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## The Development of Folk Literature: Insights from Haryanvi Folk Songs

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**Abstract:** Folk literature serves as a vital repository of cultural heritage, reflecting the social, historical, and linguistic evolution of communities. This research paper examines the development of folk literature through the lens of Haryanvi folk songs, a rich oral tradition from the Indian state of Haryana. Drawing on historical contexts, thematic analyses, and cultural significance, the paper explores how these songs have evolved from ancient oral practices to contemporary expressions, preserving dialects, traditions, and values amid modernization. Key figures like Pandit Lakhmi Chand and challenges such as translation and digital preservation are discussed. The analysis underscores the role of Haryanvi folk songs in sustaining folk literature's dynamic nature, offering insights into broader folkloristic trends.

**Keywords:** Folk Song, Culture, Traditions, Dialect,

### Introduction

Folk literature encompasses oral traditions such as songs, tales, proverbs, and ballads that emerge from collective community experiences and are often transmitted verbally from generation to generation. In contrast to formal literature, it is renowned for its adaptability, simplicity, and deep integration into everyday life, serving as a mirror to societal norms, historical events, and cultural identities. Within the Indian context, folk literature varies regionally, with Haryanvi folk songs providing a distinguished example from Haryana. Sung in the Haryanvi dialect, these songs encapsulate agrarian lifestyles, rituals, and emotional narratives, making a significant contribution to the development of folk literature by combining orality with performative elements.

Haryana, which became a separate state in 1966 amid post-Partition linguistic and communal demands, possesses a folk heritage rooted in the Vedic era. Haryanvi, frequently marginalised as merely a “dialect” of Hindi, has thrived in rural oral forms such as songs and “raginis” (poetic ballads), which have evolved through cultural interactions and adaptations. This paper examines this development, focusing on historical origins, types, themes, key contributors, and contemporary challenges.

## Historical Development of Haryanvi Folk Songs in Folk Literature:

The roots of Haryanvi folk songs lie in ancient oral traditions, influenced by Vedic hymns and Indian classical music systems. Originating from agrarian communities, these songs were initially unwritten, composed collectively, and passed down orally, rendering them vulnerable to variations and potential loss over time. Historical milestones, such as the formation of Haryana after independence, highlighted linguistic tensions, with Haryanvi gaining prominence in folk expressions despite the official dominance of Hindi.

In the medieval period, influences from Sufi and Bhakti movements incorporated devotional themes, while the colonial and post-colonial eras saw adaptations reflecting socio-political changes—such as Partition migrations and agrarian reforms. The twentieth century marked a turning point with figures like Pandit Lakhmi Chand (1901–1945), who formalised elements through “saangs” (folk operas), blending songs with narratives to educate rural audiences on morality and history. In the digital age, these songs have evolved via media platforms, presenting both opportunities for wider dissemination and risks such as cultural homogenisation. This evolution illustrates the resilience of folk literature, transitioning from pure orality to hybrid forms while preserving core elements.

## Types and Themes in Haryanvi Folk Songs:

Haryanvi folk songs are diverse and classified according to occasion, style, and function, contributing to the richness of folk literature. Broadly, they divide into classical folk music (linked to ragas such as Bhairavi and Kafi for heroic ballads, e.g., Alha-Khand) and desi folk music (rooted in rural melodies for seasonal and ritual songs). Singing styles include gharwa gayan (domestic singing), jhoolana (lullabies), patka (rhythmic chants), and rasia (devotional tunes).

Themes are deeply connected to life cycles and nature:

**Ritual Songs:** These ceremonial or auspicious songs are tied to major life events (birth, marriage, death) and religious rituals. They are often called mangal geet (auspicious songs), sung chiefly by older women to invoke blessings.

- Birth-related (janm sanskar geet)—Songs welcoming a newborn, such as those praising the child's arrival or rituals like kuan-poojan (worship of the well upon a boy's birth).

- Marriage songs—Sung during various wedding stages, including sagai (engagement), baan (pre-wedding festivities), bhat (gifts from siblings to the bride/groom's mother), sehra, vidai, and band-band (duets expressing love or playful banter).
- Other ritual songs—Include devotional bhajans, songs for deities such as Gugga (Gugga geet—praise of the snake saint, often during processions), and death-related laments.

These songs emphasise family bonds, auspicious beginnings, and spiritual protection.

**Seasonal Songs:** These celebrate seasonal changes, agriculture, and natural beauty, typically sung by groups of young girls and women. They are joyful, fast-paced, and linked to festivals.

- Phag/Phagan songs: these songs announce the arrival of Holi festival. They capture the playfulness of spring, the arrival of colours, Holi celebrations, and the sowing of rabi crops. The society becomes intoxicated with the rhythm of passions such women starts behaving like naughty. Such sentiments are beautifully expressed in the lines of the folk songs as:

Kacchi amli gadrai saman mei  
Boodhi rei lugai mastai saman mei. (Baburam, 52)  
(In sawan, even unripe amla becomes sour and tangy, similarly, in Phagun, even an old woman becomes intoxicated and playful)

- Teej songs: Such songs are sung during Hariyali Teej or Sawan (monsoon season). Women sing while swinging on jhulas, expressing the joy of rains, love, marriage, and relationships. They evoke the freshness of the monsoon and longing for loved ones.
- Other seasonal categories—Many other songs are also sung in harayana including katak (Kartik month), samman (Shravan/Sawan month), and bara masa (songs describing the twelve months and their agricultural moods).

These ritual and seasonal songs form the heart of Haryanvi folk literature, preserving cultural values, rural joys, and emotional depth across generations. Despite the popularity of modern Haryanvi pop, traditional forms continue to flourish in villages during festivals and ceremonies.

**Life Event Songs:** In Haryanvi folk literature, life event songs—also known as sanskar geet or mangal geet—are profoundly linked to major life milestones, from birth to marriage and beyond. They constitute an essential part of Haryana's oral tradition, primarily sung by groups of women, often accompanied by instruments such as the dholak, manjira, or thali. They invoke blessings, express emotions, strengthen family ties, and preserve cultural values across generations. Unlike

seasonal songs, life event songs are ceremonial and auspicious, performed during specific rituals that mark life transitions.

**Birth and Childhood Rituals:** These songs celebrate the arrival of new life, particularly the birth of a son, and early childhood ceremonies.

- Pregnancy and birth songs: Sung by women to bless the expectant mother or announce the birth.
- Kuan poojan: Special songs for a boy's birth, involving worship of the well as a symbol of prosperity.
- Naming ceremony or first feeding: Joyful compositions praising the child and seeking divine protection.

These are typically mangal geet, filled with auspicious wishes.

**Marriage Songs:** Haryanvi weddings feature the richest collection of life event songs, sung across pre-wedding, wedding, and post-wedding rituals. Women from both families participate, often in call-and-response style.

Key types include:

- Sagai geet: Sung during the ring ceremony, teasing and blessing the couple.
- Bhat: Sung when maternal relatives (bhat) bring gifts to the bride/groom's mother; joyful and full of gratitude.
- Tel baan or haldi songs: During oil and turmeric application rituals.
- Sehra bandhi: For the groom, when his turban veil (sehra) is tied; praise and playful advice.
- Ghurchari: As the groom mounts a horse/mare.
- Pheras and mangal geet: Auspicious songs during the wedding circumambulations.
- Jakdi: Leisurely marital songs sung by newlywed women, often expressing a daughter-in-law's desires, experiences, or banter.
- Vidai geet: Emotional songs are sung at the bride's departure, expressing sorrow, love for the parental home, and hopes for her new life.

## Other Life Events

- Death-related laments: Less commonly celebrated in folk performances; these are mourning songs expressing grief.

- Devotional overlaps: Certain bhajans or songs for local deities (e.g., Gugga geet) are sung during life rituals for protection.

These songs are the soul of Haryanvi cultural identity, transmitted orally and still performed in rural weddings and ceremonies despite the rise of modern Haryanvi music. They beautifully capture the emotions of life's pivotal moments.

## Devotional and Romantic Themes

In Haryanvi folk literature, devotional and romantic themes enrich its oral tradition, intertwining spirituality, divine love, and human emotions. These themes appear in bhajans, kirtans, raginis, and ritual songs, often sung by women or groups during festivals, rituals, or leisure.

**Devotional Themes:** Devotional songs form the core of Haryanvi folk, expressing reverence for Hindu deities, local saints, and spiritual seeking. They include bhajans (hymns) and kirtans, typically performed collectively at religious gatherings, festivals, or rites, accompanied by harmonium, tabla, and dholak. Themes centre on surrender, divine protection, and celebration of gods such as Krishna, Radha, Shiva, Parvati, or folk saints (e.g., Gugga Pir). Phag songs during Holi often praise the divine love of Krishna-Radha, blending bhakti with playful devotion.

- Bhajans and kirtans: Simple, repetitive hymns invoking blessings, sung by older women in satsangs or temples. A common theme is faith and surrender, as seen in modern renditions like "Baba Ji" seeking divine grace.
- Phag songs: Devotional hymns to Krishna-Radha during the Phag dance at Holi, celebrating celestial love and festival joy.

These songs foster community piety and spiritual reflection, often overlapping with auspicious mangal geet.

**Romantic Themes:** Romantic elements permeate Haryanvi folk through love ballads, pangs of separation (virah), playful banter, and marital desires. They appear in seasonal songs (e.g., Teej songs expressing longing for the husband during monsoon), band-bandit duets, and especially ragini and jakdi. Ragini, a narrative folk theatre form, frequently explores love, relationships, and socio-romantic issues. Jakdi songs, sung by women during leisure, vividly portray post-marital romance, desires, power dynamics, and sarcasm in relationships.

Examples of jakdi songs (translated from Sahapedia, focusing on marital romance and assertion):

- Tumhari maaye lade din raat: The wife complains to her husband about constant quarrels with her mother-in-law, demanding separation and equality as “Nyyara ho ja, nyaara ho ja bhartare” (Separate yourself, separate, my husband).
- Gaya, gaya ri sasu tera raj: Triumphantly declares the end of the mother-in-law’s reign, instructing her to do chores while the daughter-in-law takes charge.
- Choodiyan banglori meri haath mei: Uses symbolic bangles to assert control over family decisions, including romantic aspects such as procreation.

These themes highlight joy, longing, humour, and subtle empowerment in love and marriage, preserving the emotional depth of rural Haryanvi life.

### Social Commentary

In Haryanvi folk literature, social commentary songs serve as a subtle yet powerful medium for critiquing societal norms, patriarchy, family dynamics, and social ills. They feature prominently in ragini (narrative ballads performed in folk theatre like saang) and jakdi (leisurely marital songs sung by women), acting as a “safety valve” for expressing grievances, resistance, and moral lessons in a culturally acceptable manner.

**Ragini:** Ragini, a popular folk theatre and ballad form, combines music, dance, and storytelling to address love, mythology, and contemporary social issues such as dowry, addiction, moral decay, and community ethics. Performed at gatherings, ragini often aims at social reform through humour, satire, and moral education.

Pandit Lakhmi Chand’s renowned ragini promotes ethical social conduct: “Le ke dede kar ke khale, us te kon jabar ho se; Nugra manas te door raha, chahe wo bhai band ho se” (Live by borrowing and lending, nothing is greater than that; stay away from selfish people, even if they are kin). This critiques selfishness and encourages communal harmony.

**Jakdi:** Women’s Songs of Resistance and Assertion Jakdi songs, sung by married women during leisure or chores, sharply comment on patriarchal structures, mother-in-law conflicts, marital power dynamics, and daughters-in-law’s desires/agency. They constitute a form of protest, allowing women collectively to challenge hegemony while preserving cultural narratives.

Jakdi songs indirectly reflect son preference, gender roles, and rural hardships; some birth rituals reinforce patriarchy while others permit veiled critique. Social commentary in Haryanvi folk preserves oral resistance traditions and influences modern awareness of issues such as gender inequality.

These elements demonstrate how Haryanvi songs enrich folk literature by incorporating myths, orality, and performative aspects, evolving structurally through repetition and adaptation.

### **Key Contributors and Cultural Significance**

Pandit Lakhmi Chand remains a pivotal figure in the development of Haryanvi folk literature. His works, such as “Seth Tarachand” and “Heer-Raanjha”, employ local colour, dialect, customs, and topography to vividly portray Haryana’s ethos, using metaphors like “nine doors, ten guards” for life’s challenges. Through saangs, he transformed oral traditions into performative education, preserving cultural identity amid societal disdain for folk arts.

Culturally, these songs safeguard the nuances, idioms, and vocabulary of the Haryanvi dialect, countering the erosive effects of globalisation. They promote social cohesion, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and emotional resilience, while depicting rural women’s lives and gender dynamics. In education, they serve as tools for moral instruction and cultural awareness, embedding values such as respect and peace within school curricula.

### **Challenges in Preservation and Translation**

Despite their vitality, Haryanvi folk songs face threats from urbanisation, youth disinterest, and lack of documentation. Translation into languages such as English presents difficulties due to dialectal variations, semantic losses, and cultural nuances, requiring sensitive adaptations to maintain authenticity. Digital platforms offer opportunities for revival but risk diluting traditions through modern reinterpretations. Efforts to integrate them into education and media are crucial for sustaining this form of folk literature.

### **Conclusion**

Haryanvi folk songs exemplify the development of folk literature as a living, adaptable tradition, evolving from ancient oral roots to modern expressions while preserving cultural essence. Through themes of love, devotion, and social norms, and figures like Pandit Lakhmi Chand, they underscore folk literature’s role in identity formation and resilience. Addressing preservation challenges will ensure their continued contribution to global folkloristic discourse.

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