

***Suhāg* and *Ghorīān*: Cultural Elucidation in a Female Voice**

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The traditional song genres *suhāg* and *ghorīān* have been sung in some form as part of Punjabi wedding-time rituals since medieval times. Although the texts of *suhags* concern the bride and those of *ghorian* concern the groom, both song genres are sung exclusively by women. Indeed, these genres can be viewed as one of women's few outlets for expression in the feudal era, and as such they are read here as texts providing a markedly female perspective on culture and society. Through these songs, women speak on multiple levels. *Ghorian* tend to contain more public expressions while those of *suhag* songs are more intimate. Particular attention is paid to the relative position of the human subjects addressed (i.e. in the maternal family, paternal family, or in-law family) and the connotations associated with each. The manner of address is also noted, in which the women's voice betrays the helplessness of several parties within patriarchal agrarian society.

***Suhāg* and *Ghorīān*: Sanctioned Song for Joyous Rituals and Functions**

Suhāg and *ghorīān*² are song forms connected with the bride and groom that are sung by women in the days before a wedding. The tradition is an old one; indeed, the cultural structures in which these songs rest are those well established by Punjab's agrarian society. Yet although the customs found referenced in their texts seem to be ancient, from the perspective of their linguistic forms and cultural details, extant examples do not appear to be, say, more than three centuries old. As such one cannot consider these folkloric texts to have continued on unchanged from some remote date in the past. In these texts, traces of the oligarchic mindset of the pre-colonial era are found in abundance. This suggests that these texts, too, are connected with an older, mainly medieval way of thinking, and with the worldview of the feudal era. No matter where one looks in

these texts, one is pressed to find much that reflects a modern way of thinking.

Suhag and ghorian are ritualistic song forms, and the tradition of singing them during weddings seems very old. In fact, there are numerous references in 15th and 16th century Punjabi literature, especially in *qissā* poetry and *gurmat* poetry, evincing that at that time suhag and ghorian were sung during weddings.³ The Sikh Gurus used several vernacular poetic meters and tunes, in a spiritual capacity, in the *Adi Granth*. There we find included the use of two *ghoṛīs* by Guru Ram Das in Rag Vadhans. And the word *suhāgaṇ* or *suhāgvatī* for a married woman is found to have been used since Vedic times.

It is thought that the use of horses on the battlefield in South Asia began with the coming of the Aryans. It must have been as an analogy, then, to the way warriors rode onto the field of war, that the groom in a wedding used a mare (*ghoṛī*) for traveling to marry the bride. Even today, for domestic uses, a rider on a horse may be used when speed is a requirement. Thus the *ghoṛī* (mare) became part of the joyous rituals of a wedding. And with songs sung in praise of the groom being customary, these must have come to be known as *ghoṛīān*. So both song forms, ghoṛi and suhag, must have become accepted as part of ancient rituals and the Aryan culture.

According to custom, from the very day that the letter announcing a matrimonial match is sent out from the daughter's (i.e. bride's) home, women young and old from among the local kin and community begin to gather in the home of the engaged in their free time after supper. Whether it is in the kitchen or the sitting room in the cold weather, or up on the roof in warm, gathering to sing these songs is an obligatory cultural *duty*. Each day the throng of women, with the guidance of a *Mirasan* [woman of a "Mirasi" community of hereditary performers] or *Nain* [woman of the barbering community, a traditional go-between in wedding functions], sings suhag, ghorian, "long songs" (*lamme gaun*), and assorted other items of verse, with long drawn-out *heks*.⁴ When the song session heats up, they might rap upon a pitcher, pot, *ḍholak* [small barrel drum] or bowl, with a spoon or a ring on the finger, all the while giving out short *heks* and calls of *hāi shāvā* ["oh, hurrah!"] in choral response. At this point they would be engaged in singing other kinds of folk-songs, *bolīs*, and *ṭappās* [the latter two being brisk verse forms consisting of one-line units].

Via a matchmaker and with the assent of both parties, the wedding day is set. The "wedding announcement letter"—*sāhe dī chitṭhī*—is sent out one and one-quarter month, twenty-one days, or on some other auspicious day before the wedding. In the daughter's home, members of the local community get together in the form of a *panchayat* and, with a supplication of *Wahiguru ji ki fateh* or *ikk onkar*, begin the letter. After

writing it, the panchayat calls *fateh* and the whole process is finished. During the reading back of the letter by some learned person or priest of the village, women of the community, sitting in a corner of the house would also be singing suhag or ghorian in muted voices. The auspicious rites of sending off or reading the *sāhe dī chitthī* are fulfilled with the melodious singing of sanctioned songs like suhags and ghoris. When the letter is sent off, it is suhags that are sung, and when it arrives at the house of its destination, ghoris are sung. This starts off the whole process, as from that very evening the song sessions begin. The crowds of women gather each night continuously until the wedding.

Singing Context

As mentioned, the singing of suhag and ghorian begins in a methodical way starting a month and a quarter, twenty-one days, eleven days, or seven days before the wedding. Nowadays the practice of these singing sessions has very much declined. The song circle is typically established five days before the daughter's wedding, or from the day of setting out the cooking cauldron or lighting the oven.

In the Majha region, when the song circle is practiced for the boy's (i.e. groom's) wedding in the Majha region, something called *petrā* is sung. *Petrā* is a type of singing in praise of a first-born son. In Majha, the daily singing of ghorian is begun with *petra*. An example follows:

- Solo: *pethā māū pethorā, pethā nī*
puttar jamm māvrīe, jethā nī
- Chorus: *pethā māō pethorā, pethā nī*
pethā māū pethorā, pethā nī
- Solo: *jeṭhe jamme milaṇ vadhāīān nī*
sajāde jamme milaṇ vadhāīān nī
- Chorus: *jeṭhe jamme milaṇ vadhāīān nī*
jeṭhe jamme milaṇ vadhāīān nī
- Solo: *ajj asān āndoṛā guṛ mīṭhā nī*
ajj asān tere bābe dā ghar ḍīṭhā
- Chorus: *nī ajj asān tere bābe dā ghar ḍīṭhā*
nī ajj asān tere bābe dā ghar ḍīṭhā
- Solo: *pethā māō pethorā, pethā nī*
- Chorus: *pethā māō pethorā, pethā nī*
- Solo: *ajj asān āndoṛā tel nī*
ajj asān āndoṛā tel nī
nī ajj tere sāhe dā mel
- Chorus: *ajj asān āndoṛā tel nī*
nī ajj tere sāhe dā mel
- Solo: *ajj asān āndoṛān guṛ roṛīān*

Chorus:	<i>ajj asān āndoṛiān guṛ roṛiān</i>
Solo:	<i>jīvan tere bhāiān dīān joṛiān</i>
Chorus:	<i>jīvan tere bhāiān dīān joṛiān</i>
Solo:	<i>ajj asān āndoṛiān phull kaliān</i>
Chorus:	<i>nī ajj asān āndoṛiān phull kaliān</i>
Solo:	<i>sadā salāmat vasaṇ haveliān</i>
Chorus:	<i>teriān sadā salāmat vasaṇ haveliān</i>
Solo:	<i>ajj asān āndoṛiān phull kaliān</i>
Chorus:	<i>ve ajj asān āndoṛiān phull kaliān</i>
Solo:	<i>sandal bhinnīān mānegā raliān</i>
Chorus:	<i>sandal bhinnīān mānegā raliān</i>
	<i>pethoṛā māio pethā, pethoṛā nī...</i>
Solo:	Be fruitful, young mothers, bear fruit O. Bear a son, dear mother, a boy child O.
Chorus:	Be fruitful, young mothers, bear fruit O! Be fruitful, young mothers, bear fruit O!
Solo:	Blessed are those who bear boys. Blessed are those who bear handsome ones.
Chorus:	Blessed are those who bear boys. Blessed are those who bear boys.
Solo:	Today we brought much sweet sugar. Today we gave it to your granddad's house.
Chorus:	Oh today we gave it to your granddad's house. Oh today we gave it to your granddad's house.
Solo:	Be fruitful, young mothers, bear fruit O.
Chorus:	Be fruitful, young mothers, bear fruit O!
Solo:	Today we gave much oil O. Today we gave much oil O. Today we've set your wedding date.
Chorus:	Today we gave much oil O! Today we've set your wedding date.
Solo:	Today we've given many lumps of jaggery.
Chorus:	Today we've given many lumps of jaggery.
Solo:	Clumps like your brothers' top-knots.
Chorus:	Clumps like your brothers' top-knots.
Solo:	Today we've brought many flower blossoms.
Chorus:	Oh today we've brought many flower blossoms.
Solo:	That you might forever live in mansions.
Chorus:	That you might forever live in mansions.
Solo:	Today we've brought many flower blossoms.
Chorus:	Oh today we've brought many flower blossoms.
Solo:	He will enjoy all sorts of sandalwood and things.
Chorus:	He will enjoy all sorts of sandalwood and things.

Be fruitful, young mothers, bear fruit O!

In Malwa there is no custom of singing a *petra* as an introductory song. However, at the start of the daily singing in the son's home, five or seven *ghoris* are sung. In these introductory *ghoris* one especially finds some sort of praise expressing the greatness of house and family, or thankfulness. These *ghoris* include blessings for the groom:

bāg bagīchā mall ve vīrā
ghar satigur āe
dhann tumārī mātā vīrā
jīhne jagg dakhāe
bāg bagīchā mall ve vīrā
ghar satigur āe
dhann tumārī dādī vīrā
jīhne kangaṇ pāe

Occupy your garden, O brother.
 The Lord has come to our house.
 Blessed be your mother, O brother,
 Who has shown you the world.
 Occupy your garden, O brother.
 The Lord has come to our house.
 Blessed be your grandmother, O brother,
 Who put on the bracelets.

Likewise, at the start of daily singing in the daughter's home, five or seven *suhags* are sung. These *suhags* are typically connected with mythological heroes like Ram, Krishna, or Shiv; oftentimes they contain a sentiment of thanks or praise. Among the starting five or seven *suhags*, a ritual-like song is sung.

kalīān te bījaṇ main chālī
āṇe bābal dīān phulvārīān
nīmen tān nīmen āio mere karishan jī
main vī tān kanniān kumārī ān

tūn vī tān kanniā kumārī ain
nī rādhā piārīe nī
main vī karishan murārī ān nī

I've gone off to sow among the blossoms
 In my father's flower gardens.
 Come down low, my dear Krishna.

I, too, am a virgin maiden.

You, too, are a virgin maiden,
O dear Radha, O.
As I, too, am Lord Krishna O.

* * *

*bābal dharmī de darbār
hare hare vaṇ ve khaṛhe
shiv jī dā beṭā nādān
āgaṇ bainā tap kare
andaroṇ tān nikalī bībī dī mātā
ki motān dā thāl bhare
lai jo krishan murār
āgan merā chhoṛ de
nā laindā motān dā thāl
nā laindān main kangaṇā
tere ghar kanniā kumārī
uhdā var main lavān*

In the good father's court
Stand green green *van* trees.
The son of Shiv, a young lad
Was sitting in the courtyard, performing austerities.
From inside emerged the girl's mother,
Saying, "She's like a platter of pearls.
Take her away, Lord Krishna.
And leave my courtyard."
"I'll not take the platter of pearls.
I'll not take the bangles.
In your house is a virgin maiden.
I would take only her blessing."

Besides these, in both homes "long songs," *birahaṛās*, or other songs sung in sharp timbres whilst rapping upon a pot. In the daughter's home, even ghoris or other ghorī-like songs, in which there may be some talk of the greatness of the groom, would not necessarily be unheard of. It may be that the available repertoire of folk-songs concerned with women is shrinking. Field research has also shown that, at various sites, in weddings some "out-of-place" songs are sung. The other issue is that, in Malwa, melodious songs with long, unvarying *heks* have become more or less extinct. Newer singers do not have an understanding of the traditional tunes and meters, or else these female singers are simply

unable to follow the kind of strict practice that is required of the traditional style of singing folk-songs such as male singers do. The older ladies are justified when they complain that, “Nowadays the girls do not know how to sing songs.” The style of music/singing propagated by commercial recordings has arguably spoiled the singing of “long songs,” suhag, and ghorian. Indeed, the manner of women singing in pairs has completely died out.

Singing Manner and Occasions

In Malwa, the contexts of singing suhag and ghorian are very flexible, as is the manner of voicing them. With respect to singing manner, suhags and ghoris are songs sung by pairs of women at a time, from verse to verse. Oftentimes, depending on the location of their performance, they are also sung in choral fashion by the whole group. Or, frequently, the group of women repeats the refrain in response to a soloist. When singing like this, the leader’s line guides the other women, who respond in chorus. Just as the moon sits in the sky surrounded by a cluster of stars and as, in Punjabi folklore, Hir is surrounded by her 360 friends, here the soloist’s sharp, trembling utterances are answered by the responses from a chorus.

In the daughter’s home the primary occasions for the singing of suhag songs or other songs of marriage are:

1. At the time of writing the *sāhe di chitthī*;
2. During the song sessions each day leading up to the wedding;
3. During preparatory chores, like sifting flour, sorting stones from the daal, and rolling roti;
4. During all occasions connected with preparation of the bride;
5. During the [Hindu] *sānt* ritual, when setting the ritual fire (*bedī*), and while its circumambulations are done;
6. Whenever the bride’s girlfriends gather around her;
7. When the bridal palanquin (*dolī*) is seen off.

In the son’s home the primary occasions for singing ghoris are:

1. At the time of opening the sahe di chitthi;
2. During song sessions leading up to the wedding;
3. At the time of smearing turmeric-paste on and bathing the groom;
4. The day before the wedding procession when the guest and relatives give contributions to the groom;
5. During the preparation of the groom and the ritual of putting on the *sīhrā* (tasseled face-covering);

6. Before processing, when paying respects at religious places.

During the preparation of the bride, and when she is made to sit during the circumambulation ritual, suhags containing religious sentiments are sung with great reverence. Likewise, during the preparation of the groom, and during breaks in the wedding procession, ghoris and *hearās* full of auspicious sentiments are sung. On both of these occasions, the suhags and ghoris are usually sung by the crowd in choral fashion; when sung in seated sessions, they are performed by one or two women at a time. When women sing these songs in the daughter's home or the son's home, the sentiments are mainly kept focused on the concepts of the ideal groom and bride. In gatherings at a boy's wedding, *sohalrās* [auspicious songs of birth] are sung, or at the time of the birth of a boy, ghoris-like songs are sung indiscriminately. In truth, a ghoris is essentially a song in praise of a boy and a suhag is the direct poetic utterance of the female-perspective of the bride. However, because singers on both "sides" are women, and due to there being a similarity in singing context, manner, and style, one cannot draw any strict lines of division between suhag and ghoris or similar songs.

The Sonic Universe of Suhag, Ghorian, Lamme Gaun, and Kirna

With respect to compositional form it may be observed that both suhag and ghorian are actually constructed on the pattern of Malvai *gaun*s or so-called "long songs" (*lamme gaun*),⁵ along with which they may be classified. One finds several patterns of tune and compositional form that are shared between long songs, suhag, and ghorian. In Malwa, suhag, ghorian, and *biraharā* [songs of separation] (which make up the bulk of the long songs category) can be subtly differentiated with regards to their sentimental atmosphere. However, each among these three can be more or less recognized on the basis of theme, characters, and locales in their texts.

These three song forms (suhag, ghorian, and birahara), being all related to woman's psychological state, her domestic life, and similar aspects of family relationships, share some facets of their inner emotional universe, their tonal structure, and their compositional shape. The ultimate connection between these three is their basis in the economic chokehold of the feudal system along with their tragic expression of woman suffering in social slavery. Being as such, the sonic universe of these songs is also shared. One finds in these three song forms both long *heks* [read, wails] and long silences which, lend the song an air of seriousness and oftentimes depression or lonesomeness.⁶

Though it may appear an exaggeration to say so, if one takes the low and gentle wailing of *kīrnā* [a sort of funeral lament] and compares it to

the cries of these three song forms (suhag, ghorian, and birahara/*jheṛā*) one will not find much difference in their sentimental atmosphere. This is to say that suhags, ghoris and biraharas are also often sung in a tearful tone. Indeed, whenever I recall the delivery of many suhags and of certain ghoris, my head begins to forcibly resound with the sounds of women crying. The direful crying of women at the time of a death, the sweet suhags at wedding times, and the gentle *birahās* sung by women in the still of night all share long, low-pitched cries that induce melancholic feelings.⁷

Similarities and Differences

Suhag and ghorian are both song forms manifesting the emotion of joy whose substance is that of presenting the image of the happy Punjabi family. Whereas in ghorian one finds sentiments of pure joy and desire, in suhag one finds a mixture of joy and grief. Whereas ghoris are songs expressing the feelings of the “victor” [i.e. the groom and his family], suhags manifest the sorrow of a father’s “loss” [i.e. of his daughter and property]. As such ghorian and suhag are manifestations of woman’s powerlessness. However, in each form the woman’s condition and cultural position are different. In ghoris, the sister participates in the victorious joy of her brother [*vīr*, literally “hero”], while in suhags is a lament—of falling into the possession of a “stranger.” In ghorian, the subjugation of the woman, manifested indirectly in these songs, is set among her blood relatives in the home. There are no resentful feelings for this subjugation, but rather a misplaced sense of security born of attachment to and familiarity with blood relations. However, in suhag songs, the woman’s existence is insecure, as seen in the narration of her anxiety about the potential severity of a strange man. Nand Lal Noorpuri [poet (1906-1966)] presented woman’s condition with nuanced feeling in one of his songs:

gaḍḍe ute ā gaiā sandūk muṭiār dā
shīshīāñ ‘ch kahinde uhdā vīr vagg chārdā

On the cart arrived the maiden’s trunk.
In the mirror, one sees her hero grazing cattle.

* * *

ik tasvīr vich, ghaṛā dohl ghiu dā
hasdī ne hatth phar laiā jā ke piu dā
māñ dā nā dhiḍḍ ik vaṭṭ vī sahārdā
gaḍḍe ute ā gaiā sandūk muṭiār dā

In one image, we see a spilt pot of butter.
Smiling, the girl went and grabbed her dad's hand.
Her mom's belly did not suffer a single ache from this mishap.
On the cart arrived the maiden's trunk.

* * *

*tutte hoe shīshe tāī vekhiā je tār ke
dolī vich āṇ baiṭhī doven palle jhār ke
dil vich khiāl dādhā dādhīān dī mār dā
gadde ute ā gaiā sandūk muṭiār dā*

If you were to look into the broken mirror you'd see her
Sitting in the palanquin as both parents claim helplessness.
In her heart is the fear of beatings from high-handed in-laws.
On the cart arrived the maiden's trunk.

The first image is set in the girl's parents' home, where even the spilling of a pot full of ghee does not upset her father. Here, the mother is the girl's sympathetic confidante. The second image depicts traveling to the in-laws' house, replete with fears in anticipation of chastisement by the "severe husband." Here, the relationship between husband and wife is portrayed as cruel and oppressive—between a severe husband who gives beatings and an innocence wife who bears them. He who once appeared deceptively as a "hero" in the mirror's reflection now in a broken mirror takes the appearance of a severe figure. This is the picture imagined by the woman whilst going to the "stranger's" land—by a woman filled with discomfort due to her uncertain condition and unseen fears.

While both suhag and ghorian bear the influence of the superstitious mentality of medieval times, in suhag songs one also finds some hints of woman's tragic condition. As such, whereas ghorian and suhag present the material splendor of agrarian culture, alongside of that—in suhag—we also find representations of woman's oppressed mental condition.

From the literary view as well, ghoris are mainly focused on objects and on perpetuating normative relationships. In suhags, however, woman's charm shows through in subtle and rich colors. It is clear that although ghorian and suhag both are creations of women, into suhag women put more of themselves.

In ghoris, woman speaks as a sister who bears witness to her brother's happiness, and in suhags she expresses her own homesick state. In this light we can call a ghorī a song by women that is centered on men, whereas a suhag is a song by women that is centered on women (or, on the self).

In the ghoris and suhags of marriage time, the hero and heroine's life journeys from childhood to young adulthood are presented, employing anecdotes about relationships and the happiness of family life. The desires, joys, and wishes associated with their coming of age are articulated, while connecting them with various cultural contexts. Yet whereas ghoris are replete with feelings of achievement, fulfillment of ritual, and victorious joy, in suhag songs one ultimately finds the feeling of estrangement. In place of joy, sentiments of loneliness become predominant. So in the narrative of the wedding, ghoris and suhags shift the focus to particular facets, according to the state of the hero and heroine.

Although, in both ghorian and suhag, the theme is presented through definite and prescribed rhemic particulars, in ghorian the rhemic details are formulaic and subject to great repetition. In suhags these details retain very much a compositional character. In other words, when compared with ghorian, the language of suhag songs is more creative. Ghoris stay fixed mainly on aspects of the wealth and achievements of the hero and his family. Conversely, while in suhags the topic of discussion may indeed be the bride's family or material objects, they are set on the emotional scape of the woman's mind. So whereas ghoris are songs of an outward character, the suhag-s are of a more inward character. It is for this reason that many suhags are embedded within the deep structure of Punjabi culture in a profound way.

The hero of ghoris is the groom, who is the princely "vir." The agents of his adornment and blessing are *sisters*. In ghorian, the bride (sister-in-law to-be) is rarely mentioned. Indeed it is notable that, in their songs, women give less importance to woman in the form of bride and more to man in the form of groom. The heroine of suhags is the bride, and she, too, is a "princess." However, her condition is actually like that of a "lady in distress," for whom her pious father, in contributing gold and cows, is "performing a virtuous act." In these suhags, the groom-hero is sung about with a very "open throat" [i.e. in a proud and admirable fashion]. In the course of expounding his greatness, he is elevated to the level of mythological heroes like Ram, Krishna, and Shiv. In suhags, the bride is referentially called Sita, Savitri, Subhaddra or Gauri, however one does not find concrete mention of the *active* heroic qualities of these mythological heroines. Instead, in very many suhag-s there is a pronounced emphasis on the woman's experience of powerlessness and the callousness of her cultural condition:

sahīānī chhoḍ tur jāṁṁā, tur jāṁṁā
tainūn jarā taras nā āiā
ih kī kītā bābalā ve
phull toṛ bigāne ghar lāiā

*uṭṭhīñ tāñ uṭṭhīñ māe mil lai nī
dhīāñ ho pardesañ challīāñ ne
ihñāñ dhīāñ nūñ kī milñā
jo bāg vichānā kar challīāñ*

Leaving your girlfriends, you must go away, go away.
You've received not a shred of compassion.
What have you done, O father?
You plucked the flower and brought it to a strange home.
Get up, now, get up and meet mother.
Daughters have gone off and become estranged.
What can these daughters receive
Who have been removed from the garden?

Eulogization of Social Conventions

Both suhag and ghorian are song forms connected with the presentation of basic conventions and norms of agrarian culture. One primarily finds in them normative manifestations of the idyllic values, relationships, rites, desires, and dreams of agrarian life. From this perspective, both of these song forms are ultimately connected with the presentation of a misconceived reality or the creation of a dream. The main, distinctive cultural contexts of these songs are ones that reinforce social convention. As such, the heroes of suhag and ghorian represent conventional ideals, not iconoclasts. In both homes at some stage of a wedding or at the time of completing some ritual, the following of convention is eulogized. Perhaps at this particular time it is considered unlucky to discuss iconoclasm. From this perspective, the state is that of one kneeling before the family. In these songs, this demure state of ours is proudly illustrated.

Ultimately, suhag and ghorian seem to manifest the ideological baggage of the feudal era's established rules. At the same time, the tragedy of the era's delusion-based ideology is hidden. All of the displays, rituals, and songs of a wedding are driven towards the pretence of the groom as "king" for a day.

In these songs one can see the maintenance of feudal values and established tradition on several levels. It is possible that, at the cerebral level, this gesture of kneeling before social norms—of submitting to enslavement in a system of values that belong to the social class which controls the compositional framework of these songs—is understood as a *good* thing. Yet these songs have a base level composed of a landscape of unadulterated ideas. Folksongs are artistic creations. They contain a wealth of sentiments and emotions below the fog of the cerebral world.

The Clash Between Everyday Reality and Fallacious Ideology

In suhag and ghorian the reality is that, on one hand, one finds empirically observable expressions of human responses to a tragic condition. On the other hand, one finds a layer of ideology and feudal values, full of misconceived notions of the world, that are nonetheless allowed to permeate everyday reality. Thus these songs present a clash between thoughts and concepts on one hand and feelings and natural human responses on the other. A sense of achievement coexists alongside a feeling of unfulfilled dreams and the cruel reality of one's condition. Therefore, it is my view that in reading suhag and ghorian texts, in order to understand them one must pay attention to this clash of worlds. These songs are romantic images sprouted out of an atmosphere of cultural suffocation and an inadequate, even cruel, agrarian lifestyle. Yet in these images, here and there, one finds holes. Beneath this single day of imperial splendor, one finds concrete expression of the true longings and aspirations of common agrarian life. Thus the texts of suhag and ghorian have a two-layered character.

Now the question arises: why create this scenario of "king for a day"? Possible answers are:

1. Perhaps by acting in such a fashion to appear like royalty, morale is boosted and one staves off potential feelings of low self-esteem. Or;
2. Perhaps by imitating the established ruling class—all the while lacking a historical consciousness of the mental slavery imposed by its structures—due to a misplaced sense of class-consciousness, one compensates for the *existence* of feelings of low self-esteem.

No ritual or cultural text can be wholly explained with a single model. A given ritual is multifaceted and at once related to several cultural aims. Furthermore, despite the constancy in form of a particular song, at various stages through its history, too, its meanings transform. The case is the same for all folklore texts. Because the meaning in these songs and texts is constantly transforming, their cultural significance may be of a two-layered, three-layered, or polysemic character. To reiterate: Despite being products of a fallacious ideology, the songs also perform the duty of boosting the morale of the common public. The people engaged in these performances aim for the material comforts that life has to offer.

Here the argument also can be made that from the Mahabharat era this region of North India has been divided into small republics. With the consolidation by minor kings or chieftains, they formed into larger republics. As such, even the village was a small empire of sorts. In villages there has remained a practice of imitating royalty through imperial emblems. This meant displaying the crest and brandishing the sword in the manner a king. By adopting such emblems, the common

village family showed their *loyalty* to the rulers, not their comparison with them.

Woman's Place in the Punjabi Household and Among Her Relatives

The basic substance of all Punjabi folksongs is home and family; they are multicolored images of domestic life. Among the multifarious images of relationships presented in Punjabi folksongs one finds desire, love, tension, conflict, jealousy, animosity, harmony, and disharmony. However, in *suhags* and *ghoris* one primarily finds praise for harmonious balance in family relationships, while an expression of tension, conflict, and disharmony is very infrequent. A social relationship, whether by blood or as part of a community, constitutes a definite and defined pattern of cultural behavior. *Who*, in *what relationship*, in *what context*, is to do *what*? The program for this is fixed according to culture's established norms.

In *suhag* and *ghorian* there are three main sets of relationships: *dādkā* (the paternal relatives), *nānkā* (the maternal relatives), and *sauhrā* (the in-laws). The interrelationship between all three of these sets is presented through the characters of bride and groom. Indeed, the management of all Punjabi inter-family relationships is built on this three-part scheme. In patriarchal societies, the management of kin relationships is based on the exchange of women [i.e. per Lévi-Strauss]. The essential character of Punjabi relationships lies in the customs of "sending off a daughter" and "bringing home a daughter-in-law." In this structure, the significance of man and woman is certain.

From this perspective it is notable that in *suhags* and *ghoris* the pattern of address in relationships is by woman, towards man. In *suhags* the address is mainly performed by the daughter towards the father, and in *ghoris* it is by the sister towards the brother. Is this pattern of address a direct manifestation of woman's powerlessness? My opinion is that the address towards a man found in *suhag* and *ghorian* is mainly related to the patriarchal structure of Punjabi kinship and, in this case, the significance of men is applied to the customs of the wedding. The father, brother, *māmā* (maternal uncle), and *chāchā* (paternal uncle) all feature as "relations" of the girl. All four of these relations, at the time of the wedding, have the explicit responsibility to provide certain things. In *ghoris* and *suhags*, the woman's longings, along with the search for a handsome prospective-husband of her age-group, are associated with the giving of ornaments, clothes, and objects as dowry. The father, brother, and uncles are the contributors of these acquisitions. For this reason, their position in *suhags* and *ghoris* is that of the "bestower." And to these bestowers, the manner of address of the recipient—the daughter—is as the cry of a baby bird, full of powerlessness and helplessness. Moreover,

in the daughter's narrative, the "bestower," too, is humbled. The giving of contributions by the bestower might be considered a reflection of his *own* helplessness [i.e. so far as it is an obligation imposed by social norms]:

*vihare imlī de hare, hare pāt
ki panchhī baiṭhā rudan karo
bābal mainūn itnā ku demān dāj
ki jagg vich sobhā hove
ik lakkh demān dhīe demān lakkh chār
gauān karendā dān
ki sobhā merī chāhe nā hove.*

The green green leaves of the tamarind tree in the courtyard
Among which a bird might sit and cry.
"Father, give me quite a bit of dowry
So that in the world your glory might be known."
"One hundred thousand I'd give, daughter, 4 hundred thousand.
I'll make gifts of cows
Regardless whether or not my glory might be known."

In the case of these addresses towards the man, it is also notable that they are all done with formality and ritual. Thus it seems like each of these members of the family is also a sort of ruler, before whom requests are continually being made. The reality here is that this request is not presented by the woman because she has the power to make a *request* as such. Rather it is more an *entreaty*, by daughters from fathers and by sisters from brothers. And so it seems from this entreaty that even among family relationships a certain *unfamiliarity* has crept in. This sort of address, full of formality and entreaties, shows that, on one hand, the woman has inner riches and yet a deprived financial condition; on the other hand, her social position is insecure while she is being married. Another cause of this is that *suhag* and *ghorian*, from the perspective of cultural norms, are song forms that imitate and conform to mercantile traditions. The three song forms *hearā*, *ghorian*, and *suhag* are of a status quo sort (whereas for example [the taunt song form] *siṭṭhanī*, due to its character, is of an iconoclastic sort). Therefore, within these patterns of address, along with formality and entreaties, there is also the etiquette, propriety, and urbanity associated with mercantile culture:

*bībī sohe sohe jhaṭṭ jāg lai
āṇe bābe kolon kuchh māng lai
bābā ik merā kahinā kīṭe
mainūn rām rattan var dīṭe*

*bībī kāhe ratan var torarā
jaise bāgoñ meñ khiṛ rihā kevarā*

Sleeping girl, wake up at once.
Ask of something from your father.
“Father, please do one thing I say—
Bestow me with a jewel of a husband, like Ram.”
“Girl, why, I shall pick you a husband
Like a keora flower blooming in the garden!”

* * *

*bībī patalīe nī patang jāē
apṇe bābal rāje koloñ kush mang laē
bābal ghar ditā sohnā var ditā
hariāñ bāgāñ vichoñ phull tor ditā.*

O slender girl, like a kite,
From your kingly father ask for something.
Father gave a house, and a handsome husband.
Out of lush gardens he plucked a flower.

If we look at Punjabi folksongs from the perspective of patterns of address, several interesting points emerge. In boli and tappa, the address is mainly towards a peer or lover. Clearly in both these song forms the driving sentiment is love. In sithani and hearā, the address is towards those on the “side” opposite oneself, and the sentiment expressed in those songs reflects that sort of relationship. In suhags and ghoris, when daughters/sisters plan to share their heart’s contents, they address the mother, but if it is a question of some object or material need then it is addressed to the father or brother. So in suhags and ghoris the father is the pillar of the household’s economy, the able manager, the solid worker. On the idealized level, the father is a “spiritual-king,” a giver of bounties, a wise man. Yet if in these song forms we look at the level of economic values then this father of a small household is as the ruler of a tiny state who is supporting his family through all the resources and earnings at his disposal. He is the hardworking ox engaged in hauling the family cart, while the mother is the idol of affections. Yet woman’s existence is a materially deprived, purely human existence. She keeps the house bound in the embrace of emotional relationships. Thus in suhags and ghoris woman’s emotional self speaks in the addresses that are put to the mother:

*suṅ nī mātā merīe
nī mere bābal nūnī samjhā
dhīānī hoīānī laṭbāvarīānī
kise naukar de laṛ lā*

Listen O mother of mine,
Oh explain to my father.
His daughters have become smitten;
Marry them off to some servant.

* * *

*shakkar pāmānī sukkṇī koī kahīṅ vasār ve
lok bhulle kī jāṅde māvānī dhīānī dī sār ve
motī tānī pāmānī sukkṇe koī lok kahīṅ javār ve
lok bhulle kī jāṅde māvānī dhīānī dī sār ve*

If I spread out sugar to dry, some people would take it for
ground turmeric O.
People are clueless about the things which mothers and
daughters know.
If I put out pearls to dry, some people would take them for
millet O.
People are clueless about the things which mothers and
daughters know.

Dynamics of the Paternal Family: Individual, Family, and Society

In suhags and ghoris, the expression of relationships of the dadka family is preeminent. In both song forms, the joint family is presented through vignettes of honorable living. The head of that extended family is the paternal grandfather. Among this family the paternal aunts and brothers provide much liveliness. Every member in the joint family performs his or her respective cultural duty. We see all the people engaged in work, for there is no room for negligence in duty. All people in the family and society are bound to one another emotionally in warm and loving relationships. Nowhere in these relationships is there the smirch of malice or enmity. All the family is joined in relationships that are transparent, simple, and harmonious.

The clash of familial relationships is embodied in abundant form in Punjabi qissa literature, where individual desires and cultural norms clash on the model of individual-versus-society. In gurnat poetry, qissa poetry, and Sufi poetry, the clash between individual and society is also made the basis of composition in the form of a clash of ideologies. And in

other forms of Punjabi folk-poetry, the individual's inner self clashes with the normative forms of the social routine. The composers of folk-songs have taken a very rebellious tone against the suffocating atmosphere of tradition-based nurturing, but in the ritual-based songs-like suhags, ghoris and, to some extent, hearas, one avoids such clashes as those between the individual and family, the individual and society, or the individual and other institutions. In these songs, clash *can* definitely be detected, but on a subtle level—e.g. where the speaker shares her inner self with her mother or where an entreaty is put before her father/brother in a powerless voice. So we can say that suhag and ghorian are song forms associated with the presentation of cultural norms, in which harsh reality is presented having only first set up romantic images of reality as it is *wished* to be. These songs are based on the reality that adheres in Punjabis' aspirations or dreams, through the imagining of which real life starts to appear more colorful, warm, and livable. They are a way, through singing, of presenting the victory of the individual over her cruel state:

*sone dī ghoṛī te reshām dorānī
chāndī de painkhar pāe rāmā
bābā viāhmaṇ pote nūnī chaliā
latthe ne khar, khar lāi rāmā
sone dī ghoṛī te reshām dorānī
chāndī de painkhar pāe rāmā
bābal viāhmaṇ putt nūnī chaliā
dammānī ne chhaṇ, chhaṇ lāi rāmā*

On a golden horse, silken cords
And silver tethers put, O Ram.
Grandfather went to get his grandson wed.
The rafters made a rattling sound, O Ram.
On a golden horse, silken cords
And silver tethers put, O Ram.
Grandfather went to get his grandson wed.
The coins made a tinkling sound, O Ram.

Dynamics of the Maternal Family: From Mother to Daughter

Among the relationships found in suhag and ghorian, the second main set is that of the maternal relatives. The great significance of the maternal grandparents, aunts, and uncles is told in these songs. Interestingly, what description there is of the maternal relatives may be understood to represent evidence of the remains of the ancient matriarchal family structure. They are often referred to as *nānī de jāe*—grandmother's

offspring; nowhere does one find the phrase “grandfather’s offspring.” The image presented of the relationship of the groom/bride’s mother with her own mother is one especially full of affection. Reference to the institutions of paternal family and maternal family appear alongside of each other in these songs. What is clear is that in these songs relatives of the mother’s side are spoken of as the source of sentimental warmth and affection. Their economic wealth is seen apportioned:

*ghoṛī mere vīr dī vaṇ bindrā baṇān ‘choṅ āī
bāharoṅ āīā sulakkhaṇā ohne māmī balāī
māmī kare sir vārne vīrā ve
māme vārīānī dammānī dīān ve borīānī*

My brother’s mare emerged from the tree-filled forests.
Coming from abroad, the auspicious-one called his aunt.
Auntie blesses you, O brother.
Uncle bestows bags full of cash.

* * *

*māme mere kāj rachāīā
dīn rahi gae thohre
dhī hove ghar dhan hove
māmā bhāṅju de kardā dān
sālū dā pallā reshāmī
merā rondī dā bhijjiā rumāl*

My uncle has arranged the function.
Some days remained.
May there be a daughter, that wealthy may be the house.
Uncle contributes offerings to his nephew.
A bridal robe with silken veil.
My handkerchief has become soaked from crying.

Dynamics of the Spouse’s Family: Groom, Bride, and Family

In ghorian, the third set of relatives is the in-laws, which includes the mother-in-law, father-in-law, and sisters-in-law (*sālī/nanāṅ*). Talk of them is done in a bashful way. Minor fears or anxieties are found to surround these relationships as well. A great many of these representations are of a fanciful sort. The good looks of the bride/sister-in-law/“Rukmini” or the groom/brother/beloved “Krishna” are imagined. In suhag songs, there is immeasurable reverence for the groom; one can see this from both personal and economic perspectives. This is the true

“jewel” of Punjabi culture: the groom. However, in ghorian the beautiful, capable, and unsullied bride/sister-in-law is imagined: “Go marry and bring home a new sister-in-law who makes lovely partridge and peacock designs.” As such the father-in-law appears as Dashrath, the mother-in-law as Kaushalya, and the brother-in-law as Lakshman.⁸ So suhag and ghorian reinforce collective notions that are already established in cultural tradition through model ideals or mythological characters. Thus they are song forms representing status quo ideals that help to keep to Punjabi culture’s “cart” moving along the beaten track:

*main tān bābal de agge hath joṛ rahī
hatth joṛ ke arj gujār rahī ānī
merī sass hove māt kushalliā
te sahurā rājā dashrath hove
merī nanad hove subhaddrā
chhoṭā debar lachhman hove
merā kānh hove sirī rām
te sitā rānī āp homānī*

I remain before father with my hands clasped.
With hands clasped, I make these requests:
Would that my mother-in-law be Kaushlya,
And father-in-law be Dashrath.
Would that my sister-in-law be Subhadra [wife of Arjun],
My small brother-in-law, Lakshman.
Would that my beloved be Lord Ram,
And I be Queen Sita.
(A suhag)

* * *

*ghoṛī chahṛ ke challiā suṅ vīr merā
vekhaṅ challiā sauharaṛā pinḍ ve*

*kahe ku dekhe sauharaṛe suṅ vīr mere
kahī ku dekhī vīrā jūh ve*

*channaṅ chhiṛakdānī gāṭānī suṅ bhain merī
koī sad hariāvalī jūh ve*

*ghoṛī chahṛ ke challiā suṅ vīr merā
vekhaṅ chaliā sauharaṛā pinḍ ve*

kahī ku dekhī nār suṅ vīr mere
kahīān ku dekhīān sālīān vīrā tūn ve

chaunke vich sohe terī bhābo suṅ bhain merī
koī trinjanī kattan sālīān bhainē nī

“Listen, O my brother gone off riding the horse,
 Gone to see the in-laws’ village—

“What sort of in-laws were seen, my brother?
 What sort of uncultivated land did you see, O brother?”

“Moonlit lanes, my sister.
 Some verdant evergreen land O.”

“Listen, O my brother gone off riding the horse,
 Gone to see the in-laws’ village—

“What sort of wife was seen, my brother?
 What sort of sisters-in-law did you see, O brother?”

“Your sister-in-law is well suited to the hearth-place, my sister.
 Some sisters-in-law engaged in spinning, O sister.”
 (*A ghorī*)

Individual Desires and Cultural Norms: Clash and Correspondence

Suhag and ghorian are both genteel song types connected with urbane manifestations of culture. In the tradition of Punjabi folk-song, many other genres are abundant with expressions that argue for the innate freedoms of the individual. These songs give voice to disobedience from within. In many, the individual’s erotic desire is also manifested unhindered. While suhag and ghorian do not *deny* individual desire, in these songs desires are definitely kept reigned in the yoke of cultural norms. Their character is like that of a prisoner in a golden cage, dressed in the vestment of urbanity. In *these* songs, not only individual desire, but cultural values, too, are reinforced. The individual is made to sense the need for socialization and the fulfillment of cultural obligations. All in all, suhag and ghorian are primarily institution-based, not individual-based song forms. Here the individual is a girl acting within the three institutions of family, extended-family, and society. Her human self, as per society’s needs and hopes, is shown in different artistic images as an idealized hero. For example, within ghoris one finds tropes like “The mare is resplendent, O girlfriends,” and “Grandfather’s grandson has

mounted the mare,” and within suhags, images like “Father has arranged the wedding function,” etc.

*utle chubāre tainūn bulāmān nī saddo
uṭṭh ke tān sāhā sudhā
rāje dīe nī beṭīe*

*sāhā sudhāmaṇ teriān dādīān chīre vālīā ve
jihnān de man vich chāa
dilān de vich vas rahīe nī*

*uppar tān bāre tainūn sadd paī
sālū vālīe nī
bhāgān vālīe nī
ā ke tān chakkīān lavā
dilān de vich vas rahīe nī*

*chakkīān lāmaṇ teriān tāiān te chāchīān
ve chīre vālīā ve
jihnān de man vich chāa
dilān de vich vas rahīe nī*

From the upper story I call to you, dearie.
Get up and get your marriage date set,
O daughter of a king.

Your grandmothers shall set the date.
O red-turbaned one,
In whose mind is elation,
Remain in our hearts O.

The call came to you from the nook above.
Bridal robe wearer O,
Fortunate one O,
Come then and grind the millstone,
Remain in our hearts O.

Your aunts shall grind the millstone.
O red turbaned one,
In whose mind is elation,
Remain in our hearts O.

In suhag and ghorian the greatest proof of institutions being primary and the individual being secondary is that the two individuals whose

heroism is being extolled, the acting bride and groom, are in many contexts “muted” (*chupp*). They are being talked about by female-friends or sisters. Here their condition is like that of a stubborn witness. To some degree in suhags, the bride/daughter does address father, brother, or mother. In this address, the emphasis is propriety, modesty, or humility, so that such talk can also be uttered even “standing under the sandalwood tree” as it were. If while around her mother the girl were to break out of her bashfulness and recite the line, “The daughters have become smitten. Quick! Have them tie the knot with some servant,” even then the response she would get would be, “Listen, daughter, don’t say such things.” In suhags, the bride/daughter attempts to speak from under cultural shelters and artistic veils. Nevertheless it is predominantly her sister or friend who advocates for her. However, in ghorian, the groom/brother is not shown to do *anything* himself—neither in speech nor in deeds. He does not adorn himself; he is adorned. He is seated on the horse; he is given blessings. This “hero” of ours is mute, passive. Sisters/sisters-in-law are doing the talking, praising him and extolling his heroism. In ghorian, the groom is the *deed*—that which is done—not the *doer*. Ghorī is *not* an utterance of the self; it is singing that bears witness to another.

jad vīr āiā lammī lammī rāhī
ghoṛā tān bahnniā vīr ne janḍī phalāhī

bhaiṇān ne vīr shingāriā māen nī
bhābīān debar ghoṛī chāhriā māen nī

jad vīr āiā nadiān kināre nī
nadiān tān deṇ vīr nūn ṭhande hulāre nī

bhaiṇān ne vīr shingāriā māen nī
bhābīān debar ghoṛī chāhriā māen nī

jad vīr āiā sahure dīān gaḷiān nī
sass tān chumme vīr de sihare dīān kaliān nī

bhaiṇān ne vīr shingāriā māen nī
bhābīān debar ghoṛī chāhriā māen nī

When our ‘hero’ came along the long long path,
He tied up the horse to the acacia tree.

Sisters adorned brother, O mom.
Sisters-in-law sat him on the horse, O mom.

When our hero came on the banks of the stream,
The streams gave him cool lappings O.

Sisters adorned brother, O mom.
Sisters-in-law sat him on the horse, O mom.

When vir came into father-in-law's lanes O,
Mother-in-law kissed the tassels of his face-covering O.

Sisters adorned brother, O mom.
Sisters-in-law sat him on the horse, O mom.

* * *

*nikkī nikkī kaṇī dā mīnh vahre
nadī de kināre ghoṛī ghāh ve chare*

*kaṇ vīrā ve tere shagan kare
dammān dī borī ve kaṇ phare*

*bāp rājā dammān dī borī phare
mātā sohāgaṇ tere shagan kare*

Tiny little drops of rain fall;
On the bank of the stream the mare grazes grass.

Who, O brother, will give you blessed contributions?
Who will hold the sack of cash?

Your kingly father holds the sack of cash;
Your good mother will give you the blessed contributions.

Through these songs, woman has established the boundaries of her human self more broadly. These songs are the primary mode of poetic expression of woman in the medieval context. As such she needs to utilize these texts as her personal exegesis of her existential predicament. This is the significance of these songs in contemporary times. They are poetic-texts that need to be understood in relation to medieval consciousness. Even despite the limits of that consciousness, medieval woman used these songs as an artistic weapon to preserve her humanity. Let us salute these women and their female-voiced exegesis of culture.

Notes

¹ This text originally appeared in Nahar Singh's *Bāgīnī Chambā Kher Rihā*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1999, pp. 9-30.

² Regarding the morphology of these terms: It appears from Nahar Singh's usage that, when referring to genres as a whole, the singular form *suhāg* and the plural form *ghoṛīānī* may be used. When referring to items of repertoire (i.e. songs), one uses the singular form for both, in which case we may render them as *suhāg/suhāgs* and *ghoṛīlghoṛīs* for singular/plural. —*Ed.*

³ Other songs, like *siṭṭhaṇīān* and songs of blessing (*shagan*) have also remained important in weddings.

⁴ A *hek* is a vocalization (typically of the vowel "O!") of a sustained pitch or melisma, usually lengthy and unmetered, which is often performed at the beginning of a song or verse. —*Ed.*

⁵ Although it is unclear where the sense of "long" originates, one may compare such songs to the very short form *tappā*, which is in turn the basic building block of *bolī*, neither form of which, indeed, is considered a "song" in the proper sense. The *tappa* form is the subject of another collection by Nahar Singh, *Mālve de Ṭappe* (Akal Sahit Prakashan, Chandigarh, 1985), while *bolis* are collected, with some introduction of their performance contexts, in *Kālīān Harnān Rohīen Phirnā* and *Laung Burjīān Vālā* (Punjabi University, Patiala, 1998). —*Ed.*

⁶ In these passages, Nahar Singh has been tenuously implying that songs with similar textual themes would be expected to share musical features. While I find this to be an unreasonable assumption when taken with broad reference to the frames "sonic universe" and "compositional form," this last line clarifies his thesis. He is focused less on pitch or rhythm and more on timbre and broad performative gestures. (This is reinforced by the fact that he does not offer any specifics by way of tune comparison or melodic analysis to support musical similarity.) Nahar Singh is reading certain composition features—namely, long *heks* and silences—as iconic of the emotional states associated with the texts. In this scheme, *heks* represent "wails" which indicate sad, suffering, emotional states, and as such all songs with similar emotional themes are supposed to have *heks* in their performances. —*Ed.*

⁷ In illustration of this fact, the third and fourth volumes of my anthology, *Channā ve Terī Chānaṇī* and *Khūnī Naiṇ Jal Bhare* (especially), have been compiled.

⁸ The reference is to characters in the *Ramayana*, being the parents and half-brother of Lord Ram. —*Ed.*

