

SINGING FOLKSONG IN DOGRA WEDDINGS

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Abstract

Folksongs play a significant role in fulfilling the rituals of various rites and ceremonies prevalent in the society. In India, even now, hardly any wedding is performed or a child birth celebrated without folksongs. The numerous calendaric fasts and festivals would be considered incomplete without the recounting of traditional tales and the singing of the folksong meant for occasion. Thus, the daily life of an average man, from birth to death, finds an expression in folksongs. In Dogra society marriage is considered as a divine relationship between man and woman which is also considered as a relationship of a previous life and celebrated with great enthusiasm and spirit. Dogra women sing different types of wedding songs at different stages of the marriage ritual from *sagan*, *butna*, *tamol ghodi*, *dal chariye*, *sithniyan*, *milni*, *ved*, *vidaai*, *paani vaarna* to many others. This paper makes an attempt to study the most interesting and enjoyable part of Dogra wedding, the wedding songs: its topics, singing circumstances and importance.

Key Words: Dogra, Dogri, Folksong, Ghorian, Suhaag, Wedding.

1 Introduction:

Dogra weddings are famous for their rich customs, fun-filled ceremonies, color and frolic, which are woven into the community's socio-cultural fabric. The rituals and ceremonies are not as elaborate in the cities as in the villages, but the tradition of women's singing as an integral part of these rituals and ceremonies is still as strong in the cities as in the villages. Dogra women sing different types of marriage songs at different stages of the wedding ritual to make these ceremonies joyful. Actually these songs can be specifically called as women songs where women voice their inner world, their thoughts, feelings, their sense of worth dignity and power. The women not only sing these songs to rejoice but it also certainly takes off the tensions and apprehensions in the minds of the parents of the bride-to-be, as also the bride and the groom. Previously this was perhaps the only way of enlivening the atmosphere and to get everyone into the mood. Almost all of them have some relevance and show love and affection of family members and relatives with bride or bridegroom as well. Besides values such cooperation, courtesy, social status, relationship, beauty, habits, wisdom, tolerance, moral duties personality etc are also reflected through them. In a traditional Dogra wedding, songs are sung in groups at the time of performing different rituals and customs such as at that time of preparation of marriage, at the time of carrying clay from nearby field to make *Chullha* for cooking *Saant*. After taking *Sagan*, woman from the neighborhood and female relatives start coming every evening to participate in singing songs. The wedding family delivers oral invitation to the neighborhood for geet called *Geetain da sadda* after dinner so that the women can come easily without upsetting their usual household work. Young children and babies accompany their mothers and the atmosphere is very informal. The musical instrument to accompany the singing is usually a *dholaki*. Traditionally a barbers' wife (*nain*) was assigned the task of conveying the invitation personally to the women of the neighborhood.

2 Duggar and Dogras:

Jammu region, the land of Dogras is located on the map of India on the northern part bordering Punjab in the south, Kashmir in the North and Himachal Pradesh in the east. It is located between Latitude 32° 22' to 34° 10' latitude and 75° 39' to 78° 28' longitude in the east. It has an area of 8539 sq. miles comprising the outer plain, the outer hill and middle mountain (*Jyoteeshwar Pathik*). The word 'Dogra' has been derived from the Sanskrit term '*durgara*' which was used in two *Chamba-cooper* plate title-deeds of *Raja Ashtavarman*

(1330-40) mentioning events of the day of his ancestor. In Sanskrit, the term stand for *difficult terrain* which later changed to *Duggar*, and the inhabitants acquired the name *Dogra* (*S.D.S. Charak*). The Dogras are of the Aryan race and are divided into castes in the same way, as the Hindus of India with some local variation. The culture, language, literature, art and other symbols have found respectable place among another notable tradition of India. Dogras by virtue of their blood were fearless warriors and are known for their valor, who engaged themselves all along the ages either to extend their kingdom and involved themselves in attacks and battles, defended their soil from foreign invasions. In fact, the Dogras consolidated the state in its present political and geographical unity. As Jammu and Kashmir consist of three regions: Jammu, the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh, Jammu is a compact region that symbolizes Dogra ethos and identity.

3 Dogra Wedding:

The Dogra are exogamous, they marry into the clans' *gotras* other their own. Marriage within blood relation is considered as incest. The marriage system was of three types:

1. *Dharma or Punn*, (virtuous) in which nothing was accepted from the bridegroom's side.
2. *Dohari or batta-satta*, (two handed) i.e. exchange among the families.
3. *Sale purchase marriage* in which a payment was made for the bride.

Youngsters of marriageable age do not enjoy the freedom of selecting the spouse of their own choice. The selection is the exclusive privilege of the parents or guardians as it is believed that the children, however grown up they may be, would not, because of lack of experience be able to make correct choice, but the more advanced ones almost always take the girls' consent before making a commitment. Negotiations for marriage are initiated by a person called *ravara* on behalf of the girls' parents by a close common friend or relative sometime *purohit* or *barber* who is supposed to be impartial and capable of bringing the two families together. He neither demands nor is paid any remuneration for his service as the act of match making is considered as *punna karaj* (an act of merit). He arranges the modalities in connection with the marriage and remains present throughout all ceremonies of the marriage. At the satisfaction of both the families, a ceremony, known as *thaka*, (Pre-engagement) is performed before marriage, when a token sum, which may be one rupee, or according to the wish of the girl's parents of girl. After sometime the rituals of *sagan* (engagement) are fixed and *tikka* or *tilak* is sent to the boy's residence. The brother of the girl, along with some cousins and friends, which consists of dry fruit, sweets, fruits, at least one silver rupee and a large pink or red scarf. The guests are served tea and traditional Dogra sweets. After serving tea tilak is applied by the girl's brother to the bridegroom's forehead with the chanting of the mantras by the *pandit* and singing folksongs by the women. The date of marriage is fixed and communicated to the boy's parents. The wedding ceremonies start on a day reckoned by an astrologer as suitable to initiate the wedding in both houses. Usually this ceremony is performed fifteen to ten days prior to the marriage day. The mother invites the women of the neighborhood to collect clay from the near field for making Chullha for the wedding day where the Saant cooked. They share the works and thus, mark the beginning of the proposed marriage function.

4 Importance of wedding songs in Dogra Marriage:

Wedding songs are one of the most important elements of Dogra marriage ceremony. These songs are the most interesting and popular in all the *Sanskara* songs. Singing of songs by the womenfolk enlivens the proceedings of a marriage in Duggar as in many other parts of India. The singing of songs is intimately connected with the various customs and rites, after giving an insight into their nature. In addition to reflecting the life of the Dogra people, these folksongs also reveal much about their aspirations, values and goals. These are the product of the creative mind of the uneducated women folk and it has its roots deep in the tradition and is preserved in memory. By hearing these songs one can be able to know what ritual is going on in one Dogra marriage ceremony, because the womenfolk describe the situation very skillfully through these songs. In Dogra traditional marriage system, there are different stages and in every stage, there are different types of songs which reflect its importance. The songs sung in each of these days are different: containing different tunes and different sentiments. In fact these songs are the echo of the young spouses' feelings, which draw attention to

their hopes, desires, dreams and joys of their forthcoming life and wedding folksongs of the Dogra culture, helps us in understanding the social, religious and cultural life of their community, besides understanding the psychology of the their human nature.

5 Types of Wedding Songs:

The woman from the neighborhood and female relatives start coming every evening to participate in singing songs and express the overwhelming emotion of joy and delight on his/her marriage. There are two types of wedding songs those that are sung at the bride's house are called *suhaag*. Suhag is a type of nuptial song about the bride, expressing her feelings about departing from her parental home for in-laws. In these songs one finds a mixture of joy, grief and they also manifest the sorrow of a father's "loss" (i.e. of his daughter and property). Mostly these are sung by the bride to express her emotion, and some of which are sung by her friends to try to make her weep, are used throughout the wedding ceremony which describe a girl's birth, childhood, and adolescence, as well as parent's feelings towards her. Some songs describe a mother's tender and loving feelings for a daughter, while others depict the daughter as a source of misery.

बाबल जी वर लोड़िये

O father dear, find a match for me,

बेटी केहा-जेहा वर लोड़िये?

What is the kind you want for a match?

जि'यां तारें च चन्न

A best star like a moon

चन्ना च कान्ह, कन्हैया वर लोड़िये।

A *Kanh*¹ among such moons, find Krishna for me.

Krishna is considered a model of perfection (*solan kalan samproon*) and he is not only worshipped but also commonly portrayed as an ideal groom in Dogra culture. In this song a maiden is freely expressing her wish about her future husband to her father. She asks him to find a groom for her and in reply the father asks her what kind of match does she want? Her answer is highly figurative: She desires a match like a moon, the best among the stars, rather a Krishna the moon of the moons. Let *Kanhaiya* (Lord Krishna) be my match.

5.1 Ghorian

Those that are sung at the bridegroom's house are called *ghorian*, describes the groom, his would-be bride, his relatives, and the wedding rituals performed at his house. It is thought that the use of horses on the battlefield in South Asia began with the coming of the Aryans . It must have been as an analogy , then, to the way warriors rode onto the field of war , that the groom in a wedding used a mare (ghori) for traveling to marry the bride. Even today, for domestic uses, a rider on a horse may be used when speed is a requirement. Thus the ghori (mare) became part of the joyous rituals of a wedding. And with songs sung in praise of the groom being customary, these must have come to be known as *ghoriañ*. (*Nahar Singh*). They sing, dance, mimic, and act. These songs are sung by the sisters and other women of the groom's family pertain to the activities of the groom on the day of the marriage, his ceremonial bath, his elegant dress. As the wedding day approaches nearer several ceremonies are performed in succession and there are number of songs for each ceremony.

5.2 Butna Geet

Thereafter before one day of wedding *Butna* ceremony is performed in which the prospective bride and bridegroom are anointed with butna mixture which comprises of a scented powder consisting of *barley flour*, *turmeric*, *samggri* (herbs) and *mustard oil* at their respective homes. The women of the house sing songs especially dedicated to this occasion and apply this paste on their bodies. Then their maternal uncle performs a ceremony called *Barre Bharna* and lifts them into the house.

¹ Lord Krishna

तुगी बुटना मलना आई आं बीरा
 We are here to smear butna on you, O brother,
 अगें भैनां पिच्छें भरजाईयां बीरा
 Sisters followed by *bhabhis*², O brother,
 अगें चाचियां पिच्छें तेरियां ताईयां बीरा
 With *chachis*⁶ followed by *tais*³, O brother.

The paste serves as a cleanser for the body and signifies the bride or grooms' preparation and welcoming into adult married life. All close relatives turn by turn apply this paste on their bodies. Later, some family members, usually jeeja/saali or devar/bhabhi anoint each other with the same paste and there prevails an atmosphere of happiness and gaiety.

5.3 *Sehrabandi Geet*

After a bath the bridegroom puts on his wedding dress which consists of a new pair of clothes, a turban, a new pair of shoes and socks and a sword by his side. As for the boy when he gets ready, his sisters tie *sehra* to his head to the accompaniment of appropriate songs. Hence this ceremony is called as *sehrabandi*.

सेह्रा पाई लो बीरा कल तुसें सौहे जाना-2
 Wear *shera*⁴, O brother, As you go to your in-laws tomorrow-2,
 जेबां भरी लो बीरा लोंग लाची दाना।
 Stuff your pockets with, clove and cardamom seeds
 ओहू केहू करने भैने लोंग लाची दाना
 Why do I need O sister, clove and cardamom seeds,
 साली मंगदी बीरा लोंग लाची दाना
*Salli*⁵ may ask for O brother, clove and cardamom seeds.

The Sister is telling to his brother to tie *sehra* (a heavy embroidered veil) on the head as tomorrow you have to go in-laws' house and instruct him to put clove and cardamom in her pocket as the bride's sisters may demand the same from you. The clove and cardamom were not produced in Jammu region, so these were imported from other place. As these were expensive items, so keeping them in pocket was a mark of prosperity. It was a tradition in the Dogra marriages to ask for such things from the groom while he went to marry his bride. It was actually a test posed by the relatives of the bride to check groom's prosperity, and an assertion that he need to provide luxuries to his wife.

5.4 *Tamol Geet*

Later assembled relatives offer gifts and shagun to the groom. This ceremony is called as *tamol*. In some families, a record of the payments made is retained by the heads of the two families. There, a *nain* (lady barber) gets a little bakshish called *Banda* (a favour in cash).

लाड़ा मंगदा तमोल, लाड़ा मंगदा तमोल।
 Groom asks for *tamol*, Groom asks for *tamol*
 माऊ पल्लुआ दा खोल, माऊ पल्लुआ दा खोल
 O mother, untie your *pallu*⁶, O mother, untie your *pallu*.

2 Sister-in-law (Brothers wife)

3 Aunt (Fathers' Elder brother's wife)

4 A heavy embroidered veil

5 Sister-in-law (Wife's sister)

6 Edge of Dupatta

A lot of fun accompanied the wedding proceedings that were held at the bride's house in groom's presence. Her relatives would use various names his relatives; they would also call her greedy and miser, and would comparatively call the bride a sensible and matured girl. For this reason the women would sing to the mother of the bride to loosen her pallu, to offer shagun to the groom before he leaves the house, though groom would never ask for that. Shagun in the form of money is considered an auspicious practice. It was always given by the elders to the younger people as blessings. All those who witness the function give gifts and cash to the boy as a token of good luck. The practice of holding money tied in the loose end of one's saree or dupatta is also hinted here.

5.5 Ghodi Geet

Ghodi geet are very popular among the folk, which are sung when the *Baraat* is to start for bride's house. The bridegroom is reminded of the services rendered to him by his mother, sister, aunt, bhabhi etc. and, in turn, he promises to offer them the most appropriate things including his wife.

घोड़ी चढदे लाडे गी गरमी आई

The groom perspires while mounting the mare,

लाडे गी गरमी आई, पक्खा झोलै नाई

As he sweats, the barber fans him,

पक्खा झोलदियां भैनां

The sisters fan him,

सलामां करदे भाई

And brothers salute.

Again fun accompanies the seeing off ceremony. The sisters tease him that he is perplexed and confused, or scared, to proceed to his prospective in-laws. So there is ritual of fanning him with the loose end of their sarees, and they are provided shagun by the mother of the boy as a mark of thankfulness. This moment is also quite emotional for groom's brothers and sisters as he becomes a mature and responsible man entering his new life and they are treating them like a prince.

5.6 Surma and Daal Charayi Geet

Before the boy mounts a decked mare and is ready to proceed to the bride's place, the bridegroom's *Bhabhi* (sister-in-law) puts *Surma* (collyrium) in his eyes, and his sisters hold the reins of the mare. The sisters adorn the mare with garlands and offer her *chana dal* (yellow lentil) to eat which signifies the warding off the evil. In return the bridegroom gives them shagun called *Daal Chariye*. He then moves towards the temple or the local deity to seek its blessings, and from there the groom and his family men proceed towards the wedding venue.

माए सुहागन तेरे शगन करै

The mother *suhagin*⁷ offers the shagun

भावो सुहागन तेरा सुरमा भरै

Bhabhi *suhagin* puts colyrium in eyes,

पीली-पीली दाल तेरी घोड़ी चरै

Your mare masticates the yellow lentil

भैनां सुहागन तेरी शगन करै

The sisters *suhagin* offer the shagun.

⁷ Married Women

To ward off the evil eye, the mother of the groom performs the *sagan* ritual. The cash is then distributed among the poor. The bridegrooms' bhabi at this time puts *surma* (collyrium) in his eyes, his sisters hold the reins of the mare and she is served with yellow *chana dal*. The word *suhagin* is repeated here, which stands for those women whose husbands are alive. Widows were considered inauspicious. Reading in between the lines, it is revealed by this song that an excruciating difference existed between women; widows had lesser rights.

5.7 Jagrana Geet

The wedding ceremony is performed at the bride's house. When the male members of the house are gone with the bridegroom to the bride's house for the wedding ceremony, the women keep an all-night vigil to safeguard the security of the house and during the wedding ceremonies bridegroom not feel sleepy. During this vigil they perform a variety of skits and play-act. This is called *jagrana*. In *jagrana* one woman plays the bride and another bridegroom. They sing, dance, and express their emotions freely. All inhibitions and taboos are let loose at this time. No wonder that sex is also another subject that is talked about frequently and without the usual restraint.

मेरी बाहीं च नौ-नौ चूड़ियां ओ-2

My wrist is full of bangles sweet-2

ओह दिनें लड़दा ते रातीं गल्लां गूह्णियां ओ

He quarrels in the day, makes closeness at night.

In this song there is an attempt by the wife to show that her husband never cares and keep fighting with her in daylight, but the whole scene changes during night when he needs her and then he starts talking to her with love and care. Women as a commodity has always been looked down upon and used whimsically by men. Their love and soul have never been the priority. But on the other side still a love chord is there and the relationship would continue throughout life.

5.8 Milini and Sithanis Geet

The bridegroom, along with his relatives and friends proceeds in a procession to the brides' house which is received by the close relatives of the bride and they are affectionately welcomed by the father, maternal uncles; this ceremony is called *milini* where the elders embrace each other as a symbol of formal acceptance. Before entering the brides' house, the Barat stops at the gate and the *milni* ceremony is performed. The chief male relatives of the both the families hug their counterparts one by one. After the introductory embrace, the girls' relatives give to their counterparts' gifts and shagunt. While this goes on, the female relatives of the girl sing *milini geet* meant for this occasion. One most important and interesting feature of the Dogri marriage songs is the fact that a sizeable proportion of them, either wholly or partially, are meant for teasing. Such teasing songs are called *Sithanis*. The female relatives of the girl sing or just recite *Sithinis*, which are verses replete with humor and satire. They seek to make fun of the boys' family, but everybody takes it lightly.

साढे बासमती दे चोल, बंड इक बी नियों

We have basmati rice, with no hull therein

जात्री बुडें दी आई, जुआन इक्क बी नियों

Barat is of the aged, with none young therein.

A large gathering of young women welcoming the *Baratis* with folksongs by cutting jokes on *Baratis* and teasing them saying that the whole Barat comprise of the aged and there is no young man in the *baraat*. A few songs reminding the moral duties of the spouse are also sung in particular on this occasion.

5.9 Vedi Geet

Before the *pherey*, the bride remains a part and parcel of the parental family but after that all those relations are put in the background and she becomes part of her husband's family. Among the Hindus *Ved* ceremony is usually performed late at night and goes on till dawn in the courtyard of the house, or out in the

open, where a *Chauk* of flour is drawn by the priest, and the girl and boy are made to sit before it facing the holy fire in the east, and later on the main ceremony *phere* that takes place around of the sacred fire between 4 am to 7 am. The sacredness of the *pherey* has its origin in Vedic culture. When the girls' maternal uncle carries the bride for *Vedi*, a number of songs are sung.

मेरे बाबल जी वेदी पर बोलदे न तोते, तुस बोलदे दे कीहू नेई
 O father dear, Parrots chirp on the vedi, why don't you respond,
 मेरे बाबल जी हून नेई आखो धीऽ मेरी, में होई आं पराई।
 Call me not your daughter, O father! I am the other now,
 मेरे बाबल जी साढी ते योगिये आहली फेरी
 O father dear, our visit is that of a *Yogi*⁸,
 कदे पाई कदे नेई।
 So uncertain, so unlikely.

The father of the bride is sitting quietly in the *ved* as her daughter who has been very close to him and under his protection is departing for ever to a home quite unknown. Bride asks her father, why is he not speaking on this occasion. She expresses her agony of separation in her request not to call her his daughter, now she has been given to someone else. O my dear father we are like a *yogi* (friar) whose visit is unfixed and uncertain. This means that after she goes to her in-laws, she will be bound the traditions of that house, and will never be able to visit her parental house as and when she wants. Almost all are found in the ocean of tears when this song is sung, as this shows the helplessness imposed by the institution of marriage. It is a virtual bondage and slavery that a girl goes through. Socially, such practices were suffocating for the girls and fathers would feel hands-tied. Though the tradition is under transformation with the increasing empowerment of women through education and employment, yet there is no complete change. Though these songs are sung as a ritual but a close reading reveals a sense of pain and suffering of Dogra daughters.

5.10 Chhand Geet

After the solemnization of marriage, the women of the brides' side take the groom inside the house where the bridegroom meets his newlyweds' friends and sisters after the ceremony. Though they are used by grooms to praise their in-laws but it is not at all mandatory and one can have some fun with it. These songs test the intellectual caliber and creative capacity of the groom, and inaugurate the special relationship between *Jija* (sisters' husband) and *Sali* (wife's sister)

छंद बरागै आइये जाइये, छंदे अगै केसर
 Get about like Chhand, In front of chhand saffron
 सस्स मेरी पार्वती ते सौहा मेरा परमेश्वर
 My Mother-in-law is Goddess Parvati and Shiva is father-in law

There are many *Chhands* which can be recited including some for showing respect to various family members of bride side and others are just fun. This means that I would treat my mother in law like mother goddess *Parvati* and father in law as God *Shiva*.

5.11 Vidaayi Geet

Vidaayi songs are sung at a very fragile moment. These are very heart touching utterances from the mouth of daughters sung by the women folk. The basic logic behind these sensitivity is that a family member who has been in very close relation is departed forever to a home quite unknown. There are many songs, sung at the time of departure of the bride where the daughter addresses her parents in a sentimental and poignant

⁸ Friar

manner that none can help shedding tears at the fact that the daughter is destined to leave her paternal home to start a new life at the home of her in laws. Let us look at this song:

बाबल धरम करन देओ,
 O duty bound father dear!
 मिगी रक्खी लो अज्ज दी रात ओ
 Hold me back for a night,
 मिगी रक्ख लो अज्ज दी रात ओ ।
 O Hold me back for a night!
 कि'यां रक्खां धिये मेरिये,
 How can I hold you dear daughter
 मेरा धरम क्षीण होई जंदडा
 My word is broken, then
 मेरा धरम क्षीण होई जंदडा ।
 My promise gets emaciated.

The parting daughter pleads before her father to allow her to stay in his house for some more time. But her father is constrained by his word given to the groom's family. The tearful singing of these songs is not merely a demand of the occasion but, diving deep, it becomes clear that the tears ooze out of the eyes for a different reason. The girl's life is always subordinate to men. Though at her parent's house she is a prized possession because of her short stay there, and also she is conventionally considered a guest at the father's home by giving her a simile of birds. At in-laws house she actions and words will be restrained by the conventions. Her liberty will be curbed; her life will be like that of hell. Though women would not say this openly but songs provide a liberating space, and all is said under a veil. Surely for this reason, girls would always keep longing for a trip to the parents' home throughout her life.

5.12 Pani Vaarna Geet (Water Ceremony Song)

When the wedding party along with the bride reaches home, the mother-in-law pours small amount of *sariyan da tel* (mustard oil) on both the sides of the entrance door before she enters the house. Then the *Paani Vaarna* ceremony is performed.

पानी बार बन्ने दिए माए
 Do the water ritual o mother,
 बन्ना तेरा बाह्न खडा
 Your son is waiting at the door.

Diluted milk, called *kacchi lassi*, is put in a small vessel and the bridegroom's mother and other elderly ladies circulate it over the head of the bride three times each. Each time they pretend to make an attempt to drink, but the bridegroom puts his hand across and stops them from drinking it. It is one of the past customs in which the groom informs his mother that there is another contender for his love – his new wife.

Conclusion:

We can conclude that marriage still remains and is likely to remain the most revered and dominant social institution among Dogras. The least changes are found in performing traditional rites and rituals pertaining to marriage in Dogras. The marriage rituals, beginning with *kurmai* and completed with *rephera* are a rich source for understanding of the socio cultural scenario of the Duggar. For each and every ritual observed in a traditional wedding, the woman has one or the other types of songs to match with it and thus, the wedding

songs are part and parcel of the traditional marriage and these songs provides a beautiful vignette through which we can look into the complex phenomenon we call culture.

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