

## **Abstract**

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**Title of Thesis** : From Roots to Routes: A Critical Study of Select Folk  
Songs of Punjab

This research brings to the fore the dynamic negotiations that take place in select folk songs of Punjab as well as in their new age folklorismic and hybrid mutants, between hegemonizing forces and liminal entities, in a bid to contest and calibrate changing collective identities. The central hypothesis being that our folklore and folksongs in particular, keeping the ambit of this research, are not just our ‘roots’ wherein our identities are structured and reinforced but also become the ‘routes’, the paths to formulations and articulations of changing identities, which are always in a state of flux, never fixed and never stagnant. The chapters have been organized to chart the trajectory of folklore itself, as well as, to highlight that though the folksongs may have morphed into new avatars, largely due to migration and media, but their essential function of articulating and calibrating collective identities remains the same.

Chapter 1 lays the theoretical discourse against which the songs have been examined and is the plinth on which the entire research rests. Several key postulations on folklore; definition, categories, contexts, functions and trajectories have been deliberated upon as folksongs are an integral part of a larger domain that constitutes folklore. Folklore and folksongs are an integral part of the memory industry, resurrecting and reviving and also at times, fabricating our roots in order to become the ‘routes’ to contestations and formations of collective identities. Folksongs have been perpetuated through “practices of reconstruction and representation”, through collective memories and are multi accentual, negotiated with our remembrance of the past, contextualized in the present, and predicated on our sense of the future. These songs, as the research proves, are narratives of self-becoming, narratives that are constantly evolving and changing, narratives that encompass a very complex and dynamic hegemonic discourse of consensual compliance. The analyses of these songs reveal a powerful discourse deeply embedded and perpetuated in complex layers of coercion and

compliance and serve the same purpose as Gramsci's 'Intellectuals' or cultural brokers who lead and control ideological apparatuses.

Chapter 2 of this research de-contextualizes and de-territorializes the very context of the research i.e. Punjab. The palimpsest of historiographies and geographies is interrogated to reveal the multiplicities that defy the singular and insular construct imposed on it. While chapter 3 deals with key select rites of passage songs from birth to death along with calendrical rites, songs associated with marriages in Punjab are at the core of chapter 4. The ritualistic modes of communication with specific reference to *putra jaman*, *lori/loriyan* and *siyappa* are analyzed to uncover the dynamics of social identities and reveal the complex function these rites and their accompanying songs play in ensuring 'social control' to ensure compliance for the collective good through creation of a state of gnosis. Contrapuntally, select songs sung during marriages, i.e. *jaago bolis* and *sithnis/sithnian* examined in chapter 4 reveal dynamic forces of subversion and resistance at work, as those in the liminal state engage with hegemonies through cross-dressing and trans-gendering, through laughter and excess. Viewed through Bakhtin's discourse on the dialogics of the carnivalesque, this momentary unveiling of the mask is not just a cathartic therapeutic moment of release but also more significantly a space for dialogic polyphony and multiplicity. The disruption of a singular monolithic uniform insular order leads to the seminal act of 're-thinking' and re-creates new areas of Gramscian 'common sense'.

Chapter 5 on the folklorismic avatars of *jugni* first deconstructs fixities arrogated by academicians and scholars in an attempt to trace the historiography of this popular folk form. The research proves that the protean mass mediated shapes of earlier folk forms too reveal changing collaborations and contestations of collective identities. The final chapter focuses on the complete transformation and trans-localization of the *bolis*, *mahiya* and *tappes*, mnemonics of Punjab, as they get subsumed under the larger generic label 'bhangra' which is no longer just a dance form associated with the harvest celebrations in Punjab but representative of South-Asian music in general in the diaspora, a potent voice of migrancy, displacement and ethnicity. Bhangra rap emerges as a potent and radical voice against forces of racism, a polyphonic space for articulation of changed identities. The trans-localization of these forms in their changed or even hybrid modes as prosthetic mnemonics, validates yet again the central hypothesis of this thesis that, our 'roots' become the 'routes' to contestation and validation of changing identities.