

# Identity Discourse in Selected Rajasthani Folk Songs

## Abstract

A folksong has its ability to tell multitude stories and interpretations. It is one of the expressive means of culture used to generate, define, and reinforce its patterns. The songs are the cultural specimens and their inherent music is characterized with tales of identity. Identity is understood as assimilation of the self, collectively forming a unified whole. It is interconnectedness at regional and national level and the folk songs work as a catalyst in constructing identity. Rajasthan, a state in northern India has rich artists and folk culture. The song [text] embodies the voices of regional flavor making an analytical inquiry into the festivals, women voices, relationships, internal and external struggle, and celebrations. Like folktales, folk songs have the power to transform, restructure and re-ignite making them an important cultural component of communication. The present study focuses on Rajasthani folksongs, and its role in national integration, social construction and identity formation.

**Keywords:** Community, Identity, Culture, Language, Traditions, Customs.

## Introduction

Folklore is the culture of people living in particular geographical area, where the diverse groups of people share the common factors of language, religion or occupation, and livelihood tied together by common identity. In addition to folksongs, folk dances, tales, proverbs, handicrafts, it is the generic term used to designate the customs, beliefs, traditions and values of a particular group. Thus it can be referred as the accumulated knowledge of homogeneous unsophisticated people, tied together not only by common physical bonds, but also by emotional ones which color their every expression, giving it unity and individual distinction (Datta 13). India, the homeland of numerous languages and cultures, is rich in folklores.

## Review of Literature

Hukumsimha Bhati and Narayana Simha Bhati's *Svantrata Andolna ki Rajasthani Preraka Racanaen* in Hindi is a work on Rajasthani folk songs with focus on freedom struggle and nationalism. In *Encyclopedia of Indian Literature Vol 2* Amaresh Dutta gives references of *Ghumara* and *Luharu* two types of folk song sung during spring. *Rajasthani Magazine* has accounts of *Pabuji ra Pawad* a ballad sung by Bhoja singers. Similarly, *The Routledge Companion to Intangible Cultural Heritage* edited by Peter Davis and Michelle L. Stefano discusses folk songs and dance of *Kalbelia* community. The songs and dances are distinguished feature of Rajasthan's culture and traditional art. An article by Ann Grodzins Gold 'Outspoken Women: Representation of Female Voices in a Rajasthani Folklore Community' emphasizes on women's voices in oral performances and how gender identities are constructed through them.

## Aim of Study

The present paper investigates selected *Rajasthani* folk songs and the role of folk culture in formation of identity. It studies identity formation at three broader levels—family, community and nation thereby acting as a catalyst for National integration.

Being an ambiguous term, "Identity" has been used in many contexts. Identity signifies both similarity and difference. It can thus be defined as "people's concepts of who they are, what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others" (Hogg and Abrams 2). Identity and culture are interrelated, interconnected and interdependent. The idea of cultural identity refers to ancestral and cultural magnitudes of a person's identity, and how others identify him or her. The term 'culture' according to Hofstede is used for tribes or ethnic groups (in anthropology), or nations (in political science, sociology and management), and for

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organizations (in sociology and management) (qtd. in Ibrahim, Heuer 15-16). Furthermore, Culture has been also able to create difference between inclusion (similarity) and exclusion (disparity). It forms an important element in folk literature which for Mathew Arnold is the pursuit of total perfection by means of getting to know, of all the matter which concerns us, the best which has been thought and said in the world (qtd. in Bauman 3). A symbolic force of steadiness and meaning to communities, folklores or folk texts become the hauler of the cultural legacy and identity fostering inventiveness, improvisation, and the rational growth of individuals and groups.

Folk culture is the culture produced by local group of people and is embedded in experiences, traditions and values of the daily life of common people. Richard M. Dorson in *American Folklore*, remarks that the members of regional folk culture are wedded to the land holding memories. The people themselves possess identity and ancestry through continuous occupation of the same soil (qtd. in Am Paredes 5). The formation of folk culture by ordinary people makes it more acceptable and 'authentic' rather than artificial. 'Mass culture' (folk culture) is very different from 'high culture' which is aimed at high intellectual elites and is generally thought to be superior to other forms of culture. This 'mass culture' creates identity. Identity which is created through the practice of socialization and social organizations like the family, the education system and the mass media is about how people or groups see and define themselves, and how they are defined by others. It is the "ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities" (Jenkins 4). Collective identity, moreover, gives a sense of security for its members by making the world connected, sanctioning intra-collectivity communiqué and creating shared forms of knowledge/beliefs. The world becomes rational and this rationality is of particular thought-world in which it is produced and reproduced.

Folk Songs are part of folk traditions as Jan Vansina (1961) classifies folk songs as second traditions, since they are narrative they go through changes and interpolations in being handed down (Capila 50). Apart from being an instrument of amusement, a Folk song carries out the function of communication, imparts an understanding, and inculcates moral values into the community thus acting as an agency for social control. This helps in regulating the society and contributes to social transformation at colossal scale.

Rajasthan, area wise the largest state, located in northwest of India is the land of chivalry and cultural heritage and has the best melodies of folk songs conveying eventually, the whole human life extensively. Rajasthani folk songs are divided into three categories: *Puranic* songs on lord Rama, Krishna or Shiva; *Historical* songs like *Miran*, *Tolande* and *Imaginary and Domestic* songs like *Panihari*, *Ghomar*, *Mand*, *Dhola* etc. The *Langas*

and *Manganiars* in Barmer district are professional musicians. *Gorbund* is the famous folk song which describes the practice of preparing a decorative string for camel. The other folk songs are *Indhani*, *Lawarji*, *Jallo*, *Hichaki* etc. The number of communities like *Dholis*, *Patars*, *Qawwals*, *Nats*, *Rawals* living in the region popularize Rajasthani folk music. The ballads of *Pabuji*, *Bhaironji*, *Tejaji*, *Dhola Maru*, *Nihalde Sultan* and the valour of *Prithviraj*, *Maharana Sanga*, and *Maharana Pratap* are described, sung and made popular i.e. traditions and history of the region is handed down from one generation to another through these folk songs. They have an unfathomable impact on society becoming ubiquitous fixture of cultural life. Signifying, region's typicality, its characteristics and uniqueness, these folk songs functions as metaphor or trope of Rajasthani identity and Indian culture as whole.

The song "Chhoti Si Umar" illustrates the love and affection a father and his daughter share in Indian society. The devoutness and deep attachment with sensitivity has been touched upon when the girl innocently questions her father as she is getting married:

*Chhoti Si Umar Parnai Re Babosa,  
Karyo Tharo Kai Main Kasoor;  
Ittna Dinna Toh Mahane Laad Ladaya,  
Ab Kyu Karo Mahane Hivde Soo Door.*

Disturbed with the question of separation from her father, the daughter in a passionate way tries to remind him of the love that has been consistently awarded to her. The identification of the girl with her father [family] as well as her community is echoed celebrating the strength of father-daughter relationship as well as customs and practices of a society.

Similarly, small customs like the importance of make-up and ornamentation in the life of Hindu married women are apparent through another folk song "Gordi Saj Solah Singar":

*Gordi Saj Solah Singar, Challi Pani Nai  
Panihar.  
Thhalli Baith Garhi Baimata, Rupade  
Uniharey,  
Naynan Kad Se Teekha Jani, Bijli Re  
Palkarey,*

Water and wells form an integral part of Rajasthan's desert culture as depicted in the *Panihari* songs. Here, one can find a beautiful woman going to fetch water from the well. There is *chhatti puja* in this region, goddess of fortune is worshipped and she is referred to as *Baimata*. The woman going to fetch water has got a matchless beauty and has probably been created by goddess of fortune in all leisure.

Human personal relationship of husband and wife is reflected in 'Aawe Hitchki':

*Mun Dholiya Re, Main Thane Dhola  
Mana Kiyu Re, Tu Pardesa Mat Jayo  
Re. Are Pardesa Ri Kaamni, Thane  
Rakhela Milmaar, Bhanwar Sa, Thane  
Badiilo Chitare, Bairan.*

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While dissuading her husband from going abroad the beloved remembers him. Hitchki, the hiccup in Indian culture is considered as an indication of reminding the loved ones. Her apprehensions are discernible in this song as she fears he might develop intimacy with foreign women calling her *Pardesa Ri Kaamni*. *Bhanwarsa* in this region is young lover who is expected to remain faithful. At times women are unable to express their emotions individually. Such songs act as a medium of expression of emotions for these women. "Mhari Mehandiri" has a group of women singing about the traditional application of 'Heena' on their hands. *Ro Rang Lagyo, Jodira Mhari Chakri Main Chit Lagyo*. The act of applying myrtle on hands reflects the culture and tradition of northern states of India. 'Heena' signifies love between husband and wife. In fact such an informal get together consolidates the harmonious relationship amongst the inhabitants of an area.

'Holi Khelan' has the portrayal of festival of *Holi*, to rejoice and commemorate the immortal love of lord Krishna and Radha:

*Holi Khelan Dhoom Machavan, Aayo  
Yashomati Lalo,  
Aayo Prem Ki Holi Lekey, Mohan  
Murli Walo*

Like Lord Krishna who played Holi with Radha and Gopis, men and women sing, dance and perform *Rasleela* on the occasion of Holi. The colored water denotes love which must flow from our heart. This song again preaches the piousness and purity of love and Lord Krishna is the agent of this love. Indian culture gives people an opportunity to resolve the mutual conflicts through this great festival of color.

The following song "Bhar Jowan Main Naav Doobgee" explicates the connotation of community dwelling and marital institution: *Bhar Jowan Main Naav Doobgee, Taira De Manihaara, Tere Naam Ki Do Choori, Maney Pahra De Manihaara*. There is mention of proximity between two unequal classes. Manihaara, a seller of feminine goods is equally welcomed in wealthy houses. Here one can also find the value of exchange of goods that had been in trend during previous times. Unlike contemporary usage of money as an exchange token the requisite things were used in exchange. This kind of a transition undoubtedly promulgates an open community based on cooperation.

Folk songs have a great ability to be a part of culture and to serve as an emblem of cultural community. They act as a pedagogic tool to transmit national ideas and become a symbol of national representation. These folk songs also nurture patriotic fervor in contemporary global world carrying a widened gulf. Songs like "Kesariya Balaam" and "Dhan Mahra Des Bikana" echoes the spirit of nationalism. The very expression *padharo mahre des* clearly explains the sentiment of people feeling sense of pride inviting *kesariya balam* to their land. The song elucidates the zeal of an

inhabitant and his affinity to homeland. The orange/*kesari* colour denotes sacrifice and patriotism for one's land. Although the song talks of true lovers, Dhola and Maru and their legendary sacrifice, in the land of Rajasthan but the song has derived various connotations. It has now come to represent India as a whole. The singer invites everyone to this loving soil of brave hearts: *Kesariyaa Balam, Padharo Mahare Des, Marudhar Thare Marudhar Thare Marudhar Thare Des, Nipuje Teen Ratan, Ek Dholo Duji Marban Teejo Kasoomal Rang*. The other folk song "Dhan Mhara Desh Bikana" belongs to the same category and likewise discusses the merits of regionalism as well as nationalism creating a sense of identity as well as unity among people of Rajasthan:

*Dhan Mhara Desh Bikana, O Gee  
Dhan Mhara Desh Bikana...  
Kheytan Mein Ho Jya Mhar Mothh,  
Bajro Nahi Pardesan Jaana Re;  
Ghar Mein to Gaayan, Bhasyan  
Dooj, Be Dudh Dahi Ka Khana  
Re...*

Here, the land of Rajasthan and its fields are illustrated where crops like Bajra, Mothh (best of its kind) are grown. Since their own lands give the farmers enough, they would not need going somewhere else for their livelihood. Bikaner, a district of Rajasthan is known for best breed of cattle and famous for sweets.

## Conclusion

Through these songs there is transmission of ideas, religion, and culture despite absence of means of formal communication. They are the schools of socialization encouraging moral values into the community which is conducive for social change at mass scale. Rao and Shulman remark that the lyrical traits of a song form the listeners responsiveness and educate through the domain of desire, social commentary, the articulation of cultural values and critical taste [as] these interlocking stanzas embody an entire education, an expressive vision of life and poetry (qtd. in Jassal 252). Efforts therefore should be made to preserve these folk forms for the development of society at large. Collective identities protect the meanings of group and they do so by establishing boundary mechanisms and boundary filters, ensuring that ideas peripheral to the group are recognized and sense of collective self is attained. Identity can also be understood as assimilation of the self, where different aspects come collectively to form a unified whole. This unified whole makes the folk culture developing the connection of community leading to identity formation. Previous societies found a deeper solace and emotional balance since they were close to the aesthetics of music which is echoed through these songs enumerating their everyday activities. Escalating the stance of Malinowski in *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, Bascom draws attention to the functional role of folklore. Proverbs help settle legal decisions, riddles sharpen wits, myths validate conduct, and satirical songs

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release pent up hostilities (qtd in Dorson 102). The profound influence of music in shaping the aims and goals of people to form a collective identity is evidently visible in history. Besides being an apparatus of recreation, they teach us the historical past narrating various tales, incidents functioning as an instrument to understand various facets of life. Folk songs form an imperative part of Rajasthani culture and play vital role in comprehending the ancestral traditions and customs, beliefs, values inherent in society.

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