

## Selected Haryanavi Folksongs of Women: A Critical Analysis

**Dr. Rajiv Kumar**

Assistant Professor of English

C.R.A. College, Sonipat

“Folk songs are not made at all, they grow.”

- Theodore Storm

### **Abstract:**

This paper is an attempt to analyse the folksongs of women of Haryana that deal with women's common wishes, unexpected emotions, unfulfilled desires, hopes, disappointments and their reaction to their social environment. The paper highlights the crucial safety-valve function of these songs in which women are allowed to express their bottled up feelings and their longings in a socially acceptable form. Some of the folksongs show that women challenge the established norms and codes of conduct whenever they get an opportunity, and suitable medium of expression. The folksongs of Haryana are universal in their content. They also reflect the socio-cultural life of the folk. The folksongs may not be a reliable account of the incidents and actual happenings, but they reveal the attitude of people towards those happenings. It helps us to understand women's perspectives and the society of Haryana. The rhythmic folksongs of these cuckoos of villages mainly concern weddings, deities, seasons and festivals along with the songs of amusement and entertainment.

**Keywords:** Folksongs, women, reaction, opportunity, feelings, socio-cultural

Folksongs are the result of spontaneous overflow of the feelings and emotions of common people and emerge out effortlessly as the leaves of a tree. The authorship of these songs is not certain. They may have been sung by a ploughman, a fisherman, a herder (*paali*), a woman going towards her house carrying a water-filled pitcher on her head (fetching water from a well), or a damsel picking flowers and fruits in an orchid. So, it is not a tradition to mention the name of the composer of a folksong. It makes clear that the folksongs are not fixed texts composed by a particular person. The singers are free to change them according to their mood and the occasion of singing. Since the folksongs are passed orally from one generation to the next, it is not

possible to determine the exact words and the place of composition. The content of these songs is simple. The form again is simple; the imagery is clear and objective; there is a close connection with nature in these songs; they can be memorized and sung without the slightest difficulty. In brief, a folksong is a song with universal appeal, expressed in a simple language and objective imagery. It is also true that some folksongs could not attract the people for long and thus vanished with time. But some songs caught the fancy of the people and passed the test of time and survived. Many of the songs have been edited and improved with the emergence of new technologies and maybe called folksong plus art song. Whatever the case may be, but we all agree that the folksongs genuinely reflect the social and cultural milieu of the contemporary society. They are “folk poetry which, from whatever source and for whatever reason, has passed into the possession of the folk, the common people, so completely that each singer or recite feels the piece to be his own.”(Meier: 3)

The folksongs of Harayanavi women chiefly describe the household environment and the domestic rituals, festivals and ceremonies. No ceremony, celebration, or a ritual in Haryana is complete without women's songs. Nevertheless, there are also songs that instead of focusing on the domestic rituals, deal with women's common wishes, their unexpressed emotions, unfulfilled desires, hopes and disappointments, and their reactions to their social environments. They are also sung while women do such household chores as milling grain, churning curd, or working in the fields. Folksongs are precious ethnological material as they open windows on traits of individual personality and the value-system of a society to the outside world other than their own. This is what folk song is to a folk community. Folksongs are also a source of sociological data. Highlighting their sociological value, sociologist Indra Deva asserts that scholars should not treat folksongs as simple documents, nor should they take them at ‘face value’ as they are not ‘scientific monographs.’ (1989) He further argues that folksongs are not a reliable account of actual happenings, but they reflect the attitude of people towards those happenings. In other words, folksongs represent people’s perception about incidents, situations and relationships.

As mentioned above, the women’s folksongs help us to understand their feelings and the social milieu of the place to which they belong. Keeping in view these two aspects, the folksongs of Haryana can broadly be classified as under:

1. Songs related to a wedding
2. Songs about gender discrimination
3. Songs about nature (seasonal and festive songs)
4. Songs connected with chores (Sram Geet)
5. Songs for religious teachings and messages

### *Songs related to a wedding:*

The wedding songs in general are called *vivah ke geet*. There are two types of wedding songs: those that are sung at the bride's house, and those that are sung at the bridegroom's house. The former are called *kanya paksh ke geet*, the latter, *var paksh ke geet*. The songs of bride's side describe a girl's birth, childhood, adolescence as well as her mother's feelings towards her. The songs of bridegroom's side describe the groom, his would-be bride, his relatives and the wedding rituals performed at his house.

Many rituals are performed both in the cities and villages of Haryana before the actual day of marriage. The rituals and ceremonies are not as elaborate in the towns of Haryana as in villages, but the tradition of women's singing is an integral part of rituals and ceremonies at both the places. A women's get-together is organized on all important social occasions, and the women from the neighbourhood as well as family and friends get-together, sing, dance and create an atmosphere of bonhomie. Such a collecting is called *bulawa* in Hindi. The word *bulawa* means a call or an invitation. Traditionally in villages, a barber's wife (*naun*) is assigned the task of conveying the message to the women of the neighbourhood. Nowadays, except in villages, it is usually done using printed invitation cards and WhatsApp messages. The event is called a 'ladies sangeet' connected with a particular social event. The *bulawa* is generally arranged for an afternoon so that the women can come easily without upsetting their usual household work. Young children and babies accompany their mothers, and the atmosphere is very informal. Since the invitation for this get-together is not for strict formal ceremony, women are free to sing the songs of their choice after the short ceremony of *bann*. The women generally start with the singing of a few *bhajans* and then move to the songs of marital relations and then to the songs of complaints. These songs of free choice are called *jakadi*.

One of the pre-wedding rituals is *Sagai*, or the Ring Ceremony. This specific ritual is performed when bridegroom's family and close relatives visit the bride's family to give final approval to the marriage. The men and women of the neighbourhood take part in this ceremony. A beautiful scene is created by the close interaction between the two sides. The bridegroom may or may not accompany the family members at this occasion. The women give a rhythmic and religious touch to this ritual by gathering around and singing folksongs. The subject of the first song is mostly religious and tells about the local saints and deities (not gods). There is a song sung to the saint Baba Haridas who is believed to be a pious and pure sage. People unanimously agree that he performed many miracles during his lifetime for the betterment of society and after attaining the purpose of his life, he sat on a pyre of wood and thus renounced the world for forever. The two lines of the song related to Haridas give an idea about respect and devotion for him:

*Paanch patase, pana ka badle, le Haridas pe jaio ji,*

*Jiss daali mhare Haridas baithe uss daali nye jai ji...*

The song tells the listeners that those who want to pay their homage to this saint should go along with five *patase* (a white sweet made of sugar). In the second line, the saint is presented in the form of bird sitting on the branch of a tree. The devotees are supposed to bow down in the direction of that tree to pay respect to the saint.

Another important pre-wedding ritual is *bann*. The ceremony of *bann* is observed five days before the wedding. The first day of *bann* is about the ritual of *tael chadhana*. The married women of the family take part in this ceremony one by one. A small bundle of grass is used at this occasion to perform the ritual. The grass is dipped in the paste, specially prepared for this occasion, and then the feet of the bride or bridegroom is touched with it and then the knees and finally the forehead. The women who have gathered for this occasion are seen singing this particular song in:

*Teli hei telan tael, kisya ei tel chadhaiya?*

The song asks a question: 'who is applying oil now, tell me?' The following line of the song answers its own question by mentioning the person applying oil. She may be the bride or bridegroom's grandmother, mother, or aunt, or a married sister, and so on. The same ritual is again performed on the day of the marriage but this time the sequence of touching oil is reversed i.e. from the forehead to the feet. It suggests that the oil that climbed up (*chadhana*) is being brought down (*utarana*).

*Bhat* is also a pre-wedding ritual performed ten days before the marriage. The mother of the bride or bridegroom goes to her paternal house to invite her brother's family to the wedding. On the day of marriage, her brother or brothers arrive along with other family members and are welcomed one by one by the bride or bridegroom's mother. The folksongs of this occasion emphasize the importance of the sister-brother relationship:

*Kadki dekhun batt maa ke jaaye din tei pehlaam aaiye*

It translates as:

'For long I have waited for you, my mother's son, since the break of the day.'

After the ceremony is over, the lunch is served and then they begin to prepare for the wedding.

On the day of marriage, when the bridegroom's procession reaches the bride's village, they receive a ceremonial welcome. Then at the time of *faire* (moving around the sacred fire), the

women sing marriage songs before or at the time of seven rounds. Some of the songs are sung to make fun of the people of bridegroom's side. It creates an atmosphere of fun and frolic and the peals of laughter are heard. The women address the father of bridegroom saying:

*Sun mere mausa suni kyon na,*

*Mausi gahane dhari kyon na.*

Finally comes the occasion of *Vidai*. There are special songs for this parting moment which mainly show how a bride feels at the time of departure from her paternal house.

Thus, the songs of marriage make every ritual memorable, and a clear picture of social structure is presented through the songs. Moreover, feelings and emotions of women get an outlet through these songs. Women get an opportunity to rejoice every moment. They sit together gossiping, joking, singing and dancing. The younger and the older generation of women get connected, and the songs get transferred orally from the older generation to the younger, thus making the songs immortal.

#### ***Songs about gender discrimination:***

The folksongs of Haryana present a heart-rendering picture of gender discrimination. Haryanvi society is a male-dominated society. A woman always looks for the support and protection of a man in her life. She needs the protection of her father, brother and husband at every step. She is not treated as equal to men and is placed in the second position. This discrimination is not only imposed by men but well expected by women as well. This is imbibed in their lives, and they cannot even imagine their life without a son, brother, husband and other dominated male figures in different stages of their life. The folksongs of Haryana throw enough light on the issue of gender discrimination in society. The singing of folksongs itself shows discrimination as they are sung at the birth of a boy but not at the birth of a girl. The songs sung at this occasion are called *jaccha* songs. After birth, a girl faces discrimination wherever she goes or resides. In one song, sister tells her brother that they are born from the same mother's womb, but their luck is altogether different. He gets fresh meal to eat, milk and costly clothes whereas she has to eat stale food and to wear tattered clothes.

The life of barren women presents a horrific picture of gender discrimination. A barren woman is considered to be inauspicious and a harbinger of bad luck and barrenness to other women. She is castigated and disgraced. This kind of inhuman treatment of a childless woman is more prevalent in villages than in cities. She has hardly any say in the household affairs. In the present song, wife is saying to remarry her husband as she is not able to give birth to a son. She says to her husband:

*Bin pani paphiya tarsae dhakhe ho bin bete mata tarsae*

She would have to lose all amenities if he remarries, he warns. But she is ready to lose each and everything in exchange of a son.

The parents of a girl feel unsafe and helpless if their daughter is not happy with in-laws. However, the brothers' strong position does matter, and it again promotes son preference. A Haryanvi girl almost worships her brother. She is proud of him and shows an extravagant hospitality when he visits on festive occasions to her. Traditionally, a sister is sent from her in-laws to her parents' home with her brother only. Frequent visits keep in constant mutual touch between two families. The newly married bride is expected to sacrifice her personal comfort for the pleasure and comfort of in-laws and husband. She is trained for this kind of behaviour by her parents from childhood onwards. The messages of devotion and worship of husband are given to her through folksongs at the time of marriage. In a song, she is addressed as *lado* (beloved) and taught to eat and sleep at the end and clean everything in mother-in-laws house. In another song, parents explain social norms to be followed by her after marriage:

*Badh Peepal katwaye mat na, charti gau hataye mat na,  
beti ulhana layeye mat na,  
Gair bakhat pani jaye mat na, raste me batlaye mat na,  
Ghoonghat khol dikahaye mat na...*

This is how she is taught to perform the role of an ideal wife after marriage. She is supposed to behave strictly according to the social norms set by the male-dominated society of Haryana. Departure from these men made rules in any form is considered immoral and wrong.

Interestingly, some songs reflect the impact of modern influences. They present women as bold and independent in their approach and behaviour. A newly-wed girl makes a demand for fashionable shoes (sandal) to replace the one made by the village cobbler:

Unchi eidi ke sandal laye de, o piya  
Khanakte kangan laye de, o piya

She further warns and threatens her husband to leave him if he fails to comply.

***Songs about nature (seasonal and festive songs):***

There are festivals in India for every season, and for every season there are folksongs in Haryana. The seasonal songs of *Phagun* and *Savan* are replete with the feelings of joy expressed

by the simple clad women of Haryana. That is why the folksongs of these two seasons have been included in this paper for analysis. The songs of these seasons usually describe the dark clouds, the drizzle of the rain, the lightning, and the croaking of frogs. The rainy season is one of the favourite seasons of Hindu women and is held to evoke many romantic as well as nostalgic feelings. This period falls between two crops; one is ready, the other is yet to be sown. The fresh shower of rain brings a new life in every living being. The croaks of the frogs, the chirping of the birds, and the calls of the peacocks all of these are described in *savan* songs. The two most celebrated festival *Haryali teej* and *Rakshabandan* are part of this season. During these festivals a married girl is customarily invited by their parents to their homes. Usually, a brother comes to take her to her parental house.

The coming of monsoon in *Savan* arouses romantic and nostalgic feelings, and young married girls desire to return to their parents to celebrate the season. In this song, *bahu* (daughter-in-law) approaches her mother-in-law for permission:

*There comes, O Saasu, the month of Savan,  
Let me go to my father's house,  
O, my bride, who has come?  
With whose permission you'll go?  
O, Sasu, my brother has come.  
With your permission, I'll go.  
To my father's house, o sasau.*

The mother-in-law then explains the reason for not allowing her to go to her parental house. She boldly asks, who will do these jobs in her absence?

*Who will grind the assigned grain?  
O my bride, who will wash my head?  
And who will fry the Kasar?*

The intelligent *bahu* solves the problem very ably:

*Elder Jethi, O Sasar, will grind the assigned grain,  
The female barber, O Sasar, will wash your head,  
The female barber will fry the Kasar.*

The rainy season and the associated melodies have always attracted the poets and singers. With the coming of the rainy season, swings are hung from the branches of *neem*, *mango* or *pipal*



trees, and young girls and married women come together to sing and enjoy. On the day of *Teej*, climax is reached, and the folksongs fill the whole atmosphere with sweet melodies. A song sung on this occasion is here:

*Hey ri aaya teeja ka tyohar,  
Jhulan jangi hey maa meri baag mein,  
Aye re koi sang-saheli chaar.  
Jhulan jangi hey maa meri baag mein,  
Hey ri jahan log kare takrar ekli mai bheejun baag mai,  
Jhulan jangi hey maa meri baagb mai.*

The month of *Savan* makes all young and old to feel elated and romantic and there is a famous line of a folksong generally used to show the feelings of an old lady: *Kaach e ambi gadrayi savan mei, budhi e lugai mastai savan mei.*

***Songs connected with chores (Sram Geet):***

These songs are sung when women mill grain, churn milk or do their usual chores in company of other women. The texts of these songs are mostly long, melancholic and touching. They deal with women's sad experiences in connection with their daily lives as well as their melancholic reflections on the drudgery and gloom in their lives. In one song, the day of a village woman commences with the tiresome job of the *chakki* (grindstone). To lighten the tiresome labour, the woman sings:

*Pihar mai kade kara na kaam, saas meri pishvave sey,  
Chaar ser pakka dhara peesana mere pe pishvave sey.*

But that is not all. After finishing all the jobs at home, the woman has to go to the field, where her husband is busy in tilling the land. It may be the hot season of May and June, and by the time she reaches the field it can be scorching hot.

***Songs for spiritual teachings and messages:***

Indian society is based on the religious beliefs, so folk songs are also based on religion and it continues its tradition on some tracks. Music and *satsang* (singing folk songs in a group) give a soothing effect and refresh our body and mind. There are numerous women folksongs (*bhajan*) in Haryana which discuss and express religious issues and give messages for a better human life. The folksongs (*bhajan*) provide messages of peace and brotherhood. The songs convey that ups and downs are the parts of life. We need not to be elated when we have ups and need not to be depressed when we face downs. The following song highlights the importance of *bhajan* in our life, whether we are young or old:



*Bhje kyon na Ram kyon soyve mahari budiya?*

These folksongs (*bhajan*) of religious importance are sung both in urban and rural areas of Haryana. However, Women's folk songs are not getting that much affiliation in today's society, and interest is gradually decreasing in the younger generation. The new generation is supposed to revive their interest in these songs of eternal importance.

**Conclusion:**

The folksongs of women analyzed in this paper give a variegated picture of the women of Haryana. The songs do not only depict her as a conventional stereotype of a Hindu Woman, but they also portray her as a woman capable of expressing her emotions freely. The songs tell about her longings, wishes, frustrations and the predicaments that accompany different facets of her life. The songs lay bare her status in a male-dominated society. Some describe her as submissive; others depict her as bold daring and rebellious. The wedding songs beautifully capture both the personal and social life of women. The seasonal songs of *Phaglun* and *Savan* express their romantic and nostalgic feelings. Women's bitter experiences find the best expression in the folksongs connected with chores. The folksongs of Haryana are universal in their content, and their present a reliable and authentic picture of the socio-cultural life of the folk.

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