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RESEARCH ARTICLE

GENDER RIGHTS AS CONJECTURED FROM FOLKSONGS OF UTTAR PRADESH.

Asmita yadav.

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Abstract

This paper is based on an empirical study of women's folksongs of Uttar Pradesh. Folksongs are a rich source for understanding the place of women in Hindu society. The significance of these folksongs lies in their suggesting and hinting at themes, rather than directly addressing them, women sing what they often cannot talk about. Folksongs deal with women's common wishes, unfulfilled desires, hopes, disappointments, unexpressed emotions, and their reactions to their social environment. These voices also highlight rural women's relationship with land, and their own perceptions of significance of independent land rights in their lives. Women would not answer direct questions but freely sing about labor practices and rights to land. This paper highlights the very important safety-valve function of these folk songs in which women are afforded an opportunity to express their bottled-up feelings and their longings in a socially acceptable form.

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Folksongs form the universal legacy of the entire mankind and binds together the different social groups together propounding their cultural identity. Scholars from different backgrounds are realizing the fact that folksongs bring traditions close while helping shape our future and should be documented and preserved as an inheritance for the forthcoming generations. For the last three decades, there has been a rise in the number and variety of studies done on the south Asian countries. The rituals, verbal traditions, worldviews and religious performances have provided new perceptions to the issues of religion, gender and caste in India. Most of the works done in this field in Indian context offer a rich empirical data on folksongs but they lack in analysis. This article portrays women as described in the women's folksongs of Uttar Pradesh. Women's folk songs of India chiefly describe the household environment and the domestic rituals connected with the rites of passage, festivals, and ceremonies. Nevertheless, there are also songs that, instead of focusing on the domestic rituals, deal with women's common wishes, their unexpressed emotions, unfulfilled desires, hopes, and disappointments, and their reactions to their social environment. Even though there is no description of the domestic rituals pertaining to a particular ceremony or festival in these songs, they are, nevertheless, sung on these occasions and festivals. No ceremony, festival, or ritual in India is complete without women's songs. They are also sung while women do such household chores as milling grain, churning curd, or working in the fields. Related work on North Indian folklore has been done by many writers. These authors have dealt with folklore from various angles, but none have discussed them specifically from the woman's point of view, a viewpoint that is the main focus of this paper. Mishra (1959) has, admittedly, touched upon women's conditions, but only briefly, and has left many aspects related to women's emotions untouched. Wade (1971) emphasized only the wedding songs. Chauhan (1972) and Srivastava (1982), on the other hand, have studied folk songs only in an anthropological and cultural context. Kuldeep (1972) and Upadhyaya (1978) have given only a general view of folk songs and have not dealt with them from the woman's point of view. Henry (1976) mentions the names of a few

types of women's songs, but he does not give any texts or discuss women's feelings as expressed in these songs. Jain's work (1980) is almost exclusively centered on chaiti songs, which are mostly composed by men, even though the text usually describes women's feelings and predicaments. Tewari (1974, 1988) has given some folk songs of women, but he focuses mainly upon those that describe domestic rituals and traditions. Avasthi (1985) gives a good variety of women's folk songs, but his contribution remains restricted to anthology. Singh (1983) has made a comprehensive study of avadhi folk songs, and Tripathi (1962) has done the same for the bhojpuri songs, but they have not studied them from the specific stand-point of women. How a woman is portrayed in women's folklore and what she desires, wishes, and aspirations she cherishes, what frustrations and injustices she suffers, is a subject that has received till now little or no attention in the literature. The present paper attempts to fill this gap.

This article is based on a study of folk songs sung by Hindu women in North India. These songs are in the avadhi, bhojpuri or khariboli dialects of Hindi. My study is restricted to those folksongs that depict women's wishes, feelings, emotions, unfulfilled desires. Folk songs that describe only rituals, festivals or ceremonies without touching upon the wishes and feelings have been excluded.

In cultures that do not openly discuss inner emotional condition, songs are the shared tradition through which emotions are expressed, thus providing a medium for the expression of what might be taboo in everyday conversation. For instance, in the emotionally charged segment below, about a visiting brother's distress at his sister's misery, we also learn that women are prone to hide details about ill treatment in their marital homes, so as not to alarm their natal family.

*'Sonva ta jarai bahini sonara dukaniya
Bahini jarat hin sasurariya ho Ram
Lohara ta jarai bahini lohara dukaniya
Bahini ta jarat hin sasurariya ho Ram
E dukh jani kahiya bhaiya Baba ke agva
Sabhava baithi pachtaihen ho Ram
E dukh jani kahiya Maiya ke agava
Chhatiya piti mari jaihen ho Ram.'*

Gold melts at the goldsmith's. Sister burns away at her in-laws. Iron thaws at the ironsmith's. Sister wastes away at her in-laws. Brother, do not say of this pain to father. In the assembly, he'll be filled with self-reproach. Brother, do not speak of this to mother. Beating her bosom, she'll die of heartache.

Urmila Maurya and friends, Chachakpur, Jaunpur.

It's been found that women, despite being silenced in other spheres and contexts and hesitant to volunteer information on contested issues such as the nature of rights and entitlements to land or to share their opinions even when persuaded to do so, nevertheless participate in song sessions with great enthusiasm and lack of inhibition. Women were often unable to connect the culture of disinheritance with the immediate marginality they were experiencing. The political explosiveness of the subject also hampered frank expression. In this setting, marked by the systematic negation of women's rights to land, marriage songs wherein brides claim their shares from fathers spoke volumes. The song below is an astounding example, elucidating the sleight of hand by which women are refused rights in natal properties. We hear both complacency and relief in the father's tone as he elicits the bride's vermilion, the symbol of matrimony that will eradicate the threat to the property of the patrilineage that unmarried daughters pose.

*'Je kuch arajihe e baba, adhiya hamar
Adhiya adhiya jini kara beti
Sabhe dhan tohar chutki bhar sindurva e beti
Tu ta jayebu kauna par'*

In all you earn, Father, I stake a claim for half.
Insist not on half your share, daughter,
This entire wealth is yours, after all
Just a pinch of vermilion, daughter, before long, far and away you'll be gone.''
Jassal, 2001.

Conclusion:-

The songs of women discussed above give a dappled picture of Hindu women. They do not depict only a conventional stereotype of a Hindu woman, they also portray her as exuberant and capable of expressing her emotions freely and with abandon. The songs tell us about her longings and wishes, her frustrations, and the quandaries that accompany different facets of her life. The songs lay bare her status in Hindu society. Some describe her as submissive and acquiescent, others depict her as audacious, daring and rebellious. Some show us that girls are unwelcome and can only bring misery to the family, while others describe how tenderly and with what loving care they are raised up. In these folk songs, we also see the contradiction between daughter who is so adored that her going away can be heartrending, while, on the other side, once she gets married she cannot come to meet her parents without a proper invitation. The conventional stereotype of a Hindu woman portrays naïve, gullible, and superstitious, as a person who looks sorrows of life, disease, and death as stemming from the wrath and goddesses. She is deemed to be devout and god-fearing. stereotype of the Hindu woman finds its confirmation in the but also its refutation, for on occasion the Hindu woman appears individualist who is disdainful of social restraints, as someone is prepared to challenge the established authority of social customs, and is willing to forcefully enunciate the injustices and inequities to which she is subjected. While she can be docile, she can be tough and indomitable as well.

Women's folk songs are a kind of safety valve meant to be vent for women through which they can express their animosity against the social order. From their earliest girls are taught to be respectful and submissive to their husbands as well as their relatives. In contrast to this, we often hear in the strongly disparaging and accusatory words against these same who in real life would be treated with great respect. Normally daughter-in-law does not dare squabble with her mother-in-law, but in the folk songs these rules of normal conduct get separated with indemnity. Anything, however unacceptable in real life, finds an acceptable outlet in the folk songs. It is these folk songs that women give vent to their passions, their frustrations, their anger, and their love. It is through them that they show the grievances and show their hurt. The folk songs provide vignettes through which we can look into the complex motley we call culture. Folk songs, particularly women's folksongs are indeed a rich source for understanding the place of women in the society.

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