



# Echoes of Tradition: Exploring the Cultural Fabric of Haryana through Folk Songs

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## ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

The folk songs of Haryana offer a profound reflection of the region's cultural identity, intertwining elements of its agrarian lifestyle, social norms, and historical experiences. This paper delves into the rich oral traditions of Haryanvi folk songs, examining their thematic and structural compositions to reveal insights into gender roles, community values, and the region's socio-political history. By exploring various categories of folk songs, including those associated with rituals, seasons, and life events, this study highlights how these oral narratives serve as living archives of Haryana's collective memory and cultural ethos. Through an interdisciplinary lens, the paper seeks to understand how these songs contribute to sustaining local traditions while adapting to contemporary changes.

**Keywords:** Haryanvi folk songs, oral traditions, cultural identity, gender roles, agrarian society, ritual songs, oral history, Haryanvi folklore.

## Introduction:

The Haryanvi culture, characterised by its liveliness and dynamism, is firmly grounded in the traditions and historical heritage of the northern Indian state of Haryana. This culture is distinguished by a resilient agrarian way of life, which is evident in its festivals, music, dance, cuisine, and social rituals. Haryanvi culture is epitomised by its folksongs, such as "raaginis," which serve as both musical compositions and narrative devices that communicate stories of bravery, love, and daily existence, thereby safeguarding the region's oral history. *Ghoomar* and *Khoria* are traditional dance forms that are typically performed by the Haryanvi people during festivals and celebrations. These dances showcase the collective spirit and joy of the community, characterised by rhythmic movements and vivid costumes that enhance the festive atmosphere. *Teej*, Holi, Diwali, and *Lohri* are enthusiastically observed festivals that symbolise the agricultural cycles and religious beliefs that are integral to the community's lifestyle. These festivals serve as opportunities for collective assemblies, intricate ceremonies, and the execution of customary artistic expressions, strengthening social connections and cultural perpetuity.

Haryanvi cuisine showcases the agricultural origins and dependence on local ingredients and dairy. It features wholesome and uncomplicated meals such as *roti*, *kachri ki sabzi*, and *lassi*, providing a gastronomic experience that is both nourishing and deeply rooted in tradition.

The social structure of Haryana is conventionally characterised by male dominance, with a significant focus on familial and communal principles, as demonstrated by the practices around marriage, kinship, and societal responsibilities. Despite the impact of modernization and globalisation on education, industry, and lifestyle, Haryana has successfully preserved its cultural heritage. The crafts of Haryana, particularly the elaborate needlework of *Phulkari*, exemplify the artistic aptitude and traditional expertise that have been inherited across generations, functioning as a means of sustenance and cultural esteem. The utilisation of digital media and worldwide platforms to modify traditional traditions for modern settings has facilitated the dissemination of Haryanvi culture to a broader audience, guaranteeing the flourishing and resonance of the region's abundant legacy with both local inhabitants and the global community.

## Research Objectives:

1. To explore the cultural elements reflected in Haryanvi folk songs.

2. To analyse the role of folk songs in the social and cultural life of Haryana.

### **Importance of Folk Songs in Preserving Cultural Identity:**

Folk songs are a primary vehicle for preserving oral traditions, which are essential components of cultural heritage. In many communities, especially those with limited written records, folksongs have been the primary means of passing down stories, legends, and historical events from one generation to the next. These songs encapsulate the collective memory of a community, ensuring that important cultural narratives and historical experiences are not forgotten.

**1. Reinforcement of Social Values and Norms:** Folksongs often encapsulate the core values, norms, and ethical teachings of a community. Through their lyrics, they convey lessons about social behaviour, moral conduct, and communal responsibilities. For instance, Haryanvi folk songs often highlight themes such as respect for elders, familial duty, and community solidarity. By embedding these values in memorable and engaging songs, the community reinforces its cultural norms and social expectations, ensuring their transmission across generations.

**2. Maintenance of Language and Dialects:** Language is a fundamental aspect of cultural identity, and folksongs play a vital role in preserving regional languages and dialects. In Haryana, for example, folk songs sung in the Haryanvi dialect help to keep the language vibrant and relevant. They capture the linguistic nuances, idiomatic expressions, and vocabulary unique to the region, thus contributing to the preservation of linguistic heritage. This is especially important in an era where global languages often overshadow regional dialects.

**3. Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Identity:** Folksongs create a sense of belonging and cultural identity among community members. They act as markers of cultural uniqueness, distinguishing one community from another. Singing and listening to traditional folk songs during communal gatherings, festivals, and life events strengthen social bonds and reaffirm a shared identity. For diaspora communities, folksongs serve as a crucial link to their homeland, providing a sense of continuity and connection amidst displacement.

**4. Artistic Expression and Cultural Innovation:** Folksongs provide a platform for artistic expression within the framework of cultural traditions. They allow individuals to creatively interpret and adapt traditional themes, ensuring that cultural expressions remain dynamic and relevant. This interplay between preservation and innovation helps to sustain cultural identity, allowing it to evolve while retaining its core elements.

**5. Educational and Pedagogical Value:** Folksongs are effective educational tools, making the learning of history, values, and language engaging and memorable. The rhythmic and melodic elements of songs enhance recall and understanding, making them powerful instruments for cultural education. Schools and cultural institutions often incorporate folksongs into their curricula to provide a holistic and immersive cultural education.

**6. Strengthening Intergenerational Connections:** The transmission of folksongs from elders to younger members of the community fosters intergenerational connections. This practice not only ensures the survival of the songs but also promotes respect for the wisdom and experiences of older generations. It creates a living link between past and present, allowing cultural identity to be experienced as a continuous and evolving tradition.

**7. Reflection of Cultural Practices and Lifestyles:** Folksongs often depict the everyday life, agricultural practices, social customs, and festivities of a community. In Haryana, folksongs frequently reflect the agrarian lifestyle, with themes centred around farming, seasons, and rural life. By capturing these aspects of daily life, folksongs provide a detailed and authentic representation of the community's cultural practices and way of life.

**8. Resilience Against Cultural Homogenization:** In a globalized world where cultural homogenization is a growing concern, folksongs act as a bulwark against the erosion of unique cultural identities. They preserve the distinctiveness of local cultures, providing a counter-narrative to dominant global influences. By celebrating and perpetuating their own cultural expressions through folksongs, communities can maintain their individuality and resist cultural dilution.

Thus, it can be concluded folksongs are indispensable in preserving cultural identity. They serve as living archives of a community's history, values, language, and traditions, ensuring their transmission across generations. By fostering a sense of belonging, enabling artistic expression, and strengthening intergenerational ties, folksongs help maintain the vibrancy and continuity of cultural identity. In regions like Haryana, the celebration and preservation of folksongs are crucial to the enduring legacy of the community's cultural heritage.

### **Historical Context of Haryanvi Folk Songs:**

#### **A. Origins and Evolution**

Haryanvi folk songs have their roots in the rich tradition of oral cultural productions. Over centuries, folk songs have served as a medium to express the deepest sentiments and experiences of individuals within society, connecting them to their heritage and loved ones. The evolution of musical folklore, including folk songs, showcases a continuous process of change and variability, with each performer adding their unique touch to the melodies and texts, resulting in a multitude of variations over time and across different localities. This evolution is driven by the need to adapt to performance standards and audience expectations, leading to the transformation of traditional folklore performers into artists who navigate the delicate balance between

authenticity and stage presentation. Through this process, Haryanvi folksongs have evolved, maintaining their essence while adapting to the changing cultural landscape. Their evolution is influenced by cultural interactions and historical contexts, as seen in the case of Luciano Berio's vocal cycle "Folk Songs" incorporating multinational folk sources (Garmel). The significance of folk songs in the evolution of literature and artistry is evident in the works of Grigor Narekatsi, who introduced folk songs into church use, expanding the semantic field with nature analogies and detailed descriptions. The development of folk singing schools in Russia highlights the educational aspect of preserving and promoting folk song traditions.

## B. Historical Background of Haryanvi Folk Songs

The significance of folklore in understanding historical movements is emphasized by Joyner, who argues that folklore should be studied within the framework of historical events, which can be applied to Haryanvi songs that often narrate local histories and societal changes. Haryanvi folk songs are deeply rooted in the historical and cultural context of Haryana, reflecting the region's social dynamics and traditions. Additionally, the evolution of folk music, as seen in the transition from traditional forms to modern interpretations, mirrors the broader cultural shifts noted in Morrison's analysis of the folk revival's influence on music genres, suggesting that Haryanvi folk songs have similarly adapted over time while retaining their core themes of community and identity. Furthermore, the relational aspect of storytelling highlighted by Rudy underscores the importance of these songs in maintaining community ties and cultural heritage, which is crucial for understanding their role in Haryanvi society. Therefore, Haryanvi folk songs are an integral part of the cultural and social fabric of Haryana. These folk songs have a rich historical background that reflects the socio-cultural evolution of the region, encompassing themes of love, valor, tradition, and everyday life. Thus, they serve as a vital link between the past and present, encapsulating the region's rich cultural narrative.

### Cultural Themes in Haryanvi Folk Songs:

Haryanvi folk songs, a vital component of Haryana's cultural fabric, exemplify a profound oral heritage that has been transmitted across successive generations. These songs are profoundly connected to the everyday lives, societal customs, and religious convictions of the individuals. The Haryanvi folk songs delve into a variety of themes, covering a broad spectrum of experiences and values. Here are a few of the main themes:

**1. Love and Romance:** Haryanvi folk songs often celebrate the emotions of love and romance, capturing the subtleties of relationships between lovers. These songs highlight the joys and sorrows of love, often with a focus on the experiences of women. The portrayal of love is not always idealized; it can also include themes of separation, longing, and the pain of unrequited love. There are songs during sawan month where love, joy, separation, and pain all these emotions can be seen. Teej is a festival celebrated in Haryana during the month of sawan. Swings hold significant importance during this festival. During the Teej festival, individuals in rural areas hang swings on trees. This holiday holds significance in the lives of women as it provides them with an opportunity to enjoy and experience a little respite from their home responsibilities. Conversely, a sense of sadness can be witnessed due to the separation of wives from their husbands who are employed in distant locations to provide for their families. Teej is typically seen as the conclusion of a vacation period, prompting many individuals to resume their duties and thus part ways with their family. There are many folksongs which witnesses all these situations one of them is as follows:

तीजँ बड़ा त्रौहार सखी हे सब बदल रही बाणा  
हे लिकड़ी बिजली गाल जेठानी, मार गई ताना  
हे जिनके पति परदेस आच्छा जीणे तैं मरज्याणा  
हे बान्दील्याओ कलम दूआत पति पै गेरु परवाना... (Dhankhad 69)

("Teej is a huge festival changing direction of winds  
Sister-in-law taunted like a lightning bolt  
Woman whose husband is away should die rather than live  
Give me pen and paper to write a letter to husband...")

This song demonstrates the sorrow a woman feels due to her husband being away from her during the festival season. The woman feels bad when another woman who stay with their husband, taunts her that it is better to die than to live away from one's husband. In earlier times when there were no phones or internet it was hard for people to communicate and life of such woman was Tough. Later in the song the woman asks for a pen and paper to draft a letter to her husband so that they can communicate and she can feel better.

**2. Representation of Family Life & Relationships:** Marriage is a significant institution in Haryanvi society, and folksongs frequently revolve around the rituals and customs associated with it. These songs explore various aspects of matrimonial life, from the celebrations of a wedding to the challenges of married life. They often reflect the social expectations placed on women, emphasizing their roles as daughters, brides, and mothers. In our culture there is variety of songs for marriage and rituals related to them. These songs often emphasize traditional gender roles within the family, with men depicted as providers and protectors, while women embody nurturing and emotional strength, particularly in the roles of mothers and

wives. The emotional bond between siblings, especially brothers and sisters, is a recurring theme, often tied to the protective role of the brother and the sister's virtue. Songs of Rakhi, *Bhaat*, songs related to *kothli* in sawan songs describe this bond.

Marital relationships are characterized by the emotional transitions of brides as they navigate new familial environments, with an emphasis on sacrifice and duty. The dynamics between in-laws, particularly between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, are explored with a mix of tension and solidarity, reflecting the complexities of extended family life. Themes of separation and reunion frequently appear, capturing the emotional depth of family ties and the longing that accompanies physical distance, whether due to marriage or migration. Following song describes irony in family structure

सासू तो बीरा चूले की आग

ननद भादों की बीजली

सौरा तो बीरा काला सा नाग

देवर सांप संपोलिया

राजा तो बीरा मेंहदी का पेड़

कदी रचै रे कदी ना रचै

("My mother-in-law is like fire from stove oh brother

My sister-in-law is like lightning of Bhadra

My father-in-law is like a black snake oh brother

My brother-in-law is like a snake charmer

My husband is like Henna tree oh brother

Sometimes in favor sometimes against")

**3. Gender Roles and Expectations:** Haryanvi folk songs frequently address the social norms and gender roles prevalent in the region. They offer insights into the patriarchal structure of society, where women's roles are largely defined by their relationships with men. Themes of honour, duty, and social expectations are recurrent, with some songs even challenging or questioning these norms. There are songs which are sung during the birth of a child, they are called 'jaccha' songs. In these songs gender discrimination and various rigorous societal norms can be observed. There are celebrations and songs are sung only during the birth of a boy child. No celebration and joy are seen during the birth of a girl child. In society women's roles are mostly associated with household chores and child birth. But during that time also women did not get proper care as she faced discrimination on the basis of boy or girl birth. There is a song related to such discrimination.

जिस दिन लाडो तेरो जन्म हुयो थो, हुई ए बजर की रात।

नो लख दीवला घर में चास धर्या था, फेर भी घोर अन्धेर।

गुडु की सीरा तेरी अम्मा भी खावै, बाबल गहन उदास।

जिस दिन लाला तेरो जन्म हुयो थो, हुई ए सोरण की रात।

एक ही दिवला घर में चास धर्या था, च्यारू कूट उजास।

ताता-ताता हलवा तेरी अम्मा भी खावै, बाबल दरब लुटाय।

("The day you were born my daughter it was very dark night

Nine lakh lamps were lit but still it was very dark

Your mother is eating jaggery and your father is very upset

The day you were born my son it was a golden night

Only one lamp was lit but it brightened the whole area

Your mother is eating hot porridge and your father is elated")

**4. Songs Associated with Festivals and Seasonal Celebrations:** The folk songs in Haryana are intricately connected to the cyclical patterns of the seasons and the community jubilation of festivals, effectively encapsulating the fundamental aspects of rural existence and collective merriment. The songs, which have been down across generations, embody the agrarian culture of the region and the recurring patterns of the seasons. During the season of Spring, the festival of Baisakhi serves as a source of inspiration for vibrant and jubilant songs that commemorate the bountiful crop. These songs, frequently accompanied by traditional instruments such as the *dhol* and *manjeera*, convey appreciation for the abundance of the earth and the diligent efforts of the farmers. The tunes are lively and vibrant, reflecting the positive and energetic nature of the season. During the Winter season, the songs dedicated to Lohri and Makar Sankranti symbolise the sense of togetherness and camaraderie that is experienced during communal gatherings around bonfires. These songs frequently possess a contemplative nature, exploring themes of warmth, unity, and the conclusion of the severe winter season. The melodies are uncomplicated yet evocative, uniting individuals in a collective sense of intention and jubilation.

In general, the folk songs of Haryana function as a dynamic cultural practice, establishing a connection between the community and the recurring patterns of the year, as well as the collective encounters of existence, affection, and work.

Among seasonal songs majority of folksongs are sung during sawan month, part of Monsoon season. In this season traditional melodies related to Teej and its celebrations depict the splendour of the rainfall and the

revitalisation of the land. As they sway on adorned swings, women sing these melodies, their voices resonating with the delight and solace offered by the monsoon following the blistering summer. The lyrics frequently address themes of love, fertility, and the profound link between the land and its inhabitants. There is a beautiful song describing this beauty of nature and the joy of celebration in it.

नांनी नांनी बूदियां मीयां बरसता हे जी  
 हां जी काहे चारूं दिसां पड़ेगी फुवार  
 हां जी काहे सामण आया सुगड़ सुहावणा  
 संग की सहेली मां मेरी झूलती जी  
 हमने झूलण का हे मां मेरी चाव जी  
 हां जी काहे सामण आया सुगड़ सुहावणा  
 सखी सहेली मां मेरी भाजगी जी  
 हां जी काहे हम तै तो भाज्या ना जाय  
 पग की है पायल उलझी दूब में जी  
 नांनी नांनी बूदियां मीयां बरसता जी  
 हां जी काहे चारूं पास्यां पड़ेगी फुवार  
 ("Little droplets of rain are falling  
 The rain is on full swing in all four directions  
 This is the beginning of the pleasant sawan season  
 My friends are riding the swings o mother mine  
 I also wish to ride on the swings  
 This is the...  
 My friends are running on mother  
 I can not run like my friends  
 The anklet of my feet is tangled in the grass  
 This is the.....")

**5. Devotional and Spiritual Themes:** Religion and spirituality are deeply embedded in Haryanvi culture, and this is reflected in the folk songs. Many songs are devotional in nature, dedicated to deities like Shiva, Krishna, and various local gods and goddesses. These songs express a deep sense of faith, reverence, and the spiritual longing of the people.

The theme of spirituality can be observed in several songs where the songs present the feelings of devotion by people towards their deities, gods etc. Several elements of nature have been awarded a god like structure to their role in the lives of people like rivers and clouds because they provide water, trees because they give oxygen, land because it gives us food. Several songs depict this human-nature connection by magnifying the role of these elements of nature and being mesmerised by the sheer beauty of nature along with the gifts we receive from it in our routine life. Spirituality plays an important role in human life as it provides people with hope and faith. And hope sustains life.

जमना की देखी राही, मैं भूल गई बहाण अर भाई  
 जमना माई तेरा जल अमृत पाणी-2  
 जब जमना की देखी रेती, मैं भूल गई बेटा बटी-2  
 जमना माई तेरा जल अमृतपाणी-2... (गीतनं०-0335)  
 ("When I saw a way of river Jamuna, I forget my sisters and brothers  
 Jamuna your water is like an elixir of immortality-2  
 When I saw the silt of Jamuna, I forget my son and daughter  
 Jamuna, your water is like an elixir of immortality").

This song demonstrates the spirituality of river Yamuna to rural women. These rural women were always conscious of the virtues of nature and its values. Spirituality is all about finding a soul in something. They believed that purification of the spirit and a sense of detachment from material concerns could be attained through the womb of a river, which also provided joy and calm. According to the Hindu calendar, Yamuna bath is a seasonal celebration that is often held on the full moon of the *Magh* month. This allows us to see the spiritual side.

There is one other song which also shares the same theme and magnifies the human-nature connection by glorifying the importance of trees and various values associated with the tree. The tree mention here is the Peepal tree and the song is as under:

तें चौड़ा तैं चीकण , ते बिरमा का पत।  
 तेरी डाली सीज के सदा पावैं हम सुख।  
 जोओ की क्यारी चणेभरी उसने सीजै राधा प्यारी।  
 पीपल सीजन मैं चली कुल अपने की लाज।  
 पीपल सीज्या हर मिले एक पन्थ दो काज। (Sharda 241)  
 ("You broad you smooth, you are leaf of Brahma.

We get pleasure by watering your branches.  
 Barley bed filled with gram, watered by dear Radha.  
 I water peepal tree to bring honor of the family.  
 I killed two birds with one stone by watering peepal.”)

This song demonstrates the spirituality theme. The Peepal tree in Hindu Mythology is believed to be the abode of Lord Brahma so here the woman is mesmerised by the massive size and strength of this very tree and starts to sing its praises. Due to the tree being connected to Lord Brahma, people water its branches to feel the pleasure of spirituality. In our culture it is also believed that the Peepal tree reflects the health and honour of a family. So, the woman in the song describes watering branches of Peepal as a medium of both maintaining the honour of the family as well as paying homage to the deities which in turn gives her joy and pleasure in life.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study of Haryanvi folk songs reveals their essential role in reflecting the cultural and social dynamics of Haryana. These songs serve as a vital medium for expressing the emotional experiences of individuals, particularly in the context of love and romance, where themes of longing and separation are poignantly articulated. The significance of these songs extends beyond mere entertainment; they encapsulate the region's history and traditions, providing insights into the societal norms and gender roles that shape the lives of women, especially during festivals like Teej. Furthermore, the historical context of Haryanvi folk songs highlights their function as narrative devices that document local histories and societal changes, emphasizing the importance of folklore in understanding cultural evolution. The connection between nature and spirituality is also evident in these songs, as they celebrate the relationship between the community and their environment, particularly the reverence for the river Yamuna and the agricultural cycles that influence their lives. Overall, Haryanvi folksongs are a rich tapestry of cultural narratives that not only preserve the heritage of Haryana but also continue to resonate with contemporary audiences, underscoring the need for ongoing appreciation and study of this unique musical tradition.

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