

A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FOLK BALLAD OF RANI RUPI OF THE LAHAULA TRIBE: A STUDY BASED ON THE PERSPECTIVE OF GENDER

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Abstract: The folklore of Lahaula tribe is very vast especially it has a rich heritage of folk ballads of different genres like narrating stories of deities, embellishments, marriage rituals, historical incidents, significant persons etc. The study of their folk ballads is not much explored and discussed according to gender point of view so it becomes significant to analyse them as they were an inseparable part of their social and cultural practices like marriage and birth related practices. These folk ballads give a hint of how earlier people of Lahaula tribe had perceived about gender that what duties should they perform and what qualities they should possess? The folk ballad of *Rani Rupri* was selected as it gives a hint of underlined expectations of roles to be performed by a female in the Lahaula society. The presented ballad was collected from the local experts Lahaula tribal society. The theoretical framework of social construction of gender was adopted to analyse the selected folk ballad. 'One is not born but becomes a woman', the core idea of Beauvoir becomes applicable from the ballad of *Rani Rupri* as various types of qualities a woman should possess were presented in the ballad. The ballad is not only famous in the Lahaul area but also in neighboring district areas like Chamba and Kullu.

Keywords: Narrative analysis, Folk ballad, Tribe, Gender, Gender roles

Introduction

Tribes are one such group of people who live in a common geographical area, and they share a common culture with other members of the tribal group. They have a rich heritage of non-material culture. Most of these cultural elements are oral, i.e., they are transmitted from one generation to another by word of mouth. In this way, they have maintained their existence till now. The tribes are generally not very literate and are living in a primitive lifestyle, directly coping with the local resources available to them. No doubt, as change is a universal truth, these tribal groups are also not separate from this reality. But, relatively, this rate of transition is lower than in the other advanced areas of a society. The rich folk culture of these tribal groups plays an important role in the daily lives of the tribal people.

There are various types of folkloric elements present in any tribal group, like folk ballads, folk songs, folk dances, folk stories, myths, legends, proverbs, rituals, etc. With the help of these elements, the tribal people get a medium to come together, bond together, and entertain themselves. They all give a distinct identity to any

tribal community. A sense of unity among the members of a tribal group could be seen or observed by following these folkloric elements. These elements also give a platform to understand the common differences present within gender groups, i.e., between males and females. In a tribe, social differentiation is present at a low level and with low complexity. Generally, the difference could be seen only on two bases, i.e., age and gender. These gender related distinctions could be traced out by analyzing these folkloric elements. Various hints of gender related roles assigned in a tribal group are explained in folk songs, ballads, and stories.

The present paper has tried to underline the importance of folk ballads in the life of the tribal people mainly of the Lahaula tribe by proper analyzing the selected folk ballad of *Rani Rupi*'s sacrifice specifically belonging to the *Gushal* village of the Lahaul valley. Further the study also defines the gender related differences in the Lahaula tribe with the help of this particular and popular folk ballad of *Rani Rupi*.

Research Methodology

The presented study is a part of the ethnographic study conducted on the Lahaula tribe on how gender is being represented and reproduced by the folkloric elements in their socio-cultural practices and social-cultural life, for the Ph.D. work of the main author. For the purpose the seven elements of Lahaula folklore were explored and observed which give a hint of gender related differences present in them, out of which folk ballads was one major element of their folklore.

To explore the folk ballads of Lahaula people specially the ballad of *Rani Rupi*, help of local experts were taken. The first local expert related to the music field of Lahaula tribe Ram Dev Kapoor was contacted and further through snow ball method other experts were contacted. The help of unstructured interviews with the experts and pre-recorded audios of ballads was taken for getting complete information on the folk ballads. The help of published books was taken where a mention of selected folk ballad was there.

The research design of this paper is of an exploratory and descriptive nature. A narrative analysis is presented of the selected folk ballad by keeping in mind the gender perspective, i.e., how gender related differences are represented in the selected folk ballad. The theoretical framework of social construction of gender was incorporated for analysing the folk ballad of *Rani Rupi* as how the folk ballad, which is a part of Lahaula people cultural tradition, defined the expectations of society from the role and position of a female like being a queen, wife and mother. The qualities like being sacrificial and devoted for her family or for her whole village was expected from the woman only, compared to other characters of the ballad.

Punia (2025) had provided a critical study of representation of women in Haryanvi folk culture. She had analysed their oral traditions like folk songs and folk tales to

know the images and roles of a woman interpreted in them in light of contemporary changes happening in the society. Mishra (2021) had studied the women folk of Odisha society and provided the psychological and cultural construction of gender in their orally transmitted folk traditional elements. The two folk rituals were observed which states the subjugation of woman to the males in her family.

Upon exploring the Lahaul tribal area, a total of about sixty-seven folk ballads were found, and one main ballad was selected. The criteria for selection were the popularity of the ballad in the whole of the tribal area, its connection to the neighboring district of Chamba and Kullu of the same state, and the circulation of this ballad around the aspect of gender representation being directly displayed in the lines of the ballad named as sacrifice of *Rani Rupi*.

Study Area

For the study, the area selected is Lahaul which is one part of the Lahaul and Spiti district of the state of Himachal Pradesh (*Him* means 'snow', *Anchal* means 'coverage', and *Pradesh* means 'state') of India. This state means a state which is covered with snow; major of its mountainous regions could be seen fully covered with a layer of snow during the winter season. The hilly regions of this state are generally constituted of tribal groups. In the scheduled tribe category list of this state, one of the tribal groups is mentioned, which is Lahaula, and it would be the focus point of the paper presented. The term Lahaula means residents of Lahaul, part of the Lahaul-Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh. This state has a total of twelve districts, out of which Lahaul and Spiti tribal district takes the maximum share of geographical area, but the overall population is very low. The total population of the district is 31,564 and the population density of this district is only two persons per square kilometer, according to the latest census recorded of the Indian population (2011 census report of India). This district consists of a hundred percent tribal population. It consists of two main parts: Lahaul and Spiti. The people under study reside in the first part only and constitutes a population of 10,218.

The Lahaul part can be divided into three main valleys according to the river distribution system. The main river of this part is *Chanderbhaga*, which is composed of the *Chandra* and *Bhaga* tributaries, which originate from the *Baralacha* pass on opposite sides. The three main valleys are divided and named after these rivers, i.e., the *Chandra*, *Bhaga*, and *Chanderbhaga* valleys. The Lahaul tribal area, just like another part of Indian areas, came under British dominance. Before their dominance, certain powerful areas had ruled this area, and they are the *Ladakh*, *Chamba*, and *Kullu* provinces. In the historical phase of Lahaul tribal area, for the smooth functioning of local administration, the Britishers had divided this area into fourteen *kothis*, kept under three valleys. Local rulers (*Thakur* or *Rana*) were given the power of all tax collecting work and other local functioning work.

Here, the folk ballad that is being selected and analyzed properly belongs to the area or *kothi* of *Gushal*. *Gushal kothi* had a very rich historical heritage as it was kept under the patronage of local *thakurs* or *ranas*, and they had a connection with the powerful neighboring areas like Chamba district.

***Ghure*: Folk Ballads of the Lahaula Tribe**

Ballads are poetical narratives frequently having medieval legendary background and are performed to music. They have their origins in folk oral tradition and tend to change little from generation to generation (Buchan, 1972). Ermakova and Likhareva (2017) in their article had stated that folk ballads act as being the transmitters and reflectors of a naïve mythological picture of the world; a manifestation of the traditional values of a society; a mirror of the primordial view of the traditional gender relationships.

Folk ballads are one of the elements of the folklore of any community. According to Manorama (1998) who had tried to study the melodies of Lahaul valley had asserted that in general, the study of the folklore reveals the ideas, ideals, hopes, fears, aspirations, and superstitions of the people who share that folklore. She had stated the significance of folklore as they are reliable and a trustworthy index to understand the background of people. She had stated that *ghure* which is a local term for the folk ballads in the Lahaul area; are the traditional lore which are mostly sung or narrated by the locals.

In the Lahaula tribe, various folk ballads have been a part of their culture from very old times. These ballads in local terms are called *ghure*. *Ghure*, in general, means *Lok-katha Geet* (*Lok* means ‘folk’, and *katha geet* means ‘ballad’). These are the stories of some individuals, mythical characters, incidents, or local deities that are sung in a simple rhythmic way. The characteristic of these ballads is that the originators of these are anonymous, as they are very old, and no one folk of this tribe had any idea of who had created them and on what time they were created. By analyzing these *ghure*, we can conclude that the words used in them do not belong to the local dialect of Lahaula tribe. There is an amalgamation of words from different languages of neighboring areas like *Pangwali*, *Kulluvi*, and *Chambyali*. These *ghure* are sung in an order that one person, usually a male or a group of males around three to four people, mainly sing a line, and then the rest of the present people (males) sing and repeat the line once, and this pattern continues till the end of the *ghure*. These are sung mainly during the occasion of a get-together, which usually happens when people meet during weddings, festivals, or any other kind of function. No musical instruments are accompanied while these are sung. All the other people (females, kids, and other males) enjoy this by listening as a medium of entertainment. These are sung by people who have a complete knowledge of them and have a sense of rhythm on how to sing them.

Ghure can be categorized based on the story being narrated by them, like *ghure* narrating the story of some famous personalities describing their personality or their work to society, of some local deities, of marriage-related celebrations, of embellishments, etc. *Ghure* did not have any written source and were transmitted through oral transmission only. *Ghure* mainly reflects the old age culture and traditions of the Lahaul tribal area and on analyzing them the impact of the mythological beliefs and customs are quite evident from the narration of these tales (Sharma, 1998).

According to Sahni (1994), *ghure* is a folksong of ballad type which depicts either a historical or a mythological story related to the Lahaul area. If any type of the history of Lahaul valley was kept it was in the form of *ghure*. On the other side Handa (2014) had stated that *ghure* are mostly long episodic and narrative songs which are inspired by varied instances and the subject matter of ballads belonging to the Lahaul valley are largely inspired by the traditions which are quite like that of the district of Chamba. He had mentioned the sacrifice of *Sui Rani* of Chamba and *Rani Rupi* of *Gushal* village of Lahaul valley to the *Naag Devta* (the serpent God) as a perfect example in the regard of inspiration.

Sharma (1998) had described them as the folk stories which are sung only on special occasions and rituals which puts them apart from the folk songs of this valley. Another difference is there is no scope of dance and of accompanying musical instruments with them unlike of the folk songs. *Ghure* is only sung by the males of the society.

Ghure of Rani Rupi

A mention of the folk ballad of *Rani Rupi* could be found in certain texts; one excerpt is mentioned by Sahni in his book where he has described it as a *ghure* which describes a historical event of the Lahaul valley. Another mention of the same *ghure* is also found in the book published by Handa in 2014. The below mentioned *ghure* is extracted from the book written by Loppa who had collected this whole folk ballad from his late paternal grandfather (Loppa: 1994: 33).

“*Ae ghushe ri paanu dana shunkara geyi je*
Ae kula shuki muran shuki pani na ae tipu je
Ae chambe aaye udantu rouda raane ri prodi je
Ae chambe aaye udantu rouda pothi patiri heri je
Ae patiri andura je buri prashna bhuyi je
Ae patiri andura je manush bata lodi je
U udho mama titu maita mana suba kiti je
Ae bata lodi bata lodi Raghu rane ri ghare ji”

Ae sheti lada bata deunle thacha kunu parela
Ae kaadi kuti bata deunle prodi kunu parela
Ae kaadi blini bata deunle chuli kunu parela
Ghungru tika bata deunle rasi ae kunu kamela
Ghungru deyi bata deunle chamba kunu byayela
U udho mama titu maita mana suba kiti je
Ae granyi yana gushana kula ferune jana je
Ae aayo aayo rupi ae rani kula ferune jana je
Ae dhira dhira gushana chuchu pinda je
Ae aayo aayo rupi ae rani kula ferune jana je
Ae dhira dhira gushana balak rolune lagi je
Ae rupi yana rani je thagi kari leyi je
Ae rupi yana rani je bata su denda je
Ae rupi yana rani je meni arujana shuni je
Ae meni bata denda je chuchu bare neese rakhi je
Ae meni yana balak ayela meni ae chuchu piyela
Ae mani yana sira je bare neese rakhi je
Ae mani diva ayela meni jua harela”

Narrative Analysis of Ghure of Rani Rupī

The above-mentioned folk ballad starts with explaining the worst situation of Gushal village of Lahaul area suffering from drought as whole of the village's water streams are dried out. The Rana of village is in urgent need to solve out the life threatening issue for his villagers. In his village there comes a Sadhu from Chamba area and Rana explains his worry to Sadhu. The maternal uncle of Rana, Udho and minister Titu Maita conspires against the Rani as they do not like her as a queen. The whole of the story goes with a melodious narration of getting rid of Rani by the two vicious characters.

Characters in the Ghure of Rani Rupī

- Rana Raghu of Gushal village
- Sadhu, who came from Chamba
- Maternal Uncle of Rana, Udho, and Minister of Rana, Titu Maita
- Domestic Animals in the palace of Rana: sheep, a black female dog, and a black cat
- Prince and Princess

- Wife of Rana, i.e., Rupi Rani

Personality traits of each human character in the Ghure of Rani Rupi

<i>Rana Raghu</i>	<i>Sadhu (Ascetic)</i>	<i>Udho and Titu Maita</i>	<i>Rani Rupi</i>
Not the main character. Very much gullible. But has the final power of giving orders. Neutral character.	Just a medium for carrying out the conspiracy against Rani.	Villains. Cunning personality. Are against Rani for some reason. Create a conspiracy against Rani with bad intentions. Negative characters.	Main character. Selfless personality. Committed to her assigned social roles as a queen, wife, and mother. Stated as an epitome of a good woman. Positive character.

Table 1: Personality traits of each human character which are mentioned in the Ballad of *Rani Rupi*

Social Roles and Status of each character

Rana Raghu: He, as the Rana of the village, was very concerned about the extreme drought situation, as the village was his responsibility. He was very concerned about how to bring the village out of the worst situation and would do anything for the solution, no matter if it was an irrational solution. Very much influenced by his minister and uncle. His order was the final one as he holds an authoritative status in the village.

Uncle Udho and Minister Tito Maita: They have a lot of influence on Rana's decision-making, as each way of argument presented against each order of Rana was finally accepted by Rana.

Rani Rupi: The status of the queen was given a very low level compared to animals like sheep, dog, cat, prince, and princess. As she has already performed her role of expanding Rana's lineage, she is considered replaceable, as another wife could be brought to the house. She even performed the role of a queen to her villagers to bring them out of the dangerous situation, even if it cost her own life. Even before her sacrifice, she is again conscious to perform her motherly role to her children as feeding her son.

Son and Daughter of Rani: Son was exempted from the sacrifice because he must carry forward his father's legacy, which underlines the patriarchal nature of the society. Even Rani was very concerned, especially about how her son would be fed after her sacrifice. The daughter was exempted from sacrifice as she had to be married away to the Rana of Chamba to expand the affinal kinship. Rani was concerned about her hair management after the sacrifice, so she wished to keep her hair off the ground where she was going to be buried. She assigned her daughter

to this work. She was so concerned about her hair, which shows the importance of managing hair among females, as having long and healthy hair is considered a standard of beauty.

Replaceable Position of *Rani Rupī* in Comparison to Others

In deciding whose sacrifice must be given to overcome the drought situation, every other living being was considered irreplaceable, but not the position of Rani.

1. *Gushal* village was facing an extreme drought. One Sadhu who came from Chamba told Rana that a soul from the palace had to be sacrificed. The uncle and minister took this as a chance to conspire against Rani.
2. Firstly, Rana orders the sacrifice of the sheep. An argument is presented by the two about who will protect the herd of sheep.
3. Secondly, Rana orders the sacrifice of the black female dog of the palace. The argument presented was who would protect the door of the palace.
4. Thirdly, Rana orders the sacrifice of the black cat. The argument presented was about who would protect the kitchen room.
5. Fourthly, Rana orders the sacrifice of the son. The argument presented who will carry forward his legacy.
6. Fifthly, Rana orders the sacrifice of the daughter. The argument presented who would be married off to Chamba and expand his relation with the Rana of Chamba.
7. Rana somehow convincingly accepts the advice of the Sadhu to give the sacrifice of a soul and the arguments presented by the uncle and minister.
8. Lastly, when Rana runs out of ideas of whom to sacrifice, the two suggest that Rani could be sacrificed as she has performed all her duties, and a new wife could take her place. Shockingly, Rana agrees with this argument. He was in a deep agony, but in the end surrendered to this suggestion.

***Rani Rupī*: An Epitome of a Good Woman**

When this *ghure* is sung by the folks of this tribal group, the great sacrificial contribution of Rani is glorified, and all the folks tell how we are all blessed to have such a good woman as the Rani of *Gushal*. What is this concept of a good woman? In the ballad, Rani has put her role of being a queen, wife, and mother first. She has given priority to her socially assigned roles over her own needs and rights. She had put her fundamental right to live in second place and put the lives of the whole village in first place. She was quite aware of the conspiracy being plotted against her, but still, she agreed to be sacrificed for the welfare.

Rani is stated as a good queen as she has put life of her villagers in forefront to be saved, a good wife as she puts herself in front of her husband at the time of danger

and a good mother as she completes all her motherly work before her sacrifice like to feed her son and she still cares for her children that what will happen to them after her sacrifice.

Relevance of Putting this Ballad under Critical Analysis

Folk ballads can influence the daily life of an individual or the overall pattern of behavior of a society. They can also reflect a society, i.e., the basic traits of a society are displayed through ballads. According to Sharma (1998), various specific elements of the historical events are preserved in *ghure* which are related to the past time of the Lahaul valley mainly of its *Pattan* valley. Balram (2017) had stated the significance of *ghure* as the symbols of the civilization of Lahaul specially of *Pattan* valley which not only tell their identity but also acts as the links of the past and present of the valley by which the past heritage of the valley is still living in the minds of the locals.

Ghure of Lahaula tribe which literally translates to the folk ballads of the tribal area are sung by the males specifically elderly males of the area who had knowledge of how to narrate the stories in a rhythmic way. During collective occasions a group of elderly males (three to four) starts to sing three lines of a ballad and then the rest of the present males in a room repeats the same lines of ballad in the same rhythm.

This ballad of *Rani Rupi* is very important and popular in the area under focus. Rani is very much seen as a respectable woman, not only in Lahaul but also in the *Chamba* district of the state of Himachal Pradesh. On talking to the locals about the personality of Rani, they stated that she is a character who was very selfless and devoted woman not only to her husband, children but to welfare of whole village. One local stated that the wellness of a family and its members relies on the female owner of that house and Rani Rupi was one such woman who did not care about her own self for the wellness of her family and village of which she was a queen.

Conclusion

In the folklore of the selected Lahaula tribal society, there are certain elements of their folk culture under which the gender related underlined differences are defined. This folk ballad of *Rani Rupi*, which is quite popular in the tribal life itself, shows the differences in the position of a queen, mother, or wife than a husband, son, daughter, and domestic animals of the palace. The subjugated position assigned to a mother, wife and queen to a father, husband and king by a society. The importance given to a son and daughter than their mother also shows a lower position of her compared to her children in a family. The feminine traits like a woman should be devoted, caring and compassionate to her family is depicted in the presented folk ballad. This ballad highlights the replaceable status of a wife in a house when all

her duties are already performed in the family. This ballad also narrates the basic characteristics of a woman to put her in the category of a good woman. A proper analysis of this ballad shows how a woman's social roles, duties, and status were assigned by societal and cultural norms.

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