



Cultural Reflections In Kangra Folk Songs

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Abstract: Folk songs are one of the most conservative and articulate forms of cultural memory in traditional societies. Transmitted orally, folk songs function not only as artistic expressions but also as repositories of historical, moral, emotional, and familial values. This paper presents a thematic analysis of a few folk songs of the Kangra region based on the thematic analysis of seven representative compositions that are Hari Singh Raajjey, Suliya Tangoi Gayi Meri Jaan, Prithvi Singh Inderdeyi, Pind Deya Lambda, Sithniyan and Ghodi. The paper examines how these songs convey justice, heroism, tragedy, loss, regional pride, nostalgia, the voice of women, social denunciation, and rites of celebration through close textual analysis and interpretive reading. The paper concludes that Kangra folk songs serve as an alternative historical narrative and emotional archives to support the social values, gendered experiences and regional identity. Through the process of collective memory, these folk compositions ensure cultural continuity and provide insight into the moral imagination of the people.

Keywords: Folk literature, Kangra folk songs, oral tradition, regional identity, justice, tragedy, women's voice, ritual culture

I. Folk Songs as Cultural Texts and Oral Archives

In traditional societies, folk literature plays a central role in cultural life. In contrast to written literature that tends to represent elite attitudes and institutionalised pasts, folk songs are created out of lived experience and memory. They are informed by the daily realities of governance, pain, feast, displacement, gender relations and moral principles and passed on orally between generations. Folk songs in such areas as Kangra are a form of cultural text where history, emotion and identity are codified in the form of a poem and a song. Kangra region is well diversified in folk music that portrays its geographical location, social and historical awareness. These songs do not involve mountains, rivers, villages and valleys as passive participants of the narrative process. Nature often turns out to be a spectator of heroism, tragedy and moral order. The songs that will be discussed in this paper expose how

folk traditions create alternative historiography, keep ethical ideals and provide emotional expression to marginal voices, especially women.

This paper concentrates on seven folk songs that reflect different thematic areas in the Kangra folk literature. These songs belong to Kangra's oral ballad tradition and are traditionally performed during community gatherings and festivals. Instead of looking at them as individual commodities, the paper examines the songs as interrelated manifestations of social consciousness. This paper aims to examine how Kangra folk songs function as cultural texts that preserve collective memory, express social values, and articulate regional identity. They collectively demonstrate that folk songs can serve as living archives of history without paperwork, authorise authority using morality, turn grief into social memory, give a voice to women through humour, and ritualise the life-cycle events. The study adopts a qualitative thematic approach, examining the selected songs through close textual reading in order to identify recurring cultural motifs such as justice, heroism, tragedy, nostalgia, women's expression, and ritual practice. Folk songs are effective vehicles of cultural memory, particularly in cultures with a dearth of such historical records. Oral traditions save the shared experience, ethics and local identity by repetition and performance. Oral traditions, as Jan Vansina notes, are used as sources of history by themselves because it is the way communities have learned to remember and to interpret their history (Vansina 27). According to Kangra folk culture, songs serve as other historical narrations where social morals, regional identity and emotional reality are passed between generations.

II. Ethical Leadership and Alternative Historiography

The fact that folk literature is able to keep the history beyond the written documentation is one of the distinguishing features of this genre. Folk songs are not only a frequent celebration of local rulers, warriors, and other social events, but also not to be found in the official historiography. By so doing, they will oppose the historical monopoly of written history and insist on the validity of popular memory. The folk song Hari Singh Raajjey does not show history as a series of political events; it is a story of morality based on justice and compassion. Hari Singh, a ruler, is remembered orally and not through any written texts, and this illustrates the fact that folk songs are able to maintain the localised history outside of the official historiography. Richard Dorson argues that folk narratives tend to justify authority by ethical behaviour as opposed to institutional authority (Dorson 112). Justice in the song is shown as another moral power that folds injustice, and it lays stress on governance based on empathy and equality instead of coercion (Thompson 58).

An example of how oral tradition can be used in the role of a historical archive is the folk song Hari Singh Raajjey. Not dates, documents, or monuments recall the ruler Hari Singh, but songs. His legacy lived on since it appealed to the idealism of the society.

The song begins with very strong imagery of nature.

धौलाधार की चोटी बोले, रावी गाए तान,
कांगड़ा की माटी कहती, राजा था महान।

Mountains and rivers here are personified as they testify to the greatness of the ruler. This description creates a strong bond between the land and leadership and implies that only nature and people can acknowledge true power without supporting institutions. The legitimacy of the ruler is produced automatically out of the Kangra soil.

The concept of heroism in the Kangra folk tradition is not characterised by military success only, but moral bravery and responsibility. The character of Hari Singh as a ruler listening to the poor is what Alan Dundes recognises as the folk hero ideal in which a leader is justified through service to the community (Dundes 76). The fact that heroism is placed in the context of ethical government makes the song turn the ruler into a moral unit whose power is based on popular confidence and not coercion. Hari Singh is depicted as being a victim of injustice. The sword of justice in the song is not a violent symbol, symbolically speaking.:

न्याय की तलवार उठी, झुका अन्याय सारा।

Justice is presented as the moral power based on fairness and understanding. The king is deaf to the wealthy, and his palace is inside the hearts of the citizens and not in buildings. This image contradicts the traditional understanding of power grounded on affluence or force and substitutes it with ethical leadership. This song has an ethical view of heroism as opposed to a militaristic view. Hari Singh is made to be a hero since he is righteous, compassionate, and socially responsible. His name is repeated, therefore strengthening his presence in the collective memory, turning him into a moral example rather than a historical one.

III. Tragedy and Collective Emotional Memory

The tragedy holds an important position in the folk literature as an individual loss is transformed into a communal grief. Folk songs express grief, and folk groups can work through the emotional disruption as a community. The folk song Suliya Tangoi Gayi Meri Jaan is the best example of the experience of tragedy in folk literature in a collective context, but not in an individual context. The whole village grieves the loss, which accentuates the interdependence of social life in traditional communities. According to Ruth Finnegan, folk songs tend to express collective emotional reactions to crisis and loss and turn the grief into a societal manifestation (Finnegan 141). The imagery of the song, the dead lamps and the silent courtyards, is a representation of the emotional discontinuity of the abrupt tragedy. As a social experience, the song Suliya Tangoi Gayi Meri Jaan predestines tragedy. Collective grief is set right in the first line.

सुलिया टंगोई गई मेरी जान, रोया सारा गांव।

The whole village is in grief, which stresses that nothing in traditional societies is personal loss. Relationships are inseparable, and the loss of a single life leaves a vacuum filled with emotions in the areas of community. Darkness and the burning of lamps are imagery of lost hopes.

सपने टूटे, दीप बुझे, छाई काली रात।

The abruptness of the fate implies the ambiguity of human existence, which is a common element in tragic folk stories. Tragedy comes in domestic settings, close to the mother, silences her lullaby and the vacuity of the courtyard, making the emotions even stronger. Folk tradition helps sustain the emotional experience in the culture by transforming grief into music. The pain-to-music conversion enables the communities to work through grief and make sure that loss is not erased or suppressed. Lauri Honko wrote that oral traditions are used as a kind of emotional archive that preserves the collective identity by remembrance (Honko 89). In this regard, Suliya Tangoi Gayi Meri Jaan turns out to be not just a song of sorrow, but a cultural survival tool of emotion. Even sadness itself is made music in the final lines.

लोकगीत बना पीड़ा अब, बन गया साज।

Suffering is changed into music, which makes sure that bereavement is not forgotten and is proven culturally. The folk song, therefore, is a personal depository of grief and inter-generational healing in the form of expression.

IV. Moral Heroism and Regional Pride

Heroic folk songs are commonly about the local warriors whose deeds enshrine local ideals and communal pride. Such songs conserve the history of a region and strengthen cultural identity. The Prithvi Singh Inderdeyi song predicts heroism as an ethical and cultural value that is firmly rooted in the regional consciousness. The fact that the song personifies the Inderdeyi valley as the eyewitness to heroism creates a symbolic connection between the land and the warrior. This type of geographic-identification association is at the core of folk literature, whereby in many cases, a landscape is used as an indicator of cultural affiliation (Basu 203). The absence of aggression in the face of fear by Prithvi Singh is more of moral steadiness than aggression, which supports the folk notion of virtuous courage. Prithvi Singh Inderdeyi's song predicts courage based on moral belief and not physical conquest. Inderdeyi valley is depicted as an eyewitness to the activity of the hero and, therefore, as a part of the connection between the land and heroism.

इंदरदेयी की घाटी बोले, गूंजे वीर का नाम।

Prithvi Singh goes to war with the truth and not aggression. The fact that he never bows down to storms is a symbol of moral integrity. Saving the honour of Mother Earth brings bravery to the level of collective accountability, making personal heroism related to the honour of the culture. The conversion of his sword into a legend and his battles into songs is evidence that historical acts are mythologised by oral tradition. Prithvi Singh will not die, but he will remain as a symbol of the regional pride of Kangra.

V. Nostalgia, Migration, and Rural Memory

The folk literature has been exacerbated by migration and social change, which increases nostalgia. Rural life is romanticised through songs, and emotional displacement is stated. Nostalgia in the theme of Pind Deya Lambda indicates the emotional impacts of migration and social change. The village is not just remembered as the physical place but as the place of emotional safety and cultural belongingness. According to Raymond Williams, the nostalgia in rural literature is mostly the result of the tension between traditional life and modern displacement (Williams 45). The song manages to turn individual desire into communal cultural feeling to enable continuity of the rural identity by means of recollection. Pind Deya Lambda makes the village appear as a world of memories, but the village is not determined by physical location, but by the emotional attachment of attachment.

पिंड देया लम्बड़ा, यादों का संसार।

The smell of soil portrays genuineness and groundedness. Photographs of fields, wells and peepal trees remind one of naiveness and social togetherness. The material wealth is not embraced, but emotional belonging. The lanes in the village are made alive, and they are in inquiry of the speaker why he is not there, and the glitter of the city signifies alienation. The personal nostalgia is transformed into the collective folk song. The village becomes the heart of the soul, which supports the emotional meaning of life in rural areas.

VI. Humour, Satire, and Women's Cultural Voice

The folk songs have traditionally given women a culturally approved platform to voice themselves. Critique can be done through humour and satire with no confrontation. Sithnayan shows how folk songs give women a socially legitimate position to hold views and criticise the patriarchal conventions. Humour and satire are some of the safeguarding mechanisms that help women to be candid without necessarily facing them. According to Susie Tharu, folk expressions by women tend to provide resistance through playfulness and irony (Tharu 118). The teasing terms used in Sithnayan display the knowledge of society without the depressing mood of folk tradition. Sithnayan anticipates the voice of women by means of joking and laughing.

सिठणियाँ हँसतीं, बोलतीं, तानों में सच्चाई।

Humour is a means of revealing social contradictions. The mockery of male family members uproots the natural power and gives a sense of equality in the moment. The questions concealed in laughter are expressed as social criticism but not rebellion. The song is a symbol of resistance, which is represented by joy. The celebration tradition gives women freedom to express their inner thoughts, which turn personal voices into shared consciousness. Sithnayan, therefore, represents the folk songs as the source of emotional liberty and social consciousness among women.

VII. Marriage Rituals and Social Continuity

Folk songs that are marriage-related ritualise the transitions related to the life cycle and strengthen social ties. Social transition through marriage-related folk songs like Ghodi makes social bonding stronger. The song emphasises the collective involvement, emotional multiplicity and cultural persistence. Marriage songs are symbolic texts that remind society of the social structure and value system, as argued by Jack Goody (Goody 91). Ghodi focuses on peace, tradition and social unity by presenting marriage as a community feast. The Ghodi song identifies marriage as a community party and not a personal agreement. The groom on the horse represents ritual switching, with music and general happiness. Opposite feelings that the mother cries and the sister laughs express the complexity of marriage in terms of emotions. The song has a traditional way of connecting relationships and strengthening social continuity. The marriage is glorified as an expression of life itself, and folk song is just a cultural tool that keeps values, feelings and rituals through the generations.

VIII. Conclusion: Kangra Folk Songs as Living Cultural Archives

The Kangra folk songs come out as living representations of the cultural tradition and not artefacts of traditional art forms. These songs are based on the oral tradition, and thus they keep the communal memory of the land since they convert the past experiences, the emotional facts and the social principles into the cultural permanency. In their themes of justice, heroism, tragedy, nostalgia, the voice of women, social commentary and ritual acclaim, Kangra folk songs serve as substitute archives helping to keep cultures alive even in the absence of written records. It can be seen that folk songs like Hari Singh Raajjey and Prithvi Singh Inderdeyi keep the history of a region alive as they focus on the morality, ethical leadership and righteous courage. These songs recycle the definition of heroism as conquest and domination, but as compassion, justice and responsibility to the community. By doing so, they will make authority morally legitimate, not politically legitimate, which strengthens the moral imagination of the society. Marriage songs like Ghodi ritualise the change of life cycles and reestablish social unity. As the songs present marriage as a communal celebration, which is given an emotional depth, they support shared values, relationships and cultural continuity. It is in folk music that traditions are brought alive and are remembered and passed down through generations. Altogether, this paper confirms the idea that Kangra folk songs do not only mirror the cultural life but are also active participants in the process of social consciousness development. Being oral traditions, they can keep history unwritten, ratify moral principles, articulate disenfranchised experiences and maintain regional identity. With the fast process of modernisation and cultural transformation, such folk songs are still very potent reminders of how cultural tradition lives on through memory, performance and collective imaginations.

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