

Status of women and folklore of Rajasthan

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Abstract

The weltanschauung (also known as the world view of an individual) of the women can be effectively studied by listening to the women's voices in the folk songs of Rajasthan. Women's folksongs are stories of the self that encapsulate their entire worldview of life, including their sociocultural, philosophical, religious, and political perspectives. This worldview incorporates not only their responses to but also their perspectives on folk life's professions and pastimes, as well as its customs and traditions, its fairs and festivals, its superstitions and beliefs, its cuisine and attire. In addition, they are narratives of women's responses to the emotional traumas of life and serve as a medium for women to express their aspirations, desires, thoughts, and emotions. These songs are essential resources for identity discourse because they project images of the listener onto themselves. They also sing about the relationships between the sexes, both within and between the sexes, and they delve into the role that women play in families and in society. This paper attempts to study the status women through folk songs and folk kathas of Rajasthan.

keywords: *women, folklore, Rajasthan, status.*

Introduction

The women in India enjoyed a very high and respectable position in ancient society, they are treated as good indicator of a civilization's worth. 'Tatra nari pujanti, ramantr tatr devta' refer wherever women are respected, even the deities prefer to live there, and where they are not respected, all actions remain fruitless. (Manusmriti, 3.56). In due course, the status of women got deteriorated and they are being discriminated on various ground. In this paper attempts have been made to study the status of women as depicted in folklore of Rajasthan, as Rajasthan is regarded as land of great warriors with very unique culture and traditions. Women also have played important roles in upholding the folk tradition. The folk culture and traditions are the important witness of that period of time. The incidents of child marriage, Johar, mismatched marriages and girl infanticide had drawn our attention to study status of women in Rajasthan. Before studying the status of women in Rajasthan as portrayed in folklore, it is necessary for us to know about folklore. The word "folk" originates from the Anglo-Saxon language and refers to a community that is primitive and illiterate. In common parlance, this phrase refers to "All of the people of the nation." The meaning of the term "folk" in compound phrases such as "folk sayings," "folk dances," and "folklore" is restricted to the cultures that are not civilized and that are distinctively different from the mainstream cultures of the West. Therefore, it refers to something that is rustic and country. In his seminal book, *Essays in Folkloristics*, Alan Dundes makes an effort to challenge the restrictive definition of "folk" as "illiterate peasant" that was prevalent throughout the 19th century. He is of the opinion that common people currently occupy a position that is somewhere in the centre of the evolutionary ladder, with civilized elites at the very top and uncivilized savages at the very bottom. He continues by saying that the common people are considered to be "the

uneducated in the literate culture" (2). By virtue of this definition, "folk" is a link between the civilized and the savage, in the unilineal evolutionary sequence, and that folk live in or near a society that also has literate people. Additionally, this definition stipulates that folk engage in cultural practices that are similar to those of the savages. The noun "folk" is translated into Hindi as "lok," which is pronounced quite similarly to the English word. According to Siddhanta Kaumudi Bhattoji Dikshita, the word 'lok' may be traced back to the Sanskrit word dhatu 'Lokdarshane,' which can be translated as 'to see.' As a result, the name Lok might be interpreted as "one who sees," signifying the entire group of persons who engage in the activity of looking. The term "ordinary people" is used to several times throughout the Rigveda, the Upanishads, the Bhagwat Gita, Panini's Asthadhayi, Varruchi's Vartiko, and Bharat Muni's Natyashastra. All of these works use the word "Lok." It is also mentioned in the inscription of Ashoka, where it is translated to mean "the wellbeing of the people." "As a literary adjective, it is used to describe the people who live in more or less primitive state beyond the realm of sophisticated influence," observed Kunj Bihari Das (15). The term "popular antiquities," which meant "popular among masses" up to the first half of the 19th century, was used to designate writing that dealt with the lives of the "general public." The well-known English archaeologist William John Thoms is credited with the invention of the phrase "folklore" in the year 1846. The concept was quickly praised and embraced. Oral literary folk culture makes up the bulk of Rajasthan's folklore and is considered to be its primary form. Lok Geet (also known as folk songs), Lok Gatha (also known as folk ballads), Lok Katha (also known as folk stories), Lok Natya (also known as folk plays), Lok Subhashita (also known as folk sayings), and Okhanas are all a part of it (proverbial sayings). The folklore give an very clear picture of the folk society.

In this paper to study the status of women we will focus on two forms of folklore, **folk songs** (lok geet) and **folk tales** or stories (lok Katha) First we will take folk songs as songs were most common ways of expression especially in public which would further make our discussion more reliable.

The method of study is descriptive research design. The data are collected through secondary sources as books, research papers, television, and radio programs, among other things. Even interaction with elderly women of rural areas also served as sources of data collection.

Status of women and folk songs

Folk songs, also known as Lok Geet, are essentially the unscripted utterances of the general populace; as a result, more than any other musical form, they are able to express the myriad facets of folk culture. Folksongs have been referred to as "the sentinel of the culture" by Mahatma Gandhi, while "invaluable treasure of the history of our progress" was Lala Lajpat Rai's description of their significance. The analysis of these songs can provide a foundation for the creation of a detailed portrait of the folk life and culture of Rajasthan. They skillfully outline the image of the modern political system, trade, agriculture, haat-bazaar (local trade market), art and architecture, flora and wildlife, geography, climate, season cycle, games and sports, and they capture a snapshot of the socio-cultural environment. To be more specific, the weltanschauung of the women may be effectively studied through the use of the women's voices that are included in the folk songs of Rajasthan.

The ideal divine pictures of women that were prevalent in ancient traditions are being supplanted by more realistic views of women made of flesh and blood, a human being with all human feeling and emotions. The context-sensitive nature of written works is where the idea that "genres are genders" originates from. Texts

take on different meanings depending on factors such as the setting in which they are told (whether they are spoken in private or in public), the gender of the teller (whether they are a man or a woman), and the culture that the text is a part of. The songs have different connotation when performed in a private setting as opposed to a public one or when sung by either a man or a woman. When compared to the public renditions of folksongs or those performed by males, which are primarily intended to provide aesthetic pleasure, the renditions of folksongs that are sung in private settings by women are more individualized and evocative. The songs sung by men tend to portray women either as objects of desire or as obedient and subservient mothers, sisters, wives, or daughters whereas the songs sung by women tend to reveal both the good and bad parts of their psychology. Women have not only sung about the emotions of love, separation, attachment, detachment, commitment, compassion, care, hope, joy, and pride, but they have also sung about the passions of fear, worry, rage, envy, concern, and hatred, among other emotions. When compared to the songs sung by men, the women's songs tend to be more accurate in their portrayal of females. Women's folksongs are consequently, in the terminology of poetics, women's voices, which under the catalyst called stress turn their bhavas (natural feeling) into rasas. Women's folksongs have been around for a very long time (the essence of feelings). Women's folksongs do not adhere to the Kantian universal settings of time and space in the same way as men's folksongs do. Context is extremely important in Indian culture, and this is evident in the women's folksongs that have been passed down through the generations. The same song can convey different meanings depending on the time and place in which it is performed. In the Indian philosophical tradition, the landscape is regarded to have a mood and character, and so is time, which is labelled as either shubh (auspicious) or ashubh (inauspicious) according to the tithis of the calendar (dates). In the context of women's folksongs, this introduces the concept of ritusatmya, which might be translated as "the appropriateness of season." The term "ritusatmya" refers to the sequential arrangement of activities in terms of both time and location. The folksongs capture the ritusatmyata of women's lives and the ideas that go through their minds. The folksongs provide the impression that time and location have an effect on the feelings that women experience. In Sawaan (the rainy season), erotica is triggered, but in Vaisakha (April-May), religious impulses are inspired. The example of 'well, 'a underground hole from where water is fetch, which is an otherwise secular space because it is a source of water, transforms into a sacred space for women during ritualistic performances. Sociologically speaking, it becomes an agora for women to discuss the politics of the family and the village, and when they are in the company of their loved ones, it becomes a romantic space. It shows time, mood, character and season have great effect on songs. Women's folksongs are stories of the self that encapsulate their entire worldview of life, including their social, philosophical, religious, and political perspectives. This worldview includes their responses to and outlooks on various aspects of folk life, such as vocations and hobbies of folk life, fairs and festivals, superstitions and beliefs, food and apparel, and so on. These aspects are all embedded within the larger framework of this worldview. In addition, they are narratives of women's responses to the emotional traumas of life and serve as a platform for women to communicate their aspirations, wishes, ideas, and emotions. These songs are essential instruments for identity discourse because they project pictures of the listener onto themselves. Through songs they initially started expressing their refusal for many activities which they had been doing for years. They also sing about the relationships between the sexes, both inside and between the sexes, and they dive into the role that women play in families and in society. Women's voices are often heard in folk songs, and they express the unspoken, either symbolically, figuratively, or sometimes even frankly. It clearly reflects their feministic approach. It also highlight that however the voice of half society remained unheard but they still raise their voice to show their existence that they cannot remained unheard and unheard all the time. In this paper attempt have been made to describe that status of women as depicted through folk songs

Various Songs indicating the status of women

In Rajasthan it is customary for women of all ages and social classes to perform songs at various event. These songs have been transferred verbally from one generation to the next and are full with local idioms, phrases and stories.

Song that shows women's importance, the society and family is thankful to them as she has given heir to the family. The song of celebration known as a Badhavo is performed on the occasion of a woman giving birth. It sings of the empowered identity that she gets by virtue of her power of reproduction and motherhood:

“Kin ghar gaaven sundar gauri halroji. Moto ji sahar nee nagar aee anjar Ghar ghar gaaven Maruji haalroji Laevae sundar gauri mharo naam ae Goth bakhane mhare baaproji” (Chundawat Rajasthan ke Sanskritic Lokgeet 54).

"In whose house are the songs of birth being sung (asks the husband), it is a big town and so women keep singing from house to house (answers the wife); my beautiful wife they are mentioning my name and praising the clan of my father (says the husband); it is a big town and so women keep singing from house to house (it is a big town and so women keep singing from house to house); it is a big town and so women keep singing from house This song is a conversation between a husband and his wife, and it's set to music. After the co-wife gave birth to a son, the other ladies began singing birth songs as a way to show their admiration for the wife, who has now provided her husband with an heir. The message of this song is that becoming a mother elevates a woman's status within her family and in society as a whole. Additionally, in order for a woman to enjoy the favors of her husband, she has to give birth to children, and more specifically boys.

“Pilo ood kyu ne le jacha”

“Tharo rajan nayuora khya”.

Women not only enjoy the favor of their husband but also gets pampered when gives birth to a son, in this song husband bought yellow saree (pila – a saree which is worn after the birth of the male child) for his wife with great love and charm but women refuse to wear. It reflects that women are giver and men are receiver so they are lower hand, women enjoy good status in society. But at the same time she aspire to instil values of sacrifice, duty and of heroic deeds. Through lullaby while nursing her baby she wishes that when he grow old he become a great warrior so that she feels proud that she has given birth to a valiant son.

“Baalo godi doodho change doodh chungawat bili yu, Dhole pay par kayartaro lalo daag mat layetu”.(Jagmal Singh Rajasthani Lok geetaon ke vivid Roop99)

Freedom and expression of thought where she prays for her marriage and type husband and in laws she desires.

“ Baaya pujan poojasyaa ke kaae var maang rahi, Main to sasu Jasoda, ek Kisan var maang rahi” (Ramsingh Rajasthani Lokgeet 44).

(I ask for a mother-in-law like Yashoda and a husband like Krishna because I want to know what kind of blessing the young women who worship Lord Shiva and Goddess Gauri hope to receive.) In Indian

mythology, Lord Krishna is portrayed as the ideal lover, and it is the dream of every young woman to one day marry a man who is just as loving as Krishna. After marriage, a woman's relationships with her husband and her mother-in-law become the most important aspects of her life, so it is common for women to pray to the gods for favorable outcomes in these areas

“Kajal tiki lai bhai,kajal tiki lo”,

“Kajal tiki lain a mahari sanja bai ne do”.

The unmarried girls performed for fifteen days and ask to God to give her good husband, through these songs she also tells her family what type of husband she wants.

“Moriya aacho boliyo re dharti raat ra,mare hivde mei lage re katar re”.

The song is sung by girls who are either engaged in which they express that they are away from their beloved. It indicate their emotional expression.

“Ghoomar ramva ne jasa o raj ji ghoomar ramva ne jasa”

In song ghoomar the women in rainy season when fields are lush green and it is very beautiful outside, they want to enjoy with their friends (dance, swings and sing). It indicates that women through songs express that they want to enjoy, they tells that they want to rejuvenate themselves.

There are numerous song in which women raise their voice and express their pain of being away from their husband.

“Kesariya balam Aao ni padharo mare desh re, Padharo mare desh”.

Rajasthan is the land of desert, the land are not fertile and ever more due to the scarcity of water field produce less hence to meet the expenses of the family, in Rajasthan men often go out to earn. There is an important saying ‘*ja na pahuche gadi vaha pahuche Marwari*’ means where it is difficult for cart, bullock and motorcar to go, means unapproachable place, Marwari people go there to trade as they often face drought. In this song the wife sing to call her husband from foreign land.

*“Tu hai kurja bhayle ae, Tu che dharm re bhan ae, patri likh du prem re ae,
Dejo piyaji ne jaye ,kurja maro bhawar mela dijo”*.

Kurja is demoiselle crane found in central Euro Siberia, they are migratory birds come every year to a Kichan village in Rajasthan. Women express their pain to Kurja and tell them to go and give the letter to their husband as they want to meet them.

*“Mar gaye sajan khagiyo bichudo, Bichudo re karne mei pivare gye ae sajan,
Uttarsajan bicudo re, khagiyo re sajan bichudo”*.

Women not only express their emotional pain but also physical pain, when through this song she tells that she had been bitten by scorpion want to her husband and in-laws to release the poison, because of nettles she is going to her parent’s house. Nettles are often found in the desert areas and are hidden in the sand, one cannot find that underneath the sand there are scorpions.

*“Maa mane olu ro angocho de ne,
Mane olu ghane aave re”.*

Women after their wedding while departing or during farewell sing this song, they tell however they are leaving for their husband house but they will miss all her family members. This song indicates the psychological pressure they are bearing as they had leave their parent's for husband place where everyone is not familiar with them, it reflects the mental strength of the women.

In a similar vein, there are an ample number of folksongs connected to the many rites that are carried out throughout the wedding ceremony. Various aspects of *Vivah Samskar*, such as *Vinayak*, *Badhavo*, *Mayro*, *Bindi*, *Kasthuri*, *Sevro*, *Ghodi*, *Fera*, *Bano*, and *Vani*, are connected with the various rituals that take place. One of these songs gives women's perspectives on the interaction between man and environment. The ancient Indian philosophical notion of *prakriti-puruush*, often known as "Mother Nature and the Universal Cosmic Male," assigns feminine characteristics to the natural world. Therefore, women have a connection with nature, and this tie is depicted through a folk song in which a woman asks various components of nature to join the wedding ceremony of her son, just as friends and relatives are asked to attend the event:

Mhare raja hariyasa dungra ne nuvatiya Mhare raja toran thamb le gharaaviya Mhare raja Pechola jsyosagar nuvtiya Mhare raja neersanjovanjogo Mhare beladiya ghar chaviyo (Chundawat Rajasthan ke Sanskritic Lokgeet 72).

(I have invited the green mountains, they shall bring *tooran* and *thamb* (the wooden articles used in marriage ritual); I have invited Lake *Pichola*, it is capable of bringing water. The creepers have spread in my house.) Similarly, through a song, the singer heaps praises on her husband's country (village) in Mewar:

“Mhe to vari ji thara desh ne Jhathe neepaje bajri ro punkh Mhe to dal dal randhu khichado Jeemavu mharo so parvar” (Chundawat Rajasthan ke Sanskritic Lok Geet 1).

(Blessed is your land which produces *bajra* (pearl millet); I grind *bajra* to cook *khichada* (porridge). I serve it to my whole family.)

These songs they not only convey their various emotion and pride but they are also caring, they not only care for their families but the whole village, it indicates their community feeling.

The above songs present women as very soft, full of love, affection and caring but there are songs which highlights that women firmly raise their voice against the social problem not only social but economic.

*“Choti se umar parnaiye ae bhabhosa,
Kai tharo kariyo mei Kasur”.*

A very emotional song wherein women expresses her grieve and raises voice against the child marriage.

“O maa manne budha ne kyu parnai”

They complain about mismatch marriage as girl's husband is much elder than her. He is old and she is young.

*“Sasu ji mane nayri kar do, mahal maliya mat do,
Thana jayoda mare lare kar do, sasu ji mane nayri kar do”*

Women daringly speaks to her mother in law that she doesn't want to stay in joint family and doesn't want any house or wealth but want only her husband with whom she wants to stay happily in nuclear family.

*“Ao jeero jev ro beri re mat bhao mara parniya jeero,
Panat kart era pagliya ghasgiya aur karliya ghasgiya chandi ra, mat bho mara parniya jeero”.*

Women say to her husband not to sow cumin in the field as it is difficult to work in field and even her *kadliya* (ornament worn in feet) have been damaged.

“Sagar pani leva jao nijar lag jaye”.

Through this song women even refuse to go to fetch water from pond or well, she complain that when she goes she get affected by evil charm. It indicates women believe in superstitious which is further in the songs.

It is commonly believed that women have a stronger religious and superstitious worldview than males. When compared to men, they practice a greater number of austerities and fasts more frequently, and their faith in folk deities is founded on a more solid foundation. There are songs that depict beliefs in things like demons and ghosts, tantra and mantra (which are forms of enchantment), good omens, dream intuitions, and superstitions. A women's phobia of demons and other supernatural forces is expressed through a folksong:

These apprehensions have a basis in the individual's psyche. People back then didn't know what caused many diseases and ailments, so they attributed them to supernatural forces and had a strong belief that they could be appeased and calmed through rituals, worship, or sacrifices. During those times, people didn't know what caused many diseases and ailments, so they attributed their causes to supernatural forces. These kind of songs provide credence to the widespread folk idea that afflictions such as illness and disease, as well as natural calamities, are the result of the anger of a higher power, which people pray to appease. Folk songs have meticulously sung the deeply established beliefs in the miraculous actions of lok devtas (also known as folk deities), such as Pabuji, Gogaji, Panraji, Tejaji, Ramdevji, Jambhoji, Karnimata, and Jeevanmat, amongst others. These deities devoted their entire lives to working for the betterment of society and giving their lives as a sacrifice for the liberation of the oppressed and the poor as well as for the preservation of wildlife, in particular cows. They did this so that they could ensure the safety of the world's cows. The songs that are dedicated to the local deities portray them as guardians of life, who alleviate the sorrows of people living in an ecological environment that is hostile, provide rains, promote greenery, and ensure that the ordinary people have a means of subsistence. Women have a firm faith in the notion that they will be saved from whatever difficulty they face by the folk deities they worship. Bhairuji receives a complaint from a woman who says:

“Ubhi Gujarki de che olambha Mhara rewar mine kariyo ujar Baadh batuni jhadi todh gaya Le gaya amarya bok Ji Bheru aavo kyuni kai ghada padhrahya”

(*Gujri*, a member of the Gujar group and a lady, is complaining that her herd of cattle has been slaughtered. Both the fence and the prickly bush have been taken down, and the fence has been demolished. Also, the

immortal he-goat has been removed; why aren't you coming to *Bheruji* for assistance? What's the hold up? In the elite culture, the deity and the devotee have a relationship similar to that of a master and a servant.

The different folk songs sung by women at various events and occasions present women as very emotional, lovely and caring creatures at the same time. On the contrary, she is courageous as she through lullabies tries to inculcate bravery and courage in their sons, demand various needs and even reject various malpractices in the society. The vivid qualities of women have helped in discarding her image so that the status in the society could easily be studied. Hence on the basis of folk songs it could be drawn that women enjoyed a valuable status in the society where she could express her happiness, grief's thoughts, moods and desires. There are various evidences which clearly indicate that their griefs are addressed and attended.

Status of women and folk tales (Lok Katha)

Folk tales are the stories which are orally transmitted from one generation to another, there are no written evidences of these stories. There is various possibility that the Katha may be imaginary or could have been based on personal experiences. In this paper emphasis is made to recount the status of women through these folk Kathas. On the basis of few Kathas (two types: first the Katha which are told on fast and feast and the another one which tells the real life incidents of the people) attempt would be made to depict the status of women in Rajasthan. The paper attempts to describe the status of women

There are many Kathas which are told on various fasts and feasts like Katha of 'Teej' in this a young woman of seven brothers who is at her parent place and has observed fast for well-being of her husband, as she had not eaten all day long and would wait till the moon rises, she felt weak but when her brothers saw this, they decided to make illusionary moon so that she would perform pooja and would eat. She told her sister in law also but they refused that this is her moon, their moon is yet to arise. As soon as she starts eating she had a call that her husband died. She prayed for one whole year and brought back her husband from the God Yamraj. This Katha elaborates two different perceptions of status of women, first of some innocent women who blindly believe her brother and sister in laws, secondly she did not let others do the cremation of her husband and brought her back from the God Yamraj, shows her strong character, her will power.

The Katha of *Bach Barah*, *Sakat chauth* and of *Seetla mata* where women do every possible thing for the health and well-being of their children. The Katha of *Suraj Lota* in which she prays for the well-being of their brother. These Kathas indicate that women had been a giver to the society not only in terms of giving birth to a child but as a well-wisher of the family too.

The Katha of Ganesh Ji in which the old women tell Lord Ganesh that she does not know how to ask (when Ganesh Ji told her to ask what she wanted), when Lord Ganesh further insisted, she asked I want to see my grandson drinking milk in golden bowl. (As the woman was blind she smartly asks for her eyes, as her daughter in law did not have child she ask for grandchild and as her son did not have much money she ask for money). It shows the intellect of the women with strong mental state of mind and intelligence.

Besides the above mentioned Kathas, the Kathas recited on special occasions, there are some different folk tales which highlight the status of women based on some real incident of the life. Like the Katha of Rani Sati or *Andekha Antas*, these Kathas highlight the strong character of women that they would prefer to set themselves on fire rather than becoming the mistresses of other men.

The Katha of Rani Hadi who when her husband ask for some keepsake before going for war as they were newly wedded couple, the rani cut her head and sent it to raja so that he would not falter going to Warfield. It reflects that not only men but women too in a different way contributed for the self-esteem and dignity of the motherland.

The katha of *Khejadli*, a vishnoi women caught hold of *khejadli* tree when police personal of king came to cut the tree, the police cut her with the trees and seeing the women the men of that village also came forward to save trees from cutting down. It indicates that though women at that time were not educated but were well aware and responsible towards the importance of trees for the environment.

All the above kathas presented women were very brave, courageous, caring, sacrificing and environment conscious. It reflects that women however been an object of lust but had a very dignifying and respectable status in the society.

Conclusion

Women have always played an important part in the upkeep of Rajasthan's indigenous folk traditions, culture and even the literature (as mostly they are in oral form) which today provide an important source of women study. The folk lore is the important witness to show that status of women of that period. Through the data collected it is clear that women enjoy a very respectable place in the society. They were very brave, courageous, caring, sacrificing.

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