

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN FOLK SONGS OF HIMACHAL PRADESH: A CRITICAL STUDY

DR SAVITA SEHGAL

Associate Professor in Music Vocal, Govt Degree College, Kandaghat, Solan, Himachal Pradesh

Abstract

Many songs in Himachali folk songs/folklore are related to women's life in which their suffering, sorrow, joy, sacrifice, valour, tolerance, love and kindness are clearly seen. The depiction of women's life is visible in these folksongs. Looking at various aspects of women's life through folk songs, we will come to know that how many rugged paths and struggles woman must face and had faced in past. Efforts are being made to show the role of woman's existence, her emotional strength, background, family and social responsibility etc. with examples from some folklore tales. At present women role in society has changed and making greatest impact in our society. Education has made women independent and no longer dependent on men to lead their lives. Women are now getting power in rural areas also. Although a woman is going on the path of continuous progress, but she still has not got the desirable respect that she deserves. Women have a major contribution in the preservation of folk culture. It can be devised that music has been an important feminist expression across generation. The splendid feminist works and resistances of women in music diversity and gender equality have been proven to improve the performance and quality of music. While it is encouraging to see that the visibility of women in traditional folk music has improved, we still have a long way to go. The portrayal of Himachali women has been expressed in various styles in many folk songs, which have been described in more detail in this research paper. The valour, tales of women courage and various incidental folk songs give us glimpses of that period or its antiquity, which sowed the seeds of communication or inspiration in our folk life.

Keywords: Himachali folk songs, Rural empowerment, Education for women, Folk culture preservation, Feminist expression in music, Women in traditional folk music.

INTRODUCTION

This section of research paper deals with an overview of the folk songs of 10 Districts of Himachal Pradesh. Folk music is a music genre that include traditional folk music and contemporary genre that evolved from traditional folk music during 20th century. Traditional folk music is usually transmitted orally, music with unknown composers, music about cultures and national identity and as it used to be transmitted orally so changes are usually observed from one to another generation. Himachal word made up of words 'him' and 'achal' which means ice and mountain respectively, so Himachal means "a mountain of snow". Himachal is extreme northern part of India occupying a region of scenic splendour in Western Himalayas offering a multi textured display of snow-clad mountains, valleys, lakes and cascading streams. The population comprises of distinct ethnolinguistic groups and social castes. Himachal has its own identity for its rich culture of music and dance which can be seen because of multiple waves of human migration from other areas witnessed by the state in past and it has remained largely untouched by external customs due to difficult terrain.

There is *no classical form of music* in the state but plenty of folk music can be heard which are best performed by people of region. It comprises of Chamba, Kangra, Hamirpur, Una, Mandi, Kullu, Bilaspur, Shimla, Solan, Sirmour and 2 tribal districts Kinnaur and Lahaul

Spiti. The folk songs lure through the green valleys, are indirectly around daily chores and are a treat after a hard day of work. Himachal encompasses, within its vicinity many tribal or remote areas, which use traditional ways of living far from modern day hustle. For these simple people, simple are the ways of life, simple is their music. The people residing here live simple life and mainly involved in agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry. Most of folk songs require no such instruments to accompany and sung to the heart's delight that renders the uniqueness and beauty of Pahari culture. These folk songs can be sung solo or in groups.

The emotions have an utmost Importance for making these songs soul- touching. The music here is tantamount with various events and happenings in day- to-day life of the people. The main subject of these songs varies largely of romance, chivalry, stories of war and gallantry, seasonal variations love; separation marriages, child birth as well as mourning too are common.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this research paper is to critically analyse the contribution of women in the folk songs of Himachal Pradesh.

FOLK SONGS: AN OVERVIEW

Folk songs may be associated with history, religion culture, customs but most of songs are associated with love ballads, heroic ballad, praise of deities and social recreation. Some of commonly sung songs are as under:

- Laman of Kullu, Jhoori and Bhiunri of Sirmaur, Mohna of Bilaspur, Luddi of Mandi, Basoa of Chamba.
- Dholru is a seasonal song.
- Bare Haren is ballad about warriors.
- Soohadiyan are songs sung at child birth.
- Losi and Suhaag are family songs.
- Karak are songs of praise in the honour of deities.

They are usually sung in unison and these songs do follow a pattern as per the singer who decides how and which way notes and syllables and are to be pronounced. The folk music and these songs' identity of rich tribal culture of people residing in the state. The instruments usually used in folk songs includes:

- Wind instruments like peepni, shehnai, flute, karnaal (straight brass trumpet), ranasingha (curved brass trumpet).

- Drums (Dhol, Dholki, Nagara)
- Percussion instruments: Jhanjer, Manjira, Ghunghru
- Stringed instruments like Ektara, Sarangi and Rubana

The valleys in Himachal are filled with people who never fail to miss an opportunity to sing their favourite folk songs whether at important festivals, rituals, fairs or with the onset of seasons. The folk music has utmost importance in Pahari culture which is full of life and emotions. As the folk songs depicts the various cultural, historical, religious aspects the transmission from one generation to another promotes the unity, sense of belonging, teaches morals and values imbibed from ancestors and in a way folk songs helps in preserving cultural identity of the place. The progress of country or society is not only due to material development but literature, art and Folk songs also plays an important role in progress. That is why it is said that to know any society it is important to understand the culture which includes Folk literature, Folk art and Folk songs.

IMPORTANCE OF FOLK SONGS

The tradition of folk songs is as old as human civilisation. The way people observed in the human society or their community, expressed it similarly through the folk songs. Therefore, the history of the entire human being is expressed in folk songs, and they are always alive in the society. Folk songs are not the creation of an individual but the creation of the society as whole. The progress of any country is not only due to material development, but literature and art also play an important role in its progress. That is why it is said that to know any country or society and its culture, it is necessary to connect with its folk literature, folk art or folk songs. Himachali Maanas Bhoomi is very fertile. The folk songs here have a wonderful blend of local specialties as well as poetic elements. When a vowel wave ends or becomes old, then new songs emerge in this tune which are the mirror of society.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

In Himachali folk life, the sequence of fair rituals, festivals or Teej continues throughout the year. At every occasion, the audience get mesmerised by listening to the reverberation of folk songs and folk instruments.

The various regions of Himachal have their discrete fair and festivals that reflection of the rich cultures, social diversity and traditions. The diversity keeps people quite busy with the celebrations throughout a year. Festivals are celebrated by singing various types of folk songs. Mangal songs, Sanskar-songs, Marriage songs, dance-songs are sung at various occasions. Some folk songs depict mythology, history and many revolve around the religion. The songs are always a treat to the world of music. In these songs, where there are men singers on the one hand, on the other hand, the participation of women is also no less, in dance songs; women are seen performing special dances with men.

The valour, tales of women courage and various incidental folk songs give us glimpses of that period or its antiquity, which sowed the seeds of communication or inspiration in our folk life.

HIMACHALI FOLK WAY OF LIFE

People in mountains lives a simple life, happily and generously, they adapt to survive in harsh geographical conditions. Everyone has their own dialect, dress, food, and musical instruments and rituals, according to the local tradition, from birth to death, all the rituals related to work are expressed through folk songs. Whenever the person takes out time after doing his hard work throughout the day, he removes his fatigue by singing songs, dancing etc., various folk songs are sung at every occasion throughout the year. While engaging in work, listening to melodies of the diverse folk songs by men and women rejoices every moment.

Folk songs fill new enthusiasm and emotions in our lives. Along with the entertainment, there is a message in these songs for the contemporary generation. The message of acquiring knowledge from elderly learning from their experiences, living a happy life, renouncing bad habits, respecting elders, living respectfully and eradicating social evils, etc. is described in these folk songs.

WOMEN CONSCIOUSNESS AND DISCOURSE IN HIMACHALI FOLK SONGS

Women consciousness means to recognise capabilities and raise voice against wrong and those who oppress women. Only when women will recognise their potential and immense strength of achieving anything, she will be able to solve her problems and face every hurdle in the journey of life. Women are incarnation of Goddess Shakti with immense strength, energy and ability, so women need to perceive life with immense courage and utilise every opportunity to empower and face every obstacle in life and not only stand for herself but others as well.

In past women were generally accorded a low status and were inferior adjuncts to men, with no identity of their own. They enjoyed no scope of giving expression to their talents as they were suppressed by practices such as purdah, early marriages, polygamy, sati, widow remarriage etc. Women were economically and socially dependent on male relatives, while education was denied to them. The glorification as wives and mothers was the only way in which society recognised the contribution of women as members of society. From 19th century onwards women performance in public realm was looked down upon. Women's expression in public was considered transgressional activity that demeaned the social status of the family and the community itself. Indian social reformers and intellectuals intended to initiate changes in the social and customary behaviour of women. In the past decade with the spurt of urban and rural musical festival interaction things has changed. The women find new

form of identity and expression through folk music. . The songs depict the lives of women in past, the social conditions and how they spend their lives full of struggles and how women faced every situation fearlessly and came out stronger fighting for their basic rights and identity. The condition of women has been improved with people becoming more aware of their rights which can also be observed in the songs, though this journey is still very long. The voyage of women can be traced through these songs.

There are many examples of women power in history, who have set a unique example by showing their valour and courage. From the birth of a daughter in the house to her parents, she is considered a burden. When she grows up, she is married and must face many difficulties in her life. Women have played extraordinary part in history, whether moving toward freedom from socially depressing condition of women or freedom to make one's choice's, women have positioned themselves as voices of empowerment and endurance. The women have lent their incredibly important voices in the struggle for their own rights. The women of Himachali folk music are no exception, the women singing songs depicting the stories of their struggle, victory, happiness. In present modern time women can also make career out of it, as the soul of folk music from Himachal can hit you in the pit of your stomach. It is a process of economic and social empowerment as well and when women recognise her capabilities, only then she will move forward in the society and the country will also grow and move forward. Nowadays there are many vocalists who have made a voyage from performing in their traditional settings to reclaiming their place in public forums paving a way for women to take control of their image and to explore previously taboo roles. Women of Himachal have played a role in shaping the rich repertoire of region by composing songs and expressing themselves through language and music. Women musicians can be nonprofessional musicians, who performed within their own communities and professional musicians who perform in the public space often in exchange of rewards. In many ways women in villages are the custodian of culture because they are custodian of family and communities as well Music comes to them naturally

The depiction of women's life is visible in these folk songs. Keeping in view look at the different situations of life of women, we will come to know that how many rugged paths and struggles woman must face and had faced in past. Efforts are being made to show the role of woman's existence, her emotional strength, background, family and social responsibility etc., with examples from some folklore tales.

A woman named Bhiunri was married in the marginal village of Shimla and Sirmaur district. In Sirmaur, on the day of Diwali, married daughters of the village come to meet their mother. This practice is present in modern times as well. The mother is waiting for her arrival but Bhinuri carries her baby on her back, crossing a creek on the way and gets washed away in the water. The mother faints after getting the information of her death and since that time in

the memory of her daughter. The people of the area have threaded the accident in the medium of a folk song. The lyrics of the song are as follows:

"Gaon re Dhiyani Roe Ayee Meri to Bhinuri na Aee.

Gaon re chhotuo tume agu dekhdi Jao

Aana bey thiya Bhinuri re, Pota tiyon ra Lyao".

While arguing, in another folk song, the mother-in law pushed her daughter-in-law over a trivial matter and pushed her off a hill into a deep gully where she died. The daughter-in-law's clothes were found hanging in the branches of the tree and bones piled up in the stream below:

"Pari bolo dhaka ri ridua tere, hundi Podi tuni re nale

Rashi bolo dachi teri odme chhuti, dhatu Maunva' tune re dele.

Kune bolo beriye ghale bheji, dita bolo kuniye dhaka

Sagi bolo shashuye ghale bhegi, dita bolo bebiye Dhaka"

Where heart wrenching incidents have been described in-sad songs, the beauty of women has also attracted everyone towards her

"Banthano juhno bere juriye hola satho da

tara kiyan bolo narja tinda tola jiuta mahara".

The theme of this song is an extramarital affair. The word jhuri itself literally means lover, beloved or sweetheart. Where a lover is amazed by the beauty especially eyes of his beloved. It is a typical song of Himachal and sung with fun joy and merriment. These folk songs are popular in Sirmaur and Mahasu. It is accompanied by a folk-dance form and entirely danced by women only.

"Kalua Majura ho dera tera doora lo kadi ghare auna,

kadi biti gaya faugana lo aaye gaya sauna lo kadi ghare auna"

The songs talk about women who is separated from her husband when he went for labour but never came back neither she got any message from him. She kept waiting and counting days for him to return home, many seasons passed away but she did not get any word from him. This song is sung in Kangra region of Himachal.

RANJHU FULMU

In the presented folk saga, the story of the namely Ranjhu and Fulmu, tragic romance of two lovers. Ranjhu is the son of Thakur of the village while Fulmu is a girl from a simple family of lower caste. Mutual love of both compels them for marriage but Ranjhu's family members are facing caste discrimination. Because Ranjhu gets married to another girl. Preparations are being made for Ranjhu's marriage but Fulmu keeps silently watching from the window of her house and keep crying. On the day when Ranjhu was going to be married. Eventually Fulmu died and her dead body was being carried for the cremation. Ranjhu came to know about this incident, he got down from palanquin and cremated his girlfriend with his own hands. Even today the saga of these immortal lovers is sung by everyone belonging in the Kangra area.

” Ranjhu Guwadue pachuaiye to kajjo jhakdi,
jhakan kajjo mandi do haath butne jo la fulmu galla hoi bityan”
“Phulamu Butna je lana teri sagi bhabhiyan, t
eri sagi chachiyen, jinhan de manney bich chao jani, galla hoi bitiyen”

In another folk song from Shimla district, a beautiful girl is getting dolled -up to see the fair. The song has praised the beauty of women. Where beauty can be found in her grace not just beauty of face and how her presence is her whole essence.

"Banthno chali bolo hey jatrey jatrey Dhoya muntu harshu
aage bharvin chhati dey battano lage banthno chali bolo hey jatrey.
hatho di Mehendi nosho di lali Kasarey Puchhni
kerki chali Banthno chali bolo hey jatrey”.

Sometimes women were victims of caste discrimination and sometimes must face other social evils like “sati”. after the death of her husband. Women have made many sacrifices throughout their life. According to one such incident, there was long-standing enmity between two villages named Dibbar and Kufar.

The people of two villages were killed by each other, to end this enmity and hatred, a woman of kuffer village name ‘**Jhanko**’ sacrificed herself by sitting atop her deceased husband's funeral pyre. It is believed she did sati to stop the fights among the people of two villages and to stop-killings of innocent people. It is a single incidence that can be traced from past by folk songs. It is still sung throughout the region as a folk ballad for the sacrificing trait of women for the betterment of society.

" Tharo kanaito chou kheli re, Aye kufri re gaven la
chou deothi re devte aye, sati nari re naven,
sati nari re naven divta premo ra jalaya la.
Kufro dibru ra jhagda pora mataya la "

Along with men in history women have also fought fearlessly and shoulder to shoulder with men against the enemies. . According to an old saga associated with Bharmour (Chamba) in Himachal Pradesh when, the invaders attacked Chamba region, people of the village entered their homes and hide at safe places, only a Brahmin lady named Ludy went out courageously to fight with them. She killed four invaders. Hearing this incident, king Shail Verma of Chamba honoured that brave woman with a reward. This song is still sung in Chamba region for remembering the lady named Ludi who choose courage over fear for protecting the region from invaders. This saga lyrics are as follow:

" Loody Bramaniye Bo Tera Kathera Gaman.
Loody Bramaniye bo mare char jawan
loody bramaniye jandi Chambey re Chaugan "

Similarly, in Mandi a folk song is famous named Lahola.

" Pingale ri dhara te, teen jane uttrej ji
aye gaye lohala re ravarey
dur dekhye denda tu mera bapua ho. "

A young lady named Lahula who has reached the marriageable age. People from place named Lahaul region reached the home of woman with a proposal of marriage. The girl's father confirmed his daughter's engaged without her consent and got her married. A married woman named Lahula could not spend a happy life in new family and committed suicide. It is an emotional song which still brings tears to the people's eye.

In a folk-dance event, which is called '**Munjra**', extremely popular dance form in **Sirmaur**, a beautiful woman dancing there becomes a centre of attraction. All the spectators get mesmerised seeing-her trembling feet, emotions displayed and intensity of the dance. the lyrics of song attract spectators are as follows:

Nachana Chhubiya banthaniye hame tere munjre aaye
tera munjre dholo di geo bolo nachney khey sabi rajiyo

pawaney dhavaney dhyani- dhiyo

munjara da pawana dhobo sido sita dhobo gheeyo.

Suspicious and sarcasm on the female character at times, the woman has been forced to bear unnecessary and false accusations against herself because she has been seen helpless due to social evils or evil-doers in the society.

In her youth, the lover she wanted to love, made up absurd stories of conspiracy to humiliate and defame her in the society. In the following folk song, young woman is forced to bear false, baseless accusations and insults.

She continued to lead an unsatisfactory life by becoming the subject of discussion. Many such songs, in which women broke social bonds and spent their life freely, happily and fearlessly. A similar song is specially sung in the **Bilaspur** region by the name '**Gambhari**'.

" khana peena nand leni o Gambhariye khana peena

khana to khae gai bandale re gambhari

chheeng rachae ga basanta o Gambhariye

nachana to nachigi bandle re gambhari dholki bajanega khajana"

CONCLUSION

It has thus been seen that many songs in Himachali folk songs/folklore are related to women's life, in which women's suffering, sorrow-joy, sacrifice-sacrifice, valour, tolerance, love and kindness are clearly seen. In one form she is the goddess Swarupa while there is also another form of mother, sister and wife. Present Indian women has inculcated many changes from the ancient time women. The women have endured many atrocities, she must bear many kinds of harassment from her in-laws, she was forced to do marriages without her consent, she had to bear many types of sorrows for the upbringing of her children. The root of all these problems was the poverty, illiteracy of women and social evils persisting in the society, traditionally women were full time home makers. At present, women role in society has changed tremendously and making greatest impact in our society. Women are standing strongly and playing major role in many important areas. Women have attained power and their impact is simply due to fact that now more women are getting literate which in turn is creating an opportunity to work. Women are now playing role in decision making and have voice unlike before. They have stood against dowry, domestic violence etc. Education has made women independent and no longer dependent on men to lead their lives. Women are now getting power in rural areas. Although the woman is going on the path of continuous progress but she still has not got the desirable respect that she deserves. In 21 centuries even

in field of music women began to embrace the singing and music that was traditionally dominated by men

The explanation of the life character of women can be widely known through the books of history. It should also be accepted that the women living in remote areas and villages like Himachal Pradesh have taken their responsibility, which can be easily learnt through the characters in our folk songs. When "Shabad and Swar" combines it resonates in surroundings, which affects the whole society and environment. Therefore, the tales, stories and plots present in folk songs are deep rooted in the hearts of people in a very interesting way, which are inherited from generation to generation orally. These folk songs become an integral part of our civilisation, tradition and culture and make us aware about the protection of our ancient heritage. Women have a major contribution in the preservation of folk culture, it must be accepted. It can be devised that Music has been an important feminist expression across generations. It is time to acknowledge and amplify the splendid feminist works and resistances of women in music. Diversity and gender equality have been proven to improve the performance and quality of music. While it is encouraging to see that the visibility of women in traditional folk music has improved, we still have a long way to go. The depiction of Himachali women has been expressed in many folk songs in various circumstances, which is described here in a more elaborate way.

REFERENCES

Sehgal, Dr. Krishan Lal "Himachali Lok -Swar Madhuri "

Sehgal, Dr Krishan Lal. "Geet Meri Maati Re"

Garg, Luxmi Narayan. "Lok Sangeet Ank" Sangeet Karyalaya Harlthras.

Sirmaur Satigatha.

Some traditional folk songs were obtained through AIR Shimla broadcasting

Audio Cassettes: Lok Madhuri, Lokranjani

Ludi and Lahola folk songs of Mandi were obtained through interview with Popular folk singer Manju Bhardwaj.

Jhuri, Povada and sirmauri lokgeet were obtained through Interview with Dr Krishan Lal Sehgal.

Chauhan, Shiv Singh." Katran se parivartit hoti nari" Dev Bharti Prakashan.

Chauhan, Shiv Singh." Mamta ke Mandar