Conclusion

The concepts related to the Ballads, the ‘Heroic’, invisible / visible, feudal lords and their victims and women as depicted in the ballads have been dealt with in the Introduction and Chapter I to IV of the thesis. The logical conclusion that can be arrived at in terms of the discussion presented in the preceding chapters, can be summarized as follows.

The ballads form has always been associated with music, and while all ballads don’t have to be sung, most were presented in the form of a song. They were sung and they told stories. Infact, for centuries, ballads were a form of popular art, a form which was not restricted to any special audience, whether of birth, or wealth, or education. If a poem was to be heard by a large and various audience, it needed some special characteristics. It should tell its story in a pretty straightforward way, and it helps if the patterns of the verse are familiar to the audience, and if there is some regular repetition.

The poetry taken up for discussion in this thesis, constituted, the official poetry of the Medieval period, both in the case of English as well Dogri. The ballads were anonymous popular verses, both ruder and more truly alive which cannot be localized or dated with any precision. Their origin cannot be traced to the 14th century and later because they in all probability have an earlier beginning and continued to be produced till a
later time. The impulse to compose them, however, seems to have been particularly active in the late 14th & 15th century, to which most of the oldest specimens belong.

The ballads of both the regions depict feudal age. The minstrels narrated the exploits of feudal lords and border reivers in an exaggerated manner, eulogizing them. Since the ballads were about the heroic deeds of the character involved, are they termed ‘heroic’ poetry. Ballads were composed to entertain the people, narrating their exploits, with emphasis on acts of social responsibility. Dan Ben-Amos relates the social context and folklore in three different forms:

… possession, representation, and creation or re-creation.

Basically, a literal interpretation of the term “folklore” sets up the first type of relationship. Accordingly folklore is “the learning of the people” “the wisdom of the people, the people’s knowledge,” or more fully, “the lore, erudition, knowledge or teaching of a folk.” This view of folklore as the lore shared by the whole group communally applies, in practice and theory, to different degrees of public possession. (5)

The minstrels who were poor illiterate people relied on the knowledge which they gained through different stories and eye-witness accounts of the soldiers who returned safely from the battles. Moreover, it
was discovered that sometimes, the bards also accompanied the warriors to the battlefields. They sung ballads incorporated with chivalry. By doing so, they inspired the soldiers to fight bravely and glorify their ancestors’ name and their motherland. They also recorded the current exploits of the warriors in the battle and instantly composed new ballads, eulogizing their heroic deeds. Gradually, they became court minstrels and entertained the lords with their wit and humour along with the exaggerated tales of their ancestor’s heroism. But Jan Vansina writes:

Eye witness accounts are only partly reliable. Certainly it is true that complex (battle) or unexpected (accidents) events are perhaps rarer than simple, expected events. Yet even here the account remains imperfect. The expectation of the event itself distorts its observation. People tend to report what they expect to see or hear more than what they actually see or hear. To sum up: mediation of perception by memory and emotional state shapes an account. Memory typically selects certain features from the successive perceptions and interprets them according to expectation, previous knowledge, or the logic of “what must have happened,” and fills the gaps in perception. (5)

The idea that these minstrels narrated what they heard or saw, is contradicted. Even if he was himself an eye-witness to the incident, the
narrative which was passed on from one generation to the other by word of mouth, underwent many changes and at each level, new additions and deletions were liable to take place.

Minstrels were men of creative genius and honourable nature, enjoying privileged social and intellectual patronage. Thomas Percy wrote on the position of minstrels in the feudal times. He writes:

… there were grads in this profession as in other, and law-givers doubtless found it necessary to control such Bohemians as wandered about the country without licence. The minstrels of a noble house was distinguished by bearing the badge of his lord attached to a silver chain. (XV)

Since the minstrels were patronized by the feudal lords, they had to be loyal to them. The type of relationship that existed between a patron and his client (the minstrels) was governed by the power. The patron exercised power over the minstrel, not in an active form but rather in a passive way. The fear of being punished or deprived of the patronage prevented the honour of the lord, no matter what the truth might be. He legitimized his acts by subverting the truth. The reward system did not relate to the faithfulness of the reproduction, but only to its pleasing character. Border reivers were cruel people who raided the Anglo-scottish borders and afflicted pains on the poor people as well as the rich. But the ballads glorify these reivers as romantic figures.
The first chapter reveal that the texts of ballads, like other kinds of verse, have often undergone a complex process of change and revision before actually being read. But unlike poems for which an author may write several versions before arriving at a final one, ballads cannot be identified with a single author. Revision still occurs, however, but it is a kind of collective revision, as a ballads is taken up by various performers and often changed—perhaps to meet the expectations of differing audiences, perhaps simply to make better sense to the individual performer. Hence, a ballads was invented, elaborated, refined, and passed along by many singers, whose names and faces cannot be known.

Sir Walter Scott was often blamed by the critics for adopting a sympathetic attitude towards the reivers. The reason behind this is that Scott’s ancestor, Walter Scott of Harden was a notorious reiver of the 16th century. Sir Walter Scott, the poet and writer who compiled the Reiver ballads in his Minstrelsy was his direct descendant. Hence, it may be said about scott that as he himself belonged to one of a border clan, in editing the ballads, Sir Walter Scott took care to include only such matter which glorified the reivers.

Characters in ballads should not be assumed to be accurate reflection of any historic parallel they may have. The ballads may have a personal or political bias, it may have been created or influenced by friends or enemies of the person who actually lived, or it may contain
fictional events. It can be interesting to discover how accurate, or otherwise, the ballad representation is when compared to historic accounts. Certain ballads can be linked to known historic events. They may contain some detailed accounts of incidents which may actually be minor incidents or they made provide a creative interpretation of a well known or notorious event.

The heroes depicted in the ballads are a part of realism, subtlety and modernity of the narrative character drawing. By ‘modernity’ it is not suggested that these characters belong to the 21st century, but to the narrator they were contemporary. They were not summoned from an imaginary part, but created out of the narrators’ own experience of life. The warriors, the women are heroic in the manner in which they grapple with the challenges of time. Minstrels used history to get patronage and attention. They lied about the past to prop the regimes of corrupt feudal lords. But they were not historians.

The definition of a historian being used in this argument would imply that Historians are those who succeed in maintaining their double responsibility to the past and the future.

In Dogri historical ballads (‘Bars’), the heroes were not deified, neither any spiritual power was attributed to them. They were represented as historical personages performing some feats of valour. The objective of these ‘Bars’ was to amuse large gatherings of people at fairs and
festivals and to earn something in return. These ballads were framed
historical events and person, recorded in other sources also or known to
the people at large. The narration underwent a constant change from time
to time according to the requirements of the changing audience and the
family of the patron over centuries. This fact makes the ballads
inaccurate for use as historical data in comparison to scientific historical
sources. Consequently the ballads have failed to add new knowledge
about the events they narrate.

In the second chapter, an attempt was made to explain that Sir
walter Scott hardly portrays the plight of the victims of the border raids,
living on the Anglo Scottish border. He included only three ballads
pertaining to the cattle raids and their victims. The narratives of these
ballads are however, presented in a comic manner. The pain, the agony
and suffering undergone by the poor people is not all described. The
stories proceed comically towards their ends and the victims are
presented as actors of some comic play. This is in contrast to the attention
devoted to the border reivers. Hence, both the minstrel and Sir Walter
Scott, the editor of the *Minstrelsy* have played their respective roles in
making the invisible visible and visible invisible.

As far as Dogri ballads are concerned, the ‘Karaks’ were composed
as devotional songs praising the deities. The victims of the feudal social
system were all deified after they died an unnatural and violent death.
Deification was a mode of apology adopted by the people for fear of receiving the wrath of the dead person. Men as well as women were equally deified as deities after their untimely death. The ballads portray the sufferings of these people while they were alive. Here, the minstrel eulogizes the common man who has been deified.

The third chapter reveals that the ballads collected by Sir Walter Scott are mostly about the deeds of male heroes. The role of women in history of Scotland and England was altogether ignored. They were portrayed as good and faithful wives, as virtuous ladies waiting for their husbands. Reversely, they were also depicted to be involved in vanity and worldliness. In contrast, women in Dogri ballads, the ‘Karaks’, have been eulogized in the same manner as male deities were. The sufferings of a female beginning from her very childhood till her violent and premature death are well visualized in the Dogri ballads. But, the ballads are constructed from a patriarchal point of view. The women who performed Sati either on their own or under the social pressure were deified and revered as heavenly beings. Their sacrifice or murder was accepted casually but given due importance through the ballads in order to reinforce the ideals of sacrifice and chastity among women.

The study of form and technique of the ballads of both English and Dogri origin in Chapter IV reveals that the ballads possessed similar patterns and techniques. Similar characteristics of the ballad poetry are
present in the ballads of both countries, although with little variations and exceptions. These ballads, though separated geographically, share common inherent features and social background.

Ballads are also associated with dance. But in the ballads in English and Dogri, undertaken for this research project, dance as mode of representation has not been referred to since both Dogri and English ballads were more known as narratives. Emphasis was given to the story of the narrative than its tune. The ballads have their ends rhyming like in a song which made it more striking and appealing in their narrative quality. The interesting and attractive tale of the ballads couldn’t be mixed with dancing. It would have deprived the ballads of their actual charm.

Oral history has been increasingly recognized in academia as a valuable contribution to the historical record. Ballads were recorded, transcribed, reread and analyzed. Yet the transcript is not the real narrative and should not be seen as such. Transcription by its very nature must adhere to the rules and regulations of its written language-punctuation marks, for example, that give a sense of the way something was said but do not account for the rhythm or the melody of one’s voice or the variations in diction that emphasize different points or feelings. Narratives convey meaning that can only be perceived by listening, not by reading and simply reading a transcript flattens the emotional context.
Notwithstanding the importance placed on accuracy, ballad narratives often present variations—subtle or otherwise—each time they are told. Narration may adjust a story to place it in context, to emphasize particular aspects of the story or to present a lesson in a new light, among other reasons. Through multiple telling, a story is fleshed out, creating a broader, more comprehensive narrative.

Written histories can also be criticised for they were also written by people employed by the kings and lords. History means ‘his story’ and the contents of the history were the historians’ own stories about the patron. Gulabnama which is a very important chronicle of history of the Jammu and Kashmir State was written by Diwan Kirpa Ram, the Dasturi-Azam of the state. The title page of the historical record mentions that Gulabnama is, “…compiled on the orders of the benevolent and exalted. …Sri Maharaja Ranbir Singh Sahib, G.C.S.I., the Ruler of Jammu and Kashmir State.”

The character of Mian Deedo is discussed in a chapter entitled “Chastisement of the Wicked Rebels” which states, “While his lordship was staying at Riasi it was reported to him that the rebels Bhupdev and Dido had stretched their hand of tyranny on Dansal” (83).

These facts prove that history was written on the order of the rulers and ‘historians’ were paid for that. These historical chronicles were shaped and fabricated according to the wills of the ruling class. Writing
against them meant severe punishment. A learned and well educated historian came under pressures of the power structure, and also a poor and an illiterate minstrel. The invisible is present even in the historical documents and the visible is constructed to suit the power structure.

Written history does not present a dialogue so much as a static record of an authority’s singular recounting of a series of events. Readers may interpret these writings, but the writing itself remains the same. Oral narratives, on the other hand, do not have to be told exactly the same way. What is fundamental is whether or not they carry the same message.

Oral tradition, is therefore, a collective enterprise. A narrator does not generally hold singular authority over a story. The nuances evident in distinct versions of a specific history represent a broader understanding of the events and the various ways through which people have internalized them. Often, oral histories must be validated by the group. This stems from the principle that no one person can lay claim to an entire oral history.

Lakshmi Narain and Sansar Chand state that Dogri ballad tradition and

Ballad public dwindled from the scene of ballad recitation into offices and factories and the soft music of the minstrels was drowned into the crude whir of the steam engines. Industrialization dealt a heavy blow to rural crafts
consequent upon which the rural population was dislocated and lost many of its ballad tradition. (29)

Nothing could be more absurd than the above statement. Where and when was the whir of steam engines heard? Jammu had never been an industrial town, or a factory workers’ abode. The available criticism on Dogri ballads has made no serious efforts to study the sociological origins of the poem. The above statement may apply to the ballad tradition in England partially but it is totally misleading as far as Dogri ballads are concerned.

However, the demise of ballad tradition can be attributed to the decline of the feudal social structure and development of new modes of representation in Literature.

The English and Dogri ballads are similar in many respects. If they are removed of their local and historical backdrop, they will hardly have anything to discriminate them from each other. Not only they narrate gripping tales of men and women but afford an insight into the minds of the medieval man.