

Kinship in Folklore: A Study of Selected Punjabi Folk Songs

Ankita Sethi¹

Abstract

The paper is an attempt to find out how folk songs give an insight into the Kinship and familial relationships of people of Punjab describing the psyche of the individual and especially the women. It also aims at understanding how relationships help in forming socio-cultural rules and limitations. Various social, economical, cultural factors are considered while forming kinship. A study of folksongs is indispensable in understanding the organization of the Punjabi patriarchal family and the stresses and strains inherent in it. This paper would be an attempt to understand kinship through folk songs by throwing light on their structure and cultural importance.

Keywords: Kinship, Folklore, Folksongs, Familial Relationships, Oral Traditions, Punjabi

The system of Kinship, that is, the way in which relations between individuals and groups are organized, occupies a central place in all human societies. From all the cultural formations, Kinship is the best gift human beings have ever got. It decides the set patterns of behavior of a particular clan or community. It also serves as a great binding factor as most of the kin have to perform certain specified and obligatory functions on social occasions. To understand the Kinship system of a society, it is necessary to understand languages, social values and behavioural patterns. All of this can be understood through the Folklore. Since ages, Folklore has depicted each and every aspect of life of people and it continues to do so. This continuity is generated from a certain body of moral and ethical values that are handed down from generations through folklore that serves as the moving spirit for familial relationships and social existence. The Folksongs in particular, in context of Punjab draw a beautiful picture of the familial relationships and the Kinship structure.

The customs and rituals are performed in a community, only with Kinship. Without kinship, these relationships lose their meaning. In the hour of need, to share happiness or sadness, humans seek their relatives. Belonging to the same clan, people share values. Various scholars have defined the term in different ways.¹ Dr. Bedi writes, "Kinship is basically a group of people of same caste, sharing some relationship. Being a part of the same root, all these relationships smell of the same blood." (Bedi, 1991. P.81) Levi Strauss has compared this structure of Kinship to the structure of language. Like alphabets together make a meaningful word, similarly all the relationships together make a meaningful society. Like symbols and metaphors, these relationships are also constructed by human beings. (Strauss, 1969. P.490) Kinship started with the custom of marriage. Marriage came into being when human beings realized that they need to choose someone and create emotional as well as physical bonding with that person. (Engels, 1977. P.49) Many kinship relationships were also formed then. All these beautifully and intrinsically woven relationships can be seen and understood through Folklore.

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies University of Delhi.

E-mail Id: ankitasethi92@yahoo.com

Orcid Id: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8588-0232>

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The Folklore celebrates familial relationships be it between mother and daughter, father and son, relationship between lovers, husband wife, jealousy generated by other man or woman etc. all these permutations can be easily seen through various genres of folklore. Folklore is an essential part of a culture which depicts beliefs, customs, values, socio-cultural system and attitudes through folk dance, folk songs, proverbs, folk tales, riddles, charms, traditions, fables, legends, ballads, superstition, fairs and religion. It is the oral tradition which is transmitted from one generation to another through the process of socialization. Folklore portrays contemporary life of the community by documenting traditional behavior. It helps in understanding how relationships help in forming socio-cultural rules and limitations. Various social, economical, cultural factors are considered while forming Kinship. Folksongs in particular, in context of Punjab, help us in understanding the structure as well as cultural importance of Kinship. A study of folksongs is indispensable in understanding the organization of the Punjabi patriarchal family and the stresses and strains inherent in it.

Punjabi folk songs are set in the complex cultural context of a society in which a village is a unit of institution. These songs depict discrete Kinship patterns maintaining rigid cultural, social and economic distinctions. These songs have a social role or function to play. They are also highly effective in exercising social control. Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms describe folk songs as, "A song of unknown authorship that has passed on, preserved and adapted in an oral tradition before later being written down or recorded." (Baldick, 2001. P.47) Folk songs serve as, "a system of values and projects the innermost recesses of the socio cultural life of a society reflected in its ethos which is the important content of culture dealing with qualities that pervade with the whole system." (Punia, 1993. P.17) These folk songs start from the birth of a child and follow him throughout his life like shadows, till death. Folk Song is, "vital element of any living culture, and is considered to be an unrecorded tradition of the society which maintains an informal social force regulating the present of the society's social systems." (Punia, 1993. P.11) The songs are less artistic but full of rhymes and rhythm. They are influenced by the regional dialects and are set in the rural background depicting day to day life of the common people. (Amir, 1978. P.140)

There are various types of folk songs, sung on different occasions and with different meanings and contexts. Some of the major types are *Sithnia*, *Goan*, *Suhaag*, *Boliyaan*, *Tappe* etc. A fine picture of the culture can be drawn through these folk songs. There is no religious, social, personal, economic angle of Punjabi life which cannot be seen through these folk songs. They carry within themselves, a long tradition which is rolling down from generation to generation. There is a need to understand

folk songs as a compulsory part of human life. Every song has its own tradition and context. Some folk songs are sung on special occasions only and, when a song is sung on special occasion, the entire group shares the same feelings and emotions. Each and every member of the group, singing that particular song, shares a common mental state. These songs are full of inner emotions and from that, social relationships, mutual love and compassion, anger and taunting of a relationship are understood.

Where on one hand these songs represent the mutual love, compassion and respect in familial relationships, it also describes the taunts of the in laws. Be it the colourful or interesting relationship of a *jeeja-saali* (a girl and her sister's husband) or a pious relationship of a sister-brother, these songs draw a lovely picture. In these Folk Songs,

Mothers tell a tale of their separation and meeting with their sons; crying father makes her daughter sit in the palanquin, a daughter who stays far away from her parent's house requests the crow to go and give her message to her parents's house. She promises the crow that she will give him anything he wants in return. It shows how a wife, away from her husband spends her night counting stars. (Chheena, 2004. P.143)

Many folk songs sing of the relationship between lovers, father-daughter, husband-wife, mother-daughter, mother in law- daughter in law etc. Kinship relationships provide a fundamental structure to Punjabi society. The liveliness and relatedness of the songs prove that they are still very much relevant. They are pleasing like a flowing stream of river which makes its own way. It represents the sweet bitter emotions and memories of familial relationships. It is interesting to note that how a song on importance of Kinship itself is also available. The following song depicts how a Punjabi rural man is incomplete without his relatives. Man is a social animal and thus he needs his kinsmen to stay in a society or a community. The song personifies the Pipal tree and compares it with a Punjabi man. It says that like a Pipal tree is incomplete without all its branches, similarly a man needs his clansmen to stay a part of a particular community. The song compares the persona of the father to the broad shady Pipal tree which cannot sustain without its branches.

Ve pippla aap vadda parivaar vadda, tere patteyan ne chhehbar laai

Taahnia to baajh pippla, tera vi sarda naahi.

Oh Pipal, you yourself are great. Your family is great.

Your leaves shower down.

Pipal, you can't do without your branches².

There is not a single familial relationship which did not get mention in the folksongs. The following verses feature a sister singing to her brothers about the paternal uncles. In a Punjabi context, the paternal uncles play a major

role during the girl's wedding. There are different nuptial customs and rituals that are performed by the paternal uncles. During the wedding of the girl, the uncles come and give her various gifts that also adds to the social value of the girl's mother and her family. Here in the following verses, the girl is happy and represents her deep affection by singing this song.

*Maame aaye sadda man vadheya
Vehda vadheya gajj chaar
Gitth gitth vadh gaye chotre sadde housle maaro maar
Ve mere veero!
Our uncles came, my heart grew, the courtyard grew four
yards
The stovetops each grew a hand, and my spirits are on the
rise, O brothers of mine!*

A study of the folk songs also provide an insight into the nature of interpersonal relationships within the institution of the rural family. Familial interactions show how parts of culture are interrelated. Being a patriarchal society, father-daughter relationship is very delicate in Punjab. Though the father loves her daughter, but there is no place for an independent daughter who revolts against the rules and customs. She can be the pampered daughter only by following the already set rules and regulations. A girl is considered someone else's property and the parents take extra care of the daughter. From the birth of the girl child, the father starts saving for her marriage so that she can get a suitable groom. It is only through the folk songs that the girl can ask her father to find a suitable groom for her. Otherwise, girls are not allowed to say anything or choose a groom. But the folk songs serve as the medium to speak out her heart. Each and every aspect of community is described through the songs. Be it to find a suitable groom or to get rid of an unsuitable fiancé, a girl can freely state her wish to her father and other male members of the family through folk songs. Memories of married daughters and sisters who are far away, remembrance of the husband who has gone abroad for work, pampering of parents, strictness or taunting of in laws are very much evident in these songs.

*Babul mera ik kehna kijiye
Menu ram rattan var dijiye
Dhiye! Lai aanda me var dhol ke
Jive rang kasumbha ghol ke
Baabla! Ik menu pachhtava bada ei
Mai aap gori var soula ei*

This song describes how a girl of marriageable age asks her father to find a suitable groom for her like a gem of a person. When the groom is of dark complexion, she also complains that the physical personality of the guy does not suit her at all. She tells her father that the only thing that bothers her now is that she has a fair complexion but her husband has a very dark complexion. Not only

the husband, but the girl asks her father to choose an apt household also. The society is closely knitted thus the girl does not only asks for a suitable husband but a suitable family where the in laws will be good. The girl imagines a happy and prosperous family for herself and states this desire to her father through the help of the folk songs. She requests her father to choose such a household for her where the mother in law and father in law have good name and fame in the society. She wants in laws with strong background and at the same time they should be good natured. The girl understands the importance of the familial relationships and knows that getting a good household and good in laws is equally important. She says,

*Devi ve baabla us ghare, jitthe sass bhali pardhaan
Sohra sardaar hove
Daaah behendi peeda saahmne ve, matthe kade na paaundi
vat,
Baabal tera pun hove, tera hovega vaddra jass!*

Love and respect, which is the essence of the family and familial relationships, can well be seen through these folk songs. The relationship between a mother and a son is one of the most loving relationships. Especially in a patriarchal set up where mothers are dependent on their sons, in the third phase of their life; women are not considered complete without children and sons in particular. In every condition, a mother wants to acquire a son. She longs for the husband who is far away. She keeps ready to pay off any prize for a son.

*Ik lakh devaan, devaan lakh chaar
Puttar lea de kisi hatti to
Oh Goriye! Ik lakh de bhaavein de lakh chaar
Karma bhaajho puttar nai milde
I give you one lakh, I give you four lakhs
Just get me a son from somewhere,
Oh lady! Whether you give me one lakh or four lakhs
Without fate no one gets a son*

The desire to become a mother, that too of a son disturbs her all the time. Her desire is so strong that she feels like doing anything in return. She craves for a son all the time. She wants to tell her husband how she craves for a son, but is not able to do that. She is too shy to say that directly and her husband does not understand her. Through the medium of Folk songs, she then curses him for his childishness. Her husband is not able to understand her desires even when she gives him a hint. She then curses the innocence of the husband who is too immature to understand what his wife wants.

Folksongs are predominantly transmitted by women and thus reveal each and every part of their life. It expressed hopes, fears as well as troubles of the women folk. Punjabi folk songs or *Lok Git* talk about various arenas like women's social existence, their sexual desires, unfulfilled dreams,

domestic conflicts as well as emotional disbalances. Village, being a single unit is closely knitted. The entire village is considered one single community or extended family. The rules and regulations of a clan or a *Bhaichara*³ are of utmost importance. These rules serve as the strong basis of the kinship but at the same time constricts individual freedom. Each and every member of the clan is supposed to stick to these rules or laws and any transgression is considered an act of violation. The youngsters are taught lessons which they are supposed to stick to throughout their life, especially the sexual and moral codes. Such codes are tightly enforced for the interests of the family or clan. One such *boli*⁴ shows how these rules of the clan bound the youngsters to stay in their limits and adhere to the principles of the clan.

Yaari laaun nu bada chitt karda, juttiyan to dar lagda.
Yearn to fall in love, but I am afraid of thrashing.

Congregation of the young girls and the women folk at the festivals or weddings provide them with a chance to mingle with one another speak their hearts out. Even during the household chores, they create a cultural space for themselves where they express their desires and sub conscious through the help of the folk songs. They sing out candidly, not only about the difficulties they face in their day to day life but also about their hidden desires and aspirations, that otherwise they cannot. The most common featured familial relationship is of the girl with her in laws. For females, one's paternal home is depicted as a source of love and nurture while the in-laws' house is a source of all the tyranny and torture.

Sohre kaid katti, na chori na daaka.
I served jail time at my in-laws', innocent of theft of crime.

Conclusion

Though several decades of slavery and globalization has changed the Indian mind as people are fond of imported stuff and forgetting their own rituals and culture. The

cases of fragmentation of family as a single unit can also be found because of modernization and urbanization, but still a strand of unity of cultural life and familial relationship can be seen in folk songs. Still, there are many villages that have successfully stuck to their own ethnicity, identity, culture, ideas, rituals etc. The ambience which the folk needs for its growth and nourishment is still found in the villages of Punjab. People have very well preserved their folklore here and that is the reason that folk songs, rituals, proverbs, idioms, riddles etc are still always there on the lips of the Punjabi's.

The songs bring together to the focus, the intensity of relationships in the Punjabi context. Be it household chores of the women or agricultural field work of the men, no activity is complete without folklore. Be it the churning of curd, or while spinning the wheel, while taking lunch for their men to the fields, while working in the fields, harvesting crops, ploughing land with bulls or while walking as a cowherd etc. folksongs are sung to make these daily chores more musical and melodious and enjoy their life to the fullest

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End Notes

1. Levi-Strauss (1969) insisted on how through marriage, members are recruited to the kinship groups. According to John Beattie (1974), Kinship provides categories for distinguishing between people. In the Indian context in particular, Iravati Karve in her book Kinship Organization In India, (1953) took up the metaphor of a quilt to describe the Indian society and it's Kinship system. She says that like a quilt is made up of different colourful pieces of cloth, similarly; Indian society is made up of various relationships that are tied together with the thread of Kinship.
2. The songs taken for the study have been collected through fieldwork in the Kapurthala district of Punjab.
3. Brotherhood. In a Punjabi Context, the values of the community are of utmost importance.
4. Boli is a small verse which is sung individually.