

## Folk songs and sacred places preserving culture and promoting tourism: A study of prominent areas in Himachal Pradesh

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Amrik Singh, <sup>2</sup>Vipasha

<sup>1</sup>Working as Tourism Expert in Himachal Adventure Leisure and Holiday, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India

<sup>2</sup>Research scholar, H.P.U Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India

### Abstract

Tourism is an activity developing our economy. And culture is the complete whole that consists of everything we think and do and have as member of society. The word culture is used in many senses. In common language it means dance, music, languages, art belief and literature. There have been many factors which influenced our culture. In our country the basic culture had to pass through many changes. It was Mughal period, British regime and external attacks which tried to shake our culture. Similarly, Himachal Pradesh is known for its rich culture. Although it remained cut off from outside world because of its geographical location, yet its grand culture cannot be unnoticed even today. This topographical condition made its people conservative. It is lack of communication and primitive attitude which is dangerous to our society. But with the passage of time the influence of modern and outside culture also influenced the culture of Himachal Pradesh. The present paper is an attempt to explore how folk songs and religious places are helpful in preserving culture and promoting tourism. This paper also discusses leading themes like women, religion, secular culture, and patriarchy and marriage festivity.

**Keywords:** Folk songs, sacred places preserving culture, promoting tourism

### 1. Introduction

Tourism is an activity enhancing our economic, social, and cultural life. Basically, "Tourism presents unexcelled possibilities for people to gain direct knowledge of each other's ways" (Sharma 195). It is tourism which promotes and preserves our culture. Sometimes, there are many factors which are helpful in promoting tourism and preserving culture. Although there have been much data-based analysis on tourism and culture and it has been looked at through many perspectives, yet a few areas perceptible before us are still unexplored. The present paper focuses on how folk songs and sacred places are helpful in preserving culture and promoting Tourism.

Coming to Folk culture, it refers to the unifying communicative components of everyday life as enacted by localized, tradition-bound groups; whereas folk literature refers to myths, legends, epics, fables, and folktales passed down orally by word of mouth through the generations. Most of the times, the authors of folk literature are usually anonymous. They endured because they are entertaining, represent the cultural belief system and they hold fundamental human truths by which people have lived for centuries. Being aware of the stories, songs, characters and situations of folk literature is part of being culturally literate.

Over a period of time oral literatures have been recorded and transcribed by various scholars in the field. Ever since the register of folk literatures has been greatly enriched by a variety of proverbs, idioms and phrases of folk manners and life. Most important of all Proverbs are an integral part of language. Sapir, regards them as a "culture preserving instrument" (qtd. in Bande 141). The consideration of proverbs and riddles in relation to ecology [society] raises a question of relationship between culture and festivities on the one hand and culture and language on the other" (Bande 141). Similarly one

finds folk theatre which "is rural, community based, improvised, exuberant, wanton, flexible, inclusive, and of course 'theatrical', as opposed to the classical which is elitist, refined, fixed, exclusive and primarily verbal and literary"(Singh 14). She further says that folk theatre dealing with mythological tales provides dramatic situations of conflict, moral dilemmas and melodramatic scenes of violent happenings. And while handling mythological themes in folk theatre, one can find connective elements of contemporary life, social issues, and wit and humour with topical jokes. These forms readily include individual innovations and adapt themselves to the changing socio-historical milieu (Singh 14). The above discussion has been made to present a backdrop to understand the specific debate within which this paper locates itself and to create a dialogue between the language and the content of folk songs. Of all forms of folklore, folk songs are the most popular, easily accessible and entertainable. They do not require any listener as a folk-tale requires nor do they need any audience as a folk theatre does. A singer may sing in the fields, among the forests, on the mountain tops and in the deep village all alone to his own joy and amusement. If any one hears or listens a singer he might get appreciation, but if none hears him he takes pleasure in what he sings. Folk songs are sung by the people in the village without any rhyme or reason. These "folk songs reflect their happiness, misery, problems and worries" (Sareen 271).

Not only the form but the content of a folk song enhances the inherent dynamic character of a song. The folk songs are most enjoyed forms of folklore because they may have a rhyme or a musical tone which makes them easily imaginable, memorable and more stable. In the words of Upadhyaya "folk songs are like the fragrant flowers from the gardens of human heart plucked with deep devotion"(15).

Himachal Pradesh has a rich reservoir of folk songs. They are the initial and truest expression of hill-life and are of incredible interest during various public festivities. They give a glimpse of the State's history, religion and culture of its people. Usha Bande observes that "behind the creation of the folk music, songs and dance there is a potent psychological factor: the human need to assert and preserve identity" (137).

Diverse folk songs are sung on different occasions in different places of Himachal Pradesh. Ritual songs are also the preservers of our culture. These folk songs are sung during the presentation of various rituals. For instance, birth of a boy is an event of merry-making where women-folk of the neighbourhood congregate to sing *Mangal* songs. "They cover up the entire life span of the hill people from womb to tomb" (Thakur 205). There are festival songs too which are apprehended throughout the year and no festival is complete unless it is accompanied by songs for those occasions. For example, *Chatter*, the first month of the year is celebrated with harmonious songs in extol of Gods. Festivals like *Lohri* and *Maghi* are the occasions in which many explicit songs are sung by the people of a village. Another form of folk songs is heroic songs. These songs are sung in the honour of heroic deeds performed by the soldiers. These songs are also in the form of letters which mirror the state of mind and restlessness of the wives of the soldiers. These songs reveal how our grand culture has been. Likewise, there are devotional and divine songs which are sung in praise of Gods and Goddesses like *Rama*, *Krishna*, *Jwalamukhi Ma* and *Bhagvati Ma* etc. In hills, the songs of *Devi Ma* are very popular. Likewise, patriotic songs are sung in honour of the State e.g. '*Lage dhola ra dhamaka, himachal bara banka*'. One also has a rich tradition of love songs in the State which include *Kunju-Chanchlo*, *Ranjha-Phulmo* and *Suni-Bhunku* signifying faithfulness, pure love between husband and wife. The main themes of these songs are love, chivalry, village gossips, sacrifices, prayers and seasons. As discussed earlier most of the songs are based on love themes. They do not recognize the barriers of caste or colour. All these songs remind us our great culture and are helpful in preserving it even today.

Besides, numerous marriage songs are sung throughout the Himachal Pradesh reflecting our grand culture. Marriages in Himachal Pradesh like in other states of India are settled by parents. There are many ceremonies performed during the marriage on both sides, but largely the financial/ceremonial burden is borne by the bride's father. The bride's parents/relatives have to perform more ceremonies during marriage. Since the present paper focuses on folk songs here we have a glimpse of a marriage festivity, it may be noted these songs are sung mainly by a group of women who belong to bridegroom and bride. There are many songs which are sung only for the sake of entertainment. For example, the songs called *Suhags* like *Kajjo aaye sunehri pagg bann ke, asaan beiti nahaio bhejhni. Aasaan aaye chaaron bhai leike, chaaron saajan leike doli paake leiye jaanna* etc. Such songs are essential part of marriage ceremonies but do not essentially contain any satiric or comic elements. *Suhags* are generally witty and can be meditative and can enhance the solemn ambience of marriage festivities.

Exploring enough, various songs sung during marriage festivities are specific to certain ceremonies like *Neundra* (invitation), *Battna* (Haldi), *Saand* (oil ceremony), *Jalpuja* (water ceremony), *Milni* (welcome/greeting), *Vadhu Pravesh*

(welcoming bride in groom's house) etc. Herein the focus is the marriage folk songs specifically sung in Hamirpur district of Himachal Pradesh. This area has been taken shortly for the analysis. The representative songs contain elements of satire/*gaaliyan*/abuses sung by a group of women in both households which exist in our culture. A few such songs have been personally recorded and transcribed by the present researchers from women who belong to rural areas of Hamirpur district.

-I-

The following section of the paper focuses on a close reading of *Sithniyan* (teasing songs/abusing songs) which are chiefly aimed at towards men-folk/bridegroom/bride sung by women/girls of both households. These songs are sung during specific marriage ceremonies in a light-hearted way for entertainment.

The first ceremony in the category of *Sithniyan* is called *Saand* (oil ceremony) which is performed by the relatives on both sides. *Saand* performed in bridegroom's house is of special interest in which women make satirical comments on bridegroom's father, brothers, friends, maternal uncles etc. Women-folk sing satirical songs such as:

*Larre da Peio tel pawaan laggeya  
Hath kamne lagge, nakk churme laggeya  
Jalya paisaya o Joru te choriya rakhaya tha  
Larre da Bhai tel pawaan laggeya  
Hath kamne lagge, nakk churme laggeya  
Jalya paisaya o Joru te choriya rakhaya tha*

Roughly translated the song is read as:

"Father of bridegroom is pouring oil  
His hands are shaky and his nose is blowing,  
What worth is such money which he has kept secretly  
from his wife?  
Brother of bridegroom is pouring oil  
His hands are shaky and his nose is blowing,  
What worth is such money which he has kept secretly  
from his wife?"

These lines are instructive of a satire on the relatives of bridegroom. The song is sung when oil ceremony is in progress in bridegroom's house and women-folk mock at the father/friend/maternal uncle of the bridegroom for being misers and for hiding their money which has to be otherwise offered to a *Pandit* as a reward for performing the ceremony. Oil ceremony is most important part of our culture during marriage. The song is a good example of the freedom enjoyed by women to speak freely against their male-counterparts without any fear of retribution. During such ceremonies women get a license because "customs grants the right to certain freedom and familiarity, the right to break the usual norms of social relations" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1965) 200-201).

Similarly the following song presents the well-known *Jija-Sali* relationship. Wherein girls (friends and sisters of the bride) get a opportunity to mock at the bridegroom.

*Do do paise dendhiyan  
Do do paise dendhiyan  
Bhedon charo mere Jija, mai teri Sali hundhiyan  
Hathe rasi dendhiyan, nalle draati dendhiyan*

*Ghah bado mere Jija, mai teri Sali hundhiyan*

Roughly translated the song reads:

“We will give you two paise-2  
Take my sheep for grazing, I am your sister-in-law.  
I will give you a rope and a sickle.  
Cut grass my brother-in-law, I am your sister-in-law”

During the marriage, other ritual songs are also sung when the *baraat* (bridegroom’s marriage procession) comes to take food at the bride’s place. While the members of *baraat* are having their food, the women-folk of bride’s house sing a few songs which in particular mock at the insatiable appetite of the bridegroom and his relatives. For instance:

*Larra satta dina da bhukha, grahiyan khoob marda*  
*Jida Amma ne tor dita bhukha, grahaiyan khoob marda*  
*Aadhi ni khanda, puri ni khanda thaliyan jo marda*  
*muchan*  
*Grahiyan khoob marda*  
*Lajorru satta dina da bhukha grahiyan khoob marda*  
*Jida Jorru ne tor dita bhukha, grahiyan khoob marda*

Roughly translated:

“Bridegroom is hungry since seven days, and he is stuffing himself with food  
As if his mother sent him hungry, he is stuffing himself with food  
Not half, not full but he is hogging the full plate  
He is stuffing himself with food  
Friend of bridegroom is also hungry since seven days; he is stuffing himself with food  
As if his wife sent him hungry, and he is stuffing himself with food

Or yet another song sung on a similar occasion:

*Mirchan charperiya chaneya di daal karaari-2*  
*Larra khai kari hor mangada, botiye karchhi maari*  
*Labada te khoon aa gaya, mukadma ho gaya jaari.*  
*Mircha charpariyan chaneya di daal karaari-2*  
*Larre da babu khai kari hor mangada, botiye karcchi maari.*  
*Mircchan charpariya chaneya di daal karaari-2*  
*Larre da Jija khai kari hor mangada, botiye botiye karchhi maari*  
*Mirchan charpariya chaneya di daal karaari-2*

Roughly translated:

“Daal of gram is full of chilies.  
After having the daal, the bridegroom asks for more, cooks hit him with the serving spoon  
His lips start to bleed and a court case ensues  
Daal of gram is full of chilies  
Father of bridegroom asks for more, cooks hit him with the serving spoon  
Brother-in-law of bridegroom asks for more, cooks hit him with the serving spoon.  
Daal of gram is full of chilies”

These are occasions which give women a opportunity to reprimand and subvert the male authority. In Bakhtinian sense these women play a role of carnival clowns who have “the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His*

*World* 163). The above songs not only indulge in rebuking but also make telling comments on the cultural life of people in the region. It also appraises the reader of the cookery culture of the region. Reference to lentils like yellow gram daal cooked for the occasion or *botis* (cooks) are suggestive of *Dham* culture – a specialized way of cooking peculiar to Himalayan region. This *Dham* culture is microcosm of the whole culture in Himachal Pradesh preserving our great culture. It is the time when everyone comes and sits together and eats food.

Here is a suitable example of a philosophic/ consequential song which not only expresses the sadness of parting with their daughter but also comments on the patriarchal system which does not allow the girl any say in the property of her parents:

*Charke da tand maaye charkha ch raheya, dudh raheya*  
*kadhaiye mai chaliye jaana*  
*Ann bi dinghe dhiye, dhan bi dinghe, hor dinghe jagiraan,*  
*dhiye nahiyon jaana*  
*Ann taa dhan teriyan nuuhan lenne, putran ne leniyan*  
*jagiran, mai chaliyan jaana*

Roughly translated:

“O! My mother, the thread remains in the *charkha* and leftover milk is in vessel, I am to go to my in-law’s house  
We will give you bread, money and even share in property, O! My daughter don’t go.  
My mother! Bread and money will be taken by your daughter-in-law and property will be had by your son.  
So I must leave”

When the bride reaches bridegroom’s house a salutation song is sung by women-folk of bridegroom’s village in an ironic sense:

*Kothe heth basera, hun sassu fikra pei gaiya mera*  
*Tai khai laiya bathera duaye laiya bathera, hun ghar-*  
*baar hoyi gaya mera*  
*Kothe heth basera, hun sassu firka pei gaiya mera,*  
*Jethaniye tai khai laiya bathera, duaye laiya bathera,*  
*hun ghar-baar hoyi gaya mera*

Roughly translated:

“Now this is my house and my mother-in-law is worried  
You have eaten enough and have led a luxurious life so far, now this house is mine  
Now this is my house and my mother-in-law is worried  
Sister-in-law you have eaten enough and have led a luxurious life so far, now this house is mine”

The above a small number of songs show how women remark other women. When the bride reaches at the bridegroom’s house, she is not treated well by her mother-in-law. It is because she is for the moment at the margins of power and is still an outsider in the family. On the other side, after sometime the newlywed bride becomes a lawful member of the family and has a legitimate right on whatever belongs to bridegroom. Her right to property of bridegroom shows the position of the bride in the family where she is married. This reversal of position of women is reflected through these above songs. Now the newlywed bride may or may not hold a position of power in the new household. Such types of songs are sung during marriage ceremonies in most of the areas of Himachal Pradesh which are helpful in preserving our culture.

## -II-

In Himachal Pradesh sacred places like Temples, Churches, Monasteries, and Gurudwaras play an important role in preserving our culture and promoting Tourism. It is observed that the ancient art of this state has survived in the form of temple architecture, wood carvings, and metal sculpture. Religious sites are good source of tourism. It is "Tourism that can also help to raise awareness of local population about the financial value of natural and cultural site and make them proud of their being part of the heritage and need for its conservation" (qtd in M. Sarngadharan 102). Besides, there are numerous factors which make our culture great and promote tourism. The following are some select sacred places in Himachal Pradesh, have been visited by the scholar and came to the point wherefrom one can have a glimpse of cultural grandeur enhancing tourism:

First and foremost, in Shimla, Jakhu Hill is the highest peak offering panoramic view of the town and the mountains. Hanuman temple of Jakhu is very famous for its huge statue which attracts many people. "According to legend, Hanumanji took some rest here when he was carrying a hill *Sanjiwani booti* (a herb to save the life of Lakshmana, the younger brother of Lord Rama)" (Balokhra 828). This place is site for the attraction for those tourists who are not only from India but also from abroad. Besides, a Hindu belief in Hanuman is reflected in this place. And a massage is given through the story of Hanuman's *Sanjiwani booti* where he obeys his master Rama and saves the life of Lakshman. He did it without worrying the obstacles came in his way. It is already found in Puranas and ancient books that how rich our culture has been. So such religious places invite many devotee of Hanumanji from all over India. Another site is the Catholic Church which stands grandly on the ridge at Shimla. It is considered the second oldest church in the North India. It has a very magnificent look and inside there are stained glass windows which symbolize faith, love, hope charity, patience and humanity. It was built in 1857. It is the icon of Shimla and no picture is complete without it. The structure of the Church is noted for its Neo-Gothic architecture. Its historical value attracts many people to visit it.

In Kulu, Manali is a small town where one can notice the glimpse of Manu temple. According to legend, the great Hindu law giver 'Manu', after the great torrent, first stepped on to earth from the celestial boat at a place in this island. The particular spot where he recognized his abode was the present Manali which is regarded as the changed name of Manu-Alaya, the home of Manu. It was here that the human race came into existence. A small temple dedicated to Manu still exists in Manali village. This temple is symbol of our culture reflecting religious story of Hindu Shastra. Such temples are examples of our human race preserving our grand culture. It is world's only temple of the first man of human race in the earth inviting several visitors to have a glimpse of it.

Hadimba Devi Temple also known as Doongri Temple "dedicated to the Goddess Hidimba, the wife of Bhima" ( Balokhra 771) is situated in Manali. It reminds us of time of Pandavas. It has four tiered pagoda-shaped roof with a doorway carved with figures and symbols. Although carving is simple, yet it beauty can never be ignored. It is heard that this temple has been built by Raja Bahadur Singh of Kullu. On his order both hands of the Chief Workman were chopped, so that he should not build another temple of equal appeal and style. In Himachal Pradesh there are numerous pagoda-style temples.

Hadimba temple is one of them. Aesthetically, Pagoda style is the most interesting of all. It is believed that it came to this region from Nepal, where it is common to most of the temples in Kathmandu. So this style of art attracts many tourists to have a glimpse of it. And it preserves our ancient culture of art in a very vivid way.

Tabo Monastery in Spiti, is the seat of one of the most famous Buddhist monasteries - *Sherlang, Duang, Chamba Chibbo, Domlang Gompas* regarded by many as only next to the *Tholung Gompa* in Tibet. This monastery was built by a Western Tibet ruler named Ye-Sashoad around the year 996 AD., with the inspiration from a Buddhist scholar Rinchen Jango. Tabo monastery is definitely the oldest and archaeologically the most significant monastery of Spiti. Pirta says that "it is full of artistic merit"(Pirta 186). It is believed that forty six long years were taken in its completion by the workmen who had come from Kashmir, Kullu and Swat alike far off and difficult places. Tabo is also known as the Ajanta of the Himalayas. In the present time, these caves are being renovated and preserved by Archaeological department of India. It is in the plan of UNESCO. This place is attracting many people from abroad also and promoting tourism to a large extent.

In Kangra, Chamunda Devi Temple is situated on the right bank of the Baner stream with the Dhauladhar as a backdrop, this has an idol of Goddess Chamunda, who, it is said, was the given the boon to fulfill the desires of those who worshipped her. On the back of the temple is a cave niche where a stone Lingam under a boulder represents Nandi Keshwar (shiva). Besides, Jwalamukhi, the 'Flaming Goddess' is one of the most popular Hindu temples in Northern India. There is no idol but the flame is considered a manifestation of the Goddess. The eternal flame issues from the rock sanctum and is constantly fed by the priests. It is heard that "the great Mughal Emperor Akbar had visited this place to test its originality" (Balokhra 761). Two important fairs are held during the Navratras, in early April and in mid October. These temple of Ma Chamunda Devi and Jawalmukhi are symbols of our great culture. Thousands of people come to these places during *Navratre*.

The Gurudwara of Paonta Sahib has been built on the bank of the river Yamuna on the spot where Guru Govind Singh dismounted from his horse after arriving at Paonta. Balokhra says that "the shrine is an architecture marvel" (848). It is the largest Gurudwara of Himachal Pradesh. In architectural point of view, it is one of the best specimens. And it is popular all over India. The Sikh community has an important place in our grand culture. So the place is the symbol of love, respect and unity attracting many people from far and wide.

The Renuka Lake is a religious place in Sirmaur district. It is surrounded by lush green forests supporting a variety of animal and bird life. It is not only an idyllic holiday resort but also revered Pilgrim centre. It is believed that "the Parshuram Taal, which appears shaped in the profile of a sleeping lady, was created to mark the immortality of Renuka, the wife of Rishi Jamdagni"(849). It is also said that Rishi Jamdagni unhappy with his wife Renuka, ordered his son Parshuram to behead her. The son obeyed his father's wish. Pleased at Parshuram's loyalty the Rishi granted his son a wish and Parshuram asked for the restoration of his mother to life. Consequently, the reunion of mother and son is celebrated at the annual Renuka fair in the month of November. This place is also promoting tourism and preserving our grand culture.

Summing up the present topic, it has been observed that folk songs are a significant part of our cultural heritage. A closer look has brought to notice the diverse cultural meanings these songs carry. In the present paper first section demonstrates that oral literatures go beyond the entertainment realm alone. Folk songs sung in rural India during certain festivities have enriched our cultural awareness. Such songs, folk theatre and other oral literature are helpful in mapping our cultural growth. Beside cultural significance, these songs have aesthetic value too. The second section of this paper touches on the sacred areas of Himachal Pradesh which are helpful in promoting tourism and preserving our grand culture. Besides, the present paper also demonstrates that oral literatures do not only entertain, but create a space in which rural women can engage in challenging social relations and patriarchal discourse. The songs amply demonstrate that women feel briefly empowered to subvert patriarchal oppression. These songs depict how social and gendered power relations are challenged during marriage festivities. This section also explores diverse ways in which power relations are played out in the familial space and the different ways in which women diffuse or negate these relations. The reading of the songs does not only concern itself with the marginal position occupied by wife/mother/daughter-in-law in the familial space, but also examines ways in which the position of mother/wife/daughter-in-law fluctuates from the margins to the centre of power. The closer analysis of songs shows that these women are not powerless all the time. Although with the rise of globalization and technology the tradition of these songs is fading. These songs are being gradually replaced with the use of recorded popular film music which is now played during village marriages. Village folk songs may be collected and transcribed by scholars in future to understand how such songs have been providing a carnivalesque space for women keeping them empowered since decades to bring down male hegemony howsoever briefly. Besides, sacred places in Himachal Pradesh are the symbols of secular culture. The Temples, Guradwaras, Churches and Monasteries are looked at and regarded just as without any discrimination. This secular culture attracts many people to come and forced them to invest their earned income. These places have become a source of income to the State. So the sacred places are playing a very significant role in the growth of our economy. Last but not least, these sacred places have historical, social, cultural and religious values bringing forth a great development in our economic and cultural life.

## References

1. Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helen Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965, 1984.
2. ---*Rabelais and His World*. Cambridge, Mass: the M.I.T. Press, 1965.
3. Bande, Usha. *Folk Traditions and Ecology in Himachal Pradesh*. Indus Publishing Company, 2006.
4. Sareen TR. *Folklore of India*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1993.
5. Singh, Pankaj. *Representing Woman: Tradition, Legend and Punjabi Drama*. Shimla: IIAS, 2000.
6. Thakur MR. *Folklore of Himachal Pradesh*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 2006.
7. Upadhyaya HR. *Bhojpuri Folk Songs from Ballia*. Lakecity: India Enterprises Incorporated, 1988.
8. Balokhra, Jag Mohan. *The Wonderland Himachal Pradesh*. New Delhi: H.G Publication, 1995.
9. Pirta K Devendra. *Himachal Pradesh: The Himalayan State*. Shimla: J.M.D Publications, 2006.
10. Sarngadharan MG Raju. *Tourism and Sustainable Economic Development*. New Delhi: New Century Publication, 2005.
11. Sharma KK. *Tourism and Culture*. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 1999.