



Unveiling Gender Dynamics In Punjabi Villages: An Exploration Of Male Dominance At The *Sath*

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Abstract:

The present paper examines the significance of *sath* as a space that is completely controlled by men. In the socio-cultural contexts of Punjab, the term '*sath*' also refers to a common gathering place or a central meeting point within the village. It serves as a focal point for community interaction and acts as a platform for sharing news, resolving disputes, and making decisions collectively. But the paper emphasises how this space provides a privilege or dominating position to men and restricts the entry of women by demanding a complete absence from public places. Moreover, in Punjabi social structure, it is considered morally and ethically inappropriate, rebellious and shameful act if women of any family visit *sath*. However, women are summoned only when someone does a heinous crime or if there is any domestic issue. From the perspective of gender, the paper is an attempt to evaluate the space that has offered privilege to men and established a status quo of masculinity by prohibiting the presence of women. Apart from the gender dynamics, another aspect is linked to how *sath* is misused by the privileged sections of the society. They manipulate the space by using their money-muscle power and other resources. For such people, *sath* is a perfect location to avenge the personal rivalries in order to maintain a monopoly and powerful position over others. The representation of *sath* in Punjabi songs is critically evaluated by contextualising the caste and gender dynamics of Punjab.

Keywords: *Sath*, Gender, Power, Folklore, Representation, Punjabi Music.

Introduction:

According to Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha's magnum opus *Mahan Kosh*, *sath* is a sitting place where people gather for multiple social activities, discussions, and events (574). Therefore, it is considered as the common place of a village where people sit together during the free time. Ultimately, *sath* becomes a space where the village *panchayat*ⁱ also gets involved in making any decisions (particular or general for that matter). As a space, it becomes a platform where people can exchange ideas, express opinions, and seek consensus on matters affecting the community. It promotes unity, cooperation, and a sense of belonging among the villagers. Additionally, *sath* is also used for various cultural activities like storytelling, singing folk songs, and playing traditional games (like playing *taash* or cards).

Sath is typically an open area, often situated under a tree or in a designated communal space. It serves as a hub for community interaction and is an important part of rural life in Punjab. People from the village, both young and old, gather at *sath* to engage in different kinds of conversations, share news, discuss community matters, and spend leisure time. The basis of all life plays played in the village is *sath*. *Kavishars*, *nakaliye*, *bhands*, *rasdhariyas*ⁱⁱ and *dhadh sarangiye* from other villages also perform poetry, drama and music at the *sath*.

In this context, *sath* holds cultural significance and plays a vital role in maintaining social connections within the village. It is a space where elders share wisdom, stories, and traditional knowledge with younger generations. Festivals, religious ceremonies, and other community events are often organized and celebrated at *sath*, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity among the villagers. In brief, *sath* is a communal gathering place in Punjabi villages that acts as a meeting point for socialising, sharing information, and conducting various activities that strengthen community bonds.

Speaking about the villages, they are intricate and multifaceted places. In terms of physical structure, they consist of numerous overlapping layers shaped by human activity. Socially, the perspectives of city dwellers are vast and diverse, leading to countless interpretations of the urban environment. Consequently, it is evident that there is no one definitive approach to narrate the evolution of a village. Rural and urban historians have employed various sources to track transformations in the space, including demographic data showcasing socioeconomic changes, maps illustrating land utilization and the actions of official institutions.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the representation of women in Punjabi folklore and creation of stereotypical image of a female character. The second part is an examination of male domination at the public places (such as *sath* in Punjabi villages). This part also highlights the portrayal of men in folklore and popular Punjabi music by taking into consideration *sath* as a space.

***Sath* as a Masculine Space:**

People are surrounded by space. They move through it, live within it and attempt to think in terms of it. Therefore, to think of the village's *sath* is to think ultimately in one way or another, of space. As a result of the contestation of space, different spaces have different meanings that signify different meanings to different people or group of people. Although, it claims to exist objectively but it is subjectively shaped by a set of experiences to the extent and as a result the production of meanings is completely divergent from person to person.

Within the perceived and conceived space is, what Henri Lefebvre argues, a lived space. The concept of "lived space" revolves around how individuals utilize and adapt space according to their needs, particularly through modifications and personalization. *Sath*, in this case, can be labelled as a space that is not simply a physical entity but rather a social construct that is shaped by the predetermined value systems and a collective creation of meanings. This social production of space significantly influences social practices and how individuals perceive and interact with their surroundings. Therefore, the selection of an unassuming imagery, featuring a *sath*, serves a purpose in illustrating this fundamental theory of comprehending rural environments.

Drawing upon the overarching dialectical understanding, Lefebvre identifies three primary dimensions within the process of space production: "perceived space", "conceived space", and "lived space" (Lefebvre 1991). First, the perceived space is generated through the spatial practices of all individuals who interact with a particular space, resulting in intricate social dynamics. Secondly, the conceived space, as per Lefebvre's definition, is the space that emerges from knowledge and ideologies. In addition to spatial practices and planning (intellectus), the invisible level of people's emotional connection to a specific place contributes to the formation of space. Lefebvre referred to this subjective dimension of space as lived space (intuitus) or representational spaces, which encompass intricate and often symbolically coded meanings (33). Taking into consideration Lefebvre's idea, it can be seen that the concept of *sath* functions implicitly and through symbols it has opened a space for particular sections by limiting the entry of others. He defines lived reality or space as a "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated — and hence passively experienced — space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (Lefebvre 81-84).

In terms of caste based social structure, *sath* acts as a "carnavalesque" (Bakhtin 1984) but patriarchal and conservative in terms of gender. In Bakhtin's sense, carnivalesque represents a literary approach that challenges and breaks the established conventions and prevailing atmosphere by utilizing humour and disorder. The carnival sense of the word *sath* "is opposed to that one-sided and gloomy official seriousness which is

dogmatic and hostile to evolution and change, which seeks to absolutise a given condition of existence or a given social order.” (Bakhtin 160). The aforementioned statement does not imply that the primary goal is to advocate for complete freedom from all forms of authority and sacred symbols as an ideology. On the contrary, it argues that when individuals engage in carnival, they are temporarily removed from their ordinary lives or lived reality, and as a result, nihilistic and individualistic ideologies hold no more power and are equally susceptible to the transformative and satirical nature of carnival, much like any other form of serious authority (Bakhtin 160).

In this context, caste can be taken as a fundamental obstacle that classifies the society into different sections. But *sath* offers a space where everyone act as active participant and attempts to play the role equally. The gathering of various castes at *sath* attempts to create a neutral environment that is completely different from the real world. People from different castes may have designated areas or spaces within *sath* based on their social standing. Higher caste individuals or families may occupy more prominent or central positions, while lower caste individuals or marginalized groups may be relegated to the periphery or have limited access to the place. Various stereotypes associated with certain castes may lead to their marginalisation and exclusion from the public place.

The Gender Dynamics of *Sath*:

Punjabi society, like most of the other societies, has traditionally been structured around patriarchal norms and values. These norms tend to assign a higher social status and decision-making power to men. In this case, the gender dynamics related to *sath* throws light on the issue of male hierarchy at the *sath*. It is often characterised by a gender imbalance that skews toward male authority. Consequently, women’s voice and participation result in their marginalized positions at micro and macro levels.

In this context, cultural expectations and gender roles play a significant role in shaping the dynamics of *sath*. In many Punjabi villages, women are primarily assigned domestic responsibilities, while men are expected to engage in public affairs. This cultural division of labour often leads to men dominating public spaces, such as the *sath*. They participate in discussions and decision-making processes by acting as the powerful leaders. As a result, women in Punjabi villages face constraints on their mobility and access to public spaces due to various factors, such as traditional norms, in the name of safety concerns and limited resources. These barriers restrict their presence and active participation in the activities of *sath* and reinforce the male dominance at the space.

Just like other societies in India, Punjabi societal perceptions and stereotypes about women’s roles and capabilities can also contribute to their exclusion from *sath*. They are seen as lacking expertise in certain areas as well as their opinions are considered undervalued, leading to their absence in discussions and decision-making processes. Therefore, the absence of women in leadership roles and positions of influence within the

community can perpetuate the male dominance at the public places. When there is a lack of female representation in decision-making bodies or community organisations, women's perspectives and concerns are not adequately addressed or noticed. However, it is significant to understand that while male dominance may be prevalent at *sath*, it does not imply that women are completely absent from these spaces. They may participate in the *sath* in different ways, such as indirectly through their male family members as their representatives or through informal networks within the community. Otherwise, the direct presence of women at *sath* is considered as a *bhandi* (shame) to the entire family.

Sath in Punjabi Folklore and Reflection of Patriarchy:

Folk-literature carries a special importance to identify the fundamentals of any culture as well as to represent its uniqueness. The significance of this type of literature is considered timeless, self-contained, intuitively expressing the emotions, myths and other cultural phenomena of collective human life. In this context, the present article also critically evaluates the representation of *sath* in Punjabi folklore- especially in *sitthniyan*, a form of Punjabi folk songs or *lok geet*. The repetitive use of *sath* and gender in *sitthniyan* can be scrutinised in order to examine the presence of gender biasness and disparity that is deeply embedded in the socio-cultural as well as political practices of Punjabi society. In this scenario, the control over economic and political resources enables particular communities to take the charge to target and defame other sections co-existing in the same society. The self-proclamation of these authoritative people claims to have ritual, spiritual and racial righteousness which they maintain by marginalising the lower sections away from the central position through various kinds of discourses- like 'self' and 'others'.

Throughout different countries, there has been a consistent perception of men and women as not just distinct but also in opposition to one another. Scholars such as Nancy Chodorow, who identify as feminist, attribute this division of gender roles to the concepts of masculinity and femininity that are shaped by socio-cultural surroundings or the lived reality of everyday experiences. Chodorow contends that the process of parenting plays a crucial role in instilling gendered attitudes and dispositions in boys and girls, ultimately shaping their identities as men and women (ix). Moreover, she suggests that boys are more deliberately and explicitly trained to embrace masculine qualities, whereas girls are not subjected to the same level of conscious and direct instruction to embody femininity.

In this scenario, Punjabi folklore functions as a vehicle through which traditions are circulated and acts as a tool to transfer values from one generation to another. It functions both as a form of entertainment and as a medium for socialisation, portraying gender roles and representations. Folklore helps to elucidate the socially accepted roles of men and women, which have evolved gradually over time but continue to be practiced in various forms at the larger level. The gender depictions presented in folk songs can provide valuable insights

into societal attitudes toward gender, highlighting the beliefs and perspectives prevalent within a given society (Carter 243).

Consequently, in traditional Punjabi villages, the limited access or participation in the discussions and events that take place outside ‘four walls’ of the house is reflected in the marginalised situations of women inside the house. In the context of family, all important decisions (sizeable or diminutive) have traditionally been made by men. Through such practices, the male dominance or patriarchy has remained prevalent in Punjabi society. The present study also intends to identify the contribution of women and men in the formulation of gender specific dimensions through folklore which articulate and reinforce the masculine and feminine images prevalent in rural society of Punjab.

Punjabi folk songs and proverbs serve as evidence of the contrasting expectations placed upon men and women, often glorifying masculinity through statements like: “*Khaan bakre te peen sharaaban, putt Sardaaran de*” (Sons of Sardars eat meat and drink liquor). This notion of masculinity, which has long been praised in Punjab, has experienced a significant resurgence in recent times, primarily through Punjabi pop culture. Unfortunately, this revival has led to an aggressive reinforcement of Punjabi men’s masculinity, particularly among the *jatt* community, consequently leaving women in a vulnerable position. The quoted expression celebrates the consumption of alcohol and meat by men, considering it a symbol of prosperity, empowerment and success.

The Concept of *Sath* in *Sitthniya’n*:

Sitthniya’n is an independent and unique variety of folk-poetry or the predominant form of folk-literature. It is derived from the word ‘*sitth*’, which means unworthy speech or indecent speech or a speech uttered with abuse and sarcasm. In previous times, when people were angry with their patron or landlord, the *bhatt*ⁱⁱⁱ or *bhand* used *sitths* to defame them or to create a shameful environment for not getting full compensation or food grain from them. The literal meaning of *sitth* is unsightly speech, slander, disobedience or slander. In this context, the word *sitth*, in fact, is the proper Punjabi synonym of the English word ‘satire’.

According to Dr. Nahar Singh, “*Sitthani* is a direct address from the daughter’s party to the son’s party at the time of marriage. For him, *sitthani* is a characteristic song full of bitter sarcasm and mockery, in which the moral life values are made immoral by creating an unusual image and is hurt by associating it with the son’s party. The other party is ridiculed on a moral level” (20). Similarly, Dr. Vanjara Bedi has contextualised, “In the *sitthnias*, the maidens of the girl’s side make fun of the male side, expose the faults and their errors (361)”.

In the patriarchal setup, it is not considered acceptable that women have a control over men but women of the opposite party are always shown dominating and completely out of control. They make orders in the households, while their husbands and other male members are submissive fools. This notion undermines the social status of any family. For example, in a *sitthani*, the mother of the groom is represented as uncontrolled and dominating. The *sitthani* goes;

“Mard howe ta ’n ankhi subhah, ankh pichhe mar mar jaye,

Teewi ’n nu rakhda dakk dakk andar, ohnu akh di ghoor na samjhawe,

Teri ta joro kurhma ’n kothe tappni, ohnu andar baarh ke samjha ve,

Nahi ’n ta ’n ohnu saade hawale, asi ’n pawage jadhni nu raah ve”

The above *sitthani* describes the patriarchal setup of the Punjabi society. It is clearly mentioned that those people who cannot control their wives are labelled as impotent, worthless and shameless. The person is portrayed as unable to keep his wife “inside the *haveli*”. By challenging his masculinity, the women ask him for to surrender his wife to them so that they can teach her the traditional ‘feminine values’. Moreover, the lines expose how patriarchy is a legacy that is carried by women for generations. They do not want the women of the opposite party to disobey the pre-determined feminine roles and rules rather they are willing to train them to behave in prescribed manners. Instead of liberating themselves from the clutches of patriarchy, these women are represented as trapped in prevailing order that is totally controlled by masculine value system.

According to the traditional and conservative settings, the presence of women at the *sath* is considered a shame or frowned upon due to deep-rooted gender biases and societal expectations. It is important to note that such views are not universal and do not represent the beliefs and attitudes of all communities or individuals. In the social structure, the meanings related to gender are always constructed and reconstructed at the levels of biology and ideology. Therefore, the purpose of gender construction is to express the universal inequality between women and men. Virtually, every popular society (at micro and macro levels) is founded upon assumptions of gender difference and the policies of gender inequality. For example, the opposite party in *sitthani* targets the women in order to create a shameful environment for them. As a group, they bring the women at the *sath* which is not only an unconventional act but a challenge to the masculinity.

“Laarhe bebe nu charhi juaani, sath vich moongliya ’n ferdi, Aunde jande raahi musapar akh matakke la ke gher di, fer ohna nal kardi kushti, akh de fer vich ger di”

Or

“Uche tibbe ve jeeja beejeya narne di khirh gayi futti futti, laarhe bebe barhi kangal kal di firdi ruthi ruthi, kehndi adhiya peena ae sath vich beh ke ghutti 'n ghutti 'n”

There are multiple reasons why the presence of women at *sath* is considered shameful. First and foremost, societies with regressive gender norms can view women's presence in public spaces as a violation of prescribed gender roles or norms. Traditional beliefs may dictate that women should primarily stay at home and focus on domestic responsibilities, leading to the perception that women participating at *sath*, is a deviation from societal expectations. The above lines from the folklore deal with this inside/outside dyad as the women experience throughout their lives. They are passive sufferers; unable to remove the conventional, orthodox and traditional rules and taboos of the four walls of the house. In this context, Meenakshi Thapan remarks that “Women who transgress their habitual, ‘assigned’ socio–physical spaces run the risk of being labelled as of ‘loose virtue; and are subjected to strong censure by older member” (115).

In other conservative settings, the honour and reputation of families are closely tied to the behaviour and visibility of their female members. The presence of women at *sath* might be seen as potentially compromising the family's ‘honour’, as it is perceived as exposing them to outside influences and interactions that are considered inappropriate or against social norms. Restricting women's presence at *sath* may stem from a misguided belief that it is necessary to control and protect them from potential harm or moral corruption. This perspective is rooted in paternalistic notions of women's vulnerability and the idea that their presence in public spaces may lead to situations that are deemed inappropriate or unsafe.

Some individuals or communities may view women's presence at *sath* as a challenge to existing power dynamics and traditional hierarchies. Women participating in discussions and decision-making processes within the *sath* can be seen as a disruption to the established social order, leading to resistance or attempts to suppress their involvement. It is crucial to challenge these harmful and restrictive views and promote gender equality and inclusivity in all spheres of society, including communal spaces like *sath*. For them the boundaries of the house become a symbol of tradition which is offered as a fortress protecting their women from the outside world, giving them security and a sense of superiority.

Representation of Men at *Sath* in Punjabi Folklore and Popular Music:

Punjabi folklore and music often reflect the vibrant and communal spirit of Punjabi culture. The representation of *sath* is a recurring theme in many Punjabi songs. In Punjabi folk music, the *sath* is often portrayed as a lively setting where villagers engage in traditional dances, such as *bhangra* and *giddha*^{iv}, accompanied by energetic music. These songs capture the joyous spirit of the community gatherings and highlight the sense of togetherness that the *sath* represents. But it is important to notice that the representation of *sath* in

contemporary Punjabi music can sometimes reinforce traditional gender roles and norms. While some songs may celebrate the inclusivity and camaraderie about the space of *sath*, others may reinforce traditional gender roles by portraying men as the primary participants in these gatherings, while women are often depicted observing from the sidelines. This is a reflection of the existing gender dynamics prevalent in Punjabi society. Overall, Punjabi music plays a significant role in representing the *sath* as a vibrant and culturally significant space where community bonds are forged, celebrations occur, and stories unfold. This resonates with the evolving nature of Punjabi society and its ongoing journey towards exclusivity, gender inequality and promotion of caste based politics.

The presence of men at the *sath* carries different meanings. In folklore and contemporary Punjabi songs, this particular gender is always praised or glorified for its rebellious, violent and masculine nature. For instance:

“Hora ’n de veere khundha ’n uttey behndey,

Mera veera sath vich ni,

Jihdi likhiya ’n kitaba ’n hath vich ni”

Or

“Hora ’n de veere khundha ’n uttey behndey,

Mera veera sath vich ni,

Jihde sone di daatan hath vich ni”

The aforementioned references focus on the treatment of men in Punjabi folklore. Just like in the real world, they occupy a respected position, representation and quality in the folk songs. In these songs, the contrast between the representation of men and women is clearly visible. In the above songs, men are portrayed as educated and respected members of the family with neat and clean image. On the contrary, the presence of women at the *sath* is associated with disrespect, shame and unconventionality. This is how the folklore reflects the prevailing socio-cultural and ideological value system of the society that generates the hierarchical order or power relations. It highlights the biasness and construction of stereotypical images about particular gender. The sober and clean image of men, at the *sath*, is in complete contrast to that of women. There is no objection on men mentioned in the songs rather they have a complete charge to take control over the space.

While the *sath* is primarily seen as a space for community gathering and social interactions in Punjabi villages, it is also possible that this setting can be used for personal rivalries and conflicts. As a place, where villagers come together and engage in discussions, the *sath* can become a platform for particular people (especially the *jatt*^v community or the one who holds power relations) to assert their personal agendas and vie for power to influence the masses. In some cases, personal rivalries between individuals or families can spill over into the *sath*, leading to heated arguments, verbal confrontations, or even physical altercations. These conflicts may arise due to various factors, such as competition for resources, disagreements over village matters, disputes over land or property as well as over personal grievances.

Punjabi songs are diverse and cover a wide range of themes and these references are often used to depict conflicts, rivalries or assert power dynamics within the narrative of the song. The concept of *sath* (together) can have different interpretations in relation to violence, depending on the context and perspective. *Sath* represents and promotes the idea of collectiveness and has no inherent connection to condone or promote violence. But the place can be misused or manipulated by the particular sections in order to justify violence or aggression against others who are perceived as threats or enemies. This can be seen in instances where different groups use a distorted interpretation of unity to perpetrate acts of violence or discrimination based on religious, ethnic, or political differences. For instance, Amar Singh Chamkila's song "*Sath vich roj gandasi khadke, Ni velly putt sardara'n de*", represents the particular community whose primary job is to fight and protect their lands. However, it becomes important to understand that the word '*velly*' defines the fundamental characteristics of being an upper in Punjabi society. As the *sardars* hold the land and economy, they believe that they have complete freedom to be violent and aggressive at public places. Moreover, the song exudes a sense of *jatt* pride, emphasizing the higher social status associated with being a *jatt*. These songs celebrate *jatt* heritage, customs, and traditions, projecting them as a community with a distinct identity and a sense of collective pride.

The lyrics of "*Ghar Di Sharab*" by Gippy Grewal revolve around the theme of home and the emotional attachment associated with it. The song expresses nostalgia for one's homeland and the warmth and comfort found within the four walls of a house. It highlights the cultural significance of Punjabi traditions, particularly the concept of *sharab* (alcohol) being enjoyed within the confines of one's home. On the other side, the song attempts to establish a masculine image of a person who is fearless and have open access to public places. The lyrics of the song, "*Chunni da hi hona oh marda mandasa, Jihne sath vich banda kharhkaya ni*", depict how the privilege section can manipulate the space for their personal rivalry and aggression. Such instances of personal rivalries are generally considered disruptive and go against the spirit of the *sath*. The metaphor of '*chunni*' symbolises the stereotypical image of a woman i.e. disempowered or weak, fearful and domestic. The song demands the hyper-masculine characteristics in a person who can beat anyone at the *sath* or the centre of the village.

Efforts are often made within the community to mediate and resolve conflicts that arise in the *sath*, with respected elders or village leaders playing a role in facilitating reconciliation and restoring harmony. It is important to address personal rivalries constructively and find ways to channel disagreements into productive dialogue and collective problem-solving rather than letting them undermine the overall cohesion of the community. But the *sath*, being a public space, is a platform for the so called powerful people to amplify the intensity of personal rivalries. It can further fuel tensions and lead to the formation of factions or divisions within the village. The same space is used for taking avenging in the name of 'honour killing'. For example, Kuldeep Manak in his song "Chal Sath Vich" remarks, "*Sucha rafal donali farh ke, Paapi vall nu sidhi kar ke, kehnda ghukkar vadda velly, ni suteya gicchi bhaar piya, Chal sath vich chal vikhavan, Ni tera vadheya yaar piya*".

The above quoted song narrates the story of Sucha Singh and depicts the scene in which Sucha Soorma has his last word with his sister-in-law Balbir Kaur aka Balbiro Bhabhi. Sucha Singh is a folk legend (one of the famous Punjabi Kisse) in Punjab, perceived by some as having restored the 'family honour' by killing his sister-in-law Balbiro and her alleged extramarital lover Ghukkar, who at one time was his own best friend. The story of Sucha Singh has been passed down through generations and has become a popular tale in Punjabi folklore. This song represents how the space is compromised for personal rivalry or to seek revenge from the enemy. In this case, it is crucial to differentiate between the positive aspects of *sath* that promote harmony and cooperation and the negative misuse of the concept to incite violence. Upholding the true essence of *sath* requires a commitment to peaceful coexistence, respect for others, and the resolution of conflicts through dialogue and understanding.

In cases of personal rivalry, individuals may exploit the idea of *sath* to gather support from their friends or the entire community. They may convince others that their cause is just and that supporting them is a way to demonstrate loyalty and unity. This manipulation of the concept can lead to conflicts between different groups or individuals. Personal rivalries can sometimes escalate to involve larger groups or communities. In such cases, individuals may use the notion and space of *sath* to mobilize their community against the rival party. By presenting the rivalry as a battle between two groups, they manipulate the sense of collective identity and loyalty to justify their actions. In certain situations, personal rivalries can be fuelled by societal expectations or norms. Individuals may feel pressured to maintain their reputation or honour, and they may exploit the concept of *sath* to gain support from their peers or community members which can be seen in the case of Such Singh Soorma who murdered Ghukkar for honour and gathered support from his community.

This can create an environment of hostility and perpetuate the rivalry. The use of emotional manipulation to garner sympathy and support from others is also significant. They might depict themselves as victims and use the idea of *sath* to gain empathy and rally people to their side, even if the underlying rivalry is rooted in personal disagreements or conflicts. In such cases, it is important to understand that the misuse or

manipulation of the location of *sath* for subjective matters goes against the true spirit of unity and togetherness or the carnivalesque. On a macro level, *sath* is about fostering positive relationships, respecting others, and promoting harmony rather than exacerbating personal conflicts. Instead of breaking the boundaries of caste, class and gender, such people take pleasure in killing, lynching and creating chaos in the village.

Similarly, Balkar Ankhila's song depicts how a public space can be manipulated and dominated by a particular community of a village. The song represents the everyday socio-cultural structure of the Punjabi society. The song goes:

“Oh darda na koi bahar nikle, Ve pind sunsaan ho gaya haye, Oh sath ch khalo ke mare thaapian, Putt jatt da jawan ho gaya”.

The song depicts a strong sense of pride and honor associated with being a *Jatt*. He highlights the rich history, bravery, and resilience of the *jatt* community. Historically, *Jatts* have held a dominant position in Punjab's agrarian society. They have traditionally been associated with land ownership, agriculture, and rural leadership. This historical control over land and economic resources has contributed to their social and political influence in the region. *Jatts* have generally enjoyed higher social status and access to educational and economic opportunities compared to other minorities.

The lines examine how the privilege section of the society can use the space to create a powerful image among the entire village. The control over the land and economy become a medium for them to appoint themselves as heroes. They attempt to create a terrifying environment in order to supervise the society by their money-muscle power and according to their own rules. Moreover, they position themselves strong enough that no one even can dare or challenge them. The song deals with the similar situation the self appointed *jatt* protagonist who has turned adult and fabricated a petrified environment to establish him as an empowered personality.

Punjabi songs, like the above mentioned, celebrate *Jatt* culture, depicting them as strong, brave, and proud individuals. These songs often highlight agricultural life, valorize *jatt* masculinity, and emphasize the importance of land and family heritage. They may project *Jatts* as dominant figures in rural society, reinforcing their social and economic power. In these songs, *jatt* dominance is often linked to physical strength and bravery in Punjabi songs. *Jatt* characters are portrayed as fearless warriors who possess exceptional physical prowess. These songs highlight their ability to protect their honor, families, and communities, reinforcing the perception of *jatts* as dominant figures.

Apart from this, as it is mentioned earlier *sath* is used for personal rivalry and fights over minor and major problems. Raf-Sappera's song "Modern Mirza" focuses on the issue of male gaze (discussed and elaborated by John Berger and Laura Mulvey) that result in a violent situation between two groups. The song

brings a girl into the centre and blames her eyes for the chaos and firing at the *sath*. The song also highlights that the spectator, consciously and unconsciously, engages in the socially and culturally defined or assigned roles of men and women and takes satisfaction in seeing women as an object of their pleasure (the pleasure that is linked to sexual attraction as well as to narcissistic identification). In this context, male gaze denies the woman's human agency and identity and considers only for her beauty, physique, and sexual appeal (Mulvey 14-18). The song goes:

“Purana Jani na tu Mirza mai ajj da, Sidha vairiyaan di hikaan vich vajda

Sadey asla diggi de vicho labhda, Gallan hundia ne pind pind shehar kudey

Teri tor katlaana ne maraya, Sath ch chaley faer kudey

Tu Saraa pind shamshaan banaya, Sath ch chaley faer kudey

Kara billi billi akh ne karaya, Sath ch chaley faer kudey”

The aforementioned lines explain how women are typically presented as sexualized objects, framed through the male perspective and positioned to cater to male fantasies. This can be argued that the objectification and fragmentation of women at public places (*sath* for that matter) and in cinema serve to reinforce the patriarchal power dynamics in society, where women are positioned as passive objects for male consumption. The song emphasises physical attractiveness, objectify woman or depict her in stereotypical gender roles. The lyrics blame her walking style for creating a chaos at the *sath*. In this context, Mulvey also highlighted the concept of the “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 19) of women in cinema, meaning that women are often placed on display for the audience's visual pleasure rather than being portrayed as active subjects with agency.

These songs often depict narratives of love, heartbreak and interpersonal relationships which can sometimes involve rivalries or competition between individuals or group of people from particular caste and class. In these songs, the *sath* might serve as a backdrop for confrontations or emotional exchanges between characters. Lyrics may describe instances where individuals express their grievances or frustrations, engage in verbal sparring or compete for the attention or affection of a romantic interest. Therefore, it is important to note that these portrayals in songs are fictionalized and often exaggerated for artistic purposes. At the micro and macro levels of the social setup, the purpose of such songs is represent particular ideology related to gender, caste and class. As a representative of any caste or gender, the popular songs result in constructing stereotypes and derogatory images about the targeted person, group, gender or caste.

Conclusion:

The setting of *sath* holds an irreplaceable position in Punjabi village life, symbolizing unity, culture, and community. It serves as a physical and metaphorical anchor, connecting generations, preserving heritage, and promoting social cohesion. The *sath* stands as a testament to the resilience and collective spirit of Punjabi villagers, reminding us of the timeless value of human connection and the significance of shared spaces in shaping vibrant communities. But the space has turned into male dominated arena in the contemporary period. Men are generally perceived as more authoritative and credible in public settings, making it easier for them to exert influence and occupy prominent positions. This bias can manifest in various forms, including professional settings, political arenas, and public decision-making processes.

The critical analysis of Punjabi folklore and popular songs defines that men tend to have greater freedom to occupy and dominate public spaces as compared to women. Whether it is parks, streets, or transportation, women frequently face restrictions or concerns that limit their access and enjoyment of these areas. Male privilege can be seen in the ability to claim space, engage in activities, and socialize freely. On the contrary, women encounter judgment, objectification or harassment for simply existing in public place such as *sath*.

The examination of *sitthaniya'n* discusses that public places can be unforgiving for those who deviate from traditional gender norms, especially in reference to men. Male privilege can be observed in the societal expectations that men should embody strength, stoicism, and emotional restraint. Consequently, men may face criticism or ridicule for expressing vulnerability or engaging in behaviors considered 'feminine'. The so called 'feminine' nature is considered a shame and scar on the masculinity. The women in *sitthaniya'n* target such people and publically mock them because they cannot control their women who are wondering at the prohibited areas, such as *sath*. Men generally enjoy greater freedom of movement in public spaces compared to women. They can walk alone at night without the same level of fear or concern for their safety. On the other hand, women often feel the need to take precautionary measures such as avoiding certain areas or being accompanied by others, limiting their mobility and overall access to public spaces. This discrepancy highlights the differential experiences men and women have due to male privilege or patriarchal setup of the society.

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End Notes:

ⁱ A village council is called *panchayat*.

ⁱⁱ These are the examples of Punjabi folk songs and art.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Bhatt* or *Bhand* are the performers who attempt to create a laugh by their jokes.

^{iv} The folk dances of Punjab.

^v The dominant caste in Punjab holds land and economy.

