

ROLE OF MUSIC/SONGS IN PRESERVING CULTURE AND CREATING SPACE: A STUDY OF SELECT FESTIVITY SONGS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract

Music and song are part of almost every festival. Music enriches our life with love and entertainment. One can feel the intensity of love by hearing a few melodious songs. In some songs, satire and comedy are significant features developing oral folk literature. The Western Himalaya is rich in its folk songs. Although folk songs provide entertainment to the masses, yet these are the reflection of the social standard, its originality and usefulness. Songs during festivities are inevitable part of the oral folk literature. These are manifestation of inner voices of suppressed class which have not been given outlet on account of dominant class. The present paper explores how traditional norms are censured or curbed through festivity songs. It also aims at exploring the sociological meaning of these songs. The paper also focuses on how the power shifts from lower to higher and powerful to weaker sections in certain occasions. A difference is perceptible in songs sung by woman during these ceremonies. The paper chiefly deals with leading themes like Culture, Patriarchy, Women, Power, Humour, and Subalternity bringing forth a psyche which has been undersurface owing to many hidden reasons. The present paper intends to focus on certain rural areas of Himachal Pradesh for its traditional songs and their significance in contemporary times. Altogether, such narratives related to comical and satirical situations, interspersed with various types of persona, are living testimony to Western Himalayan culture which deserves our attention.

In the present era of tension, depression, trial and tribulations everyone wants to lead a happy and healthy life. It is music and songs through which we can make ourselves happy. Music and song are part of almost every festival. Music enriches our life with love and entertainment. One can feel the intensity of love by hearing a few melodious songs. Even Shakespeare has said that music is the food of love. In his work *Twelfth Night*, Duke, one of characters in the play says “give me some music” (qtd in Paul 432). It is songs that can alter our minds into broader and positive side of things. So the role of songs has become more important in the development of human being.

Coming to Folk culture, it refers to the unifying expressive components of everyday life as enacted by localized, tradition-bound groups; whereas

folk literature refers to myths, legends, epics, fables, and folktales passed down orally by word of mouth through the generations. Most of the times, the authors of folk literature are usually anonymous. They endured because they are entertaining, embody the cultural belief system, and they contain fundamental human truths by which people have lived for centuries. Being aware of the stories, songs, characters and situations of folk literature is part of being culturally literate.

Over a period of time oral literatures have been recorded and transcribed by various scholars in the field. Ever since the register of folk literatures has been greatly enriched by a variety of proverbs, idioms and phrases of folk manners and life. Whether an exploration of this linguistic dimension should be included as a part of folklore remains a debatable question. There are scholars who favour the linguistic side of folk literature and in doing so dichotomize folklore lexicon and folk literature; whereas others contend that such literatures are on the borderline of lexicon and folklore and must be a part of the language. Proverbs are an integral part of language but then as Bacon puts it, in them we discover “genius wit and spirit of a nation” (qtd. in Bande 141). Sapir too, regards them as a “culture preserving instrument” (qtd. in Bande 141). In the similar vein Mikhail Bakhtin the famous Russian linguistic thinker views language as “language of the marketplace, which is swarmed with all kinds of profanities, oaths, and curses — retains its positive, regenerating pole: the passing from excessive praise to excessive invective is characteristic, and the change from the one to the other is perfectly legitimate. Praise and abuse are, so to speak, the two sides of the same coin” (Bakhtin, *Literary Theory and Anthology* 690). The consideration of proverbs and riddles in relation to ecology [society] raises a question of relationship between culture and festivities on the one hand and culture and language on the other” (Bande 141). Similarly one finds folk theatre which “is rural, community based, improvised, exuberant, wanton, flexible, inclusive, and of course ‘theatrical’, as opposed to the classical which is elitist, refined, fixed, exclusive and primarily verbal and literary”(Singh 14). She further says that folk theatre dealing with mythological tales provides dramatic situations of conflict, moral dilemmas and melodramatic scenes of violent happenings. And while handling mythological themes in folk theatre, one can find connective elements of contemporary life, social issues, and wit and humour with topical jokes.

These forms readily include individual innovations and adapt themselves to the changing sociohistorical milieu (Singh 14).

The above discussion has been made to provide a backdrop to understand the specific debate within which this paper locates itself and to create a dialogue between the language and the content of folk songs. Of all forms of folklore, folk songs are the most popular, easily accessible and entertaining. They do not require any listener as a folk-tale requires nor do they need any audience as a folk theatre does. A singer may sing in the fields, among the forests, on the mountain tops and in the deep village all alone to his own joy and amusement. If any one hears or listens a singer he might get appreciation, but if none hears him he takes pleasure in what he sings. Folk songs are sung by the people in the village without any rhyme or reason. These “folk songs reflect their happiness, misery, problems and worries” (Sareen 271).

Not only the form but the content of a folk song enhances the inherent dynamic character of a song. The folk songs are most enjoyed forms of folklore because they may have a rhyme or a musical tone which makes them easily conceivable, memorable and more stable. In the words of Upadhyaya “folk songs are like the fragrant flowers from the gardens of human heart plucked with deep devotion”(15).

Himachal Pradesh has a rich reservoir of folk songs. They are the earliest and truest expression of hill-life and are of tremendous interest during various public festivities. They give a glimpse of State’s history, religion and culture of its people. Usha Bande observes that “behind the creation of the folk music, songs and dance there is a potent psychological factor: the human need to assert and preserve identity” (137).

Different folk songs are sung on different occasions in different places of Himachal Pradesh. Ritual songs are the preservers of our culture. These folk songs are sung during the performance of various rituals. For instance, birth of a boy is an occasion of merry-making where women-folk of the neighbourhood gather to sing *Mangal* songs. “They cover the entire life span of the hill people from womb to tomb” (Thakur 205). There are festival songs too which are held throughout the year and no festival is complete unless it is accompanied by songs for those occasions. For example, *Chatter*, the first month of the year is celebrated with harmonious songs in praise of Gods. Festivals like *Lohri* and *Maghi* are the occasions in which many specific songs are sung by the people of a

village. Another form of folk songs is heroic songs. These songs are sung in the honour of heroic deeds performed by the soldiers. These songs are also in the form of letters which reflect the state of mind and restlessness of the wives of the soldiers. Likewise, there are devotional and divine songs which are sung in praise of Gods and Goddesses like *Rama*, *Krishna*, *Jwalamukhi Ma* and *Bhagvati Ma* etc. In hills, the songs of *Devi Ma* are very popular. Likewise, patriotic songs are sung in honour of the State e.g. '*Lage dhola ra dhamaka, himachal bara banka*'. One also has a rich tradition of love songs in the State which include *Kunju-Chanchlo*, *Ranjha-Phulmo* and *Suni-Bhunku* signifying faithfulness, pure love between husband and wife. All these songs bring forth a new musical environment to human being.

Having very briefly explored the significance of folk culture /literature/ songs one may briefly touch upon Bakhtin's understanding of the carnivalesque in the context of folk culture. Since the present paper intends to make a close reading of the songs sung by women during festivity like marriage, it is imperative to briefly conceptualize Bakhtinian framework surrounding the importance of laughter during the performance of such songs by women. Bakhtin believes that such festivities are occasion where authority is subverted and temporarily dissolved. In his book *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes*, Roberto da Matta studies the reversal of hierarchical norms, both social and philosophical, that characterizes Brazilian Carnival. He writes, "At Carnival everything is 'sung.' Song, indeed, is the form of participation that is possible and legitimate. Through singing songs, everybody becomes equal and understands each other" (110).

Marriage is one of festivities in which songs play a pivotal role. Marriages in Himachal Pradesh like in other states of India are settled by parents. There are many ceremonies performed during the marriage on both sides, but largely the financial/ceremonial burden is borne by the bride's father. The bride's parents/relatives have to perform more ceremonies during marriage. Since the present paper explores the songs sung at a marriage festivity, it may be noted these songs are sung mainly by a group of women who belong to bridegroom and bride. There are many songs which are sung only for the sake of entertainment. For example, the songs called *Suhags* like *Kajjo aaye sunehri pagg bann ke, asaan beiti nahaio bhejhni. Asaan aaye chaaron bhai leike, chaaron saajan leike doli paake*

leiyе jaanna etc. Such songs are essential part of marriage ceremonies but do not essentially contain any satiric or comic elements. Suhags are generally witty and can be meditative and can enhance the solemn ambience of marriage festivities. However, the present paper focuses on the festivity songs like marriage songs. These marriage songs include *Sithniyan* (*gaaliyan* or abuses/satires) sung mainly by women belonging to the bride as well as bridegroom. Various songs sung during marriage festivities are specific to certain ceremonies like *Neundra* (invitation), *Battna* (Haldi), *Saand* (oil ceremony), *Jalpuja* (water ceremony), *Milhi* (welcome/greeting), *Vadhu Pravesh* (welcoming bride in groom's house) etc. Herein the focus of the present paper is the marriage folk songs specifically sung in Hamirpur district of Himachal Pradesh. The representative songs contain elements of satire/*gaaliyan*/abuses sung by a group of women in both households. A few such songs have been personally recorded and transcribed by the present researchers from women who belong to rural areas of Hamirpur district. These songs have been analyzed with the help of Bakhtin's idea of carnival developed by him in his famous book *Rabelais and His World* as discussed in previous paragraph. The following section of the paper undertakes a close reading of *Sithniyan* (teasing songs/abusing songs) which are mainly directed towards menfolk/ bridegroom/bride sung by women/girls of both households. These songs are sung during specific marriage ceremonies in a light-hearted way for entertainment.

The first ceremony in the category of *Sithniyan* is called *Saand* (oil ceremony) which is performed by the relatives on both sides. *Saand* performed in bridegroom's house is of special interest in which women make satirical comments on bridegroom's father, brothers, friends, maternal uncles etc. Women-folk sing satirical songs such as:

Larre da Peio tel pawaan laggeya
 Hath kamne lagge, nakk churme laggeya
 Jalya paisaya o Joru te choriya rakhaya tha
 Larre da Bhai tel pawaan laggeya
 Hath kamne lagge, nakk churme laggeya
 Jalya paisaya o Joru te choriya rakhya tha

Roughly translated the song is read as:

“Father of bridegroom is pouring oil

His hands are shaky and his nose is blowing,
 What worth is such money which he has kept secretly from his wife?
 Brother of bridegroom is pouring oil
 His hands are shaky and his nose is blowing,
 What worth is such money which he has kept secretly from his wife?"

These lines are illustrative of a satire on the relatives of bridegroom. The song is sung when oil ceremony is underway in bridegroom's house and women-folk mock at the father/friend/maternal uncle of the bridegroom for being misers and for hiding their money which has to be otherwise offered to a *Pandit* as a reward for performing the ceremony. The song is a good example of the freedom enjoyed by women to speak freely against their male-counterparts without any fear of retribution. During such ceremonies women get a license because "customs grants the right to certain freedom and familiarity, the right to break the usual norms of social relations" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1965) 200-201).

Yet another song:

Larre da Baba baitha sandariya taa Anma charh gai gaadariya
 Baba bolda suit dingha, boot dingha, dhoop dingha, bati dingha
 uterija Parmesariye

Larre da Mama baitha sandariya taa Maami charh gai gaadariya
 Mama bolda suit dingha, boot dingha, dhoop dingha, bati dingha
 uterija Parmesariye.

Larre da Jija baitha sandariya taa Bheina charh gai gaadariya
 Jija bolda suit dingha, boot dingha, dhoop dingha, bati dingha uterija
 Parmesariye.

Roughly translated the song reads:

"Father of Bridegroom attends oil ceremony and his mother
 climbs on his father's back.

The father lures her with new suit, shoes, incense etc. and
 requests his Goddess to climb down.

Maternal uncle attends oil ceremony and his wife climbs on his
 back.

Maternal uncle lures her with new suit, shoes, incense etc. and
 requests his Goddess to climb down

Brother-in-law of Bridegroom attends oil ceremony and his sister
 climbs on his back.

Brother-in-law lures her with new suit, shoes, incense etc. and requests his Goddess to climb down.”

Here is a song on the occasion of Mixture of turmeric ceremony (*Battna*): This song illustrates how women get a chance to tease the bridegroom. Herein the women jovially fight to assert their right over the bridegroom. This occasion is an example of light hearted marry-making during marriage festivities.

Saila battna peela battna, ji battna mai
malhna ji o (2)

Battne di beila hoyi ki maiye ne paaya
jhagrra waye wa, ki battna mai malhna ji o
Battne di beila hoyi ki bhaina ne paaya
jhagrra waye wa, ki battna mai malhna ji o.

Roughly translated the song reads:

“Green turmeric mix, Yellow turmeric mix
I want to apply this mixture
At the time of applying the mixture, the
mother of bridegroom starts a quarrel that it
is I who should first apply this mixture
At the time of applying the mixture, the
sister of bridegroom starts a quarrel that it
is I who should first apply this mixture.”

Similarly the song:

Gahane kayun nahin lande o muhnsukarya dandjikarya-2
Chalya tha mai sahra jo par Ame ne rokeya tha
Anma bari khraab o darandi thi mai darda tha
Chuni kayun ni landi o muhsukarya dantjikarya-2
Chalya tha mai sahra jo par Bhabo ne rokeya
Bhabi bari kharaab o darandi mai darda tha
Jute kayun nahin lande o muhnsukarya dantjikarya-2
Chalya tha mai sahra jo par Bhaein ne rokeya tha
Bhaein bari kharab o darandi thi mai darda tha.

Roughly translated the song reads:

“Why didn’t you bring jewellery? O! hollow- cheeked and thin fellow-2
I was to go to the city but was stopped by my mother. My mother is not
good, she used to scare me and I use to get scared.

Why didn’t you bring *duppatta*? O! hollow- cheeked and thin fellow-2

I was to go to the city but was stopped by my sister-in-law. My sister-in-law is not good. she used to scare me and I use to get scared.
 Why didn't bring shoes? O! hollow- checked and thin fellow-2
 I was to go to the city but was stopped by sister. My sister is not good she used to scare me and I use to get scared.”

The women-folk of the bride's house are seen singing a song on behalf of the bride. In this song they penalize the groom for not bringing marriage accessories like jewelry, *duppatta* and shoes. The women also give a lame reply on behalf of the bridegroom who cuts a sorry face saying 'he was going to buy all these accessories from the city but was prevented to so by his mother, sister, and sister-in-law since he feels scared of them'. It is also relevant to know that women folk poke fun at the groom for being a miser (which is also evident in his hollow-cheeked face and squeezed jaw). They not only are seen making fun of the bridegroom but also mock at his relatives. It is an example of how women-folk of bride's household are empowered briefly to challenge hierarchy of male authority as well as the superiority which the family of bridegroom enjoys in society. During the performances of these songs, the women “temporarily suspend all hierarchical distinctions and barriers...and of the prohibitions of usual life” (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 15). It is a space that gives women freedom to give vent to their suppressed voice.

Similarly the following song brings out the famous *Jija-Sali* relationship. Wherein girls (friends and sisters of the bride) get a chance to mock at the bridegroom.

Do do paise dendhiyan
 Do do paise dendhiyan
 Bhedon charo mere Jija, mai teri Sali hundhiyan
 Hathe rasi dendhiyan, nalle draati dendhiyan
 Ghah bado mere Jija, mai teri Sali hundhiyan

Roughly translated the song reads:

“We will give you two paise-2
 Take my sheep for grazing, I am your sister-in-law.
 I will give you a rope and a sickle.
 Cut grass my brother-in-law, I am your sister-in-law”

During the marriage, other ceremonial songs are also sung when the *baraat* (bridegroom's marriage procession) comes to take food at the

bride's place. While the members of *baraat* are taking their food, the women-folk of bride's house sing some songs which specifically mock at the voracious appetite of the bridegroom and his relatives. For instance:

Larra satta dina da bhukha, grahiyan khoob marda
 Jida Amma ne tor dita bhukha, grahaiyan khoob marda
 Aadhi ni khanda, puri ni khanda thaliyan jo marda muchan
 Grahiyan khoob marda
 Lajorru satta dina da bhukha grahiyan khoob marda
 Jida Jorru ne tor dita bhukha, grahiyan khoob marda

Roughly translated:

“Bridegroom is hungry since seven days, and he is stuffing himself with food
 As if his mother sent him hungry, he is stuffing himself with food
 Not half, not full but he is hogging the full plate
 He is stuffing himself with food
 Friend of bridegroom is also hungry since seven days; he is stuffing himself with food
 As if his wife sent him hungry, and he is stuffing himself with food”
 Or yet another song sung on a similar occasion:

Mirchan charperiya chaneya di daal karaari-2
 Larra khai kari hor mangda, botiye karchhi maari
 Labada te khoon aa gaya, mukadma ho gaya jaari.
 Mircha charpariyan chaneya di daal karaari-2
 Larre da babu khai kari hor mangada, botiye karchhi maari.
 Mirchan charpariya chaneya di daal karaari-2
 Larre da Jija khai kari hor mangada, botiye botiye karchhi maari
 Mirchan charpariya chaneya di daal karaari-2

Roughly translated:

“Daal of gram is full of chilies.
 After having the daal, the bridegroom asks for more, cooks hit him with the serving spoon
 His lips start to bleed and a court case ensues
 Daal of gram is full of chilies
 Father of bridegroom asks for more,cooks hit him with the serving spoon
 Brother-in-law of bridegroom asks for more, cooks hit him with the serving spoon.

Daal of gram is full of chilies”

These are occasions which give women a chance to rebuke and subvert the male authority. In Bakhtinian sense these women play a role of carnival clowns who have “the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 163). The above songs not only indulge in rebuking but also make telling comments on the cultural life of people in the region. It also apprises the reader of the culinary culture of the region. Reference to lentils like yellow gram daal cooked for the occasion or *botis* (cooks) are suggestive of *Dham* culture – a specialized way of cooking peculiar to Himalayan region.

Or there is yet another song which plays around the idea of serving water to the bridegroom and his friends admonishing them to eat slowly and not like greedy epicureans:

Larreya halkeya bujeya maar, pani kaun pilayega
 Teri Anma hai door, pani kaun pilayega
 Lajorru halkeya bujeya maar, pani kaun pilayega
 Teri Jorru hai door, pani kaun pilayega

Roughly translated:

“O bridegroom! eat slowly, who will give you water
 Your mother is far away, who will give you water
 O friend of bridegroom! eat slowly, who will give you water
 Your wife is far away, who will give you water”

Women play a central role during marriage. They occupy centrestage and the rest are made to act like mute spectators or at the receiving end of their rebukes. These songs sung for each occasion of a marriage have aesthetic significance too. These songs have a rhythm and tone to sustain listener’s interest.

Here is a suitable example of a philosophic/ meaningful song which not only expresses the sadness of parting with their daughter but also comments on the patriarchal system which does not allow the girl any say in the property of her parents:

Charke da tand maaye charkha ch raheya, dudh raheya
 kadhaye mai chaliye jaana
 Ann bi dinghe dhiye, dhan bi dinge, hor dinge jagiraan
 ,dhiye nahiyon jaana
 Ann taa dhan teriyan nuuhan lenne, putran ne leniyan

jagiran , mai chaliyan jaana

Roughly translated:

“O! My mother, the thread remains in the *charkha* and
leftover milk is in vessel, I am to go to my in-law’s house
We will give you bread, money and even share in property,
O! My daughter don’t go.

My mother! Bread and money will be taken by your
daughter-in-law and property will be had by your son. So I must leave”
When the bride reaches bridegroom’s house a welcome song is sung by
women-folk of bridegroom’s village in a ironic sense:

Lari tu aai teri Amma nehin aai aj di garhi-2
Usa chaliya aana tha, sanjha jamiyon kuri
Usa chaliya aana tha, asi dende dawai di puri
Dede dwai di puri nale chhai ki chuli

Lari tu aai par terei Bhabi kyun nahin aai ve aj di ghari

Roughly translated:

“Bride! You have come but why has your mother not
accompanied you today

She would have come had she not given birth to a daughter
She would have come we would have given her medicine
We would have given her medicine with buttermilk

Bride! You have come but why has your sister-in-law not come”

A song sung in favour of bride:

Kothe heth basera, hun sassu fikra pei gaiya mera
Tai khai laiya bathera duaye laiya bathera, hun ghar-baar hoyi
gaya mera

Kothe heth basera, hun sassu firka pei gaiya mera,
Jethaniye tai khai laiya bathera, duaye laiya bathera, hun gharbaar
hoyi gaya mera

Roughly translated:

“Now this is my house and my mother-in-law is worried
You have eaten enough and have led a luxurious life so far, now
this house is mine

Now this is my house and my mother-in-law is worried
Sister-in-law you have eaten enough and have led a luxurious life so
far, now this house is mine”

The above few songs show how women suppress women. When the bride reaches at the bridegroom's house, she is not treated well by her mother-in-law. It is because she is for the moment at the margins of power and is still an outsider in the family. On the other side, after sometime the newly wed bride becomes a legitimate member of the family and has a legitimate right on whatever belongs to bridegroom. Her right to property of bridegroom shows the position of the bride in the family where she is married. This reversal of position of women is reflected through these above songs. Now the newly wed bride may or may not hold a position of power in the new household.

To sum up, folk songs are a significant part of our cultural heritage. A closer look has brought to notice the diverse cultural meanings these songs carry. In the present paper firstly we demonstrate that oral literatures go beyond the entertainment realm alone. Folk songs sung in rural India during certain festivities have enriched our cultural awareness. Such songs, folk theatre and other oral literature are helpful in mapping cultural development of human being. Beside cultural significance, these songs have aesthetic value too. Secondly, this paper touches on the concept of 'carnival' by Mikhail Bakhtin. It has been called to reference to demonstrate how the position of women who sing marriage songs during weddings may be looked at through the prism of Bakhtin's carnival-how marriages festivities create a temporary carnivalesque space to rebuke male authority/position. Thirdly, the present paper demonstrates that oral literatures do not only entertain, but create a space in which rural women can engage in challenging social relations and patriarchal discourse. Ashwani Rana says that "These songs amply demonstrate that women feel briefly empowered to subvert patriarchal oppression"(Rana 1151). These songs depict how social and gendered power relation through 'ambivalent laughter' and rebuke during marriage festivities. This section also explores diverse ways in which power relations are played out in the familial space and the different ways in which women diffuse or negate these relations. The reading of the songs does not only concern itself with the marginal position occupied by wife/mother/daughter-in-law in the familial space, but also examines ways in which the position of mother/wife/daughter-in-law fluctuates from the margins to the centre of power. The closer analysis of songs shows that these women are not powerless all the time. These songs reflect succor

and helpful in releasing tension of people from the clutches of mundane life. Some of these songs are indicative of humorous in nature which keeps us in a state of fine fettle during stressful life. Although with the rise of globalization and technology the tradition of these songs is fading. These songs are being gradually replaced with the use of recorded popular film music which is now played during village marriages. Village folk songs may be collected and transcribed by scholars in future to understand how such songs have been providing a carnivalesque space for women keeping them empowered since decades to bring down male hegemony to some extent. At last but not least, these songs reflect fun, teasing, subversion, rhythm, tone, love, power and powerless, humour, satirical elements and women's voice bringing forth aesthetic and psychological development in human characters are challenged in the carnivalesque space and are challenged

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