Chapter 2 - The Conditioning of Gender

Criticism ...is brought to bear on objects of experience whose objectivity is called into question; criticism supposes that there is a degree of inbuilt deformity which masquerades as reality. It seeks to remove this distortion and thereby to make it possible the liberation of what has been distorted. Hence it entails a conception of emancipation.\(^56\)

Connerton

This present contemporary 'order of discourse' (a term adapted from Foucault) has a property which distinguishes it from an earlier order of discourse or which at least has not been manifested in an earlier discourse to anything like in the same degree. It deconstructs notions of gendered discourses in the manner wherein 'inbuilt deformity' in the Haryanvi folknarratives can be criticized leading to 'liberation' and 'emancipation' of the 'objects of experience'.

The recent analysis of gender and culture has drawn heavily on literary theory, on Derridian Deconstruction, and also on the discourse analysis of Michel Foucault. "The emphasis has shifted from the individual's learning experience to the creation of the texts of representations or discourses which construct our notions of gender."\(^57\) This work often speaks of the difference, both between women and men, but also between women. Indeed some of the emphasis on differences between women has problematized the very concept of the woman as a unitary category.

Gender identity is conveyed and structured by both verbal and non-verbal means in the folknarratives. Recent interest has focused on, among other things, the manner in which gender classifications are influenced by the semantic structure of language.

In the old mythology Aditi or infinite space was regarded as the Eternal Mother and Prakriti was the Eternal Mother capable of evolving all created things out of herself but never so creating unless united with the eternal spirit principle embodied in the Eternal Male, Purusha. There appears to have been a tendency on the part of the Indo-Germanic race to


look upon their deities as belong to both sexes at once, and hence the dualistic idea of the androgygous Shiva.

Religions are powerful social institutions that are shaping gender identities in society. In the Haryanvi religious folktales, woman is defined as an “ambivalent” persona. Woman is located in myth and popular culture as both goddess and dangerous power (Shakti), as virtuous wife and dangerous evil, both pure and impure in her embodiment. Women were not only revered and worshipped but also controlled through a direct regulation of her sexuality. Women find mention in religion in the following roles.

Worshipping starts as the day starts, as we get up from bed, we kiss the ‘land’ as a mark of respect for someone which has endowed upon us everything – Goddess Earth - Dharti Mata - in Vedas personified as mother of all things – an idea common to all folktales. It’s a regular rite common to all inferior castes that a few days before a wedding the women go in procession to the village clay-pit and fetch from there the sacred earth (matmangare) which is used in making the marriage altar and the fireplace on which the wedding feast is cooked. There are various elements in the ritual which point to a very primitive origin. Then, one part of the proceedings is that of a Chamar, one of the non-Aryan castes, who leads the procession, beating his drum the whole time to scare demons. When the earth has been collected the drum is worshipped and smeared with red land. The Chamar, again, digs the earth with an affectation of secrecy, which, as we shall see, is indispensable in rites of this class. The mother of the bride or bridegroom veils herself with her sheet, and the digger passes the earth over his left shoulder to a virgin who stands behind him and receives it in a corner of her robe. In villages, earth is also used to purify the cooking vessels.

There is a curious tale of Gange Mai. The nymph kalauria bore to Indus a son of notable beauty, by name Ganges, who in the ignorance of intoxication had connection with his mother. But when later on he learned the truth from his nurse, in the passion of his remorse he threw himself into the river Chiaros, which was called Ganges after him. Another legend again is found in Mahabharata. The wise Santanu goes to hunt on the banks of Ganges and finds a lonely nymph, of whom he becomes enamoured. She puts him under the taboo that he is never to say anything to displease her. She bears him eight sons, of whom she throws seven into the river, and her husband dares not remonstrate with her. When

58 Recorded in cassettees
she is about to throw away the last child he challenges her to tell him who she is and to have pity upon him. She then tells him she is Ganga personified and that the seven sons are the divine Vasavas, who by being thrown into the river are liberated from the cause of human life. The eight remains among men as Dyaus, the sky, in the form of Bhishma. 59

These worships, probably derived from one of the so-called non-Aryan races, were subsequently developed into that of the female energies of greater gods, a Brahmani of Brahma, Indrani of India, and so on; and thus the simple worship of mother has developed and degenerated into the abominations of the Tantras. These mothers are usually regarded as eight in number – Asta Hati, Sometimes seven – Brahmi or Brahmani, Mahesvari, Kaunlari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Indrani or Aindrani or Mahendri and Chamunda, Chandika. Sometimes nine - Brahmani, Vaishnavi, Randri, Varahi, Narasinhiya, Kauman, Mahendri, Chamunda, Chandika. Somestimes sixteen - Gauri, Padma, Sachi, Medha, Savitri, Vijaya, Jaya, Devasena, Svadha, Svaha, Santi, Pushti, Dhriti, Tushti, Atmadevata, kula-devata. 60

The Jumna/Yamuna – Yami or Yamuna was the daughter of Sun and Sister of yama, the god of death. They were the first human pair and the progenitors of the race of men.

Yamuna was unmarried and hence some people will not drink from her because she was not purified by the marriage rite, and so the water is heavy and indigestible.

Anasuya, wife of Atri, was a daughter of the Rishi Daksha. She did penance for 10,000 year and so was enabled to create the river Mandakini and thus saved the land from famine.

Narmada was wooed by the river Son, who proved faithless to her, and was beguiled by the Johita, a rival lady Stream, who acted the part of the barber’s wife at the wedding. The Narmada’s enraged at her lover’s perfidy, tore her way through the marble rocks at Jabalpur, now great rival of Mother Ganges. 61

The patrilineal part of Haryanvi society expects several virtues in a woman. The first among them is chastity. Before marriage a woman should not think of any man in sexual

59 ibid

60 Monier-Williams, Sanskrit Dictionary.

61 Recorded in cassette
terms; after marriage, of no man other than her husband. The second virtue is devotion to her husband. The notion of Pati Parmeshwar—the husband as the supreme God—is widely referred to and women observe several fasts to ensure that they get the same husband life after life. Such fasts also include prayers for the long life of the husband, so that the wife does not have to undergo the sufferings of widowhood.

The closely related idea is of Sati, which involves a woman in immolating herself on the pyre of her husband. Of course, there is a legal ban on the practice and cases of Sati are indeed rare in contemporary Haryana. What is important in this context is the powerful hold that the ideal has on the mind. Sati sites are often developed into shrines and fairs held there attract huge crowds. The word Sati means ‘pure’, a model wife. The woman throws herself alive into the pyre of her husband and thus embodies purity and a sense of self sacrifice for her husband. Metaphorically, this concept is depicted in “A Sadhu and Married Man”62. In the story, a pigeon sacrifices his life to quench the hunger of their beloved Raja. When he dies after jumping into the fire, the she pigeon also follows the act and becomes a sati.

Third, a wife is expected to mould herself in the pattern of the family into which she is married and merge her individual identity into that of her husband. She was after all, meant to be her husband’s “shadow” and had to follow him through the course of life. In the hour of need, she must stand by him, adding her strength to his.

These, it should be added, were meant to be ideal values and it was recognized that not many could live up to them. Thus, several Jatis and communities—in fact, a substantial majority in the population—permit divorce and widow re-marriage. In the cult of poverty, adherence to such norms is not possible.

Culture has traditionally been seen as of key significance in the construction of gender identity. The oral tradition of folk narratives has been an important part of cultural construction. In the folktales, gender roles, i.e the expected or preferred ways for people of each sex to behave, are rigidly defined. For instance, men have traditionality been expected to be strong, aggressive, even dominating. Women have been expected to be nurturing, sensitive, emotional, and relatively passive. Sigmund Freud theorized that “identification and imitation of same-sex parents leads to effective gender-identity formation.” In the latency period described by Freud (ages seven to twelve), “males and females tend to segregate

62 ibid
themselves which solidifies gender identification and roles-specific behaviour.63 Schools and families continue to influence gender socialization throughout adolescence. During adolescence, peer influence becomes the strongest agent of gender socialization as teens form together in small social groups to facilitate their transition into adulthood and into the larger society. The socializing effects of the mass media have also become powerful in teen years.

The anatomical difference were for a long time viewed as intimately related to differences in emotional and intellectual capacities, as well as differences in physical abilities. The task and roles assigned to men and women in Haryanvi cultural tradition are assumed to be correlated highly with anatomically based aptitudes.

Men and women undeniably have certain physical differences. It is a subject of debate whether these biological differences also cause behavioral differences and whether biology, therefore is one of the causes of sex roles and gender-related social stratification. Biological determinism holds that biology does affect these things, but sociologists argue against the idea. For instance, in Haryanvi folktales, from birth a female child is received in a different way from a male child which show that the notion of women being inferior to men is stressed from the very moment a child is born, which is later, supported by the behavioural patterns prescribed for girls and women. Hence gender discrimination and gender roles are to a large extent imposed by the society and constructed and expressed in many areas of social life.

The body is clearly a medium of culture. It is also more directly, a locus of social control so that we are not what we want to be but are made through culture. This is what Foucault calls the 'docile body' which is regulated by the norms of cultural life.

Anthropologists and sociologists have commented on the nature of the women's body marked by caste, religious belief, social norms and practices and on how women's embodiment and sexuality serve as important boundary markers. The female sexuality is controlled by caste and class factors in folklore discourses. A woman's body and sexuality are in any case under the controlling purview of men. It is an assertion not only of patriarchal power but also of social control. Woman is allowed little or no space for an independent, self-perceived articulation, definition or expression of her sexuality. Her body becomes an instrument and a symbol for the community's expression of caste, class and communal

63 Sigmund Freud, *History of Sexuality.*
honour. Chastity, virtue and above all, purity are extolled as great feminine virtues
embodying the honour of the family, community and nation. In a sense, women’s body is
often no longer her body but has been taken over by the community, of both men and women,
to establish and legitimize its image in society.

To the extent that woman’s body is the foundation on which gender equality is built,
established and legitimized, understanding the female body in different contexts, settings and
situations is important in folklore discussions.

Only when we view the female body as a communicative or lived body that we can
begin to understand the implications of both social construction of lived experience as well as
women’s own perceptions and articulations of their embodiment. The gender is inscribed on
woman in everyday life both socially as well as through her life experiences, perceptions,
desires and fantasies. It is in this sense that gender identity is truly both constructed and lived.

The internalization of representation of the female body by women in folktales
appears to be fundamental to the formation of feminine identity here. At one level, women
menstruate, give birth, nurse babies and undergo menopause experiences which are
unavailable to men. At another level, women and men are located in a cultural setting that
shapes their experience of embodiment differently, depending on class, ethnic, religious and
caste factors. These socio-spatial and other historical factors are therefore equally important
in the experience of embodiment in these discourses.

Socialization practices in Haryanvi folklores reflect the care and concern that goes
into the upbringing of girls so that they are in fact trained to conduct themselves according to
social norms, values and practices. Later women absorb social expectations and in fact
experience them as their own, so that power, in a sense does not operate coercively but from
within.

The processes of social learning that people imbibe (notably young) into
understanding the various aspects of their culture, includes the process of gender
socialization. Gender socialization encompasses the process of learning society’s gender roles
and their advantages and limitations.

In the folktales, there is a clear categorization of what it means to be made of the
female flesh. This categorization process and the agents of socialization that transmit
knowledge about how gender roles influence how individuals define themselves and others in terms of gender and sex role.

Secondly, I will dwell on what precisely is the relationship between the economic roles of women and gender stratification.

Patriarchy means to serve the interest of the male sex. The sex role division in Haryanvi folk narrative is such that men are for production and women for reproduction. The unpaid, unseen household work is considered lower than the work done by men outside the house. There are various folktales where women are shown engaged in household tasks as the only apt task for them. Women are sexually vulnerable, therefore conservative men put a lot of restrictions on them and many rituals and taboos are linked to the various biological events in life.

George Peter Murdoch sees biological differences between men and women as the basis for sexual division of labour in society. Men have more physical strength and therefore they take such roles which require physical strength. Women can bear children and therefore they are associated with activities that are related to the raising of family.

Men, as compared to the women, carry higher prestige for the same work done. This is primarily due to male dominance which results from the fact that a man’s life is more public and a woman’s life is more private due to child bearing and child rearing. Men thus claim greater rights than women.

In the folktales women have been shown walking longer miles to collect firewood and water which increase women’s work load. Similarly, women are also shown to be the major water carriers. They cook with inefficient fuels like crop wastes, dung cakes etc. Anthropological studies indicate that woman were the major producers of food, clothing, crafts and many different tools.

In the contemporary times too, greater female dependency on men has resulted from the process of urbanization. From the shift from household to factory and industry from the introduction of cash crops, women have lost their traditional rights to land, and men, though continuing to rely on women’s traditional assistance, claim the entire income from the cash production of export crops for themselves.

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In many parts of the state, originally egalitarian gender relationships have been replaced by more hierarchical ones, and women have consequently been marginalized and removed from the positions of economic and political decision making.

If women received any attention in the folk tale it was as mothers and housekeepers. It is argued that women, because of their reproductive roles, are universally viewed as being closer to nature while men are linked with culture. That which is cultural and subject to human manipulation is assigned more worth than that which is natural. Therefore women and women's roles are degraded or devalued, whether explicitly or implicitly. There are numerous folktales where the devotion of the mother is exhibited. In the Bhagat Puranmal story, the mother regains her vision when she sees her son after a long separation.

Mother, being the epitome of love, has always unadulterated love for her children. In the story of "Puranmal Bhagat" when Puranmal returns after twelve years, her mother regains her lost eyesight, happiness surrounds everywhere and the fields turn green and fertile too.

In the folktales a woman keeps fast for happy life of their children. In "Tilkutni Chauth", a mother keeps fast and prays for long life of her children. She gives her son some rice that protects him from many dangers. When the son is going out, she gives "Jo-Til" to her son. He is able to cross large rivers by sheer strength of jo-til. It protects him against wild animals like lion, snake, so much so that he comes out of fire alive.

In "Sankat Chauth", the old mother says to her son, "I will keep Sankath Chauth fasts, so that I can keep you away from all problems."

The children are protected from small pox infection by keeping Sheetala Ashtami fasts, in the story "Shetala-Ashtami".

In "Hoi Astmi" story too, mother keeps fasts to pray for longer life of her children.

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65 Recorded in cassettee
66 Recorded in cassettes
67 ibid
In a family, husband and wife fulfill the foremost role; their mutual relations have an impact on the entire family. Traditionally, the husband earns or the male counterpart makes fulfilling the arrangements for basic amenities in the family and the wife looks after household. In Rigveda, the wife is symbolised as home. According to Vashistha, “Wife is the soul of her husband. In Puranas, there is an explicit description of husband and wife. Husband ought to fulfil all the wishes of his wife, treating her with dignity and self-respect. Wife on her part, expresses her heartfelt gratitude towards him and in whom husband can confide in.”

Bhagvat Gita expounds the duties of a wife as, “One who serves her husband lives according to his wishes and remain committed to him. The woman, who serves her husband, like Lakshmi serves her Lord, will attain heaven after death. She will live with her husband only, in heaven in peace as Vishnu and Lakshmi. So, no tapasya for a wife is greater than devotion to her husband.”

Similar strain can be seen in Haryanvi folktales. Mostly religious stories are replete with love relations of husband wife like Karva Chauth, Gangaur etc. Usually, the wife prays for long life for her husband, her ‘suhaag’ In one of the religious folktales “The Story Of Lord Shiva”, Parvati keeps fast secretly and astonishes Shiv and Narad by her latent shakti.

In the “Story of Dhruv Bhagat”, Uttanpad’s wife Suniti persuades her husband to remarry to continue their pedigree. She requests, “Lord! You get married our family name will be sustained”.

In the “Story of Pipal Tree”, the brahmin and his wife travel twelve kilometers everyday to worship a Pipal tree. Both share each other’s sorrows.

In the “Story of Sparrow and Goldsmith”, the male sparrow takes revenge for his wife’s insult. It shows the immense respect that the husband has for his wife.

In the “Story Mother Cow”, a woman neutralizes the curse on her husband who is living cursed life in the body of a donkey.

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68 Pt. Shri Ram Sharma, Rigveda. (Bareilly: Sanskrit Sansthan).
69 Pt. Shri Ram Sharma, Bhagvat Gita (Bareilly: Sanskrit Sansthan).
70 Recorded in cassettes
71 ibid
72 ibid
In the “Story of Gugapeer”, Kanchan keeps fast for continuous twelve years for her husband. At last, her husband comes and takes her along with him in a respectable manner.

One even comes across certain stories where a husband doubts the integrity of his wife. For example, in the “Story of Thursday Fast” a brahmin castigates his wife. A son is born in his absence which the Brahmin disowns. He abuses his wife and son and plans to throw the new born in the well. But Lord Hanuman appears in dreams and tells him that the new born boy Mangala is his own. After that they live happily for ever. 73

In the “Story of Raja Sohail Singh” wife of Jaswant Singh Rajput, Nirmala, inspite of being dedicated to her husband is accused of adultery. This all happens because of the minister Sadiq Khan’s plans according to which Jaswant Singh will be hanged if his wife’s adultery is proved but his wife proves her innocence and saves her husband 74

So, it can be seen that, in these folktales, wives consider their husbands, literally a God, and spent their entire life serving only them.

Depiction of woman as a sister is another facet of her representation in folk tales. In the story “Bhaiya Dooj”75 the sister protects her brother from dangers that might have taken away his life -snake, tree and Toran76. There is so much respect for the relation of sister that when the girl addresses Nag as ‘my brother’ even the snake makes her its sister and gifts her ornaments.

The daughter in the family has been shown to bear the brunt of prejudices. She is there only to be disposed of. She has to pray for her safety herself in some of the folktales. An old lady marries off her daughter to a dog in the “Story of Wednesday” just because she gives grains to the poor people and hence could save only little for her mother. The mother has to pay the price for her misconduct. But the daughter, on the path of dharma, right conduct, saves her mother from the hellish life by giving her Prasada. 77 In “The Story of the

73 ibid
74 ibid
75 ibid
76 A kind of sacred thread.
77 Recorded in cassettes.
Lucky Girl”, a Raja marries off her daughter to a woodcutter as he believes she is unlucky for him. But his daughter proves to be lucky for the groom’s family.⁷⁸

In Haryanvi folk narratives, the relation of brother and sister is depicted as very pious. The sister is always ready to sacrifice anything for the welfare of her brother and brother vows to protect her sister throughout his life.

The manifestations of these feelings can be seen in celebration of festivals like Raksha Bandhan, Bhaiya Dhooj etc. These festivals signify love, harmony, commitment, trust in this relation.

In the “Story ‘Bhaiya Dhooj’” a sister saves her brother from snake, tree and a fierce wild animal.⁷⁹

In the “Story of Thursday”, the Thursday asks a brother to leave his sister but the brother refuses. He says, “If I leave you, only my stomach will suffer, but if I leave my sister, entire village will leave me”.⁸⁰ In the “Story of the Nag Panchami” a “nag” or snake regards a girl as his sister when being addressed as “Brother!” by the girl. Nag also gives her jewellery. When the nag is about to bite her, she says “Namaste Brother!” Nag, then replies, “If you would not have called me by that name, I would have bitten you!”⁸¹

Even in animals, the pure relations of brother and sister could be seen. In the “Story of Bular-Bulari”, both brother and sister help each other. Daughter-in-law gifts lots of presents to her sister-in-law.⁸²

But in the “Story the Magic Shoes”⁸³ sister disregards her brother when he could not bring expensive gifts owing to his poor economic condition.

In the “Story of Hoi-Asthami” a daughter-in-law, while digging soil accidently kills seven children of Mother Hoi. Mother Hoi curses her that she would remain barren

⁷⁸ ibid
⁷⁹ ibid
⁸⁰ ibid
⁸¹ ibid
⁸² ibid
⁸³ ibid
throughout her life. But sister-in-law takes the curse upon herself and remains barren throughout her life. What a magnanimous description of the relationship between a daughter-in-law and sister-in-law.\(^{84}\)

In a joint family system, the mother-in-law generally dominates over other family members. Though she treats her daughter-in-law affectionately but at times tends to get harsh. She keeps fiddling with the freedom of her daughter-in-law and keeps control on her movements resulting in strained relationships between the two. The contemporary scenario in Haryana in not different from elsewhere, where a sea of difference exists between educated daughter-in-laws and uneducated mother-in-laws.

In the “Story of Amla-Naomi” an old woman continued to distribute amla to brahmins even after her son’s wedding. The new bride did not like it and instead asked the mother-in-law to give only a little amla to brahmins and that too, unripe. The old woman finally leaves the house.\(^{85}\)

In the “Story of Surraj-Narayan” the mother-in-law blames the new bride that the new born baby is not his son’s and is illegitimate.\(^{86}\)

There are folktales that show acrimonious behavior of daughter-in-law towards mother-in-law also.

In the “Story of Lord Ganesh” the mother-in-law used to have her meals after Vinayak’s puja. The daughter-in-law said, “You old woman! First you eat and also let other eat. Today, I will not give you roti, let me see how you do Vinayak puja without bhog”.

Another area of their conflict is the hold of treasury. If this issue is solved then probably their relationship will have greater stability. The sort of suggestion is given in the “Story of the Pipal Tree” in this story a brahmin couple have their son married to a very dutiful girl, who can prepare all thirty six traditional items of food. But the neighborhood incites her to grab the household keys. She then starts treating her in-laws badly, giving them half-cooked dal. Next day, when she asks them for keys, while they were about to go out for

\(^{84}\) ibid

\(^{85}\) ibid

\(^{86}\) ibid
pipal puja, she says, 'Give me the house keys!' Old woman answered, "Why such a fuss over keys. You take the keys". The bride was really embarrassed. 87

The relations between the two sisters in Haryanvi folktales do not reflect a very sound relationship generally. In the "Story of the Poomima Fast" Parwa and Poona were two sisters. Parwa's children die as a curse of her being irreligious. Out of extreme jealousy, Parwa sends sweets and toys for her sister's kids. They are poisoned sweets and the toys are enclosing a snake in them. But Poonam's children are prevented from this, because she has been religious in her life. 88

There is the existence of world of symbols in the folktales that assign meaning and value to the categories of male and female. In folk narratives children come across women as spoken of as a wife, a mother or a sister who do not have an individual identity of their own and seldom as advisors. But in the "Story of tailless buffalo", the Jat gets back his money and tailless buffalo from the thugs when he follows his woman's advice. 89

Within their walled houses, the women avails minimum amount of autonomy. In folktales, firstly there is a prescription for certain kinds of food for certain occasion. Secondly, the food is to be ready within a specific time. Thirdly, the control is exerted by the preferences of the consumer which dictate the exact variant of the dinner to be served.

On the other hand, these days working couples in the urban society (since spouses need each others help more) have learned to share and cooperate in many ways. Men whose work shifts are different from those of their wives often care for their children while their wives worked. Husbands also helped their wives with the household chores but the subtle discrimination between the two sexes continues.

There is nearly a consensus among the scholars engaged in cross-cultural research on gender and folk narratives that central to the structure of women's role in decision making is the structuring of production and reproduction.

Motherhood is the central facet of female existence because it is the most authentically biological experience that differentiates a woman from man. A women's role in

87 ibid
88 ibid
89 ibid
the reproduction of human beings far outweights that of a man. It is invariably a woman who mothers. Motherhood and mothering are usually perceived as naturally related. This bringing forth of new life and its sustenance, so essential to human survival, paradoxically become instruments of subordination. Maternal responsibility is used as an alibi to exclude a woman from power, authority, decision and a participatory role in public life. Further, motherhood and mothering are not controlled by her.

Glancing specifically at the situation of Indian women Krishnaraj argues that “what was originally, a source of women’s power, viz, her procreative roles has rendered her powerless that is especially subject to male domination. Perceived as a field in possession of the owner of seed (read semen), a woman’s motherhood renders her especially susceptible to male control and domination”. Deprived of minimum safety nets such as nourishment, safe birthing, adequate ante-natal care, child care facilities, motherhood renders working Haryanvi women, specially in poor rural areas, extremely vulnerable. State sponsored incentives to motherhood, both as ideological and material help are also questioned in a patriarchal culture denying women the ability to render motherhood as materially empowering.

In the folk narratives the process of human reproduction has been conceived of in terms of male seed germinating in the female field. This can be seen in texts used during rituals of marriage and other crises of life many of which are of vedic origin and the great epic of Mahabharata.

The conception of the process of human reproduction seems to have formed part of both the folklore tradition and people’s consciousness through the ages. Leela Dube argues that “though medical science as expressed in Ayurveda recognized a woman’s contribution to heredity, it was propagated in popular culture that the child carried the man’s blood, as semen was believed to a product of his blood”.

The underlying implications of the metaphor of conceptions as the seed sown in the soil are used for biological symbolization of descent, to understand the nature of relations between the sexes and their relative rights and positions. Two things emerge from this. First,


an essentially unequal relationship is reflected and emphasized through the use of these symbols; and second, the symbolism is utilizing the culture to underplay the significance of women's contribution to biological reproduction. While tying her down to the supreme duty of motherhood, this symbolism is instrumental in denying her the natural right over her own children.

Caste and Women

In order to properly assess the position of women in Haryanvi folk narrative, a brief reference to stratification system as expressed through the varna and caste system is necessary. Features like caste endogamy as a mechanism for recruiting and retaining control over the labour and sexuality of women exist. Concepts of purity and pollution segregating groups and also regulating mobility of women are very crucial. Caste not only determines social division of labour but also sexual division of labour. Certain tasks have to be performed by women while certain other tasks are meant for men. In folktales, for instance woman can engage themselves in water regulation, transplanting, weeding but not in ploughing. Also with upward mobility or the group, women are immediately withdrawn from the outside work. Overt rules prohibiting women from specific activities and denying certain rights did exist. But the more subtle expression of patriarchy through symbolism giving messages of inferiority of women through legends highlighting the self-sacrificing, self-effacing pure image of women and through the ritual practices day in and day out which emphasized the dominant role of a woman as a faithful wife and devout mother were also depicted in folk narratives.

The linking of women and shudras together is a one more evidence in folktales of the low position of women. Prescription and prohibitions for shudras and women were same on many occasions, like prohibition of the sacred thread ceremony for both women and shudras. Similar punishments for killing of a shudra or a woman, denial of religious privileges etc, these are some of the illustrations which indicate how caste and gender get entrenched.

Today with an altogether different situation in this society, the religion is facing an entirely new challenge. Since the social economic and political emancipation of women are on entirely new challenge, new pressures from the social environment are affecting all the religious traditions and the inadequacy of their traditional teaching regarding the general status or image of woman is being fundamentally questioned.
Marred In Marriage

The concept of anuloma and pratiloma marriage by definition denigrate women. A marriage where a boy of upper caste marries a girl of lower caste is approved and is called anuloma, while the marriage of women ritually pure groups with men of lower ritual status were considered pratiloma. Most serious punishments like excommunication and even death could be evoked for transgressing the norms. Physical mobility is also restricted through caste norms. The significant symbol of the low status of women in society is that the women of lower castes are accessible to men to higher status, while there is very severe punishment for men of lower castes who dare to approach any women of higher groups. Marriage is a sacrament whereby a women is bound in wedlock till she dies. These were all the practices which suggest the control of sexuality.

As the code of Manu states, “A woman should never be independent. Her father has authority over her in childhood, her husband in youth, and her son of old age”. 92 Women’s identity, access to resources, opportunities etc, are determined by the caste and class status of the family. Marital status and their fertility provide an identity to women. Married women achieve status and respect in the family and society after attaining motherhood, especially after giving birth to sons. The ceremony of marriage remodels the role of a girl and a boy. Marriage not only allows physical intimacy between a husband and a wife but also endows responsibility upon the husband to rear his wife and children, in strict traditional sense.

The relationship between a husband and a wife in marital relationship is quite pious and dedicated. Husband and a wife are like two pillars of their married life. Both of them share the marital responsibilities. In Valmiki’s Ramayana, a very beautiful description is give “the way there cannot be a Veena without string, a chariot without wheel similarly, the life of a husband without wife cannot be joyous”. 93

Let me give an overview of how women are represented in common marriage customs followed in Haryanvi society and as also depicted in folk narrative tradition.

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Engagement

There are various ceremonies to enter into the marital relationship. The first of its kind is engagement. The songs are sung at the bridegroom’s house and sugar is distributed among the visitors. The ceremony is accomplished in the presence of a brahmin and a barber.

In a folktale the “Story of an Old Lady”, old lady engages her daughter to a dog which turns out to be a God himself. The story goes as:

There is an old lady. She wants to get her daughter engaged but finds no good match for her. In a very tense mood, she meets a barbar and a brahmin, she tells them her cause of concern. Brahmin suggests, whosoever, you meet today, get your daughter engaged to him all your problems will be solved, might be poorest of the poor or ugliest of the ugly. The old lady promises herself to do exactly like he tells her. She meets a dog on her way. Hence, she engages her daughter to a dog only. But, it is not actually a dog but Almighty in dog’s form. Both the women are, blessed.\(^\text{94}\)

The ceremony is vividly described in the folktale “God’s daughter”, in which the king engages her daughter to a woodcutter:

There is a king. He looks out for good matrimonial offers for his daughter. Finally, he finds a good match for her, surprisingly, a woodcutter. The ceremony of engagement is fixed. A barber and a Brahmin are invited for its accomplishment. People gather to celebrate, to sing songs and also dance. Sweets are distributed. Everybody is happy. The brahmin and the barber are given lots of gifts and sweets.\(^\text{95}\)

A brahmin and a barber from low caste are indispensible for the culmination of marriage. Women have no say in choosing their life partners, either the father chooses for her as in the “Story of God’s Daughter” or the mother chooses for her as in the “Story of an old lady”.

Baraat

After the ceremony of engagement, a yellow letter is sent to the groom’s side by the bride’s side in which the dates of ceremony and marriage are written. On the marriage eve,

\(^{94}\) Recorded in cassetees

\(^{95}\) ibid
the baarat goes from the groom’s place to the bride’s place. The ceremony of Toran is performed as soon as the barat arrives as the bride’s place.

In the story “Bhaiya Dhooj”, the sister-in-law does not allow the brother-in-law i.e. groom to perform the ceremony of toran due to the fear of falling of the door. She gets a paper door constructed. All the baaratis said that she had saved the boy.\textsuperscript{96}

The baraatis and the baraat are received in a very regal manner. Earlier, the party would stay at bride’s home for three days. The baraatis enjoy the riches a lot.

The scene of the story ‘Magic Boots’\textsuperscript{97} is worth appreciating. The barat comes in the afternoon. They are well attended. The baratis had bathed in sweet smelling oil and soap. They wear new clothes. Various delicious meals are cooked. They eat to their full. The barat stays for three days. They are given coins and glasses and they are send off.

During the ceremony of marriage ‘Saptpadi’ is of great importance. After the Toran ceremony is done, the groom is called for another ceremony in Haryanvi folktales. The custom of taking ‘seven pheras’ around the Pipal tree is considered to be marriage itself. This is called as the ritual of saptpadi.

In “The story of Potter and His Son”, this custom is depicted:

Seventy eight girls become the wives of the potter’s son after taking seven pheras around the pipal tree. The potter’s son told the girls before offering them water, ‘First eat this medicine and then take rounds with me around this Pipal tree. This way they became pregnant because of eating tablets made out of wine.\textsuperscript{98}

This is the time now for the bride to leave her parent’s home. It is called Bidai. Feeling of sadness prevails everywhere. The bride’s family gives ample dowry to the girl.

In ‘The Saturday Story’ King Vikramaditya marries the daughter of Seth, named Kambri. She is given sufficient dowry at the time of her send off:

\textsuperscript{96} Recorded in cassettes
\textsuperscript{97} ibid
\textsuperscript{98} ibid
The Seth has a beautiful daughter named Kambri. King Vikramaditya asks for her hand. The Seth marries her daughter to him. He gives ample dowry. The King stays there for few days and then leaves after a few days, taking his wife, money, dowry and servants, to Ujjain. 99

After the wedding, taking into consideration the age of the bride and the groom, the Muklava is done. Sometimes it is done immediately after the wedding. But other times, keeping in view the age of the bride and the groom, it is done after years. The ceremony denotes the arrival of bride to the groom’s place after marriage.

In the story, ‘The Story of Friday’ the sons of a brahmin, the Vaish and the Kayasths are friends. As they get married, the brahmin and the Kayasth feel that, “The house looks dull without a wife.” So, both complete their muklava ceremony and bring back their wives from their parent’s places. But the son of the vaish does not. The Seth’s son later feels that his friends have taken the right decision and then decides to bring his wife also. 100

In ‘The Story of a Merchant’, the bride asks the merchant’s son to hit himself with shoes five times. Only after this she will come back to his place.

This tradition of Bhaat has been important part of marriage since ancient times. In this, the sister invites the brother for bhat, before wedding. The maternal uncle offers money, clothes, sweets etc. to his nephew and niece according to his economic status. The sister worships her brother. He is made to stand on a platform and is measured by the rope. Everybody is offered ladoos afterwards. The panchayat is called to celebrate bhaat. In the story ‘The Magical Boots’, the tradition of bhaat is depicted very vividly:

Bhopal’s sister Jamuna comes to invite him for bhaat. He treats and pampers her well. Songs are sung. The day of wedding arrives. Bhopal does all the arrangements very well. He carries lots of new clothes, gold ornaments and plenty of money and reaches his sister’s house. The sister performs puja very affectionately. She invites the panchayat and shows everything before them. Her joy knows no bounds. 101

99 Recorded in cassettes
100 ibid
101 ibid
It is considered very auspicious and pious to accept the bhaat. Even if there is no money for food, still he borrows money and his wife offers her own dresses.

Types of Marriages

According to Manusmriti eight types of weddings are performed i.e. Braham, Dev, Arsh, Prajapatya, Asur, Gandharva, Ratsshchya, and eighth one is Peshach. In the Haryanvi folk tales, there is description of Braham, Prajapatya and Gandharva marriages only.

Braham Marriage

A reader of Vedas and a man of high character and esteem is called to chant marriage hymns. He is worshipped by giving clothes and ornaments.

In “The Story King Vikrajit”, the Brahmin Vikram sought out for a Brahmin boy Markandya, who was handsome and scholarly for his daughter Mohini. The king called the Diwan and asked to seek a Brahmin match. The Diwan sought a Brahmin match and the bridegroom was given rich dowry102

Prajapatya Marriage

It is quite similar to the Brahm marriage. In this too, the bride and the groom are worshipped and are given teachings of religious life. In Haryana, this type of wedding is performed in folk tales also. In the story “The Daughter of Brickmaker” the poor brickmaker begs King Vikramaditya for money to marriage his daughter. He then marries off his daughter with great pomp and show by borrowing ten lakhs of rupees and jewels. He spends all the money in marriage.103

Other than that, in the stories like ‘The Story of Saturday’104 and ‘King Vikramaditya story’105, such types of marriages are performed.

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102 ibid
103 ibid
104 ibid
Gandharva Marriage

When a boy and a girl in love marry on their own, without the permission from the parents, it is called Gandharva marriage. According to Manusmriti, “the mutual relationship, be it physical or otherwise is called ‘Gandharva Marriage’.” It can be considered a sort of love marriage. In the ancient times, in the ashrams of rishis, around the streams etc. the lovers would meet. They would vow to live together forever. The marriage of King Dushayant and Shakuntala is the ideal example of this.

The Gandharva marriage is of two types. In The Raakshas Marriage mixed with Gandharva Marriage, the girl would like the boy secretly. If she faces opposition from her parents, she would request the boy to kidnap her. The boy would kidnap her killing her family members. This fulfils the condition of a Rakshas marriage. In “The Story of a Prince”, such type of wedding is described. The prince loves his classmate but she tells him that she is engaged, and they decide to elope.

In Mixed Gandharva marriage type of wedding, there is no kidnapping but the bride and the groom marry without the consent of their parents. In the story, ‘Dhan Teras’, King Hema sent his son to live a life of celibacy in the caves of Jamuns, but by chance the daughter of King Hans comes there. They then marry in the Gandharva way.

In this way, in the Haryanvi folktales Brahman marriage, Prajapatya and Gandharva marriage are described lucidly.

Various modes of Marriages

Swayamvar Marriage

In this type of wedding, the girl has the complete liberty to choose her own husband. There is some condition kept for wedding the girl. If anyone fulfils that condition, he is chosen by the girl. The ‘Sita and Draupdi Swayamvar’ are quite popular of this kind.

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106 Recorded in cassettes
107 ibid
108 ibid
In the Haryanvi folktales this is quite prevalent. In the story of ‘Samaya Mata the King’s daughter, in spite of so many impediments, puts the garland around the neck of the gardener’s son and marries him.\(^{109}\)

In the story, ‘Til Kutni Chauth’ \(^{110}\) the girl chooses the old lady’s son as her husband. In the story of ‘The Fast For Sixteen Mondays’ the king claims that he would marry his daughter with only that man around whose neck the she elephant would throw garland. The she elephant throws the garland around a brahmin’s son. The king’s daughter is married to him with great pomp and show.\(^{111}\)

In the same way in ‘The Story of Lord Ganesha’ similar instances are found.

A very strange story is found in the ‘Sant and the Grihasthi’. In this story, King Karan Singh puts a condition that whosoever will bathe in hot oil will be married to his daughter. No one could do so. Then a saint is able to do that out of his religious fervour. But as the girl proceeds to put garland around his neck, the saint lets her marry his own student.\(^{112}\)

**Monogamy**

According to this system a man can only marry once. It is the most prevalent system in society. The Vedas too profess monogamy.

In the Haryanvi folktales monogamy is given extreme importance. Even if the husband is characterless, uneducated, impotent and immoral, the wife always considers him as God and worships him throughout her life. In the famous story of ‘The Pipal Tree’, a brahmin and his wife are childless. But still he doesn’t remarry. They pray pipal tree with great devotion and get a son. In ‘The Story of Thursday’ a poor businessman and his wife keep on praying to Lord Jupiter and get rich ultimately.

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\(^{109}\) Recorded in cassettees

\(^{110}\) *ibid*

\(^{111}\) *ibid*

\(^{112}\) *ibid*
In the same way ‘Til Kutni Chauth’ and ‘The Story of Wednesday’ the old lady doesn’t remarry after becoming a widow. In the story, ‘The Frog and the She frog’, both live together remembering Lord Rama.\textsuperscript{113}

Polygamy

In this system a man marries one or more than one woman. Such types of weddings were considered of great social importance. That’s why only kings or the leaders of prestigious class/community could marry more than once. Lord Manu orders that a husband can remarry if the child is sick or characterless.

In the story ‘The Fairy and the Prince’, the king had four wives but still remained childless. He was very unhappy\textsuperscript{114}. In the story of ‘The Prabav Dacoit’ the businessman gets his son married to eight beautiful daughters in order to prevent him from becoming a saint.\textsuperscript{115} The story of Dhruv Bhagat is very well known in which king Uttanpad marry for the second time with Suruchi, as his first wife Suriti fails to produce a child.\textsuperscript{116}

Even today, in societies, the trend of polygamy exists. In ancient societies, the kings used to enjoy harems. There used to be continuous strained relationships and it goes to the extreme step of even murdering each other’s offsprings.

Similar incident can be cited in Bhagat Puranmal’s story. After twelve years Bhagat Puranmal goes to his father’s place. He meets his maternal aunt first before meeting his own mother. But maternal aunt gets attracted to his beauty and expresses her desire. He refuses. The Rani orders for his limbs to be cut and he be thrown into a well. Afterwards Guru Gorakhnath rescues him.\textsuperscript{117}

Inter-caste and Inter-creed Marriages

In such marriages, a man marries a girl of another caste or religion or creed. In the Manusmriti there been a mention of inter-creed marriages. According to Manu, “generally for

\textsuperscript{113} Recorded in cassettes

\textsuperscript{114} ibid

\textsuperscript{115} ibid

\textsuperscript{116} ibid

\textsuperscript{117} ibid
marriages, a girl of same caste is preferred. But if the marriage is born out of love, it can be made in any other caste also. It means, a Brahmin can marry in any of the other castes. A kshatriya can marry in the other two varnas such as vaish and shudra. Vaish can marry in Shudra but Shudra can marry among themselves.\textsuperscript{118}

According to the above mentioned law, the inter-caste marriages can be of two types. In the folktales, both types are mentioned:

Anulome Marriage

According to it, a man of high caste can marry a girl of low caste. In ‘King Vikramaditya’ the Brahmin king Dharamesh marries girls belonging to other castes.\textsuperscript{119} In ‘The Story of Saturday Fast’, the Kshatriya king Vikramaditya marries the daughter of a vaish.\textsuperscript{120}

Pratilome Marriages

In this custom, a person of low caste marries a girl of high caste. In the ‘Monday Fast’ the son of vaish marries a girl of kshatriya.\textsuperscript{121} In the ‘Saturday Story’, such marriages are mentioned\textsuperscript{122}. In the same way, in the story of ‘Samya Mata’ the son of gardner marries the girl of a king.\textsuperscript{123}

Inter-Species Marriages

In such kind of marriages, marriages are shown between human, birds, animals etc. The daughters of the kings are not only asked by the low caste boys but also by birds etc. Such one story is ‘The Poddle’s Story’ The poddle is killed by getting crushed under the feet of the King. It decides to take revenge with the help of ants, rivers. The king is defeated He

\textsuperscript{118} \textsuperscript{ibid}

\textsuperscript{119} \textsuperscript{ibid}

\textsuperscript{120} \textsuperscript{ibid}

\textsuperscript{121} \textsuperscript{ibid}

\textsuperscript{122} \textsuperscript{ibid}

\textsuperscript{123} \textsuperscript{ibid}
takes away the daughter of the king.\textsuperscript{124} There is another such story, ‘The Story of Wednesday’ where the girl is married to a dog.\textsuperscript{125}

Inter-Professional Marriages

There is no mention of such stories as such. Although it can be included in Inter-varna marriages, but in inter-varna marriages, varna is considered the most important. In the inter-professional marriages, problems can arise due to different professions as in ‘The Story of the Old Lady and the Girls’:

The old lady has two daughters. One daughter is married to a farmer and the other is married to a potter. After some time, the father goes to meet the farmer’s wife. He asks about her welfare. She informs that if it rains well, things will be fine but if it does not things will go bad. Then he visits his other daughter, who is a potter’s wife. She says, ‘Father, if it does not rain, things will be good but if it rains, we will be ruined. The old man gets confused and tensed because if it rains the potter’s wife and if it does not rain, the farmer’s wife will be ruined.\textsuperscript{126}

Phenta Marriages

But in ‘The Story of Pipal Tree’, there is mention of phenta marriage. In such marriages, the groom is not present at the time of wedding. So the wedding is performed with phenta.

A Brahmin couple is childless. But they worship pipal tree which is twelve mile away. They are blessed with a son. Once on their way they stop at a brahmin’s house who has many daughters. As one of the girls starts cleaning the floor, she finds a diamond. The Brahmin feels greedy and proposes his son’s marriage to that girl. He says that their son is not with them. So, they get the girl engaged with phenta and after a few months she was married to a phenta only.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{124} Recorded in cassettes
\textsuperscript{125} ibid
\textsuperscript{126} ibid
\textsuperscript{127} ibid
Widow remarriage

Widowhood is the deepest trauma of a lady’s life. If unfortunately, the society also isolates her, the life becomes miserable for her. So, it was essential that she should live with dignity. That’s why widow remarriage was required. In the Rigveda and Atharvaveda, there is slight reference of widow remarriage. In the Manusmriti, complete protection has been provided to the rights of a widow. It also means, in the vedic times, remarriage was of great importance. The main reason was that the birth of children was considered very important. So, after the death of her husband, the husband’s brother or his nearest kin had the right to produce her children. This was called Niyog.

Niyog

After the death of a young husband, the lady is allowed to get married to the brother-in-law in the presence of the panchayat. Such ceremony is called ‘Putting of Bangles’. But such was possible only when both the parties agreed. Although no direct mention is made in folk tale of such type but there are certain indications. For e.g., in ‘The Story of Sparrow’ the sparrow starts loving the other sparrow after the death of the he sparrow.\textsuperscript{128}

Sati

After the death of her husband and with the impossibility of re-marriage, the widows have only two alternatives left. The first is to live a life of self control and hard work. Such type of life it is believed, would let a widow, to achieve heavily bliss, even though she could not be a mother. In ‘The Story of Sankat Chauth’, the old lady leads a life of discipline.\textsuperscript{129} The other way is to perform Sati after the death of her husband.

Aumaran is considered when the husband dies at some other place and the wife sacrifices herself with his sign or memoir at their home place. In ‘The Saint and the Grihasti’, the Sati is also presented. Not only in human world but also in animal world, this custom can be seen. In a story, of a she bird, the she bird kills herself by jumping into the fire along with her children when she comes to know that he bird has died.

\textsuperscript{128} ibid

\textsuperscript{129} ibid
The onus of preserving their sanctity lies mainly on the women. It thus emerges like a big tree in whose grace all family relations grow and prosper. It is also a great teacher right from the childhood till the adulthood. For instance, in ‘Kartik Katha’, a woodcutter’s wife keeps kartik fast daily. By doing so, she is able to save one wooden stick everyday. She collects thirty wooden sticks in this manner and then sell all of them. She does this to perform the religious ceremony of “langar” for the welfare of family. Woodcutter asks his wife if she does charity work. She replies, “From where do I do charity? The wooden sticks that you get are sufficient only to cook your food.” Again, woodcutter asks, “Why do you lie? I know you have performed langer.”

A number of factors have affected the solidarity of the family, marriage and the quality of relationships in modern times. Education, non-traditional occupations, disparities in income, and spatial distance are the most important factors impinging upon relationships and pushing them in the direction of change. The culture of “live in” couples, the single woman phenomenon, and unwed mothers has not yet come to India in a big way, but at least the urban family is undergoing a transformation wherein women are trying to create their own niche.

Role of Women

After analyzing folktales, the researcher could cull some broad features of various important roles that women played in the folk tradition. In the ancient times the condition of women was quite respectable. She was presented as an ideal wife, friend, well wisher, loving mother, sister, counseller and teacher etc. When Lord Rama went to vanvasa, mother Sumitra gave a wise counsel to her son, ‘Son, go to the jungle, think of Lord Rama as king Dashrat and Janaki as mother, stay with love and serve them.’

In Haryanvi folktales the various aspects of woman’s personality have been presented in a very beautiful manner. She is a young girl who later transforms into a beautiful lady. At some points she sermonizes her husband but sometimes lands herself into self-created problems.

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130 Recorded in cassettes
131 ibid
A traditional Haryanvi woman is generally believed to be a domesticated being. She augurs wealth and happiness for the family by steering life against all the odds and difficulties of life and doing her duties gracefully. She is shown to hardly avers from her righteous path and gets strength from her religious ideas. The man gets love, care, sharing from her. The ever engaging concepts of mother and motherhood throughout her life are supposed to bring a kind of salvation to her body and personality. According to Rigveda, “it is the duty of the lady to produce a good child.” Lord Manu has considered motherhood the greatest boon.

In the Pipal story, the brahmin couple is childless. Everyday they visit to the pipal tree and worship it. Consequently, a son is born to them. The barren wife is generally left out and not remarried, unlike men.

In ‘The Story of Baisak’ the queen offers food to the dogs, cows and needy people. She prays to the Almighty then, the king comes to her by chance and stays with her. She becomes pregnant, gives birth to a child and is also respected.

A lady is the symbol and epitome of tolerance, help and service. In the story ‘Hoi Astarni’ the bahu takes upon herself the curse of barrenhood from her sister-in-law. In the story of Lord Shankar, Parvati gives her womb to a mare.

In the story ‘Sant and Grihasti’ the family of the bird destroys itself to help king to quench his hunger. In the story of ‘Three Boons’ the old lady serves the fairy unconditionally. In the ‘Story Of Dana’, the girl gives shelter to the Prince and also saves her father’s life.

In many stories the lady gives good counsel to her husband and helps him to get out of trouble. In the story ‘Tailless Buffalos’, the lady saves life of her husband by rendering him a wise advice.

In the story ‘Mungo and Meetho’ the two sisters are presented full of zest in serving others. Mungo helps everyone whosoever she meets on her way to her maternal uncle home.

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132 Pt. Shri Ram Sharma, Rigveda. (Bareilly: Sanskrit Sansthan).
133 Recorded in cassettes
134 ibid
She gets plenty of rewards for her feeling of social service. On the other hand, the other sister who is quite selfish does not get any thing and feels disappointed.\(^\text{135}\)

‘The Story of Gayaras’ is quite significant where a prince become a donkey because of the curse of a cow. His wife worships day and night. Due to her piousness, he becomes a man again.

The researcher could catalogue a few stories whose content is against the grain of what is generally believed. It seems intolerant of women who stand for their self respect, who exhibit their unrestrained sexuality, who scheme and commit murders too. Let me quote some folktales to convey it.

In ‘Lucky Girl’ the king calls his six daughters. They convey to him that they would always act according to their father’s wish. The king appreciated their attitude. So, he marries them off to rich grooms. But the seventh daughter says that she would like to act according to her own wishes. The king is hurt with such a candid reply. So, he marries her to a woodcutter. But her innate self belief makes her a queen one day. \(^\text{136}\)

Women are again uncannily represented in the “king Vikramaditya” story:

The King observes a beautiful girl of a businessman romantically engaged with a baniya’s son. She opens her hair and rests her head on his chest. One day they meet in the darkness of the night and plan to elope. At the midnight, the king throws a stone from the window. The girl thinks that her lover has come. She quickly collects all the jewellery and comes near him and asks him to elope. The king tells her that if her lover remains alive, he might kill all of them. So, she should kill him. So, she kills him. They try to cross the river but the king, very quickly runs away with jewellery etc. She is left alone. She comes back home and laments for her husband. She intends to become sati but could not tolerate the heat of fire and comes out. Then the king informs her about the truth. She tells him that her six other friends were also going to do the same thing. \(^\text{137}\)

\(^{135}\) ibid
\(^{136}\) ibid
\(^{137}\) ibid
In another story, the king returns to his palace and decides to keep a watch over his wives. They all leave the place at midnight and meet a Saint who makes six clones of himself and has sex with each one of them. The king kills the saint and returns home. As he admonishes his wives, they all create a hullabulla there. So, the king kills them all.¹³⁸

There is considerable ambiguity about the nature and status of women in Haryanvi folk narrative. Some sacred texts give them an exalted status by saying 'the gods live where women are worshiped.' She is revered as Mother Goddess, Durga, Kali, Chandi, or worshipped under several other names and manifestations in different regions. She is believed to represent power (shakti) and evokes both fear and reverence. She can protect and in different circumstances she can also wreak vengeance. If pleased, she can fulfill every wish, when annoyed she can unleash unprecedented terror. Male gods find themselves helpless before her and do not intervene when she has decided to act. Some of her attributes are believed to be invested in every woman.

But there is another profile of woman, also sanctified by religious writings and folklore. She is believed to be fickle and fragile. She is sensuous, a temptress, given to falsehood, folly, greed, trickery, impurity, and thoughtless action. She is sometimes regarded as the root of all evil. As an aporism claims, 'always remain wary of jār jamin, joru' (lady). These two dichotomous images are contradictory, the tilt in the accepted stereotypes is towards the negative and derogatory picture. Being the allegedly inferior sex, a woman has to forgo some privileges and rights that are regarded as exclusively the male preserve.

This ideology of subordination, is pervasive and has invaded the Haryanvi way of thinking and ethos of almost the entire Haryanvi society. There are, of course some exceptions, which permit a greater measure of equality and freedom to women.

The Contemporary Scene: the Existing Continuities

What are the principal areas in folklore in which controls are exercised on women that are conspicuous in more extreme form in Haryana today?

First, their sexuality is controlled much more strictly than men's. Women are more easily defiled and given social attitudes. This brings disgrace both to the family in which they are born and the one into which they are married. The preservation of their purity is behind

¹³⁸ ibid
the norm of getting females married before the onset of puberty (first menstruation). Implicit in the control of sexuality is the control over reproduction, i.e. giving birth to progeny.

Second, there are restraints on women’s movements and contacts. The alleged idea behind this is that women should not yield to temptation and transgress sexual norms because of the opportunity to do so, and also that their resources- property, cash, and labour and skills- are not to be exploited or shared by others. Women at the lower strata have to take up work to meet their family expenses and this necessitates their movement outside the precincts of the domestic group. Thus, these regulations apply mainly to upper and middle level families.

Third it was believed that women’s resources need regulation and control. For a majority of women their main resources are their labour and skills. They may be wage-earners engaged in outside work, or participants in family craft, craft, or have special skills that get recognition and can be gainfully used. The questions in this context are: How much of their earnings can they spend at their will, how much can they save, and how much have they to contribute to the pool of the family’s earnings? Women at the upper and middle strata may bring with them some property that is legally regarded as Stridhan or “women’s property”. Can this property be handled by them as they wish? Or are there pressures on them to use it to support common family projects and to tide over family crises?

The manner in which these controls are exercised depend to a great extent on social structure, role allocation, value premises, and the rigidity or flexibility of social control. The interplay of historical, economic, social, and political forces contributes significantly to the shaping and re-shaping of gender equations.

The social system in Haryana folknarratives that speaks volumes about the Haryanvi society too, is characterized by patriarchy, with a few exceptions. Patriarchy recognizes male dominance and female subordination. On marriage the bride breaks loose from her parental home and acquires membership of the family into which she is married. Children born to her belong to her husband’s lineage. He is the principal decision-maker, although he has to consult other elder males also. Women’s presence in the decision-making process is not conspicuously visible, though experienced, strong-willed, and mature women do assert themselves. But they often remain in the background. Even younger women pull the strings from behind. Thus, in the politics of the domestic group the role of women cannot be discounted, but in the final analysis male dominance is not seriously questioned by them.
When this is done the breakup of the family becomes imminent. Of course, there are examples of some female-headed households also, but this happens only when children are young and the domestic group has only an elderly female to take charge of its affairs.

In respect of role allocation, distinction is made between 'men's work' and "women's work". The management of the household is invariably in the women's sphere. If they cannot hire domestic help—only a few can afford it—women must handle all the domestic chores like drawing water, cooking, cleaning the house, washing the clothes of men and children as well as their own, and looking after the children. Men are usually ridiculed if found undertaking any of these functions. A man may do so only when the wife is away or ill and there is no other woman to take charge. This notion is so deeply ingrained that even women in professions and full-time jobs are expected additionally to continue looking after household affairs. Many women have a sense of inadequacy, if not of guilt, when they cannot attend to their domestic responsibilities. Men, on the other hand, are supposed to look after the affairs of the world outside the home. They are expected to provide for the family and to function as arbiters of its discontents and conflicts.

Men dominate, but women also have ways of getting things done according to their desires and wishes. And in lower Jatis and classes they have a substantial share in the economic pursuits of the domestic group. They may not wield the plough, but they contribute in diverse ways to agriculture. Women in the families of artisans have well-defined roles in carrying out the traditional craft. Their contribution to the household economy, thus, thus, cannot be ignored. In the higher social groups men used to be the providers, but even this is changing fast. Women are entering the public services and professions and earning regular salaries. The trend has to be accepted, partly because of increasing costs and the demands of higher standards of living. But men do not relish being maintained by their wives, and their ego is hurt when their wives earn more. The emerging ethos does not favour patriarchy, but the hangover of the past is often unrelenting. Society is adapting itself to the altered scenario, even if the pace of adaptation is very slow.

The implementation of norms and values depends to a great extent on the strength or weakness of control mechanisms. Articulation of values and the prescription of norms in socio-religious texts does not imply their automatic observance; even when tradition was strong, mediatory efforts and intervention by elders and social institutions like the Jati Panchayat or village Panchayat were necessary to resolve conflicts and to force recalcitrant
members to comply with the normative structure. Notions of honour and shame are strong in
the higher Jatis and upper classes. They make a special effort not to let family affairs come
out into the open and mediation is done by elders of the concerned household as well as the
women’s parents and important members of her kin group. In the lower Jatis and classes
generally secrets cannot be kept and intervention becomes necessary. They are also sensitive
about shame, but they cannot afford to be very particular about it. Family honour is protected
by wifebeating and violence to the offending parties. The extent of intra-family violence
cannot be measured. It is all too visible in the lower classes, but it also persists in the upper
strata. Even after four decades of Independence one frequently reads of bride-burning and
dowry deaths. Other forms of lesser violence are: heaping indignities on the wife and her
relations on the paternal side, making the wife do too much work with little rest, failing to
provide her adequate nutrition, and mentally torturing her on several scores. Even highly
educated and well-placed women are not immune from such maltreatment.

Generally in Haryana, a woman’s sense of personal growth is related to her fertility
performance and the social standing she achieves as a mother of sons. High fertility in this
sex segregated society affects the status of women in several ways like maternal mortality,
child care, house work and agricultural labour that few options are open to them for their
personal growth apart from their main role of wife-mother as the statistical figures show. This
pattern of early marriage and the attitude to female education is largely responsible for the
high female illiteracy rate as stated by the facts of the Table-5.139

Some of the important contributing factors for the declining sex-ratio (refer to table -
6140) are as follows. Females are under enumerated in the census, the general mortality rates
of females are higher than those of males, Haryanvi families prefer sons and female infants
are consequently neglected leading to higher female mortality, frequent and excessive child
bearing has an adverse effects on the health of women. For instance, in the folktale, “The
Guru and Chela”, the chela is in need of a wife for bearing number of children141. Certain
diseases have higher incidence in women.

139 appendix
140 ibid
141 Recorded in cassettes
It is beyond doubt that systematic indirect female infanticide exists today in Haryana in addition to the sex selective abortion (i.e. female foeticide) and female infanticide (killing of a child under one year of age). The indirect female infanticide accomplished by nutritional and health care deprivation of children results in higher mortality rates of daughter than sons. In several parts of rural Haryana there is a strong preferences for sons. Sons are considered as economic assets. They are needed for farming and for income through remittances if they leave the village etc. Sons play important roles in local power struggles over rights to land and water. They stay with the family after their marriage and thus maintain the parents in their old age, daughter marry out and cannot contribute to the maintenance of their natal households sons bring in dowries with their brides, daughters drain family wealth with their required dowries and constant flow of gifts to their family of marriage after the wedding. Sons, among Hindus are also needed to perform rituals which protect the family. After the death of the father, daughter cannot perform such rituals. The extreme son preference is more prevalent among upper castes and classes than the lower castes and classes.

Unequal gender relations and injustices perpetrated on women have attracted the attention of social reformers, many of whom have come out in support of their cause.

Although the abolition of Sati was a positive intervention that spared women much torture, glorification of the self-immolation of a woman on her husband’s pyre still continues. In the twice-born Jatis, widows are still looked down upon, although a small number of them break loose from the shackles of tradition and do remarry. Female infanticide still continues. Amniocentesis has made it possible to recognize the sex of an unborn child, and this has facilitated female foeticide.

This facility is now available in almost all cities and many towns. The percentage of inter-community marriages is increasing, but some child marriages also continue to take place, despite legislation. In the original act the minimum age of marriage was fifteen years for girls and eighteen for boys; it was later revised to sixteen years for females and twenty-one years for males. But in some parts of the state even now there are mass marriages in which children (including infants) are married off. After Independence, women got the right to vote and there has been some improvement in their right to own property. But many problems still remain like exploitation of female child labour, dedication of girls as Jogans or Devadasis to temples for sexual exploitation and prostitution, and sexual abuse of the female child in the family and neighbourhood. Without social consciousness and purposive social action, social legislation remains a hollow and unfulfilled promise.
Educational opportunities for women have been broadened; more of them enter the portals of educational institutions. But enrolment figures for girls are lower than those for boys and the dropout rates are alarmingly high. New economic opportunities have been opened up and women are taking advantages of them. Invisible discrimination is still practiced against them and, in proportion to their size in the population, are still seriously under-represented in the regular employment sector.

Law, education, and now economic and political opportunities, could have altered the situation rapidly, but the State moved cautiously, perhaps because it did not want to tread on the cultural sensitivities of communities in a tradition-bound society. Since the abolition of Sati, legislation has touched several areas impinging on the status of women. Efforts have been made to correct the abuse of polygamy, the age of marriage has been raised, there is legislation against dowry, divorce laws have been liberalized, there have been some changes in the laws pertaining to guardianship, there is new legislation regarding maintenance, and inheritance laws have been made more favourable to women. But there have been difficulties in implementing the changes in law; some loopholes in them have defeated their purpose. The Hindu Code has to make concessions to traditional practices. Women find it difficult to get their lawful share in family property; they do not enjoy full rights over ‘Stridhan’.

Several forms of gender discrimination emerge from a contradiction in the Indian Constitution. It ensures equality for all before law and prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, but it also guarantees freedom of religion—the right freely to profess, practice, and propagate religion. This provision of religious freedom takes away much of the freedom and equality extended to women by the Constitution. Because family and personal law is rooted in religious codes, women do not have equal rights within the family, or to property. There has been brave talk about a Common Civil Code, but the opposition from orthodoxy and entrenched vested interests unnerves the country’s political leadership, which defers initiatives for a more propitious time in future. The fear of the possible political fallout and the resultant alienation of the religious communities and the loss of vote-banks holds progressive legislation in check. In the process, equality eludes women, not only within the configure of Haryana but in general the social and political system appears geared to continue gender inequality.

Keeping in mind the ethos of the state, some honest effort must be made for changing the face of Haryanvi women as is stated. M.N. Srinivas remarks “It (the changing position of
India women) has many facets and generalization is well nigh impossible because of the existence of considerable variation among regions, between rural and urban areas among classes and finally among different religious ethnic and caste groups." Historian Romila Thapar also refers to the same predicament when she remarks “within the India sub-continent there have been infinite variations on the status of women diverging according to cultural milieu, family, structure, class, caste, property right and morals.”

Unless this is accomplished, the march of the Haryanvi woman, to exploit the legacy of the title 'The Lucky Girl' endowed by it's narrative tradition, is a march to equality, the long and tortuous one.


143 Romila Thapar