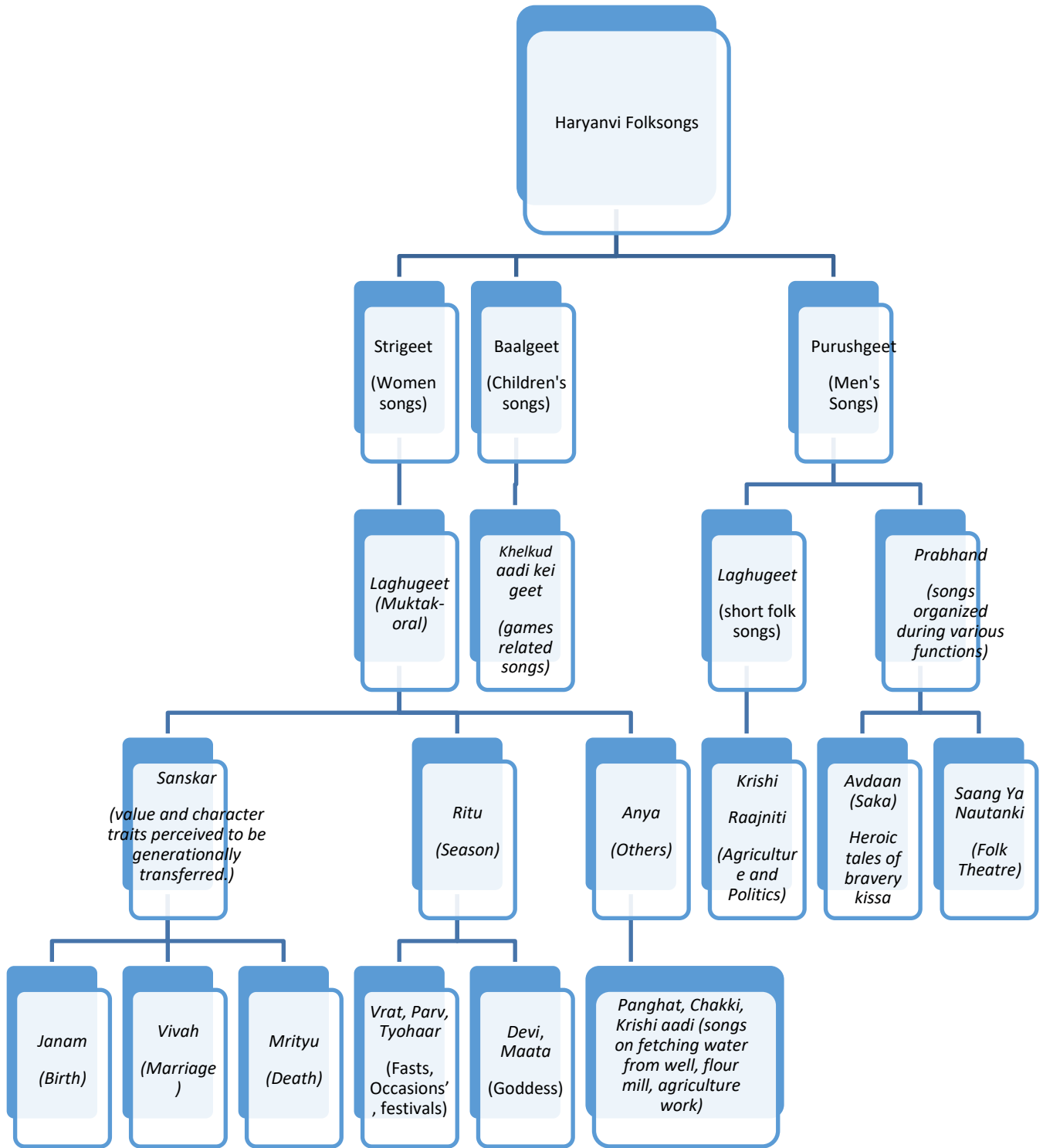
Image 1: Women coming back from fields **Source:** From the researcher's fieldwork, Kasanda Village in Haryana.

Proceeding sections try to explore two Haryanvi musical genres *ragini* and women's *geet* which are spatially organized between public and private realm and symbolically represent masculine and feminine, respectively. These genres also participate in producing and sustaining the dominant ideology of patriarchy/ structure and gender relations and associated identities.

IV. Gender and Space: The Public-private Divide in Haryanvi Musical Genres

Jagdish Narayan Bholanath (1989) explains that musical genres in Haryana have been streamlined along with the gender roles and duties in society as evident, which he represents in terms of a graph (as given below in Graph 1). The songs on themes concerning life cycle rites and traditions believed to belong to the domestic sphere like goddess worship, rituals, child-birth, death, seasons, festivals and farming, etc. are all sung by women. Men, on the other hand, have just a couple of themes including politics, farming and Saang-ragini or Nautanki to sing. Space becomes definitive in streamlining not only the forms of entertainment but the claims of presence as well. Thus the folk genres further reinforce the pre-existing stereotypical cultural codes of behaviour, roles and identities as well. The next few paragraphs will help us in understanding this process.

Graph I presents the prevalent social fact that a genre is not gendered by itself but is formulated and reshaped by the assigned spaces of individuals in the context. To illustrate further, the genres relating to farmers/agriculture, politics and *raginis/ swangs* have been classified as masculine genres. It implicates their accepted dominant role in the public realm of community at large be it in agriculture as owners or controllers of property/technology or regarding concerns of farmers (though women's agricultural work goes unrecognized as discussed in detail in the first chapter). The socio-political and economic decision making is believed to be the domain of rationality.



Graph I: Classification of Haryanvi folksongs. **Source:** Jagdish Narayan Bholanath (1989, 67).

The same is true for public performances of *ragini or swangs*. A famous proverb in Haryana symbolizes irrationality as a characteristic of women.

lugai ki buddhi tho chotti/ guddhi mei ho se

(Women's brain is in their braid)

Certainly, the norms of public space in villages are symbolically implied on the supposedly public part of the house as well, called *bhathak* (outer guest room in the house) and primarily seen as a masculine sphere. Juxtaposing Prem Chowdhry's argument here, women are excluded and deprived of "discussing, questioning, partaking or influencing the decision-making process of men in any way" (Chowdhry, 2014, p. 43). This space is also seen as representing a sphere exclusively used by village folk (men especially) for 'discussions of village affairs, politics and economy as well as national politics.' Thus women are not expected to have any political opinion of their own¹⁰ and are indeed considered inept and only capable of managing domestic chores of private space. Thereby this process excludes women's access as well as participation in the domain of knowledge, a highly valued one in public realm (ibid).

One also observes along with this, the collective understanding amongst women regarding their inability to think or decide about the public domain. As many respondents shared that:

"bahar kei baare mei tho admiyon ko jada pata ho. hum nei kei bera...aadmi jada duniya daari jaane sei (men are more aware about

¹⁰ Many respondents shared that their husbands' political affiliation becomes crucial while casting their votes.

public affairs... what do we women know? They have seen the world more).”¹¹

Prem Chowdhry points out that in Haryana, the all-male spaces from home to the public in the villages play an essential role in constructing gendered identities. These spaces denote and legitimize the symbols of power and control over resources, including material and non-material, i.e., socio-political, cultural and ideological (Chowdhry, 2014, p.41). It further reasserts caste-class hierarchies apart from naturalizing women’s relative absence and men’s predominance in decision making in the public-private realm of community and village spheres.

However, one also gets evidence of dissenting voices of women in the historical accounts of Haryana. For example, in the year 1996, Bansi Lal, the former chief minister of Haryana won Haryana Vidhan Sabha elections in the year 1996-97 completely on the basis of “women’s popular demand of imposing prohibition of liquor in the state. Women of Haryana voted almost en bloc in favour of Bansi Lai despite strict instructions and threats of violence made by their male family members” (Chowdhry, 2012, p.56). Thus this suggests that both negotiation as well as resistance have gone hand in hand in Haryana. On one hand assimilation of beliefs are naturalized such as with respect to their spheres, roles, values and duties etc. However, by no means it should be understood as complete obedience or submission as on the other hand there may run, quiet yet determined defiance by women of men’s dictates such as a case cited above regarding their voting rights.

¹¹ Respondent shared in Khanpur Kalan.

James Scott (1986) argues that everyday forms of the resistance can only be understood in the contexts and particular settings in which individuals are located. He further says that it becomes essential to look beneath the conformist public behaviour. He opines that though those who are oppressed may accept their domination in public but they do question their domination in the private realm. Many studies on women's geet would subscribe to this thought as discussed in last section of the chapter (Chowdhry, 2012; Raheja, 2003; Niranjana, 2001; Gupta, 2001).

The next section explores gendering of two genres in context (*ragini* and *geet*) along the spatial lines and explains how in turn these genres participate in reinforcing established gendered identities along with the ascribed spaces. However, one also witnesses that it is from within these very structures and spaces that the voices of resistance emerge as one witnesses in the theme like *khordiya* discussed towards the last part of the chapter.

Masculinizing Public Spaces/Ragini and Skills of Performance:

Apart from being a leisure activity, the public genre *ragini* (in its composition, i.e., lyrics, style, performance and gestures) acts as a medium of social interaction/communication (Jassal, 2012) with a wide range of social groups (varying caste-class) in the form of audience. The performing space is henceforth converted into a continual and rigorous site of reinforcing/re-producing gendered (masculine/feminine identities). This is further associated with the construction and articulation of a strong communal identity as well, especially for men such as a 'Jat masculine identity'¹² as was discussed at length in the previous chapter. Needless to say, both gender and caste identities cannot be dissociated

¹² Ragini like '*Ithihaason mei bana li pehchaan Jaat nei*' narrates the bravery of Jats in the battles fought.

and thereby should be understood in relation to each other. One must understand that ‘the male dominance and upper caste dominance’ has a common lineage historically and structurally as well, i.e. caste and patriarchy (Chakravarti, 2006, p. 37).

While Arya Samaj discourse facilitated a platform for asserting an Aryan identity to Jats through *bhajans*, referring to Jats as a ‘martial *quam*’ (race) helped in re-configuration of a masculine warrior identity and was perhaps one of the crucial reasons behind laying stress on physical strength amongst men in the region. Further, the association with caste not only brings in the question of class but also determines the occupation and leisurely activities a person must ascribe to. Being born in a particular community further reinforces in them a masculine identity such as reflected in the compositions of Fauji Mehar Singh, a renowned ragini singer writes:

Landownership is for Jats; what occupation he has been carrying?

Sit somewhere and recite *Om*, why are you wandering here and there?

Some say you sing well; some say you sing in right notes.

Some ask what does he know? He is just posing as a knowledgeable orator.

Jat Mehar Singh, tell us now, who all will you die fighting with?¹³

The above mentioned *ragini* brings forth the commonly accepted belief amongst the Jat community, i.e. Jats are landlords and they should stick to it instead of doing any demeaning work. The singer above resists and questions the perception of villagers. He explains that how can he fight everyone as it is not a few individuals but the whole society which condemns his singing. Singing even for men is not a rewarding occupation

¹³ Song 1, Free translation from Haryanvi, Appendix II (Chahal & Mathana, 2010, p. 26).

and thus they are also not expected to pursue this field in Haryana as it is considered below the dignity of an honourable man.

So ironically singing (though *geet* in this context) is seen as a feminine activity and not as a masculine source of earning a livelihood. Thereby, deeply entrenched, masculine cultural traits of bravery, audacity, and strength of character hold an authentic value in the region and can be found to be engraved in these musical genres.

Implicit in the *ragini* singing is the ‘gender hierarchy and ideology of male superiority’ as reflected in performance style such as ‘female singers always show their knowledge of the male repertoire and sing in a boisterous manner characteristic of the manly gestures (use of hands) as a sign of mastery (Nino, 2006, p. 459) while performing. Bodily movements and dance steps form an essential part of the performance as it keeps the audience engaged for longer duration said a women singer in Kasandi (Sonepat).

In contrast, men *singers* never show or even attempt to perform in the manners associated with women *ragini* singers such as using the veil, then suddenly removing it, movement of hips and chest, dancing peculiarly. Though these acts are commonly seen as inviting gestures by many in the audience reinforcing the image of women as ‘entertainers for men’ yet these gestures may often become instrumental in giving expression to the sexual agency of women singers while performing. Thus, despite challenging contexts, women singers continuously negotiate for respectability and an identity of artist instead of just being seen as an entertainer with sexual appeal.

While one talks about Haryana, one must keep in mind that the state largely has a rural structure and thus it becomes critical to see the construction of its identity through folk

music in this context. From the anthropologists' standpoint namely 'Campbell's and Bell's (2000) masculine (in the) rural is perceived as the 'ways in which masculinity is socially constructed in different kinds of rural spaces' and 'rural (in the) masculine refers to the manner in which particular characteristics or significations of rurality help to construct ideas of masculinity.' It emphasizes upon understanding 'symbolic, discursive, or ideological constructions, demarcated as some things, some people, and some places as masculine' such as the role of collective 'alcohol consumption' in the construction of masculinity (Campbell & Bell, 2000, p. 539).

In cognizance of this idea, one can easily observe certain places in the villages that are considered as masculine spaces for example *chaupals*, *panchayat ghar*, *bharaat ghar* and even *gaal* (streets /by lanes outside the house in the village). Consumption of alcohol by the audience during ragini performances is quite prevalent as it is seen as a masculine attribute in the region.

Drinking as a Marker of Dominant Masculinity

Consumption of alcohol, during the *ragini* performance, is a prominent feature. It is considered to be 'natural' for the audience, especially men. A respondent during a programme said:

“mard manas tho piyan hi karei yeh bhi koi baat sei.”

(Men are usual drinkers! Is this something to talk about?)

Entertainment i.e. having a good time for men is unquestionably associated with alcohol. However, its arrangement is usually made at a distance from the main stage during big public programmes. In small programmes, men may consume liquor while watching it

near the stage. There is no restriction on drinking for the male audience as far as it does not disrupt the programme. Accompanied with it is the question *kaun pilata hai?* (Who is the host?) The one who pays is considered to have a higher status. Jats usually are seen hosting such gatherings.

Haryana has been in the grip of alcohol addiction ever since green revolution in the state. It is considered as one of the prime points when much of the disposable income was being frittered away in alcohol consumption and further led to increase in domestic problems across the state such as wife thrashing (Maheshwari, 2004, p. 40). Violence is considered as an intrinsic component of masculinity along with strong physicality (Chowdhry, 2015, p.11). Gradually it has further increased due to the growing economic uncertainty, unemployment and illiteracy amongst men and thus has majorly contributed to the growing alcoholism in the region. Thus consumption of alcohol has implications for masculine identity crisis. As Prem Chowdhry rightly points out in her article ‘Crisis of Masculinity in Haryana’ that situation has changed from,

“des me des Haryana, jit doodh dahi ka khanna.”

(The great land of Haryana, a place of milk and curd as food) into

“des me des Haryana, jit jagah jagah ban gaya daaru khanna”

(The great land of Haryana, a place where liquor shops abound) (Chowdhry, 2005, p. 5197).

Interestingly, whether one would find basic amenities in the villages of Haryana remains a question. However, one would undoubtedly find a liquor shop outside all the villages. While one travels in the interiors of these masculinized villages, especially in early

mornings and evenings after 4'o clock, one can easily find some heavily drunk person dancing or sleeping on the roads. It testifies Campbell's notion of 'masculine rural,' "constructing community power and performative norms in terms of a dominant group of men, and in turn promoting the invisibility of others, notably women" (Bell & Campbell, 2000). Therefore,

the "pub (lic) performance of hegemonic masculinity not only is mediated through the structural characteristics of a specifically rural community, but it also mobilizes notions of locality/rurality that reinforce the embeddedness, and thus the naturalness of this particular version of masculinity" (ibid., p.579).

Alcoholism is thus rampant in Haryana and thus also exists as prominently as a social fact in the field as well. Male drinking at the place of *ragini* performance symbolizes a site of cementing power and legitimacy of masculinity in rural community life which in turn, as Campbell explains, perpetuates the invisibility of women as the audience. Prem Chowdhry rightly points out that studying the 'existence of male space' could prove to be of great help in analyzing 'the strength and extent of patriarchy' in a given region and society.

The next section puts forward selected popular mythological *kissas/raginis* that have always formed an integral part of Haryanvi folk culture and history. Thereby folk narratives promulgated the mythological *raginis* as the objective reality of the Haryanvi society. As Edward Soja, postmodern geographer, argues in his work 'Postmodern Geographies' that "life stories have geography too; they have milieu, immediate locales, provocative emplacements which impact thought and action. The historical imagination

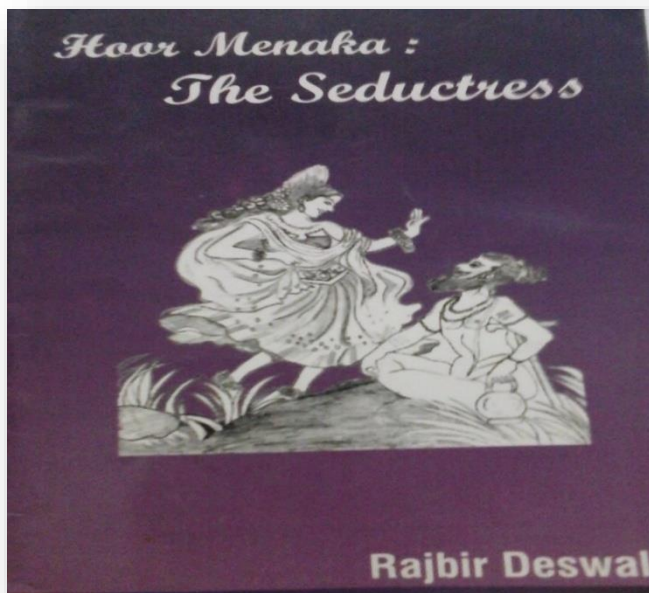
is never completely spaceless” (Soja, 1997, p. 14). Thus these narratives become essential in delineating the spatial identities along the gender lines. The next section focuses on *raginis* (considered as a public genre) rooted in popular folk motifs portraying women as essentially seductresses and men as a victim to their pre-supposed immoral sexual desires.

V. Portrayal of Women in *Raginis*: Protagonist yet Submissive (Ideal)/ Seductress (Deviance)

Women protagonists in *raginis* have always drawn considerable attention from its audience in Haryana as well as across other cultures. Sexualization of a woman’s body in media is a pan Indian phenomenon and certainly stands true also for Haryanvi folk traditions. One of the prominent themes of *ragini* has always been about the man-woman relationship within the realm of kinship and the instabilities associated with it. The sexual identity of an individual, in Haryana, like elsewhere, culturally determines their access to space, resources and opportunities. *Ragini*, *bhajans* and *geet* bring forth such binaries (of women, i.e. either of a submissive ideal or that of a seductress) in public as well as the private realm of social interaction. Folk songs posit women, especially the ones who cross the threshold of morality, as a seductress, lustful, immoral and not worthy of trust. *Raginis* discussed below helps us identify the stereotypes/motifs, formed over a period of time in the regional context, for understanding the culturally shared and held conceptions/beliefs about the nature of femininity.

*Hoor Menaka: The Seductress*¹⁴

Based on a widespread folktale motif, Hoor Maneka is one of the celebrated *saang*, composed by Man Singh (mentor of Pt. Lakhmi Chand), often sung in the form of *ragini* in Haryana. It is based on the story of *Indra* (an Indian god) and a renowned saint named Vishwamitra who wishes to have domination over the heaven and is meditating (Tap-dhyan -bhajan) for the same (Deswal, 2010, p.15). To distract Vishwamitra, *Indra* calls upon a fairy named *Menaka* whose ‘beauty, charm and blandishments could win over any male around, could fill lust into any man, in giving in to her seductive ways and charm’¹⁵



A famous couplet of *ragini* from this *saang* says:

*Mere jovan ke ke aag lagave,
Mere uthe chis ishq ki jane,
Nigore ikhre tane ghani satai
re'*

(Increasing the heat of my youth, this thorn of love is pricking again and again.

Oh sugarcane, you have troubled me a lot!¹⁶)

Image 2: Translated version of *Swang Hoor Maneka*. **Source:** Gifted to the researcher by the Author during the fieldwork.

¹⁴ Thompson, 1993.

¹⁵ Deswal, 2010, p. 15 (Regional Interpretation of Hoor Menaka).

¹⁶ *ibid.*

Interestingly in a ragini performance even this mythological story is portrayed in such a light that shows women having a bent towards alluring men sexually to fulfill their needs. Further, after succeeding in distracting and marrying the saint Menaka gives birth to a daughter named Shakuntla and leaves her with the saint to go back to heaven, where she came from. On being abandoned, Shakuntla is adopted by saint Kanva. This story introduces women as protagonists, but like many other stories labels her as seductress with a heart of stone who can seduce men for lust and also abandon her husband and children for her own wellbeing. Such songs/stories further embed and reinforce the belief that women are sexually more active in contrast to men and thus deserve a strict control to maintain their chastity. Women across various cultures have been represented in the same light, says Stith Thomson (1955), the folklorist who indexed this motif in his work titled 'Motif-Index of Folk Literature.' He classified a similar motif (as portrayed in Hoor Maneka) under Potiphar's wife¹⁷ and the below mentioned one of lustful mother (Rup Basant) having intentions for 'illicit sexual relations.'¹⁸

Chap Singh: The Unfaithful Wives



(Image 3: Chap Singh raginis sung by late Shri Master Satbir Singh. Source: From the researcher's fieldwork. This version is available on YouTube).

¹⁷ Thompson 1993: Under section K2111

¹⁸ Ibid: Under section T418

The Kissa named Chap Singh was originally composed by Pandit Lakhmi Chand and later re-composed by others like Jat Maher Singh. It reflects upon the culturally prevalent male anxiety of mistrusting women, especially wives. Chap Singh used to work in the kingdom of Shah Jahan and marries a girl named Somvati. After 15 days of his marriage, he plans to resume his work and on knowing this his newly married wife says:

You are going to a foreign land, breaking the heart of a newly married one¹⁹

I will feel very lonely here without you

.....

In such a young age you are going, you did not enjoy and play with my youth,

My intoxicated youthfulness knows no bounds within my body,

it is like a virgin Jasmin flower,

Without the ploughman, the land remains barren like a mare without rider

Without physical intimacy, there will be fights if not much than little

Without water fish wriggles and dies, such is the partnership of man and woman

Mehar Singh, when will you taste the unique and erotic youthfulness within me.

This couplet portrays women to be sexually more inciting than men, as many respondents shared a common response like ‘*aurtein mei ghani garmi ho sei*’ (women have more

¹⁹ Chahal & Mithana 2010, P. 78-79. Song 2, Appendix II

heat). Further, Chap Singh, before joining his duties at the *darbar*, instructs his wife to maintain distance from other men and maintain veil all the time. He says²⁰:

If you want to go to heaven then stay away from wrong things,

Keep taking your husband's name as you should praise your beloved,

If your thoughts turn evil, then it will bring disgrace to both the families²¹

The functionality of folk genres is visible in keeping these societal norms intact, from generation to generations, through narration of similar mythological stories in Haryanvi society from times immemorial which act as a religious text. Chap Singh further narrates stories of ideal woman/ dharma of a pativrata woman to Somvati²²:

Savitri's husband got a life because of her dharma

Her husband became a servant, so she also became a servant herself,

That is what a devoted wife is.

Later in the story, one of Chap Singh's envious colleague Sherkhan bets that his wife is unfaithful to him. Sherkhan sends a messenger woman named Tara (a prostitute) who entraps Chap Singh's wife and tells Sherkhan about a mole on Somvati's thigh. Tara also gives Chap Singh's turban and sword (which she got from Somvati out of friendship) to Sherkhan. Thus blinded by the doubt, Chap Singh rebukes her for having an illicit

²⁰ Excerpt from Ragini (19) from Chap Singh Saang composed by Pandit Lakhmi Chand, p. 144. Old Granthavali

²¹ Song 3, Appendix II

²²Chahal & Mithana, 2010, p. 144. Song 4, Appendix II

relationship. Despite her innocence, Chap Singh leaves her and goes back to the king. Later in the story, Somvati reaches the kingdom and proves her innocence.

The story reflects the inherent anxiety amongst Haryanvi men regarding fidelity of women. Such lyrics depict and reinstate the “cultural notion of the insatiability of the desires of the woman-the notion that a woman’s lust is uncontrollable, and that it is she, not the man, who is by nature the aggressive partner, the seducer to the love act” (Kumar, 2009, p.105). However, in response, men are depicted as virtuous; conscious of their *dharma* and are not easily swayed by emotions like love. It is indeed worth noticing that in most of the *raginis*, love is described outside the marriage than within. Women are shown having a yearning for their lover other than the husband. Such a representation brings forth the idea that women should not be trusted as they may easily give in to their sexual desires and thereby have a potential of betraying their husbands/families or even lovers.

Rup Basant: The Lustful Stepmother



(Image 4: Rup Basant ragini cassette sung by Rajinder Kharkiya. Source: From researchers’ fieldwork. This version is available on YouTube).

One of the widespread perception in *raginis* as well as self –projection of women in women’s songs is that ‘lustful nature of females as natural (Chowdhry, 2015, p.22). Similarly, the category of Lustful Stepmother is another label women are being categorized with as Ved Prakash Vatuk & Sylvia Vatuk (1979) elucidates while analyzing popular motifs in Indian folklore. They reflect upon the common usage of the image of a lustful stepmother (who tries to seduce her step-son) or of a wife seducing her younger brother in law (brother of husband). Various other *kissas (saangs)* that are sung in the form of *raginis* such as *Rup Basant*, *Puran Mal*, *Devar-Bhabi*, *Jaimal Phatta*, *Gulab Kaur*, *Bhabi Ka pyaar*, etc. also reflect upon the deep-rooted unconscious beliefs of a Haryanvi society that portray women as an object of sex, their potent sexuality and thereby calls for imposing restrictions on their sexuality. To elaborate further, *Rup Basant*²³ is a story about two brothers. Their father King Khadak Singh’s second wife (who is a young girl) tries to seduce her younger step-son Rup. She says:

After so many efforts, you have come why are you so rigid and adamant,

Neither I am your aunt nor you are my son, do as I desire,

why don’t you take a step forward? And give romance a chance,

On being denied, having a fear that the truth may come out, she, gets him executed. However, her husband gets her hanged after he gets to know the reality (Rup Basant

²³ Rup Basant is believed to have been adopted from a Persian popular story title ‘The Magic Bird’ recited in parts of Europe, North Africa and Asia. However, it has been contextualized. Pritchett says one can find two dozens of printed versions in South Asia (Sit Basant: Oral Tale, Sangit and Kissa by Frances Pritchett Columbia University, New York) Asian Folklore Studies, Vol.42, 1983: 45-62.

Saang/ragini written by Pandit Mange Ram). Similar stories named *Puran Mal* and *Gulab Kaur*, categorize step-mother, mostly second wives –young in age, widows, and young girls as seducers who make sexual advances towards either step-son or younger brother-in-law. To say this is, of course, nothing unusual as such stories implicate the cultural practices and reflect the existing gendered notions which are prevalent in every community. However, what is more interesting is to evaluate these social processes which enter the unconscious of an individual resulting in an internalization of stereotypes in both the sexes.

Devar Bhabi: The Immoral Sister-in-law

Another popular theme reflecting the joking relationship, prevalent in the folk genres of Haryana is that of Devar-Bhabi (brother-in-law & sister-in-law). Again brother-in-law (mostly the younger one) is seen as a potential ally to the sexuality of the daughter-in-law. However, the sexual advances are usually seen as made by women as already mentioned above. Thus relationships that are not in the prohibited kinship ties are believed to be sexual. To name a few of such *raginis*, *kissey* and even *geets etc.* implicating these ideas such as *Devar-Bhabi*, *Bhabi ka pyaar (love of sister-in-law)* is a story in which a wife of Prince named Vikram has an illicit relationship about which his brother discovers and this leads to his sister-in-law accusing him of molesting her. However, the Prince on knowing about her infidelity, gets her lover executed. The Bollywood movie *Rockstar* depicts the same portrayal of a sister-in-law who is always looking for an opportunity to touch her younger brother-in-law who later rebukes her for trying to get close to him. So the younger brother-in-law is not only seen as a potential threat to the sexuality of daughter-in-law but at the same time, especially in these

narratives, also a potential spy on her activities. One of the couplets written by Pt. Lakhmi Chand in a Kissa says:

Oh brother! she climbed on my head, overly naughty, spoilt seductress,
Men are in trouble from all sides, when a woman strips a man of dignity

Consider her to be a scoundrel then²⁴

Thus the relationship between *Devar* and *Bhabi* is perceived as a joking one as it may lead to an extra-marital affair. However, it is always the sister-in-law who is held responsible for it.

Jija-Sali: Joking Relationship as Essentially Illicit Relationship.

Not only *Devar-Bhabi* (Brother-in-law & Sister-in-law) relationship is seen in this light, but even the *Jija-Sali* (sister's husband and sister of wife) relationship is assumed to be leading to an illicit one if both communicate too much. A famous proverb often doing round on the *ragini* stage symbolizing it is:

saali tei aadhi gharaali ho sei

(Sister-in-law who is wife's sister is half-wife)

One can also observe that in Haryana, unmarried daughters are never sent to her sister-in-law's house for a longer duration. The only reason behind it is the prevailing belief that there can be a possibility of having a sexual alliance between her and her brother-in-law. Though joking, but avoidance relationship is strictly observed between *Jija –Saali* and

²⁴ Song 6, Appendix II

one can find hundreds of *raginis* which talk about the hidden sexual motives of both brother-in-law and sister-in-law as depicted in the *ragini* below:

Sister-in-law: Get me an ornament made, oh brother-in-law

Brother-in-law: In return, what will you give?

Sister-in-law: Your bad intentions are visible

Brother-in-law: It is a saying that wife and sister-in-law are one and the same.

Similarly, other *raginis* often sung during live programmes such as: *baddh lene de jija razai mei* (let me enter you quilt, brother-in-law) Song 8, *dhorrein si sarka le jija khaat nei* (Bring your bed near mine brother-in law) Song 9, *saali aaja karre meeti meeti baath* (Sister-in law come let us have a sweet talk) Song 10 (See Appendix II). The image of a lustful woman is that of a corrupted one mostly viewed in an illicit relationship with her lover and not husband however one rarely finds such an image of women within the conjugal relationships (Chowdhry, 2001, p. 29). Perhaps this is one of the reasons behind the portrayal of love outside the marriage bond in *raginis* (Kumar, 2009).

Propagation of such kinds of stereotypes through *raginis* (*folk songs*) further intensifies the perception about women's character, considered as central to kinship solidarity of males (Raheja, 2003, p. 210) and categorizes them as immoral by nature. Men, on the other hand, are depicted as righteous (though an object of seduction at times). Thus *ragini* as a public genre becomes functional in reproducing the patriarchal structures establishing masculine identity as superior over the feminine. Simultaneously it also redefines women's participation in public as unbecoming of her and classifies them as having '*triya charitra*' i.e. 'sexually predatory with a proclivity for liaisons' (Parry, 1979,

p.146-48). On the other hand, *geet* related to rites of passage inculcate values of kinship solidarity, ideal womanhood and associated roles and stereotypes for women.

Thus the oral tradition of men depicts women's character as essentially the cause of 'kinship tensions and fractured solidarity' (Raheja, 2003, p. 206). Women's folk genre (*geet*), on the other hand is seen as a mode of sustaining clan-kinship ties and lineage across the generations. *Geet* are sung within the private realm demarcating ideal womanhood virtues, conduct and behavior which enables structural control over their sexuality. The embodied spaces of *geet* facilitate and sustain the hierarchies of inequalities, power relations and the structure of patriarchy across generations. The chapter concludes discussing a particular theme called '*khordiya*' also called *gari/gali* (verbal abuse) (Gupta, 2001; Jassal, 2012, p.4) elsewhere, which is seen as a voice of resistance and provides women with an expression of sexuality within their private spaces.

VI. Women's (folk) Songs/*Geet*: Maintaining Genealogical Foundations and Solidarity

'Women are reservoir of *geet*, they are always singing.'²⁵

Villages and rural areas are common sites for experiencing women's songs that are linked with the life-cycle rites, festivals and rituals. Women's *geet* range from themes like *sanskar* to *ritu* as was mentioned earlier in the chapter. Jagdish Narayan (1989) explains that the song related to birth, marriage and death constitute *sanskar geet* in Haryana. Elaborating further Sadhu Ram Sharda in his work '*Haryana ke Lok Geet*' explains that

²⁵ Om Bhaj, 59 years old respondent from Panipat (Haryana).

these *geet* inform one about the societal and familial relationships, expected behaviour, prevalent traditions and customs and food habits of the region (Sharda, 2009, p. X). Whereas *ritu geet* are sung symbolizing changing seasons, festivals, fasts and worshipping gods and goddess. ‘Obligatorily sung by women to accompany rituals or as a religious devotion (Narayan, 2003, p.24),’ *geet* are sung inside the house called ‘*bhittar*’(inside) in Haryana or the enclosed courtyard ‘*aangan mei*’(outside), separated from men’s space.

Women’s songs narrate the cultural tradition and social practices that structure their lives. Thus the prevalent gender segregation in the region goes along with constructing a ‘generalized woman through oral tradition’ (ibid., p. 46). Often the gatherings are led by one or two women while mostly married and middle-aged along with a few elderly women participate in the gathering of collective singing. Though women’s songs are collectively performed, they connote meanings which seem ‘complex, multifarious and often ambiguous’ (Narayan, 2003, p.11). Thus their meanings are never fixed and uniform (ibid). However, women’s songs become a medium for the expression of their emotions, lived experiences which are otherwise ‘tabooed topics in everyday conversation’ (Jassal, 2012, p.2).

‘*Yeh mahri jagah sei*’²⁶ (It is our place). Women refer to the singing of *geet* as their own sphere, they sing without any professional inclination for singing in public. Associated with auspiciousness (Raheja, 2003, p.24), women’s singing for rituals is considered as their moral duty, a respondent said:

²⁶ 38 years old respondent Kalanwati (Karnal) said

*“Jananiyon ka dharm se rit riwaz nibhana, agli pidhi tak lejana esh maari gavei se
geet.”*²⁷

(Women’s religion is to observe and carry forward the tradition and customs to next generation, that’s why they sing *geet* (songs). On being asked why women sing?²⁸

Common responses were:

- i. *‘khushi manatee hai’* (celebrate happiness)²⁹
- ii. *‘yeh aurthon ka farz hai ki* (it is moral duty)
- iii. *riti hai* (because of custom)³⁰
- iv. *hmarei purvajon ki den hai* (gift carried from ancestors)

‘Aur kaun gayega?’ (who else will sing?) said kamlesh, a middle-aged woman in her mid-forties. *Bhai ki shaadi kei aurtaan ke geetan bina purre ho sei?* (Do marriages of brother happen without women’s *geet*) said Bimla, sitting next to her. Another respondent Fauji Ranjbir Singh, 71 years old retired army personnel said *“sun shaman, shagun ke geet jananiyan vaar-tyohaar pe te gave se, marda ka kaam geet gaan ka ke ho se?* (Women sing sacred, seasonal, auspicious songs on festivals, is it men’s work to sing)? Sharing testimonies of women’s *geet* from Kangra, Kirin Narayan comes across similar narratives. She shares that women’s singing is believed to be a custom and is considered

²⁷Ch. Dharampal Malik (interviewee) Khanpur Kalan village on 21st Nov. 2011 in an interview.

²⁸Similar question was posed to women by Kirin Narayan in her extensive study of women’s voices in and about *Kangra* Folksongs.

²⁹Narayan, 2003, p. 42.

³⁰Ibid.

women's "duty to perform actions for the well-being of men" (ibid). Aligned along with it is a perception that since *geet* are to be sung at sacred/auspicious occasions, it must be done with happiness or else goddess of the clan would be angry/upset and may bring bad luck for the family.

Thus tied with kinship roles and relationships, *geet* sung during rituals form an integral part of household chores apart from being the spatially determined duty and 'feminine' activity. Women as bearers of tradition thus help in transmitting and reproducing the patriarchal hierarchies of caste and other kinds in accordance with notions of custom and sacred practices. The responses suggest an embedded idea of the celebration of the motherhood role of women in maintaining the genealogical foundations of a family and kin group. This also suggests the construction of a genre which evolves along with the evolution of the feminine agency in north Indian rural patriarchy. Some more instances of the same have been elaborated in the forthcoming sections as well.

Women's Sexuality and Stereotypes in Geet

Gender roles ascribed to both men and women are visible from the lyrics and composition of the folk songs. The folk genre of *geet* thus becomes instrumental in inculcating the conventionally approved values like boys being encouraged to become strong, masculine and bold while girls asked to stay polite, simple, feminine, fragile and weak. It is also important to note here that for daughters, there are different kinds of roles expected at parental residence. For example:

A girl at her parent's house is advised to remain with a low profile, simple, messy, not to wear bright and new clothes. Reflecting upon these concerns, a respondent shared a few popular *geets* such as:

In father's house, daughters' are wrapped in torn quilt,

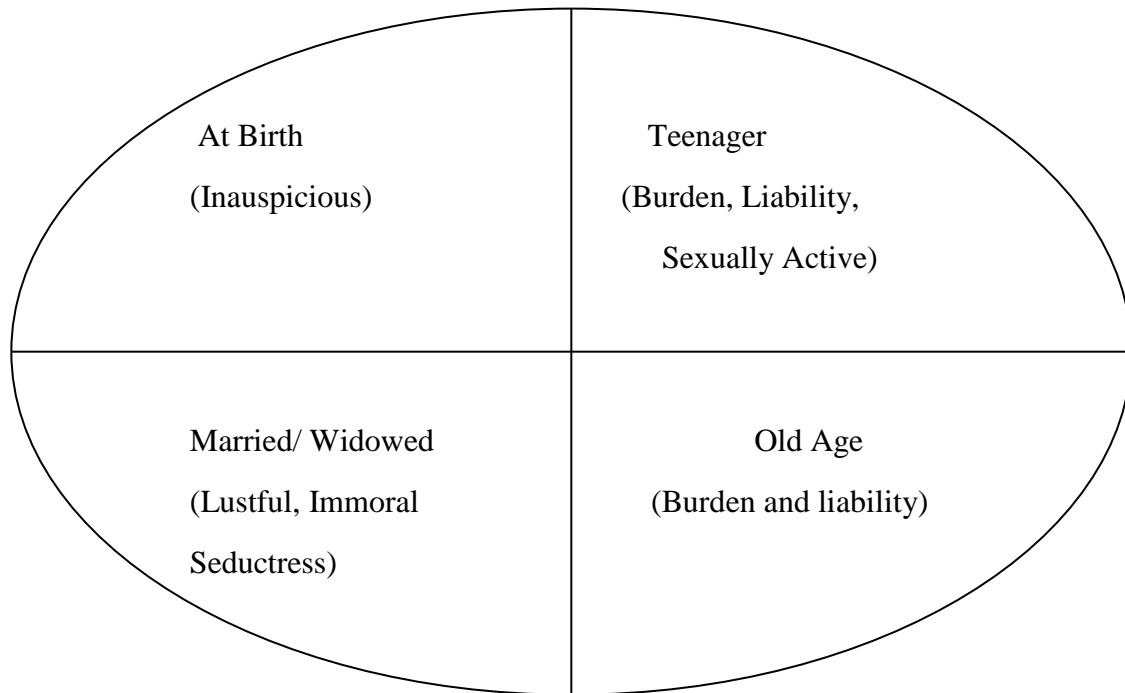
Sits on stool in her in-laws' house,

Always wear simple clothes, oh sister,

Never wear a silk suit

Do not wear a necklace

Visible here is a prescribed way of living and dressing for young unmarried girls as seen, giving expression to a threat in the form of their sexuality. However, a married girl is asked to put make-up and dress beautifully only after marriage. These songs are sung during the marriage of girls symbolizing a celebration of protected virginity of a girl through her patterns of dressing, gestures like being shy and soft-spoken. The song mentioned above further talks about encouraging unmarried daughters to wear simple clothes and be obedient at in-laws' house after marriage. As silk clothes, ornaments and laughing in the bye-lanes can attract unwanted sexual attention from men, it is essential for women to have control over their desire for wearing good clothes or looking good. Thus characterization of women according to their age (in the figure below), prescribed attire and dresses and their roles are well defined and find expression in folk songs as well.



Analyzing Haryanvi folksongs, Deep Punia and R.K. Punia (2004) in their work on ‘*Gender Discrimination in Haryanvi Folksongs*’ argue that women’s songs become instrumental in legitimizing and delineating gendered roles as per spaces. For example, below mentioned couplets from various women’s *geet*, sung on different occasions, express the entrenched cultural belief that daughters bring misfortune, whereas the birth of a son is seen as good fortune.

Daughter as a Misfortune and Son as a Fortune

Preference for a son echoes from the folk *raginis* and *geet*. The status of parents is depicted as declining with the birth of a daughter. Birth of a daughter compels parents to spend very less and wear and live hand to mouth.³¹ However, the birth of a son is marked as a golden night that will ensure, at least for the mother, her lost recognition at the birth

³¹ Prevalent in Haryana Villages.

of a daughter, if any. Birth of a daughter/ son brings along differential cultural beliefs which make parents behave in the manner they act on such occasions. This is precisely due to the prevalent notions of a patriarchal society which recognizes a woman's motherhood and father's masculinity in giving birth to a child. Thus the deep desire of mothers to not have daughters could be observed in their songs/*geets* at the birth of daughters as (for example song no 12 mentioned in Appendix II).

The day you were born as a daughter,

Born is a dark night,

Since the day you have taken birth son,

The nights have become golden

The folk song above describes a mother's pain which she undergoes after giving birth to her daughter. Left alone in a segregated room without proper light, food and bed, she feels deserted. However, on the birth of son, her nights have become golden with lot of lights, good food, clothes, bed and lots of gifts. A *ragini* composed by Pt. Lakhmi Chand expresses that no salvation could be attained without a son. It says:

Without a son, no salvation is attained,

However much knowledgeable the family may be,

Without a son even a morsel of food appears a poison to the house³²

³² Song 13, Appendix II

Thus, from the birth to death, rites of passage are performed celebrating the masculine identity and mourning daughter's birth (considered inauspicious) as reflected in the women's *geet*³³:

On my birth, torn shoes were displayed

On my brother's, steel plates were played

But on mine, almost everyone is crying

This *geet* narrates the ordeal of a daughter's differential treatment since her birth. In fact, the rites of passage and modes of their celebration attest to the fact that societal practices and rituals are heavily biased towards giving higher status to men. Similar patriarchal mind-set is also visible in a popular saying prevalent in the region as mentioned below, which sees the death of a girl as a fortune.³⁴

Boy dies of an ill-fated one,

While the girl dies of a fortunate one

Boys are called lanterns and respected as kings

Will kill daughters if permitted

Indeed, it is not unusual to hear such proverbs often in the region as one respondent's granddaughter got hurt while playing in the house and her immediate reaction was '*accjha sei raandh kategi (good we will be free from her/ debt)*.' Women's space is prescribed through these songs along with the expected roles and the notion of ideal

³³ Song 14, Appendix II

³⁴ Song 15, Appendix II

womanhood. However, it is also pertinent to mention and note here that despite changing gender equations in Haryana, the folk songs, especially women's geet sung at various life cycle rites still remains the same. These songs are still sung in the lone spaces without any reflection on the lyrics in the changing context.

VII. Singing from Segregated Spaces: Performance as an Obligation

Gloria Goodwin Raheja's (2003) observation that a woman's song is generally not to be sung in the presence of men underlies the belief of dominant ideologies which confine women to the domestic spheres of the household. Singing spaces for women are, since ancient times, restricted to the interior sphere of homes and further isolated, with no role or participation of men in any form i.e. as singers or as the audience. Women sing from separation as they are traditionally restricted through practices of gender segregation and veiling (ibid., p.26):

Women's *geet* are 'participatory' with no clear division between singer and audience as anyone and everyone can sing and at the same time, all are part of the audience. Women sing in each other's functions as *Gulbari*³⁵ shared "*nahi tho mahre kaun aaga, gar hum ni jangi*" (who will come attend our functions if we don't go to others' gatherings?). It suggests that women sing at times as a formality on account of the threat of being alienated from kinship ties and the neighborhood.

In the similar context, Kirin Narayan opines that there are two categories of songs women sing i.e. one category of *songs* which are sung under obligation by women to accompany rituals such as the wedding ritual, on the birth of a son, and on festive occasions. She

³⁵ respondent

exemplifies '*pakharu*' also popularly known as '*viraha*' in other regions of north India as an obligatory genre which is sung by women of Khangra when remembering their husbands, migrant workers, who are away from them and further show bride's longing for her natal family and also of mistreatment faced from in-laws. Another category is of the ones that are sung as a form of religious devotion known as religious *bhajans* (Raheja, 2003). All the gatherings are segregated sites of performance with only women and children (girls mostly) present. Men appear only in the dark, as also in the content of women's songs, for they are not even interested in this space actually, she contends. Thus the performance of *geet* becomes an obligation that is merely performed to sustain traditions and customs.

VIII. The Question of Agency in Women's Geet

Prem Chowdhry, in her book (1993) elucidates that folksongs become a medium for women to vent out their frustrations. Folk songs are seen as a way of expressing agency. At the same time, the women's songs also represent the structure. The contents of *geet* mediate the process of assimilating conventional ethics, values and customs in a natural way. Take an example of a *lore/geet* which is sung during *phere-bandre geet* (wedding ritual)³⁶:

*Our bride is so fair just like a moon's bowl,
your groom is so black just like a buffalo lying in the lawn,*

³⁶ Song 16, Appendix II

*our bride is so beautiful just like a fairy and your groom is standing like a paralyzed
monkey.*³⁷

This song helps in breaching the power hierarchy between bride's family and groom's kingroup. In Indian marriages, the status of groom is considered higher than that of the bride's family. Thus this song tries to subvert the unequal power relation in a subtle way. At the same time such songs also reinstate the structures of patriarchy.

Often while passing by the village, in fact even in urban areas, one can hear women singing in religious gatherings. They sing with devotion such couplets as '*dhol, gavar, shudra, pashu, nari, yeh sab taadan ke adhikari*' (a drum, the uncivilized, shudras, animals and women deserves to be beaten). Once the researcher heard a recitation of this in a residential colony in Haryana and on asking what was being sung, she got the reply that a *Sundar Kaand Paath* (from the *Ramayana*) was being organized by the parents on the occasion of their son's birthday. It needs to be questioned that folklore functions as a medium of expression for women as proposed by some. Do women who seem to be somewhat passive recipients of *geets*, of religious ideas or of rites of passage, have an expressive agency?

Judith Butler in her work 'Gender Trouble' defines agency as 'the capacity to subvert norms', however, Saba Mahmood (2001) cautions that values like silence, shyness, simplicity etc. may not be mistaken with 'passivity and inaction' just because they do not "buttress the autonomy of the individual" (222). She advocates that 'limiting the notion

³⁷Narrated by Babita, Gohana, Sonapat, 10th October 2011.

of agency to the actions taken by individuals' obscures an understanding of 'how structures of gender, class, caste, and race shape or affect the possibilities for the agency'. Abu-Lughod cautioned against treating 'agency as a synonym for resistance' (Abu-Lughod, 1990a).

Agency, in this context, refers to the 'capability to express oneself creatively as an active actor' or 'communicating subjectivities' (Jodi Dean, 1998). Women are not even bothered about the lyrics, they sing what they have learnt from their ancestors, as if without listening, and they, especially the elder ones, wish to preserve the 'stock of knowledge' and pass it on to the younger generations. There is no consciousness of performer and audience while women sing in a monotonous tone and rhythm as if only working towards an end of discharging their duty, the obligation which is ascribed to them since birth.

Karin Narayan (2003) contends that the practice of collective singing does not raise the consciousness of women through *geet* and instead of instigating change through gender solidarity, it helps women to adapt and adjust with the constraints in their lives. As Anna Caraveli (1986) rightly argues that collective singing of women generates a feeling of 'sisterhood of pain or natural forces' among women which is in a way 'communal victimization inflicted by social forces' (1986, p.81-82). Further, Caraveli also posits that the very act of collective recognition of their shared inequalities and pain while singing becomes a form of protest and thereby becomes instrumental in expressing agency.

In the similar context, Seemanthini Niranjana (2001) adopts an alternative basis to thematize women's agency. She locates agency through bodily locus intersected by

sexuality in a given space and context. She attempts to “map the process of delineation of space, as negotiated through female body, where descriptions of community and identity are mediated through rules of movement and female morality” (Niranjana, 2001, p. 47). Thus she locates agency within the space-body matrix. She illustrates that within the village every interaction, work, caste group, appropriate behaviour, women’s activities, etc. are all defined with ‘recourse to the vocabulary of *olage-horage*’ (ibid). Thus she opines that agency delineates space into public and private. The public symbolizes an overtly political domain and the domain of power. Niranjana points out that the relative marginalization of women from the public (power) domain is generally interpreted as a sign of powerlessness and lack of agency. However, she draws her understanding of power from Foucault’s view:

“...Power is not that which makes the difference between those who exclusively possess and retain it, and those who do not have it and submit to it. Power must be analyzed as something which circulates...(individuals) are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation” (Niranjana, 2001, p.89).

Thus Niranjana traces women’s agency within their lives in the very space they are located ‘as that which has taken the form of resistance offered against the exercise of power’. She attempts to read resistance into women’s acts within the private sphere and defines women’s agency in terms of a ‘transformative capacity’ meaningful within a ‘politics of change’ (Niranjana, 2001, p.88).

IX. Women's Social Space in Haryana

The social space of women in Haryana is conventionally confined to their domestic sphere (Chowdhry, 1993). Their day is compartmentalized between *tadke aur saanjh* (morning and evening) household chores. Private space i.e. house is considered as sacred and the fields are considered as extension of their private spaces. Mornings for young girls and married women are usually engrossed with field work and fetching water from the nearby well whereas women above around 50 years of age prefer visiting temple on almost a daily basis. Young married women occasionally visit temple at the time of some festival or when they observe fasts (*vrata/upvas*). Ritual symbolism, as discussed elsewhere by scholars (Kakkar, Kondor, 1986; Tapper, 1979), also acts as a powerful instrument of inculcating cultural ideas and behaviours pertaining to feminine nature and image of women /goddess as both destructive and benevolent. Thus women must be kept inside the four walls as they are believed to have a *triya charitra* as mentioned in a famous story sung in a *ragini* named as the *Kissa of Leelo Chaman*.

For many, once the household chores are over by noon, the afternoons are consumed in either sleeping or watching Haryanvi *natak* or soap operas on television. As many middle aged women respondents shared that:

“*dophari mei tei natak aaja sei tho khet ka kaam karke, khana khake t.v.*

dekh le...ghar parivaar wale” (In the afternoon after lunch, we watch

family television soaps, once the agricultural work is done).

Thus the daily soap operas based on family and kinship ties are liked the most. It also suggests that television becomes a crucial medium of socialization that helps in

internalizing the dominant ideologies, especially that of religious behaviour and in creating a stereotypical 'self-image' of women of every age. It further reinforces the stereotypes of women's roles and expectations attached with different stages of life.

However, Rukmini (37 years old mother) shared that these *nataks* keep them updated about how society is changing and its impact on family relationships as well. Chandra (40 years old) agreed that they discuss about social issues as well and television news and soap operas have been instrumental in making them aware of those issues.

The outer domain is not considered safe for women in Haryana. Young women (mostly daughter in –laws) are busy with their household chores, and in fact a few of them work as teachers in government schools or are in clerical jobs in the nearby University. Teaching is considered the best job for women, as one of the respondents said “*teaching line badhiya sei, tame pe ghar aaja sei bahu, pher apna kaam dhanda arr baccho nei bhi sambhal le sei, accha pisa bhi aaja kharcha nikal ja*”³⁸ (Teaching profession is good; the daughter-in-law comes home on time and takes care of household work and kids too, and even gets enough money to take care of expenditures). Though it is also crucial to note that usually their salaries are taken by their husbands and they decide how to spend it and when to do so. So young married women do not actively participate in decision making at home which is done only by their husbands and in-laws. However, the elderly women in the family have the authority of deciding crucial matters of the family.

Though villagers educate their daughter-in-laws and get them appointed in government jobs with the help of recommendations or political contacts but on the other hand, women

³⁸Ramita shared about her daughter-in-law

do not participate in major decisions within the household. However, women are seen as an economic resource in family, as the male occupation in agriculture dwindles, but still, they are unable to reap the benefits of economic independence for themselves due to severe ideological and structural constraints.

However, there is no surety that the husbands of these working women would also be employed. Mostly the men in the village are alcoholic and busy playing cards at chaupals. Women's space remains confined to household activities, i.e. their private sphere. Women are not even visible except for a few older ones with their grandchildren. Thus the estranged '*char dewari*' becomes the destiny of a woman.

The only source of entertainment for them is television as apart from that the village has only *chaupals*, *Sarpanch ghar*, liquor shop, etc. which are seen exclusively as men's spaces. The structuring of the village suggests how leisure, for women, is perceived. So the only social space for a woman is the gathering for women's songs/*geets* during festivals or weddings. Here too, it is not without restrictions or constraints. Time and again, movements either in the form of reformists or nationalist have tried sanitizing the social space of women by drawing boundaries of four walls and dictating the contents as per the societal codes. Women's *geet* are also sung within houses or at times in the lawn, i.e. *aangan*.

Reflecting on women's social space in her work on '*Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Music and The Hindu Public in Colonial India*', Charu Gupta advocates that during colonial times an urge to sanitize women's space, particularly the 'social ones' and 'controls over entertainment' remained a crucial means of controlling women's sexuality. She exemplifies that the 'so-called respectable women' remained secluded

from the public life and did not participate in the ‘singing of licentious songs’ (Gupta, 2001, p.89) such as during festivals or marriage ceremonies.

In agreement to Gupta’s views, Nita Kumar in her study on leisure activities of the artisans of Banaras says that women were completely ‘excluded from the world of public life and popular culture’ (ibid, p.86) and their social and cultural sphere of entertainment was completely different and separate from that of men. She also argues that the social and cultural world of women ‘occasionally facilitates co-mingling with men’ and not necessarily always confines them to their ‘inner spiritual or private domain’. So for women, source of recreation were performances during marriage ceremonies, festivals and rituals etc. which fall within the boundaries of neighborhood, family, relatives or the territory of the village during festivals! It would be intriguing to explore whether it is a ‘public extension of private sphere’ or an extension of private itself.

X. Custodians of Women’s Chastity: Controlling Sexuality by Sontrolling Leisure, Activities and Entertainment

Charu Gupta (2001) opines, that in north India women sang vulgar genres such as ‘*kajalis* and *raginis* which articulated their desires and sorrows’ (p. 87). These genres were not only a form of private leisure for women but a ‘public extension of the women’s culture.’ However, the ambiguity regarding fictitious ‘women’s culture’ remains questionable. Are we talking about the ‘women’s culture’ which is constructed with the patriarchal norms of society?

Interestingly in the context of UP, Khatri Hitkari Sabha of Agra issued a pamphlet urging *Khatri* women not to sing *gaalis* (known as ‘*Khordiya*’ in Haryana and other regions

amongst Jat community) at marriages as it symbolized uncivil and shameless behaviour and in fact, ‘civilized’ women were not expected to sing even ‘ordinary’ and simple songs.

In fact, “women were constantly reprimanded for transgressing respectable boundaries through their songs” (Gupta, 2001, p.93). It was believed that because of such songs, ‘many high caste women abandoned their homes to marry into low-caste households. Other castes like Jats and Ahirs also followed in giving similar instructions. Thus there has always been a drive for defining women’s space so as to maintain their chastity, whether private or ‘social’ and sensitizing them in accordance with societal norms. There is constant surveillance on what women are singing even within the four walls by men.

Savita, in her late 30s, quoted:

“chori ka babu bole se ke baddhe gaon so, balaka pe ke bhunda asar padega?” (my daughter’s father says what dirty songs you are singing; it will badly influence kids).

This is not just control on the lyrics and control over entertainment but control on their sexuality through it. Rasalon Devi, 50 years old woman, addressed as *tai* (paternal -aunt) on being asked about who composes songs replied ‘*jis ke ghar byah ho sei, us hisab te bana le se, jo mann mei aaja, bake ja sei usi*’ (Where someone is getting married, accordingly one composes whatever comes to mind and utters it).

Ever since the colonial period, concerns regarding women singing indecent songs during weddings have been raised by Arya Samaj, caste *sabhas* and panchayats in Haryana. Arya Samaj has always attacked and condemned such customs considering these songs as

sin against their puritanical code (Jones, 1976). Thus attempts were made to curb or replace these traditional songs with decent songs or *arya samaj bhajans* which were considered to be the purified versions of singing. However, all these attempts failed as despite objection, women across different caste and class continue to sing these *geet* explaining these songs as symbolizing their rural worldview.

“...*dehati* (rural) culture that they would not give up. This is one of the interesting instances when women have appropriated the male logic of keeping the *dehati* culture or custom alive in order to justify the retention of this space for themselves” (Chowdhry, 2012, p. 56).

Implicit in such responses, says Karin Narayan, are the “feminist codes, making for a hidden transcript or veiled sentiments whereby women could exchange subversive messages” (Narayan, 1997, p. 42).

XI. Voices of Resistance

Women perform *khordiya* on a night before marriage at home which is part of *rat jaga* (staying awake the whole night) which is seen as an expression of sexuality for women within the private space and thereby is taken as a threat to the structure. Countering the arguments about Indian women’s passivity and silent submissiveness to tradition, Gloria Goodwin Raheja rejects the colonial and postcolonial rhetoric of nineteenth and twentieth Century. She further says that women’s songs may not just reflect the hierarchies of power relation and social differentiation of the location. Rather on one hand, if the voice participates in reconstituting social reality, then on the other hand, it also challenges the ideologies sustaining those relations of power (Raheja, 2003, p.6).

For example, ‘khordiya’³⁹ is a theme performed by all married women during marriage rituals. It consists of singing and dancing which varies from imitation/enactment of masculine and aggressive behaviour to jokingly abusing close family members like husband, father-in-law, mother-in-law or some other authoritative figure. It is performed on the night of marriage at the groom’s house after the marriage procession leaves for the marriage venue. All the women after performance take bath and wash *hair* in particular before the *baraat* returns. This is explained as a respondent put it, ‘*gaali utar ja sei*’ (abuse will go away).

It becomes crucial at this juncture to understand the origin of such a theme in this genre. Women are not expected to join in the *baraat* i.e. groom’s procession to the bride’s place, especially in the context of Jats of Haryana. It was due to the belief that firstly, women must be confined to their private space and secondly, men are scared that drunken *baraatis* might tease or misbehave with their women or even stare at them. Women are kept away from the ‘ritual of dance’ in public as part of the marriage procession. Thus women’s sphere on the day of son’s marriage is designated within the home which should not be left empty on the wedding night and *ratjaga* must be observed.

As *Sarla kaki* in her mid-60s said that *pehla te jananiyan barat mei kit ja thi, esh maare picche thei, lugaayiaan apne sang rachave thi, ib te bas nibhavei se, na thei pehlan thei ek bandra bane tha arr ek bandri banei thi*⁴⁰ (earlier women never used to go in the marriage procession).

³⁹ Songs sung after the procession of *Bharaat* at groom’s house.

⁴⁰ Respondent.

Thus women's singing is associated with auspiciousness (Narayan, 2006, p.24) only if sung within the estranged four walls of the home. However, as discussed above, 'the context' becomes crucial, according to which meanings are attached to women's singing. As singing on the public stage and that too outside the defined boundaries would throw them in a whole new world from which they have been separated since generations and thus singing itself would become inauspicious in this context. Thus singing only within the isolated and domestic spaces is usually considered 'sacred' for women.

Thus voices which act as vehicle of empowerment and agency in the form of self-expression (Weidman, 2006) in *geet* also represents resisting voices of women who aspire to alter their subservient positions in the hierarchy of the repressive structure. Asserting *geet* singing as a 'moral duty' and sacred, women try to negotiate with the traditional customs and behaviour. However, conformism should not always be seen as acceptance as James Scott explains that "conformity is calculated, not unthinking and beneath the surface of symbolic and ritual compliance there is an undercurrent of ideological resistance, just as beneath the surface peace there is continuous material resistance" (Scott, 1995).

The case in the point is that despite surveillance on *geet* sung within the private spheres, voices of resistance emerge with themes like *khordiya*. As protagonists, women in this theme try to subvert their subjugated position by enacting men's role themselves. This space provides women with a space for the expression of agency and sexuality (Gupta, 2001; Raheja, 2003) and thereby becomes a site of contestation and objection by the dominant structure. Meenakshi Thapan rightly asserts that

“Resistance in fact is a double edged sword in women’s lives, one with which they constantly articulate and exhibit their struggle but one which does not always enable complete success. Resistance, nonetheless, remains central to their lives whether or not it achieves social transformation” (Thapan, 2009, p. 15).

Voices of resistance are not limited to performance of *geet* only. *Ragini* too found its moment of experiencing women’s voices as a challenge to that of men. The next chapter looks at this moment of change in the context of *ragini* performance as one witnesses a foundational transition in the genre with entry of women. As the all-male genre of *ragini* witnessed entry of women on the public stage in the mid-1980s, it proved to be a critical juncture in slowly changing the very notions and structures of public performance of *ragini* both for performers as well as the audience. The voicing of resistance and negotiation with change in *ragini* performance is however not embedded in traditional safety valves like that of *khordiya* as in case of *geet*. It has been a tough ride for women performers in of *ragini* in not just establishing themselves but also in the integration of their struggles, experiences, rebellion and claims to power within the fold of the structures of *ragini* performance rooted in the historical equations of caste, patriarchy and feudalism. One must bear in mind what Prem Chowdhry cautions in the context of Haryana that:

“Exclusive male spaces connote sharpening of certain aspects of masculinities like male bonding, group solidarity, swearing, drinking, fighting and using aggressive and sexually explicit language leading to abundant use of abuses involving the female anatomy. Women are

extremely vulnerable in these spaces as their presence there invites attention, ridicule, sexual harassment and even greater violence. Indeed, all such male gatherings act as means of controlling women” (Chowdhry, 2014, p.41).

Chapter Three

Women's Entry into *Ragini*

Negotiating Identities and Recasting of Performance

"I am what I am and I know it well....."

If you think and speak ill of me, to hell with you then."

--A celebrity woman ragini performer

As observed in the previous chapter, prevailing gender ideologies and spatial practices in Haryanvi society segregate the musical genres along gender lines. These genres in turn replicate and enforce the ideological structure that society in Haryana subscribes to. Existing hierarchies of gender, caste and class thereby continue to be reproduced in various forms. Voices of resistance (seen as expression of sexuality) emerging from within the private spaces of khordiya performance, even though momentarily for a short span of time, are seen as threat to the institution of family. This in turn calls for bodily control of women by spatial segregation, surveillance, strictures on sexuality and violence as elaborated upon in the second chapter. This is specifically applicable in Haryana for women performers in public.¹ The moment women's singing voices reach public stage, sexuality overshadows their vocal skills. Their bodies become instruments of performance within the hyper masculinized and violently sexualized spaces of ragini singing.

The attention in the present chapter is upon understanding and mapping the moment/processes of change when women entered the public performances of ragini as

¹ The last couple of years have witnessed increasing crime against women performers in Haryana.

well as its bearing on existing caste-class equations and identity discourses in the region apart from the influences on the local musical cultures. The chapter simultaneously deals with questions like how women singers express their agency amidst a politics of sexuality, performance styles and representation. This includes their negotiation with cultural identities conventionally constructed along ideas and images of ideal womanhood, seductive entertainers, dancing damsels (nautch girls) and performing artists.

The chapter thus focuses upon the transition in socio-musical cultures of Haryana in two important and related spheres. One is the ragini singing and listening cultures in the region with a broad based connection to the north Indian alignment of folk-popular continuum in musical consumption while the other more important change being the changing lives and challenges for women singers and dancers who are not just situated in but actively shape these contexts as well as the musical genres they are part of. The chapter locates this change in the post green revolution period in Haryana when women singers entered ragini singing, an erstwhile male preserve. The life histories of these women singers have been analyzed to make sense of the changing circumstances and context while this transition came about. However, stating more emphatically, the purpose is to write gender histories through an example of women performers who act not just in their individual capacities as agents of change for a particular musical culture but as emblems of human potential to rewrite cultural codes of existence.

I. Women Enter into *Ragini* Performance

The entry of women into the cultural sphere of *ragini* performance is a phenomenon which has cast a transformative shadow on the ideology and structure of Haryanvi society and its

musical cultures. Today it is not uncommon to find references drawn in everyday discussions about different aspects of men-women relationships from anecdotes of popular *ragini* songs performed by leading women singers. A multiplicity of factors has resulted in the ascent of women on the ladders of *ragini* performance and the same is not completely detached from a similar transition achieved in the mainstream of entertainment industry namely cinema and popular music. The associated currents of caste-class variety as well as the change in technological and commercial aspects of *ragini* performances also needs to be seen through the prism of changing lives of women performers as their agency is seen at the forefront of a revolutionary transition as discussed above.

As it emerged in our discussions with the first generation of these performers the challenge of caste and feudal politics was one of the foremost they faced in their journey into *ragini* performance. As rare women performing *raginis*, they encountered in their listeners a keen interest about their origins and lineage. It was seen as highly difficult for the women of the dominant caste to transcend the honour related barriers in becoming stage performers. However, the caste identity of a performer was crucial at the same time to confer status upon performance itself. The performance patronage systems demanded adherence to a value system attached to caste-honour regimes. This had to be so both in terms of the content of *raginis* sung on stage as well as the identity of the performers. A singer amongst the first few ones who started performing shared:

It matters who you are and how you present yourself. The concept of honour applies more to women. Every single move you make is being closely watched by everyone. They try all methods to understand you. They are deeply interested in our personality and our background. If they start

looking at us with disrespectful eyes, it is very detrimental for our image as artists. Any reason can make them do so. Our personal lives are under the scanner as much as our public performances.

The entry of women in *ragini* singing in Haryana dates back to mid-1980s when two sisters were introduced to stage singing by their own teacher who practiced this genre. This experiment was to turn into a transformation of the whole musical culture of singing and listening to *raginis* in the days to come. The initial entrants were few yet were able to command great amount of fan following which eventually resulted in their recording songs for cassette companies too. The first to enter shared:

People used to come from far away areas just to see me perform. It meant a lot to me. I was someone they looked up to. I was seen as a pioneer of sorts. Till date I remember how much respect I commanded. People used to say all kinds of things about those women who are performers in films and theatre though. They must have been saying for me as well but it did not affect me much. I was welcomed by everyone almost everywhere. It helped me a lot financially too. When it came to pulling crowds, I was a star in my own eyes.

The first stereotype that was challenged as a result of these women entering the genre was of stage performances of *ragini* being an exclusively male preserve. Alongside this came the recording of songs in cassettes and women who were not allowed to perform on stage had the option of recording their albums. This gave them a voice as well as financial leverage in dealing with their existential issues.

Initially when I performed on stage, it felt extremely uncomfortable to do so. All kinds of men surrounded me. Their stares and gestures disturbed me so much that I decided not to perform on stage. Instead I started recording songs and it brought me name and fame without facing all that discomfort. I became extremely sought after by cassette companies and their audience. I ruled many a hearts for days to come. My finances improved and I felt I was not less than any other performer or man. I had an identity now.

Life Histories of Women Ragini Singers vis-à-vis the Agency of an Artist in Musical Cultures

Women performing art are seldom seen as subversive to the dominant themes and format of art. Rather the feminine emerges itself as a dominant theme comprising evolution of art and art history. Art as an aesthetic rendition of the cultural history of humankind provides a sublimatory reservoir for documenting the ripple effects of its masculinized forays into the world of military domination, strategic conquests in trade, systems of governance and control as well as a technological imagination for an automated future. Art as resistance on the other hand, is generally visualized as a part of the above mentioned projects only and thus does not qualify for being seen as true art which is art for art sake. In other words, the feminine projection of an art form is at the root of visualizing the muted agency of an artist. It is seen to just exist, as if one is born with it. The celebration of feminine in art and performance is thus in the wake of its perceived potentiality for transcending the materiality of existence. It almost mirrors the imagined spiritual upliftment brought about by the divinity associated with womanhood. Though it is more so for the classical forms of art, even the folk artist is someone who is seen not just through the binary of gender in public

view. She is curiously alienated from her being the moment she starts enacting another being on stage. To stay close to her being then she has to come back to her vulnerable self, softened and mutilated as well as enraged by the everyday realities. If the public is close by and shaping her performance constantly through outbursts of feedback as in a *ragini* performance on stage usually, she may have to move back and forth from her own reality to that of a performer constantly in order to maintain consistency in her natural and performative expressions. This engagement with self is articulated in almost every sphere of lived realities of these women singers as their personhood engages with the images they carry on stage.

Having grown up in a society which makes it difficult for young girls to aspire for a singing career, many of these women singers who have made a mark in folk music narrated their childhood difficulties with such dreams. A prominent singer shared:

I always wanted to sing in my childhood. I do not even remember how young I was when I started dreaming about singing on stage. My school did a lot to promote my ambition. I remember how my teachers recognized my talent and encouraged my singing in school functions. At home the atmosphere was not very open. I used to sing in a clandestine manner at home in the beginning. Some of my teachers convinced my father about my singing abilities. He faced a lot of opposition from his parents and family members in giving me training in music. I was so happy to have been able to sing with his support. It is so difficult in our society to make people understand that singing can be a career option for women too. In one's childhood many close relatives and elders feel that if they encourage

musical taste in you, it will affect studies. How strange it is? If someone is born to sing, then why expect otherwise from them?

The agony one feels as a girl child who has grown up in such a society as that of Haryana is visibly woven into the affective agency of the woman singer who feels disturbed by those who judge her negatively and replies as a true reactionary.

I want to ask those who mistreat a little girl and tell her that she should not try to take place of her brother what do they feel when a boy fails to perform the tasks his sister does so efficiently? Same should be the question to those who feel it is not right for girls to challenge each other or even men openly. Are they not cowards themselves if they are so afraid of girls coming out in the open? There is no big deal in facing these people. They give up very soon and start admiring you. Even if they hate us, they admire us. They admire the courage we show, our qualities and our style too.

Another singer expressed her surprise over her own evolution as a *ragini* performer who faces unruly crowds regularly with an acquired ease over a period of time.

I do not know how I became so bold. I remember how sensitive I was as a child and used to cry over small things. Performing in public raised my confidence. Perhaps I learnt to manage my emotional side well. Even if you are angry about some gesture or comment, you cannot immediately show your anger. One has to be highly tactful. The public loves tactful handling of such things or troublesome elements. One has to be witty as well. At times one has to ignore and neglect too. If things are becoming difficult one

has to take control of the situation. Otherwise one can be easily branded as immature and foolish.

This management of affect and subjective feelings of hurt is extremely crucial for a woman artist in public performances of *ragini*. The layout of the *ragini* performances is different from other kinds of stage theatre or popular music performances. The stage is constantly being approached by members of the audience here. They usually reach out to their favourite performers to display their appreciation with cash reward and its show-off to those watching it. They also briefly interact with the performer while doing this. This interaction is a potential scenario for misbehavior and making lewd comments or giving such proposals. The same can also happen from some distance and through gestures as the performance is on. An extremely famous performer Sapna Chaudhry has talked about such challenges in detail. She says:

One has to face all kinds of things. Someone throws a matchbox at the performer and someone else may throw a toffee. One may hear such remarks that we have paid her to dance and she will dance as long as we wish her to.

Sapna Chaudhry says that she did not see much of her childhood as normally children do as she started performing at a very young age when she was around ten years old. Her only objective in the beginning in her own words was earning money as her family was facing utter poverty due to her father's ill health. Her mother's devotion for her father and their bonding motivated her. When her father died after a prolonged illness, it became a mission for her to repay the debts of family and give back the papers of their house to her mother. She describes her initial struggles with poverty, her father's sickness and her mother's

fighting spirit as being the foundation of her entry into *ragini* performances as well as the reason for her being down to earth and family oriented. However, her advice to people who want their daughters to enter *ragini* singing like her is that they should rather encourage their daughters to study and focus on career options which do not require them to dance before an audience like that of a *ragini* performance.

In the recent past Sapna Chaudhry had allegedly attempted suicide after being heavily criticized for using casteist remarks in a song. She says that it had become too much for her to cope with the pressure of her name being soiled like this even after apologizing to those must have felt hurt in public. During her shows when audience becomes uncontrollable she often tells them to behave, at times even sternly and in a sarcastic manner as well. Sapna Chaudhry is now a highly established in Indian media celebrities and is appearing in various national level media shows and Bollywood films. Sapna's evolution from a regional *ragini* performer to her present status has also been discussed in the next chapter.

In contrast to Sapna Chaudhary and other contemporary *ragini* performers who are more in tune with the current globalized media entertainment industry, the first generation *ragini* singers in Haryana found it more constraining to deal with the forces of tradition. An example is of Shweta Sharma, who entered in late 80s and was one of the first five singers to enter the field. However, she kept her performance limited to recording in studios as she did not find the right support in village and family environment for stage singing. She said:

I found myself limited and became a studio artist. I could not become a stage artist. I use to sing even in auditorium at Delhi but could not perform amidst public in Haryana. People in Haryana see a girl who has come out of her

house to perform on stage as someone who is their property. They start behaving badly with her and do not give the respect due to an artist. I was only 21 years old when I started singing and had to convince my father first to allow me for the same. After that my aunty helped me in convincing the family to let me go for studio recordings. The amount which one would get was around Rs. 1500 for a cassette in those days. I did not earn too much money but definitely got fame. Because of my fame the cassette companies may have earned more money than I did. I recorded almost hundreds of cassettes until 93-94 when I decided to quit *ragini* singing. These were days of competitions and the recording companies started making inappropriate *ragini* compositions. I decided against singing double meaning *raginis* which the companies wanted. Incidentally, I got married around the same time and did not sing for a long time. In the last 20 years, I have only been able to come out with 2 albums of religious bhajans and that too with a gap of 15 years in between. I would like to resume my singing with some innovation in folk music as it is also the important to do something for my kids, especially after my husbands' death. I would like to bring women's geet into the fold of professionally sung songs. My efforts will God willing make my children proud of me.

An important factor which was highlighted by the singer quoted above as well as all other performers is the idea of family support. Most of the women performers have a clear understanding since their childhood if they wish to realize their ambitions of taking up singing as a career then the first requirement and the most important one is having support

and backing from their immediate family. As young girls, if the family has not promoted them in this field, they find it hard to convince their parents, especially father regarding the same. Once crossed, this barrier turns into a facilitator and the most reassuring as well as crucial factor for deciding their future course of actions. If the family prohibits public performance, the way out may be recording in studios. In case the family prohibits that too, there is a still hope that after marriage the husband may enter into the shoes of father and the ambitions may still be realized. However, it is seen that it rarely happens and if it does there may be specific reasons for this to happen. For example, in case of another famous singer from Haryana who started singing around the year 2003, the reason behind being able to continue after marriage was that she married a music composer out of her own choice. Though, her father had supported her singing, after marriage, she recalls her inconsistent journey into pursuing her public singing.

Though I used to sing before marriage after my father was persuaded to let me perform in public, I still used to perform mostly for recording in studios. I did not sing *raginis* on stage except for a couple of times which made me feel uncomfortable with the audience. However, I was quite sought after as a Haryanvi playback singer. I chose to marry a music director so as to be able to continue my career after marriage. I faced a lot of difficulty in convincing my family and relatives for an inter-caste marriage. In Haryana it is extremely rare to find family support after marriage in the pursuit of a singing career. I am trying hard to balance my roles as a daughter-in-law, wife, mother and that of a singer. Women who sing must not neglect their family as our traditional values (*sanskar*) ought to be upheld so that singing

does not get a bad name and a woman singer gets her due respect. There are times when situations are adverse and the familial roles may prevail over one's ambitions but if the immediate family supports you, there is still hope. I also took breaks in between because of domestic responsibilities and kids but still am very much on the scene. My recent songs have been appreciated and couples of awards have come my way including the top most one in the state. With my husband's guidance and support, I am nowadays concentrating on introducing new innovations in my music as well as in *ragini* remix containing the original *kissas*.

In a society where caste-honour regimes are very strong, it is almost impossible to enter singing after marriage. Still the case of Rajbala can be considered as one of a kind. She says that her husband is around six years elder to her and thus has been like a friend, philosopher and guide in her journey of joining public singing of *raginis* as well as in the process of her education. She is the only singer whom one came across as someone who entered *ragini* performance after marriage and that too with encouragement coming primarily from her husband. She shared in an interview how she experienced some resistance and negative evaluation from some of her in-laws on account of the joint decision of both husband and wife regarding her taking up a career in singing *raginis* on the public stage. Her husband continuously advised her about how to negotiate with such responses while maintaining the balance within family. She further said that:

I always had an association with spiritual side of stage singing. With the change in the form and structure of *ragini* in today's time, concerns are raised regarding preserving the original form which I also represent.

Although I became popular for singing *raginis* on stage initially yet nowadays I prefer going to *jagran* for stage singing and recording original form of *raginis*.

Thus by entering the genre and by progressively changing its form and structure, the agency of women singers has been responsible for *ragini* becoming popular. The use of media technologies and new emerging themes and other structural changes were largely brought about by women performers. As evident in the life histories of women *ragini* singers, it is no doubt that sustaining oneself as a performer is as challenging as breaking the barrier to enter this domain. However, the life-course of the artistes acts as an inspiration for the new generation and despite extremely agonizing circumstances, the number of new entrants has been swelling. With exemplary courage and deep concern for the art form, women singers of *ragini* in Haryana have impacted the musical cultures of the region in a definitive manner by integrating elements from other musical cultures and performing arts as well as by changing the alignment of *ragini* with popular mainstream entertainment media. The implications are discussed with details in the coming sections.

II. Understanding the Implications of Women's Entry into *Ragini* Performance

Social change in Haryana during 80s-90s was specifically centered upon the agro-economic sector. Thus with the impact of green revolution as well as the coming of liberal economy, ripples were created in almost every realm of society. Growing instability and higher cost of inputs in agricultural work compelled the *Jat* peasants to substitute field labour by their women while some also had to resort to selling off their lands (Chowdhry,

1994). Simultaneously, the subtle entry of market through technological intervention also introduced new cultures of leisure in the region. The inception of both competitions and cassettes facilitated the entry of women singers in the field. However, many of the established performers also got marginalized at the same time as upper caste men performers were now being replaced by women singers mostly from the Dalit community. Thus coming of women singers earmarked the beginning of shift in themes as well as the lyrics, music, the audience and the occasions of singing *ragini*. This transformed the sites of performance into an amphitheater of power politics.

The transforming cultural sphere also changed the caste and class nexuses in the region which is reflected in the lives and experiences of women singers and thereby influencing their social ambit. The transformation one is deliberating upon here refers to the entry of women singers in the field of *ragini* singing, given the complex caste-class dynamics as well as the shifts at the level of structure, patronage and growing performance opportunities for these women performers.

Changing Contexts of Caste and Patronage alongside Women's Entry in Raginis

As explored in the last two chapters as well, the relationship between gender, caste and performance is inextricably intertwined. The dominant caste (*Jats*) emphasized on consolidating their dominance through folk genres like *ragini* and *swang*. Brahmins were the first one to sing *ragini* (Kumar, 2010) and were followed by other castes except the dominant caste, namely the *Jats* who considered *singing* to be a demeaning occupation to be performed by the peasant-warriors (Chahal & Mathana, 2010).

Though historically any form of association with the lower caste is considered as impure, *ragini* performance did facilitate a space for Dalit singers on the public stage. Traditionally the dominant caste acted as patron for *raginis* and the performers (mostly men) were chiefly from Mirasis, Doms, Barber, Chamar, Potter castes in Haryana. Thus there existed an ‘aesthetic division of labour and roles between the performer and patron’ (Tripathy, 2012, p. 60). Seemingly this could have been the reason behind there being only a few *Jat* performers.

In accordance with the peasant worldview, the most preferred and sacrosanct themes sung in *raginis* were based on the *puranic gathas* (mythological tales) of legendary kings/princesses such as of *Raja Haris Chandra*. Stories of brave soldiers on the war front stressed the importance of patriotism apart from inclusion of sacred tales of mythological characters (like the *chandavel* love story) which shared the value of commitment and devotion. *Raginis* depicting seasons and life cycle events like marriage, birth of a son and so on, were also prevalent. These sung *gathas* were regarded as foundational texts for inculcating values and norms amongst village folks. The same is visible in the *raginis* of the eminent *Saangis* like Pt. Lakhmi Chand, Baje Bhagat, Pt. Mange Ram etc. Apart from that, it was expected that the content of *raginis* shall be ‘neat and clean’² which could be heard by everyone including men and women. Such as cited in one of the *raginis* by Pt. Baje Bhagat, the couplet says:

Keh Baje Ram guru dhorrein, yeh sikhi baat banana,

Chahe babu-beti, bahan sunein eshi ragini gaani (Chahal, 2012).

² Content that does not talk about sexuality

(Baje Ram says that he learnt from his mentor, that such type of a ragini should be sung which everyone, including father, daughter-in-law or sister too could listen while sitting together).

Other prevalent popular *raginis* from mythological swangs being that of *Puran Mal*, *Rup Basant*, *Gulab Kaur*, *Devar-Bhabi*, *Jaimal-Phatta* and *Bhabhi Ka Pyaar*. These *raginis* stress upon social values and culturally shared assumptions about the worldview, norms of society, human nature, relations in the family, between the sexes, stereotypes regarding gender roles, and about human sexuality and its control (Vatuk, 1979, p. 201). The villagers used to ardently wait for such gatherings to happen as this was usually the only source of live entertainment in the rural areas. Women were and are yet excluded from such gatherings except in a few ones which were religious and performed in daylight (morning or afternoon). However, as observed during fieldwork, village women's curiosity to listen to *raginis* leads them to see such programmes from a distance either from the terrace of their homes or from a considerable distance from the public stage. One of the respondents shared that "*bel gaadi pe beth kei dekh la sei*" (*one can listen sitting on the bullock-cart from a far off place*). Visibility in front of stranger is seen as a sin and is strictly prohibited in rural areas where the veil is reinforced.

The changes in the patterns of patronage with the coming of liberal economy in the region when we see the emergence of the cassette industry as a key player, not only transformed the structure but also the caste dimension of performance. Now performers are seen to be drawn from almost all the castes including the Brahmins, Dalits and a few men singers also from the *Jat* community. However, it is also critical to note that most of the singers prefer

singing the compositions of their own communities' poets or of the ones belonging to higher castes but seldom use the *raginis* or *kissas* composed by the Dalit composers.

Even Dalits sing *raginis* composed by Lakhmi Chand, Baje Bhagat and of the many old renowned *saangis* while performing for a large public. Even women singers from Dalit and Brahmin community prefer singing popular *raginis/kissas* in front of predominantly the higher and dominant caste audience and never seem to resist or challenge the contents within. These *raginis* often range from mythological *kissas* to erotic love stories heavily rooted in the *Varna* hierarchy and worldview.

However, with the publication of numerous *ragini* books by Dalit poets, the last decade has seen a shift brought about in narratives. These *raginis*, written by members of their own community, portray their social conditions and idealize Baba Saheb Ambedkar as a protagonist.³ But these compositions are not usually performed in front of the dominant caste. These compositions are mostly sung in small gatherings with their fellow community members by men and for a male audience on public functions like Balmiki Jayanti or Ambedkar Janam Divas. Dalit women are further marginalized within their community both as audience and singers.

This reflects how politics of gender and caste influences the performance. Clearly gender led to structuration of performers as per their caste, on one hand providing opportunity to Dalit women on a bigger platform but on the other hand restricting Dalit men to perform in small gatherings. And perhaps this is the reason for a wide gender gap between remuneration given to performers.

³One gets hint from the songs written by Dalit poets.

A Dalit woman singer now gets somewhere around twenty-one thousand (Rs. 21,000) upto two lakh rupees (Rs. 2, 00,000) depending upon the marketability, reputation and fame of the performer.⁴ However male Dalit singers/musicians get a remuneration somewhere between Rs. 1,100 and Rs. 5,100 depending upon their popularity. Only a few renowned ones get a maximum of Rs. 11,000. Perhaps this is also the reason behind many Dalit male singers not performing even for their own community's small gathering.⁵

A Dalit singer, Ramniwas from the village Khanpur Kalan (Sonepat) aged 52 shared:

Behanji kkuch na de pher kyu apna bhadda laya...esh mare na aavein ghar bhi tei chalana sei (sister they don't give anything than why should we pay fare...that's why we don't sing, have to run house also).

The singing stage often becomes the arena to set one's goal against the other community members. Such fights over each other's caste are not uncommon in live *ragini* performances. Though *Jat* women do not perform but the few who even tried to enter the genre were also banned by their Khaps later. They are even taunted by Dalits, especially women, and other castes as well.

'Jaton ka aur gaanein ka kei taalmel...Jat kei janei'

(What is the symphony of Jat and singing? What they know about singing?)⁶

Thus *ragini* also becomes instrumental in sharpening the existing caste rivalries. For example, many times during such programmes the members of audience compete with

⁴ Field data of the researcher.

⁵ Field data of the researcher.

⁶ A Dalit woman singer's comment about a Jat co-singer during a performance

each other in giving reward money. In the earlier days even land was given to the performer and the one who gives more is seen as having a higher standing. As a renowned *Nautanki* artist Devender Sharma suggests, art could be understood not only as an ‘art form but as a community event where people collect, talk and socialize in each other’s company...and discuss the social issues in the performance’ and hence it becomes a strategy for community development’ (Sharma, 2007, p.7).

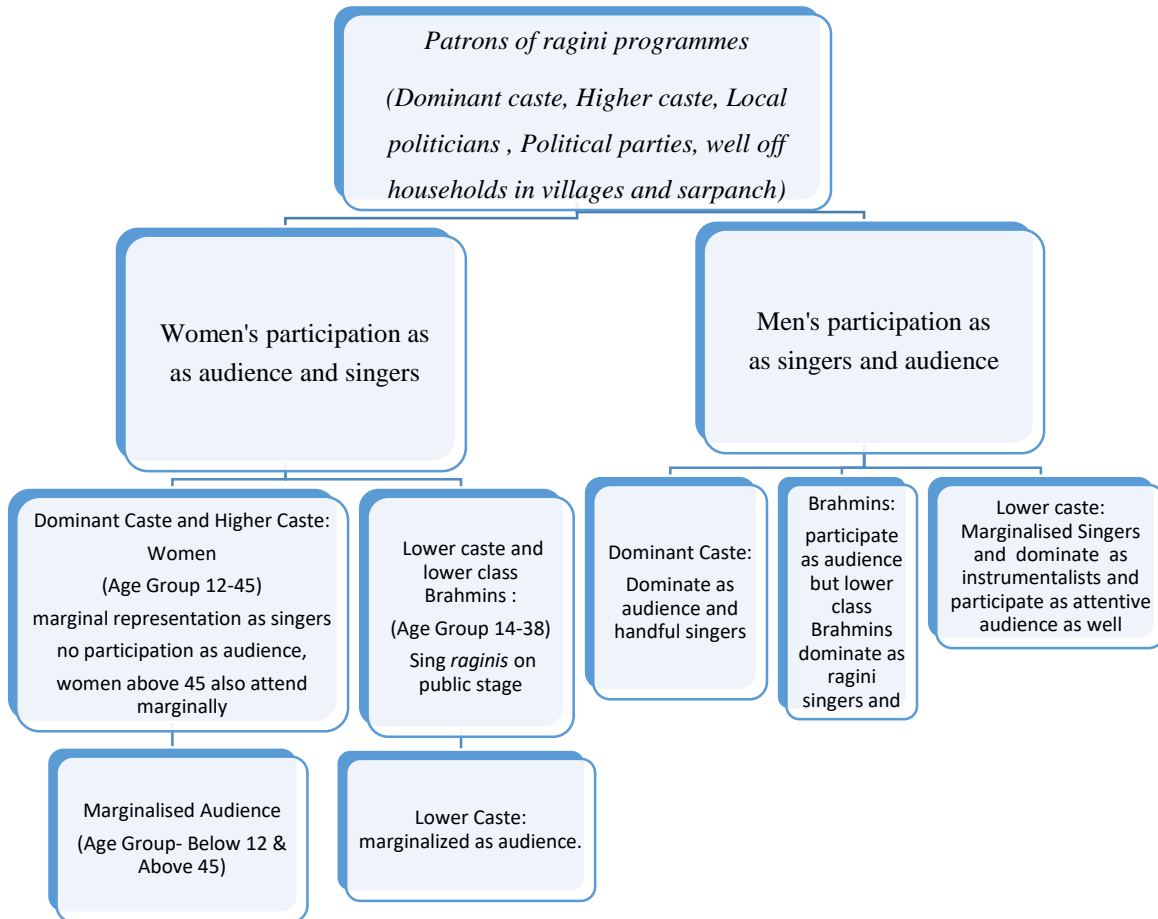


Image1: Caste, Class & Gender composition of singers & audience in ragini programmes

The organization of the site of performance in itself helps in understanding the caste-class and gender implications on the stage and the prevalent social organization of the community in the region as in Image 1. The singers and their troupe sit on the stage on the floor. Whereas the patrons (sponsors belonging to higher caste or dominating caste with local politicians and *thekedars*⁷) usually sit on the chairs on the stage. In front of the stage (in the centre) the space is occupied by men audience from all the castes. On the margins towards left and right, one can witness marginalized audience in the form of women and children (girls specifically).

The whole structure and aura of a traditional folk art thus came under transition. Its new form is not very popular amongst the elderly folk while the youngsters and middle-aged men (15-45) have generally become more inclined towards a specific form containing higher degree of flashy elements and bodily moves in performance. Women's opinion matters less in live performances as they seldom participated even as spectators.⁸ The ones who at times attend and that too mostly in gatherings of religious kinds, do so just by virtue of being elderly women (between 45 to 65) who may have higher social prestige and say but her sexuality is no more considered a threat, and this participation would not have any ill effect upon the same (Duran, 2007, p.576).

The post-green revolution period in Haryana thus saw the entry of women performers in *ragini* which changed the structure of the genre to fit a new context and form altogether. Along with it the idea of a troupe or band of performers became important as part of the new practices of organizing performances. This had an impact upon the prevailing

⁷Contractors

⁸Kharju Singh-respondent.

ideologies and conventions like that of the teacher-disciple relationship tradition referred to as the *guru-shishya parampara*.

Troupes, Competitions and a Judgemental Audience

A mentor or a *Guru* is considered to be essential for *ragini* singers generally but only a few of the women singers are systematically trained ones. Women singers usually enter singing first and then go and find a guru. As Manju from *Kasandi* village shared

“Pehle tho mei aisei hi gaati thi par ab mujhe sikhna hai Gohana mei ek school music teacher hai. Unko request ki hai ki mujhe apna shisya bana le. (Initially I used to sing without training but now I want to learn. So I have requested a school music teacher in Gohana to make me his disciple)”⁹

Earlier transmitted through the mentor, now association with troupes often addressed as parties becomes important for fetching performance opportunities on public stage. As one of the singer said, ‘*hamari party ko bulatein hai*’ (*our troupe is invited*). Performing in a group not only provides security, especially to women singers and girls, but also ensures good earning. These troupes are all headed by men as women are not encouraged to lead the groups. Until last decade it was difficult to trace even a single woman headed *ragini* troupe except Sarika Chaudhary’s who carved a niche for herself in the field. After her, prominent singers like Rajbala also formed her party with an artist from *Jat* community named Nardev Beniwal.

The young girls and middle aged performers (between 18 years to 38 years) accompanied by their fellow troupe men, are seen performing very intense dance moves so as to fetch

⁹Interviewed at Polytechnic College, Khanpur Kalan, Sonapat (Haryana).

more tips. It is interesting to note that earlier a party which only had singers now also employs a dancer in the troupe primarily to attract the male audience. The women in audience participate passively without openly voicing their desire. The troupes are usually controlled by men singers except for one or two troupes being headed by *Dalit* women singers in last couple of decades.¹⁰The Guru-Shishya *parampara* is evading day by day as the original form of genre itself is on decline and is moving towards a structural change.

Haryanvi *ragini* competitions came into existence around 1982 (Badgujjar, 2011) which coincided with intervention of markets with inception of musical technology in Haryana (Kumar, 2009, p.123). Different artists compete on stage against each other and a feel of wrestling is created for the audience. These performances started to be recorded as they happened and further released in market by cassette companies. Cassette industry also crept in between 1980s-90s (Kadyan, 2007) and deployed technology which majorly impacted the folk genre of the region. Impact of technology and cassettes shall be subject for discussion in the last chapter.

However, with *ragini* competition, the concerns of copyright and authorship erupted as different stakeholders tried to encash on the popularity of some songs (Badgujjar, 2011).

¹⁰ So it is very rare to find a musical troupe being headed by women artist in Haryanvi society. Madhubala is amongst the few who has her own troupe apart from Surekha Chaudhary. Surprisingly, a young Jat woman *ragini* singer formed her 'party' and cassette company, later she was banned from performing on public stage by her Khap for supposedly denigrating the *gotra*. She sold off her company¹⁰ but started recording private albums in studio. Lately she has changed her genre (which was *ragini* earlier) to pop-rap singing. She claims to be the first one to revive the Haryanvi musical industry of Haryana by launching her famous album in 2010.

Some artists have a unique cultural explanation too. A singer who had come to perform at Khanpur Kalan from Karnal shared his opinion and said:

‘Competition shuru huein kyuki hum hajir javabi rakhei, latmar bhasha mahri esh maare’ (Competitions began because of our witty and quick response ability as well as due to our culture of using blunt and bold language).

It is not uncommon to see these days that the stage of live performances often become like a boxing arena. Performers often use this space to pass lewd comments on their co-singers through dialogical-lyrical clashes. Apart from verbally abusing each other on stage there have been many cases when the professional rivalry between women singers/ troupes turns into giving threats of violence (including rape threats) too. A case of such kind was even reported in media when a Dalit dancer from Rohtak accused her fellow artist and associates for issuing rape threats to her if she ever performed on stage.¹¹

Perceptions about Women on the Public Stage of Ragini Performance

“Jab mei stage par pehli baar aayi tho, duur duur sei log aatei thein mujhe dekhne ki woh kaun hai jisne itni himmat ki stage par itne logon ke saamne gaati hai...mujhe bahut fakra hai ki meri ek alag pehchaan hai... (When I came on stage for the first time, people would come from far off places to see who has such courage to sing in front of so many people. I feel pride in having an identity of my own).”

¹¹ *Rival issuing rape, death threats: Haryana Singer, Times of India, Jan 4, 2018.*

As explained earlier too the mid-eighties saw women singers enter the public sphere of Haryanvi *ragini manch* (stage).¹² These women were not from the upper caste or class but primarily represented the marginalized sections of the society including Dalits. First among them was Sarita Chaudhary who performed a ‘*duchasmi*’¹³ *ragini*, a duet, with a male co-singer on the public platform for the first time in 1986. She was soon followed by other women singers like Neelam Chaudhary (Sarita’s sister), Beenu Chaudhary, Passi Nayar and many more (Kumar, 2010, p. 40).¹⁴ Life histories of each one takes us to the unheard trajectories of pain and pleasures, these performing subjectivities experienced in their journey of making ‘choices through vocality’ (Hillier, 2013, p. 1).

Having entered a constructed masculine sphere, as only men until then were supposedly seen as accomplished artists /performers among the *ragini* singers, creating a space for oneself became an all the more daunting task. Despite such constraints, the number of women performers has substantially increased over the last couple of decades. Proclaiming their right over the public space of *ragini* performance in Haryana, women singers are seen to have challenged the prevalent notion regarding women’s place in public vis-à-vis the ideas of domesticity. The assigned image of an ‘entertainer’¹⁵ has thus evolved for women performers in contradiction to the ideas of domesticity and ideal womanhood in these cultural contexts.

¹²It was around same time when cassette production companies were getting ready to enter the local music industry of Haryana.

¹³*Duchashmi* here has double meaning one it refers to a duet *ragini* and other it’s double meaning.

¹⁴The chronological records are not written but were there in people’s memory. Chronological sequence of their

coming to *ragini* singers is not recorded or documented.

¹⁵ Seen as a prostitute/ seductress, as freely available.

Socio-economic vulnerability of women is the most important factors behind their decision to perform on the public stage. The same also holds true for some of the men singers and instrumentalists as well, but such cases in comparison to women performers are less. Sapna Chaudhary, the most famous contemporary artist, recently said in a public interview¹⁶ that;

“Paise ki shortage ki wajah sei dance karna shuru kiya. Stage pe naachna kisi ladki ka dream nahi hota, maine nahi socha tha kei mei khulei mei itne aadmiyon ke saamnei naachungi. (Due to shortage of money, I started dancing on stage, otherwise it is not a dream of any girl to dance, never thought she will dance in front of so many men in open).”

Thus many folk artists including singers and musicians largely believe that women enter such professions due to lack of economic support base in family, absence of male bread earner and at times due to loss of dignity on account of some incident like sexual victimization, harassment, mishappening or getting raped. This is perceived in terms of loss of honour which facilitates shedding of inhibitions regarding stage performance.

To cite a response with reference to this belief, a *saangi* (male *swang* artist) by profession said;

‘Jiske saath kuch galat hoja, pher uskepaas ke reh sei, ga ke pet pale sei’

(If something wrong happens with someone, what is she left with? They sing and earn their livelihood).

¹⁶ 06.06.2017, Interview given to Haryana News, Sapna Chaudhary.

It reflects the societal belief of understanding the virginity of women as sacred and pure, once lost they are worth nothing. However, many of the women singers admitted that ‘they never wanted to be a *ragini* singer’ as Rekha Chaudhary (name changed) shared

“Ess profession mei bhalei ghar ki chori na aati, woh tei mhari jaisi ki majboori hoja, essh mhare karna pade na tho kharcha kukar challein (No girl belonging to a good family will ever come in this profession, it is because of our situation, the economic one, that they are compelled to do so as it is difficult to meet one’s ends).”

The other popular notion being, absence of a man in their family has primarily led them to flaunt their sexuality so freely. As many respondents were of the view that

“koi mard janana na hoga kamaan khatar innhne kabu rakhan khatar esh tai naachti haandei ghar challan khatr...na tei kaun karan de eshe kaam, sab kuch dikhati phirei sei, baap bhai ki bhi sharam na mannei, randi hori sei. (There may not be any man to earn and control them and that is why they dance to run their houses...otherwise who would let them do such work. They keep on showing everything, not even respectful for anyone, they have become sluts).”

Engraved is a popular perception that women would only defy the established conventions in the absence of men to fulfil the public and economic roles. Indeed, women themselves have inhibitions regarding being associated with non-conventional roles i.e. singing in public (as hinted in the interviews above). Thus the collective understanding of the village folk reinforces the thought that people from respectable backgrounds will desist to be

associated with performers. If a woman shows interest in performing in front of strangers in public than she is a prostitute (Vatuk,1979, p.28).

The coming of women in *ragini* was also facilitated by market that received a boost with the emergence of *ragini* competitions which is to be discuss in the coming sections. These competitions were held at night mostly to sustain the interest of the predominantly male audience in which women singers became instrumental (Kumar, 2009, p.129). Introduction of competition and women on the public stage proved to be a double edged weapon for the markets in transforming *ragini* in its very core. The structure of the *genre* has substantially changed as original *raginis* are preferred only occasionally or on the demand of the audience. Singers now usually prefer singing *raginis* in filmy tunes so as to gain popularity from it. The one who composes the most vulgar lyrics extempore and is the most whistled for gets popularity in audience and is declared the winner in the end. As a *ragini* singers said “*kati phuhadta maccha di (It has become extremely vulgar now)*”¹⁷

*Bhaddhi ragini gavein aurtei...inke aatein hi katti naas mardiya. Shurru mei
tei Beenu paramparagat raginiya hi gaati thi par usne dheere dheere usne
ashlil majak karnei shurru kare. Tho usko khup paise milne lage...phir tho
usne upratali ki ragini karni shurru kardi...kyu paise milen the ghannei.
(Women sing vulgar songs and they spoilt everything. Initially, Beenu use
to sing traditional raginis but slowly and gradually she started cracking
vulgar jokes. She got a lot of money so she just shifted to erotic raginis).*

¹⁷ Hindu News, Haryana (28.09.2016).

Consequently, *raginis* are seen to have become pornographic expressions of agency. The male repressed sexuality gets an expression through *raginis* as it becomes a source of drawing voyeuristic pleasure. Seeing women performing a supposedly erotic dance with provocative gestures is otherwise a taboo in this society, especially for women.

Men as ‘Performing Artists’ and Women as ‘Entertainers’

Public stage is a social space and women’s cultural position as the ‘other’ results in sites of performance further intensifying the stereotypical feminine and masculine roles and images. A woman singer is relegated to an identity of an entertainer or a seductress and not that of an artist. Anguished over mistreatment of women performers in public and the painful realities of a transformed genre, an eminent folk *ragini* singer said:

“bahot mehnat ke baad bhi humme artist nahi mantei entertainer kahte hai aur admi to masti karte hai phir bhi artist hai...Entertainer mantei hai matlab woh picture thi na vidya balan wali...aurat ko tho sirf entertainment ki cheej ki tarah dekhte hai...Sur taal pe kisi ka dyhan nahi...jo jaada ganda nacche aur gayei..Khuli ho ...woh utni badi entertainer...”¹⁸ (We work so hard, even then we are not considered artists, they call us ‘entertainers’ and while men just enjoy at our cost, even then they are ‘artists’. Entertainer

¹⁸ In a popular Hindi film titled ‘The Dirty Picture’, the lead actress Vidya Balan who is playing the role of a south Indian film star named Silk Smitha delivers a dialogue where she says that for the audience her job is giving them ‘entertainment, entertainment and entertainment’. Interestingly the star portrayed was also described as a ‘sex symbol’ of south Indian cinema in popular film magazines of the day. The film was also said to be an attempt by Vidya Balan to redefine her image in line with the popular demand of a sensuous and body centric performance by actresses. The identification with the idea of an entertainer and Silk Smitha’s portrayal by Vidya Balan is striking.

means that Bollywood movie of Vidya Balan. Women are seen as only objects of entertainment, not much bothered about tune and rhythm. The one who dances and sings with greater degree of openness and vulgarity becomes a better entertainer).

Thus women on stage are objectified as commodities to lure the audience for raising money by pleasing men and appealing to their gaze, in Haryana as in other places. This at times also becomes one of the reasons behind rivalry between women singers as one category of singers wishes to retain the mythological form in *raginis* (seen as devoid of the contemporary form of eroticism) while the other favour performing on erotic themes to earn more.

Rajbala, a popular *ragini* singer in Haryana has quit singing *raginis* after the entry and rising popularity of dancers like Sapna Chaudhary. She has now taken to religious singing but occasionally still records *raginis* that were written and sung by the famous *Saangis* like Lakhmi Chand. She shared in an interview:

‘Jab sei raginiyon mei phudta aai tab maine socha ragini gaana bilkul chod du aur ab mei jargan karti hu, bas asli ragini record karti hu’

(Ever since this vulgarity entered raginis, I thought of quitting ragini singing and shifting to devotional song-nights. I now record original raginis only).

Thus women see themselves as performers by singing on a public platform and feel empowered by having been able to create a niche for themselves in the male dominated public sphere. But for the spectators/listeners or co-artists (men) women’s bodies

overshadow their singing voices and skills. On the contrary women singers intend to break free from this image of entertainer, often seen as a seductress and a freely available one, so as to carve out their place in the public domain with some social respectability (Courchesne, 2013, p.iii).

Various studies have analyzed the notion of ‘woman as an artist’ and have reflected upon their unrecognized or missing identity of a performer. Arguing around the same belief, Ellen Koskoff, an ethnomusicologist, cites studies on court traditions in Asia and Europe and argues that women performers and musicians perform ‘dual roles of entertainers and courtesans’ (Koskoff, 2014, p.87). Amlan Das Gupta, a literary scholar on women and music, opines that with coming of recording industry in India, women singers have been uncomfortably positioned at the fringes of the musical world. They were called as *tawaifs and baijis*. However, the profession of music for a male singer entails ‘skill in singing various classes of songs and playing instruments’ whereas for women there exist ‘additional elements of dancing, the arts of courtesy and sexual gratification’ (Das Gupta, 2012, p. 14).

A similar narrative one encountered during the field is reproduced below. An eminent lead singer of a *ragini* troupe points out that males are regarded as artists as they have real skills while women are only for pleasing the audience as they entertain with their bodies.

“Sapna Chaudhary singer na sei who tho dancer sei aur uski figure aur surat bhi matlab acchi sei issh marei ghani popular hogi..uska dance karanh ka tarika..body figure, haav bhaav aadmiyon nei ghana

lubhavei..admi tho fankaar artist ho..arr aurat apne tan-bhav arr triya charitra tei audience nei lubhavei..”¹⁹

(Sapna Chaudhary is not a singer, she is a dancer and her figure and face is, I mean, good...that is why she has become popular...her dancing style, her gestures fascinated men. Men are skilled artist and a woman has to please the audience through her body, gestures and character).

Negotiating multiple identities

“aise samaj mei jahan ladkiya ka jeans pehena bhi bura mana jata hai, accha lagta hai ki mei Kalakar hu aur meri ek pehchaan hai”²⁰ (In a society, where wearing jeans is considered a taboo, she feels good to be an artist and having an identity of her own).

Women singers negotiate with multiple identities i.e. of a performer (chaste one), an ideal woman and at times that of a bread earner too. There is no single axis of identity which may absolutely represent their multiple selves. The social location of singers in the community determines their access to resources, identity and respectability as well. A Dalit singer asserted:

“aap madam kya sochte ho ke jo mei dalit ban kei gaun tho kei yeh manne jin denge”

(What do you think madam, if I assert/sing with a Dalit identity will they let me live peacefully?)

¹⁹ Folk *ragini* singer artist interviewed in June 2018, Bhiwani (HR).

²⁰Shared by Ms. Radha (name changed), a local *ragini* singer, during an interview in 2012.

It has been observed that performers of *Ragini* from the Dalit community prefix dominant castes' surnames. Deepak Kumar, a scholar of history also discloses in his unpublished work on *savings* (Kumar, 2007, p.143), that a male performer named Pale Ram²¹, barber by caste, uses *Dahiya*, a Jat surname which signifies belonging to an important *Khap* in Haryana. Similarly, singers also use names of their village which provide them with an affiliation to the identity of a village community or the dominating caste even when the performer belongs to the marginalized community of that village.

Thus *ragini* as a genre is of great sociological interest because of the transformation in both gender and caste profile of performers. *Ragini* performance gives an opportunity for upward mobility in the caste hierarchy. Such a process also highlights the oppressive structure of the performing sites which results in performers using fictitious surnames so that the audience does not tease them with derogatory remarks about their caste status. Sureka Choudhury²² a prominent *ragini* singer shared that she does not use her real surname so that her performance is not affected by her caste affiliations. A persisting threat of being exploited by the influential persons from higher/dominant caste also propels many of the women singers from lower caste to hide their surnames and use neutral surnames or of higher caste but usually not the Jat *gotras* as it may be seen as offending by the dominant caste and would further lead to intervention by the respective *khaps*.

Ellen Koskoff opines that in most societies, 'a woman's identity is believed to be embedded in her sexuality i.e. she is seen primarily as sexual partner, child bearer, and nurturer. Thus,

²¹ 'Mahars of Maharashtra produced a rich documentation of his life in cassettes and popular musical sphere used for contestation and claims of identity.'

²² Pseudonym.

one of the most common associations between women and music links women's primary sexual identity and role with music performance.' According to her,

“sexuality affects music performance in three important ways: (1) performance environments may provide a context for sexually explicit behaviour, such that music performance becomes a metaphor for sexual relations; (2) the actual or perceived loss of sexuality may change women's musical roles and/or statuses; and (3) cultural beliefs in women's inherent sexuality may motivate the separation of or restriction imposed upon women's musical activities” (Koskoff, 1988, p.6).

Thereby such a self reproduces issues of the gendered self, inequalities, and the artistic self. However, Judith Butler (1999) like many other social scientist stresses upon the essentiality of recognizing “the multiplicity of cultural, social and political intersections in which the concrete array of women is constructed” (p.19-20) Construction of gender identities have to be seen in multi-layered contexts, including a regional one and caste, class etc.

Out of the 50 performers interviewed, women singers were 30 in total, two third of them were from Dalit community, one third belonging to upper caste and other castes including Brahmans though economically weak. Couple of singers from Jat community met with unfortunate incidents while performing and thus quit *ragini* singing on stage. What further complicates things is that women singers may use different castes' surnames in place of their own. On inquiring about men singers (10 interviewed), one found that they belong to all the caste and classes. Economically needy people are entering the *ragini* field including Jat men facing financial constraints. Majority of musicians/instrumentalists in the *ragini*

troupes are from the Dalit communities often called Chamar, Balmiki, Nai (Barber), Doom in Haryana.

As discussed in the last section, artists do not always show their caste and community affiliations due to existing discriminatory practices apart from gendered ones. For example: singers from lower castes use the title Chaudhary/Kumari to gain respectability and escape their original identity both in case of men and women performers. It is further supplemented with valorizing the dominant *ragini* themes which please the patrons.

Apart from it, desire for an identity of performer as well as homemaker is seen as a common response amongst most of the women singers. A singer, who left singing after the genre changed too much for her to cope with, shared:

Mei jis tariha, ragini, gaun auron tei alag sei. Mei aajkal kei ragini gyaanaali ki tariha na su...Jiska sara dyaan singran mei sei aur kittei bhi ja. Mei thei sirf bade stejo pei gaya aur naam kamaya. (The way I perform ragini is different from the others. I am not like ragini singers of today whose only interest is to dress well and go anywhere. I only perform at bigger stage and have earned a name for myself).

Even an interaction with women *ragini* singers is seen as malicious and fear of being boycotted by the whole community keeps people, especially women, away from them and their company. While planning for an interview with a singer, a respondent said:

“tum pagal ho gaye ho ke uske ghar jake interview loge...koi baat nahi karega tum se. Samaj bhi tho dekhna padta hai...waha jaoge tho tumhe bhi waisa hi samjhenge.kai baar colony mei complaint ki hai use nikalne ki par

koi kuch karta hi nahi...kitne log aatein hai uske ghar mei...bacchon par kya asar padega...hum tho yaha se khud hi chale jaayenge”

(Have you gone mad that you will go to that singer’s house for interview...no one will talk to you. One has to live as per society. If you go, there than society would consider you also like her. Many men visitors are seen at her house. But the colony management does not take any action despite complaints...what kind of influence the kids would be under...we will leave this colony soon on our own).

Thus their social position in the varna hierarchy marginalizes them culturally, economically and politically as well. With an immutable scope of upward mobilization in Varna hierarchy, mobilization across the class becomes a possibility for performers with increasing incomes. However, their shifting realities get manifested in their shifting identities as well. The question of the ideal woman identity only bothers women singers who sing in public and not in private (as in *geet*). Thus the site of performance is transformed into negotiating spaces of ambivalent gendered identities. The personal becomes political despite endless efforts of performer to keep professional life separate from personal one.

Women’s Sources of Power: Contrasting Ragini with Geet

Source of entertainment for audience, performance on stage is a medium of living; perhaps also instrumental in expressing agency and at times becomes a symbol of power for a singer. Women singers, in context, consider the space of performance and the act of singing (performing) instrumental in ensuring power to them despite their commodification as an

object of desire. However, the perception is, of course, not same for the male artists. The profession empowers women performers with financial independence and related decisions. However, socially their power is still relegated to their capacity of attracting larger audience being a female performers and their relevance of being able to seduce the male audience. A *ragini* singer shared that:

'Stage pe audience ko control karne wala singer hi tho hota hai, stage se ek pehchan milti hai aur logo ko mohne ki shakti artist ke paas hoti hai'

(On stage, the singer controls the audience, stage provides an identity and the artist has the power to attract people)

Thus women singers' encounter power in many ways even though the audience comprises primarily of listeners from higher caste powerful men. First in the very moment of climbing on stage, they break the stereotype of moving beyond the designated spaces of domesticity. It privileges them over the marginalized audiences constituting of women sitting in veil amongst the audiences or observing their performances from the terrace or sitting on the bullock cart. They feel they are the symbol of empowerment in front of a hundred others. At the same time, a dilemma corresponds too as the other women behind the veil are seen to have a peaceful family life devoid of the turmoil women performers face.

Further the public stage witnesses a different social structure during live performances. The stage facilitates performers with an upper hand over the audience, who see them from lower level i.e. ground and watch them perform on the stage above. As otherwise lower caste performers would not even be tolerated standing or sitting near higher caste audience. Interestingly singers from lower caste become preacher for the upper caste which they

cannot even dream of otherwise. Thus public stage is transformed into a site of power politics as the performer even from lower caste participates in reinforcing symbolic significance of the idea of *sanskara* (values) among the audience. Similarly, through mythological stories woven in the *ragini* and even *geets*, beliefs of the accepted system are reproduced and become site of power as the performer are able to reinforce the existing inequalities of gender, caste or class (Charsley & Kadekar, 2006, p.32).²³

It is interesting to look at the dynamics of the site itself (*ragini space i.e. public*) as the performer, who may belong to the so-called untouchable, lower caste and the marginalized sections, is able to transcend the in-equalities of caste, class and gender, though only at superficial level, by exerting power on the audience (by dramatizing the principles of idealized order) (Robertson, 1987, p.225).²⁴ So they are able to defy, their defined status, and attain a superior position than the higher caste and the powerful.

While examining the nexus of power and gender in the musical performance of women, Robertson argues that music operates as a mediator of power between genders (ibid., p.227). To come back to the audience, mostly men, use such musical performances to circumscribe the lives of women through social coercion. And perhaps is the reason behind letting women, in both Khanpur village and Sonapat, listen to mythological ritual

²³Drawing upon the similar thread in the 'Sarpam Tullal: A ritualistic performance of Kerala,' Vayala Vasudevan Pillai observes that in ritualistic performances, performers are able to create time & space while performing as they represent the collective conscience 'aesthetic and spiritual consent' of the participants i.e. the audience.

performances that idealize woman as *devi* as well as *kali*, through *bhajans*, *shabd* & *Jagratra* even at night.

In contrast to this genre *ragini*, the notion of power in women's *geet* is derived from the very space they come to occupy in the name of entertainment i.e. a space of their own, though a controlled space again, but no one is bothered about becoming a performer or deriving an identity out of it. In fact, there is no notion of performer or audience so everyone participates and everyone is a performer as well as the audience in form of listeners.

As Rasmi, a newly married woman aged 22, said

“hum tei pihar mei nui geet sun sun kei badde hue, eb sasural mei bhi teej tyohar nei, bhyah mei mil kei sukh –dukh baat lei sei...arr ghar ka dhanda peethein jaa sei...jisnei jo geet aave wah galei sei haam bhi peeche peeche gaavein...addei koin puruskar milna sei...na koi gayak...sadh ja sei...jis tariha mard aapni ragini sun la sei hum beer adden sun le sei...gaa lei sein”

(We grew up listening to these songs now in even here in-laws house, on the occasion of festivals and weddings we share our good and bad experiences. we are all the time doing house chores...whosoever knows any song starts singing. We follow...as if we will be awarded and no one is singer here...it suffices...just like men listen to *ragini*. We women listen and sing these *geet*).

Thus performance could also be seen as ‘sharing subjective learning/experiences, one excels in, in a politically correct language.’ Performance is thereby seen as inherently

political that stages representation, ideology, hegemony and resistance through performing art such as body politic on stage.

So performance enables performer to exercise power and express agencies, even a repressed one due to existential reality of being placed in a patriarchal structure, but it also induces a fear amongst the marginalized audience of women who are scared of losing their husbands to these women artists. Power for an artist may entail different meanings, especially for the women audiences, who see these women performers as a threat in that they may seduce their husbands and have a bad effect on their relationships. So with power for women performers, a symbolic fear/threat also enters for lay women who are scared that their spouses may indulge in an illicit fascination /affair with women *ragini* singers. A respondent aged 32 Khajani said:

“en ka ke bera pattein kis ke mard nei moh le, langad ka langad picche reh se inke...inkaa tei ke bigde...ghar tei mahri jissa kahi tutee sei...padhei rah sei daru piyein ishiya ke ghel...kei pher mahre bas ke...enka ka ke koi dharm maan...jide ja udhe das log aur banna lei...uh na thi Meenakshi Chaudhuri (name changed) mari gi ja...nui nah char byah racha ri thi...char party badle...arr das mard...nui tei mard...kissin aura galein hole thi...aur dusra kei khasmon nei ahlja lein sein...”

(One cannot say anything about these women *ragini* singers, a long line of men is after them. They do not lose anything...women like us, our homes are broken...our husband are all the time drunk and stay with such women ...than what should we do ...such women do not have any respect /honour or character...wherever they go they find ten more husbands...that women

named Meenakshi Chaudhuri was killed...she married 4 men...and changed 4 parties. And kept 10 husbands. That is why she was killed. They go with anyone and everyone...and get involved with other's husbands).

Evident enough, the power of women performer is just measured in terms of their capability to fascinate (seduce male audiences). Whereas at the same time, the wives of male listeners, already separated from the site of performance who participate as the extended audience at times, feels threatened as their men may find women singers sexually enticing. So in a way, power for one may symbolize powerlessness for the other. Implicit in it is the belief that by choosing unconventional professions, a woman singer contests the notion of ideal womanhood and thereby is not expected to deserve respectability.

Conversely, at the same time women singing *geet* has an upper hand over these *ragini* women singers as they are aware that they will never be equated with the public women or *randi* (though means widow while in this context it appropriates a new meaning i.e. prostitute) despite their using an abusive language, lyrics and contents in marriage songs. Space being the mediator generates difference of perceptions and opinions with regard to the women singing *geet* i.e. private women singers and women singing *ragini* i.e. public women singers, looking through the prism of defined categories of home and the world.

It would be relevant here to cite an interview of a neighbour, of one of the renowned women *ragini* singer. On being asked what they feel about the performer, the respondent said:

“esi aurtan tei kalank sei samaj pei...ennhei tei eisi saaf colony mei rehan ni dena chaiye kitna bunda asar pade balka pei, bahu, beti pei” (Such women are a stigma for the society as they inflict a bad influence on their

children, daughters & daughter-in-law. They should not be allowed to stay in decent colonies).

It is also crucial to bear in mind that even men audience feel threatened that such performances certainly lead a negative influence on their women and children (only girls) that would disable them to control their sexuality for example: *kissas* that incorporates *raginis* that depicts *jija-sali*, *devar-bhabi* (brother-in-law and sister-in-law), *sasur-bahu* (Father-in-law and daughter-in-law), *liaisons etc.* A common narrative appears time and again while interviewing respondents:

‘aurton pei aur chorriyon pe iska galat asar padei kya shiksha dei’

(What influence it would have on our women and girls, what education it gives).

Thus women’s proximity to popular culture is perceived as a threat to the structure as it may bring forth their suppressed natural desires (expressing themselves or sexually for that matter) to forefront which are culturally thought to be a sin if expressed in either spaces i.e. public or private both.²⁵ This further intensifies the rural beliefs of keeping women and girls away from *ragini*.

Coming back to the context, thus defining the idea of *saafsutri* (clean-clear) performance, artists believe, helps in earning a tag of respectable artist. Madhubala, a renowned singer from Bahadurgarh, began her performance, in Sonapat, by saying:

“mei apni seema janu su...uske bheetar hi gaungi...”

²⁵ Verma, Smitha. ‘How Popular culture is changing women’s desires to the forefront.’ Financial Express, July 1, 2018.

(She knows her limit and therefore would sing accordingly within it).

Saafsutri implies *ragini* performance that does not involve any vulgar lyrics (offending the dominant caste or males) and gestures (eye blinking) during the *ragini* performance.

Interestingly their limit is generally defined by the spectators, as performers choose as per audiences' demand. Manju shares how challenging it is for a woman singer to stand and perform amidst drunk males, especially at night. As there exists no limit to listeners' comments and uninvited gestures, performers grapple with offending behaviour of the listeners all the times. Gestures are embedded in every social interaction and thus become all the more important on a public stage. For example: a sharp gaze to the male co-singer would directly imply 'mind it that's it'. Manju, a renowned *ragini* singer from Sonapat shared:

*Jaunsa kharab bollen ...ek bar ghoor du...tabein samaj ja sei...kei nuna
chale bahot holiyan...*

(Whosoever talks dirty...I stare them once...and there and then they understand that it will not work. Enough is enough. You have crossed your limit).

These offensive gestures, however, also become opportunity for many other performers to earn more. Contesting the gestures (does not seem to be a possibility as ability to face the consequences of raising violence) is usually determined by one's social capital in the given structure thus the unwanted gestures become inevitable most of the time.

'Missing Women' as Musicians and Composers

There has been a dearth of women composers and musicians in Haryana and rarely has it been debated or written about in academic circles of Haryana. Even if there are a few, they remain marginalized from the mainstream culture. Historically been part of oral tradition, only the life histories of eminent folk artists including biographies of the eminent *Saangis* and *ragini* singers find mention in the available published folk literature. Here as well one witnesses the dominance of men i.e. over the arena of performance and entertainment either in theatrical way or in form of script writing. However, as mentioned elsewhere it can also be seen as a Brahmanic agenda to establish their primacy by publishing the life histories of prominent *Saangis* who were Brahmins and not of other such performers.

Initially one may feel perplexed whether women performers ever existed in this region or they were intentionally kept behind a veil. If such performers existed, then why not even a single authentic work or biography has ever been published even in local journals? Throughout the field work, not even a single woman instrumentalist came to light and the same is true for *Swang* or *ragini*. A crucial feature of *ragini* is that the name of writer/lyricist is quoted in the end. However, one does not find such *raginis* where women's contribution appears recognized.

The relative absence of women musicians, instrumentalists and composers is not just a rural but pan Indian phenomenon. Sneha Khanwelkar, musician in Bollywood Industry

said in an interview, on absence of women musicians in India, that “*unless you create a niche and break the male stereotype, you cannot survive as a composer.*”²⁶

Women have always been the subject of debate and controversy over being women performers, composers as the prejudice against female composers/artists has been always visible across the national boundaries. The eminent scholars like Kant and Rousseau once wrote:

The experience of centuries ...has proved that woman is, without exception, incapable of any true artistic or scientific work...The attempt is useless, since we have not yet produced the female artist or musician, notwithstanding all the desperate efforts of daughters of 'concierges' and of all the marriageable young ladies in general who study the piano, and even composition. Woman on earth has two parts to play, quite distinct roles, both of them charming--Love and Maternity!

Sunidhi Chauhan, a renowned hereditary singer, on being interviewed by a local newspaper regarding women composers in Bollywood, says that since Usha Khanna, there has been a dearth of women composers in Bollywood. She further adds that “music direction has been male dominated for so long that women might be apprehensive to venture into it” (Unny, 2005). Underlying such a belief, that too of a woman singer, shows that woman performers are always seen as under performers in comparison to male artists

²⁶Cited by Divya Unny in her article ‘Missing in action: women composers,’ in www.dnaindia.com, 15th Feb 2014, accessed on September 26, 2005.

or their performance is always judged in relation to men which further reinforces such categorization.

Commenting on whether women writes songs, a 50 years old woman said that:

*“ye geet arr bhajan tho pehle lakhmi, mehar singh aur jo pehle ke saangii
thei woh dege virasat mei...aurton nei konya likhe...aurat tei gayaan karein
likhe na.” (Women generally do not write songs. Many of the geets that
women sing at home were composed and written by the legendary saangis
and singers like Pt. Lakhmi Chand, Mehar Singh etc. Women do not write
but generally sing).*

The other examples include the *geet* sung by women during *bhaat* ceremony which have been borrowed from the original work (part of oral text) of Pt. Lakhmi Chand, Mangeram, though compiled by Pt. Bhimraj Kavi Raisaranba (Image 2) and published from local vendors like one named Chand Book Depot, Khari Baoli, Delhi (see photograph) and could be purchased in about rupees 5 to 15.



Image 2 Famous Kissa 'Narsi Bhaat' **Source:** From the researcher's fieldwork

Similarly, many of such original *kissas* like *mirabhai*, *tota-maina*, *sarvarneer*, *nal-dushant*, *gopichand*, *raja vikramaditya*, *Haryanvi lok geet* etc. (Image 3 and 4) were compiled in small booklet form, rarely, available at local markets of Delhi like khari bawli and naisadak as such collections has few clients. It is also crucial to note here that all such compiled work is dominantly done by men. Thus all the *saangs* and *raginis* that exist in the history of the region are of men and not of any women writer or composer. Had this been the case than what led to entry of women in the genre? Perhaps now the reasons as were elaborated in the previous section stands justified.

However, the songs are now also reproduced in descriptive form by some academic mostly belonging to music or hindi department as no sociological intervention has been made as yet except a few local ones.



Image 3 and 4 ‘Mira bhai, Nal Dampatti, Haryanvi Lokgeet, Sarvarneer

Source: From researchers’ fieldwork

Thus hundreds of such booklets are all written by men except few books on *geet* that have been written by women mostly since last decade. However, the authenticity of such books remains questionable as most of these books do not have proper referencing and usually cite the *kissas* and *raginis* of eminent performers from here and there. One of the threats that singers feel today is of plagiarism as anyone and everyone could make someone else’s work their own due to absence of properly written and verified compositions. Despite women entering the genre as artists, they still remain alienated from the intellectual work of composing the music, lyrics or tune. As one moves downward in the hierarchical ladder of performers, the respect keeps on decreasing as per the payment and type of work.

The women singers sing the compositions of either the legendary *saangis*, poets or of male *ragini* co-singers but not vice versa. None of the compositions sung by male singers has been composed by women. Though, a few of the women respondents (singers) shared that they also compose but they did not share much about their role as composers or that of instrumentalists. Women playing instruments is considered derogatory perhaps due to its historical affiliations with the lower castes like *dooms* and *mirasis* and also due to less money being paid to these musicians. Women are not suitable for low grade profession and can also be subject to exploitation, said a local instrumentalist *Ballu* who has been playing *Banjo* (a musical instrument) for the last 15 years in a *saangi bera*.²⁷ He also shared that he has never seen a woman composer or instrumentalist throughout his life.

Further it seems that both these categories i.e. of instrumentalists or composers entail a masculine association and this is perhaps another reason women do not feel themselves fit for these domains. As one of the performer shared:

“basuri, dholak, matke tei pei yeh neech jaat .jugar mirasi, dhanak, chamar, hi shuru thei bajavein sei..inhnhei jadaa bera maretein.pher aurat kei acchi thodi laggein chimtein bajati..”

(Flute, drum and other instruments are played by low castes since beginning like Mirasis, Dhanaks, Chamar...they know more than us and women also do not look good playing instruments like Chimta).

Social class becomes instrumental in determining the instrument a musician chooses to play as for example: not everyone could afford playing a synthesizer given the competitive

²⁷ Interviewed the whole *Saang* troupe as they performed in Khanpur Kalan in 2013.

musical industry. Thus many prefer playing harmonium instead. Artist belonging to Dalit community would not use *pakka saaj* but will perform only with *kaccha saaj* that incorporates matka (covered with leather sheet), chimta etc. As is illustrated in the Image 5 below:



Image 5: Dalit *ragini* singers celebrating Balmiki Jayanti in Khanpur Kalan (Sonepat).

Source: From the researcher's fieldwork.

Even use of harmonium would vary as per class/ caste or whether the performance is by a party. The situation is completely different for women's *geet*, the only instrument that they use while performing in the private sphere includes a small *dholki* (drum) that is beated with the help of a spoon and hands. The notion of *Kaccha* or *pakka saaj* is not there as they do not consider themselves as performers.

*'Khadh jaat ke bajaavein sein ghadvei, chimta, beein, baanjoon...jis tarihan
weh ho nei neech jaat...Jonsei yeh sein doom, mirasi, dhanak,*

chamar...gayak samba pehla pher yeh paanchei aanvein...arr isi dhal inne pisse dei' (Outcaste people from lower castes like Doom, Mirasi, Dhanak, Chamar etc. play instruments like drums, banjo, flute etc. Singers come first and than instrumentalists and accordingly they are paid).

So if a singer usually gets half of the payment, only one fourth is distributed amongst the instrumentalists while the rest goes to the head of the troupe, a performer explained. The idea of respect is also visible in another comment by a drum artist who is 40 years old and has been playing this instrument for last 15 years. He also shared that he teaches in a college.

"Mangan khaaniyon walein gavei karein... bhand. Mujhe log tabalchi kevein...majak banaya karein...mei teacher hu issh marein sharam maanein...ni te ke sirf kalakar nei log jeen dei" (Those who beg in order to eat and also sing along are called *Bhand*. People make fun of me by calling me a *tabalchi* and only because I am a teacher too, they give some respect. Otherwise the society does not let an artist live peacefully).

Thus his association with teaching profession than that of being an instrumentalist helps him earn a status and little respect. Otherwise had he just been an instrumentalist, he would have been viewed differently. Such a belief also relates to an assumption that such jobs as of instrumentalists, musicians and composers are not considered suitable for women.

Emma Mayhew (2001) argues that the musical genres and their divide i.e. for men and women reflects the gendered division of labour and an aesthetic one and "layered onto it are values which position principally male dominated musical roles, such as the individual

composer/author, the instrumentalist, and the producer, as highly creative” (Mayhew, 2001, p. 68). Thus the agency that structure constructs, in either sex, formulates collective beliefs of society and thus becomes gendered. The absence of women composers and musicians is not just a question of gendered realities of our society but it also raises an essential concern associated with it i.e. of ownership and exclusive right over the composed music. Women’s work, in the field of art, has been historically marginalized or has not been recognized as that of creative performers.

Agency and Crisis

The issues of identity and agency become important for women *ragini* singers as they slowly realize the significance of stage and public performance for their otherwise subdued lives. Chandana, a *ragini* singer, says:

‘Jo awaaj abi tak ghar mei dabhi Hui thi, useh jaise pankh lag Gaye ho, aisa laga jab pehle baar ghar se bahar Gaya, jaise ek stage mil Gaya ho apne aap ko sabit karne ka, ek nayi pehchaan banae ka’ (A voice that was suppressed at home, now got wings to fly. When one sings outside the home in public one feels as if one has got a stage to prove oneself and establish an identity of one’s own).

One is propelled to question as to what extent these agencies are actually practiced given the fact that these performers are prominently from the oppressed castes. The term ‘agency’ can be understood as a medium of expressing one’s self/will freely through voice, body, gestures etc. However, agency is a social construct and its expression is contextual. Haryanvi society systematically expects women to compromise on their right to act,

express and choose freely. It is perhaps this expression of selfhood in public which not only threatens the existing order of society but also positions women singers outside the ambit of ideal and respectable women who would otherwise refrain from choosing to speak in public.

Diana Tietjens' (2002) work on 'Gender in mirror' is helpful in understanding how patriarchy disturbs agency of women. Women's singing i.e. a form of 'expression through voice' on stage should not be assumed as a free agency devoid of repressed consciousness. Voice authentication becomes necessary for any researcher before asserting it as a claim of identity says Diana. She further argues that it is necessary to identify and differentiate "when women are speaking in their own voices and when they are lip syncing the ominous baritone of patriarchy" (Diana, 2002, p. 16) as all women internalize oppression to some extent.

Singh (2012) examines the lost identity and agency of women performers, during nineteenth century Bengal during the colonial times, in her work 'Play House of Power: Theatre in Colonial India.' She emphasized that in the 'over-determined paradigm of respectability' (Gupta, 2012, p.212), so-called reform movements and nationalist discourses kept theatre women segregated from the defined respectability of chaste middle class women.

Citing from an autobiography of a renowned actress Binodani (ibid., p. 211), Singh further elaborates upon the agonizing journey of women performers who negotiated for a social status, identity, agency, caste, class and honor. However, only a few of these actresses entered the public sphere of performance with their own will and choice because majority of them were constrained by economic reasons in taking up this profession. So women's

own voice, 'agency or non-agency' (ibid., p. 12) that lay primarily in the hands of Hindu men and state as an object, got marginalized. A lot has been already researched on this question but rarely has anyone dealt with the presumed identities or agencies these women artists live in, as well as negotiate with an image of so-called ideal womanhood, especially talking in context of Haryana. Is not competing for an ideal image itself a reflection of the societal conditioning that these singers thrust for?

Ragini singers thus reproduce the existing structures of inequalities and discriminatory practices that mirror the cultural practices such as *ragini* based on caste, class and gender stereotypes, sexuality etc. Thus what kind of expression does such a voice give or how voice becomes agency for the performer when an artist and audience both are artifacts of defined (shared) spaces with expected lenses? For example, the audience may desire women to perform but have different expectations from women of their own kin group whom they consider as pure and sacred while publicly performing women are seen as profane or impure. Thus one is again propelled to question whether these agencies are not repressed? And how can these subjugated voices help women gain an identity and space of their own?

Thus it can be concluded that the agency of singers in a given context is not neutral²⁸ of the conventional ideologies. Replicating social norms, 'performers and audience' become gendered subjects on sites of performance. Performance (of singing) is not just an 'act of expression' with a 'communicative competence and accountability to an audience' (Sawin, 2002, p. 31)²⁹ but also a nexus of coercive tradition, practices and human

²⁸Sherry Ortner's idea of Agency.

²⁹ Sawin cites Bauman.

experiences manifesting through one's voice, body and gestures. This perpetuates a sense of crisis for the performer as a continuous tension needs to be negotiated at site of interplay between one's agency aspirations, contextual constraints and the oppressive structures of the staging of *ragini*.

III. Recasting *Ragini* Performance: In the Realm of the Body

Music as an aspect of leisure and is contingent upon gender and sexuality in a given social context (Caudwell, 2012, p. 389). Scholars have looked upon the linkage of women's singing and voice with their sexuality (Koskoff, 1989). Women *ragini* singers too perform through their bodies. Their bodily gestures are performed parallel to the rendition of *raginis* and many a times overshadow the impact of their voices. The body thereby becomes an

“instrument...In so doing, she enacts a scenario which affirms an enduring understanding of femininity as both in tune with, and subject to, the natural givens of her body...vocal performance is akin to a type of display, and indeed, the singing woman has been associated in many cultures with sexual temptation or sexual availability...” (Green, 2010, p. 141).

Bodily gestures are culturally inherent aspects of *ragini* performance or for that matter for any art form. Keith Thomas says “gesture is inseparable accompaniment of any spoken language” (ed. Bremmer & Rodenburg, 1993, p. 6) and thereby defines it as ‘a significant movement of limb or body or use of such movements as expression of feeling or rhetorical device’ (ibid., p. 1). Every gesture decodes a meaning such as winking, smiling, blushing, nodding or pointing at someone though may be intentional or unintentional.

Thus the stage of *ragini* performances now witnesses women singers ‘jostling for, primarily male, attention both in visual and narrative forms’ (Srivastava, 2013, p. 240) blending erotics of tradition in modernity. Here aesthetic of erotics is enjoyed by women, male co-singers as well as the audiences as the sexual desire gets an expression, in public, through the performers. Erotic of tradition in modernity is symbolized by the performers’ depiction of women in various roles, in private sphere like wearing a veil, putting vermillion etc. symbolizing a married Hindu woman. But at the same time, enacting and fantasizing the sexual desires openly in public space than ‘desexualized versions of public visibility’ (ibid) captures the influences of modernity.

For example, in almost all the *raginis*, married women performers apply thick sindoor, wear bangles/*chudda* at times (symbolizing new marriage), wear veil, in between remove *dupattas* etc., “plays upon the erotic potential of the sexually voracious traditional woman. The excitement lies at the site of putative transgression: hence, the making of an erotic of tradition” in modernity (Srivastava, 2013, p. 243).

In *raginis* as well, aged women singers are not preferred as performers due to their incapability to have a sex appeal for audience. An owner of a cassette company shared:

“ib nayi ladki aagi tho badi aurtein chod de sei (now young girls have come so aged women leave singing).” Further that “Pehla isshi marein tei aurtoon na aan de thei jo bhi karrei thei mard manas hi karei thei...jib janania stage pe chad ja tei pher un gela aur kei kaam baneei...pehla laaj sharam mei ghar mei kiya kartei ib stage pe kare... katti gand maccha rakhya”

(It was because of this fear that women were not allowed and everything was managed by men. Now when women have mounted on stage, what else you can expect to do with them. Earlier such things were restricted to homes but now it has become an open show on stage with so much of vulgarity and obscenity).

Thus, women's sexual identity determines their musical roles, particularly with regard to the loss of sexuality through ageing. Young women (in the age group of 20-35 years) take the center stage as sexual objects "producing obsessive voyeurs and peeping toms, whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other" (Mulvey, 2013, p.8). Men are seen naturally endowed with masculine tendencies and eroticism being one of them. One of the *thekedars* (contractors) Rajbir Malik³⁰ attending a *ragini* programmes shared that "*mardo ki asal duniya hi ess mei..kati sab kuch khol ke rakh de, maje lade woh sei asal kalakar*" (this is men's real world, the one who opens up everything, gives us pleasure is the real artist).

Women singers are seen to have lost morals due to their erotic singing and their choice to sing on these platforms displaces them from the ideal frame of reference for womanhood in the region.

Ironically at the same time the audience, predominantly consisting of males, is eager for *raginis* with semi pornographic contents/lyrics but wish that a veil of morality /secrecy should hide their expectations. This will provide a cathartic gratification of hidden sexual expression. The seductive performances by women lead to typification which the *Jat*

³⁰ Interviewed in Feb. 2016.

community has seldom resisted even though listeners largely remain unaffected by the stigma.

Even the male singers are not much affected, primarily due to the belief that good woman is protected in exchange for loyalty and submission obtained through the institution of marriage, and bad woman refuses protection by claiming right on her own life (Srivastava, 2013, p. 114). This also suggests one of the reasons for organizing such *raginis* at night, in an alienated space devoid of women's presence even as audience, and helps in sustaining the hierarchy of conservative sexual morality for women.

This dynamic of the spaces and cultures of performance has transformed the very structure of *ragini* from being a mythological *kissa* to a popular genre often seen as a seductive one. Women singers are not only encouraged to enact fantasies about sexual situations and flirtation on stage but also receive demeaning glances, unwelcome vulgar gestures and abuses in turn. Thus public stage of performance becomes a site of sexual phantasmagoria and spectacle. In the process a hidden masculine desire of voyeuristic pleasure unearths itself and thus gives expression to repressed fantasies/ sexualities. One of the ways adopted by the audience is passing lewd comments on women singers and the content of songs. The whole scenario is that of a complex of fantasy, validation of erotic masculinity, masquerade and cathartic articulation of femininities. Next section tries to analyze contemporary erotic *raginis* highly appreciated in Haryana these days.

Popular Appeal of Ragini as an Erotic Symphony of Desires

The *ragini* cited as song 1 (appendix III) '*aeh re gandasei tera kei dhang sei*' depicts a young beautiful girl seducing her village's boy for sexual intimacy. Though, as per the

conventional patterns, the proposal first comes from the boy who addresses the girl as *ghandasa* i.e. which is also a commonly used symbol for woman's genitals amongst men in the rural areas of Haryana. What are you up to? The *Ghandasa* is a machine/system which is used to cut animal's fodder, portrayed here as the vagina. The term machine here has three symbolic meanings. The first, in being seen as a machine like a cloth stitching one, fantasized as vagina with penis, which moves enacting the imagery of sexual intercourse. Secondly, a machine of reproduction (machine also has outcome) and third being the reference to women as machines for the household work.



Image 6 & 7: Singers enacting on stage while singing *ragini*. Source: Taken from *raginis* analyzed on Youtube Channel.



Image 8: Audience during a *ragini* programme. **Source:** Taken from *raginis* analyzed on Youtube Channel.

*Ragini 2 Suit kaad de mera and ragini*³¹ and *ragini 3 Mistri nalka diyen simar*³² portrays possible sexual alliance between higher caste women and lower caste men. As wherever little spaces of social interaction with men are perceived as available for women, these are imagined as possible sites of extra-marital affairs and sexual alliances. Like in two *raginis* mentioned above, women have been portrayed interacting with a tailor, plumber etc. However, the culturally entrenched beliefs that women are naturally endowed with sexual desire to have proximity with men, whosoever she may encounter, overpowers those interactive spaces. It also reflects upon the possible threat that higher caste *Jat* women have from lower caste men as they may pollute them.

³¹ Song 2, Appendix III

³² Song 3, Appendix III

A local Khap leader said “shuru sei hum apni behan beteyon ko hamare taur tarike mei rakhte hai kyuki hamara rutba samaj mei bada hai, kyuki yeh jo choti jaat kei aadmi hai who hamari jat sei barabri kei liye hamari behan beteio se shaadi karna chahte hai...aur sarkar bhi inhe jati sei bahar shaadi kei 50000/- rupee de...par hamari tho izzat ja sei

(Since beginning we keep our sisters and daughters as per our tradition because our status is higher in society. Because these lower caste men try to marry our daughters and sisters so as to claim our status. Government also gives them Rs. 50000/- if they marry outside their caste but we lose our honour). ”³³

Thus such *raginis* further reinforce women’s sexuality as an object of desire, control and repression as well. Both men and women are subjected to similar categorization of being just sexual beings. For example: a proverb which is often used even in Bollywood films asserts that *ak ladki aur ladka kabhi dost nahi ho sakte* (a girl and a boy cannot be friends). Similar proverbs take varied form at regional levels and contexts. It is further fantasized through double meaning erotic lyrics.

Similarly, other *raginis* like *miti miti sali do baat karale*³⁴ (*Oh sweet sister-in-law let’s talk*) depicts husbands’ fantasy of having sexual relation with his wife’s sister. *Mei maal ghajab bangi*³⁵ (I have become an awesome good) talks about a sister-in-law’s eagerness to have intimate relation with her brother in law. So she is shown seducing her brother-in-

³³ *Izzat nagari ki ashabya betiyan*, Documentary movie.

³⁴ Song 10, Appendix II

³⁵ Song 4, Appendix III

law luring him through her blossoming adolescence. Similarly, *Oh Jija meri lelene*³⁶ (Oh brother-in-law please take mine) talks about a sister in-law urging her brother-in-law to take away her virginity. These erotic and semi-pornographic *raginis* bring out repressed sexual desires and fantasies out in the open.

Body Movements and Gestures

Gesture may not necessarily imply talking or utterance of word but as seen in a staring moment, conveys the desired message to the observer or listener. Before we get into the intricacies of gestures and the role it plays in both the genres, *ragini* and *geet*, it is essential to have a conceptual understanding at the outset. As per the Oxford Dictionary, Gesture could be defined as bodily movement or posture, through hands, head, legs also including facial expression etc., which transmits a message to the observer, but not necessarily consciously. Keith Thomas says “gesture is inseparable accompaniment of any spoken language” (ed. Bremmer & Rodenburg, 1993, p. 6). and thereby defines it as ‘a significant movement of limb or body or use of such movements as expression of feeling or rhetorical device’ (ibid., p.1). Every gesture decodes a meaning such as winking, smiling, blushing, nodding or pointing at someone though may be intentional or unintentional. There are also hidden ideological behaviours, social habits formed over a period, in gestures. Anthropologists like Mary Douglas see body as a symbol of social relations and control over bodily expressions would vary as per the societal norms. So both the performer and the audience are placed in a ‘socio-aesthetic context’ where neither they can be fully ‘themselves’ nor the ‘other’ (Solis T., 2004, p.252).

³⁶ Song 5, Appendix III

Keith Thomas argues that gestures have been historically instrumental in reinforcing social differentiation which led to emergence of inferior and superior classes. Citing example from fourth century BC of the Greek upper classes and of early modern Poland, Thomas points out that the elites and the nobility ‘cultivated an upright posture and an unhurried gait; the strict control of emotion and the maintenance of dignity’ which ‘became essential to their authority’ and thus ‘differences in gesture became the outward expression of social hierarchy’ (ed. Bremmer & Rodenburg, 1993, p. 7). Gestures were attributed as per class and the superior class assured a strict compliance to the so –called ‘distinctive modes of bodily comportment’ that would prove them to be different from the inferior class (ibid., p. 7). Thus gestures also play a crucial role in the construction of identity of an individual and that of a community/group.

Coming back to the context of *ragini*, here in, everyone (performer as well as audience) acts out to be politically correct and a strict compliance of the defined behaviour is a must either at public stage or even while singing *geet* in the domestic domain. However, in all the *ragini* performances attended, namely one or two, of the women singers were conscious of their body language, limits in terms of the lyrics used in *ragini*, facial expressions, etc. As use of erotic gestures, language and by highlighting body parts, the performance becomes much more effective and thus compels the audience to give more money. For example, as is visible in the Image 9, 10 and 11: -



Image 9

Image 10

Image 11

Image 9, 10 & 11: Woman Singer performing during a *ragini* competition for collecting funds for *Gaushala* (Haryana). **Source:** From the researcher's fieldwork.

The *ragini* singer begins singing in a normal manner in Image 9, however by the end of first paragraph of the song she takes out her dupatta and wears it on her head and in the last Image 11, she covers her forehead and eyes simultaneously displaying her cleavage which is otherwise covered with dupatta. After this the singer starts shaking her chest and buttocks fast on the rhythm and the reason behind removing dupatta first seems to be this next step of shaking her body with more emphasis on exhibition of this movement. This is a common gesture found in the most performances done by women. This becomes an enticing movement for many in audience who immediately start whistling, winking and dancing. Simultaneously, the same act makes women audiences, sitting on the extreme corner, to look in different direction or looking downwards and thus leaves them feeling shy and embarrassed.

Veil in Image 11 has some symbolic functions. The first is that of symbolizing a daughter-in-law who observes veil all the time. Secondly, the performer wants to convey that she is actually hesitant and shy to face the audience. This hesitant behaviour is important for the women performer as shared by a respondent that it is a signal that her singing in public does not necessarily mean that she is of loose character. On being enquired about the reason for wearing veil while dancing, a singer responded '*ugaadi chhati acchi na lage...sharam aave...iss mare ghunghat ghal lei...*' She said 'uncovered chest does not look good, we feel shy so that's why we wear veil.'³⁷

Beneath such an act is a belief that covering their face would at least show them as clean performers who also feel shy like other women in the community in different roles like that of a wife or daughter-in-law. Such a concern of almost every woman singer reflects upon their anxiety of being looked at as dirty women and their urge to be seen as respectable. This also shows a struggle of negotiating with an identity of ideal womanhood. However, for many in audience such a gesture or bodily movement is an inviting posture and women performers doing this are seen as seductresses. Even on religious occasions there is a likelihood that the programme may end up with inclusion of such gestures in *ragini performance*. It is also interesting to observe in the photograph that on stage a woman is performing without dupatta and across the road on the terrace of a house, towards the left of the singer, a few women are seated as audience who are holding their veil in a very conscious manner as if they do not want themselves to be identified while watching this show.

³⁷ Interviewed on 8th Feb 2013, in a *Gaushala ragini* programme.

Men singers are often seen making imagery of penis with lyrics in *raginis* such as mentioned in *Suit kaadh de mera*³⁸, where the tailor tells his woman customer about the different size of needles (*darji*) he has and the kind of embroidery she may wish to have. In another *ragini*, a woman is shown asking the plumber to mend the tap (*mistri nalka diye simar*)³⁹ in the backyard of her house, however, the plumber starts talking about different kinds of taps. Going on with the conversation both the plumber and the woman start imagining a possible sexual encounter. During a duet performance of these songs the male co-singers also touch them (women singers) at sensitive areas. These gestures are thus embedded in such performances called *duchashmi* also called *upratali raginis* (duet *raginis*) and that too without anyone feeling offended about these acts. For example, *raginis* as mentioned in appendix III, Song 2 *Suit Kaadh de mera* and Song 3 *Mistri nalka diyen simar*.

The male performer announces:

Aaj ek nayi ragini...naya lifafa aaj hi phadenge (accompanied by loud mysterious laugh) addeh arr dekhenge kai dewensei log. (Today a new ragini...a new envelope we will tear here...let's see what audience will give).

It is worth noticing that the tone and gesture while using some specific terms like. *Lifaapfa...phadengeaddei*, is accompanied by a mysterious smile and stress on specific terms. A double meaning is attached to the term 'sealed *lifaapfa* (envelope)' which is also imagined as virginity.⁴⁰ So the lyrics are accompanied with various other performative

³⁸ Song 2, Appendix III.

³⁹ Song 3, Appendix III.

⁴⁰ Informed by a singer at the venue.

acts/ gestures that convey the intended double meaning to listeners. Even the women performers adopt the masculine gestures/language on public stage that will ensure maximum tips from the audience, '*jitna badahha utne peisein log phekkein*' (the more erotic is the content/gestures, the more cash will flow). The male co-singer performs a lot of body-contact gestures such as pointing at the lower part, patting on the shoulder of the women singers, the chest, on the stomach and the breast of the co-singer while talking about making a flower on the suit's front side i.e. on the chest. So both the male & female performers compete with each other as to who can be the more vulgar and fetch more cash. Such a show of gestures could be understood through various fantasies that are used by the artists on the stage.

Formation of Fantasies, Gestured Masculinity and Masquerade as a Refuge

Gestures have to be contextualized amidst the "networks and social relationships, and in sets of cultural notions that govern and maintained these relationships and provide an identity to the actors involved" (ed. Bremmer & Rodenburg, 1991, p.237). Otherwise barely describing the physical movements would just yield caricature of gestures, says Henk Driessen (1991) in her article on '*Gestured masculinity*' in the context of rural Andalusia (ibid). She illustrates that handshaking, as a gesture, between men and women is common in cities but is seen differently in context of villages and small towns. Driessen elaborates:

“degree of social proximity or distance determines the extent of spatial distance and the intensity and duration of the physical performance. Differences in the degree of physical performance of both parties are often

an index of status differentials, the superior party moving less than the inferior. A description of the Spanish embrace should also contrast masculine and feminine body movements. The female equivalent of the male embrace is typically more restrained and involves less physical performance when executed in public: the hands are placed slightly on the shoulders while the lips brush the cheeks” (1991, p. 241).

Such a hug, she says should not be mistaken as a display of affection rather it is just a formal male embrace. So the body movements/physical performance, intensity of the embrace, form, duration etc. are determined by factors like caste, age, class, status etc. Accordingly, both masculine as well as feminine gestures are culturally constructed. Talking in the context of Sonapat (Haryana), a gesture of handshake between opposite sex may imply an intimate relationship between the two or the character of woman comes in question as it does not match with the normative social order. However, the masculine gestures of men towards each other may not be judged the way women’s gestures are reacted to.

The public stage of performance (in the context of *ragini* performance) becomes a site of sexual gesticulation (gestured masculinity) as a meaning attributing form of communication. The formation of sexual fantasies and contentious gesticulation on public stage by the male singers such as of penetration, penis, breast and the sexual act helps in sustaining the masculine domination (ibid., p. 249). On the other hand, though women performers are not refrained from fantasizing a sexual relation or flirtation but the gestures and postures are comparatively constrained and perhaps defined in a performatively modest code.

Joan Riviere's idea of 'masquerade' (1929) could prove to be useful in understanding such acts of sexual gesticulation. Riviere posits her argument amidst the context of film and cinema while raising questions regarding representation and sexual difference (Riviere, 1929; Burgin, Donald, Kaplan, 1989, p.48). Riviere talks about the women put up a "mask of womanliness, as a defence, so as to avert anxiety and retribution feared from men" (ibid). Butler's discussion on gendered appearances and the political motivators tied to those appearances with the term "masquerade" borrowed from Lacan also demystifies the idea of masquerade. Masquerade, as it relates to appearance, "may be understood as the performative production of a sexual ontology, an appearance that makes itself convincing as a "being" according to Butler (1990, p. 64). That is to say, what exactly the masquerade is masking has been a subject of controversy (ibid).

Butler outlines Joan Riviere's (ibid., p.65) position that masquerade "transform(s) aggression and fear of reprisal into seduction and flirtation". Thus it is an attempt to attain sexual advances from men by 'means of flirting and coqueting with them in a more or less veiled manner' (Burgin et al., 1989, p.48). Riviere further opines that "masquerade" is more than the characteristic of an "intermediate type" and it is essential to all "womanliness" (Butler, 1990, p.71). Butler continues, "femininity becomes a mask that dominates/resolves a masculine identification (that) would produce a desire for a female object" (ibid., p. 72).

Following Butler's thinking, I assert that the masquerade of femininity is especially powerful, in lines of employment that directly require the woman-actor to perform in ways specifically designed to elicit sexual desire. Through masquerade, she is able to assert her "womanliness" and derive the powers associated with a convincing performance. The

masquerade of masculine femininity thus leads to gratification but through a repressed agency only.

Audience, Gaze and Transition

Structure of the audience during *ragini* programmes, as observed in almost all the live performances attended and also for political rally campaigns or for *gaushalas'* fund raising competitions, may vary depending on the occasion, time and place. For a programme in village, a small stage of 10-12 wooden tables called *takhats*, covered with white cotton bedsheets is arranged at the center, for the musical troupe which sits at one side (corner) of the stage and the performer stands at the center and at the back are the local political leaders, *thekedars* (contractors) and *sarpanch* (village head) of the village as also discussed earlier. The audiences mostly males including those with old age, adults and small boys sit around the stage. This is prevalent in almost all the *ragini* nights but day performances vary as far as structure is concerned as now women, old people and girls below the age of 12 also participate as audience who earlier did not. The structure of audiences is mentioned below in the image 12.

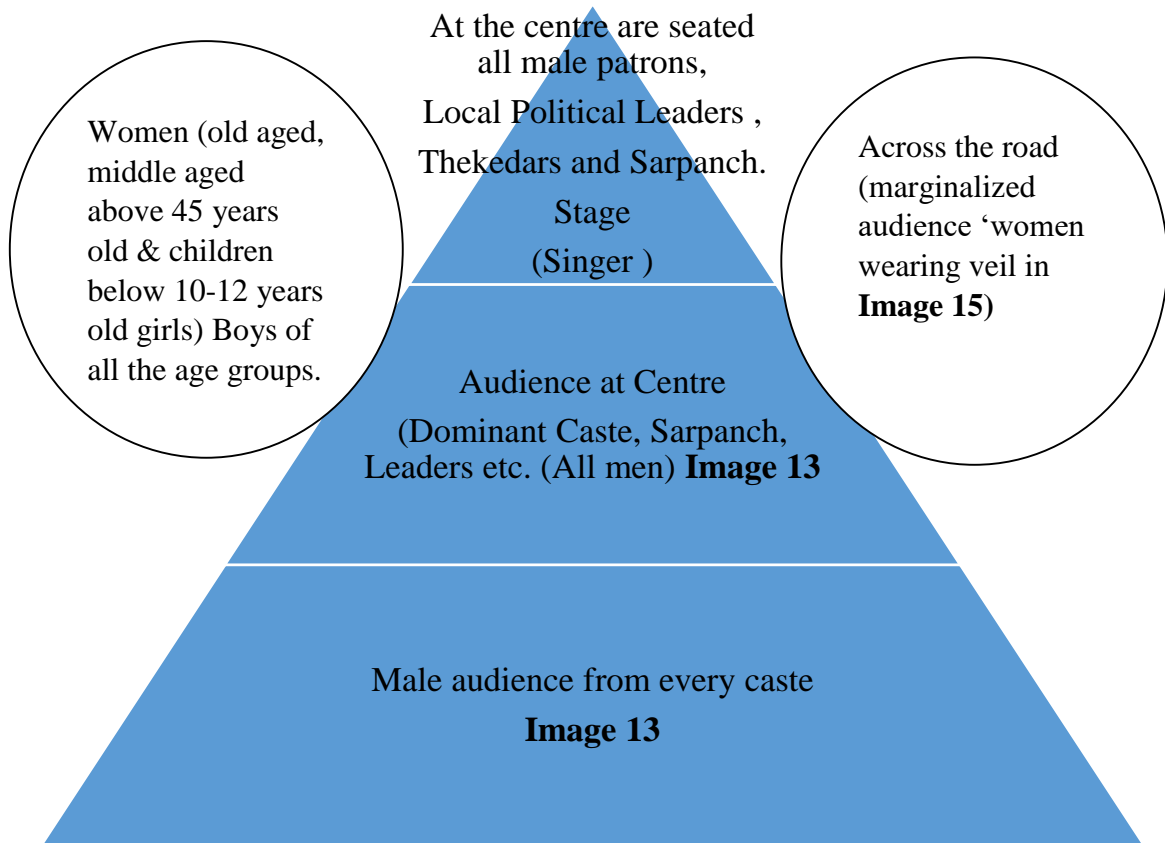


Image 12: The Spatial Organization of *ragini* and its social connotations. **Source:** From the researcher's fieldwork.

The singer stands at the center stage and the musical troupe sits on the floor towards either side of the stage i.e. right or left corners. The local patrons like *thekedars* and *sarpanch* of the concerned village and of the nearby villages sit in the centre of the stage on chairs. The audience participates in the performance in various ways by giving spontaneous cash awards to the artist in-between the performance, a person is assigned the duty for collecting money from the reward givers and making a list. Spontaneously the reward giver's name is announced along with his designation, caste affiliation (surnames) and cash amount and name of the performer/troupe that is to whom it is given. After the performance, a small amount is also distributed amongst the junior artists and instrumentalists.



Image13: Masculine Spaces consisting of all men (Sonepat) **Image 14:** Masculine in the making, a small boy giving money to the performer. **Source:** From the researcher's fieldwork.

As seen in the figure below, the performing sites become an exclusive space for men at the center symbolizing the prevailing structure which at times making inconvenient for the women performer to sing amidst the drunken audience, some of whom not only whistle at them but also pass lewd remarks. It is worth noticing that mostly during the big live-performances, many males in the audience are drunk and in fact consume alcohol while watching the performance and keep commenting on the women performers. At margins remains the marginalized audience comprising mostly of women.



Figure 15 Marginalized audience (Kasandi, Sonapat),

Source: From the researcher's fieldwork.

Thus male gaze and women's gestures become instrumental in transforming the space of performance into a site of erotic pleasures and fulfilling sexual fantasies. Accompanied by vulgar, semi pornographic lyrics, women take the centre stage as sexual objects thereby "producing obsessive voyeurs and peeping toms, whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other" (Mulvey, 2013, p. 8). Freudian's idea of Scopophilia could provide us a lead in gaining an understanding of the same.

Scopophilia is an instinct of sexuality in which looking becomes a source of pleasure and in reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at, as one can contemplate from the image 16 as below. Women singers here are subject to a controlling and curious gaze as

the male gaze projects a phallus phantasy on the women entertainer/performer. Thus Scopophilia is essentially active during such performances and the pleasure of looking is transferred to others by analogy. Thus such *raginis* gratify a wish for pleasurable looking and for the audience further develop Scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect.



Image 16: Ragini singers performing a duet *ragini* **Source:** Collected while analyzing Youtube ragini channels.

Laura Mulvey (1975) in her work ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ argues that cinema reinforces the pre-existing patterns of fascination at work within the individual subject and the social formations moulding her/him. Thus a visual performance/art form “reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls image, erotic ways of looking and spectacle” (Mulvey, 1975, p.6). Taking a prism of psychoanalytic theory, as a political weapon, Mulvey decodes ‘the way the unconscious of patriarchal society structured the film form’. She quotes various psychoanalytic analyses that provide the link of women’s oppression who “stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man

can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not marker of meaning” (ibid).

Thus there exist two aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking, as described by Mulvey, borrowing from Freud, “Scopophilia arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The other developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image see” (Mulvey, 2013, p.9). These structures drive meaning within symbolic order which articulates desire.



Image 17: Ragini singer and dancers during various programmes. **Source:** Taken from YouTube channels while analyzing *ragini* online.

The space witnesses’ women singers ‘jostling for, primarily male, attention both in visual and narrative forms’ (Srivastava, 2012, p.240) blending erotic of tradition in modernity.

Here aesthetic of erotic is enjoyed by women, male co-singers as well as the audiences as the sexual desire gets an expression, in public, through the performers. Erotic of tradition in modernity is symbolized by the performers' depiction of women in various roles, in private sphere like wearing a veil, putting vermillion etc. symbolizing a married Hindu woman. But at the same time, enacting and fantasizing the sexual desires openly in public space than 'desexualized versions of public visibility' (ibid) capture the influences of modernity. For example, in almost all the *raginis* (Appendix III), married women performers apply thick sindoor, wear bangles/*chudda* at times (symbolizing new marriage), wear veil, in between remove *dupattas* etc. as could be noted in the photographs below in Image 17, "plays upon the erotic potential of the sexually voracious traditional woman. The excitement lies at the site of putative transgression: hence, the making of an erotic of tradition" in modernity (Srivastava, 2013, p. 243). To illustrate it further, in a traditional society like Haryana, the sensual appeal of a Sapna Chaudhary characteristically presenting herself with traditional charm and attire would be much higher as compared to that of a model or dancer being presented in a western mould.

Thus some insights emerge regarding the way *ragini* has evolved over the last three decades especially with the entry of women. On the face of it, the transition appears to have favoured the taking over of the whole idea of *ragini* performance by the *body rhythm of the performer* as opposed to the earlier version with primacy of the *hypnotic rhythm of the folk melody*. That it has an implication for the sexuality and identity of the performer is a natural corollary. The performer consistently negotiates with multiple identities tracing the locus of this transition having a catalytic engagement with the fast upcoming and internet driven media-market ensemble. The agency of women performers has cast an indelible

imprint on the changes introduced in the genre of *ragini* and its travel story from the world of regionally famous folktales (*kissas*) to the present blend of cinematic and body centric popular folk rooted in a new form of feminine charisma.

The next chapter will address the influence of technology on folk genres like *ragini*.

Chapter Four

Power Play: *Ragini* as Political and the Technological Reshaping of the Genre

As observed in the previous chapters, the socio-economic developments around the 1980s played a significant role in influencing the local musical cultures of the region. Liberal economy facilitated the growth of the cassette industry in the region, a major stakeholder in folk popular music, this also acted as one of the important facilitating factors for growth of women ragini singers. Alongside this moral side of the erstwhile peasant driven economy also got transformed normatively¹ (at least for those women who decided to perform/sing despite hindrances from caste-honour regimes) to meet the demands of the liberal economy. Thus women singers entered the stage of *ragini* performance in Haryana with socio-economic upheavals in the wake of new technology-driven changes in society. Close to this transition was also the political side of the shifting patterns in the socio-economic realm.

Once on the stage, the agency of women singers is expressed in an embodied manner and the audience privileges their bodies over voices and singing. For the body fixated audience the performers' bodies became objects of projecting the repressed sexual fantasies. Thus ragini having a status of popular genre thereby becomes the sexualized 'opium of the masses'. Thus *ragini* not only became a tool in the hands of not just such markets hungry for titillating music content but also of political actors like local *thekedars* and leaders who capitalized on it for influencing their potential voters and followers.

Along with the political dimension, technology took over the traditional way of performing '*ragini*' and also '*geet*' for that matter. A dominant concern throughout the

¹ As women other than Jat community started performing on stage.

chapter is also the politics of recognition among performers. While *ragini* as a genre actively got associated with political processes as also the caste-feudal regimes of it, women's *geets* became a marker of moral duties of women primarily. The present chapter thus in the first part looks at *ragini* as a political genre and its nexus with power play while in the second section reflects upon the contemporary transformations in the genre during different phases of technological intervention ever since cassette industry targeted the region.

“Music connects faster and stays on the mind longer than political speeches. It will help us reach out to larger vote bank, especially youth,” said a secretariat member of a Political party.

-Economic Times Bureau (Sengupta, 2014)

I. Politics of Music and Music of Politics

A mere glance at the statement above hints at the implicit relationship between music and politics that has been a pan-national phenomenon. Music inevitably becomes intermeshed with the socio-political changes and development of any given society. As Bertolt Brecht rightly points out that art not only reflects society but becomes the very ‘hammer’ (instrument) that shapes it. Adopting the Marxist idea of religion, John Orman calls “art as a very entertaining opiate” (Lockard, 1998, 28). Thus music can never be devoid of politics and rather becomes its tool/weapon to politicize the audience/performer in the process (ibid., p.27). Peter Manuel opines that “sociopolitical stances...are implicit in any artistic production including...music genre...”(Manuel, 1993, p. 236). For example, the very choice of singing a song/its lyrics in a given dialect may have political implications. Thus the relationship between art, culture, and politics is indispensable.

Social scientists and musicologists have widely researched the relationship between music and politics, adopting musically-mediated approaches to social theory (Brown, 2008, p. 1-2). To cite a few, Karen A. Cerulo's (1984) through her work '*Social Disruption and its Effects on Music*' argues that the musical compositions/contents mirror the societal events and thereby social changes. Similarly, Judith R's (1988) in her work '*Music as Social Circumstance*' elucidates upon the visible class differences implicit in the compositions. Brown also points out that 'listening to popular music is related to feelings of social dislocation and alienation however music with elite appeal has a low level of alienation' (Brown, 2008, p. 2). Courtney Brown argues that interpretation of musical styles and folk theatre of a region could disclose the intricacies of emerging classes within the culture in terms of consumption patterns, political consciousness shaped by it, and the political transformation. Brown opines that the link between music and politics could be understood in-depth through representational and associational political music approaches.

The representational method links music with a political perspective or message of the composer, through content relevant to the society. Such as the Bollywood song '*Sadda Haq aithe rakh*' (Give me what's mine, right here)² shares the composers' concern about the negative consequences of urbanization on the environment, and claims political corruption in the country responsible for that destruction. Thus this song conveys an explicit political message addressing the issues and lacuna on the part of the state and political parties and thereby it becomes a piece of representational political music. Another example could be 'Number 1 Haryana' (Oh our Haryana is no.1 in Appendix III, Song 6). On the other hand, associational political music is the 'mirror

² Song from a Bollywood movie Rockstar released in the year 2011. Free translation by the researcher.

image of the representational counterpart' (Brown, 2008, p. 4). The individual or a group is not involved in the original composition but makes a connection with (also exploits) a particular or complete piece of work of the composer and a political message or ideology to pursue her or his political interest. For example, *Vande Mataram* is politically considered as associated with BJP³. The original version of *Vande Mataram* had verses on praises for Hindu goddess *Durga*, which is a matter of religious concern for Muslims. The BJP thus uses *Vande Mataram* to pursue its *Hindutva* brand of nationalist ideology (Chatterjee, 2017).

Since times immemorial, both folk music and political theatre have been cross-culturally used as vehicles of political expression (Wood, 2012) and thus proves to be an effective mode for mobilization in rural areas (Sengupta, 2014). In the same context, John Street (2012) in his work '*Music and Politics*' emphasizes that 'music does not just provide a vehicle of political expression, it is that expression' (p. 1). However, redeeming it (music) as a conveyor of political messages, Brown in his work '*Politics in Music*' argues that every genre is historically rooted in the expression of social and political ideologies prevalent in the given society. Thereby 'transforming these platforms into crucial venues for political expression not only for performers, composers, and musicians per se but also for the political parties and State that aims at generating overtly patriotic overtones in the name of nationalist agenda.' Classical thinkers like Plato, while reflecting upon the influence music has on the political evolution of society say that "the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions" (Republic Book IV, 2002, p.280).

³Bhartiya Janta Party, a major political party in India.

In contrast, music is not only seen as a vehicle of political expression, but it is the (political) expression (Street, 2012, p. 1). Contextualizing ‘musicology as a political act’, Philip V. Bohlman (1993) sees musicology as a reflexive process and underscores the same reflexivity with the political act and assumes agency as an object than music and politics. Thus Bohlman stresses upon analyzing music as a political act than looking it as separately as the very act of depoliticizing music becomes the most hegemonic form of politicizing music (ibid., p. 419). So music embodies a political voice, be in the form of composition, or at times by being associated with the dominating ideologies.

On similar lines, music is also seen as an instrument influencing different dimensions of society and culture. In an incisive account of the development of South Indian Classical (Carnatic) music around late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Amanda Weidman (2006) uses the ‘politics of voice’ as a lens, in her work explains the role music played in producing modes of South Indian subjectivity and modernity. Similarly, Tony Langlois outlines that music becomes a medium and barometer of cultural change in her article ‘Music and Politics’ in North Africa. I would like to quote her at length here:

“Politics permeates N. African music in complex, diffuse ways, power being most frequently manifested through the (generally unspoken) rules which regulate when music can or cannot be performed, who is permitted to perform and where and when it is appropriate to listen to it” (Langlois, p. 207).

Borrowing from Bourdieu (1984) and Hall (1997a), she further argues that the experience of difference sustains the ‘cultural along with political meanings’. Thus musical genre and practices, in distinguishing tastes, define the consumers as communities of shared knowledge and interest.

Similarly, even *ragini*, the popular folk genre, not only functions as an emblem of regional Haryanvi identity but also serve as a magnet for mass involvement in party activities. It is pertinent to clear at the outset that the ‘music and politics’ here in reference is about the politicization of the genre. *Ragini* performances are frequently associated with political usages and objectives such as mobilizing people and vote bank politics of different political parties.

Ragini celebrates the ‘aural’ (Subramanian, 2008) culture of rural north India which becomes instrumental in communicating a social message, often being manipulated by the political parties these days, for the illiterate and semi-illiterate people to materialize a community dialogue utilizing their local social conditions with dignity in globalized context (Sharma, 2007, p. 24). Thus ‘*ragini*’ has always been a tool to woo voters for the political parties. Parties hire musical troupes for composing songs which are used as an advertisement for canvassing around election times. For example, a song popularizing the Prime Ministerial candidate has lyrics stating ‘*Hum Modi Ji ko lane walei hai acche din aane wale hai*’ (We are going to bring Modi Ji (in power), good days are about to come).⁴

⁴ Narendra Modi (YouTube Channel), <https://youtu.be/tGI07w8eYI>, 15 April, 2014.

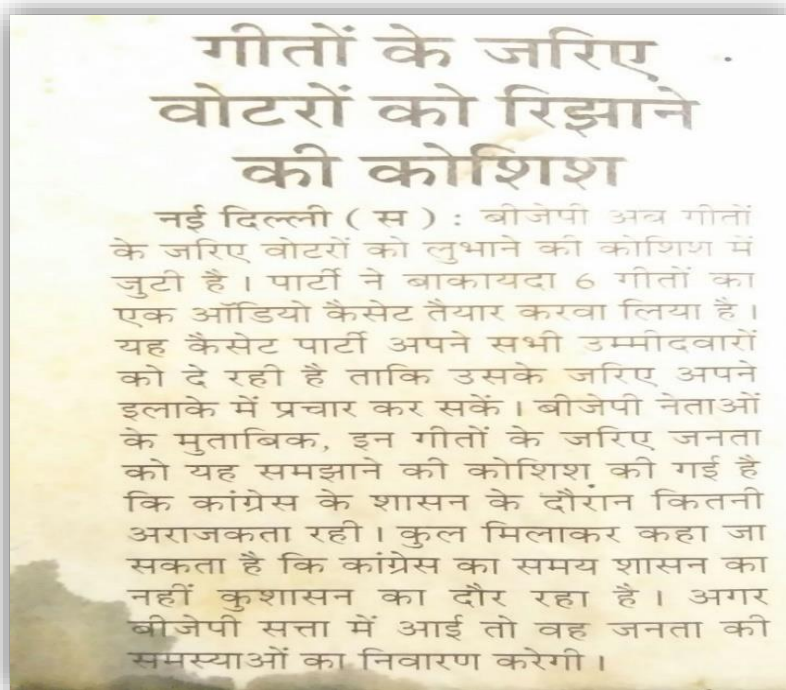


Image 1

A woman respondent from Khanpur Kalan Village in Sonapat District shared this cutting from a local newspaper (2013) while talking about *raginis* being used as a political weapon to earn votes during election campaigns.

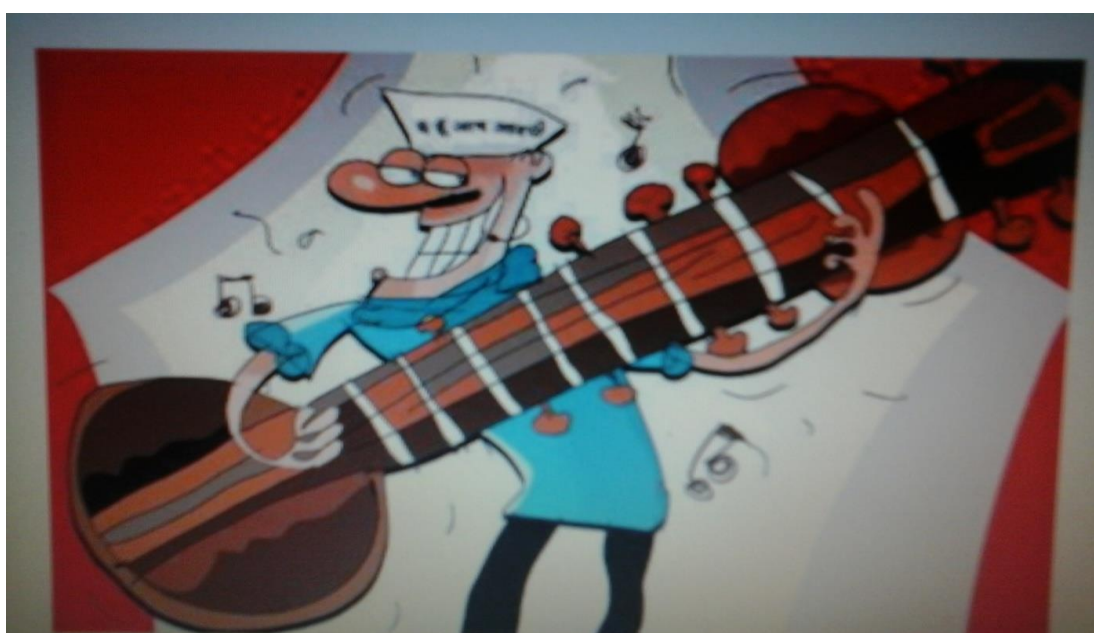


Image 2: Taken from online newspaper on www.google.com in the year 2014.

Electoral battles are endorsed by performers, both singers and actors who also contest elections for their parties. Madhava Prasad (2014) in his work on 'Cine Politics' highlights the cultural history of the deepened relationship between the performers and

politics of the state in Southern Indian states. He exemplifies it through the case of various popular film stars in these states who exploited their popularity and acquired political power by deploying their cultural charisma in the political field (p.4-5).

This is a very common trend in every election as political parties rope in various performers, i.e., singers and actors, either during campaigning or by giving them a ticket to contest election from their parties, to influence the voters. For example, the image of actors and performers like Sakshi Tanwar and Smriti Irani (who once played the role of ideal daughter-in-law in the leading daily soap) apart from actors like Nagma, Jaya Prada and Vishal-Shekhar (musicians) were employed in campaigns for encashing votes in the 2014 elections. Interestingly the most recent elections in India (2019) witnessed various Bollywood actors campaigning for different political parties, reciting their party ideology and manifestoes. For example, the most recent entrant has been Sunny Deol⁵, the poster boy of Indian nationalism. Moreover, not only music but the most prominent theatre of the country, that is, the box office is also used by parties to promote their ideologies. For example, movies like the Accidental Prime Minister⁶ and PM Narendra Modi⁷ were released just around elections.

Thus, music is widely used as an instrument to meet the political ends of different parties because music when in its composition, 'lyrics or melody evoke or reflect a political judgment by the listeners' (Dunaway, 1987, p.269), it becomes political. Given this background, the proceeding section tries to examine how *ragini* stage became a platform to advocate political agendas of parties and the state for their vested interests and goals.

⁵ 'Everyone should love their Nation, that is what is Nationalism: Sunny Deol', Economic Times, Delhi. May 15, 2019. Retrieved from URL www.economictimes.com

⁶ Released on 11.01.2019

⁷ Released on 24.05.2019

II. *Ragini* as a ‘Political Genre’: Historical Reflections

Folk music such as ‘*ragini*’ has always been enacted as an ideal vehicle for socio-political mobilization in Haryana. The political intervention in the folk theatre i.e., *Swang* has been a historical phenomenon as evident from the writings of Raja ram Shastri’s (1958) work on ‘*Haryana Ka Lok Manch*’.⁸ *Raginis* in the Twentieth Century, ever since the colonial times were the most effective mode of influencing and inducting men to join militaries and army battalions. During the First World War around 1914, Britishers employed Deep Chand’s troupe for performing and encouraging men to join the British army, says Shastri. *Raginis* such as the one mentioned below and various others were usually sung.

Get recruited, military men are standing in front of your house

Here you get torn shoes, there you will get a long boots,

Here you get torn clothes; there you will get suit to wear,

Here you get dry bread, there you will get biscuits

Here you get humiliation, there you will be get a salute

Get recruited; military men are standing in front of your house⁹

Immediately after the programme, the young soldiers present at the site of performance would announce on the spot recruitments. The recruiting officers there used to measure the chest and height of the interested candidates immediately. Thereafter, all the selected men were sent to their assigned stations and the regiments. Pandit Deep Chand¹⁰ was awarded the title of ‘Rai Bahadur’ and was given cash prize by the British government (Kumar, 2010, p. 63). Similarly, the Deputy Commissioner, Sangrur, also

⁸ Lok sampark Vibhag, Haryana

⁹ Song 7, Appendix III

¹⁰ A renowned Saangi of twentieth century in Haryana.

hired Saangi Chandralal Badi and his troupe for performance for recruiting men in the army in the year 1963. As a result, Jat men in large numbers joined.

During the last phase of colonial rule, the period following independence to this date, though mass media has penetrated the lives of villagers massively, yet *ragini* remains one of the favourite sources of entertainment. However the influence and form of the original *ragini* that existed over centuries has been negatively influenced partly due to the neglect by the political leadership and also through the prevailing attitude of looking down upon the performers associated with the folk tradition.¹¹ However, the regional disparity¹² in the distribution of resources between urban and rural centres also becomes one reason for it. Such as in villages like Khanpur Kalan, Kasandi, Gamdi and other neighbouring villages, the crisis of electricity and water is not new and they are habituated to something like 6 hours of electric supply a day. The situation varies at the suburb/urban districts of Haryana as these areas being the hub of local political activity and residence of leaders.



Image 3: During the Haryana Shakti Rally, a woman dances while others sing and clap during the rally at Gohana on Sunday. **Source:** From the researcher's fieldwork and local newspapers¹³.

¹¹ Similar trends were seen in the folk genre '*Nautanki*'

¹² In terms of electricity here particularly.

¹³ (Picture as above in the left side) Tribune, 11 Nov. 2013, Chandigarh.

Amidst such a crisis, one can easily imagine the fascination villagers, especially men, have towards a live *ragini* performance. It contains mainly two motives of the organizers having political affiliations. One is that of entertainment for the audiences and the other one is for furthering their political agenda of pleasing the caste vote bank. It is not unusual to witness larger number of large scale *ragini* performances being organized in the villages when the election is approaching. ‘*Election ki rally mei kai bar ragini dekhan to log dur dur tie aanwei sei*’ (During election rally, *ragini* programmes are organized to please the villagers, and they come from far off places to watch it). A mere glance at the poster advertising the programme reflects upon the hidden agenda behind such programmes. Women also participate as the audience in such gatherings, especially during the day time as in Image 3.

III. *Ragini* and Politics in Haryana: Contemporary

Politics occupies a highly significant place in the ideological landscape of caste and class-based social fabric of Haryana. So politicized is the society in Haryana today that it is not possible to conceptualize any institutional structure without the ingredient of party politics and its dynamics. Be it development or music, education or sports, party politics hijacks everything. Something similar has happened to the genre of *Ragini* and its stage performances. While speaking to the *Ragini* singers, one can understand the relevance of political connections for the performers’ world. They drop names of local politicians while speaking about their social connections and demand as a performer. The traditional patron-client relationships are being re-written in political terms. *Ragini* performances are used as crowd pullers in political meetings and rallies. Local political functionaries also organize special *ragini* shows to increase their popularity from time to time. Politics has proved to be the last refuge of the art form, which is facing all kinds

of challenges for its survival. It is during election campaign/ rallies that the renowned performers are being invited to perform.

Performance, Music and Politics

To say that music is politics would imply the power dynamics inherent in music and performance. Like any other social medium of expression, music also faces the challenge of acquiring legitimacy and alignment with structural power equations. That it is performed in a social space itself gives it such a dimension and embedded nature which inherits the power play at work in a particular context. *Raginis* emerged as a form of entertainment which right from the beginning attested to the theorizing of femininity through men. Thus men determined the idea of ‘public’ and the entertainer. *Saang* used men in the roles of women. Something similar had occurred in cinema. The first silent film in India, *Raja Harish Chandra*, had males performing the role of women. It was not just because women artists were not available to perform on stage but primarily because women would not have been acceptable on stage to a large section of the audience. The politics of morality intertwines with performance, entertainment, and music in all societies. It is evident in religious music as well as other forms of folk and popular music.

If music is a part of the culture, then it is difficult to separate it from the socio-political culture and processes. It explains changes in musical cultures. As the socio-political sphere experiences change, a corresponding change is visible in patronage as well as modes of performance and public taste as we witnessed in the previous chapter. It further affects artists’ instrumentalities and subjectivities too. As Lydia Goehr (1994) maintains in her work on ‘*Political Music and the Politics of Music*’ that the investigation of musical form and content in isolation may not provide a more in-depth

analysis. So it must be understood in the institutional context in which “the composition, performance and reception, the production, exchange, and distribution of works take place—the context in which the works assume their full meanings” (Goehr, 1994, p.101).

While investigating the role music plays in materializing politics, Margaret Dorsey (2004), an anthropologist at University of Texas, borrowing ‘neo-Maussian exchange theory and ethnographic theory of ritual speech and political authority’, argues that music creates identification and thus leads to ‘formation of political publics’ (ibid). Highlighting a musical tradition ‘corrido—as a form of ritual speech’ of Greater Mexico, she treats exchange of musical tradition as a transaction and thereby, it as an object i.e. gift or commodity such as “offering music in exchange of votes” and thereby “music becomes enmeshed with actors’ social experience” (Dorsey, 2004, p. 61). Dorsey suggests that performances at such events are in a ‘series of political instantiations that constitutes politics’ (ibid., p. 62). She further says:

“Politics can start at a party, but it can just as readily start with the poet’s interaction (or transaction) with a friend (or political candidate), with the poet’s disposition toward politics and how s/he expresses that in his/her text, with the candidate’s reception of the formalized text, how the candidate and the candidate’s media team integrate the song into the themes of their campaign, as well as with the public reception of the music and what individuals do with the ritual speech. Do they ignore it? Do they memorize it and sing it? Does it change their relationship to the political process?” (ibid., p. 62).

In Haryana, *ragini* singers today face an altogether different audience and patronage. The demands of the audience reign supreme when it comes to stage performances of a troupe. Be it an open political meeting or celebration of the birthday of some politician's son; a *ragini* performance is seen apt for entertaining the public. The singers also do brisk business at the time of elections. *Ragini* is now also the propaganda tool of contestants in local panchayat, assembly or even parliamentary polls for that matter. *Ragini* singers increasingly boast of their affiliations with different political leaders and parties. The sarpanch of a village arranges *ragini* programmes for his followers 'party workers and even for the general public. It has class implications as well as emerging changes in patronage which is now too closely related to the community power structure. While interviewing inhabitants of Khanpur and Gamdi village, I came across similar views as:

'Ib toh ragini sarpanch karaya kare kabhi kabhi, kai koi ghane note wala kara de. Mhare keese ke na baski party bulana' and 'rajniti ka chakkar ho gaya ib toh ragini mein bi...ib toh bas...daaru pee kai masti chaiye logaan nai...vote tab gerainge jib puri masti kaat lainge inke jimme'.

(Now *Raginis* are organized by Sarpanch sometimes, or by those having too much money. We are not in a position to call any party and now *raginis* too are politicized...now people only want to have alcohol and party...they will vote only when they are pleased enough by parties).

Caste has played an essential role in deciding the form and content of *raginis* and the organization of performances in Haryana. The idiom of caste has been extensively used by *ragini* singers in alignment with their purposes of gaining popularity and legitimacy. Caste in Haryana comes across as the synonym of politics. In this way, caste and politics

become highly relevant for giving effect to *ragini* compositions and we witness a politics of identity on many fronts. Apart from this, *ragini* are also at times narratives of resistance and counter-forces to the power play of regional caste politics. In the same context scholars like Manish Tiwari and Rajan Pandey (2013) in their work '*Battleground UP*' also speaks of the difference visible in the rallies of UP is the presence of *ragini* troupes during political campaigns, a practice also prevalent in Haryana.

Ragini in the rallies of Western Uttar Pradesh say Tiwari and Pandey, makes them different from various others, which are the 'traditional folk songs associated with the local peasant culture' (Tiwari & Pandey, 2013, p.47). So the performers, i.e., singers and dancers, have become an integral part of such campaigns arranged mostly from Haryana (ibid) to pull crowds. Women have to perform on obscene songs in such programmes.

“people pass lewd remarks while throwing money. Arrangements for male-female interaction are made, where someone from the audience or a person on stage will make suggestive or sometimes openly obscene remarks to the dancers and the latter will reply in the same tone. During such sessions, things often take an ugly turn and on some occasions, the situation goes out of control” (ibid).

Recalling similar incidents, Tiwari and Pandey cites various candidates, contesting election, who organize rallies and arrange for women dancers in the name of *ragini* performance. Some of these events may even turn into a site of molestation of the performers. In one of such incidents, clothes of a woman performer were torn by the goons present in the audience. As Pandey argues that “the distortion and disrobement

of the *ragini* folk form is complete...now, you just get vulgar music and vulgar dances. A lot of lewd movement and pelvic thrusts. With more women than men in the all men performance” (Eram, 2014).



Image 4: A *ragini* troupe waiting for the rally programme to begin at Jind (Haryana), October 2014. **Source:** Taken from the local newspapers during the fieldwork.

Political campaigns in Haryana are also not devoid of such incidents during rallies in the name of entertainment. *Ragini* performance, at political rallies, acts as glue stick for the political parties and helps in sustaining the interest of the voters at the venue for a longer time. A singer interviewed at a political gathering/campaign added that ‘*ragini sunei sei log, bhaashan tei pehle, hi gaavei, kai ber ghani vaar hoja neta nei aan mei, the unka bhi manoranjan reh*’ (people listen to *ragini* even before the political speech many times; when the leader gets late, the audience also enjoys).

Interestingly, it is ensured that women also attend in good numbers in such rallies still the ratio remains less. The anganwadi workers (women) who also work as BLO (Booth Level Officer) are given the duty of bringing women to the venue and also sarpanch of all the villages are given direction for arranging and bringing village people, i.e., 100 or 200 for participation in the rally. The number politics becomes crucial in influencing the potential voters, which in turn also encourages other voters to cast their votes for the same party (number of attendees implies the power of the party). The strength of the rally, i.e., in terms of attendees symbolizes ‘rallies dominated’ politics of Haryana. In fact, ‘numbers’ becomes the benchmark of successful political rallies.¹⁴

Interestingly, support to a party is also symbolized by colour i.e. dresses worn in cognizance with the party colour i.e. pink, green, yellow or saffron. As could be observed in the Image 3, during a rally at Haryana in 2014, women wore pink *dupattas* which represent the colour of the turban of the party. As seen in the Image given below, a dancer entertaining the women audience at a political rally, before the arrival of the leader. The colour of the party is also visible from the stole women carry i.e. pink. Similarly, even the decoration of pandals is planned accordingly (Image 3).

In contrast, ragini singers are supported by their party affiliates and they increasingly boast of their affiliations with different political leaders and parties.

A popular ragini singer shared:

‘Main to Mr. X ko neta manta hoon. Woh hamesha mujhe hi bulate hain.

Unke party ke liye main puri tarah samarpit hoon’ (Mr. X always depends upon me for his functions and performances. I completely support his party and leadership).

¹⁴ Tribune Chandigarh, 2nd December 2013



Image 5 C.D. consisting of political *raginis* and songs in Haryana. **Source:** These CDs were collected by the researcher during fieldwork (From MDU Rohtak Haryana).

Thus the political affiliation of the performer gives them a sense of pride and status. As days before the elections, the troupes/singers are hired for composing and recording *raginis* and songs based on the political ideology/manifesto of the parties. In return, the singers are given a minimal fee as discussed in the proceeding section as well. These recordings are massively used for political campaigns in the villages.

Campaigns with a Difference

The newspapers during elections are usually filled with interesting articles on various methods adopted by different political parties¹⁵ for luring the voters (Mathur & Pushpan, 2014). The stage of political speeches gets transformed into musical shows or an erotic

¹⁵ Mathur, Rashi & Pushpan, Shikha. (2014). Not just speeches, but folk music, dances adorn election rallies in Haryana, October 12, 2014, New18.com *Sapna ke tumke dekh bujurg hue bekabu*, 26 March 2018, Yuva Haryana. Rally mei challe Sapna Chaudhary ke tumke, 26 March 2018, Punjab Kesri, Delhi.

dance party as most of the respondent shared. This stands true for almost all the states across the country. Almost all the genres starting from bhajans to popular songs are employed depending on the regional influence and the audience of the rally. However, the songs recorded for campaigns are not the conventional *raginis* as they are not considered as appealing for the younger generations and mostly young men participate in such rallies. A women *ragini* singer shared:

It is mostly around the elections time, they get opportunity to record political *carols*, *raginis* and songs for various parties. The political parties give contract to the musicians and singers for recording these party based *raginis*. For every *carol* and *ragini* the musician gets an amount of Rs.5000-6000. We get good amount of work before elections, during rallies and are also paid well for it. For us that ways all parties are equal as we are artists and we work for everyone. Now we just give them a soft copy of recordings in the pen drive so we save more and earn more as well around elections.

Similarly, the life histories of eminent politicians of yesteryears are composed and recorded in the form of *ragini* albums by different political parties for projecting their political affiliations and influence in the region for wooing the voters. Another *ragini* singer Jitender Padana (specializes in election campaigning songs) shared in an interview that the songs they sing in the election rallies are aligned with the political ideology of the parties hosting the programme. The songs are woven in accordance with the historical background of the political parties so as to connect and please the voters to vote in favour of the concerned party. However, these songs do not reflect their preferences, as Padana said that they just perform and do their job. They are the least bothered about which party wins but they sing as they get lucrative deals from the

organizers such as Rs. 11000/- per hour (Mathur & Pushpan, 2014). Few verses from the songs he sang during rally for two different political parties are as given below:

*“Ayegi BJP¹⁶ sarkar,
Congress hovegi sharmsar,
Chautala khada na ho payega”¹⁷*

(BJP government will come to power,
Congress will be embarrassed and Chautala would not even stand a chance).

Another for INLD¹⁸ political rallies, one of their slogans is,

“Yo pota tau Devi Lal¹⁹ ka, hai bada kamal ka” (Devi Lal’s grandson is simply wonderful).

These *raginis* become instrumental in sensitizing the potential voters about the candidates (contesting in election) background, caste and family affiliations considered as one of the determining factors for voting in Haryana. For example, a complete *kissa* incorporating several *raginis* on Chaudhary Ranbir Singh²⁰ (Image6) and Deepender Singh Hooda²¹ (Image 5) was composed and is used by Indian National Congress (Haryana) for a long term effect during election campaigns. Similarly, the life history

¹⁶ Bhartiya Janta Party (Political party)

¹⁷ Mathur & Pushpan, 2014.

¹⁸ INLD (Indian National Lok Dal) in Haryana

¹⁹ Chaudhary Devi Lal (1915-2001) has been one of the influential Jat leaders in Haryana. He was an Indian politician and served as sixth Deputy Prime Minister of India from 1989–91 in the governments of V. P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar. He has also been Chief Minister of Haryana twice, first in 1977–79 and then in 1987-89. His son Om Prakash Chautala has been Chief Minister of Haryana for five terms. Source: www.google.com

²⁰Chaudhary Ranbir Singh Hooda was a renowned Jat leader from Haryana and father of Bhipinder Singh Hooda, former Chief Minister of Haryana. He was a politician and member of Indian National Congress. He was also a minister Indian in the undivided Punjab and then Haryana government. Source: www.google.com.

²¹ Former MP from Rohtak (Haryana) and grandson of Chaudhary Ranbir Singh Hooda.

of many eminent personalities are composed and politically used, for example, life history of Tau Devi Lal Jiwan Gatha²², Ch. Harnand Rai (Image 6). Almost every political party in Haryana has a collection of *ragini* albums that are used for influencing voters during elections.

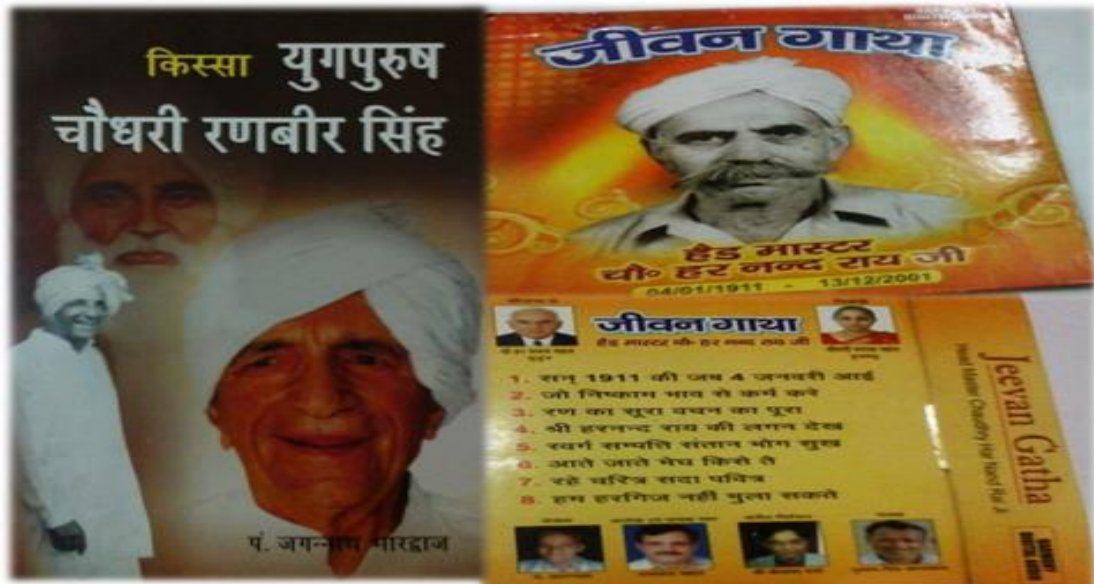


Image 6: A kissa & CD on life History of Chaudhary Ranbir Singh & Harnand Rai.

Source: Gifted to the researcher during fieldwork (From Murthal Haryana).

It is essential to understand here that the songs recorded for political campaigns are different from the above mentioned conventional *raginis* as the genre itself is under transition due to the influence of the Bollywood music and advancing technology and thus is attaining wide popularity in the region. The studio owner of one of the renowned studios of Rohtak (Haryana), said:

“aaj kal tho filmi dhuno pei gaatei hain singer, technology nei badal diya sab kuch. Party walei election se pehle appni liyei ragini banwati hai campaigning ke liyei par yeh geet jaisi ho..jadatar punjabi beats

²² Sung by Fauji Karambir Jagla easily available on YouTube. Interestingly, a *geet* was also composed on Bhudapa pension scheme (for elderly people) launched by Chaudhary Devi Lal. Available on youtube.com

*pei..jaisein INLD nei banwali 'hatja tau' ki dun pei.logon ko , khaskar nayi pididi ko yo pasand hai aur..jaldi dyaan javei hai..do chaar ragini bhi gvatei hai singer sei..jukur baddei buddhon ke liyen”*²³

(These days singers sing on filmi tunes, technology has changed everything. Party people get *raginis* recorded for their rallies/campaigns, but these songs are on Punjabi beats, for example, Indian National Lok Dal²⁴ got a song composed titled ‘Tau Congress’ for their party on the tune of a popular song of Haryana, i.e. *Hatja Tau* and the youth find such songs catchy. Two to four *raginis* of conventional style are also composed for the elder ones).

Such recordings become an essential part of the campaigning process for all the parties. However, these cassettes and C.D.s are not saleable in the market and are available only for the party workers and campaigns.²⁵ Rarely such records are ever found with the singers or with the recording studios except for the performers who themselves are associated with these parties.²⁶

The musical compositions either in the form of *raginis* or simple songs entrenched with the political ideologies of these parties are recorded just before campaigns. However, these are not saleable in the markets otherwise. On being enquired regarding the same, a renowned *ragini* singer from Bhainswal Kalan (Haryana) Late Master Satbir Singh²⁷said that such compositions are just like ‘*barsati maendak*’ (Seasonal Frog)

²³ Informed by the owner of a recording studio at Mohana, Haryana (in-depth interview).

²⁴ Political Party in Haryana.

²⁵ All the cited *raginis* and songs were collected with the help of people connected with the political parties.

²⁶ Informed by the Studio owner at Rohtak & a *ragini* singer.

²⁷ Interviewed at his home in Bhainswal Kalan on 10.06. 2014, Image 7.

which appear only during elections/political campaigns. Gathering such records becomes a real task as these CDs or cassettes are only available either with the party workers, recording studios or with the singers. For recording such CDs or cassettes, a minimal amount of RS. 4000 to 5000/- is given to the singers, especially in the context of Haryana.²⁸ It may vary at urban centres where celebrities and star performers are hired for attracting voters.



Image 7: Researcher with Late Master Satbir Singh (towards left) and his grandson at his home in Bhainswal Kalan, Sonapat (HR).

Thus party politics appropriates popular folk performances to create and entrench a new political culture in Haryana. These compositions reflect more upon the schemes launched by the political parties/ government. A glimpse at banners of *ragini* performances by the organizing political party reminds of one or the other initiative

²⁸ Informed by the owner of recording studio at Rohtak (in-depth interview).

taken by the concerned party. As Marshall McLuhan writes that the ‘medium is the message’, it becomes a medium to advertise to gain political mileage amongst listeners. Thereby it becomes a vehicle of popular communication regarding developmental activities or public awareness campaigns as well. Thus *ragini* becomes a powerful tool in the hands of political parties and the state as well.

The proceeding section attempts at understanding and analyzing the processes which led to the transformation of oral traditions (*ragini* and *geet*) into a commodity for mass consumption, popular music. It investigates the impact of technology on the two folk genres, integrating accounts of lived experiences of the audience and the performers in both. A relevant thread that runs throughout the chapter is the way audience negotiates with a transformed genre that once represented a benchmark of their (Haryanvi) tradition and has now swiftly appropriated a new identity of pop-rap sang/erotic genre.

III. The Cinematic Appeal of *Ragini*: From Hypnotic Folk to Titillating Pop

Neckar arr T-shirt peahen kar aaya cyclone.... Jee bhar kei naach lei.... abhi tho party shurru hui hai...jisko dance nahi karna woh jaake apni bhains charaanei’ (Wearing shorts & T-Shirt has come the cyclone (addressing a woman wrestler) ...dance as much as you wish...the party has just begun. Those who do not want to dance should take their cattle for grazing) plays loudly on the tractor of a middle-aged farmer working in his field (Image 8).



Image 8: Khanpur Kalan Village, Sonapat (HR). **Source:** From researchers' fieldwork.

The resonance of change is quite clear, loud and visible in the transformed musical tastes of the village community with an almost intoxicating influence of new technologies. It alters the way people relate to music in terms of taste/choice, perception, consumption, and production. Transformation in the technological sphere reflects the same in the socio-cultural and economic field of any given society. To further illustrate, the above-cited incident is a recent one which struck me during the period of this study while standing in the backyard of my house in a Haryana village and looking at the scenario in the adjacent fields in the morning.

It was not different from any other morning except for the playing of songs '*abhi tho party shurru hui hai, neekar arr t-shirt pehen ke aaya cyclone*'²⁹ which this time grabbed my attention. Usually, a folk song or *ragini* used to wake me up in the morning for the past few years. The all-time favorites are now being replaced by filmy Haryanvi songs item no. like '*hatja tau paanchei nei naachan de jee bhar ke ne, banno tera sweater laagei sexy, mei bhanwanli hogi, baby ko bass pasand hai, idiot hai mera banna* (get aside old man, let me dance as much as my heart desires, oh! would-be bride

²⁹ As translated above.

your sweater looks sexy, I have gone crazy, Baby likes bass music, Idiot is my would-be groom,).' The song 'banno teri ankhiyan (oh bride your eyes)' is an age-old Haryanvi folk *geet banddi*³⁰ sung for the bride in the *baan* ceremony (a couple of days) before marriage. After *baan*³¹, *jakhadi*³² is performed during the night at the groom's house.

It is interesting to observe these days that the song '*banno tera sweater*'³³ (in the movie Tanu Weds Manu returns) is often being played loudly as '*banno tera swager*' in most of the marriages and other kinds of functions in Haryana. Otherwise, the original *geet* used to be sung and listened to only by women in secluded spaces during marriage rituals. Now the same *geet* has been appropriated by Bollywood and has now been transformed into a popular song and was amongst top 10 songs of 2015 -2016 across India. Dozens of other folk songs with Haryanvi dialects are flaring up on the top charts of Bollywood music as well like from *Veere Di Wedding* (2018), *Dangal*, *Sultan* and *Laal Rang* since 2016.

A few of the *raginis* with the help of advanced technologies have gained popularity to become a part of popular pan-Indian light music. Some of them are nowadays used in even Bollywood films which rarely happened earlier. There is also another side to it as with the increasing global influence of Bollywood music, artists tend to compromise on the originality of their work and try to imitate the same tunes from film music. Cassettes, CDs, MP3, Internet and YouTube have helped in the production and

³⁰ Bunch of songs sung during marriage rituals.

³¹ It is a ritual in which a paste of turmeric, milk and curd is applied to the bride with the help of tiny bundles of grass. There are 7 cycles of this and after every cycle girl has to take bath. These 7 cycles are performed after the *lagan sagai* ceremony and it can vary 2 days before marriage or a day.

³² *Jakhadi* includes bunch of songs sung after *bandri* songs.

³³ Translated as above.

dissemination of folk music in Haryana for the larger audiences outside the state. However, the medium of listening may vary according to the caste and class of the listener as discussed in the proceeding sections as well. Thus it has affected not only the listeners but also the folk artists whose voice can now be heard by millions of listeners.

Once known as the famous *ragini* of Haryana “*tu raja ki raaj dulari* (you’re Daughter of a King, a ballady tribute to the Shiv-Parvati lore)”³⁴ a hundred years old *ragini*, landing onto the top chart of Bollywood music from the movie “*oye lucky, lucky oye*”.³⁵ Another pop version of this *ragini* ‘*bhaang ragad ke piya karu*’ was reproduced in a Bollywood movie titled ‘*lal rang*’. Haryanvi *ragini* singers have sung both the *raginis*, as the folk music of Haryana has something new to offer now. The entry of *raginis* in cinema has a new appeal altogether. The hypnotic folk is transformed into a sensational titillating pop. This process suggests that e-age culture accelerates the pace of change, accessibility, and appropriation of pop-folk form in its mass consumption as a commodity.

The interaction of folk genre and technology in the region has transcended the rigid structure of private-public spaces. The voices of singers which echoed only in the ears of few in the small gathering of *chaupals* (before these changes) have now reached millions transcending the barriers of region, caste, class, gender, and age. Technology has changed the social composition of the audience from consisting of mostly men to the inclusion of women who may sit at home and enjoy a genre like *ragini*, though mostly not in the presence of the men folk of the household. As one of the respondents, a married woman named Kanta, aged 42 said:

³⁴ This *ragini* was originally composed by *Saangi Mange Ram*.

³⁵ Bollywood Movie.

*“inhkei saamnei bethi ragini dekhu kei aachi lagu...eska papa manna
karei”³⁶*

(Sitting in front of him and referring to her husband, do I look nice
watching *ragini* in front of him? He also tells me not to).

Rather, a majority of the women (respondents interviewed) gave similar reasons for not being able to listen to or watch *ragini* programmes on Television. Thus technology may facilitate but often falls short of cutting across the conventional boundaries of regional customs and traditions.

The Politics of Representation

Technology no doubt liberates but at the same time also marginalizes, it may help in the preservation of folk songs, oral traditions apart from its technological upgradation, however, the original version of the genre mostly gets influenced with the changing socio-cultural dimensions or structure. The decision regarding what is to be recorded and represented may vary as per region or context. The local cable channels prefer flashing *ragini* competitions, including lewd Bhojpuri regional songs and *raginis*, over ‘boring women’s *geet*’ as one of the respondents, a cable owner, said:

*“geet gaat kaun dekhei yeh tho byaa shaadi mei lugaai gavein.pher hum
tei woh chalaavei jo mahri audience nei accha laage. Ib tei Sapna
Choudhary chaalein sei”*

³⁶ Said a respondent from Khanpur Kalan village in Sonapat district

(Who watches *geet* these days, actually women sing these during marriage ceremonies. We play what our audience likes. Now-a-days Sapna Chaudhary is in demand).

It also shows that the cable channels are majorly being watched by men (referred to as the audience here). So, the cable operators in Sonapat region, especially in villages, telecast recorded VCDs/DVDs of *ragini* competitions all day. The same pattern can be observed in the regions dominantly occupied by Jats, including Delhi, NCR regions.³⁷ So the growing popularity of contemporary version of *raginis* attract youngsters and men in particular.

On the other hand, women's *geet*, ritual songs without which festivals are considered incomplete, and women's singing during life cycle rites is seen as their moral duty and not as a performance. Film tunes have also had led to a tremendous effect on women's *geet* as well. However despite that it remained understated and invisible in media in comparison to *raginis* as stated above. However it is also crucial to note that the songs which women use to sing during harvesting/spring seasons in the fields are no more audible. Perhaps the belongingness has undergone a sea level change apart from developing a hostile environment in the villages.³⁸ The growing hatred and conflicts in rural and urban Haryana (Singh, 2019) have led to an emotional disenchantment and has changed the very lifestyle and thought patterns of villagers as well as the ways people related to each other traditionally in the past. In cognizance of the same thought,

³⁷ Even in the urban villages of Delhi, NCR region, women from Jat families' do not participate, neither as audience nor as performer, in *ragini* competitions organized in their own villages. Response received from villagers of Munirka and Masoodpur village, Narela and Faridabad. However, women attend *bhajans* and *jagrans* that are organized in their respective villages and area.

³⁸ Responded an 80 years old woman who recalled her young days, when all the women in the neighbourhood would gather and travel to the fields as they used to singing in spring month.

Gupta (2005) advocates that ‘villages are vanishing and exist just as space’ and a ‘hopeless disenchantment’ prevails.

Villages have witnessed drastic changes in the last few decades. Caste equations and agriculture have undergone shifts and weakened their hold which leads to uncertainty, unemployment, etc. Elaborating upon the existential crisis of agriculture in villages, a Jat farmer from UP or Punjab, would not mind taking up urban menial jobs, they may not prefer doing in their villages in comparison to farming which was once considered sacred, points out Gupta (2005). He further states:

“.... gross statistics do suggest a whittling down of the importance of agriculture as the mainstay of Indian society, there is, in addition, a general undermining of values and practices that have their origins in the villages and are imbued with the so-called rural ethos. The joint family is disappearing, the rural caste hierarchy is losing its tenacity, and the much-romanticized harmony of village life is now exposed for the sham it perhaps always was” (Gupta, 2005, p.752).

The same gets translated into the prevailing folk culture of a community, as mentioned in previous chapters and the practice of singing during harvest times is no more prevalent in Haryana. This may partly be attributed to decreasing agricultural activities and farming in villages. Politics of representation enabled one genre to become more popular (*ragini* here); however, the other has gradually lost its value, women’s *geet* in this context. One of the reasons is the challenge of documenting the genres. Even if some *geets* have been printed, it has been done through local publishers and at times the same *geet* are published by different authors. Moreover, technological interventions

in the form of a gramophone, vinyl records, radio, cassettes, CDs/DVDs, TV, internet, pen-drive, etc. played a crucial role in influencing both the genres.

IV. Transforming Genres and Realities: Impact of Technology

Thus to understand the impact of technology on the two genres under consideration, *ragini* and *geet* can be seen in three different phases which brought about radical shifts in the history of folk music in Haryana. First, the coming of transistors and gramophone. Secondly, coming of cassettes and C.D.s/DVDs. Lastly, with the internet, YouTube channels, tech-savvy gadgets like pen-drive, iPhone, etc. Recording techniques have made everything easily available as it transcends the idea of live performance and brought about numerous opportunities for *ragini* performers.

Phase I: Transistor and Gramophone

Remembering the transitional phase in the context of the contribution of *Women in Twentieth-Century Classical music of India*, Vidya Shah explicates that gramophone provided the much needed performing spaces to renowned artists like Gauhar Jan, Jaddanbai, etc. These decades, Shah says, saw a movement of performance from salon to the studio that changed the very way of experiencing music. One is reminded of how technology, particularly Gramophone, led to a resurgence of the institution of devadasis in south India in mid-19th Century.

Since the very beginning, women musicians had been unfortunate in getting the recognition or appreciation for opting singing as their career to earn a livelihood. As Tokas (2009) writes that

“the nineteenth century witnessed gender-based divisions regarding the recognition given to the male musicians as compared to the female musicians who were often called by the different degraded names in the

different parts of India at that time...In South India, female musicians were called devadasis, while in the north they were called baijis and tawaifs. Although, the rajas were the great patrons of music although throughout the nineteenth and mid-twentieth music got affected differently by the different rulers, such as, in the rule of the Mughal emperor and under the British rule etc. During this phase not only the identity of the musicians changed but also the notion of performance changed for the artists. Such social changes affected not only the artists and their performances but also the institution of gharana and family. Later in the twentieth century, the introduction of the gramophone in India, provided an opportunity (another platform) to these 'nautch-girls' and baijis to restore their lost status and identity. The recordings not only gave them the means to earn their livelihood but also a way of gaining name and fame, which they used to have earlier" (Tokas, 2009, p.34-35).

In the context of Haryana, before the intervention of recording technology, live performances were the only way of experiencing folk music in the region. Lay folk in the Sonapat region recall coming of a transistor in the 1960s when some military personnel of Jat regiment brought it while coming back from Hong Kong. A retired government employee, aged 70, said that:

"transistor tho ke military mein jawaan laya tha jib woh Hongkong gaya tha aur log duur dur tei usnei dekhni aawei thei, ustei pehle kisi kei paas na tha"

(Military personnel brought transistor with him while returning from Hong Kong and villagers from far off places used to come to see it. Before that nobody had transistor).

In those days, having a transistor was a status symbol, recalls a very senior professor of Hindi in Rohtak, originally from UP. He said “un dinoh shaadi mei agar teen cheez kisi ladkei ko milta tha, tho maantei thei bahot mila hai bhyaan mei jaantei ho kya? *Ghadee*, Transistor aur cycle” (During those days in marriage if a boy used to get three things, it was considered as a status symbol, i.e., wrist watch, transistor and cycle). Possessing a technological gadget was symbolic of high status and power of the owner. Over the last six decades, Haryana has witnessed the massive entry of recording technology starting from Vinyl recording, followed by radio, cassettes; C.D.s/DVDs, internet, etc. that changed the very idea of performance for singers and experience of listening for the audience.

The gendered nature of music can be witnessed in its encounter with technology as is the case of Haryanvi music. Gramophone provided a platform for women singers to record their voices for the public (with which a stigma was attached earlier) without being gazed at. Technology helped in bridging the gap between private and public spaces. Women singers started emerging from neighbouring states like U.P. and Punjab, with the coming of the gramophone, for recording Haryanvi *Geet* in duet songs with other male performers as cited in coming paragraphs.

Women Performers in the Wake of Technology: Gramophone, Radio and Cassettes

As discussed above, recording technology in Haryana, brought with itself an opportunity for the neglected performers, especially women, to be visible in public spaces in the 80s. In most parts of the country, gramophone came first followed by radio

but in Haryana presence of both was felt almost during the same time, i.e. 1976-78 that intensified the pace of transformation, i.e., movement from live performances to the studio, as it had a socio-cultural and economic impact on the way people related to music. However, vinyl recording for performers was only available in metro cities like Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay, etc. as gramophone recording facilities were only available in the cities and states like Haryana, Rajasthan, and Punjab remained largely outside the influence of this technology.

First ever recorded Haryanvi *Geet* on Gramophone included the voices of Gulab Singh and Kusum Tanwar from U.P. in 1980 for the vinyl record album 'Saun Rab Di' followed by many other albums like 'chhori dilli ki' with the labelling of 'Haryana *Geet*' (Image given below). The only source that informs about the first ever vinyl record of Haryanvi *Geet* is the dozens of records available at New Gramophone House that dates back to 1978 onwards, mostly, sung by Kusum Tanwar and Gulab Singh and a dozen by other singers like Mohini Narula³⁹, etc. Only one record of swang, i.e. 'Nal Damyanti' is available in the records sung by Gulab Singh and Kusum Tanwar.

³⁹ Mother of eminent playback singer Jasvinder Narula from Punjab.



Image 9: First few recorded Haryanvi *geet* and *raginis*. **Source:** From records available with Gramophone company of India online.

The coming of gramophone initiated the much-needed process of preservation of the folk music of Haryana and simultaneously invaded the musical tunes and rhythm of the folk genre of the region. Bollywood tunes captured the minds of the lay folk. Although gramophone liberated people from conventional modes of performances, that were seen to be only men’s genre, however, it enslaved the originality of folk genres in Haryana. As many of the early Haryanvi *geet* recorded in the 1940s have been sung borrowing filmi tunes and rhythm. So, entry of recording technology led to the demise of original folk music of the region which was to be preserved.

Women got an opportunity, not to say that they did not have before. However only a few of them have recorded their voice on vinyl as duets for simple Haryanvi songs, to name a few, Kusum Tanwar, Mohini Narula, etc. though none is being recorded by the women belonging to the dominant caste in the region.



Image 10: First few recorded Haryanvi *geet* and *raginis*. **Source:** From records available with Gramophone company of India online.

The rise of women *ragini* singers in Haryana coincided with the emergence of female *gurbani* singers on a public stage (the 1980s) of Punjab also as noted by Francesca Cassio in her work (Cassio, 2014). However, the difference is that *kirtanie gurbani* women singers also started performing on AIR and Doordarshan National channel which was supposedly a cultural agenda (ibid., p. 5). However women performers in Haryana remained relatively devoid of these opportunities. Cassio analyses the social and cultural circumstances that gave way to budding female *kirtanie* amidst a context wherein only male Sikh Gurus rendered the traditional performance of *ragis* (required professional training) in public and women were expected to give domestic performances which meant singing the everyday folk style accessible to singers who are not trained in music. She further elaborates upon the role of media in empowering women *kirtanie* singers which provided them with an ample number of opportunities

to perform in public and also in the sanctum sanctorum of Golden Temple which was forbidden for women performers until 1990s (ibid).

Half a dozen records available with Gramophone Company of India indicate that historically, the first few women to record their voices for Haryanvi *raginis* must have been Sudesh Sharma (Karnal) and Kusum Tanwar (belonged to UP). Usha Seth, Mohini Narula were amongst others who recorded Haryanvi *geet*. Though studio may be a part of public space, it kept these women away from the public visibility; as women's singing in public was against the normative social order of Haryana. Early 80's also marked the beginning of cassette productions in Haryana (Kumar, 2009, p.123). This initiated the movement of live performance to the recording studios. It has been discussed in the next section.

Phase II: Entry of Radio and Cassette Industry

With the coming of radio station at Rohtak, commissioned in the year 1976, the folk performers of Grade A were invited to perform live on the radio. However, the grading was and is yet done based on the popularity of the singer.⁴⁰ The state-owned local radio channel (Rohtak) at 92.75 Rohtak frequency entertains *ragini* performers. However, only the performers who sing the original *raginis* Grade A/B are invited to sing, said the incharge of radio station at Rohtak. In the early years of radio, *ragini* singers like Gulab Singh, Kusum performed on invitation. Later on, sometime in the late 90s, reputed singers like Ranbir Barwasaniya and Pale Ram came during mid-80s were invited for performing on AIR in Delhi as well as later in Rohtak. They were paid a reasonable fee for recording 2-3 songs just in excerpts due to lack of time of telecasting these programmes on AIR. Performers preferred recording at AIR over cassettes as they

⁴⁰ Verbal information from a folk singer.

received double the amount they got while recording for cassettes. However, singers from Haryana felt that the coming of radio station at Rohtak brought about a polarization of artists as AIR Delhi preferred inviting singers from western U.P. and Rohtak station promoted Haryanvi singers.

As unfolded in previous sections, the intervention of technology in the cultural sphere of Haryana is not a recent phenomenon as it began early in the 20th Century. The early recordings in Haryana incorporated the orally transmitted *raginis* composed during the early twentieth century i.e., 1900-1945. As discussed elsewhere the only source of entertainment, before the advent of cassette culture, was live performances of *swang-raginis* particularly. The advent of recording technology in Haryana in the year 1980s (Kadyan, p. 120) initiated the much-needed archivization of the folk genres by documenting this oral tradition in these compact cassettes. Haryana Sahitya Akademi that was set up by the state in the 80s commissioned various studies on the folk performers like Pandit Lakhmi Chand, for collecting folk songs like *ragini* and other forms of oral traditions to be documented in textual form.⁴¹ Though, no such efforts were ever made for preserving women's *geet* which formed an integral part of life cycle rites ceremonies of people in the region. It is only in the last one decade that C.D.s consisting of *geet* sung by women have started emerging in the market, though with less number of buyers. These C.D.s are mostly attached with the books on *geet* so as to increase saleability. It is also crucial to understand here that women in Haryana may not have the autonomy to spend money on recording one's voice as an eminent folk singer from Sonapat also shared that after marriage her husband decides songs to be sung or recorded for the music albums.

⁴¹ Haryana Sahitya Akademi.

Initially, cassette recordings consisted of religious themes (like Gurbani, spiritual songs about festivals, etc.) as it was during the late 1980s only that most of the households acquired television sets and were thereby exposed to religious/devotional serials like Ramayana and Mahabharata or mythological stories. Kumar (2009) points out that the first phase of cassette recordings was marked by conservatism and thereby it changed the style of singing.

The cassette culture (Manuel, 1993) pierced the only existing genre (source) of entertainment, i.e., *swang/saang* of Haryana after 1980s onwards and immensely influenced the original form of '*ragini*' which has now transformed into a pop-filmi *ragini* form (Manuel, 2014, p. 360). The 1980s also marked the entry of cassette companies like Sapna, Max, Maina, Jagdish, Sonotek, Sonotone, Superline, T-series in the region. The *swang* consisting of 50 to 70 *raginis* which would take 2-3 days and nights were now easily made available to people in a compact form of Cassettes in 3-4 volumes costing around Rs. 70-90. However, the cassettes compromised over the number of *ragini* as only 4-5 *raginis* were recorded in a cassette. Thus recording led to shortening of the stanzas and the music between the songs was reduced and thus the *kissa/sang* was reduced to 40-50 minutes which was initially performed over 2-3 days. *Kissa Satyawadi Harish Chandra* (Story of truthful Harish Chandra) is amongst the earliest cassettes consisting of 8 *raginis* was produced in the year 1988. Pre-recorded cassettes alienated the performer not only from the live performances but also pressurized them to limit their mode and length of expression to some 40-45 minutes. So the performers became merely singers reproducing old tunes without any scope of creativity and expressions.

Coming of cassettes in the region boosted the *ragini* competitions as those competitions⁴² were organized by the cassette companies themselves to record their tapes throughout the programme (Singh, 2019; Kadyan, 2007, p. 29). It led to a transformation in the pattern of recordings as now the public stage became open studios for recordings. These structural changes posed a lot of challenges for the cassette industries like Max, T-series, Maina, etc. as it generated intense competition amongst cassette producing companies. The race against each other was also regarding who will record which competition.

The volume of cassettes recorded at the competitions that would continue for whole day and night were named after the area where it was being organized such as ‘Rohtak *Ragini* Competition,’ ‘Sonapat *Ragini* Competition’ or in the name of the singers such ‘Rajbala ki Superhit *Ragini*’, ‘Phutkal *Raginiyan*’ etc. So the idea of competitions brought about economic transformation in the music industry of Haryana at the cost of the originality of the genre itself. The length of *raginis* was reduced to fit into the compact cassette discs. Along with it, singers were now directly paid by the organizers which cost less on the pockets of the cassette company owners and they were quickly getting cassettes recorded with a minimal cost.

From Folk to Filmi

The phase of singing *ragini* in filmi tune began towards the end of the 1970s and renowned artist Paleram (from Halalpur) is supposedly the first one to sing on the Bollywood music. Not only did the structure of *ragini* transformed in terms of notations, music and rhythm but also the lyrics got influenced as was discussed in the previous chapter as well. Though appropriation did not happen in a one-sided manner

⁴² The idea of competition is different here. i.e. competitions between male singers as not many women singers were visible in public initially.

i.e. folk genres emulating film/Bollywood music /tunes but also the other way round as Bollywood started capitalizing the existing folk tunes for its inherent mass culture appeal and characteristic. (Hamm, 1981).

The second phase (early 80s-early 90s) initially focused on *raginis* based on interpersonal family relationships such as on Devar-Bhabi and Jija-Sali relationships than on mythological episodes and religious themes. As Peter Manuel notes that:

“in the first half of the 20th century, a set of known singer-poets composed what became a fairly codified and standardized repertoire of *rāginis*. In the mid-1980s the cassette boom came to Haryana, generating a whirlwind of musical activity. Most recordings presented condensed versions of the established *rāgini* repertoire, alongside short, spicy *devar-bhābhi/jījā-sāli* songs, which also loosely came to be called *rāgini*” (Manuel, 2014, p. 402).

This transformation of theme probably came with the coming of women *ragini* singers on the public stage. Further, Jagdish and Maina cassette companies overtook Max cassette company that was amongst the top cassette companies. It happened because of changes it introduced in the music, i.e., rhythmic including Jhankar beats and content of genre as well as by bringing new singers. Capitalizing the global influence of film music on folk genres, Maina cassette company towards early 90s started producing *raginis* composed on Hindi film songs as Kumar cites ‘*meri chatri kei neeche aaja, kyon beeghein kamla khadi khadi* (come under my umbrellas why are you getting wet standing kamla)’ (Kumar, 2009, p.127).

Overall the inception of radio and cassettes combined with imitation of filmy tunes not only influenced the musical composition of *ragini* but had a detrimental impact on the lyrics, which included double meaning jokes adopted from films (ibid., p. 30). The

*kaccha/pakka saaj*⁴³ was now replaced by mic, amplifiers, piano, etc. which also alienated the old instrumentalists who were comfortable playing *ghadwa*⁴⁴ and banjo.⁴⁵ As renowned artists started appropriating filmi tunes while singing, the *raginis* joined the race of popular musical traditions.

Marcus Scott asserts that the emulation of film music by the folk artists or the villagers, during their celebrations, is their way of asserting their identity with modernity. In the case of Haryana, it proved to be very impactful for the *raginis* in terms of lyrics, rhythm and originality. However, the replica of folk music in Bollywood may have helped in regaining *raginis*' fading presence and also became instrumental in asserting traditional/caste identity.

Thus competitions by 1990s provided a bigger platform for the amateur singers to sharpen their skills by participating in these competitions which were recorded by the various reputed recording companies. This reduced the cost of the cassette production as the organizers were already paying the singers. It also helped in maintaining heterogeneity while recording 2-3 singers in a single volume of a cassette. Kumar advocates in his work that as the competitions usually lasted for 2-3 days including nights, "the interests of the crowd needed to be sustained over a longer time, this meant entry of female singers for the first time on stage in public performance in Haryana" (Kumar, 2009, p.129). Similar trends can be seen to be prevalent in most of the regional musical traditions of North India (Manuel, 1993).

On the other hand, women's *geet* also got influenced by technology as cassettes of women's *geet*/songs such as spring songs, wedding songs, etc. were made available

⁴³*Kaccha saaj* consists of 4 earthen pots, banjo, and khartal whereas *Pakka saaj* consists 4 earthen pots, Harmonium and chimta.

though with very small number of buyers. However, the availability of such cassettes depended on the profit it generates for the commercial cassette producers. Technology transformed women's songs and thereby also displaced their voice as an effect of modernity (Jassal, 2012, p. 258). The 'informal women's songs' were also not devoid of filmy tunes, melodies and similar compositions (Manuel, 1993, p. 56). These songs are usually now seen playing in the background during festivals especially prevalent in suburban areas as in villages; women may not still have access to the stereo/transistor. Commenting on this, a 50-year-old, women from Gohana (Sonapat district) said: "*humane kaun radio de bhai arr mahara keh kaam*" (Who gives us radio and what work we have with it?).

Addressing the question regarding the accessibility, Peter Manuel rightly argues citing findings from the work of Mills on '*Gender and Verbal Performance Style in Afghanistan*' where the women are discouraged from using cassette players even at home and further they should not even own it. Mills says that "the differential use of tape recorders is thus part of a larger, long-standing pattern of gender-based differences, which pertains even in the absence of...new, foreign gadgets" (Manuel, 1993, p.160).

Thus he opined that 'cassette culture is primarily male culture' (Manuel, 1993, p. 160). He further elaborates that the gender orientation of popular music is determined predominantly by men as they constitute most of the customers/audience due to the patriarchal structure in India. He also cites an example of recorded genres like erotic Dadra, *rasiya*, etc. performed by a courtesan and is mostly enjoyed by men as per his research. So he asserts that women rarely own/control means of production, which act as a prerequisite to empowerment. He further argues that 'cassette trade is completely in the hands of men' (ibid). One can witness similar trends in Haryana as hardly any woman owns a cassette company in the region as discussed elsewhere and their male

counterparts are managing the ones who have by chance. As one of the respondents (women *ragini* singer from Rohtak) shared that she started her company but it did not work well, so she had to close it down.

Towards Popular Music

Two reputed singers who joined the league of *ragini* singing competition and popularized the *raginis* in Haryana (during this phase of transformation in the mid-80s till mid-90s) were Pale Ram from Halalpur and Ranbir Barwasania from Barawasaniya in Sonapat District. Both capitalized the opportunity to record with almost every cassette company and promoted the *ragini* culture through cassettes in Haryana. It is believed “that *ragini* is to be sung at a very high pitch, a masculine voice is what makes it different from other forms of singing since it requires intonation at a very high pitch and even a tragic scene is described in a full bursting throated voice” (Kumar, 2009, p. 134). Ranbir Barwasaniya emerged as an opponent to Pale Ram around the same time as both were paid highly by the dominating cassettes companies in the region.

Interestingly, individual competitions got further transformed as singers started making their own *ragini* party/ troupe consisting of 7-8 artists, including singers, instrumentalists, accompanists, etc.⁴⁶ Kadyan (2007) points out by 1994, significant *ragini* recordings were done and the same were reproduced wherever these troupes were invited as per the demand of people or as per the occasion. Importantly, during this phase, Haryanvi *raginis* were popularized beyond the boundaries of the Haryana state. It caught the attention of amateur singers from neighbouring regions like eastern U.P.

⁴⁶ Artists in the troupe may not necessarily be professionally trained. A glance at the background of these artists provides the fact that the majority of performers in these troupes are Brahmins with exceptions of few instrumentalists belonging to Mirasis (ibid).

However, singers from U.P., Himachal and Bihar who started singing Haryanvi *raginis* received a lot of resentment from the local Haryanvi *ragini* singers. This posed a threat of dilution to Haryanvi culture as folk singers from other states integrated their regional elements, including lyrics and represented that as Haryanvi. Master Satbir Singh,⁴⁷ the oldest *ragini* singer, who died recently in 2016 due to ill-health, further said that this process harmed the image of Haryana culture and the genre came to be seen as associated with lower category of tastes. He believed this happened due to the entry of women in *ragini* singing, followed by cinema and commercialization. Until women came, said Singh, *ragini* was not only original but the contents were also decent.

As already pointed out, the changing nature of reciprocal connections between folk genres and Bollywood song styles contributed to the emergence of new experiments and collaborations.⁴⁸ ‘Mera Naulakha mangadei ho, ho saayiaan diwanei’ has taken its tune from a folk song of Haryana ‘*mera daaman sila dei oh nandi bira*’ Such is an effect of cinema music that these days’ *raginis* are made on filmi tunes. Similarly, the song from Delhi 6 ‘*saas gari deve nanand samjha levei, sasural genda phool*’ is based on a folk tune of Chattisgarh. In a recent film, ‘Tanu Weds Manu’, the song ‘*bano tera swagger*’ and other songs of the film have been partly borrowed (some lyrics and tune) from Haryanvi *geet*. Songs like ‘*idiot hai mera banna*’ from the film Dangal has also been taken from the traditional *geet gaari* which is sung by women in villages at girls’ wedding on *mehendi* night. The lyrics, rhythm and tune have been changed in the film for mass appeal. Haryanvi language these days is capturing the market because of its

⁴⁷ Interviewed at his home in Bhainswal Kalan.

⁴⁸ The Fourth Audience-Charles Hamm-Popular Music, Vol. 1, Folk or Popular? Distinctions, Influences, Continuities (1981), pp. 123-141.

stubborn accent. Though these tunes are appreciated when co-opted into films, they also lose originality in the process.

The sudden popularity of Haryanvi dialect in the film music industry has generated a trend these days of including at least one character from Haryana or a song with the local dialect of the region in Bollywood films. “*Mei raja tu raajdulari, bhang mila kei piya aaj mei, kundi sautein wala hu,*” a *ragini* from a Mange Ram’s composition has been reproduced (in different versions) by Bollywood movies like ‘Oye Lucky Oye’ & ‘*Lalrang*’. Though *raginis* have come into the limelight in their Bollywood version, it is unfortunately at the cost of a compromise on their originality and structure. Thus it becomes a challenging task to preserve this heritage.⁴⁹ Upset over the remix culture, Prof. Udhabhan Hans, an awardee of Sahitya Ratan in Haryana, points out that

“ish vartamaan remix kei yug mei purani hindi filmon kei gaano ki dunno ko pop sangit mei dhalnei ki jo pravarti aajkal badh rahi hai, ush ka kuprabhav Haryana kei lokgeeton ki paramparagath mool dhuno par bhi padaa hai aur bhavishya mei esh prabhav kei badhnei ki aashankhya hai. Aaj Haryana ki mulyavaan dharohar ko shurakshit rakhnei ki jarurat hai”(Sharma, 2011, p. 15).

(In contemporary remix decade, the trend of converting old Hindi film tunes to pop music these days is increasing. Its negative influence has also been cast on Haryana’s folk songs and traditionally original tunes and this might increase in future. There is a need to preserve the precious heritage of Haryana today).

⁴⁹ Said Director of Dharohar Museum, Kurukshetra.

Simultaneously the other genre 'geet' is also on the verge of extinction. Women's *geet* performed in the private sphere are also vanishing⁵⁰ as there are no buyers for a genre performed by women within their houses or those in the neighbourhood. The younger generation, particularly young girls, even in villages or sub-urban villages, are no more interested in these narratives conveyed through songs, even though it may be conventionally desirable. Impact of technology on this genre too is reflected from the music and tone of these songs. As many women say, *geet* nowadays are sung in the filmi tone/ music. Even the devotional/ religious bhajans sung by *arya samaji bhajnopdeshak mandali* imitate similar tunes to lure more audience and for disseminating Arya Samaj's ideologies.

For instance, *Saanso ki maala pe simru mei pi ka naam*⁵¹ is a beautiful composition of a Qawwali by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, which was later adopted by hit Bollywood movie 'Koyla'. Not only that, but the musical tune of this song is also adopted by women (as well as Arya Samaji *Bhajnopdeshaks* for *dharmik* bhajans) while singing mata bhajans, shabd in their houses during *jagratra*.⁵² This one is so popular that one can listen to it even on the Mata Katyaayini channel on the television...saanso ki mala pe simru mei maa ka naam. Another similar bhajan 'jaane kitne dino ke baad kanha ji mere ghar aaye, jaane kitne dino ke baad guruji mere ghar aaye' has taken its lyrics as well as music from the song 'jaane kitne dino ke baad gali mei aaj chand nikla' from the Bollywood movie *Zakhm*. Thus from mid 90s to 2005 witnessed a significant transformation in the Haryanvi music industry as audio medium shifted to visuals with the coming of T.V. and C.D. By 2000, folk music came fully under the influence of filmi music.

⁵⁰ AK Ramanujan opines in his article who needs folklore.

⁵¹ Composed by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and was part of Pakistani Qawali Tradition. It first travelled to Bollywood and from there to other local musical cultures.

⁵² Overnight religious musical function.

Phase III: Television, C.D.s and beyond Cinema

The third phase saw a complete shift from audio cassettes to Visual Compact Discs (VCD). Now *raginis* were produced in CD format which has attracted a larger audience. Gradually, it increased the remuneration of *ragini* singers from Rs. 7000-8000 to Rs. 12000-13000 per recording and it became a full-fledged profession according to an orchestra player. The second phase saw the entry of women on the public stage primarily to entertain and for sustaining the interest of the crowd. The third phase saw the entry of more women performers on stage and that too more independently such as Upasana Sharma (Kumar, 2009, p. 138). Michael Christiansen (1995) observes in his study '*Cycles in Symbol Production*' that introduction of CD in the market enhanced the number of albums as well as allowed performers to launch their album. Within less than a decade of coming, CDs completely replaced the cassettes.

Further the production of Video Compact Discs essentialized the need of dancers as well as actors to enact a role in visual recordings. The singers now wear Haryanvi traditional costumes consisting of white kurta and dhoti and a colorful *khandwa* representing the Haryanvi culture of dominant caste primarily Jats. The CD producers felt the financial burden of recordings along with that of the remuneration of numerous artists hired for a VCD album. So now producers wanted not just singers but performers who can dance and sing well. Old *ragini* singers were replaced by young singers and dancers who made filmy music an integral part of pop *raginis*. Around the same time, production of Haryanvi films also got a boost and rise of regional actors like Suman Negi and Billoo Chaudhary made them popular across Haryana, Rajasthan and Western UP (Kumar, 2009, p.141). It reflects that new technology does not only introduce transition in the music industry but gives a way to women *ragini* dancers to come out on the conservative public space of Haryana.

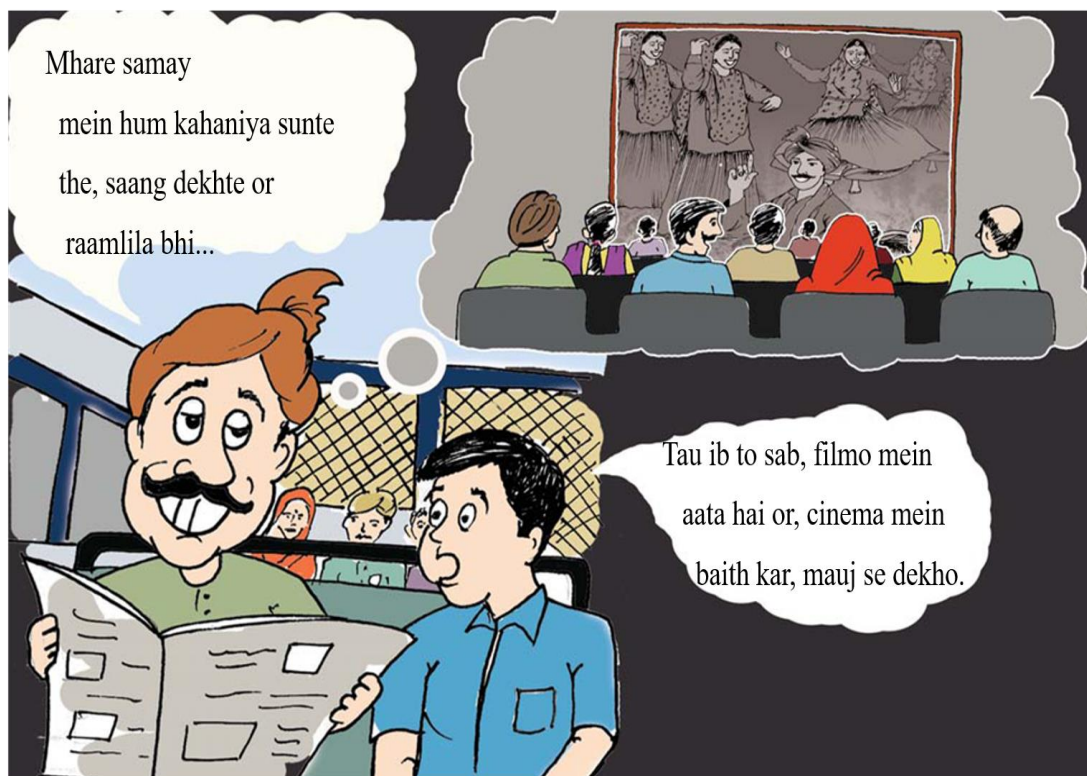


Image 11 A local man wearing turban is shown telling the boy that “in their times, they used to listen to stories, would watch saang and raamlila as well”. To this the boy tells him that “uncle now everything is shown in films and one can sit in cinema theatre and watch with fun.

Source: Samvad, 2009, Haryana Sahitya Academy.

By the late 90s, the influence of filmy tunes and cinema music reached a new height. Bollywood movies like Disco Dancer (1982-86) introduced disco beats and tunes in the cassette market of Haryana. Immediately, disco beats were integrated into *raginis* due to its popularity. It had an immense influence on *raginis* as they were sung on filmi tunes to name a few ‘Tutak Tutak Tutiya’, ‘Meri Chattri kei Niche Aaja’ apart from the influence of Punjabi pop which gradually transformed the genre into pop *ragini*/sang rap. So, this not only marked the beginning of a trend towards the appropriation of film tunes and lyrics in *raginis* but also diminished the usage of traditional tunes and musical

instruments. Film music on the other hand also adopted folk tunes to create the mass cultural appeal (Manuel, 1991; Kumar, 2009).

Peter Manuel (2014) revisits his work on '*Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*' which was done in 1993 and points out that the influence of 'audio cassettes on vernacular Indian music production, content and consumption' during 90s such as 'decentralisation of the music industry and proliferation of regional and niche folk-pop genres-remain fundamental today' even with the coming of digital technology such as DVD, pen drive and internet. He further opines that commercial music production adapts to recent technological developments, which leads to 'vigorous and persistent flowering of regional music' in North India' (Manuel, 2014, p. 389). He further shares that "Haryanvi music – unlike its Bhojpuri counterpart – is seldom heard outside its homeland, but like Bhojpuri music it has nevertheless been undergoing a fairly robust boom, comprising both VCD production and a vigorous live performance network" (ibid., p.402). However, the original *ragini* performances declined with the popularity of "condensed versions of the established ragini repertoire, alongside short, spicy bhabi/Jija-Sali songs, which also loosely came to be called *ragini*" (ibid).

Vanishing Live Performances of the Original Form of *Ragini*?

The technology enabled mediums and *ragini* competitions not only had a deep impact on folk traditions in terms of its content (seen as vulgar in the region) but it also affected the live performances. The effect can be seen at two levels: one is in terms of quality of performance where the integration of vulgar content demands erotic dance steps; secondly with declining numbers of live performance of original *raginis*.



Image 12: *Swang mandali* performing. **Source:** Samvad, September Issue, 2010, Haryana Sahitya Academy.

Considering the extinction of folk genres in North India, specifically in Western UP, Sandeep Rai in his article on ‘*Folk Songs Dying a Slow Death*’ points out that, now-a-days, there are only a few performers left who can deliver renditions like *alha udhal*, *ragini*, *swaang* and *dhola*. These genres have been trademarks of the north Indian region. He further says that not a single *dhola* singer could be found in entire western UP and similarly *swang* performers are also diminishing. *Ragini*, he comments is the only form that still survives because radio stations play these songs (Rai,2015).

Talking about the process of vanishing folk music, a columnist⁵³ in daily newspaper argues that it is the villages where folk music is disappearing faster and urbanization and migration have left the entire content of folk music lifeless. Manuel’s prediction in the case of north India can be seen as coming true in the region as mass media flourished at the cost of live performance and cinematic music, in particular, had a detrimental impact on genres as well as on the idea of live performances (Manuel, 1993, p. 202).

⁵³ Times of India, Sept. 19, 2011.

V. From *Ragini* singers to Dancers: *Ragini* in the *Sapna* way

Desperate need of audience for the new version of hip hop *ragini* propagated the agenda for introducing *ragini* performers, especially dancers to the newly evolved contexts of public performance. Dancers joined the *ragini* troupes to lure more audience. Beenu Chaudhary was known to be one of the boldest *ragini* singers as well as a dancer in Haryana. She was known to recite and sing jokes with sexual and erotic contents in *ragini* on the public stage as well as in the private parties consisting of male patrons. To illustrate the same while addressing the public during her performance, she used to say:

“*mausam dekhiyen kitna kasuta sei, kimme karan ka jee ni ho raha kei?*”

Look at the weather, how exciting it is, don't you feel like doing something?⁵⁴



Image 13: Beenu Choudhary performing upratali *ragini* with her co-singer.

Source: Taken from www.youtube.com

Known for singing most sexually enticing *raginis*, she was classified as *upratali ragini* singer who was the first one to start the trend of bringing intimate interactions and

⁵⁴ Patrika, 28.9.2016, *Ashlil jokes sunati thi yeh dancer, private party mei chal gayi thi goliya*, www.patrika.com

conversations of husband and wife on the stage. Her albums can be accessed from YouTube easily such as ‘hot and sexy Beenu Chaudhary *ragini*’. She was murdered in the year 2012.



Image 14: *Ragini* Dancer performing in a programme in Haryana. **Source:** Taken from local newspaper.



Image 15: One of the popular Haryanvi dance song of Sapna Chaudhary. Source: YouTube channel online.

In recent years, Sapna Chaudhary has emerged as the most popular *ragini* dancer (sings occasionally) because of her performance on a famous song ‘*solid body re*’. It went

viral on YouTube making her an overnight star, popular across the states Haryana, Rajasthan, U.P., Delhi,

Replacing Madhubala, who was until 2014 a very famous *ragini* singer in the region, Sapna Choudhary added popular dimensions of performance to the *ragini* stage and is widely appreciated as well. However, like other women performers, she also faced criticism and exploitation from the audience. The unfortunate incident of Sapna Choudhary's suicide⁵⁵ attempt brought the concerns of performers, especially women, to the forefront in Haryana. Unlike her who has now been able to make a mark for herself in mainstream culture industry, i.e. Bollywood, many *ragini* singers, especially women, still grapple with the fear of violence and exploitation for performing in public in Haryana. Last few years have witnessed growing incidences of crime against women *ragini* singers in Haryana as discussed earlier as well. A scholar of literature, Vibha Sharma rightly points out that:

“female singers/dancers lead vulnerable public lives. They are directly exposed to the onslaught of a brutal, harsher face of a patriarchal society, more so than other working women. Society looks at them as the women they are on stage, without realising that they are merely performing an act” (Sharma, 2017).

Thus women performers remain at the margins even after more than three decades of having made their presence felt on the public stage of Haryana. However, even their fan following remains cold towards growing hostilities against them. These women fall prey to such victimization on a day to day basis. Eve-teasing is a widespread

⁵⁵‘Haryanvi Singer Sapna Choudhary attempts suicide’. *The Hindu*. 22 September 2016.

phenomenon during live performances with a predominately male audience including as young as 12 years of age and old men of even 80 years. Underlying this is an assumption that women who express themselves in terms of singing and dancing are sexually available.



Image 16: A latest album on a classical *ragini Dhumma Aave sei* from the *kissa Chandrakiran* (originally composed by eminent *saangi* Baje Bhagat) launched by a contemporary singer of Haryana named Meenakshi Panchal. She has been singing since last two decades.

Source: From the researcher's fieldwork as shared by the singer herself.

The new breed of commercially inclined, techno-savvy singers who use *ragini* contents and imagery are on the rise. They use the folk appeal in a popular *filmi* way and create fusion lyrics with fast beats and sensational content to titillate the audience. This has led to popularising of *ragini* in cinema and TV channels broadcasting music albums. These albums are circulated and advertised through new media platforms like YouTube Channel, Internet, music apps. like Smule and Starmaker etc. A growing popularity of

ragini style Bollywood numbers and those who perform have changed the way *ragini* was performed and seen in the public imagination. *Ragini* is now seen as a ground of innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity having a huge potential for making profits in the entertainment industry. The acceptance of this new *avatar* of *ragini* in Bollywood and mainstream cultures of pop music has led to a transformation and parochialisation of Bollywood music itself. Bollywood numbers are now marked with jocular contents emerging from such musical contexts as *ragini*. All this is rooted in the technological mixing of genres and markets. The new social media platforms have facilitated convergence and hybridity along with creation of new market avenues for both performers and private enterprise in the business of music.

Musical Techno-Cultures, Youth and Raginis

Youth cultures in the present neo-liberal era are highly consumeristic in nature (Mathur, 2014). *Ragini* songs and videos have permeated the fabric of consumption in association with the growing consciousness of brands amongst youth. The viewership of reality shows like Indian Idol, Voice of India, Big Boss and *Khatron Kei Khiladi*, etc. have projected the performers and actors in these different shows as brand ambassadors of image and celebrity status. Thus a continuous appropriation of these symbols is visible alongside the use of new age mobile technology convergence. New styles of living such as face, hair styles, wardrobe, expressions, use of slangs, popular ways of gestures including food patterns, travel and leisure activities etc. are being explored in a compulsively indulgent way. The selfie phenomena in Indian society is the most glaring example of this. The audio-visual cultures of entertainment and the proverbial usages encountered in *ragini* style songs are together forming an assemblage of identity negotiating patterns for youth in North India.

Thus the changing context and composition of audience has resulted in emergence of new techno-cultural ways of shaping the *ragini* based worldview of the youth. Women ragini singers have played a crucial role in defining new patterns of creating, composing, innovating, performing and responding as audience as well. Some of these women performers of ragini have also become new youth icons. This has a bearing on the gender politics of music-society relationship. The genre has travelled a considerable distance from its origins as a masculine dominated musical genre located in a caste-feudal rural society to a transformative musical intervention in the new identity driven techno cultural landscape of human interaction. This is what mediates the encounter of new musical youth cultures with a futuristic imagination of self and other.

Conclusion

The study meanders through different conceptual terrains to make sense of the course of the phenomenal rise of a new folk-popular genre of music in north India, namely *ragini*. Beginning with understanding the origins of *raginis* as part of *Swang* (folk theatre) culture in the northern region, it grappled with those socio-economic as well as cultural reasons which established *raginis* as an independent entity in the world of stage performance and musical recording industry. The popularity of *ragini* in Haryana knows no bounds. The live shows of the popular artists draw thousands of spectators who even clash with each other to find a place amongst the audience. The craze has travelled to Bollywood as well and now-a-days Haryana is increasingly finding a place in various movies along with its characteristic cultural feature in the form of *ragini*. What is much more interesting is that women *ragini* singers have become more popular in comparison to male singers. Case in point is the current internet star Sapna Chaudhry who has become the third most googled celebrity in India with millions of views of her famous songs. She is now seen as an emerging Bollywood performer with a huge fan following. Though there is a clear conceptual distinction between the popular version of *ragini* and the original *Swang* style one and scholars have questioned the use of the term '*ragini*' in describing the recently popular form which has a heavy bent towards filmy music and dance, this journey of *ragini* is itself of immense interest. The common people too have an opinion that the new generation has lost touch with the folk music culture of the region under the influence of new media cultures. However, the new meaning acquired by the term *ragini* in contemporary times is still very much aligned with Haryanvi folk identity. This has a clear bearing on the regional pride associated with its performance and appeal for the young and old alike.

The study began with a questioning of these fault lines in the narratives of folk music cultures which provide a boost to the identity negotiation processes of a community as well as to understand the linkages of this identity politics with gender. A society known for its rigid patriarchal social structure and adverse sex ratios for women has been seemingly able to transcend some of the most improbable barriers to break in this arena. Women singers not only entered the stage of *ragini*, a traditionally all male performing art and folk genre, but also have been able to leave males far behind in the race of popularity and influence. A whole new generation of young and aspiring performers is entering the fray and new styles of performance are being invented using elements from these folk-popular songs. Even some very popular reality shows on TV have started giving spaces to *ragini* performers off late. The forms are getting bolder and bolder in breaking stereotypes with regard to the portrayal of sexuality and desire in performance. This has led to some controversies too. However the mass appeal of *ragini* far overshadows the controversial aspects and presents itself as a fit case for sociological analysis of the influence of such phenomena which on the surface appear to be musical but contain layer after layer of connective tissues of socio-historical and cultural kind.

As with any study, we began posing certain questions after a literature survey of theoretical approaches explaining the connection between music and society especially in the context of folk music and its interface with gender, caste, performance and media technologies. A pilot study was done and the field generated insights were woven into the exploratory mode of initial surveying of the themes and perspectives relevant for understanding of the multiple strands and their interconnections within the area of study. Society in Haryana has a deep rooted patriarchal core in its ideological and cultural ways of functioning. Thus insights from gender studies and feminist theories came handy in making sense of the lived realities of both performers and audience in the

domain of folk/popular music as well as the adaptation process in case of change in the structure of performance or social structure itself.

Society in Haryana was passing through turbulent times when the study began. Crime against women including gang rapes, acid attacks, honour killings and other forms of violence were on the rise. In addition to this both media and state were highlighting the need to pay attention to women's education and empowerment issues in the wake of declining performance of Haryana on gender parameters included in Human Development Indicators. While on one hand, media was lamenting the deteriorating conditions regarding women's status and the state was announcing different schemes to counter the situation, one could also witness a surge in number of women participating in public activities. This was a result of shrinking economic potential of the conventionally male dominated sphere of agricultural activities. The progressive decrease of landholdings, disparity generating after effects of green revolution and coming of market economy, rising instability in employment opportunities and other life chances was leading to a state of uncertainty for many. One also witnessed a phenomenon of purchasing of brides on account of prevailing gender inequality and marriage related insecurity. All this was manifesting a social crisis with a fall out in the form of rising crimes and alcoholism. This was also reflected in different ways through popular culture and reconfiguration of the public-private equations.

On reading and observing the prevalent forms of folk music and their appraisal by common people one found a striking coexistence of conventional world view with exposition of crisis and contention. At the same time new social media and internet were redefining the popular ways of communication and entertainment in the region. Khaps panchayats were reacting to the assertion of femininity, choice and freedom through these newly adopted ways by women. Public singing by women was amongst these. However it had a caste-class angle and at the same time influential

people and the village folk were proudly organizing *ragini* programmes where women singers and dancers performed. *Ragini* has been a male dominated genre since beginning and the entry of women was about two decades old phenomenon when this research began. Being a folk genre, *ragini* represented the social organization of rural society in Haryana as well as dominant ideologies. Folk music in Haryana had women's *geet* as the other strand of articulating these cultural beliefs and practices.

Different scholars' opinions as well as some famous epic *ragini* tales were looked at to understand the gendering of musical genres and performance. *Raginis* projected the historical journeys of different communities through mostly a masculine standpoint. Usually, the narration proceeded through legendary tales of mythological characters who were depicted as saviours of their communities and virtuous beings having extra ordinary qualities. Also documented and sung are various masculine anxieties of an agricultural society rooted in caste-honour and kinship regimes. Both the structure of these *raginis* and the socio-cultural patterns of their consumption shape each other consistently. *Raginis* thus are defined by and symbolize the spatial arrangements and interaction of caste, gender, family, economy and kinship. Thus the masculine construction of genre gives it a legitimation to prevail over the other strand (women's *geet*) in terms of being seen as the more powerful and popular representative of the folk culture of Haryana. As women's *geet* focus on various life cycle rituals and are performed mostly in private spaces, the public private divide between *geet* and *ragini* gets reinforced. Performance of the two genres thus has an implication for identity negotiation processes for both the participants and audience.

In the backdrop of the above, research questions and objectives were formulated. The emphasis was on understanding the mediation of gender in musical performance and its embedded nature. Further the interface of music and gender needed to be studied through women singers' articulation of their agency and identity through performance. The broad objective was thus an exploration of the linkages between music and socio-cultural practices in Haryana, the specific focus came to be the study of transitions which came about with women's entry in *ragini* performance. These transitions were to be seen in the light of agency of women performers and their lived realities as well as in the contexts and structure of *ragini* performance including the implications for the socio-cultural sphere of society. The following research questions came up.

Firstly it was seen imperative to analyze the processes through which the musical categories navigate gender lines as exemplified in *ragini* and *geet*. Further the influence of notions of public and private on genres and themes of performance was to be looked at. Next, the impact of caste-class nexus on the local musical cultures and gender equations was to be explored with a specific focus on the dominant caste of Jats. Further the question of women singers entry in *ragini* performance was to be understood with mapping of the moment of change which happened in mid 1980s. Lastly, the changing structure and contexts of *ragini* performance with women in the lead needed analysis along with the interplay of technology and politics in *ragini* dominated musical cultures of the contemporary period. In proceeding with one's analysis, the study began with the social history of the genre in the region.

The first major influence on *ragini* was the spread of Arya Samaj in the region and its almost hypnotic appeal for the dominant caste in the processes of identity negotiation as a community. The dominant caste was able to upgrade its status with the help of Arya Samaj in the region and this had a deep impact on the folk music cultures. Preachers of Arya Samaj foregrounded the need

for upholding *Arya* qualities which included looking down upon those who performed *Swang* or *raginis* as they reinforced beliefs in local cults and religious symbols. The performers of these folk arts were themselves seen with suspicion and accused of having a flawed sense of morality (with a bent towards drinking liquor and influencing women) by these preachers who formed *Bhajan Mandalis* (troupes for singing devotional songs) to propagate their ideas. These tensions led to structural changes in both contents and structure of *raginis* and also created a caste based division amongst the performers. As Jats now stayed relatively at a distance from being performers, *raginis* acquired a spiritual, patriotic and militaristic colour to retain the patronage of the dominant caste of Jats who now saw themselves as peasant-warriors both under the influence of *Arya Samaj* and the colonial administration. The colonial powers needed Jats for the purposes of military recruitment and thus helped them in articulating the identity of belonging to a martial race. Many *raginis* of this period celebrate the idea of recruitment in colonial military service and the masculine image of peasant-warriors. Even for the Samajists, the creation of *Aryavrat* required inculcation of such ideals which further reinforced the construction of Jat masculine identity and a parallel valorization of ideals of motherhood and spiritual devotion for husband. This too is reflected in many *Swangs* of the day which revolved around stories of *Satyavan-Savitri*, *Nal-Damyanti*, *Padmavat* etc. which celebrate these ideals. The pioneer and originator of famous *raginis*, Lakhmi Chand, who was himself a Brahmin, included various religious prescriptions and narratives in his formulations. On the other hand there are also popular stories regarding mutual disapproval and conflict between the pioneering *ragini* writers and *Arya Samajists*. This is visible in the heavy bent of *raginis* towards *Puranic* stories and gods and goddesses which is contrary to *Arya Samaj* beliefs. One can conclude that this conflict rejuvenated *ragini* performance and helped it to consolidate its hold as a reservoir of folk wisdom and entertainment. Still the shadow of this

conflict on caste and gender equations had a deep imprint on the evolution of *ragini* as a folk genre in the region.

While famous *Swang* and *ragini* composers were dealing with the influence of Arya Samaj, national movement was also capturing the hearts and minds of Indian public. The caste based recruitment drive and divisive politics by the colonial powers led to the emergence of various *Kissas* (tales) praising the freedom fighters like Subhash Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh. Notably, many of these were written by Dalit composers and *ragini* singers. *Raginis* were also written to invoke cow nationalism with communal overtones. These community centric narratives further valorized the dominant caste status as patriotic masculine saviours of cow mother (*gau mata*) and the motherland. However such compositions remained relatively less developed as compared to those dealing with gender relations and epic romances. Thus it can be argued that the social history of *ragini* during the days of national movement as well as the Arya Samaj movement was still revolving around issues related to *Kshtriya* community identity, dominant caste status, masculinity and gender relations even though they were articulated through the then all pervasive language of spirituality and patriotism. Thus the folk element was especially strong despite a great amount of diversity in the issues being addressed. *Raginis* in this manner connected the broader issues of national and communal politics with local practices and symbols while retaining their unique appeal to folk wisdom and entertainment.

In the post-independence times a whole range of changes happened with the coming of democracy and subsequently the caste-feudal equations of performance and patronage experienced a shift. In addition to this the state owned media like the All India Radio also provided new contexts of performance. Democratic consciousness further led to emergence of new themes and motivations behind *ragini* singing. A whole new class of *ragini* singers was emerging, many of whom were

Dalits. In addition to Dalits, singers from OBC castes also entered the fray in a big way. The stage for *ragini* to acquire a political colour was set. *Ragini* was no longer merely a part of Swang performed occasionally but gained its separate identity and space for performance. Already rooted in frames of hero worship, many *raginis* emerged praising national level leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. Still popularity markers remained tilted in favour of stories having resonance with the warrior identity of the protagonist like that of Subhash Chandra Bose or Brigadier Hoshiyar Singh.

With the carving out of the new state of Haryana, the region experienced new waves of socio-economic transition and the coming of green revolution which brought a new agricultural identity and prosperity to Haryana and further consolidated the hold of the dominant caste, the conventional landowners. The new agrarian elite consolidated their economic and political power and thus directly or indirectly came to be seen as primary patrons of folk music as well. The gender norms also became rigid as on one hand women's labour was seen as functional for a family's economic welfare but her identity became more and more surrounded with ideas of honour and shame, especially within the dominant caste. Green revolution further exacerbated the socio-economic disparities and different sections of society faced different sets of conflicts, challenges and anxieties. The scenario got further complicated with the entry of market economy as on one hand agriculture started facing the fallout of the changing moral economy, occupational diversification added new avenues for economic mobility on the other. These trends were firmly rooted in the caste-class relations and had a direct implication for gender equations in the state. *Ragini* performances too were intricately involved with these transitions. The lower caste had already been assigned the roles of entertainers and now even class was looked at from the prism of caste. Thus the class of performers which had poor Brahmins and mostly lower caste members was seen

as converting itself into a new collective *caste of performers* stigmatized further with the cultural term '*bhand*'. Thus issues of respectability and honour regimes consolidated their grip on musical performance of *ragini* in Haryana in the post-green revolution period. In such a scenario, one witnesses the entry of women performers in *ragini* around the mid 1980s.

While the coming of mass media in the form of cinema, TV and radio prepared the ground for new aspirations in the young generation, the local cultural factors produced a great hindrance in realization of the same for women. Many women had started learning music, some with family permission and others in a clandestine manner on their own, and participated in their schools or any other event where they could. Some came in contact with artist-gurus like Manphool Singh Dangi who was not just a Swang and *ragini* performer but also used to act in films. Haryanvi film industry had also begun its active journey around the mid eighties only with stories based on Swang themes only. The route to enter musical performance for women was prepared and the aspirations of some selected ones were fulfilled with the right guidance coming from established performers like Dangi and Rajendra Kharkiya. Interestingly however respectability was an important criterion and it was witnessed that most of the first generation women performers used Chaudhry and Sharma as surnames. The popularity they received made it clear that these women singers on *ragini* stage were crowd pullers and the audience was already changing its preferences under their sway. It is almost simultaneously that one witnesses a surge in organization of *ragini* competitions and the advent of cassettes in *ragini* listening cultures.

These two important developments further facilitated the rising popularity of women performers in *ragini* and inspired many to follow in their footsteps. The organization of competitions brought women singers in the realm of being recognized as artists competing with each other on the basis of their ability to sing and accordingly perform the dance steps characteristic of a *ragini*

performance. It also gave them a chance to come into contact with different sets of performers and refine their skill set in game like situation. An important criterion in many competitions was judging the performer on the basis of the ability to create a feel of original ways of singing *raginis* and interacting with public in between. The artist had to use her sense of humor and wit to score better with the audience. It was observed that women singers delivered more than accurately on all these criteria and added the factors of an almost magnetic portrayal of femininity and romantic emotions on stage to much public appreciation and applause.

It was not just the idea of acceptance and popularity of women singers on stage which provided this study its central question though. More importantly, it was the transition in the genre of *ragini* after the entry of women which turned it into something even mainstream cinema has incorporated. Even more significant is the understanding of the dynamics of women's agency and identities as experienced in their lived realities and negotiations with social, economic, political and cultural constraints encountered while performing *raginis* in a society like Haryana. As the analysis proceeded through a retrieval of these *ragini* performers' experiences and agentic subjectivities through a dialogic process of knowing their standpoint, it slowly became clear that almost all of them have a deep psychological engagement with the idea of ethics. This raised a concern. Is it that these women have a defensive construction of their self, formed substantially as a result of coping with moral injuries they receive in their everyday course of being continuously judged on and off stage for being performing women and thereby seen as potentially subversive to the familial roles and identities of women in society? They have a consciousness that they are role models for many, especially young girls. In their own words, this profession is one of the toughest for women. The general advice they have for those who wish to follow them is that one should focus on studies first and must enter such a profession if there is no other appropriate option left

to meet one's ends. What constitutes their agency in their own assessment was the central issue one would like to have understood first.

If there can be a singular expression for the collective self-identification resulting from a complex process of understanding the *self* for these performers, situated in similar conditions of work yet different locations in terms of their socially recognized identities, it is the impression of being a *brave yet balanced artist*. Many of them have an early beginning in terms of age and familial circumstances play an important role in giving them a start. Some have taken to stage performance only as a result of not having an alternative route to earn money for their families in times of financial constraint. It is noticed that most of the women singers had a highly family oriented approach and feel that without their family's support it would not be possible for them to perform. Part of the reason is the concern for safety. The context of stage performance is full of risks and incidents of physical attack on women have been reported. There is a constant negotiation with verbal misbehavior and teasing with offensive gestures by unruly elements in audience. It requires both courage and tact to handle such situations. Apart from this, one is always vulnerable to all kinds of pressures and demands one has to face on account of being seen as helpless and unprotected, especially if one is not seen having a backing of someone powerful. Thus being continuously exposed to such risks fills them with anxiety which either pushes them towards a shield of familial protection or a risk taking behavior leading to alliances with not so trustworthy elements. The feeling of remaining under supervision and protection of a trustworthy group also reinforces the idea of being part of a troupe. However belonging to a troupe is also a professional necessity. Troupes also provide training to new artists and keep the experienced ones alive with a competitive and inventive spirit.

A dichotomy emerges in the performer's process of relating to her work due to the social set up and context of performance. On the one hand they experience professionalism and competition characteristic of the commercial side of things in the organization of events. On the other, the image of the artist gets subverted when uncertainty prevails regarding behavioural aspects on the part of patrons and even the audience. Thus recognition and respectability issues emerge as major anxiety generating factors for women singers. The negotiation of respectability thus is an integral aspect of performance and identity construction processes. As body is central to cultural discourses of honour for women, in a stage performance too, body is the medium of visual communication with the audience, troupe members as well as oneself. Dignity and shame become markers of embodiment and engagement with one's expressions of agency for these women performers. They pursue an art form as well as an image of an artist and their bodies become primary instruments for performing identity and agency. Thus they perform caste, femininity, desire, vicarious masculinity, sexual power play, a hypnotic rhythm of *ragini* and a range of emotions through a permutation and combination of bodily movement and dance steps with vocal modulations in their singing. A *ragini* which is previously recorded is also performed through a lip-syncing dance performance by the woman performer on both male and female voices. The famous dancer Sapna Chaudhry mostly performs such dancing moves only combining it with her acting skills. Performers use a variety of gestures and bodily actions to enact various shifts in the narrative being sung. Gestures and spontaneous reactions to objectionable comments and actions are also an important part of cultivating an image of the performer as well as negotiating respectability. The whole performance is an intense, highly dynamic and challenging exercise, demanding a spontaneous display of wit, inner strength, physical energy, tact, patience and calmness, confidence in handling the audience with maturity as well as singing and dancing skills.

Interviews with women singers revealed that respectability politics is extremely crucial for their survival and they continuously have to negotiate with this. The study uses the idea of ideal womanhood as perceived through field observation and interviews while understanding the prevalent perception of the idea of a respectable woman performer. Women singers continuously have to deal with many social pressures and the corresponding inner need to justify themselves regarding their adherence to the values and conduct in line with that of a respectable, family centric ideal Indian woman. There is continuous need to prove to others and themselves that they do not belong to the category of immoral women who live in contradiction with values of *sanskari* (morally grounded in tradition) ones. The attire of the women singers on stage also suggests the same. They are seldom dressed in western clothes and usually wear *salwar-kameez* (a traditional dress for women in India). They also proudly claim to be bearers and promoters of *sanskriti* (cultural heritage and traditions) and north Indian family and kinship values. Some of them prefer singing compositions which are devotional, motivational and contain *raginis* based on the historical uniqueness of region or cultural heritage. Most of the women singers use *Chaudhry* as surname which also symbolizes a person with a lot of respect and power in a particular social setting, be it a family or a village.

To say that women *ragini* singers' agency is primarily reflected in resisting the oppression women face in a field characterized by masculine domination would not be wrong, but the picture is incomplete without taking into account how their entry influences the musical genre and the regional culture. There is no doubt that they have been able to create a very important place for themselves in a genre that has conventionally been a male preserve. Their position and fan following has also given them enough control on financial matters within their families and also a social standing. All this also has not happened without their share of adversity, abuse and

humiliation which they fight back bravely and at times, even at the cost of losing their lives. Their proximity to people who may be part of audience or the patronage group (especially in live shows during the night) who have dubious connections and many a times involvement in anti-social activities is a constant danger lurking around. Some women *ragini* singers have been murdered and some were attacked even on stage during the last decade in Haryana bringing to light the extreme conditions of work and vulnerability to personal harm. Despite all this, the popularity of women *ragini* performers is growing and new faces are entering almost every day. It has also given hope to those young women who find it difficult to go for systematic training in learning music and dance or have even more difficulty in finding a platform for their talent. *Ragini* is now a site for innovation and creativity and is seen as having a lot of commercial potential. The entry of women in *raginis* has brought youth culture in alignment with Haryanvi folk and community worldview. Social issues have also entered *ragini* with women centric themes now-a-days. Many state entities and NGOs are using *ragini* for development communication and reaching out to youth through social media, especially about issues concerning women and health. Women singers from other states like U.P. (Uttar Pradesh) are also entering the genre in a big way. Social media has proven to be a multiplier when it comes to popularity and appeal of *ragini* with women performers taking the lead.

The mass appeal of *ragini* is now giving rise to its political usage in various identity discourses rooted in a changing public sphere and media currents. With Haryana witnessing a deep caste divide in the wake of reservation battles and the changing situation of the dominant caste vis-à-vis the others, *raginis* have been the site of emerging identity politics too. Resurgence is visible in the form of new themes and recasting of the old themes including ones on nationalism, female

foeticide, terrorism, voting rights, place of daughters, community identities etc. *Raginis* have come a long way indeed in the sphere of representational politics.

When it comes to theorizing the impact of women's entry into *raginis*, the interface of gender with music and society seen in the light of socio-cultural transitions witnessed in performance, identity and agency produces some new insights. Women's entry breaks a socio-historical barrier which was closely related to the placing of a folk genre in the matrix of gender relations and accompanying spatial configurations. The division of public-private in the organization women's *geet* and men's *raginis* is self evident and so is the projection of femininity and masculinity through these differentiations. Women's entry disturbed these equations even though the articulation of their redefining the genre was along the prevalent notions of masculine domination and gender relations carved out of kinship and honour regimes synonymous with evolution of a caste based patriarchal social organization. The dominant caste hold over patronage, themes and the whole set up of *ragini* performances continued for a long time even after the advent of green revolution and market economy. However the sheer spread of women's participation, creative innovation and the genre's transition with their involvement gave wings to the aspirations of the youth. Its integration with other popular music cultures in and around the region brought a synergy amongst different factors instrumental in redefining the associated musical cultures. New technologies including internet and social media played an important part in carrying forward these transitions.

Sexuality and its political agency has also been redefined as result of the forays of women performers in *ragini*. The folk and vernacular ways of imagining romantic intimacy as well as the celebration of that intimacy has found a new lease in the form of a new erotic genre within the fold of *ragini*. The community appeal of joking relations and the normalization of adultery in Indian cinema and popular mass media has been brought together in a sexually cathartic way in various

song and dance maneuvers by women performers on the stage of *ragini*. It is also a sort of revivalistic politics of community identity in the realm of media and music which is so characteristic of global-local equations. The politics of sexuality and desire however needs a special emphasis in attempts to theorize the agency of women performers. It is not just a sublimating celebration of intimacy that one witnesses but also a bold assertion of subjectivity, resistance to sexual surveillance and an uninhibited, sarcastic and admonishing expression of desire in the face of misogyny. This is where the most significant turn in the sexual politics of *ragini* performance is witnessed with of course a flip side in commoditization of the same.

The redefinition of the established ways of mediating the discourses of gender, identity and politics of recognition by the women *ragini* performers has been the core of this study. Women performers have shown the way by sharing their struggles and experiential insights during the course of this study and the path taken by the researcher was to follow in their footsteps in entering a meaningful journey into the world of musical imagination of human liberation.

Glossary

<i>aangan /ahata</i>	-courtyard
<i>akhara</i>	-mostly refers to a wrestling space or gymnasium, an association organized for the practice of a specific art
<i>allahs</i>	-musical genre, story in the form of a ballad
<i>baahr</i>	-outside
<i>baba</i>	-saint, respected person
<i>baijis</i>	-nautch girls/musicians
<i>baja</i>	-musical instrument
<i>bansuri</i>	-flute
<i>baraatis</i>	-grooms' family members, relatives and friends who accompany him in his marriage procession
<i>basti</i>	-a group of houses settled at a place usually slums
<i>bhaand</i>	-buffoon, harlequin, zany, mimic like as saang (seen as derogatory in Haryana)
<i>bhat</i>	-bard, hereditary panegyrist
<i>bhaat</i>	-ritual of blessing
<i>bhabi</i>	-sister-in-law
<i>bhadralok</i>	-gentry
<i>bhalthak</i>	-outer guest room in the house
<i>Bhajaopdeshak</i>	-he who sings devotional songs and gives preach sermons on religious and moral themes. Here it is in context of arya samaj philosophy

<i>bhajan</i>	-devotional song
<i>bhajniks</i>	-itinerant singer of devotional songs and preacher
<i>bhand pather</i>	-folk dance form of Jammu and Kashmir
<i>bhand</i>	-looked down upon as Saangi
<i>bhangra</i>	-dance form of Punjab
<i>bharaat ghar</i>	-wedding place
<i>bhawai</i>	-folk dance of Rajasthan
<i>bhittr/bhittr</i>	-inside
<i>chamola</i>	-giving incentive to the singers in the form of money, the amount could range from 10 rupees to lakhs (especially in context of <i>ragini</i> programmes)
<i>char dewari</i>	-four walls of a house
<i>chaubola</i>	-in the form of rhyme containing eight lines
<i>chaupals</i>	-village assembly space
<i>chuhra</i>	-one of the lowest caste usually engaged in the occupation of sweeping
<i>cimta</i>	-tongs and pincers
<i>darji</i>	-tailor
<i>devar</i>	-brother-in-law
<i>devi</i>	-goddess
<i>dharashtmada</i>	-lustful
<i>dharma</i>	-righteousness
<i>dholak</i>	-big drum
<i>dholki</i>	-drum

<i>doha</i>	-rhyming couplet, which contains two lines
<i>doom</i>	-lower caste
<i>duchasmī ragini</i>	-a duet song
<i>dupattas</i>	-scarf
<i>durbar</i>	-court of a king
<i>gaal</i>	-streets /by lanes outside the house in the village
<i>gari/gali</i>	-musical genre
<i>gathas</i>	-tales
<i>gaushala</i>	-cow shelter home
<i>ghandasa</i>	-is a machine/system which is used to cut animal's fodder
<i>ghar</i>	-home (domestic sphere)
<i>gharana</i>	-gharana is a group, which in the era of hereditary musicianship represents a lineage which cultivated a distinctive style of rendering music over successive generations
<i>gher</i>	-cattle yard
<i>ghunghat</i>	-veil
<i>giddha</i>	-popular folk dance of Punjab
<i>gotras</i>	-clan
<i>gugga</i>	-folk deity also known as protector of snakes is worshipped in different parts of North India
<i>guru</i>	-teacher, mentor, guide
<i>gurukuls</i>	-seminary founded by arya samaj

<i>haram</i>	-women's quarters that are forbidden to any males except relatives and husbands
<i>horage</i>	-outside
<i>hukkas</i>	-traditional smoking instrument
<i>izzat</i>	-honor
<i>jagratra</i>	-overnight religious musical night
<i>jalsa</i>	-gala, festival, bash
<i>janeo</i>	-the sacred thread
<i>jatra</i>	-popular folk theatre of Bengal
<i>jija</i>	-sister's husband
<i>kaaj</i>	-ritual performed as part of death rites
<i>kaccha makaan</i>	-uncemented house
<i>kaccha saaj</i>	-unmetalled instruments including earthen pot, khartal, chimta
<i>kali</i>	-stanza of a song
<i>kapat kut</i>	-false and insincere
<i>karewa</i>	-practice of marrying a widow to the younger or elder brother of the deceased husband so as to retain landed property within the family. Jats called it widow remarriage
<i>kathas</i>	-tale
<i>khap</i>	-community organization representing a clan or a group of related clans
<i>khartal</i>	-pocket-sized percussion instrument
<i>khayal</i>	-musical genre in North India
<i>khordiya</i>	-women's geet sung after the procession of <i>bharaat</i>

<i>kissas/kissey</i>	-anecdote
<i>kunhba</i>	-clan
<i>kurta</i>	-shirt
<i>lavani</i>	-as an ‘expression of the everyday desire of the common people and was seen as provoking wealthy men into parting with their money.
<i>lehnga</i>	-a voluminous skirt
<i>lokvarta</i>	-folk wisdom
<i>maachna</i>	-getting excited
<i>mandili</i>	-band of people
<i>matka</i>	-earthen pot
<i>mirasi</i>	-traditional singers and dancers of a number of communities (considered as lower caste in Haryana)
<i>mithi churi</i>	-sweetened dagger
<i>mohalla</i>	-neighbourhood
<i>nagara</i>	-drum
<i>nai</i>	-barber
<i>natya</i>	-drama
<i>nautanki</i>	-gimmickry
<i>nichli jati</i>	-lower caste
<i>niyog</i>	-temporary alliance between a married man or married woman for procreation, primarily for having a male heir. This practice was sanctioned by the Vedas and was also propagated by Swami Dayanand Saraswati

<i>olage</i>	-inside/within
<i>pakharu/ viraha</i>	-obligatory genre which is sung by women of Khangra in separation of their husbands (migrant workers) who are away from them and bride's longing for her natal family, of mistreatment faced by in-laws
<i>pakka makaan</i>	-concrete house
<i>pakkasaaj</i>	-proper instruments including piano, drums etc.
<i>panchayat ghar</i>	-community centre
<i>pannahs</i>	-clan
<i>parampara</i>	-tradition
<i>pathshalas</i>	-school
<i>patrika</i>	-journal/magazine
<i>pirs</i>	-saints
<i>pucca</i>	-unmetalled, food cooked in ghee, permanent
<i>pardah</i>	-veil
<i>purnanic gathas</i>	-mythological tales
<i>qafiya</i>	-rhyming syllable, containing three lines
<i>quami</i>	-community appeal
<i>ragini</i>	- musical genre
<i>rakhi</i>	-the holy thread sisters tie on their brothers' hand in north India
<i>randi</i>	-though means widow while in this context it appropriates a new meaning i.e. prostitute
<i>ratjaga</i>	-women awakening whole night before marriage
<i>ritu</i>	-seasons

<i>saafsutri</i>	-neat and clean
<i>saang</i>	-local folk theatre of Haryana
<i>sabahas</i>	-gathering, assembly
<i>sajinde</i>	-instrumentalists
<i>sali</i>	-sister of wife
<i>salwar</i>	-loose trouser
<i>samaj sandesh</i>	-Arya Samaj magazine
<i>sangi</i>	-performer of swang
<i>sanskar</i>	-values
<i>sarangi</i>	-bowing instruments
<i>sarpam tullal</i>	-a ritualistic performance among the Pullavas of Kerala
<i>sasur-bahu</i>	-father-in-law and daughter-in-law
<i>savaiya</i>	-a Hindi quatrain of dactylic structure, containing four lines
<i>shabd</i>	-musical genre
<i>shastras/th</i>	-doctrinal debate between an Arya Samajist and a Sanatan Hindu
<i>swaang</i>	-folk theatre of Haryana
<i>takhats</i>	-wooden tables
<i>tali</i>	-sacred thread tied around the bride's neck made by devadasis in South India
<i>tamasha</i>	-a traditional form of Marathi theatre, often with singing and dancing
<i>tawaiifs</i>	- courtesan
<i>tek</i>	-is the initial two lines of any <i>ragini</i>
<i>tekia</i>	-the chorus that repeats tek along with the ragini singers

<i>thekedars</i>	-contractors
<i>theyyam</i>	-a famous ritual art form performance that originated in North Kerala
<i>upratali ragini</i>	-double meaning duet <i>ragini</i>
<i>upvas/ vrat</i>	-fast
<i>ustad</i>	-guru, mentor
<i>varna</i>	-hierarchical system of four-fold division of Hindu society
<i>videsia/bidesia</i>	-folk form of Bihar
<i>zamindars</i>	-landowners

Appendix I

These are excerpts taken from popular *ragini* and *geet* which have been sighted and analyzed in Chapter I. A free translation of these songs from Haryanvi dialect has been carried out by the researcher herself.

Ragini 1

In marda me kya dosh hai dharana me bhes jnana

What is wrong in wearing women's clothes

(*Ragini* written and sung by Pandit Lakhmi Chand)

In marda me kya dosh hai dharana me bhes jnana

Pratham to shareer tera triya hi se tyar hua

Triya hi ke rajveerya se milke ne eksar hua

Nau mahine garbh me rakhya sakshi se bahar hua

.....

Kuch paache shaadi ho re triya ka daas hua

... *Tu naachan nai bisaraavain sai tai dekhnan kee kyun na taal maarei.*

Aaj kaal ke chhora yaan ya gaavan aalee chaal maarain.

Ab khadaya kyon khaamosh hai mhaare paachhai lagya zamaana

Pher naachaniyaan nai dekh gelyaan horee sei kyoon duniyaan saaree.

....*Naachana or gaana vedon se nikaala gaya*

Partyaksh ka pramaan teree aakhyaan aagai daala gaya.

Samved tha kai dekh le dharti par tai chaalya gaya.

Tera kisaka paas pados sun Lakhmi Chand ka gaana.

What is wrong in wearing women's clothes,
After all, your body has also emanated from a woman's body,
You have stayed in her womb for nine months,
And after marriage, you have become the slave of a woman,

You curse dancing than why don't you stop watching,
Boys these days have a song like rhythmic walk,
Why do you stand silent now? Almost everyone is after my life,
Why then everyone is mesmerized by the image of a dancing woman?

Dancing and singing has emerged from Vedas,
The obvious is self-evident before your eyes,
Pickup Samveda and see what you have missed throughout your life on this earth,
In whose vicinity do you live? Listen to Lakhmichand's song.

Ragini 2

In Jaataon ki santan sadaan tei chattriay kehlaye se

The offsprings of Jats have always been called Kshatriyas

(Sung by Dharambir Saangi, available on YouTube channel by N.K. Studio)

*In Jaataon ki santan sadaan tei chattriay kehlaye se
aadhi Kshattiya Jat kaum, dhkeham dhekh jamana hai,
bade bade jit mei liye se, Jat quam mardana hai
ghanpatiyon mei bada, hal pati re Jat ne mana hai*

rishiyon ne prachaar diyen jaatan te

The offsprings of Jats have always been called Kshatriyas
Half of the Kshatriyas are Jats and the rest imitate them,
They have defeated many famous warriors with their sturdy masculine qualities
The ploughman is the greatest of all gods,
Even saints have sung praises of Jats

Ragini 3

Jat ki paribhasha

Definition of Jat

(Ragini written and sung by Ram Chandra Nardev)

Jat ki paribhasha

Sunalo Jat kee batalaadu paribhaasha re

Apne dam pe badale yah apni kishmat ka pasha

Arrei dusro ki aapatti ko apnei sir pai dharta Jat

Lobh laalchh koi nahi aur swarth maii martha Jat

Chalaaki aur dhokaibaaji koi na kabi karta Jat

Deen dukhi garibo ka banta hai sahara Jat

Doobti nayiya ko daita hai kinara Jat

Apni hi maihnat kai re bal pai karta hai gujara Jat

Karei zamindari khetaan maaii yo markai bhukha pyaasa

Apni naik kamayi maii hi rakhta hai vishvas Jat

*Auro ki bharosai kyu karta nahi aas Jat
Chhor lootairai badmashon ko dalai nahi gaas Jat
Dharti ma ka pait cheer kahi ann ko kamaata Jat
Koi bhukh so na paayai farj ko nibhata
Sardi garmi chhamasai maii pasina bhataa Jat
Kare zamindari khet mei yo marke bhukha pyaasa*

*Desh bhakti apnei mann maii sabsai jayda palai Jat
Yudh karan maii kabhi na halai Jat
Marnai tak bhi haaton maii tai shastra kony dalai Jat
Kargil kai yudh maii bhi sabsai paihlaie adgai jaat
Uchhi uchhi chhotiyo pai chhadaigai Jat
Himmat hai tho itni kaiha kai aagai bhadgai jaat
Tirangai kahi khatar yaih tyagai jeene ki aash
Sun lo Jat ki paribhasha*

*Bharat ma ka baita hai yai sabsai pyaara Jat
Saari duniya jalgi ho par uska hai dulara Jat
Jab jab bhid padi maa pai tho foran hi pukara Jat
Shaanti ka dhoot aur ahinsh ka pujari Jat
Veerta ka asli roop pakka vrattdhari Jat
Ram Chandra Nardev sabsai pakka hai prachhari Jat
Ratti bhar na jhoott sabki kahi puri karai abhilasha Jat
Sun lo batladu paribhasaha*

Apnai dam pai badlei apni kismat ka pasha, Sun lo Jat ki paribhasha

Sun lo Jat ki paribhasha.

Definition of Jat

Listen I will tell you the definition of Jat,
They change their destiny with their own hands,
Jat takes responsibility of others' problems,
Jat is not selfish or greedy,
They do not do cheat anyone and are not deceitful,
They become support of sad and poor people,
Jat is a saviour of those who are facing deep crisis,
Jats live off their own hard work,
They protect their land even at the cost of remaining hungry and thirsty,

They believe in their honest earnings,
A Jat does not depend too much on others,
Jats does not give importance to those who are thieves and robbers,
They reap grain from the mother earth,
A Jat fulfils his moral duty so that no one should sleep without food,
Jat sweats throughout the summer, winter, as well as monsoon,
They care for their land even when hungry and thirsty,

Jats are die hard patriots,
They do not show their back when there is a war,
He fights till death,
Jats were the first ones to fight in the Kargil war too,

Jats have scaled high peaks of mountains,
They challenge the other to move ahead if they have the courage,
They easily sacrifice their lives for sake of their nation,
Listen to the definition of Jats.

Jats are the most loving sons of mother India,
She prefers Jats over all others,
Whenever there is a crisis, the mother calls for him,
Jats are emissary of peace and nonviolence,
The real face of strength and valour is the devoted Jat,
Ram Chandra Nardev is the strong preacher,
Jats do not lie and fulfil everyone's desire,
Listen, I'll tell you the definition of Jat,
They change their destiny with their own hands,

Song 4

Gaddi (Sampala) Janam Sthan, vraj samjho ya gokul dham

Gaddhi (Sampla) is the birthplace, consider it as a shrine

Arya Samajist Bhajan

Gaddi (Sampala) Janam Sthan, vraj samjho ya gokul dham
Shayam kaho ya Chottu ram, en dono ka ek hi kaam
.....Usne yudha mei pandhav jitaye, isne chunav mei seth harayei
Krishak ki ucchi kardi shaan, en dono ka ek hi kaam...
Ushne gita ka updeshe sunaya, isne sota kisaan jagaya....

...Ishne kisaan ko uccha uthaya

Gaddhi (Sampla) is the birthplace, consider it as a shrine

Call him God Krishna or Chhotu Ram; they have the same name,

...Krishna helped *Pandhavs* to win while Chhotu Ram defeated the trading caste in elections,

He helped farmers in raising their social status, they both did the same work

One taught the message of the *Gita* while the other woke up the ignorant farmers.

Chhotu Ram raised the dignity of farmers.

Ragini 5

Gaumata nu roh ke boli ya ke jindagi mahri

Cow mother is crying and calling out for help

(Written by Satywan Saangi)

Gaumata nu roh ke boli ya ke jindagi mahri,

Jo aankhan ke maan paani aagya, ya suno hakikat sari,

Mei in kasaiyon ne pakad li ya mere saath ke vayvaar karenge,

Arre hinduon jaagon,

Nahi te yoh hindu dharm khatam ho jagan,

Dekhya gaun mata pe aara chaalen, nihatei mei kaati se,

Kat peth kei gaun mata ki charbhi chatti ja se

Haddi nari re charbi nari,

Nari bati se re,

Itna bhunda hal yeh dekh mekh meri chhati pati ja se,

*Es Hind desh ka dharm khatam rei,
Gaun mata phir pukari.... Gaun mata nu roh.... hikikat sari.....*

Ke sirf janam dene wali maa se, Chaar mata hai hind desh ke logon,

Arrr ek dharti mata, ek gaun mata, dharm se maa kehlaye,

Bharat mata ek janani mata, yeh mata chaar batai,

Jo bête aage maa kat jaa, beta kukar kare samai,

Bharat maa ke qaid chutali kar ke ke ne ladai,

Shubash bose tane farakh karyaan re

Mei rohu qaid bichari,

Gaun mata roh.....

Kaun tha woh 'marad'? jisne gau mata bacchai,

Arre Harphool Jat julani kei, Tu kade doob ke margaya,

Gaun mata teri katan lagri,

Kukar dhore dhar ga, Tanne vachan bharye te,

Raksha karunga, bhar ke vacchan tu phir ga re,

Ke khoti hoi neet teri, ke tu papyia te darr gya,

Kit margaya ho te, Margay ho te pher janam le,

Gaun mata rudhan machha ri...

Gaun mata roh ke...

Je mei margi te, sare hindu beshak doob ke marja re,

Hindu dharm kade rehgya, Jab log gau ne khawe

Jo mere sacche bête, meri aa ke jaan bachave
Ise ise lal pade se mere, Jo pal mei jaan khapanve
Shri satywan kahe saangi wale, Na kariyon dharm ki haari...
Gaun ma nu roh ke boli....

Cow mother is crying and calling out for help,
You'll have tears in your eyes, listen to complete reality,
I have been caught by these butchers/ slaughterers,
don't know how they will behave with me,
Oh Hindus wake up, or else the Hindu Dharma will be finished

Watch Cow mother is being cut down with the blade cutter
being cut into pieces, bones separately and fat separately
Such a pathetic condition, seeing all this I am in deep pain
This country's *dharm*a is finished, mother is calling again
..... Cow mother is crying and calling out for help...

Is the one who gives birth the only mother?
There are four kinds of mother, my Hindu countrymen,
The earth and the cow both are considered as mother according to principles of *dharm*a,
The country and the one who gives birth,
these four are described as mother,
A mother who gets killed in front of the son,
how does he show his face to himself?
Subhash Chandra Bose, you fought for the freedom of mother land,

But you have discriminated against me as I am still crying in prison

Cow mother is crying and calling out for help...

Where is that brave and masculine warrior, who protected the cow mother?

Listen Harphool Jat from Julani, where have you disappeared?

Your cow mother is being slaughtered here,

why are you left behind, you sworn to protect me?

have your intentions become diluted? Or you have got scared of sinners?

If you are no more then take birth again, your cow mother is wailing bitterly.

Cow mother is crying and calling out for help...

All the Hindus should die with shame as I die,

Has Hindu *dharma* not vanished if people eats cow's flesh?

Those who are my real sons, come and save me,

Such children I have, who will die within a second for me,

As Shri Satywan Saangi says, do not let the *dharma* be defeated,

Said the cow mother, crying.

Song 6

Mei tho katha suna karu ved ki

I listen to the stories of Veda

(*Bhajan* by Ramniwas Arya, Rishi Cassettes Arya Samaj, Pakhand Khandani, Vol.3,

YouTube Channel)

Mei tho katha suna karu veda ki

Mei aryo ki balika padhu Satyarth Prakash

Sushra mera yaj karei nit Sandhya karti saans

*Mera bhai gurukul mei padhe, Meri behan shastri paas
Mei aryon ki balika, Pati mera vyayam kare,
Mei bhi karti hun yoga abhyaas, Mera jet bada dharmatma
Na woh khele chopad taash Saang, cinema hum,
dekhe sunei chandraban itihaas.*

I listen to the stories of Veda
I am Daughter of Arya family and read 'The Light of Truth'
My father-in-law performs *yajna* regularly,
my mother-in-law religiously offers prayers
My brother studies in Gurukul,
My sister has passed her Vedic education
I am a daughter of Arya family,
my husband regularly exercises,
I also practise Yoga,
My elder brother-in-law is highly dutiful
Never plays the game of dice, cards and also
avoids swang and cinema,
we all study history of Chandra Bhan (An Arya Samajist).

Ragini 7

Kahe Jat tu doom ho liya baap mera behkaya re
Jats tell my father that I have a become *doom*
(*Ragini* written by Mehar Singh)

Kahe Jat tu doom ho liya baap mera behkaya re!

Desh, nagar, ghar, gaam chuttgayan kitka gaan gaya re!

...Ghoom zamana dekh liya milya koye na marham ka pyaara

Mera gaane nei naash karya hua kunba dushman sara

Mei kei fauj ke layak tha en raginiyon nei marya

Kahe mehar singh es tei batti tere bimari na sei!

.... Mehar singh ka janam Jat ghar konya kaar gaan ki,

Jatan ka yoh kaam mehar singh ke gaavan ka ho se!

Choron choren bethein ho tei dil behlawan ka ho sei!

Chutei paachei bakht pher kei tyawan ka ho sei

Es tei aacha hai malik mhari maati nei sangwale

Jats tell my father that I have become a doom,

Country, city, home, village are left behind, what type of song did one sing,

I went around looking throughout the world,

Did not find anyone who could heal my wounds,

My singing has destroyed everything,

The whole clan has become my enemy now

Did I deserve to be in the army with my passion for singing *raginis*,

There is the only sickness I am afflicted with, says Mehar Singh

Mehar Singh is born in a Jat home, singing cannot be his work

Singing is recreational activity when boys spend time together

Time which has gone by will never come back,

It is better that I may now find solace in my roots.

Ragini 8

Laakh chaurashi jiya joon mei naache duniya saari

**All the diverse lifeforms totalling 84 lakhs species been dancing around
throughout the world**

(Written by Pandit Lakhmi Chand)

Laakh chaurashi jiya joon mei naache duniya saari

Naachan mei kei Doshya bata ya akal ki honshiyaari,

.....

.....Sab te pehla vishnu naachya prithvi upar aake

Phir duje bhasmasur naachya sara naach nacha kei

Gauran aagei shivji naachya lya parvati nei byah kei (bhakti)

Jal kei upar bhrama naachya kamal fool kei myan kei

Brahma ji nei naach naach kei rachi shristi saari

.....

Dipchand khande mei naachya sadavrath khuagya

Baaje nai nach nach ke aur bhi bhakt khugya

Haanweli mei nathun Brahman mandir naya chinagya

Lakhmichand bhi nach nach ke naam jagat mei pagya

Ese ese bhi naach liye the kaun hakikat mhari

All the diverse lifeforms totalling 84 lakhs species been dancing around throughout the world
give me a solid reason regarding some basic fault with the activity of dance

.....

The first to dance on this earth was Vishnu

After that came *Bashmasur* who danced and made the whole cosmos dance

Brahma danced on water after having entered the lotus flower

Through his dancing, Brahma created this whole world

.....

Deep Chand danced in his village *Khanda* and started *sadavrath* tradition

Baje who was a barber became famous as a devotee through dancing

Nathu Brahman got a new temple constructed in *Haanweli* with his dance

Lakhmi Chand earned a name for himself with dancing,

Who am I after all? When such extra ordinary ones also danced.

Appendix II

These are excerpts taken from popular *ragini* and *geet* which have been sighted and analyzed in Chapter II. A free translation of these songs from Haryanvi dialect has been carried out by the researcher herself.

Ragini 1

Ragini written by Jat Mehar Singh

Jatan Ka ho Zamindara ke dhande ttha rehya sei,

Kite beth ke Ohm rattein ne kyu dhakke kha rehya sei,

Koi kahei chokkhi gavei koi kahei sur mei ga rehyaa sei,

Koi kahei yuh kei jaane sukkha muh nei ba rehya sei,

Jaat mehar singh eb batta tu kis kis te marega ladke,

Landownership is for Jats; what occupation do you have?

Sit somewhere and recite *Om*, why are you wandering here and there?

Some say you sing well; some say singing in right notes.

Some ask what does he know? He is just posing as knowledgeable orator.

Jat Mehar Singh, tell us now, who all will you die fighting with? ¹

¹ Song 1 Free translation from Haryanvi, Appendix II (Chahal & Mathana, 2010, p. 26).

Ragini 2

You are going to a foreign land

(Written by Mehar Singh)

Pardeshan mei chaal diya dil tod ke naar naveli ka

Tere bina bhartar addee jee laage nahi akeli ka

.....
audh umar mei chod chalya tu kuch na khelya khaya

mad² joban mei bhari sei kaya mad pe phool chameli,

ka haali bin dharti sunni aur bina sawaar kei ghodi,

bina mel kei kalah rahei nit ghani nahi tho thodi,

jal bin meen tadap kei marjya nyu beer mard ki jodi,

.....Mehar singh kad rang lutega mad joban albeli ka.

You are going to a foreign land, breaking the heart of a newly married one³

I will feel very lonely here without you

.....

² Used in terms of Oestrus: a recurring period of sexual receptivity and fertility in female, heat.

In such a young age you are going, you did not enjoy and played with my youth,
My intoxicated youthfulness knows no bounds within my body, it is like a virgin Jasmin
flower,

Without the ploughman, the land remains barren like a mare without rider

Without physical intimacy, there will be fights if not much than little

Without water fish wriggles and dies, such is the partnership of man and woman

Mehar Singh, when will you taste the unique and erotic youthfulness within me.

Ragini 3

Je jaana chaave swarg dhaam nei,

Taj kei rahiyen bure kaam nei,

Rataakar apnepati ke naam nei,

Saajan ka gunh gana hoga,

.....Jei tannei man mei buri sochli,

tei dono kulan kei laan hoga⁴

If you want to go to heaven
then stay away from wrong things,
Keep taking your husband's name

as you should praise your beloved,

If your thoughts turn evil,

then it will bring disgrace to both the families⁵

Ragini 4

Savitri nei dharm ke karan pati jiva liya marta,

Uske pati daas bane khud dasi bani ishi ho sei pativrata

Savitri's husband got a life because of her *dharm*

Her husband became a servant, so she also became a servant herself,

That is what a devoted wife is.⁶

Ragini 5

Karma karke mushkil phetaya itna kyu ban ra se detha

Na mei mausi na tu beta, kar de man ka chaahaya

Aage kyu na kadam dalta, ishq karan ki kyu na chalta

Saas chalta dikhye dhad mei, bharya ras kele ki ghad mei

Beth pilang pei, aaja jad mei aaja aanad meri kaya

⁵ Song 3, Appendix II

⁶ Ibid., p. 144, ragini 20, Song 4, Appendix II

Karma karke.....chaaya,

bhool ja maa betei ka kaayda door hata de saari baadha

.....

Tere pita kei sang jod nahi sei buddha apne byah ke laya

chhand ne dhar de mange raam, jagdya dene me tamam

kaamdev ki aag lag ri kyu bolan mei ghani han lag ri

jawani meri biti jaan lag ri, na kuch khelya na kuch khaya⁷

After so many efforts, you have come why are you so rigid and adamant,

Neither I am your aunt nor you are my son, do as I desire,

why don't you take a step forward? And give romance a chance,

I can see your breath moving in your chest,

the basement of banana is filled with juice

Sit near me on my bed, my whole body is full of enjoyment

Forget the mother son relationship and remove all the barriers.....

There is no match between me and your father who married me despite being so old,

Mange Ram has made such a composition which could lead to fights

⁷ (Available at <https://youtu.be/5a77ol3oTWw> sung by Karampal Singh and other version by Rajinder Kharkiya)

Why are you taking so much time in becoming intimate? The fire of sexual intimacy is
burning in me

My youth is going wasted, neither I have played nor tasted much.

Ragini 6

Mere bhai mere sir pe chad gayi,

Khagdi badmash hori sei,

Mard kit-e sab tariyah mushkil ho ri sei,

Lugayi jab le tar mard ki pagri,

Badmash ho ri sie,

Oh brother! she climbed on my head,

Overly naughty, spoilt seductress,

Men are in trouble from all sides,

When a woman strips a man of dignity

Consider her to be a scoundrel then.

Ragini 7

Jija: Ghadwade jija tu ramjhol,

Saali: badle mei tu ke degi tu Sali bol,

Jija: Teri neet khot mei dikhayi shaf de,

Sali: Kaha kare ek jaisi ho saali aur lugayi

Sister-in-law: Get me an ornament made, oh brother-in-law

Brother-in-law: In return, what will you give?

Sister-in-law: Your bad intentions are visible

Brother-in-law: It is a saying that wife and sister-in-law are one and the same.

Ragini 8

Let me enter in your quilt, brother-in-law...

(Written by Azaad singh khande)

Sister-in-law (SIL): *baddh lene de ne oh jijaji manne teri razai mei*

Brother-in-law (BIL): *pher likad ke bhajegi jab karu khicchai mei*

..... *SIL: dekh hoye kare ghani marad tei aag lugai mei*

BIL: phed sungti handagi isi padu kai mei

SIL: Dekhe shilli kaya hori se meri jadde ke mei tharr ke

Mera jadda utar de jija

.....
SIL: Dekhe jija teri kholi bhar ke, lu angdayi mei

BIL: Mat marwaveye tere baap ka bada jamai mei

SIL: Aalan de garmaas ghaat mei lehar uthe tufaane

BIL: Aag fus mei gere se sarke mere khaani

SIL: Karddi kayi jawani handu thukki thukkayi mei

BIL: Jaan bhuj ke phaas ke phasgi saali tu kardayi mei

SIL: baddh lene de ne oh jijaji manne teri razai mei

Oh brother –in-law, let me enter your quilt,
Sister-in-law, you'll run away once I start teasing you,
Women have more heat than men,
Once I tear your whole being apart with my expertise,
You will roam around looking for my smell everywhere,
Look my body has become so cold, come close brother-in-law,
My cold will go away,
Oh brother –in –law, hugging you I'll take yawn with satisfaction,
Will you get me killed I am the eldest son-in-law of your father,
Let me feel your heat come close, a storm is rising inside me,
You are arousing me, getting close to me,
I am completely in for these experiences and quiet used these passions now,
Knowingly you have entangled with your passionate desires,
..... Azaad khande wrote...let me enter your quilt brother-in-law,

Ragini 9

baddh lene de ne oh jijaji manne teri razai mei

Your bed near mine brother-in law

(Written by Joginder singh, available on YouTube channel)

SIL: *dhorein si sarka le jija apni khaat nei, kade ki dekhu teri baat mei*

BIL: *Jaan gaya saali teri baat mei, aur karunga khicchai teri mei raat mei*

Ho jija dhorei si....

Karunga khicchai teri raat mei

Tere dhore aavan te yoh mera ji ghabravei

Kardda sa jii karle gori matna tu sharma

Aajaga maaja mulakat mei aur karunga khichai teri raat mei

SIL: *Tere pyaar mei margi jija ishq jaal nei gheri*

BIL: *Thodi der datja kasar kaaddu saari*

BIL: *Aajaga lele maja swang raat mei karunga khichai teri raat mei*

SIL: *Dhorei si sarka le jija khaat nei, ghane dina mei aaya jija seva teri kardu*

Rang joban ka chaat liye peta tera bhar du

BIL: *Raakh liye thaad apne gaat mei aur karunga khichai teri raat mei*

Joginder singh tu chala jaga yoh raat kyukar kategi, Aajaga majaa mulakaat mei

Oh brother-in-law, shift your bed near mine, I have been waiting for you for so long
Sister –in-law, I have understood your intentions, and I will take you to task and satisfy

in the night

Oh brother-in-law, shift your bed near mine....

SIL: I am scared of coming close to you

BIL: Strengthen your mind oh dear don't feel shy

Come let's enjoy meeting each other, I will tease you in night

SIL: I am dying in your love oh brother-in-law, your love has trapped me

BIL: Wait for some time I will fulfill all your desires

BIL: Come let's enjoy the *swang* of night I'll tease you at night

SIL: Shift your bed near mine, you have come after so long, let me take care of you

BIL: My body has beautifully blossomed, I will fulfill all your needs

BIL: Have strength in your body and I will tease at night

Joginder Singh you will go away, how will this night pass,

Come close, let's have fun.

Ragini 10

Meeti meeti saali do baath karle

Oh my sister-in-law, let's talk sweetly

(Written by Rajinder Singh)

Uploaded by Jagdish Cassettes at URL <https://youtu.be/1bhCN3tNDvU>)

BIL: meeti meeti saali do baath karle,

SIL: Haath tere mei aaun na, tu raat beshak kaali karle,

Khaan ke khatar ke laya jija,

BIL: *Aam saroli chus ke le jeesa,*

.....

SIL: *Kei bhaan meri tei petha na bharta hai*

Mere chakar mei kyu phirta

Ghut sabar ki bharle ne

BIL: *Mitti mitti saali do....*

SIL: *Umar meri te 16 saal sei*

BIL: *Laagti na konya badan ki jhaal sei*

SIL: *Tu chaavei kaccha maal sei, sabar ka ghut bhar le*

SIL: *Rajinder singh kyu itna ghirkaya,*

BIL: *teri khatar aaya*

SIL: *mei maal su paraya*

SIL: *Apni kaad kite kasar kar le ne*

BIL: *Meeti meeti saali do baat karle*

Dheere dheere bol koi sun na le

BIL: Oh my sister-in-law, let's talk sweetly

SIL: I will not come near you, even if you wait for the whole night

What have you got for us to eat

BIL: I have got mangoes, come suck it, you'll feel good

SIL: Are you not satisfied with my sister, why are you coming after me

Why are not you satisfied

BIL: Oh sweet sister-in-law let's talk sweetly

SIL: I am only sixteen years' old

BIL: But your body curves say otherwise

SIL: You want a virgin girl, be satisfied,

Rajinder Singh why are you complaining

BIL: I have come for you

SIL: I am preserved for somebody else

You go somewhere else for your desires

Oh sister-in-law let's talk, talk slowly so that no one could hear.

Song 11

(Geet sung by women)

Baap kei ghar beti guddadh lapeti

Sasural jaakei muddhei pe baithi

Saadha Baana pehna hai bebe,

kadei pehyaya na reshmi suit

gale mei girkaei na bebe

In father's house, daughters' are wrapped in torn quilt,

Sits on stool in her in-laws' house,

Always wear simple clothes, oh sister,
Never wear a silk suit
Do not wear a necklace,
never shout to the world about your family.

Song 12

(Geet sung by women)

Jiddin laadon⁸ tera janam hua hai,

hui hai bajar ki raat,

Jis din lalla⁹ tera Janam hua hai,

hui hai sarwan ki raat.

The day you were born daughter,

Born is a dark night,

Since the day you have taken birth son,

The nights have become golden.

⁸ *Laddon*: daughter

⁹ *Lalla*: Son.

Song 13

(Geet sung by women)

Putra bina moksha na hoti,

chahe ho grahsthi ne gyan,

Bete bin tuk bhi ghar ne zeher dikhai de

Without a son, no salvation is attained,

How much knowledgeable family may be,

Without son even a morsel of food appears a poison to the house¹⁰

Song 14

(Geet sung by women)

Mahare Janam mei khosdein bajen,

Bhai kei mein thali,

Budhein ki rovein budaliya,

Rovei haali paali¹¹

On my birth, torn shoes were displayed,

¹⁰ Song 13, Appendix II

¹¹ Haali paali: As farming is the common profession and mostly opted by village men. Specially, Jat men in this context, village men who are indulged in farming are called *haali paali*.

On brothers, were played steel plates,

Almost everyone is crying

Song 15

(Geet sung by women)

chhora marre nirbhaga ka,

chhori marein bhagwan ki.

Betein ko deepak kahein, raja kahe samman de,

Bas chale tho betiyon ko jaan se maar de

Boy dies of an ill-fated one,

While the girl dies of a fortunate one,

Boys are called lanterns and respected as kings,

Wish one could kill daughters.

Song 16

(Geet sung by women)

Mahri bandri isi gori, jisi chand ki katori,

thara bandra isa kala, jisa jhotta gher me pada,

Mahri bandre ghani sutri, jisi hoor ki pari khadi,

*thara badra isa khada, jisa langda bandar khada.*¹²

Our bride is so fair just like a moon's bowl,

Your groom is so black just like a buffalo, lying in the lawn,

Our bride is so beautiful just like a fairy

Your groom is standing like a paralyzed monkey.¹³

¹²Narrated by Babita, Khanpur Kalan, Sonapat, 10th October 2011.

¹³Narrated by Sonia, Gohana, Sonapat, 28th October 2011.

Appendix III

These are excerpts taken from popular *ragini* and *geet* which have been sighted and analyzed in chapter III and IV. A free translation of these songs from Haryanvi dialect has been carried out by the researcher herself.

Ragini 1.

Sun re ghandasei tera ke dhang se?

Oh listen ghandasa, how are you?

(Uploaded by Superline Music company on YouTube)

Boy (B): *Aarei suna re ghandasa tera kei dhang sei rei,*

Kei dhang sei tera?

Girl (G)-*Kei mera ya tera ghandasa?*

(B)-*Nahi bahuya nei kavein thei machine*

G- *Ek yaar bina mera kei jina, chadha jawani ka rang sei*

G: *Meri baat sun lei, Tu merteri pyaar karei sei?*

B: *bhot ghana kitna...katti kardein wala*

B: *Pacchlein nei manna chediyein*

G: *Kyu?*

B: *arrein bawle yeh tei dusri dhal kei hai arr yeh paachei betei?*

G: *yeh jodhan mei maisan kei bhi ladhei*

G: *Accha?*

G: *Ek taneh chod kei usne bana lu yaar*

B: *usne mat banaiyon chaaye usne banaliyei you kohn mei pada*

G: *Yoh accha konya?*

B: *haayein uske phas ge tei ek kaam aur karega, kasuta kaam karega,*

G: *Aa pyaar kar...*

B: *Duniya sei darr*

G: *Tanneh kyu muskil hori sei*

G: *Aa kati pyaar karengein kati prem ras tei*

G: *Prem ka rang jab chadh jaaga (we'll be in the colour of love completely)*

B-*Teri bebe kei dedu ragini gavei sei kei ji karvavwi sai*

B: *Sun re ghandasein terra kei dhang sei*

G: *Ek kaam kare nei*

B: *batta ke karva yehi vegi?*

G: *Jadaan Ghana ni hora,*

G: *Ghana lagei hai*

B: *Woh matan ka sher sei ussen uthar walei jaada*

Uska apna utarwalei naan ...

jada kei jaadan bhid jai, dast tei marjange

G: *Aana chaale*

B: *Kit?*

G: *kitein tei chalengein*

B: *Bawli galat jagah na ja*

G: *Tent paachein chalein*

B: *Tent pachei kei sei*

G: *Na bhi*

G: *Chal nei jaadan tareinge*

B: *Jadan tarenge? Tu kukar taregi jaadan*

G: *Tu ek kaam kar nei, chal ekkh mei challenge*

B: *Ekh mei mat jaiyen*

G: *Dekh chori mei huh u darr mannein lagna chaiyen,*

darrein lagei tannei

B: *Bhagwan sachla darru su*

G: *kya tahi darre se?*

B: *Bataun kya tahi*

B: *Ekh mei jaakein je kissi ki gande borri kei haath laya ,*

Arr jo uth ekh wala aagya, chaye chahcha lagta ho, accha,

Pher bhi aantei nu kehga, bhai re chorein,

haan chacha..bhai mei bhi, bhai naas hojaga

Kaisein?

Bollywood song

In-between – starts singing a bollywood song *aap ki salamati, aap hi sei pyar, aap kei liyen hi aayein hai baar baar..(2)Lalalalala....tune*

G: *Konya chalye, maka tu konya challei*

B: *Ha bata*

G: *Tu darrei ghana nu , darra karrei chorii*

B: *Arrei manne darr bhadiyan lagei hai, naas karjagya ek aadhaya*

G-*Hai bhagwan, hai parmatma kit log banna diya yoh*

B: *paggal log tei thek ho sein* G: *log kei thek ho ,*
jo samaan aagei hone chayan than uski badlei pet nikldya reh sei

B: *sahi tem aavin haina jib, peth tei bhethar nei badjaya karei jukar kangaroon ka balak*
badjaya karein

G: *tu darrein ghana nu darra karein chorri*

B-*ek baat bataun tannei..yah tei darr lagei manne,*
yoh darr asli koi dede khol koi bori

G: *aa ladh kar..*

B: *kuch yaad kar..duniya se darr*

G: *tannei kyu muskil hori sei*

B: *sun rei gandase tera kei dhang sei..*

G: *ek yaar bina mera kei jina..mere chaddha jawani ka rang sei*

Film song: *aap ka aana ,dil dhadkana..*
pyaar aagaya..kyo hota hai dil deewana..aaj yeh maine janana
pyaar aagaya...allalap.....lalalalaaal (tune)

G: *mei kassi kasai*

B: *kai jagah tei leri sei?*

G: *teen jagah sei lari su, kasi kasei addeitei,*

G: *tu kadein tei lera sei kasa kasaya, tu kati ek jagah sei bhi lera hai? Kasa kasaya*

B: *tinnei jagah ka ek kassa kassaya lera ?*

G: *dekhllyei kati dheela hora sein*

B:*pagal hai mai tei baandh kei kadd pacchei baandh kei lara su*
picchein laara hai?

B: *Mera motta pett hein addeh tei addhei tei,*
aur bhujegi

B: *Tu laa lei nei*

G: *mei na lannti*

Mei na lanti Mannei bera chotei chotei balak sei son lagrei sei

B: *Chotei hi tei badde hoja 2 minute mei*

G: *Mai kasi kasai ghodi bina sawar*

***Bollywood song Lekei pehle pehla pyaar bhar kei aakhon mei khumar, jaadun nagri
sei aayan hai koi jadugar.***

B: *Esiyen tei kehtein hei , sun re ghandase tera kei dhang sei*

G: *Yaar bina mera kei jina kai dhang sein..*

G: *Meri ek baat sun lei, Rakesh kiloi mannei leja byah kei*

B: *Le chahlei chhoro, Yeh narryei horein tei lejange,*

G: *Yeh tere tau kaka na lejya, na rahn de na nattei*

G: *Kati kardei ghandei chung rei yeh kati naat jaa..*

yeh nayei chore tei na naatei, yeh buddhei nattengei

Teri gelya aakei mei chid gi, prem rup ki yah jung sein, challa karein yeh prem tei

B: *Sun rei ghandasei tera kei dhang sein...(3)*

B: *Aur meri yeh baat sun lei, pagal yeh baat ghar mei karan ki ho sei*

Batah tu sabkei aage batlaya karein,

G: *Kaise..*

Dheere dheere bol koi sun na le khet ki kaliyan koi chun na lee (Filmi songs' lyrics)

B: Oh listen ghandasa¹, how are you?

G: Mine or yours

B: New brides and daughter-in-law were called machine earlier,

G: Without a lover, what is the use of living, my youth is blossoming

G: Listen, do you love me?

B: A lot...

G: How much?

B: A...very hard one

Conversation starts in-between

B: Don't tease the audience sitting at the back

G: (why?)

B: Oh mad woman, they are different people sitting at the back

these people don't even leave buffaloes in the pond,

they are so wild for sex, what will they do with you?

G: Is it? Shall I leave you and take him as my lover

B: Don't make him, make the one lying down in the corner (pointing at the audience)

G: Is he not good?

B: Oh, if you get hitched with him then he'll do bad things with you.

Both the singers start singing again

G: Come love me

¹ Grass and fodder cutting equipment.

B: Have some fear of society

G: Why are you finding it difficult? Come we'll love each other,

(Women performer poses her body erotically in front of the male co-singer)

B: Shall I have sex with your sister, you are singing *ragini* or seducing me to have sex with you?

B: Oh listen Ghandasa, how are you?

Stop singing and starts talking again

G: Do one thing?

B: Tell me what you will make me do?

G: Isn't it too cold?

B: I also feel very cold

G: I am feeling too much cold

B: Why don't you ask that lion of goddess durga to take off your cold

(points out at a man sitting in the audience) the whole gathering whistles

G: You get your cold off from him...cold will counter cold

and you both will die because of diarrhea

G: Come let's go

B: Where?

G: Somewhere, at least we'll have to go?

B: Oh mad woman, let's not go to any wrong place

G: let's go behind the tent

B: What is there behind the tent?

G: Come we'll take away each other's cold

B: Do away with the? How would you do away the cold?

G: Do one thing, let's go to a field of sugar cane

B: Don't go in the sugar cane field,

G: Look I am a girl; I should be scared but you are scared despite being a man

B: God's swear; I am scared

G: why are you scared?

B: Shall I tell you why?

B: If in the sugar cane field, we touched somebody's sugarcane and if the owner of the field came... then even if he's your uncle, he'll say he wants to have sex with you.

Everything will be destroyed.

Bollywood Song in between

Conversation continues

G: You won't go?

B: Ya tell me

G: You are scared so much just like a girl

B: It's good to be scared or else someone will destroy you

G: Oh god, what kind of a man you have made?

B: Oh mad man are good

G: How men are good? Look at you, in the place of thing (indicates penis), you have such a fat stomach

B: Don't worry, when the right time comes, stomach goes inside (while having sexual intercourse), just like a kangaroo baby sits inside.

G: But you are scared like a girl?

B: Shall I tell you one thing? I am scared that someone else will open you up.

Starts singing again

G: Come love me

B: Just remember, have some fear of the society,

G: Why are you finding it so difficult.

B: Oh listen ghandasei, how are you?

B: Without a lover, what is the use of living, colour of youth is ascending upon me

A couplet from Bollywood song

ragini continues

G: I am so tight

B: Where all you are tight from?

B: I am very tight from three places of my body, singer touches her chest, buttocks and vagina

(The audience gets excited, blows whistles and shouts. Many males jump on the stage and throw bundles of money on the woman singer).

G: Do you even have any part of your body so tight, are you having any hard part (is your penis hard and tight?) Look it's so loose, pointing at the penis of the male singer.

B: Oh mad woman, I have tied it, it's standing and so hard.

G: My stomach is fat from here, (the singer touches his stomach and penis), you want to know more, come touch and feel my hardness

G: No, I won't touch as I know two small children are sleeping there (indicates testicles)

B: Don't worry, these small ones will become big in two minutes,

G: I am such a tight mare without horse rider

Two lines of bollywood song in-between

B: That's why it is said , listen oh ghandasei, how are you?

G: Without a lover, what is the use of living, colour of youth is ascending upon me

Bollywood song

G: Listen Rakesh Kilo (singer and composer of this *ragini*), please marry me and take me along

B: Take her boys (points at the audience), there are so many here in the audience to take you,

G: No, your uncle will not take me, look, they are denying (points at the audience)

They have already sucked very hard sugar cane, they are denying

these young boys would not deny but old men will not take me,

with you I got excited, this is a fight of love, let's love each other.

(In –between the male co-singer holds her chin and tries to kiss and even the woman singer replies back in flying kiss).

B: Oh listen ghandasei, how are you?

B: Listen such conversation should be done at home

G: And you are doing it here in front of everyone

B: How?

Both the singers complete the *ragini* with a bollywood song.

Ragini 2:

Suit kaadh de mera

Stitch my suit

This *ragini* portrays a woman and tailor's wish to have a sexual relation in a semi-pornographic way by describing each other's private parts of body, though placed in a double meaning lyrics fantasizing each other's genitals and other parts.

Woman (W): *Le suit pakkad, latta tei dekh lei...*

Tailor (T): *Dekh liya kati design ka sei (Kilkari)²*

W: *Oh Darji Kei mera, suit kaad³ de, kar ke khub vichar,*

T: *Suit kadwayegi...kai dhal ki sui lera badi, choti,moti,*

kissi kadhai karwayegi, pher ek kaam aur karle,

T: *Suit ki gel tu khadwaale⁴ free salwar,*

teri kisi bahot gani suit kadwa ri mere pei,

W: *suit kadhan, mannein kayian tei sun rakhi estahiya hori fida tere pe*

Phool kaadd diye chati pe kar ke khada ghavr.

Suit isa bna de ke maacchen rolan...

Khad du chaati pe tir, pher na kariyon rolaaaaan,

Mera pati sei seedha bhola, tej batyaei yaar,

Yaar bhi chedenge aake rishtedaar,

Suit kaad de mera, suit te kaad du,

Salwar kadh wale free mei,

Mannei nu bhi bata dei,

Kitne ek rupyee liyakarein,

Pissa ka rola na pehle tu naapa de,

² Audience whistles and shouts in fun

³ *Kaadna* has different meaning stitching, doing embroidery and removing or taking out.

⁴ removing

*Ke liya karein suit kadai itna mannein bata de,
Aura dohre sau rupiyein,
Saun mei suit kadha dei,
Arr salwar,accha (male)
Salwar pe rob jamadeikar de, kar dei kudi sawar,
Suit ki ghel ...ke suit kadwayegi...ghel free kadhwa le salwar.*

(Woman Customer): Oh tailor, hold the cloth and have a look

Tailor (T): I have seen, it's of latest design

W: Oh tailor, stitch me a good suit

T: You will get your suit embroidered and stitched,
I have different kinds of needles, small, large, and thick,
what kind of embroidery you want? Do one more thing,
with suit also get your lower pants removed for free.

Many other women like you have got their suits stitched from me

W: I have heard about you from many other women, that's why I am so crazy about you,
make an embroidery of blooming flower on my chest

T: Shall I make an arrow on your chest, don't create a scene later

W: My husband is very simple and gullible

My close male friends and relatives will tease me,

Stitch my suit,

T: I will stitch your suit but let me take out your lower pants for free

(grand applause by the all man audience)

W: Ok tell me, how much money you will charge?

T: Don't worry about money? Let me measure your size.

W: Just tell me how much do you charge?

T: I take 100 rupees from others

W: Ok stitch my suit in 100 rupees and lower pants?

T: Ok? With suit get your lower pant stitched (removed) for free.

Ragini 3

Nalka diye simaar

Oh plumber, mend my tap

(Written by Ranbir Singh Kilo)

(Uploaded by Jagdish music company on YouTube Channel)

Woman householder (WH): *arrei oh mistri, arre sunayiaee mistri, mei keh ri kit marr riha hai?*

Plumber (P): *Oh stri, marr ni raha mai kar rya hu, ek ka nalka thek karya rya hu*

WH: *isa hai mistri sahb, ek baar mahre gher mei chaliyon*

P: *ke horya hai udeh*

WH: *nalka kharab horya?*

P: *dekhnya padega bhaee*

WH: *meri baat sunley, dekhan dekhan kei chakar mei, kai mistri aaye,*

ek tei tau kisha aaya, us ne nalke mei narri garra chod gya

pher pura samaan nahi tha tau dhorei, kya tai, Kai kharabhi ho nalke mei

jaise chiddiya kharab pajya, maddya upar chad jha –wah washer ho wah jhassi pajya

Kai hisaab dekhne paddei hei

Arr gara mangavei teh bogi marni padegi

Mei baataun lei keh dikkat sei? sunalei

Mere nalke mei ke ke kharabhi hai?

Aur tannei keh keh thek karna hai

Ek ek bol mistri wala betha karr

Mistri nalka diyen samaar

Samarun kati sahi dhal

Chal dikhade machine teri mei check karu ek baar.

.....

WC- dekhein jab mei nalka pheru su ghana langei sei hanga

Oh ter ghajab kar rakhya, mei kahu tha na gadbad kar rakhi hai,

Maar maar kei jhatke re ghaj kar rakyha rei bangya

WC: Oh mangya dede gaj din char

P: mistri apna samman mangya na diya karei

WC: Pher le payment lele

Manjya pher bhi na du meraa ghaj mota padhe

Arr ismei aave na koi

.....

Aa dikha de machine check karu ek baar

Meri patli kamar marei jumei daar layiyon

Kai baar isha hojya Kheech ke gaal hoja

Ek baat samaj mei na aati mistri tu nu bata, yoh tanki keh ki layaa

Oh tera naas ja peth nei tanki batave

P: Batau kei ki laya, suddha thuti phichhasi ki aarri hai

WC: Dekhiyein kai be pani na thavei, mei hoja su kahi be dhal

P: Washer ghati lakei ful teri yoh badal dei,

Cheej hui jo bekar, saari hi bigdi padi se

Maya puri jana padega , Kai saman isse esh market mei milyen na

WC: Saara sodha fit kar, nalka diyen samar,

P: chal dikha machine check karu ek baar

Tisri kali (third paragraph)

WC: Mistri ghane sawad matena le,

ek aadhi bari panni mei nari avei sei garra,

Ramkumar ka pipe lana padega

P: Tu esh tau ka lale na

WC: Tau nei tei ghaara phassa rakhi sei

P: Paanch saath boki maru dukh mit jaga saara

Oh chaye jitni boki maar, nalke diyen samar...

Lalalalalalala

Meri baat sunle mistri tera kaam karn ka tarika manne ghana bhaddiya laga

Mei nu kahu hu

do bhoki aur (audience)

apna no. dekha jayeye

marega...inka jee likadne hora mera tei niklega hi

dekhyiye ranbir singh kiloi wale de jayein phone tera

Ho mai bhi teri ghelya chalan ne su tyaar

Chaala paat gya dekh mistriyon kei tei ye thaat,

Aadhi raat nei bula liye mei paunga tyaar,

pardesh gayei balam kai satayei tees.

Oh Plumber, repair my tap (free translation)

WH: Listen, Oh plumber, where have you gone, are you dead?

Plumber: Oh woman! I have not died

WH: Then?

P: I am doing

WH: What are you doing?

P: I am repairing somebody's tap

WH: Ok listen, come to our house once

P: What is happening there?

WH: Our tap is not working

P: I will have to see

WC: Listen, many plumbers came to see this tap, one uncle came and he left lot of mud in the tap
he also did not have all the accessories/equipment required for repairing the tap.

P: Look there can be different types of defects in the tap , sometimes the pipe⁵ is impaired
Sometimes the upper part of the tap gets stuck and sometimes the washer gets defaulted
One has to check everything and if there is mud stuck in the tap, it has to be pushed hard.

WC: Shall I tell you what is wrong with my tap? Sit here and listen

Starts singing

WC: Oh plumber mend my tap

P: Yes I will repair it properly, ok show me your machine, I'll check it

WC: Whenever I try to move it, it takes lot of energy and water does not come and mud comes

P: Oh god, you have messed it, you have pushed it so much that it is sloping

WC: You give me yours for four days

P: I will not give mine, it is very thick, come I'll check your machine

My tap will not fit the base (hole in which the tap fits)

Bollywood song in-between

WC: Sometimes I pull it so much, how much did you get this tank for?

P: oh you damn! You are calling my stomach as tank, with tap it came for 25 rupees)

WC: It does not pickup water, I am so tired

P: You replace it completely; it has become impaired, I will go to Maya Puri market to get it and
will replace it

⁵ Pipe is synonymously used as penis in this *ragini*

WC: oh plumber repair my tap

WC: Plumber don't have so much fun,
sometimes so much mud comes from the tap,
I think I'll have to bring Ram Kumar's pipe.

P: You take from this uncle

WC: Oh uncle must be having lot of mud in his tap

P: I will push and pull for 6-7 times (enacting sexual act), all your pain will go

(Audience starts whistling and a middle aged gave 500 rupees)

WC: oh plumber I like your working style

P: I am saying audience is asking for two more pushes

WC: you give me your mobile number

P: will you kill us; the audience is already getting excited

WC: Ranbir Singh Kilo, give me your mobile number, I am ready to go with you

P: Oh damn! look plumbers have so much fun (thaat), you call me at midnight I'll be ready

WC: My beloved has gone far; my youth is troubling me.

Ragini 4: Yoh maal gajab bangi, meri saali hui jawaan

Brother-in-law (BIL): Yoh maal gajab bangi, meri saali hui jawaan

Sister-in-law (SIL): *Oh saali wala majaan mei dedu, aayeyon mere saath mei*

BIL: *Teri joban dekh meri bhi rahi na eb kaat mei*

SIL: *Aaja jija ek khaat mei, kyu horya paresaan*

BIL: *Tu maal gajab banagi meri saali hui jawaan*

SIL: *Gher mei aa jija tere karun puri armaan*

Maal gajab bangi...

SIL: *Oh meri bebe mei ras na rerha dhalti jawani jawe*

BIL: *Band kamrei tera yeh jija film banawei*

SIL: *Oh sari raat teri yaad satavei, mei hori su sunsaan*

BIL: *Tu maal maal gajab bangi, meri saali hui jawaan*

SIL: *Gher mei aa jija tere karun puri armaan*

Maal gajab bangi

SIL: *Jija ke jam par jam pinei wale, raat ko piyon tho subah utar jayegi*

Arr ek baar saali sei haath mila kar dekhle teri jindagi sudhar jayegi

BIL: *Meri baat sun le saali –yeh mulakat hoti nahi puri ,*

Aur yeh pyar ki batein reh jati hai adhuri

SIL: *Yeh pyar mulakat ki baat chod, sirf ek raat bita lei mere saath puri puri*

Mere badan ne dhirei dhrein tu salahiyen

BIL: *Saarei sukh tannei de dunga meri rum ki botal layeye*

BIL: *Ishq nasha mere bhi chadahiye, baat meri yeh maan,*

SIL: *Yoh maal gajab ban gayi, gher mei aa jija tere karun puri armaan*

Maal gajab bangi

Oh Sonu Sharma Chandra bana kei, dharm palguru kei

rahul shish jhukavei, dono mil kei mauj udahvei.

Brother-in-law (BIL): You have become so sexy, my sister-in-law

SIL: Oh brother-in-law come in cattle yard, I will fulfill all your desires

BI: You have become so sexy

SIL: Come I'll give you all you desire, come along

B: Seeing your youth blossoming, I am not in my control

S: Come in my bed, why are you getting worried

My sister is not sexy anymore, she's growing old

B: I make fantasies about you in closed room

SIL: Whole night I can't sleep; I miss you my brother-in-law,

I am getting lonesome

B: You have become sexy, my sister-in-law has come of age

SIL: Hangover of your drinking will not last much,

Oh my brother-in-law,

But you will get deeply intoxicated with my youthful desires,

just come near me, your whole life will change

BIL: Oh sister in law, these meetings never get completed and this love remains incomplete

SIL: Don't talk, leave these things just spend one whole night with me,

you caress my body slowly slowly,

BIL: I will give you all the pleasures, just get my wine bottle,

drown me in your love, you have become so sexy,

SIL: Come in the cattle yard oh brother in law,

I have become sexy; I will fulfill your desires.

Both singers: Sonu Sharma Chandra composed this song,

we should bow to him, let's have fun together.

Ragini 5

Oh jija meri tu lele nei

Oh Brother-in-law, take mine

In this *ragini*, it has been portrayed that a sister-in-law indirectly excites her brother-in-law to take her virginity and have sexual intercourse with her.

Sister-in-law: *Oh jija meri tu lele nei.... pause haath jodh pranaam*

Brother-in-law: *Oh Sali teri lele reh haath jodh..teri pranaam*

SIL: *6bahan -6 jija mannein sabse pyaara tu*

BIL: *Meri pasand ki sali ka ek beej kuwara tu sei, saali pyaar hamara tu sei*

Holiyei tere ghulam

SIL: *Oh jija lele nei karke dua salam*

BIL: *Oh saali teri leli nei haath jodh pranaam*

(Bollywood song in-between) *Bhavre ne khilaya phool,*

phool ko legaya rajkumar, Bhavre tuna bhul

SIL: *Tera mera mel isha jisa shhakar ke mei ghee*

BIL: *Tere bina saali mera nahi lagta ji*

SIL: *Mahre pyaar ka barsei mee, shubha, dhuperi, shyaam,*

Oh jija lele nei

Haath jodh pranaam.

Free translation

Sister-in-law: (Oh Brother in-law take mine. Take mine...pause)

Regards with folded hands,

Brother –in-law: Oh sister –in-law, I have taken yours...

I have taken yours...

Regards with folded hands,

SIL: I have 6 sisters and 6 brother-in-laws, but you are the one I love the most,

BIL: Sister-in-law, you are the only one virgin seed I desire,

You are my love; I have become your slave.

SIL: Oh brother in law..take mine..take mine

BIL: oh sister-in-law, I have taken yours...

taken yours.... regards with folded hand

Filmi song in between...

SIL: Our match is just like sugar and oil

BIL: Without you, I don't like anything

SIL: Our love showers morning, afternoon and at night

SIL: Oh brother-in-law, take mine...

take mine...take mine... regards with folded hands.

Ragini 6

No. 1 hai Haryana

(Haryana is no. 1)

Puri duniya mei apni alag pehchaan

Chahe khet hoy ya jang ka midaan

Sabse aage Haryana, no. 1 hai haryana

Nek neeyat sei kiya vikas

Sabse jaada pension de kei maan badaya

The distinct identity in the whole world

Whether it's battlefield or the field of agriculture,

Haryana is no. 1 always,

Developed the State with honest intentions (referring to congress govt.)

Raised dignity of people by giving highest amount of pension

Haryana is number one.

Ragini 7

Bharti holei rei, tere bahar khadei rangrut

addeh milein tannei tutee litar, udhein milein phool boot

addeh milein tanneh patein chithdei, udehein milei suit,

addeh milein tanneh sukhei tikadd, udehein milei biskut,

addeh milein tanneh dhakka –mukki, udehein milein salute

Bharti holei rei, tere bahar khaddei rangrut.

Get recruited, military men are standing in front of your house

Here you get torn shoes, there you will get a long boots,

Here you get torn clothes; there you will get suit to wear,

Here you get dry bread, there you will get biscuits

Here you get humiliation, there you will be get a salute

Get recruited; military men are standing in front of your house

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