

## FOLK MEDIA AND FEMALE CRAFTSPERSONS IN PUNJAB: THE UPLIFTING CONNECTION

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### Abstract

Punjab, the land of five rivers has a rich cultural heritage. Art and creative expression find an integral place in the Punjabi culture. The culture though abundant in tales of love and is predominantly influenced by Sikhism, the commonest religion in the state that promotes gender equality, is still far from being the ideal society that the founders of Sikh society and the visionary rulers and leaders of the land had dreamed of. Women are deemed to be the weaker and inferior gender and plenty of stereotypes mar the quality of their lives on everyday basis. Gender roles limit the liberation of females in the region. Though a change in the scenario is evident with an increasing focus of the government on education of masses particularly women, the scenario in rural areas especially remains grim.

Art and craft is not only a creative outlet for rural women but is also a skill which if rightly utilized can earn them their much desired financial independence. Financial independence is paramount in the process of women empowerment. Hence, promotion of creative art and commercial exercise of these skills can do wonders for women in the state.

This paper examines the role of folk media of punjab in empowering craftswomen of the region. It is found that the folk media, literature and religious texts are enthused with ideals that foster art, craft and their free expression. Folk media, being a deep rooted connection with the local rural audience, tends to have a better impact on the masses.

### Introduction

Punjab is one of the prominent states of North-West India with rich cultural Heritage. In *Rigveda*, this region was referred as the land of Sapta-Sindhu, the land watered by the seven fold Indus or seven rivers - Indus (*Sindhu*), Jhelum (*Vitasta*), Chenab (*Asiai*), Ravi (*Iravati*), Beas (*Vipasa*), Satluj (*Satadru*), Sarasvati (*Saruti* near *Jhaneshwar*). The name PUNJAB (correctly Panjab) is literally translated from Persian in two words, *PANJ* means five, *AB*

means water which means water of five rivers Satluj (Sutluj), Beas, Ravi, Chenab and Jhelum). Post- independence, Punjab was divided into East and West Punjab. East Punjab, nowadays commonly known as Punjab, was a state of India consisting of the parts of the Punjab Province of British India that went to India following the partition of the province between India and Pakistan by the Radcliffe Commission in 1947. The mostly Muslim western parts of the old Punjab became Pakistan's West Punjab, later renamed as Punjab Province, while the mostly Sikh and Hindu eastern parts went to India.

Punjab has made significant contributions to the rich artistic traditions of Indian culture. This region was the cradle of the richest ancient cultures of Indus Valley Civilization. This civilization placed Punjab prominently on the map of Ancient Civilized world. Indus Valley Civilization flourished in the regions of Sindh and Punjab. The unearthing of the ancient civilization has pointed that the people of Punjab have rich tradition of involvement with arts and crafts which reflect their customs and culture. Religion and culture exercise an immense influence on the arts and crafts of the region. Every village has a cobbler, a weaver, a carpenter and a dyer to cater to the community needs. Women are a major part of this workforce which is inter-dependent and self- sustaining.

Even the early practitioners of these traditional forms of art and crafts were mostly the women who also played a pivotal part in refining these creations. Some women are very skilled in drawing the artistic shapes and motifs to fulfill their passion for creating visually appealing pieces of art. These women can relate these illustrations, figures and motifs to seasons, harvests, and events in the family or to their beliefs and customs. The artistic skills are equivalent to a precious heirloom and hence the traditional art forms are passed on from one generation to another.

In earlier times, women education was not promoted and their skills with embroidery, stitching, weaving, tie and die and other household activities were, to them, an act of catharsis. There was a tradition that old women used to collect at one place and practice their traditional art. Still today, in many of the rural set ups, when woman are free of their household chores, they bring out their spinning wheels and sit out in the open under a tree. Women of all ages and from all houses of the locality sit together and spin. Besides spinning, they weave, they etch out splendid designs of embroidery, paint, decorate their households

and much more. This gathering is a common platform for the women to implement their skills and yield marvelous pieces of traditional art. Also, young girls feel encouraged and their inner creative power gets a direction and outlet.

It is in light of this wide gap in the social status of males and females that art and craft and its promotion as a means of financial independence in women becomes important. The study focuses on the role of folk media in promoting art and craft to uplift the status of women in Punjab

### **Objectives**

1. To study the co-relation between folk media and art forms of punjab
2. To assess the role of folk media in empowering female craftsperson of Punjab.

### **Review of Literature**

A study finds that Folk media as a vehicle of the expression of development messages; including health and family welfare have been fully recognized. The impact of folk media has been very clear, focused and coupled with local dialect and entertainment. Communication of message has been practical in approach and goes to the heart and head of the people. Moreover, traditional media are non-technological in nature but they are flexible and culturally rigid. However, rural people have great confidence in them because the traditional folk artists are mostly either from their own community or from the local areas and they are more acceptable to them. The impact of these media cannot be underestimated. [1]

The study titled 'Folk and Traditional Media: A Powerful Tool for Rural Development' reveals that majority of the respondents felt that folk media is used quite significantly in rural development for its cultural aspect but in the era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), it is losing its significance. The study supports the idea that folk media can be used effectively along with the electronic media for the sake of the development of rural society. [2]

In a study on Traditional Folk Media in rural Maharashtra, it was found that some government organizations related with social development work were using traditional media

to convey their messages to the rural masses. According to their experiences, these were more effective than mass media. [3]

Another study finds that in spite of the fact that the people are aware of the importance of education, they are reluctant to send their daughters to the schools due to which there is gender gap and the roles assigned to them are different. Parents deal with their male and female child separately. Preference is given to the sons because they are supposed to be the helping hand for the parents. Girls are generally limited to the domestic activities. Education is also aimed at fitting them into gender roles as prescribed by their society.

### Discussion

It is believed that the works of arts and crafts are the mirrors of the nature and personality of the women creating them. One of the most noteworthy aspects of traditional art and craft is its ability to fit into the patterns of the worker's day and the seasons of the year. The practice of these art forms is woven into the routine household duties. After the hard work of the everyday tasks these people locate little time in which they attempt to create something beautiful to make their life happier, their homes more enjoyable. Although Punjab is predominantly an agricultural economy, some households even practice these arts and crafts to generate additional income for themselves.

Even today you will find villages where there is no provision of proper electricity. People in such places might not have a good access to modern form of mass media. Similarly, illiterate people will not be able to read newspapers or magazines. Therefore, they have also developed different ways of communication depending upon the local language and culture.

***The non electronic media which work as part of our culture and as vehicles of transmitting traditional ethos from one generation to another generation are called traditional media.***

Traditional media come in different forms and is known by different names in different regions of the country. Traditional tools of communication are developed from the beliefs, customs, and rituals practiced by the people. These are very old and deep-rooted. Traditional media thus represents a form of communication employing vocal, verbal, musical and visual folk art forms, transmitted to a society or group of societies from one generation to another.

They are indigenous modes and have served the society as tools/medium of communication for ages.

A traditional media form can be anything which does the purpose of communication in your family, friends and as a whole in society. All the forms may not be popular but they help to communicate. You have already seen that these forms are different in different regions and communities. These can be divided into the following:

- traditional dance
- drama
- painting
- sculpture
- song
- music
- motifs
- arts and crafts

In old days the division of work in the village was according to the sex (male and female) and also according to the caste system. Women performed household tasks and men performed all outside activities like earning money for livelihood, grazing of animals like goats, cows and buffalos.

This historical deviation of labour, though structured, veils a highly patriarchal and feudal society wherein women are regarded as inferior beings. Fifty years after independence, Punjabi women continue to face gender inequality; deprived not only of access to basic facilities, but even the very basic right to be born. The deeply ingrained patriarchal ethos limit and confine women to subordinate roles in the society. Punjab has emerged as the most developed, but least gender sensitive State of India. On the one hand, women are deified, put on a pedestal and worshipped. On the other, they are suppressed and subordinated, denied a life of dignity. The inherent subordination of women is reflected in the folk songs and popular culture of the region, which celebrate wife-beating, oppression of women by women, favoritism for the birth of a son and also legitimise female infanticide as well as discriminatory customs such as chadar andazi or karewa (wherein a woman whose husband

has passed away is married to his younger brother. The custom does not preclude the younger brother from another marriage to a girl more his age). A continuing practice of these regressive customs and traditions makes it imperative to uplift women and ensure their financial empowerment and independence to grant them a dignified status in the society.

Besides the governmental policies, various NGOs and mainstream media vehicles working for women empowerment, folk media is indispensable in empowering the female craftpersons of Punjab. Promoting arts and craft can be equated to women liberation as it is a skill women have mastered since times immemorial. Also, Folk media has an innate and deep rooted connection with the masses. Hence it tends to exercise stronger influence on them as compared to other media especially in rural setting. The role of folk media in empowering female craftpersons cannot be ignored.

An in depth analysis of the various forms of folk media in Punjab reveals the emphasis the local folk media lays on art, craft and creativity. Some mediums studied revealed the following details:

### **Religious *granths* and Ancient texts**

Religious texts, also known as scriptures and holy books, are the texts that contain religious traditions that are considered to be sacred and of central importance. Many religions and spiritual movements believe that their sacred texts are divinely or supernaturally inspired. Similarly the region of Punjab, predominantly occupied by Sikh population hold Guru Granth Sahib as the most sacred literature available to the masses.

In our religious *granths*, we are introduced to the importance of arts and crafts. *Guru Granth Sahib* is one of the best sources to understand the subject. There are many instances in the granth that reiterate the importance of the handicrafts done by the women and call it the main adoration of the life of the lady. Couplets from *Guru Granth Sahib* such as *kadh kaseedaa paherhe cholee taan tumu jaanhu naaree* that translates to She alone is known as the Lord's bride, who embroiders her gown in his Name. She, who preserves and protects the home of her own heart and does not taste the evil, shall be the Beloved of her Husband Lord. The text also emphasizes the power vested in a woman. It states that a lady who is hard working, who is able to protect her home, can build her home in every difficulty. Such is the character of a great woman.

## Oral Tradition

In every society the significance attached to oral tradition is connected with its social functions which it fulfills. Oral tradition survives in a particular society. It plays a greater role in educating the younger generation regarding their norms and conduct of society. The various aspects of oral tradition are folksongs, folktales, myths, legends, proverbs and riddles etc. All these provide excellent choice of motifs to these people. Some folklores have mention of embroidered sheets, depots etc.

Punjabi literature in the form of folk songs, tales, proverbs and riddles is abundant in instances that focus on craftsmanship and creative tradition. Folklore, which widely circulated among all sorts of primitive people, was created simply for amusement and entertainment. These stories did not explain anything nor did they have any historical content. But their themes, emotional content and simplicity of narration still spellbind the masses. Folk songs of immense variety are available in this area to be sung at every important occasion of social life. These are known as *lok geets* which are the songs of the body and the soul. A folk song is essentially subjective, expression of the emotions welling up from the depths. It borrows its metaphors and imagery from simple things of life.

Folk songs for ceremonial occasions have a great cultural significance. These are more an expression of the deeply felt emotions of the community as a whole. These deal with sentiments of love-lorn men and women, cruelty of mother-in-law, cross relationship, jobs and satires, martyr and many aspects of nature's beauty. A woman's sentiments are deftly woven into the fine fabric of the folk-songs of the Punjab. The main supposition at the back of the folk songs is a woman, who has two lives and two minds, one for her parents and the other for her in-laws. Folk songs are ceremonial and heroic, romantic and mournful, long and short for occasions such as birth and rearing of child, betrothals and marriages, dances and games, fairs and festivals. The variety of tune and form is amazing. Almost every song has the mention of the women practicing art and craft as an everyday routine. Some examples are songs such as: *charkha channan da* (weaving), Phulkari/ Kaseeda find a mention in many of the songs, so do the temporary tattooing or henna.

Folklore has traditionally been described as something related to the culture and life-style of the rural people. It comes out to be an artistic action which involves creativity and aesthetic response both of which cover the particular art form itself. It is thus, social interaction via art media – musical, literary and visual. These are in great variety of different songs for different occasions like *Suhag*, *Vatna* and *Sithania*. Other than these motifs and patterns which are seen on the arts and crafts are also an important part of these folk songs and folk literature too.

### **Folk Literature**

The diverse forms of folk literature such as kisses, kahaniya, poetry etc are infused with the instances that have special focus on art and craft.

For instance, Needle work is unique, it has beautiful names because of its associations with beautiful aspects of life and the beautiful designs which the dexterous fingers of proverbially beautiful women create have marvelous wealth of forms and motifs. The patterns of needle work are done on the bed spreads (*chaadar*), pillow-covers (*sirhaane da gilaf*), handkerchiefs (*rumaal*), table cloths (*mez posh*) and *dupattas* (these are head covers or wrappers) are different. The joys, sorrows, hopes, dreams and yearnings of the young girls and women are often transferred onto cloth. This is such a craft through which women share motifs and designs with each other.

Similarly embroidery skills and pottery find a special place in plenty of traditional media forms.

### **Folk Theatre**

Traditional forms of theatre such as *Bhaands* (live performers at rural gatherings) and *Nukkad natak* (Street Plays) are a great way to spread awareness on issues of social importance. The plight of women and the role of their self- dependence in ensuring a better quality of life for them are addressed commonly via Nukkad Nataks and other folk theatre forms.

### **Conclusion**

Punjabi literature is abundant in tales that bring to fore the role of art and craft in lives of women. Women not only create and use their craft productively, but also find solace in the



expression of their flair. The social gatherings where women get together for their creative pursuits are a platform for collective promotion of their innate creativity. The gatherings also a platform for the elders to pass on the knowledge of these art forms to the coming generations. Festivals centred around such gatherings (*Teej*) are celebrated with great fervor and have a cathartic value in the lives of the otherwise oppressed women.

Folk media plays a pivotal role in promoting art and craft. The commercial pursuit of art and craft is instrumental in ensuring the skillful employment of rural women. The women pursuing art and craft on commercial basis are not only more independent financially, they also further the rich cultural heritage of Punjab and carry forward the cultural torch through generations. It can hence be concluded that Folk media has a symbiotic relationship with the Craftswomen of Punjab.

### References

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