

JAKARI: LIFE-SONGS OF HARYANVI WOMEN

Devender Kumar

Folk narratives, especially those of women, destabilize and deconstruct the dominant ideology of a society while using the popular modes and motifs of the folk tradition. Woman is both the object and the subject of desire. Sometimes she is constructed in very traditional terms as alluring, seductive, mysterious, irrational, and also unknowable with unfathomable depths. The feminists usually oppose the propagation of such an image of womanhood and call it a male view about a woman to justify her exclusion from the realm of power, politics and decision-making. As the 'eternal puzzle', a woman is portrayed as incapable of questioning and fighting actual oppression. She, thus, ultimately becomes an object to be desired, explored and possessed. The same woman becomes an active agent to the best of her abilities when she has her own desires especially the sexual ones to express. There are many songs and anecdotes in Haryanvi folklore about this kind of a woman. She is depicted as attracted towards some exotic character mostly an outcaste and expressing her desires and longings openly. To fulfil those desires, she can invent any guile to dupe the custodians of patriarchy. In such matters, the relationship between/among women themselves turns out to be that of female trust, understanding and friendship. The portrayal of a woman expressing her desire openly and unabashedly is revolutionary in a culture that strongly emphasizes female sexual passivity. Keeping these facts belonging to the 'private domain' of women in mind, this paper analyses the obvious universal stereotypes of woman projected in Haryanvi women's folk songs. Jakari, a significant genre of Haryanvi women's folk songs, is used as the primary text to study a woman's 'inner world' in her own words.

Haryanvi peasant women's folksongs can be divided broadly into the following categories: 1. Ritualistic songs; 2. Seasonal songs; 3. Bhajans; and 4. Jakari. Ritualistic songs comprise mainly birth songs, marriage songs and elegies. Seasonal songs consist of songs sung exclusively during a particular season. For instance, *Samman songs* are sung during the month of Shraavan, the season of rain and clouds;

Fagan songs are sung in the month of Falgun, the season of mirth and merriment; *Katyak songs* are sung in the month of Kartik, the time to propitiate gods and deities, and so on. *Bhajans* are mainly sung by old women during a religious gathering or at the time of some elder person's death. *Jakari* songs are unique in the sense that they can be sung on any occasion except that of death. *Jakari* songs are of utmost significance as I find them representing an important segment of a young Haryanvi peasant woman's life: the segment beginning with her coming of age (attaining puberty) to her becoming the mother especially of a son (attaining motherhood). This is actually the most crucial phase in the life of a woman during which she undergoes most of the drastic upheavals of her life: She undergoes hormonal changes affecting her mental make up permanently; she is married off to an unknown man; she is migrated to her conjugal home from her natal home for life; there in her natal home she is faced with the task of establishing her identity as a trustworthy member of the family; she has to bear male child to ensure the progeny of her conjugal clan. In this regard, *Jakarīs* are the most authentic available accounts of a woman's displacement and re-establishment. She is forced due to patrilineal norms to migrate from her place of birth and is gazed by patriarchy how ingenuously and skilfully that also on her own she establishes herself again. These *Jakari* songs are of utmost significance also because of the fact that these have not yet been documented or commented upon by any folklorist in Haryana or anywhere so far; these songs have rather been dismissed as sundry and miscellaneous items in virtually all the existing documents of Haryanvi folklore.

Jakari folksongs have developed mainly midst groups of women going to fields for agricultural work, to village wells and ponds to fetch water, disposing of household chores like grinding, cooking, tendering cattle and children, spinning, sewing, dyeing, etc. as most of these routine tasks are disposed of by young women. *Jakarīs* become a musical expression of their dealings with these tasks at hand. In between they weave in these songs their own view about these activities and their cultural extension into familial relationships. On the third level, they use these *Jakarīs* to spell out their web of desires and longings that remain veiled behind the veneer of *sharam* (bashfulness) and *izzat* (honour) imposed on a woman's being as something natural. If one wants to draw the boundaries of this most crucial phase in a woman's within the musical expressions, the following two folk songs can be used as the initiation and culmination of that phase respectively:

1. “*Oh O chah muklave ke Oh O chah muklave ke
Mei dussar leke jaoon ri chah muklave ke*”
[See my enthusiasm for Muklava (departure for conjugal home)
I depart with a load of gifts see my enthusiasm for Muklava]
2. “*Bagad bichale peepli Nandlal
Lalaji O janka to adbadpaan
Pyarilagekulbahu Nandlal*”
[There is a *peepal* tree in my lane
Whose leaves are too dense;
Nowadays the daughter-in-law looks lovely, ONandlal.]

While the first song is a testimony to a young woman’s desire and expectations of love as she goes to her marital home, the second folk song (a birth song) recounts the glad acceptance of that woman by her conjugal kin only after she has born a male child to them. In between these two crucial points, so much there happens in the life of a woman before which everything that occurs before or after appears negligible. The domain of *Jakari* lies within these two points and herein they turn out to be musical expression of a young woman’s heart and mind.

When the young woman reaches her conjugal home, her first substantial contact is obviously forged with her husband. Her husband also responds to her in a positive way. He starts caring for her. He even does not hesitate in helping her in heavy chores for instance in grinding, which is the theme of the following *jakari*:

“*Bakhatoothkechakijhoyi e chakidhoreaave se
Merisarkiaankhughadgi e yokechalahorya se
Kesove se jayeroyegharkachalanbigadrya se
Bahusoveyochorapeesemotachalahorya se*”

[I started grinding early in the morning; he came close to the grinding stone;
Just then my mother-in-law woke up and got stunned to see that scene.
(She woked up her own husband saying:)
How can you sleep O mourner of your kids, customs of this house are in danger:
The daughter-in-law is sleeping while our son in grinding.]

The intimacy between young couple becomes a matter of jealousy for the mother-in-law. This results into a life-long bickering between mother and her daughter-in-law.

As soon as the intoxicating phase of marriage is over and the man and woman have to engage themselves into arduous daily routine, the woman starts facing the hardships of her conjugal life especially

at the hands of her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law, who is already vexed, now starts teasing her newly married daughter-in-law in many different ways. For instance, she gives her only barley bread to eat when she senses that the latter likes wheat bread:

*“Saasbajreki roti ri’
He ri do dendi de deek, saasgihuanki de deri.
Bahu e gihuankikhave e
He terababalsahukarkebharkegaadilyave e?
Saasmharegihuankethekeri
He ritereekborimhjuarussemhbhodi e bhodiri”*

[O mother-in-law, don’t give me barley bread
if you wish give me only one, but give the wheat bread.
O daughter-in-law, you eat wheat-bread,
As if your father is a rich man who sent cartful of wheat for you?
O mother-in-law, my father is a wheat trader
While you have paltry sorghum in a sack, full of chaff.]

Dismayed at her mother-in-law’s persistent taunting, she starts pining for her natal home. One day her brother comes to meet her and she complains before him about her plight. The brother talks to the mother-in-law in favour of his sister and seeks her permission to take his sister with him for a few days. The woman feels elated at her prospect of going to her natal home. But this sense of elation turns out to be short lived when the brother tells her in isolation the real thing:

*“Keh de keh de re biramera man ki re baatbhola man ki re baat
Ma e meri ne kekahya je
Ma e kahya se re bai ne le gharaay beta le gharaay
Baapkahyadheemerigharbhali je.”*

[O brother, tell what I want to hear
Tell what my mother has said.
The mother says bring my daughter home
The father says daughters are good at their own home.]

It is not only that the mother-in-law alone is on a mission to torture the newly married woman; her other members of the conjugal kin, especially her elder brother-in-law and sister-in-law, leave no chance to torment her. And the condition of that woman becomes more miserable if her husband is not at home. In the following *jakari* a woman narrates such an experience:

*“Likkad de ne tannamaryamaryaJethHazari ne O merijyan
Matna O Jethanne mare jaangayibeemari ne*

*KhoddkhoomhgerunjewribulwalyunPatwari ne O merijyan
Likhparwanapiyedhoregeryayaadkreteribyahi O
Jaldi se piyagharpeaakabjakaryaterebhai ne O merijyan.”*

[Coming and going my majestic elder brother-in-law taunted me O my life

Don't taunt me O Jeth I know what ails you.

I'll call the village land accountant and put measuring rod in each furrow

I wrote a letter to my husband telling him his wife misses him badly

You come home very soon as your brother's possessed everything.]

Receiving the letter, her husband comes on a vacation and asks her what happened. When she tells about the wrong-doings of her brother-in-law and even about his sexual advances, he dismisses her complaint in a typically patriarchal manner:

*“Gori re kehogyathamnegeryataarpetaar?
Relwai sari merabhoorakachiyagaat
Machine chlaaundevar ne pakadliyaath
Gori re kehogyameir ma kajayachhota beer”*

[O wife, what happened that you sent letter after letter?

I wore blue sari on my fair delicate body

I was operating machine when your brother caught my hand.

O wife, so what? He's my brother born of same mother!]

The woman feels further hopeless in such a situation wherein she is shown her proper place by her own husband—the place quite inferior to rest of the clan members. The climax of miseries sets in her life when she fails to deliver a son to her husband—the ultimate test of the worth of a woman in a Haryanvi family. The husband becomes so insensible that he takes no time in deciding to marry another woman:

*“Na terechhora re gorinaterechhori
Dillisehrmh re gorisuthrisichhori
Suthrisichhori re gorilyanijaroori
Uskehojya re gorichhora re chhori.”*

[O wife, you neither have a son nor a daughter

In the city of Delhi there's a pretty girl

It's inevitable to bring the pretty girl home

She'll bear a son and a daughter]

Later on, in the same *jakari*, the unfortunate woman laments the losses of her life:

*“HeiIshbarterileela re nyari
Eklaalkeoparchutgi re nagari”*

[O God, your playful nature is unique
Not having a son I was banished from the community.]

These have been the main factors responsible for miserable plight of women in the Haryanvi society. Combined together these factors pit so much burden on the psyche of a woman that suicide seems to be a viable option for her to get rid of her death-in-life condition. In one *jakari* the woman narrates what happens after her committing suicide:

*“Kadhendevarjethbhanmeritastas rove saas he
Kyun rove merisaasbawlinirnabasikadhdeyi
Kadhendevarjethbhanmeritastas rove bhartar he
Kyun rove bhartarbaulebyahlyayiyethanedarki!”*

(Brothers-in-law draw my body out of well and my mother-in-law cries loudly
Why cry now O my crazy Mother-in-law? You pushed me out hungry n thirsty.
Brothers-in-law draw my body while my husband weeps inconsolably
Why weep now o husband? Go and marry a police inspector’s daughter now.)

The forgoing analysis shows how *jakari* as a folksong genre represent the life and its upheavals for a young Haryanvi woman. Most of *Jakari* songs are replete with sense of helplessness and hopelessness as ingredients of a woman’s life. Themes such as unnatural death in the form of suicide or even murder, banishment, alienation, etc. recur profusely. And it is but natural if we keep in mind the tests and trials that a woman has to undergo in the Haryanvi society. However, it is one aspect of the issue. In other words, all *Jakari* are not like that. There are other themes like woman’s retaliation to individual insults, her subversion of dominant ideology, and her resistance to patriarchal norms through humour, slyness, lies, etc. in one *Jakari* she mocks at the gluttony of her elder brother-in-law in order to subvert his authority in a subtle manner:

*“Eisawapenhsarke tare gulgale e dhaiserpoyi roti
Eitoknibharkerandhikheerki e laagadthimharejhoti
Eijeth mere kanyonda de diyakarkekardichhati
Eisawapenhsarkekhyagulgale e dhaiserkhagya roti
Eitoknibharikhagyakheerki e iisajethadaki
Eibalakbacchebhookhe so ge me thinirnabasi”*

[O I fried five and a quarter *seergugale* and rolled two and a half *seerroti*
O I boiled full vessel of *kheer* as our buffalo was new to milk
Summoning my all courage I invited the elder brother-in-law

He ate five and a quarter *seergulgale* and two and a half *seerroti*
 The gluttonous brother-in-law even gulped the full vessel of kheer
 My children went to bed empty stomach
 And I too remained hungry n thirsty since morning.]

In the following *Jakari*, she puts aside the patriarchal norms of sexuality and celebrates her sexual encounter in a hilarious tone. In this *Jakari*, a Jat girl invites a Brahman guy for feasting at her home. The guy takes her into the inner chamber and shuts the door. Just then a neighbour woman comes to her house. The girl asks her to come in the inner chamber. As soon as she reaches there, the guy pulls her also inside and shuts the door. See the climax:

“*Gaam ne paatgyaberateenuankakothimhdera*”

[The village came to know the threesome is in the inner chamber.]

The richness of *Jakari* folk songs as a genre is discernible in the variety of these songs as far as themes are concerned. Another significant theme dealt within *Jakari* is that of a woman’s self-criticism. In such *Jakarīs* she looks at her own dealings in a self-reflexive way and presents an unusual kind of self-analysis. It is in these kinds of *Jakarīs* that a woman’s heart finds its best expression: Her desires which remain choked in heart during daily life find fluent musical expression in these *Jakarīs*. In this context she no longer remains an object of desire but becomes a desiring subject subverting the age-old norms in such a subtle manner that powers-that-be fail simply to understand the reality of situation. She adopts so may subversive tricks to save herself from those tasks she does not want to do, from those precarious situations arising out of her desires in which she fears to be held guilty of violation. It is in these songs that female bonding surfaces at its best. In the following *Jakari*, a young girl manages to be sent to her conjugal home even before the scheduled time with the help of her mother and both mother and daughter succeed in hiding this fact:

“*Heiri ma manne de naghaalurejeelagdanamera*
Heiterisathanboojhenbaattairihamnepatya nab era
Heiuskisaasusakatbeemarjamai le gya se e mera”

[O mother, send me to my conjugal home; my heart no longer lies here.
 O your friends ask me how it happened? They couldn’t know.
 O her mother-in-law is critically ill; hence my son-in-law’s taken her]

The young woman has no doubt about coming to her conjugal home before time out of curiosity. Nonetheless very soon she realizes that life here is also not a bed of roses.

Here also she has to deal with the same household chore, rather with an increased intensity, as she is not a daughter here but a daughter-in-law. In the following *Jakari* she is asked by her husband to bring his midday meal on fields. But she does not want to go to the fields. Instead of denying her husband, she picks up a quarrel with her mother-in-law so intensely that her father-in-law has to intervene. He chides his own wife for quarrelling but the woman takes the pretence of being victimized by him and does not go to the fields. In the evening, her husband comes back from fields and before he could say anything she starts weeping. The considerate husband takes up the issue with his father:

*“O BabalisikejiwanichhegitannemeriNirmalanpeeti
Hei re beta teri Nirmalanjhoothimanneapniboodhlipeeti”*

[O Father, how much you're intoxicated with youth
That you beat up my Nirmala?
O Son, your Nirmala is a liar;
I beat up my own old woman.]

Likewise, if the husband is away to some other place and woman is living alone, she can become wayward very easily. Even such a woman is adept at befooling her man by showing her *tiriyacharitra*. In the following *Jakari*, a woman whose husband is in the army becomes wayward. When her husband comes back and he comes to know about it, he becomes furious. He takes a baton in his hand and goes to the village well where his wife is fetching water. He threatens to kill her:

*“Neidteritaarunga re tannelhyajsaramnaaayi
Aankhbhargipaniki O terekisnesyakhalayi?
Rule gerehathanke e paapi ne kaljekelayi
Gail le chalunga re merighanidhukhpayimurgayi”*

[I'll cut your throat; you've become so shameless.
Tears welled up in my eyes and asked who poisoned your ears?
He threw away his baton, embraced me and said:
I'll take you along, you've suffered much.]

As her experience of married life increases, she becomes more confident about herself and expresses his desires explicitly. One day she does not hesitate even in proposing an unknown man at the well. The man agrees to take her along with him for his younger brother and challenges her to show how smartly she will set his household. She takes the challenge boldly and declares:

“*Merakedekheiga O me to hilyahilayanaara*
Roti O teripodyungi O chadhwadyunchoonudhara
Paniketerebhardyungi O toknikebajadyunbara
Aurkechaiye se O bhaiyan ten paaddyunnyara”

[What will you test me O I’m already a seasoned ox.
 I’ll role chapatti for you but make you debtor of flour.
 I’ll fetch water for you but disfigure the brass vessel.
 What else do you want? I’ll alienate you from your kin.]

To sum up we can say that *Jakari* folk songs are full of varied reflections of the ‘inner world’ of a Haryanvi woman. If one has to understand her life, one must understand *Jakari* and analyse it one of the most important yet most neglected texts. Nowadays there is a growing consciousness of women’s cultural and historical significance in the development of any society. Scholars have mostly been concerned either with the written literary texts or mechanical data collected by various agencies from time to time to assess the women’s issues. Sadly enough, there has been little folkloristic work at least in India directly addressing issues related to women whereas folk narratives are supposed to be the most fundamental and authentic expressions of such issues. It is in the folk narratives of her own that woman projects most comfortably a female vision of the world wherein she internalizes, resists and subverts the hegemonic discourses of her society.

The question how society affects folklore is one side of the coin; the other side is the question how folklore influences the perceptions of a society. As folklore changes over a period of time, it reflects the social situation, presumably the result of material changes that affect a society. This analysis is bound to throw some light on the phenomenon how the social order and social institutions articulate in the formation of the subject (individual), or how the link between social and psychic reality is to be spelt out. Taking cues from this study of people’s verbal art, the concerned authorities will benefit while formulating emancipatory policies for the masses especially women.