

Contestations of Gender and Culture : Women's Folk Songs of North India

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Abstract

The reforming socio-religious agenda of the Indian intelligentsia in the nineteenth century in response to the scathing criticism of the West, imagined a golden past where women were treated with dignity and honour and followed certain social norms. This image of an ideal Indian woman also afflicted the lower classes for whom enforcing restrictions on women became a symbol of social mobility. This paper intends to study how the folk songs of North, juxtapose the docile stereotype creation of the Indian woman with the non-conformist image of the truly indigenous female who rejects acceptance of societal exploitation as quintessential to Indian honour and value system, a picture painted by the colonized males and the British rulers alike. The methodology of research is based on empirical study of the lyrics of the women songs, a textualisation of oral history. The study is based on primary and secondary sources and qualitative research methodology. Instead of the glorified version of women's domesticity which accept patriarchal domination as natural, the study intends to throw open the real questions of women's autonomy and historical progress expressed through women's folk songs.

Keywords: autonomy, folk songs, ideal, stereotype, womanhood.

Introduction

We have stepped into the twenty first century, yet many of the voices of our women are muted by patriarchy within the feudal mental-make up of our societies in the Indian sub-continent. The women's question became important during the colonial period when the deplorable condition of women in India was regarded as an indicator of the Indian civilisation's inferior status in the hierarchy of civilisations. Ridiculing the Indian males disability to uplift their wome, the British rulers deemed the Indian colonised society as 'effeminate' in comparison to the colonial masters "masculinity,' thus justifying their loss of independence. In response to the West's criticism, Indian intellectuals imagined a golden age in which Indian women were treated with dignity and honour. The socio-religious reformers advocated for the reformation of oppressive customs and female education and emancipation Reforms, however, were nearly always justified by citing the sacred religious scriptures and other sacred texts, and an image of an ideal Indian woman was created. Chaste, pure, docile the burden of carrying the patriarchal society's honour was placed on her. To maintain the woman's dignity, the orthodox men who were in the majority ,professed the use of the *purdah* and her education magnanimously allowed by the male members of the society had a restricted goal of making her an ideal Indian woman. Women themselves were however not involved in these reform movements, rather they were subjected to a number of restrictions in both Hindu and Muslim communities. According to Gail Minault, the goal of Muslim educators, like their Hindu counterparts, was to produce better wives, mothers, and Muslims. Rosalind O'Hanlon believes that

one can determine a broad range of consensus between the colonial state and the nationalist male elites in this stereotyping of Indian womanhood. Partha Chatterjee has demonstrated how the women's question was tackled by Indian nationalists in the nineteenth century. In the nationalist psyche public sphere took masculine overtones while the private sphere assumed a feminine role. While the public sphere was a site of conflict and compromise with the colonial government, the woman's inner domain was regarded as the pinnacle of Indian individuality, free of western colonial influences.

Lower caste women in villages and urban industrial areas are thought to have had more freedom than their upper caste counterparts. However, beginning in the early nineteenth century, the middle and lower classes began to mimic the upper classes. Purity and seclusion of women became necessary for lower caste social mobility in both Bengal and Maharashtra.

As a result, many women from peasant families were denied the right to work on farms and lost their economic independence. Women in Bengal employed in rice-husking lost their jobs to male machine operators as the number of machines increased. They were also given lower wages than men both in the urban and rural areas. Tanika Sarkar has pointed out that women were largely absent from peasant movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Women were thus adversely affected in all spheres of life and the result of putting women on a pedestal was that indigenous popular culture and oral tradition began to be looked down upon as uncouth and illiterate. The natural expression of women's voices in their farces, *nautankis*, folk songs was relegated to the realm of the commonplace and disagreeable, infringing on their own space of freedom, expression and enjoyment.

Methodology

This paper is an empirical study of the folk songs of North India sung by its womenfolk in the local language, Hindi and its varying dialects peculiar to a given communities and castes. This study confines itself to the folk songs which relate to women stories in their own voices. Folksongs sung by men do not fall within the purview of this paper. The study is based both on primary sources i.e. the folk songs as well as secondary sources. The folk songs referred to in this study are also available in other studies but the translations are the authors alone. The methodology is based on qualitative research.

Women Folk Songs: Reflection of the Society

It is customary for women to sing folk songs on all festive occasions and also during their chores. In public social and religious gatherings it is 'the thing to do' with complete backing of the society. Karve and Vatuk (287-307) have shown how the songs provide a "model" of the cultural attitudes and practices of the society that exists in North India. The women who sing them are mature and married ranging from the young to the old in the community. When they gather to sing together, they represent the collective mature feelings, emotions, attitudes and beliefs of their gender. On such occasions they stand united against the non-singers, the men, who are also their real life opponents but to whom they are wed for life and on whom they are financially dependent from birth to grave. They know and understand that as the inferior sex they suffer the same problems and are subject to the same treatment from the patrilineal society. Through the folk songs they give vent to their wants and desires, yet their sufferings continue.

The women themselves usually do not provide a solution to their miseries in these songs. In fact, in such women singings the widow, the barren are not invited as they are considered bad omens by the women themselves. In fact to avoid the miserable life of a widow, the women fervently pray in *devi ke geet* for the long life of their husbands to Goddess Parvati the consort of the handsome and immortal Lord Shiva. The songs are sung within a community or caste and women from other castes or communities are neither invited nor expected to join. Many of the *sohars* and *vivah ke geet* focus on the complexion of the child or the groom, with the fair-skinned being favoured to the dark-skinned

and the latter being accepted only because Lord Krishna is seen as dark too. Under societal pressure to bear a son, to carry on the family name, the birth of a son is as welcome to a woman as the rest of the society, in fact to her it is an expression of relief and even glory to get back to her *saas* and *nanad* (husband's mother and sister), who consider her good for nothing. There is a constant reference to this great enmity between the bride and her *saas* and *nanad* and their overbearing attitude and upper hand in the family. This relationship is fraught with tension and probably begins due to the extra household work foisted on the *bahu* (daughter-in-law) by them and their critical attitude towards the newcomer in their home who vies for the attention of the man (Karve 137). In this atmosphere of competition and conflict the women are seen as making life miserable for others of their own sex without recourse to any kindness and empathy.

The folksongs of North India may portray the conventional, docile, subservient, self-sacrificing, superstitious Indian woman stereotype reinforcing the patriarchal dominance of the Indian society but on occasions she is also shown as a contemptuous non-conformist, who jeers male notions of manhood and articulates against the injustices and inequities meted out to her by other members of her in laws' family. Srivastava believes that women's folk songs act as "safety-valves" by which the women can express their deep unexpressed hidden desires and wistful longing for happier days as well as their bottled-up resentment and hurt against their society whose unjust and unkind rules have made their life miserable (Srivastava 269, 283)

Some Women Folk Songs

The tradition of folksongs in North India is large and diverse and is a very much part of the cultural heritage sung and passed down from generation to generation. Uttar Pradesh is the largest and most populous state where the people are Hindi-speaking and communicate in different dialects of the Hindi language. The major folksongs in North India are sung in *bhojpuri*, *avadhi*, *braj-bhasha*, *khariboli*, *garhwali*, *kumauni*, *ruheli* etc. In Eastern Uttar Pradesh bordering Bihar, *bhojpuri* songs are most popular and are set to typically to the local *purbi* (eastern) tune. The poetry in the songs the women sing in *avadhi* and *khariboli* in western Uttar Pradesh is extremely powerful and expressive. The songs are sung in groups with an emphasis on escalating rhythm and beat. Most of the lines are repetitive making it easy to remember and sing in chorus. Women sing them in accompaniment to a kind of cymbal called *manjira* and a percussionist instrument, *dholak*. Other instruments like the harmonium, *sarangi*, *ektara*, *rabab* and flute are also played. Though most of the music follows age-old village folk tunes, Hindustani classical ragas like *khamaj*, *durga*, *pilu*, *bahar* are also set to tune in the folk songs. All the folk songs sung by women in North India can be broadly divided into three categories- ceremonial, seasonal and occasional songs (Sahai-Achuthan 395-396).

The wedding songs are most popular and are known as *vivah ke geet*. The bride is referred to as *banno* or beloved and some songs refer to the love with which she has been brought up by her parents and the sadness of her close relatives and friends at the thought of her going away to her in-laws house, her *bidai*. These songs are also indicative of the fear of the bride who is going to a totally new alien household where she literally knows no one, not even her prospective husband, since most of the marriages especially in rural India are arranged by the two families (Planalp 531, Lewis 183) In fact much emphasis is placed on her *bidai* in the wedding songs since in Hindu society a woman once married is required to transfer all her feelings and duties to her husband's family and essentially becomes *parayi* or a stranger to her own parents and relatives.

The songs also reflect the miseries caused to the bride's family by the dowry system or bride price to be paid to the groom's family. In a song a bride's poor mother throws all utensils in her kitchen on the ground in frustration, so that they can be sold to obtain rupees nine lakhs worth of dowry for her daughter. In her frustration, the mother also reminisces all the humiliation she had to go through at the hands of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law when she gave birth to this girl and how even her

husband did not stand by her. This is a common malady since traditionally in north Indian society the birth of a girl is not welcome in a family since she is considered a burden to her parents who have to spend beyond their means for her dowry. In the song mother goes so far as to say if she had known she had conceived a girl she would have poisoned the foetus to death. Here is the translation of the full song:

Song 1: Jahi dina ho toharo garabha rahile peduri mora ghaharai e...

O daughter, from the day I became pregnant with you, I began to feel sick.

I was unable to consume meat and fish

O daughter you were born in a dark night, as the night of *bhadon* (month of rainy season)

My *saas* and *nanad* (husband's mother and sister) did not light the lamp for me

and my husband was disappointed too

O daughter when you were getting married your father was very happy

He thanked the Gods that his daughter was getting married

On your wedding day when your husband had put *sindoor* (vermillion, a symbol of Hindu marriage) on your head

Your in laws demanded nine lakhs as dowry.

I threw all my utensils into the courtyard and cursed my luck

And wished that even my enemy be spared from the birth of a girl

Had I known during pregnancy that there was a girl in my womb

I would have killed the foetus by consuming a burning concoction of hot chillies

And saved myself all this misery

(Cited in Srivastava 297, Translation mine)

On the other hand, the birth of a male child is a cause for much singing and rejoicing. *Sohars* are folk songs sung during pregnancy or after the birth of the male child. This is the reason why these songs address the child as *babua* or *lalna*, common pet names for boys or). The mother is referred to as *jachha* which is derived from the Urdu word *zachha* for lying-in woman. The child is praised as Nandalal, Kanha (names of Hindu god, Krishna) while the mother is treated as the lucky Yasoda (Krishna's mother). The *sohars* depict the tender love for the child in his mother's heart for whom she is willing to sacrifice everything in the world. This is so true of the North Indian society even today.

Being a mother is considered to be the highest achievement of a woman while barrenness is considered to be the biggest curse that can befall a married woman. Even giving birth to a female child is considered better than not conceiving a child at all. A barren woman is seen as inauspicious in the society. In one *sohar* a childless young man cries how she is humiliated by her *saas* and *nanad* and turned out of her house by her husband. No one is willing to give her shelter out of fear that she would contaminate their wombs too, so much so that the cattle also reject her. Her own mother also shows no empathy and so she decides to end her miserable life by drowning in the Ganges. However, *Maa Ganga* (River Ganges revered as *Maa* or mother as is customary in India) takes pity on her and advises her to worship the *Surya devta* (Sun God) and soon the woman gets pregnant and is blessed with a baby boy. The lyrics of the folksong are full of sorrow and plight of the woman before she finally gives birth. The folksong goes like this:

Song 2: Sasu kahain mori banjhina nanada birajbasina re....

My translation of the full song—

My *saas* (mother-in-law) curses me as *baanjhan* (barren) and my *nanad* (husband's sister) taunts me as *brijavasan* (female celibate)

And the man I married and lived with since I was a child has turned me out of his house

With no home to go to the woman goes to the forest and cries;

Woman: O lioness, please emerge and eat me up

Lioness: O my lady, why do you grieve here in the forest?

Woman: My *saas* (mother-in-law) curses me as *baanjhan* (barren) and my *nanad* (husband's sister) taunts me as *brijavasan* (female celibate)

And the man I married and lived with since I was a child has turned me out of his house.

O lioness if you eat me up I will be rid of all my troubles.

Lioness: O dear woman, go back home because I cannot eat you

If I do I will become barren too.

In grief and disappointment the woman turns to the *nagin* (female snake)

Woman: O *nagin* please emerge from your hole and bite me

Nagin (female snake): O woman why do you grieve here in the forest?

Woman: My *saas* (mother-in-law) curses me as *baanjhan* (barren) and my *nanad* (husband's sister) taunts me as *brijavasan* (female celibate)

And the man I married and lived with since I was a child, has turned me out of his house

O *nagin* if you bite me, I will be rid of all my troubles.

Nagin (Female snake): O dear woman, go back home because I cannot bite you

If I do I will become barren too.

In grief and disappointment the woman goes to her mother's house.

Woman: O mother please emerge from the house and give my wretched self, shelter

Mother: O dear daughter what grief brings you to your parents' home?

Woman: My *saas* (mother-in-law) curses me as *baanjhan* (barren) and my *nanad* (husband's sister) taunts me as *brijavasan* (female celibate)

And the man I married and lived with since I was a child has turned me out of his house

Mother: O dear daughter go back to your husband's house

Because if I give you shelter, I will also become barren

So will my daughter-in-law and cow become barren

My female buffalo and bitch will become barren too.

In grief and disappointment she goes to the bank of the River Ganga

Woman: O Mother Ganga please envelope me in your waves, I have come to drown myself in you

Ganga: O dear child what grief brings you here?

Woman: My *saas* (mother-in-law) curses me as *baanjhan* (barren) and my *nanad* (husband's sister) taunts me as *brijavasan* (female celibate)

And the man I married and lived with since I was a child has turned me out of his house

Ganga: O dear daughter, go back to your home

Take some *til* (sesame seeds) and *chaval* (rice) in your hand and pray to the Sun God

And you shall bear a child

The woman goes back home and worships the Sun God

At the beginning of the ninth month she gives birth to a beautiful son.

Everyone is delighted with this good news and there is much singing of *sohars* and rejoicing

The woman with *chunari* (piece of cloth covering head and upper part of body, symbolic of reverence) and *coconut* (used in holy rites) to Mother Ganga

Woman: O Mother Ganga, please give me your blessings, I have come to thank and worship you.

(Cited in Srivastava 288-292, Translation mine)

Many such songs reveal that a woman's status in society is defined by her ability to bear a child. At the same time it also shows that the woman has to always take the blame of being barren for it is

assumed that a man can never be impotent simply because he belongs to the superior sex. Very few songs refer to medical intervention for child-bearing. Once a woman is married she is considered her husband's property to be treated at will by him and her family. Her own family is expected by unwritten societal norms to wash their hands off her and not to interfere in her new home which is considered her real home. Yet there are many songs especially those sung in the rainy season known as *Savan* and *Kajari* where the lady pines to meet her parents, siblings and old childhood friends. One such *Savan* folksong is depicted below:

Song 3: *Mohe bhav na savan ki fuhar re more birana naihar se nahi aile re*

The rain pours but the month of *savan* does not make me happy since my brother has not come to fetch me to take me to my parent's home

The swings must be out back home in my parents' courtyard and all my friends must be enjoying swinging on them

O dear father, why did you not invite me, am I forgotten

Outside, the clouds are pouring rain and inside my heart is bursting into tears

O dear father why did you marry me off so far away from you all?

(Cited in Srivastava 302, Translation mine)

There are also songs where the woman is happy to receive a relative from her parent's house, usually the brother, who is the harbinger of good news and gifts from home and enquires about the welfare of his sister. But the sister pretends to be happy and tries to hide her grief in the house of her in-laws. This self-sacrificing image of the woman is a stereotype of the Hindu society especially in North India rural areas that also depicts the subordinate and helpless status of the woman in the society. The following folksong brings out the expected role of the *bahu* (the daughter-in-law) to suffer silently in her in-laws' house but not to let her misery be known to her brother who comes enquiring about her welfare, and forbidding him to disclose her position to her loved ones.

Song 4: *Urat main dekhyon prema chiraiya, uri kai baithai sarasaun dariya ho rama...*

A love bird flies and sits on the mustard plant (a good omen)

I see two warriors approaching...one of them is fair and one is dark

The dark one is the brother of my sister-in law i.e. my husband and the fair one is my mother's dear one i.e. my brother

Woman: O mother-in law, my brother is approaching, what special food should I cook today for him?

Mother-in law: O daughter-in-law these is some rotten *kodon* (wild rice) in the large storage vessel and there is *chakavad* (seasonal wild shrub) that grows in the field, use that for a meal

Woman: But mother-in-law there is also some fine quality rice and *moong dal* (good quality lentils) in another vessel

At home when my mother serves food to my brother she first makes a *chauk* (good omen) with sandal paste on the floor and she shines his plate with vermilion

When the two brother-in-law sit down to have their meal, my brother begins to cry

O dear brother, why do you cry? Do you remember your wife or the food prepared by mother?

Brother: O dear sister I do not cry remembering my wife or cook prepared by mother

I cry at the thought that my sister is being devoured in her in-laws' place like a goldsmith burns gold

Woman: O brother please do not tell father of my sorrow or he will be very remorseful

Please do not tell my mother or she will be beat her breast in deep anguish and commit suicide

Please do not tell my sister or she will refuse to cohabit with her husband

Please do not tell my sister-in-law or she will make fun of me during meals

Please do not tell the villagers or they will taunt our family during quarrels
 O beloved bother, I beg you, on your way back throw this miserable bundle of my grief in the
 Ganga-Jamuna rivers (the major rivers of North India)
 (Cited in Srivastava 304-306, Translation mine)

The above song falls in the category of *Sram Geet*. These type of folk songs are usually sung during long hours of household work and other duties, and typically depict the drudgery of the mundane and tough lives led by the rural women and their consequent state of despair.

However, the folk songs also depict bold women who can stand up for themselves and can ask relevant questions about their contributions to their husband's family and protest against the undeserved ill treatment thereof. They raise their voices for social justice and have doing so informally down the ages in these folk songs sung by them in public gatherings giving vent to their feelings expressed in the powerful lyrics of the songs. A very thought-provoking folk song is about a woman who questions the family as to why her son should take her husband's name and not hers for she is the mother and her claim should not be any less than the child's father in the social order of things. The song is as follows-

Song 5: Dard humne uthaye saiyan ke lalla kaise kahiye

Woman: It is I who bore the pain of my son's birth then how can he be called my husband's son?

O my *Saas* (mother-in-law) please sit on the bed and tell me how is it just that the child should be called after his father and not me

Saas: O my daughter in law, whether you stay or leave, the child will be called the son of my son only not yours

Woman: O my *Jethani* (elder sister-in-law) please sit on the bed and tell me how is it just that the child should be called after his father and not me

Jethani: O my sister in law, whether you stay or leave, the child will be called the son of my brother in law only not yours

Woman: O my *Nanad* (husband's sister) please sit on the bed and tell me how is it just that the child should be called after his father and not me

Nanad: O my *Bhabhi* (sister in law), whether you stay or leave, the child will be called the son of my brother only not yours

Woman: O my *Raja* (dear husband), please sit on the bed and tell me how is it just that the child should be called after his you and not me

Husband: O my *Rani* (dear wife) come sit on the bed with me

The child will be called after both our names, not mine alone.

(Cited in Srivastava 288, Translation mine)

There are folksongs where the women openly laugh at the ignoble deeds of their flirtatious husband and enjoy their impunity and humiliation. These are hardly the stereotype women who are supposed to remain silent in their sufferings and revere their husband as *pati pamesvara* (Husband is God). The following song manifests this disdain of the menfolk.

Song 6: Balama surat pe are are meri jaan....

Dear friend, my husband falls in love with all female faces

Dear friend, when the house help (*maharin*) was washing the utensils

My husband too started washing utensils with her

Dear friend, *maharin*'s husband came and saw this

And humiliated my husband

Dear friend, he pushed my husband into the open drain
 And he fell into the drain.
 Dear friend when the washerwoman was washing clothes
 My husband too started washing clothes with her
 Dear friend, her husband (*dhobi*) came and saw this
 And humiliated my husband
 Dear friend, he pushed my husband into the open drain
 And he fell into the drain.
 (Cited in Srivastava 298, Translation mine)

In *Devi ke Geet*, folk songs refer to mythological stories mainly from the epics and in one such song we see how *Devi Sita*, Lord Ram's wife feels humiliated that her husband has send her into exile in the forest and prefers to die than to return to her husband who had discarded her when she was pregnant. *Devi Sita* symbolizes the disrespect a woman feels in a patriarchal society that questions her chastity and suspects her moral character though she is innocent.

Song 7: Chaita kerī tithi naumi raman jagi tanhai re

On the ninth day of the chaitra month, Ram decides to perform a *yagna* (fire ritual to please the Gods)
 Ram: [O Guru Vasisth] Please bring Sita. Without her my world seems empty
 She will not come at my request or anyone else's appeal
 However, if you tell her to come she will not refuse you.
 Ram's bother Lakshman and sage Vasisth embark on their journey on a horse
 They stop at a spot at a distance from the *ashram* (residence cum educational centre) of the sages where Sita lives now
 From their position they can see Sita standing near the hut and drying her long hair
 As Guru approaches, Sita turns around
 She calls out to her friends
 Sita: O friends please bring the water of the Jamuna river
 Please bring the golden plate and the camphor to light
 O friends please wash the guru's feet and I will do his *aarti* (a Hindu welcome ritual)
 Guru Vasisth: Dear Sita, you are such a wise and intelligent woman
 How can you possibly leave the kingdom of Ayodhya (Awadh in present UP) and live without Ram?
 Sita: O Guru, it was raining heavily in the dark night of *savan-bhadon* (months of rainy season) when Ram left me in this forest
 After that he has never come to see me, not even in my dreams
 But since you have given your word to Ram and I respect you very much
 I take five steps in the direction of Ayodhya
 O Guru, I would prefer to burn to ashes than return to Ayodhya
 Whoever sings this *mangala* (auspicious song) and sings and shares with others
 Will be blessed with the boon of milk, fruits and children, hey Ram.
 (Cited in Srivastava 294, Translation mine)

Edward O. Henry has dwelled upon the interesting and liberal smacking of *gali* (insult, calling names) in the folk *vivah* (wedding) songs sung the women of the bride's family lambasting the groom's family. The insinuations on the men of the bridegroom's family are sexual, accusing the affines of lowly immoral behaviour, of poaching on women and having bad designs on them (O. Henry 86) They are also ridiculed in the choicest of names as misers and deceivers expecting a beautiful fair

bride and huge dowry but letting down the prestige of the bride's family by bringing a lack-lustre *barat* (procession of groom's relatives) to the bride's village. One folksong translates into this *gali*:

Song 8:

You boasted that you would bring elephants; you did not bring elephants
**** your sister; you did not bring elephants!

You come to ravish the bride

You boasted that you would bring a band; you didn't bring a band! (Cited in O. Henry 74, Translation mine)

After marriage when the groom's family gifts jewellery and saris to the bride, the women sing tongue-in-cheek—

Song 9

The ornaments you have brought are glittering in the *mandap* (canopy under which marriage takes place)

But they are borrowed not purchased

Elder brother of the groom, you are no good

You **** your sister (Cited in O. Henry 75, Translation mine)

Such insults in folk songs are also directed at the *saas* and *nanad* (groom's mother and sisters) and this traditional singing is very much part of North Indian marriages today prevalent not only in the small villages but also in the big cities. In fact, many such folk wedding songs replete with their custom of heaping insult on the groom's family have found a permanent place in Bollywood movie sequences of Indian weddings. The *purohit* or priest who performs the wedding is a Brahman, the highest caste in the Hindu society who is to be treated with respect as *brahman devta* or 'god on earth'. However, the folk songs do not spare him too and as he performs the *havan* (fire ritual) during the marriage, the women sing:

Hey *brahman* your mother is like a heap of dunghill

Listen, *brahman* hurry up with my daughter's fire sacrifice

The smoke is claustrophobic to the small and tender

The *Brahman* is a dim wit, a clod from the tank... (Cited in O. Henry p.79, Translation mine)

Thus the women who are regarded as being very low down in the social hierarchy freely express their emotions and their contempt for the uppermost caste in conservative hierarchical caste-society. The liberty given to the women to express such raw, vulgar language during festive occasions is noteworthy and according to Evans-Pritchard it is a way of channelizing their heart-felt woes through traditional folk songs. (Evans-Pritchard 101).

Conclusion

Historians and anthropologists today consider one of their most urgent tasks to be the recording of as many oral traditions as possible. By silencing women's commonplace voices an important source of feminist history has been lost. Although the authenticity of such oral cultures like the folk songs that women sing and share, have been questioned as source materials for understanding feminist history, and gender studies, it cannot be denied that many feminist researchers are finding folklores useful for the social construct of women's history and status in the society. The post-structuralists also focus on culture and tradition as the true histories and voices of seemingly silent women (Sangster 5-27)

Feminist theory deduces that women think differently than men, they view the society in which they live differently than men. Most studies show women narratives are understatement where their role is underplayed and the accomplishments of their family members are highlighted (Etter-Lewis

48)). For most women their role as nurturers is central to their existence as is the dependence on their men. But the folk songs sung by them while doing household chores, singing lullabies to their children, working in the fields or on occasions of marriage and festivals, showcase a gamut of their emotions, reflecting their true thoughts and innermost feelings about the world in which they live. Folk songs are a means of expression at the periphery, the voice in which the marginalized speak, without disturbing the core or dominant ideas of existence at the creamy layer of the society. It follows then that the subdued voices are chiefly those of women in the rural areas but the picture of women these folk songs portray is not always of the conformist stereotype Indian women (Srivastava 269) as viewed since the days of colonization.

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