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Jakdi folksongs: A study of Haryanvi women's resistance to patriarchy

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ABSTRACT

Jakdi is a genre of oral folk songs sung by Haryanvi women in a group. The subject matter of jakdis revolves around the hierarchical family relations of the protagonist, and women's collective perspective on their patriarchal situation is presented in this folk form. The themes of jakdis revolve around everyday incidents involving the woman protagonist and have a form of anecdotal narratives.

The singing of jakdis is not to be seen as merely a passive form of entertainment. Through the collective singing of jakdis, Haryanvi women actively negotiate their position within the hierarchies of patriarchal family institutions. Through jakdis, Haryanvi women collectively challenge patriarchal narratives and assert an identity where they have agency within the hegemonic family institution vis-à-vis their various social subject positions of wives, daughter-in-law, daughter, mother, sister and lovers.

One gets to see a range of responses by women against patriarchal subordination in the Haryanvi family institution, right from lamentation over their subordination to a robust resistance against patriarchal domination.

Further, this paper will make this subversive oral Haryanvi genre accessible to a broader English readership through original translations of Jakdis from Haryanvi to English.

Keywords: Jakdi oral folksongs; resistance to patriarchy; translation.

Introduction

Haryanvi women sing four folk songs: ritual, seasonal, bhajans, and jakdis. The 'Jakdi' genre shows that instead of being a neutral site of socialisation, the family is an institution practicing hegemonic relations of "domination and subordination" (Williams 110). The poor sex ratio of Haryana, amongst all Indian states for many decades is an indicator of intense patriarchy in the state, which is practiced mostly through the family institution. 'Jakdi' word literally means 'to be captured', and fittingly shows how women understand and negotiate their confinement in the patriarchal families of

Haryana. However, practically jakdi songs imply a song made by adding anecdotes of everyday life. Jakdi songs are different from other folk songs of Haryanvi women, as those are sung and performed in an exclusively female space. Such space having barred men's entry altogether, allows them to openly indicate, comment and criticize the social and cultural forces leading to their subordination.

Methodology

Firstly, this paper involves the original translation from Haryanvi to English of Haryanvi Jakdi songs sung by women. The primary text for the same is Devendra Kumar's *Jakdi: Haryanvi Mahilaon ke Sarv Sulabh Geet*, which is an anthology of Jakdi songs sung by women in Haryana.

Secondly, apart from translation, the methodology of textual analysis will be used in this paper to analyse the Jakdi songs.

Thirdly, this research includes fieldwork as a methodology to find out whether women belonging to different castes have different jakdi songs within a particular village.

Discussion

Traditionally 'jakdis' have been a "neglected genre as it was considered a trivial activity that women involved themselves [in,] simultaneously with their daily chores" (Saroha 16). Even Haryanvi folklorists like Shankarlal Yadav and Sadhuram Sharad dismissed jakdis as an insignificant genre not worthy of academic study because these songs are about routine life matters. Devendra Kumar is the first scholar noting the literary and sociological value of jakdis. He collected and anthologized jakdis through extensive field work. His scholarly classification, categorization and observations of jakdis is of immense value. The present paper is an extension of the work done by Devendra Kumar. Through jakdis, one may examine the perspective of an "oppositional critic" like Kumar, who tries to understand the "voice [of] the exploited" (Dollimore and Sinfield 277). Kumar notes:

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 (Kumar, "A Saga" 3).

The jakdi songs can be categorized in three groups:

- A. The first group is of jakdis having a tone of helplessness and a sense of being inescapably subordinated by overwhelming patriarchal ideologies which objectify women. In such jakdis, women are seen to be lamenting over their dehumanisation in patriarchal societies. They cannot resist or challenge such situations and cannot do anything except lamenting their defeat in the social structure. Consider the following jakdi in this respect:

Marrying a farmer

I brought and cooked the curry of cauliflower
 I cooked chapattis by pressing the belan
 I travelled to the fields adjusting it in the tasla
 O! eat the Chapattis I've brought curry too
 I shall not eat it you've brought mixing poison in it
 I came back home adjusting the chapattis in the tasla
 I went to fetch water with the pot on my head
 I jumped into the well having strengthened my heart
 He came running when he heard of the suicide
 O! I've received great sorrow by calling the curry poisoned
 O! I've got great sorrow by marrying a farmer.

Belan: A kitchen utensil to flatten chappatis.

Tasla: A large bowl like container.

In this jakdi, the detailing of the mundane tasks done by the speaker is an assertion of the fact that it takes time and effort to do works which a patriarchal society renders invisible. The farmer husband of the speaker insults her by casually dismissing the food brought by her. However, the woman gets hurt due to his gibe because she had put in a lot of effort in making food for him. By giving the details of the process of making food the woman is making an argument against the grain. She challenges the patriarchal practise of rendering women's work invisible. She fights against the patriarchal idea that the work that housewives do is not significant.

However, it seems that the woman can hardly do anything except committing a suicide to make her point in an insensitive society. Her husband regrets making a jibe over her food only when the speaker ends her life by jumping into the well. The trope of suicide reappears in many jakdis signifying the helpless situation of women whose lives are not valued in extremely patriarchal societies.

- B. In the second type of jakdi songs, the speaker makes an attempt to negotiate with her oppressive conditions, merely by existing. Even here the speaker cannot do much to change her conditions, yet she tries to bargain her power within patriarchal family by changing the narrative of her existence. The following is jakdi exemplifying this stance.

I will grind pulses on your chest

I cut wheat he ri, my susra fights too much with me
 You cut it too high and destroy the fodder
 I cook chapatis he ri, my saas fights too much with me
 You make them too thick and destroy the flour
 I fetch water he ri, my nanad fights daily
 You walk too slow and destroy the water bank
 I milk the buffaloes he ri, my jetha fights daily
 You do it too easy and destroy the buffalo
 I wash the clothes he ri, my devar fights too much with me
 You don't clean properly and destroy the pants
 I walk in the verandah he ri, my husband fights too much with me
 Go jump in the well, you're destroying my life
 I won't jump, o my father will be insulted
 I will stay here only, o, I would grind pulses on your chest.

Susra: father-in-law

Saas: mother-in-law

Nanad: husband's sister

Jetha: husband's elder brother

Devar: Husband's younger brother

In this jakdi, one gets to see that every single in-law of the married woman tries to dominate her by demeaning and belittling her work. However, all the resistance that the woman speaker can offer here is to simply stay in her condition. Her mere existence seems to be an act of 'grinding pulses on her in-laws' chests. A married woman is herself a lone migrant in a family of strangers in another location, away from her own house. Her position becomes especially vulnerable due to the compulsory emigration of the married woman in societies enforcing exogamy. The practice of exogamy is practised through women alone in patriarchal societies whereby women are culturally made to emigrate and the male children become the sole inheritors of ancestral property. This jakdi shows how women become vulnerable in such patriarchal situations, whereby every in-law tries to subjugate her.

- C. The third group of jakdi songs are the ones whereby the speaker offers robust resistance against her subordination against patriarchal norms. The woman does not shy from expressing her individuality and refuses to be cowed down by patriarchal domination. The following is an example of such a stance in jakdis.

Ae farmer is left staring

The silk saree slips from the head, wayward hair partition, vermilion in hair

I took chapattis to the fields, eat o husband I have to go home

Put them down, sit down, don't sneer I have to plough

I dumped the container, broke the pitcher, started on the college's way, Ae farmer was left staring

At evening I came back home, the mother was teaching the son, Re she's not a bahu she's trouble

He picked the lathi, advanced to hit, I stared bitterly, the farmer was left staring.

In this jakdi song, one gets to see that an educated woman knows her rights. Her educational status is reflected by her saying that she has to go to college. She does not accept any insults from her husband, nor does she allow him to make her a victim of domestic violence. Her awareness of her rights, individuality and dignity makes her gaze itself so powerful that her husband is left staring and is unable to proceed to hit her. Education allows her to break traditional norms subverting woman. This is symbolized by her wayward hair partition and the refusal to veil herself, as her saree slips from her head.

The arguments seen in jakdis prove the validity of Deniz Kandiyoti' concept of "patriarchal bargain" for gender relations. Kandiyoti describes patriarchal bargain as an outcome of social and political negotiations that women make, to increase their autonomy, within the larger patriarchal framework.

Kandiyoti's concept of "patriarchal bargain" also allows and asks for an intersectional approach to studies of gender relations, by arguing that the nature and amount of this bargain is not essentialized. The bargain with patriarchy varies at the local level within societies, across classes and ethnicities, with an intersectional framework. For instance, wealthy women might enjoy more autonomy, privileges and empowerment than relatively poorer women, or even men from less privileged areas (Benstead, 8).

However, the field work done in research nuances/ problematizes/ challenges this specific argument of intersectionality.

In Juglan village of Hissar district in Haryana, the women familiar with the practice of jakdi singing argue that with respect to singing of jakdi songs by the women of a particular village, there is no intersectionality of gender with caste or class. Instead, they make a case for uniformity across class and caste when it comes to subjugation of women in patriarchal family units within Haryana; or in other words, family relations of women within at least one particular village. This is because, Juglan's women argue, that there is no difference between jakdis of upper-class or lower-class women, or even of women belonging to different castes within a village. They claim that jakdis are sung together by all the women who are present. Now, this claim cannot be dismissed on the basis of sample itself, because it was made by Anganwadi workers, who belong to all castes within a village, thanks to the representative reservation policy of Indian government.

This finding need not be seen as being against the argument of intersectionality. One has to remember that jakdi songs are narratives of anecdotes of incidents happening within a patriarchal family unit, describing the negotiations a woman makes regarding her subordinate social position within the family unit, vis-à-vis her various familial relatives. Moreover, even if particular experiences may diverge to some extent, the female sex as a group may find certain similarities in their experiences

within their respective patriarchal family units, irrespective of any difference of caste and class. This similarity of experience within the family unit gets reflected in the jakdis. One has to remember that the family space is a very private form of patriarchy, whereby one experiences patriarchy in its most intensive form. It is possible that the most private and most intensive experience of patriarchy within the family unit has certain similarity for women's experience of patriarchy, across caste and class.

Nevertheless, a further settling of the debate of intersectionality goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Finally, the singing of jakdi folksongs must not be dismissed as merely a form of entertainment. A cultural materialistic perspective reveals that even the most neutral seeming sites of entertainment are actually sites of ideological struggle. Thus, the singing of jakdis, having the subject matter of women's negotiation with the hierarchical family institution in a patriarchal society, is an act and an intervention to their situation of crisis, and to negotiate power within patriarchal family institution.

Conclusion

Jakdi is a subversive genre of women challenging patriarchal norms. It is performed mostly by a gathering of women. Being away from the male gaze, women express their sentiments against patriarchy freely. Although some jakdis have a tone of helplessness in overwhelming patriarchal situations, the very singing of such songs is an act of rebellion against the patriarchal subordination of women in the family institution.

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