Chapter-1

Introduction: Folklore, Orality and Tradition

The study of folklore is inclusive of many different disciplines that overlap and intermingle with each other. Disciplines like anthropology, psychology, sociology, literary studies and women’s studies, linguistics, all come together to study the folklore in wider terms. It becomes essential to understand and analyse folk literature in the light of above disciplines to get a better understanding of the culture and history behind the given oral literature. Folklore surpasses boundaries of time in a way that it brings the culture and civilization of the past and merges it with the future for a better understanding. It continuously flows with the civilization by adopting different forms on the course of its journey. That way, it never gets struck in one time. It is not a static thing to be stored and preserved in any one form which struts itself as the ‘original. It is continuously and spontaneously being produced by the people who are blissfully ignorant of its various facets and its profound effect on the modern civilization. It is no more a thing of the rural or semi-urban masses but it is very much a part of the modern world.

Many attempts have been made to define, categorize and theorize the term ‘folklore’ through words that can give it a concrete meaning. Folklore does not only include what is passed orally from one generation to another rather it encompasses everything including the cultural norms, behavioral codes, individual identities, feelings and emotions, religious beliefs, and experiences of not only a particular race or nationality but also of each individual living through it. The speakers of every society or cultural group have their own way of defining folklore for themselves. Any singular definition of folklore will fall short in its attempt to encompass the
multiplicity of meanings attributed to it and derived from it by varied individuals and myriad ethnic groups. Therefore it becomes imperative to look into the cultural trajectories and critical perspectives on folklore till date.

One of the best definitions for the term “folklore” can be found in Alan Dundes essay, “Who Are the Folk?”. Dundes rejects the notion that folk belongs only to the rural folk or peasants. He argues that in the 19th century many folklorists assumed ‘folk’ to be the rural folk or peasant class who fall somewhere in between primitive or pre-literate and civilized literate classes. Therefore the folklore emerging out of such a category which is not as savage as that of primitive people, but is also not as educated as the urban masses, is assumed to be the reproducer of folklore. Such a group of people sharing common customs, beliefs, ideologies, mannerisms, and rituals etc. are the bearers of folklore. According to his definition of ‘folk’:

The term ‘folk’ can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is—it could be a common occupation, language, or religion—but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own. In theory a group must consist of at least two persons, but generally most groups consist of many individuals. A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group have a sense of group identity (6).

Thus he disagrees with the notion of rejecting folk as a part of primitive people as well as urban ones. Folk was always there since the primitive times and as man began to civilize and adopted settled ways of living, his folklore travelled and embedded
with him. Similarly, with the advent of modernization and urban development, the same rural folk moved to cities but not without their folklore. The folklore thus changed forms but it was always a part of the human life and civilization.

According to Ralph Steele Boggs, “Folklore refers to a body of materials, to the science which studies these materials, and to the art which applies these materials and scientific conclusions about them to practical ends” (3). Tracing out its origin, Boggs further adds that:

The word “folklore” was first proposed, more or less in its present sense, by William John Thoms in the Athenaeum of August 22, 1846, and has been widely adopted into Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French, and other languages, notably of the Romance group. Of wider concept, the Germans use Volkskunde.

As a body of materials, folklore is the lore, erudition, knowledge, or teachings, of a folk, large social unit, kindred group, tribe, race, or nation, primitive or civilized, throughout its history. It is the whole body of traditional culture, or conventional modes of human thought and action. It is created informally in a group of persons for themselves, but has been accepted widely enough to have attained considerable currency, and over a sufficient period of time to have acquired traditional traits, such as anonymity of authorship and historic geographic patterns of variants of basic forms (3).

Barbro Klein defines folklore through four basic meanings. He says:

First, it denotes oral narration, rituals, crafts, and other forms of vernacular expressive culture. Second, folklore or ‘folkloristics, names an academic
discipline devoted to the study of such phenomenon. Third, in everyday usage, folklore sometimes describes colorful ‘folkloric’ phenomenon linked to the music, tourist and fashion industries. Fourth, like myth folklore can mean falsehood (5711).

In the words of Jan Brunvand:

Folklore comprises the unrecorded traditions of a people; it includes both the form and content of these traditions and their style or technique of communication from person to person. Folklore is the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of culture. It encompasses all knowledge, understandings, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs transmitted in traditional forms by word of mouth or by customary examples (Brunvand: n.pag).

While commenting upon ‘folklore’ in the context of India, Trilochan Pande argues:

The term *Folklore* has always remained a debatable subject since its coinage by Thoms in 1846 among the European and American scholars, and in India and Pakistan the situation is not much different. Indian folkloristics have been using for a long time another term *Lok Varta* parallel to the term *Folklore*, but as regards its exact scope and meaning the state is still more confusing than in the western countries (105).

Pande equates the term *Folklore* to *Lok Varta* when he says:

\[
\begin{array}{cc}
Lok & Varta \\
Folk & ‘Lore’ OR ‘Wisdom of Common People’
\end{array}
\]
The present study calls for the understanding of the word ‘Lok/Folk’ in the broader context of Indian folk traditions. The word ‘lok’ has many different meanings and connotations. It refers to the whole world or sometimes, to narrow down, the society that we live in. Lok is also used to address to the masses. The world is also divided into three loks—swarga (heaven), prithvi (earth) and pataal (hell). Lok is something which is all pervasive and is an essential element of human existence. Thus the section of society, which, irrespective of any shallow brahminical customs and beliefs, follows and lives in a particular tradition, is called lok. Terms like, lok chetna/folk conscience, lok vyavhar/folk behaviour, lok smaanta/folk resemblance, or lok jeevan/folk life, defines the concept and prominence of lok in people’s lives. The term encompasses all the innate or pre-defined social codes that have long been associated with human beings since generations. Such social and behavioral codes have come to us through myths which got transferred orally through generations in the form of folklore and became part of our life. Quoting Carl Jung, Robert A. Segal argues, “Myths are original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings, and anything but allegories of physical processes” (67).

Myth is the collective dream of human race. Human conscience has developed out of mythical conscience which has further developed into historical facts. We believe in the mythical events to be true, i.e. to have happened at some point of time in past, and therefore as historically factual. There is a constant faith of human beings in the historicity of myths which make them archetypes of human virtues and vices. Myth is a tale which is assumed to have happened at some point of time in past. They are stories that narrate the lives and heroic achievements of the saints, religious beliefs and rituals of a race or a civilization, stories of genesis, etc. of a group of people or
nations. The Sanskrit word ‘*purana*’ which means an ‘old tale’ is another name for myth. Myth can also be named as any ‘religious tale’ which has a cultural significance for a particular ethnic group and therefore is very much a part of folk history. Myth has its foundation in oral tradition. “Jung suggests that dreams and myths reveal the structure of the human psyche or soul. Recurring images and symbols are “collective representations”; considered as coming from the universal substance of humankind, they form the “collective unconscious” or the “objective psyche . . .” (Doty 199).

A researcher of folklore and myth, Brent C. Augustus traces out the process through which a story travels within time and space. He says:

“Long before wide-spread literacy and the invention of the printing press made the written word accessible to most people; stories were shared within a society and from one society to another through oral tradition. Through the use of oral tradition we can see that religious myths are created and used in order to facilitate the teachings of religious doctrines to society. Not only does this process ensure that the story will spread throughout the society as it travels from person to person, but also the particular religious point is translated into the daily lives and beliefs of the culture. For example . . . with few exceptions, religious figures are shown in the stories that they inhabit as examples of the proper observance of a particular aspect of a culture’s religious doctrine” (6).

Folklore is replete with mythical elements which help articulate the dreams and desires of the human race and also express its fears. The characters of these mythical tales carry symbolic significations of the virtues and follies of human beings and acts as touchstones. The stories thus narrated slowly develop into religious and moral tales and become archetypes to be followed by people when in adversity. The
folk singer or the carrier of myth is also the one who, knowingly or unknowingly, expresses his sub-conscious desires through these tales. The tale is thus not the prerogative of any one individual rather it is an act of transmission of a collective myth as well as the individuals who have passed it on from generation to generation. The orality of these myths make them universal but with an additional aspect of individuality. Ben-Amos seconds the argument when he says:

> The anonymity of folk narratives, rhymes, and riddles hardly solved the enigma of origin. The responsibility for authorship had to be assigned to some creator, be he divine or human. So in the absence of any individual who could justifiably and willingly claim paternity of myths and legends, the entire community was held accountable for them. . . . Narrators and singers often attribute their tales and songs not to an individual but to the collective tradition of the community (11).

A. K. Ramanujan goes deeper to further differentiate between myths (*Puranic*) and folk-myths. According to him, though folk-myths are an extension to the well known *Puranic* myths. They connect daily perceptions with a mythical incident and intent. Though the stories behind folk-myths are similar to *puranic* myths, “except that we see them not in texts but in everyday speech, in a collective yet diachronic process, the stories being varied, reworked, etymologized, informed, or garbled by successive tellers . . .” (516).

The proliferators of these myths or religious dicktat are also the ones in power and are assumed to be spiritual leaders of the society. They propagate these myths further into uncontested beliefs which people accept as norms. They are held in high esteem and reverence by the society and are no less than semi-divine religious
preachers. In Haryana, the folk bards enjoy such a status and are assumed to be the
keepers of religious faith. *Ragni* being a male bastion is thus a way of spreading
normativity and patriarchy, and myths are the stories which create the binaries of
masculine and feminine attributes. These spiritual leaders, through these mythical
stories, further spread and propagate these gendered binary divisions. Doty argues:

[Myths] function particularly—or at least they have so functioned—to give us
role models of masculine and feminine behavior . . . they educate us in ways
of acting out maleness and femaleness, of interrelating the two, reflecting on
the best traits of each sex, and even of *reconceiving* the social manifestations
of masculinity and femininity within particular historical periods (72).

The present study is an attempt to look into these gendered normative
boundaries in the light of select *sangs*—“Hoor Meneka”, “Heer Ranjha”, “Satyavan
Savitri”, and “Pooranmal”. The *ragnis* chosen are based on mythical narratives taken
from *puranas* and grand epics—*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the celebrated
*Mahakavayas*.

**Origin and Development of Sang:**

*Sang, Swang, Svang*, or folk-theatre as it may be called, traces its origin to
BharataMuni’s *Natyashastra*, which is regarded as the fifth *Veda* that encompasses the
characteristics from all the other four *Vedas*—“recitation from the *Rg Veda*, song
from the *Sama Veda*, acting from the *Yajur Veda*, and aesthetics from the *Atharva
Veda*” (Richmond 25). *Rg Veda* is regarded as the earliest hymns found though it is
still a debatable issue as to what is the exact date for the composition of *Rg Veda*. But
it was only after *Rg Veda* that a vast repertoire of literature sprung up. The *Ramayana*
and *Mahabharata* are the two most acclaimed and prominent compositions amongst
all. These texts, do not directly make any reference to theatre or natya, but the actions described dramatically in these texts, and many others, throw pertinent light on the features of drama—action, words, mime and recitation etc.

Scholars and historians believe Sanskrit drama to be an originary form of theatre that inspired other forms of drama. Originally, Sanskrit was the language of the plays, which were staged at courts and religious rituals. But around the 17th century which saw the rise of the Bhakti Movement, many regional vernaculars came into being and drama took a new turn from Sanskrit to folk dialects and other local languages. However, the debate over whether folk theatre developed out of Sanskrit drama or it was Sanskrit theatre which has its roots in early prototypes of folk forms is still an unanswered question.

*Sang* is the popular form of folk entertainment in Haryana and its neighboring states. Scholars have long been debating about the origin of the word *swang/swang* or *sang* and its relationship to the Sanskrit word—*Sangit*, which means singing and music. But in cultural context of Haryana, the word *sang* means ‘to impersonate’ or ‘to imitate’ or ‘copy someone or something’. It is often used as a proverbial word while pointing at someone. Though it is known by many other names like, *nautanki, bhvai, khayal, manch*, and *bhagat* etc. but all these forms of folk theatre do not differ from each other in any important way. Vatuk and Vatuk call *sang* a ‘folk opera’. They contend that:

The stories they portray are derived for the most part from the same myths, tales and epics, and from the lives of Indian religious and folk heroes. Most use poetry, and where prose is employed, poetic elements such as rhyming, and elaborate figurative speech are prominent. All use music and song as an
integral part of the performance, so that it is appropriate to call them folk opera (31).

Qissah or Kissa is another name which can be given to sang as qissah too is an orally transmitted tale which describes the adventures and quests of heroes and which are believed to have happened at some point of time in past. The word comes from the “the Arabic/ Persian/ Urdu qissah, or ‘story’” which narrates events of a heroic tale. (Pritchett 50).

Pritchett argues:

Kissa is nowadays a printed genre, though its contents include many stories which are still transmitted orally as well. Most of the popular stories in this genre are romantic fairy tales—or, as Northrop Frye would put it, naïve romances—which describe the marvelous adventures of a human hero on a quest which includes encounters with both friendly and hostile magical forces (51).

It is believed that during 18th century, Haryana (then undivided Punjab) had other popular genres for entertainment—Mujra and Nakkal. The former was performed by courtesans and the latter by a group of artists-performers called ‘nakkalchi’/imitators. But because of mujra being a high-priced source of entertainment, only the high class rich could afford it and that too on grand occasions like marriages on birth of a male heir. The courtesans used to perform a mythical or legendary tale (like a sang) during such occasions. But certain class of people objected to this form of entertainment because of the audacity with which these courtesans performed their act. Nakkal on the other hand was limited to common people and was not as expensive as the mujra. It too did not enjoy any good reputation among masses
because these troops were infamous for sarcasm and mockery which was even targeted towards the host³.

The dislike for both these earlier dance forms called for a change in the contemporary folk forms of entertainment and led to the origin of sang. Kishan Lal Bhat is known as the precursor of the genre of sang who started performing from the middle of the 18th century.

Sang or as is suggested by its originary name, ‘sangit’ is not merely a folk form that we see today, it is rather an age old tradition. Its three most important features—music, dance, and drama—can be seen in many other folk performances like, ramlila, raslila, khodiya, giddha and loor⁴, kathputli nritya (puppet dance), bahuroopiya (impersonator) and many other popular genres in Haryana and regions around it. Each of these folk forms has music, dance and drama as its base. So in a way, the word ‘sang’ is does not suggest any particular folk form but it is wider implications to it. Thus any form of drama accompanied with dance and music, which leads to impersonation and imitation of any person or any mythological or legendary character, meant for the purpose of entertainment can be called sang.

When we talk about ‘sangit’ or ‘sang’, it becomes imperative to take into consideration the folk operas performed in Braj. It was in the regions of Braj that sangs were a popular source of entertainment for people during 18th century. Before the advent of tradition of sang in Haryana, it was the regions like Hathras and Agra in Braj which were renowned to be the main lands for this kind of folk form. This form then gained popularity in its neighboring states like Haryana, Punjab and Delhi where it developed into a new and improved folk form with the name of ‘nautanki’. And with time, nautanki left its deep mark on the structure and form of Braj’s sang type.
Sangs like, Heer-Ranjha, Guru-Gugga, Nihalde, Gopichand, Bharthari, Nal-Damyanti, Roop-Basant, and Seela Sethani etc. long continued to entertain people in Haryana, Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh.

**Performative Aspects of Sang:**

The *sang* troupe, also known as *beda*, is a group of ten to twelve performers, all of them males. Out of these, three or four are called *sajinde* or instrumentalists who play musical instruments like, dholak, khadtaal, sarangi, and harmonium. The number of these musical instruments is generally limited and varies from region to region. Rest of the troupe plays all the major roles of actor, singer and dancer. There is a main leader known as *bedaband* who usually takes up the role of protagonist. He is also the author-composer of the folk opera. All other members are more or less disciples to him who are equally responsible for the composition, performance and execution of the *sang* to be performed. The *bedaband* or the *guru*, begins by invoking the almighty and his *guru* or spiritual leader under whom he has learnt this art form. This way he pays respect to his own master and also leaves antecedents of the tradition to be followed by his subordinates.

The *sang* troupe recruits people on the basis of merit and ability. The caste or religion is not a barrier when it comes to talent and interest. Therefore we find many Muslim instrumentalists like Alibaksh (in Lakhmi Chand’s *sang* troupe) in the troupes of many popular *sangis*.

In the initial phase of the development of *sang*, each *beda* had limited number of members who played out the complete *sang*, i.e. four to five participants were enough to carry out the complete tale. The role of women characters was always played by the men so, generally the number of men playing such roles was limited to
two. They were also responsible for impersonating and playing the other roles as and when required. Though the scenario is different now a days as the troupes now have become more formal and professional in executing the sang. They can afford to have different men for playing each role though bedaband still plays the lead role.

As far as the stage is concerned, initially it was kept simple. In those days, any open space where a sufficient number of people could gather around was assumed to be the stage. A dorda (a big mattress) was spread in the centre for the actors to perform and the audience sat encircling them. A school compound or the panchayat bhavan is also used sometimes to perform the sang. The trees nearby also become the place to sit and watch a sang performance if the ground becomes overcrowded. It also gives the audience a better view from a height. Women are not allowed to watch the performance in full view of men. They are thus confined to roof tops of nearby houses. The performance generally begins in the evening or late night so people occupy their seats as early as possible. Villagers are informed of the performance through naggara (drum beating) well in advance.

The narrative of sang oscillates between narration and dialogue, i.e., varta and samwad. Varta comes at the beginning of the sang and also acts as connecting link between two actions as described by dialogues between two characters. Varta is conversation in prose whereas smwad is carried out through many metrical forms—doha, ragni, choboula, dochashmi, etc. Each actor sings his part in the form of ragni and the other actor in conversation replies to him in a similar fashion which is generally called jvab (to answer). This way the sang proceeds with varta and ragni in sequence.
The subject matter of these *sangs* is generally taken from the storehouse of mythical stories available in grand epics like—*Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Many legends which have long been into our oral tradition also become the subject matter of *sangs*. The author-composer-performer picks up a small incident or story from there and elaborates it into a full-fledged folk opera. In doing so, he intertwines it with his cultural values and normative boundaries and gives it a regional variation. Thus the core story and the characters remains the same, but we see changes in the location and sequencing of the incidents. It is not the authenticity of the events which appeal the audience but the regional variations that cause a stir in their hearts and make them listen to same story, performed by different *sangis*, time and again.

**Literature Review: Tracing the History**

Earlier folk literature was available only in the oral form as it passed from generation to generation through verbal discourse and live performances. The researchers generally associate the publication of these folk songs to R.C.Temple’s *Legends of the Punjab*, first published in 1961-63, in three volumes, which lists many tales from Haryana as well. Other than Temple’s research work, there also came another publication by Charles Swynnorton, *Romantic Tales from the Punjab*, in 1970, which also lists many tales from Haryana. The collection and publication of these oral tales and legends made them reach to the new readership through the print medium.

The folklorists (*sangis*) now started to publish their compositions on the increased demand of people with the growing popularity of the *sangs* as a major source of folk entertainment. With the advent of education, the rural and semi-urban populace now began to read and write and felt the need of connecting to their folk
literature and culture through the written word. They began to collect, compile, and document their abundantly available folk literature so as to make it available to the educated lot and also for future generations. A need to collect and critically analyse their rich folk literature, earlier available in oral form, was being felt. Many researcher and academic bodies began to take initiative in this direction and started with the herculean task of collecting and critically examining the rich literature of Haryanvi folk.

The initial period of written word in folklore saw various folk songs (ragnis and sangs) being published into small booklets that were made available by the then small time publishers and book sellers like, Dehati Pustak Bhandar etc. It is well documented that many folklorists (sangis) wrote down their compositions and got them published into small booklets (pages varying from 20-30 to 100-120) for the consumption of general public. These booklets later became the primary or originary texts for the reading mass and also served as elementary books for the future researchers.

K.C. Yadav and S.R. Phogat in, *History and Culture of Haryana: A Classified and Annotated Bibliography*, have well documented the detailed information about such materials available then. They have made an exceptionally good effort in classifying the prominent literary and critical works in the period ranging from 1965 to 1980. The Folk bards like, Basti Ram, Chander Lal (Badi) Bhat, Bhishma, Daya Chand, Devi Singh, Dhanpat, and Pandit Lakhmi Chand, to name a few, have been the ones who’s compositions were available in the printed form. In the later years, the researchers began to feel the need for shifting their focus from the collection, compilation and publication of sangs, ragnis and other folk
material, which was solely a male domain, to women’s folklore. Earlier, the ‘songs of 
women’ were a neglected genre as it was considered a trivial activity that women 
involved themselves simultaneously with their daily chores. The researchers began to 
feel the need of collecting and compiling songs of women sung on various occasions 
like, festive songs, birth and death songs, songs related to crop and agriculture, ritual 
songs, etc., which they felt were store houses of Haryanvi culture and customs. 
Women have always been regarded as the carrier of culture and tradition, but very 
little or no attention was given to their folk literature. Haryana being a patriarchal 
society made it a neglected and impossible arena to be ever taken care of. The earliest 
record of any critical work in this direction, as documented by Yadav and Phogat, is 
the two research articles in Hindi, first, by C.D.Shastri, “Haryana Ke Lok Geeton 
Mein Nari”, which depicts women in the folk songs of Haryana and second, by 
Krishan Dev Jhari, “Haryanvi Lok Kathao Mein Nari”, which briefly describes the 
women as they are depicted in the Haryanvi folk tales.

The modern period, roughly ranging from 1990-till present times, began to 
critically examine these oral literatures (now abundantly available in print form). It 
began to haunt the minds of researchers and they started looking into the socio-
political and socio-economic nuances behind the composition of these songs. 
Researches began to look into the society that these oral forms reflected through them.

The last two decades have seen a variety of literature on Haryanvi folklore. 
Many writers have produced some ground-breaking works whether in form of 
anthologies or critical appreciation. If we look at the kind of research work done in 
the field of folklore in Haryana and its neighboring states, we find that it is divided 
into three major categories:
A. Anthologies: collection and compilation

B. Critical Anthologies: brief critical appreciation of collected folk texts

C. Literary Criticism: textual study of folk texts

In the following literary review, the researcher has chosen the canonical texts falling into a period from 1990- till present.

The first and foremost research works, which also form the basis of the present study, are the anthologies based on the *sangs* of chosen four folk poets. The first in this direction is, *Pandit Lakhmi Chand Granthavali*, (1992), a collection of *sangs* and *ragnis*, sung by him, collected through field work carried out by Pooran Chand Sharma. The book comprises of not only major *sangs* composed and sung by the bard but it also includes a brief history of the poet’s life and the tradition of *sang* as a folk form. As per him, *sang* is another name for “*kaumi natak*” and he argues that the earliest form of *sang* and its tradition is still a debatable issue for many researchers and intellectuals even today. He links the roots of *sang* to the times of antiquity, where he states that the tradition of music and dance originated from the *tandava* dance of lord Shiva\(^{11}\). Not only this, the work also traces the major *sangis* (folk bards) which were popular in 20\(^{th}\) century. Besides all this, the author also critically comments upon the form and narrative style of *sang* composition used by Pandit Lakhmi Chand along with a brief comment upon the types of motifs adopted by the bard in his composition.

On the lines similar to the above work comprising the popular *ragnis* of Pandit Lakhmi Chand, based are the anthologies of other three folk bards—Baje Bhagat (2006), Dhanpat (2009), and Mange Ram (2011) in order of chronological publication. Baje Bhagat’s *sangs* and *ragnis* are published under the title, *Baje*
Bhagat: Sampoorn Haryanvi Granthavali, (2006), a joint venture by Ramphal Chahal, Ashok Kumar, Jagbir Rathee and Ved Prakash Hudda. In this work, not much has been talked about Baje Bhagat except a brief description of his life as a *sangi*. The work comprises of selected fifteen *sangs* composed and sung by him.

Then comes the anthological compilation of *sangs* and *ragnis* composed and sung by Dhanpat under the title, *Dhanpat Nindana: Amritkalash*, (2009), compiled by Suresh Jangid and Sheelak Ram. Similar to the above work, it too comprises of the bard’s life history and his career as a *sangi* and fifteen of his most popular *sangs*.

The last one among the chosen four folk bards is Mange Ram, whose collection of *sangs* falls under the title, *Kavi Shiromani Pandit Mange Ram: Haryanvi Granthavali*, (2011), compiled by Raghubir Singh Mathana. Unlike the above two, Mange Ram was popular among the masses firstly, because of him being the disciple of Pandit Lakhmi Chand, and secondly, because of his spontaneity in composing the *sangs*. The compilers have provided an in depth social and cultural critique on his *ragnis*. They have also looked into the religious aspects in his compositions. Besides that, they have dedicated a complete chapter on the ‘representation of women’ in his composition which is again a remarkable effort in the field of feminist study in Haryanvi Folklore.

Throwing light upon Mange Ram’s representation of women in his compositions, Mathana states that it is often seen that woman is juxtaposed against her traditional roles as a mother, a wife, a daughter or a sister and her neglect of familial virtues and self-sacrificing nature could bring about the downfall of them man and his social standing. He justifies Mange Ram’s efforts in projecting woman as not only a bearer of kindness and virtue but also the carrier of misfortune and
downfall of a man. His representation of women is stereotyped in its neglects of the human self of a woman, which is in shades of grey, an amalgamation of good as well as bad qualities. He seconds Mange Ram in propagating woman in the age old binaries of: kamini and bhamini\textsuperscript{12}.

Besides these canonical anthologies, there is a huge collection of critical anthologies that are in abundance. These books are the hard work of researchers who then began to think beyond merely collecting and compiling oral literature. Unlike the above discussed anthologies, these are the anthologies that have been critically examined and are properly categorized into different genres of folk songs. The scholars began to think in terms of the impact and influence of the oral literature on the lives of people. The anthologies in question not only focused on ragnis and sangs, which were the male prerogative, but also, collected, compiled and critically analysed the vast repertoire of women’s folk songs which were always at the margins of literary attention. Out of many such critical anthologies and other critical studies in this regard, the researcher has selected a few as canonical texts worth discussion here. First of these is the critical work by Bhim Singh Malik titled, Haryana Lok Sahitya: Sanskritik Sandarbh, (1990), wherein the author critically examines the folk literature in the light of its history and culture.

The focus of his research work is majorly on the folk songs sung on the festival of Holi. The author has analysed these songs from the point of view of their aesthetic beauty, their socio-cultural role, and the religious and mythical sources behind them. He also looks into the cultural reawakening and social upliftment through many other folk songs. For instance, he asserts that the folk songs have being instrumental in eradicating many social evils like—prostitution, illiteracy, casteism, child marriage, untouchability—which were prevalent in the contemporary society.
Another work taken into consideration is the research work by Jagdish Narayan titled, *Haryana Pradesh ke Lok Geeton ka Samajik Paksh* (1989), which is again a categorization and critical examination of folk songs. The author has classified these folk songs into two—songs of women and songs of men which are further classified into various other categories. The work in this regard, thus, is no different from the other works in this field. But one thing that makes this research work distinct from its contemporary researches is that the author has devoted space to a detailed study of chalking out the tradition of Haryanvi literature from the times immemorial. He traces the origin of literary history of Haryana from Sufi saint Farid (13th century) till the contemporary times. He critically examines the development and progress of Haryanvi folk literature during this long period.

Shankar Lal Yadav’s, *Haryana Pradesh ka Loksahitya*, (2000) is another voluminous work comprising a detailed study of folk literature, aspects of Haryanvi language and folk songs on various themes ranging from festival songs, agriculture related songs, songs of marriage and child birth, songs of last rites, seasonal songs (*barahmassi*) etc. The book also critically examines folk stories and folk plays (*sangs*), the two other popular folk forms of Haryana. The author has dedicated considerable literary space to the critical study of proverbs, idioms, and riddles, which form the essential part of the day-to-day communications.

There are many other critical compilations of folk songs, stories, and plays etc. which have been examined through the lens of socio-political and socio-economic critique, which are later developments. To name a few, Ram Mehar Singh’s *Haryanvi Sangeet ka Udbhav aur Vikas*, (2007) is one among them where the author has talked at length about the origin and history of *sang* as a folk form. Not only this, the author has traced the tradition of *sang* performance from the period of antiquity to present
times in which he has discussed the prominent *sangis* of all times. The author has dexterously divided the tradition of *sang* in four periods—the emergence of *sang* (1730-1900); development of *sang* (1900-1923); golden period (1923-1950); modern period (1950-present). In each of these periods, the author has descriptively talked about the then contemporary popular *sangis* and a few of their compositions. The work is considered a skillful and well researched piece of literature in the critically examined literary genre of Haryana’s oral literature. The author’s intensive field work is clearly visible after reading the book. It is a milestone in the category of critically examined literary works.

Another work which delves deeply into the intricacies behind the narratives of *sangs* and *ragnis* is the critical work by Jai Prakash Sharma, *Haryanvi Lok Sahitya ka Samajik Addhyan*, (2008), which is a socio-economic study of Haryanvi folklore. The author begins his study by analyzing the social, economic, educational, familial, political and caste-based arrangements in Haryanvi society. He divides the folk literature of Haryana into—songs, folk-operas (*sangs*), folk tales, and other folk forms like riddles, proverbs, anecdotes etc. The author has made an effort to show how folk literature reflects the culture within which it has long lived. Whether it is the arrangement of a caste-based society, the existing education system, the agricultural backdrop, a joint family setup, and the economic conditions, all get reflected through the oral narratives sung commonly. The present research work is, once again, a sociological study of society of Haryana through its folklore.

One of the prominent research works is *The Veiled Women*, (1994), by Prem Chowdhry, which is again a sociological study wherein Chowdhry covers two historical periods, colonial and post-colonial, “to determine the effects of interaction between patriarchy, class and state on gender and its shifting equations. The epilogue
treats the woman in a ghunghat (veil) as being central to what is projected as the ‘dehati (rural) culture’. A veiled woman, with the attendant ideology of plain living and austere eating, is perceived by the ruralites as the sole custodian of their culture. The stripping away of this veil is imagined as leading to the collapse of the entire rural social fabric” (22 Introduction). Chowdhry argues that women are also partly responsible for this patriarchal control and reinforcement of its ideology because “women emerge as a willing party to their own marginalization and exploitation” (17).

Another groundbreaking study by Prem Chowdhry, *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples: Gender, Caste, and Patriarchy in Northern India*, (2007), falls into the interdisciplinary fields like sociology, history, popular culture, politics, law, and gender studies is. The work is based on extensive fieldwork, interviews, gazette records, and other archival material, and analyses the widespread phenomenon of contentious marriages and elopements that take place in rural and semi-urban north India resulting in extreme violence. Spanning both colonial and post-colonial periods, it examines the customary codes that regulate marriages, which, in the name of upholding the honor of family, caste and community, defy the law of the land. The book shows how and why the state agencies upholding these norms collude with traditional caste panchayats wielding extrajudicial power, to undermine their own authority and override questions of legal and human rights.

The author has partly taken certain *sangs, ragnis* and women’s songs to examine how patriarchy influences and suffocates women and how hierarchies of caste oppress the weaker sections of society. The fear of polygamy and the inability of women to bear children are clearly reflected through the study of certain *sangs, ragnis* and other folk songs by women.
In the midst of all the critical studies done in the folk literature of Haryana, there comes a creative piece of work by Rajbir Deswal, *Hoor Meneka: The Seductress*, (2010), which is the first ever published English translation of a *sang* composition. Deswal, with his roots in Haryanvi language and culture, and his academic competence in English literature, has made the creative process of translation (of *sangs* and *ragnis*) a trendsetter in the field of study of Haryanvi folklore. The translation has now emerged as a new genre in this direction.

The present translation guilefully brings forth the English version of “Hoor Meneka”, one of the *sangs* which Deswal picked from the numerous compositions sung by the bard Pandit Lakhmi Chand. Deswal has made every effort possible to bring the dialect of Haryana closer to the readers of English language and has managed to establish a place for it in the vast repertoire of folk translations across the nation. But since Haryanvi is not a full-fledged language but a dialect, there are certain words, phrases, sayings and proverbs specifically spoken in Haryana, for which even Deswal could not find a parallel in English. The lack of a given script of Haryanvi language makes it difficult to transliterate it into English with the same cultural essence. The beauty of the *sang* remains in the fact that such words have been picked in their original form by the author, for example, the traditional gold neckpieces like—*hasli, kanthi* and *jugni* have been retained with their original names. Deswal has thus, made a remarkable effort in translating the complete *sang* while keeping the cultural flavor of Haryana’s *sang* tradition. He has paved the way for the future researchers and translators to work in the direction of translating other *sangs* and make them available to the readers of English language.

If we talk about specific research works on the oral literature of any of the prominent *sangis* so far, the name of Pandit Lakhmi Chand comes first. He was the
most popular of all the sangis because it was he who gave a new direction to the form of sang. He was the one who first brought out the tradition of ragni in folk singing. There are notably two prominent research works that widely cover all aspects in Pandit Lakhmi Chand’s sangs. First is, Sang Samrat Pandit Lakhmi Chand, (1991), by Rajendra Swaroop Vats, and, second is, Gandharva Purush Pandit Lakhmi Chand, (2000), by Kesho Ram Sharma. Where Vats have critically analysed the sangs of Pandit Lakhmi Chand in the light of—mythical elements, social values, cultural conscience, aesthetic beauty, nature and its elements, and folk belief and superstitions; Sharma on the other hand, along with above aspects, has also dedicated a detailed argument to the sang tradition of Haryana.

His work encompasses sang in all its entirety where aspects ranging from sang’s meaning and formation to its staging, audience, characterization, dresses, invocation, initiation and development of qissah (story), dialogues, and its closing. Sharma has also thrown light on the origin and development of sang which he dates back to the popular dance forms in antiquity—Mujra and Nakkal. He divides the phase of origin and development of sang according to the names of canonical sangis of each age, beginning from Age of Pandit Deep Chand, Age of Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Pandit Mange Ram, and the last, Present Age. So, the study of Sharma is a more detailed and well-researched work in comparison to Vats’s work on Pandit Lakhmi Chand.

One of the recent works in the field of folklore in Haryana is the research work by Vibhuti Gaur, Haryanvi Folk Narratives: A Study of Emerging Semantics in Transmission and Translation, a PHD thesis. Gaur has collected fifty one folktales from Haryana and has examined them from the point of view their discourse, gender and its conditioning as seen through these tales, cast biases as reflected in folktales,
the problematics of translation, and the study of folktales through a postcolonial lens. The researcher has found her primary data through fieldwork and other archival materials. The work is an effort to look at Haryanvi folktales by contextualizing them in contemporary discourses.

A brief survey of literary and critical works done so far makes it clear that folklore as an independent discipline is yet to be explored and looked into through various dimensions. Though there is no dearth of folk texts available in Haryanvi language but there is lot to be done as far as critical examination of these texts is concerned. The books given in literature review, and many other such research works are either mere compilations of data collected through field work or summarization of these folk materials. One can see a lot of critical anthologies that have focused on critically examining the different folk genres through various theoretical approaches like feminism, sociological aspects, cultural studies, religious studies, aesthetic beauty, green studies and so on but a closer look at these researches indicate that all these studies are not more than mere compilation and glorification of the culture of Haryana.

There is a hidden motive of over valuing the cultural heritage of Haryana and overlooking the conservative and rigid social values embedded in the minds of people, especially men. Prem Chowdhry’s research works is one of the few exceptions wherein she talks about critically analyzing and questioning the age old traditions, customs and rituals prevalent even today in the patriarchal society of Haryana. She questions the rigid and anti-humanist customs like Karewa (widow’s remarriage to her deceased husband’s kin); caste-based marriages; honor killings and many such vices that are still prevalent in Haryana and its neighboring regions. No researcher from Haryana, before Chowdhry, has ever raised such issues through
his/her studies. In fact, for a long time, no woman researcher from the state itself has come into the field of literary and critical study of folklore and sociology. It had long been a male prerogative.

**Methodology:**

The present research is a critical analysis of four mythical tales composed, sung and performed as *sangs* or *ragnis*—“Hoor Meneka”, “Heer Ranjha”, “Satyavan Savitri”, and “Pooranmal”. The select *ragnis* have been sung by many folk bards but because of the limitations and constraints, the researcher has chosen four folk bards namely, Pandit Lakhmi Chand (PLC), Baje Bhagat (BB), Mange Ram (MR) and Dhanpat (DP). The basis for choosing these four *sangis* is firstly, they are all contemporaries and secondly, they were popular ones among other *sangis* during 20th century. Pandit Lakhmi Chand was though regarded as a legend by all, and Mange Ram was his ardent follower and disciple. Baje Bhagat was a rival of Pandit Lakhmi Chand and had a distinguished style of composing and performing his *ragnis*. Dhanpat on the other hand was known for his unique way bringing forth the social issues in his compositions though he was the one who focused least on the number of *sangs* he composed. The influence of these *sangis* over people and over each other can be seen in the discussion in the later chapters. All the four *sangs* are popular among the people of Haryana and many folk bards over the ages have been repetitively performing them. The aura of this popular medium of entertainment is such that people enjoy these lengthy performances in spite of the fact that the story is already well-known among masses.

The story behind each *sang* has been discussed in detail in chapter 3. The methodology adopted for the present research is textual analysis of all the four *ragnis*. 
Under this head, the researcher has examined the tale in its historical as well as present context and has tried to describe the content, structure and functions of the message contained in the *ragnis* in question. In doing so, the researcher has focused on the two major aspects in *ragni* as a folk form—narrative of *ragnis* and discourse of the bard(s). A carefully examined analysis of the content brings about the hidden cultural meanings embedded in *sangs* and *ragnis*. Since *ragni* is a performative act, the researcher has carefully looked at various recordings of these folk performances in order to analyse, interpret and enquire into the aesthetic richness of these performances. A poet-performer’s choice of words in narrating an episode talks a lot more than the basic story itself. It is a way of getting meaningful insights into his character as a speaker in authority and that too with an ideological bent of mind. The researcher has therefore carefully examined the little nuances in these simple looking folk ballads which otherwise go unnoticed. The ideological discourses embedded in these folk performances give the critical reader an insight as to how deeply the society of Haryana and its customs and rituals are patriarchally governed. The study also focuses on bringing out the ‘male gaze’ through which the women view themselves and other fellow women. The researcher being one from within the culture of Haryana, has tried to shift the focus of reader from the aesthetic beauty of these folk operas towards its purpose to create and establish deep rooted patriarchal territories which calls for unequal gendered relations.

**Chapterization**

The research work has been divided into five chapters which have been summarized as follows. Chapter 1, Introduction, deals with the meaning and definition of folklore, as had been viewed initially and has been improvised, changed, transformed over the years as a result of academic discourse. An attempt has been
made to define, theorize and categorize the term ‘folklore’ in a concrete way. The folklore is argued to be part of a tradition and orality and an attempt has been made to link the three. The chapter begins with a general introduction of folklore and it is later that the folklore of Haryana comes under discussion. The researcher has tried to bring out the complex relation between Indian classics and the Indian folklore. It is still a debatable issue as to what came first—classics or the folk. The importance of myths in the creation, propagation, consumption of folklore is an invincible fact which cannot be ruled out. Any folklore—songs, stories, riddles, jokes, anecdotes etc. serve as a source of prehistory. One cannot claim the sole ownership of any folk creation as it is the ‘collective conscience’ of an ethnic group or race. Sang as a popular folk form of Haryana, has been discussed in detail. The researcher has tried to link this folk form with other popular folk performances that existed before—mujra and nakkal. The performative aspects of sang are discussed in detail which can be useful for a non-Haryanvi speaker who wants to learn about this kind of folk form. The chapter also briefly discusses various literary works worth consideration over approximately last twenty years to give the readers a better insight into the culture and folk of Haryana.

In chapter 2, Gender and its Spatio-Temporal Configuration in Ragnis, comes the issue of gender and space in Haryanvi folk narratives. It is well known fact that Haryana falters in maintaining an equal sex ratio. It is always a male child who enjoys a privileged position over his female counterpart. In this scenario, women are the ones who enjoy least space—whether physical, mental, or bodily. An attempt has been made to understand the concept of spatialising the gender, or say, genderisation of space under patriarchy in order to run cultural normativity. The idea is to explore how these women are gendered in ragni as a mythical space and the way they negotiate
these spaces through their body. The present chapter does not solely focus on the geographical aspect of space rather it extends its scope to other dimension of space i.e. social space which contains the lived body of women. The chapter seeks to explore the geographical as well as social space in a patriarchal society with which women negotiate every day.

Chapter 3, Reconstruction of Women as Patriarchal Archetypes in Sangs, is an attempt to understand the socio-political contours of folk ethos and stereotypes and their influence on the construction of women. The gendered constructs are pre-conceived as they emerge out of the core consciousness of their generative contexts. The binary constructs are clearly visible in the discourse of the given folk forms which are a part of everyday life. Haryana is a patriarchally configured society and so, the power belongs to men and it is the women who are victims of this power play. The ragnis in context bring out this argument with a detailed and well argued feminist critique of the ideological discourse in which they are performed and propagated.

In Chapter 4, Narrative Modes and Structures, an attempt has been made to understand the narrative technique which is embedded in male ideological discourse and its influence over the masses. The chapter is an attempt to understand the ideological implications behind every repetition of the same folk tale by same or the different folk narrator. The way a ragni connects itself to the myth on which it is based and how it responds to its future variants is worth attention here. The chapter unravels the mystery as to why such a folk performance is able to maintain its aura and popularity in spite of the fact that the myth or tale on which it is based is already well-known to the masses. The chapter also discusses the various functions of the narrator while giving the sang performance—narrative function, testimonial function, communication function and ideological function.
Chapter 5, Conclusion, brings out the purpose of the present research in a contemporary context. The chapter argues how the culture of Haryana and its rich folk heritage has changed over time and how this culture, which was earlier limited to rural and semi-urban people has moved forward and is taking a global approach. The various heads under discussion are—folklore and popular culture, folklore and modern society, and folklore and women today.

The scope of folklore studies has considerably changed over the years now. Earlier the field of folklore came under disciplines like anthropology, sociology, literary studies, musicology, and ethnology etc. But in the recent years, the contemporary folklore studies have emerged as an independent discipline with a gradual development of its own theories, methodologies and data collection techniques. The discipline of folklore is employed in investigating, analyzing, and interpreting the folk songs, stories, mythical narratives, art and craft, dance, music, drama and many other such motifs.

The purpose of the present research is not to put an end to understanding of the Haryanvi culture and its folk ways but it contributes and gives rise to further investigation in the field of Haryanvi folklore and its people. The research is an attempt to bring out the nuances in the folklore of the people of Haryana and reach out to people from around the world to establish an interface with different cultures. The research brings out the deeper socio-political issues present in the discourse of Haryanvi folklore and to make the culture of Haryana more women specific. The women here do not enjoy an equal status with men and view themselves via the male gaze. The state of Haryana has grown economically over the years in terms of educating women and raising the living standard of people but it is still groans under the patriarchal influences which have the final say. As a woman from the state itself
and living under its normativity, the researcher has closely looked at the customs, traditions, beliefs, knowledge, superstitions, religious beliefs, attitudes, and values of people. Though she is well informed and aware of all these nuances in the culture of Haryana but still there are areas which made her feel as a ‘complete stranger’. The researcher has studied and analysed the culture and folk ways of Haryana in both the ways—first, as an insider belonging to the same cultural pool, secondly, as an outsider who looks at the ways and attitudes of people in the state of Haryana. This has given the researcher liberty, free of all biases, to examine and analyse the folklore of Haryana and come to a critical evaluation of the discourse embedded in its folklore.

Endnotes:

1 Swann, Darius L. “Introduction”. Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance. Ed. Farley P. Richmond, Darius L. Swan and Philip B. Zarrilli, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers: Delhi, 1993, 1 Vol. Swann gives a detailed analysis of the relationship between Sanskrit theatre and Folk theatre. He says: “Several theories have been put forward and may be summarized as follows:

1. The Sanskrit theatre developed from early prototypes of folk/popular/devotional forms.
2. These forms represent “degraded remnants” of the Sanskrit theatre which went into decay.
3. The Sanskrit theatre and these popular forms developed separately but in parallel streams, neither having much influence upon the other.
4. The Sanskrit theatre developed from some early popular forms, and after its decline, existing popular forms sprang from its ruins” (239).

2 Sang and nautanki are widely performed in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan. Khayal is prevalent in Rajasthan and manch is popular folk form of Madhya Pradesh, and bhvai is performed in Maharashtra. Bhagat is also performed in some parts of Uttar Pradesh. It is also named after the legend of Pooran Bhagat who is seduced by his step mother, Loona.

3 Kesho Ram Sharma in his book, Gandharva Parush Pandit Lakhmi Chand, 2000, talks about the origin of sang after mujra and nakkal lost their popularity among common folk.

4 Khodiyia, giddha and loor are the popular folk entertainment which includes dance, music and drama, and is solely performed by women folk.

5 A common place in the village where meetings are held to solve the legal and social matters of the villagers. Panchayat as the name suggests is a group of five leaders ‘panch’ who are elected by the villagers to look into legal matters of the village folk as and when required.


7 Swynnorton, Charles. Romantic Tales from the Punjaban, Patiala: Languages Department, Punjab, 1970, XV+353.

8 Yadav, K.C. and R.C.Phogat in their book History and Culture of Haryana: A Classified and Annotated Bibliography give detailed bibliographic information regarding the various canonical texts roughly ranging from 1965-80.

9 Yadav and Phogat document various print publications of these sangis in their annotated bibliography which they claim to be published and made available by Dehati Pustak Bhandar, Delhi.

10 By the term “Kaumi Natak”, the author, Pooran Chand Sharma tries to define sangs and ragnis as ‘regional plays’ and not related to any one community or caste. Though the word kaumi, when translated into English, would mean ‘communal’ but these folk ballads were not the cultural inheritance of any particular caste, or group of people, rather they belonged to the rural folk comprising of all castes and communities taken together.
Pooran Chand Sharma in his book, *Pandit Lakhmi Chand Granthavali*, traces the history of *sang* from the times of lord Shiva and claims its presence in many classics like, the plays of Kalidasa, *Kathasaritasagar*, works of Banbhatta, and during the Bhakti period under Kabir where he quotes one of the *dohas* (couplets) by him:

*Katha hoye tahan srota soye, waqta mund pachaya re*

*Hoye jaha kahin svang tamasha, tanik na neend sataya re*

(Whenever there is a moral tale being recited, the audience fall asleep, but, the influence of the *sang* performance is so enchanting that it keeps the audience engaged for long).

Mathana talks in detail about various roles of women as described by Mange Ram in his compositions. The author critically examines Mange Ram’s ragnis and carefully chooses excerpts to justify his argument. In one such excerpt, the bard dictates the code of conduct for a *pativrta nari* (faithful wife). He says:

*Pati bahar te aave sati ne sheesh jhukana chahiye je*

*Jeem-jhoot jub pati chlya j auth ke bhojan khana chahiye je*

(A woman must bow down to her husband at all times. She should eat only after her husband has done eating).
Works Cited


