

Narsi Bhagat's Bhaat

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Abstract:

Folk songs are one of the major forms of Folklore and an integral part of our life. These are orally communicated from one generation to another in a society. Most of us have grown up listening to these at different occasions such as festival celebrations, birth and marriage celebrations. The folk songs sung by women are majorly considered as a source of entertainment and bring colour and happiness to occasions. These are associated with fun and frolic. Other than this, the songs are mirror to social and cultural traditions and customs prevalent around us. Also, folk songs present a perspective on social relations and gender disparity.

Key Words: Folk songs; Occasions; Haryanavi folk songs of marriage; Social relevance; Gender disparity.

Folk songs are an integral part of life of a community. A thought of folk songs gives feelings of varied emotions. These songs have origin in popular culture. The origin and the writer of these songs remain unknown. These are communicated orally from generation to generation in a society. Leelawati Bansal, a popular writer of literature on Folk Songs, expressed her views in Haryana ke Lok Nritya-Geet, "India is one of the oldest nations in the world. That is why its culture is also very old. If we want to learn about culture, traditions and customs of a nation, it is essential to know about its folk songs because the entire history of folk songs is associated with culture. Folk songs are one such document which presents a true image of a nation, caste, society and time." (11). Folk songs are crooned even while performing daily activities in villages such as working in fields. We can say that these songs are woven around various activities and phases of life. There are songs dedicated to or about various stages of the journey of life. The songs related to birth, marriage, life at her marital home- all reflect the socio-cultural traditions of people of any region. Broadly speaking, each occasion has a song. On the basis of the subject matter and occasion, these are broadly categorized into bhajans, festival songs, birth songs, marriage songs and miscellaneous songs. This trend is not restricted to any particular area but is found in all regions of India. The same pattern of songs is found in other regions though with language variations such as Bhojpuri and Maithili etc. For example, Durga Bhagwat in his article "Folk Songs of Central India" has described different categories of folk songs of central India such as songs of birth, songs of marriage and so on.

Many writers have given detailed descriptions of folklore in general and folk songs in particular. For example, Durga Bhagwat has given an outline of Indian folklore and folk songs of central India. Shankar Lal Sharma has given detailed description of folk literature including folk songs, in different regions of North India. He has written in detail about all the ceremonies that take place on the occasion of marriage in his book Haryana Pradesh ka Lok Sahitya. There are writers who have written on different categories of Haryanavi folk songs. Kiran Khyaliya has discussed various categories of folk music of Haryana, the historical, social and religious relevance of folk songs in her book Dharohar-Mhari Reet Mhare Geet. Ramphal Chahal has given a detailed compilation of folk songs in his book Pt. Krishan Chand "Naadan' Haryanavi Granthavali. Most of these writings have focused on the classification and description of folk songs. The folk songs reflect the glimpses of gender disparity and patriarchy that goes unnoticed because the focus has been mainly on the aspect of celebration of occasions, welcoming of seasons etc. This article seeks to explore how these songs reflect glimpses of gender disparity. The focus is mainly on Haryanavi folk songs.

The folk songs sung by women have not been given much importance because these are considered just a source of entertainment and happiness. But is that all to it? It won't be an exaggeration to say that these are the oldest proofs of gender disparity prevalent in society without women knowing it. Gender is a socially constructed identity. Right from birth, male and female children are raised differently. A range of evidences show this. For example, boys are dressed differently and given different toys from girls. As they grow up, their areas of work and spaces are defined. Girls are encouraged to be subdued saying that they have to go to in-laws' one day. The gender discrimination is not present in one particular culture but is found social and geographical locations. Judith Butler observed that being female is not natural. It is only through repeated behaviour that it appears natural. Describing social construction of gender differences, Nandita Dutta and Sumitra Jha wrote, "Children learn to categorize themselves by gender very early on in life. Boys learn to manipulate their physical and social environment through physical strength or other skills, while girls learn to present themselves as objects to be viewed." (7). Social practices, traditions, norms and values of a society contribute in the construction of gender identity. It gradually trickles down into our thought process and is internalized. I have taken some folk songs, sung on the occasion of birth and marriage. Apart from adding fun and entertainment to our life, these carry deeper meaning about social and cultural practices in society. These songs are sung by women and the listeners are also women. Therefore, these have a female perspective on social and cultural traditions. There is a subtle expression of gender discrimination.

The folk songs are sung almost on all occasions- festivals, harvesting, birth, marriage, separation, longing, bhajans (songs in the praise of God). Feelings of celebration, fun and entertainment are associated with folk songs. Apart from this, these are the mirrors of social conventions and traditions. A careful study of these songs can easily bring out the social disparity based on gender. The birth of a child is a matter of celebration. On this occasion,

there is a custom of 'chhati poojan'. This takes place on the sixth day after the birth of a child. The family members are invited to sing celebratory songs and 'Bemata' (The Goddess who, it is believed, writes destiny of a new born) is invoked to bless the child with good health and luck. After ten or twenty days, the family of the girl brings gifts for the entire family. All this happens with a great pomp and show on the birth of a boy. This news is announced with the beating of a metal plate and serving spoon even today in remote areas.

Janme hein Ram Ayodhya mein Kaushalya ji ke Dai bhi aawe vaa bhi mange

Holer janayi neg mange raja Dashrath Ji se Janme hein Rams

(Explanation: Kaushalya has given birth to Ram in Ayodhya.

The midwife is asking for reward

Mother-inlaw is asking for a rewards)

In this manner, names of all the family members are taken-mother-in-law, sister-in-law etc. Gifts are showered on all according to the financial capacity of the parental side and the in-laws of a woman on the birth of a boy.

The birth of a girl does not give such happiness. The gender bias is behind the discriminatory celebrations. A girl is considered as 'Paraya Dhan' or other's property. So, she is a burden on the family. Any kind of expenditure incurred on her is a burden. The diet given to a new mother also depends on whether she has borne a boy or a girl. The boy is the inheritor. The difference in the status and well-being of boys and girls that begins from the birth, continue throughout different phases of life. It is reflected in folk songs also.

The folk songs on marriage reveal a lot about social and cultural trends. The folk songs sung on the occasion of the marriage of a daughter are called 'Banni'. The songs sung on the occasion of the marriage of a son are called 'Banna'. The celebrations start some days before the day of wedding. Each day folk songs are sung in the evening by gathering of women relatives and neighbours. Initially, the first song is dedicated to local deities, invoking these, to seek blessings. Then the marriage specific songs are sung. These songs give us a glimpse of life of a girl.

Lado boojhe dada se ho dada

Mein kismis dekhan jayen

rangile aaye rahe bagan mein Aaye rahe, ranglaye rahe bagan mein

Mhari Savitri lado ke nazar lagaye gaye bagan mein.

(Explanation: The song portrays the life of a girl full of joy. Beloved daughter seeks permission from grandfather to visit the bageecha (garden).

Grandfather is wary of sending her there. In this manner she seeks permission from father, uncle, brother. 'Rangile' imply entertainers and entertainment seekers.)

On the other hand, we have folk songs imploring boy to go to school

Banna dhaura re mandarasa, sheesha re ghane

Tere Dada ji nelaa dayi kitab

Chlya re jaiye padhne nei

Dadi dhoop pade, dharati ye tape

Mera gora re badan kumhlaye

Kaise ri jaoon padhne ne

Banna, cycleya doon chdhane nei Chhatri ki kar dyun chhayen chalya re jaiye padhane nein

Explanation: The school is white with glass windows. Your grandfather has bought books for you. Go to study. The groom complaints-it is sunny and the earth is burning; my fair complexion would shrivel; how can I go to study? I would bring cycle to ride; would shade with umbrella; go to study.). In this manner, names of all the male members of the family are taken one after another. They are the providers and the female members are the care givers.

Mhara re hariyala banna, college padhne jaata hai

Maa ko mother, pita ko father, behen ko sister keheta hai

Byahli banadi ko my dear wife keheta hais.

(Explanation: Our beloved groom attends college, calls maa 'mother', Pita 'father' and behen 'sister', calls bride 'my dear wife's).

The folk songs imply that boys get the privilege of education. For this, they are pampered by his family members and facilities like cycle, umbrella for chhayen (shade). But the same is not available for girls. Bannis, on the other hand, sing about prospective life of girl in her marital home and relationship with members of the family there.

Mere pita ne ne zulm kiya

Mein padhelikhe ke byahi hei, hei meri behen

Roti khate khate ne, ek nayi English pharmai hei, hei meri behen

One more one more keh voh, meri samajh naa aayi hei

Mein janoo kite more dikhave mein charon taraph lakhai hei Hei meri behens.

Okay, Tata ka kade patyanaabera Nyuen zindagi khoi he behens

(Explanation: My father got me married to an educated person. While eating chapati, he spoke in English and said 'one more, one more'. I did not understand. I looked around thinking he was showing peacock. I never knew about 'Okay, Tata'. I have wasted life just like that. She feels that she has wasted her life.)

बना हो थारी हेली (हवेली) में चांसथ

Bana ho mein toh chadhathi utarti haari pedi

Bana ho thari dadiladokadi batayi

Bana ho mein toh un se bhi chadhathi aayi

Bana ho jis din se hui thi sagai

Bana ho mein toh un se bhi chadhathi aayis

(Explanation: There are 64 steps in your haveli; I am tired of climbing up and down; Your grandmother is said to be quarrelsome; I am more quarrelsome than her; I was learning to fight from the day of engagements). The life of boys and girls are different. Boys get preferential treatment because of gender. The songs imply that a girl doesn't receive education and her life revolves around household chores only. Similarly, there are songs where girl complains about uneducated husband. For example,

Jethh mera dus pdh rya se he

He mera devar B.A. pass

Ootni kaa unpadh reh gaya he

He jaye roe ne rop diya chalas

(Explanation: My elder brother-in-law has passed tenth standard. My younger brother-in-law is a graduate. My husband is illiterate.)

In this manner, she compares her husband with his older and younger brother's looks, salary and life styles in the song. While describing about the above-mentioned song Om Prakash Kadyan and Suman Kadyan write, "Husband of an educated woman is illiterate. Other members of the family are literate. She regrets that her husband is illiterate." (23). But it is not clear from the words in the song. A woman is supposed to be dependent on the male members of her family-father, brother, husband and others. She regrets her lot as wife of an illiterate as he can't take proper care of her. Though the song is sung in lighter vein, in the spirit of making fun of bridegroom, we cannot miss the streak of gender disparity.

After a marriage is fixed, the ceremony of 'Bhaat' is performed. It is a formal invitation extended to the maternal side of both bridegroom and bride. Women go to their parental home, with their sisters-in-law to formally invite their families. They are given warm welcome. Folk songs are sung at this occasion. On the day of wedding, brothers come with lots of gifts for the entire family. The status of a woman in her marital home is affected by what and how much she gets from her parental home. The folk songs for this occasion also reveal the same.

It is noteworthy that on festivals, brothers bring gifts to married sisters. In the patriarchal society, the property is inherited by male members. Though there is a provision of equal division of property among all siblings, girls do not claim their share for fear of social boycott. Girls are dissuaded from taking their share of property. Giving gifts on festivals is considered a way of taking care of them. It implies that they are dependent on their families all through their lives and need to be taken care of. The decisions making power lies with men only.

Bhaat is a very important and prestigious ceremony. It is an indicator of one's socio-economic status. They are received formally at the entrance of the house of their daughter, along with celebratory songs.

Galiyara buhaar aayi ri, ke bhaati ayenge Merachoonda marakkeri, ke chundadilyavenge
Mera moddha marake ri, ke kurtalyavenges

(Explanation: The street has been cleaned, bhaati are coming. My choonda is twitching, they will bring dupatta. My shoulder is twitching, they will bring kurta and so on). 'choonda' is a hairstyle wherein hairs are twisted in elongated bun and put on top of head.

There are songs to show that her brothers have brought more gifts than that of her sister-in-law despite being the only one.

Meri jethani ke paanch bhai,
mere meri maa ka jaya ek se
Voh toh paanch aaye pachaaslaye,
mangi tohlaye bebe choondadi
Voh toh ek aayalakhlaya,
hari e zari kilaya choondadi
Voh toh bhaat bhar ke chaalnlage,
ulti toh dede bebe choondadi
Voh toh bhaat bhar ke chaalnlage,

odh dikha de bebe choondadi.

(Explanation: My sister-in-law has five brothers. They brought only fifty, borrowed dupatta. My brother is only one, he brought lakhs, green zari dupatta. They asked for dupatta while going back. My brother asked me to wear dupatta.)

The love for bhaati is shown in the song

Mat barso Indar Raj, meri maa ka jaya bheeje Meri maa ka jaya bheeje, mera god bhateeja bheeje

Mat barso Indar Rajs.

(Explanation: Indra Raj, don't shower rain, my real brother is getting drenched. My nephew is getting drenched.). Indra Raj is the God of rain.

There are songs showing sister-in-law's difference on account of expenditure. At the time of bhaat, it is common to see difference of opinion on how much should be spent on the occasion. Many families experience social pressure to do well in order to show off. On the other hand, there are families who don't want to spend despite having enough money. Sister has no say in these matters. This is also an occasion to show importance to each other.

Meri kanthile jaa, bhar aa behen ke bhaat

Meri hanslile jaa, bhar aa behen ke bhaat

Mein kaise jaoon, aayi naa nyotn mere bhaat

Chana si ne kitna toh karya se gumaan Matar si ne kitna toh karya se guman Unne koe naa jane, hmne toh jaane se Jahan

(Explanation: Take my necklace and give bhaat. How can I go, she did not come to invite me. She has shown a lot of arrogance. No one knows her. People know us. will criticise us.). Words like chana (gram), matar (peas) are used to belittle sister who doesn't come to invite her parental side formally for marriage.

This ceremony is important because it reflects the relationship between the two families- maternal side and marital home of a woman. It also reveals her relationship with her brothers. Women also take pride in showing off all the gifts brought by her family which includes clothes, money and ornaments. All the guests wait eagerly to see the gifts. Special treatment is given to all those who come as 'bhaati'.

On the other hand, a woman without a brother feels sad that who would bring 'Bhaat' at her place. This is because of her status in society. Women are dependent on their families. They do not get any share in property. Though the law has made provisions for women as equal stake holders in property. But they do not claim it under social pressure. Assertion on this account invite strained relations and social boycott. In this context, the ballad of Narsi

bhagat is sung in almost all regions of North-West India. Ramphal Chahal's Pt. Krishan Chand Naadan-Haryanavi Granthavali, Banarsi Ram Sharma and Suresh Jangid Uday's Pt. Jagdish Chandra Vats ki kavya amrit-vrishti se Prakat Gyan Sagar-Saang Sangreh have detailed description of Narsi bhagat and Harnandi kaa bhaat. Shankar Lal Yadav has mentioned about this popular folktale and song in his book Haryana Pradesh ka Loksahitya. The story of Narsi bhagat has been popularized through 'saang' as well as commonly sung folk songs on the occasion of marriage. 'Saang' is a folk-drama. Stories were enacted in the accompaniment of song and music. Stories taken mainly mythological, historical or religious.

It is a combination of song, music and dance. A devotional song was sung in the beginning to seek blessings of the Divine. Kiran Khyaliya has observed, "Pt. Deep Chand and Pt. Lakhmi Chand have popularized this folk-drama in Haryana. Pt. Lakhmi Chand has composed 21-23 Saang among which Nal-Damayanti, Raja Harishchandra's Seth Tara Chandra's Saang were full of the feelings of love, compassion, devotion, bravery. In Haryana, the songs sung in a Saang are called Ragni." (30). She further says, "In a 'Saang' the role of women characters was played by young boys." (31).

Banarsi Das Sharma and Suresh Jangid have mentioned in detail about the life of Narsi as told by Pt. Jagdish Chandra Vats. The story describes how Narsi came to be known as Narsi bhagat. Narsi was a reputed wealthy man of Junagarh. He had a daughter named Harnandi. Whom he married off at a very early age. He was a miser and never spent a penny to help others. Once, his wife asked him to take her to Ganga ji for a holy dip. Poor people and sadhus asked for alms but he did not part with even a single penny. Then, to avoid crowd, Narsi, with his wife went aside to take a dip. Lord Krishna came to him in the garb of a sadhu for alms but Narsi told him to come to his house later. When he reached home, he saw the same sadhu. He pretended to be sick as asked his wife to declare him dead before others. But Lord Krishna advised him to denounce wealth and not to give his life for money. This changed his heart and Narsi became an ardent bhakt (devotee) of Lord Krishna. He gave away all his wealth and devoted his life to sing in praise of Lord Krishna. His only worry was who would give bhaat, to Harnandi because he did not have a son. But at the time of the marriage of Harnandi's child, Lord Krishna came to help his devotee Narsi bhakt and performed the ceremony of Bhaat himself. (p.713-724). The folk songs of bhaat are never considered complete without 'Narsi kaa Bhaat'. Writing about the same story, Shankar Lal Yadav has also observed, "when Harnandi comes to invite him for bhaat, he feels sad because of lack of a son. He realizes his pathetic condition. He remembers the Lord. Lord Krishna himself goes to give bhaat. He gave gifts to the entire village." (169). It was a bhaat to be remembered forever. The songs based on the story give mixed feelings every time these are sung.

Kaun bharega bhaat mere koi maa ka jaya bhai naa

Naa aas kati, huya naas kati,

mnei kaun udhavega cheer
Voh ujjad peehar ho jya se,
bhaiyan bin bhaan nahi hoti
Gyareh karodluta ke mera babul bana bhikhari.

(Explanation: Who would bring bhaat for me?)

I don't have a brother. Who would bring dupatta for me? The home is deserted where sister doesn't have a brother. My father has become beggar after giving away millions.)

Harnandi's mother-in-law tells her to invite her father. She tells her to do her duty to formally invite him. But Harnandi's sisters-in-law asks her sarcastically

Durani, Jethani ho babul boli maaren Ke Narsi pathharlyavego Ram

Saasu, nandi boli maaren, ke Narsi teel peherave ho Ram.

(Explanation: Harnandi's sisters-in-law mock at her saying that would Narsi bring stones? Her mother-in-law mocks that would Narsi give clothes for them?).

Her mother-in-law advises her to fulfill her customary duty of inviting

Bheli kasarleke Harnandi chali

Holi Sirsagarh ki raahi ho Ram

Boojhe sein usne haali paali

Narsi bhagat kit paven ho Ram Kaka tau ke chali he jaiye,

Narsi bhagat asthal mein pave ho Ram

Kun kiske kaka tau,

Narsi ke mein jani ho Rams.

She goes to invite her father formally as has been advised by her mother-in-law. Harnandi carries the articles according to the custom- bheli (A big lump of jaggery, usually of a little more than five kgs., kasar (roasted wheat flour eaten with boora (crushed sugar) and ghee. She asks people working in fields where she could find Narsi. They advise her to go her relations instead.

(Relations are for the name-sake. I will go to Narsi bhagat only.)

Finally, she reaches her father's place. Narsi bhagat feels dejected. He feels the need for a son at that moment. He prays to God that he has given a daughter, should have given a son

as well. Narsi bhagat makes up his mind to go to Harnandi 's bhaat with other sadhus. He takes his dilapidated cart. He has faith in God. Lord Krishna himself becomes charioteer and showers gifts for the entire village of Harnandi. All are awestruck by the glitter of the gifts. The song reiterates faith in the Almighty. The weak and the helpless find a friend in Him. The songs reveal the love of God for his devotees. The purity of soul and heart and act of kindness and compassion is celebrated. It is rewarded. It is a commentary on the customs and traditions. Also, it is a commentary on the social traditions and customs. Helplessness of a father without a son, a sister without a brother is vividly described.

Folk songs, sung during the wedding ceremony speak about the feelings of bride and her expectations from her family.

Dada mere ke char obarian,
charon toh jagmag ho rahi Peheli obarianlado janmliya thha,
dooji mein hoom karaiyan,
teeji obariyanladolaganlikhya thha,
chauthi mein byah rachaiyans

There are four rooms in the house of my grandfather, all are sparkling. In the first, I was born. In the second, havan took place. In the third room lagan took place. In the fourth room marriage takes place.

Dada mere ke bhidi-bhidi galiyan

Saajan ki hathini na naavde lbke toh helado bheed baratle lb ke toh ho dada aaye barati Pher avega saajan eklas.

Pher china de garh mokla

(Explanation: The roads leading to the haveli of my grandfather are narrow. The elephant, carrying the groom cannot enter. Grandfather asks her to adjust. Later, a big house would be constructed. This time, there are baaratis, later only husband would come.) The girl is sent to her in-laws with these excuses. She leaves with a heavy heart, praying for wellbeing of all her clan, asking her brothers to take care of parents.

The celebrations on the boy's side conclude with 'Khodiya', a combination of songs and dance where some women enact the role of men. A fun marriage is enacted. It is a way for women to wait for the baarat to come back. Speaking about the benefits of khodiya, Shankar Lal Yadav opined that it entertains, the house remains secure, marriage related knowledge is gained. But the cross-dressing by women also implies a subtle subversion of patriarchy. It shows a desire in women to don the power position which is not there for them.

Thus, we see that folk songs are very powerful medium to show the social, cultural practices prevalent in a society. It is observed that there are challenges and compromises in life of women. Folk songs give voice to this subjugated section of society. In a very subtle manner, these bring into focus that it is men who have control over property and other important tools of empowerment like education. Women are dependent on them. Folk songs express subtle resistance to the prevalent power structure in society and gender disparity.

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