

**Unheard voices: A
Feminist Analysis of
Selected Dogri Short
stories**

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Abstract

Times have always been historically hard on women in India, partly due to the intense patriarchal nature of our culture and partly due to the fact that men have always considered the female of the species to be inherently weaker than them. This weakness can be associated to their child bearing and rearing certitude in the life cycle. The absence of brute strength in women, which has been utilised to characterize the majority of men for perpetuity, in songs, ballads and countless tales of bravery has contributed immensely to the mentality of female inferiority. Men have consistently imparted the household activities and taking care of their children to women and passed it off as their duties. The birth of a girl child was considered to be a significant encumbrance and they were trained specifically for carrying out household work for their future husbands. Violence on women was considered a daily affair and those who would dare to speak against the undeniable oppression were effectively silenced. This paper focuses primarily on the actuality of the hardships, cruelty and lack of sympathy faced and experienced by the women in pre and post partitioned Jammu based on the Dogri short stories and narrations by prominent Dogri writers like Madan Mohan Sharma, Om Goswami, Shakunt Deepmala etc.

Keywords

Patriarchal, Dogri songs, Ballads, Oppression, Violence

Introduction

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Patriarchal oppression in India has historically shaped the lives of women, confining them to rigid societal roles. Literature, especially regional literature like Dogri, reflects these struggles vividly. This paper investigates how Dogri short stories portray the realities of women's oppression and survival, particularly during significant socio-political changes in Jammu.

While studies have been conducted on Indian feminism and literature in major languages, Dogri literature remains underexplored. This paper bridges that gap by offering a feminist reading of selected Dogri short stories that reflect the deep-rooted gender inequality in Jammu's cultural context.

India has invariably been notorious for crimes against women. People around the world have known and accepted the fact that India is not a safe place for women. But there are countless such girl child's who are attacked, tortured and defiled almost every day in India, but due to the fact that they live in some remote village or hamlet where the media doesn't bother to have people stationed, such incidents never see the light of day. Local 'gundas and cult leaders force the family to remain quiet or threaten violence to obtain their cooperation and due to their poor financial condition, none of them can afford to displease these culprits, as it is evident from the following report:

The 2012 National Crime Records Bureau report of India states a reported crime rate of 46 per 100,000, rape rate of 2 per 100,000, dowry homicide rate of 0.7 per 100,000 and the rate of domestic cruelty by husband or his relatives as 5.9 per 100,000. A 2014 study in the Lancet states, "Whereas an 85% prevalence of sexual violence in the country [India] is among the lowest in the world, it is estimated to affect 27.5 million women in India [given India's large population] (Raj, McDougal, 2014). Further, the 2006 survey found that 85% of women who suffered sexual violence, in or outside of marriage, never sought help, and only 1% report it to the police."

Objectives

- To examine how patriarchal oppression and violence against women are portrayed in selected Dogri short stories.

- To analyze the representation of women as victims and resisters in Dogri literature.
- To highlight the socio-cultural factors contributing to the marginalization of women in Jammu, as reflected in the selected stories.
- To investigate the narrative techniques employed by Dogri writers in portraying Women struggles for survival and dignity.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing feminist literary criticism as the primary framework. Selected Dogri short stories from notable authors such as Om Goswami, Madan Mohan Sharma, and Shakunt Deepmala are critically analyzed. The stories are chosen for their thematic focus on gender relations, violence against women, and patriarchal oppression. The analysis involves a close reading of the texts, focusing on character development, narrative structure, and symbolism to uncover how these stories articulate feminist concerns.

Literature Review

Gayatri Spivak's seminal work on the subaltern and colonial feminism provides a theoretical background for this analysis. Spivak's concept of the silenced subaltern is applied to the women characters in Dogri short stories who, marginalized within their society, struggle to be heard. Moreover, Mulk Raj Anand's views on gender-based violence in Indian society are considered relevant, particularly in relation to the unchecked male aggression depicted in these stories. Other key references include Shivnath & History of Dogri Literature and A. S. Altker's The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization.

According to Gayatri Spivak, the third world women have to face secondary layers of exploitation; firstly, they are the victims of the colonialism as being the ones who are colonised, secondly, they are muted by the patriarchal systems of their own societies:

"Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration

of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernisation" (Spivak, 1988: 306).

Violence against women occur through all the phases of their lives. From female infanticide to workplace harassment, it permeates every corner of her life.

The noted Indian English novelist Mulk Raj Anand feels: "No woman in our land is beyond the threat of rape, because of the suppressed energies of the male, through the taboos of patriarchy which deny sex before marriage and make male into wanton animals who assault any possible victim when possessed by lust."

In his story "Dislodged Brick" taken from the book *Echoes and Shadows*, the prominent author Om Goswami tries to illuminate the pettiness of crime against helpless, weak women in the minds of men in Jammu. With regards to their political aspirations and goals, the lives of conscientious and industrial women are seen as passing fancies or something not even worth mentioning to men. The boundaries of male lust is perceived to be overlapping against the insanity of their misdeeds. In all the cases of violence against women an air of triviality is exuded from the culprits with regard to the deed that they had committed. The daily lives of a family of cleaners is described. The family consisted of Amman, Pheenu and Kalo. Kalo was Pheenu's daughter and Amman was her grandmother. The neighbourhood children often teased and annoyed Amman. One day, a contractor and his gang of political sidekicks came to Amman's park and sat down for some gossip. They became obsessed with Kalo and tried to rape her, but instead due to an unfortunate turn of events caught Amman in her place. Amman could not their maltreatment and died.

In the story, the inebriated contractor had had his eyes on Kalo from the moment she had started mimicking the koel's voice. He had continued to observe her and as he did he had started falling deeper and deeper into the unending abyss of his deranged lust. His red-streaked eye shad continuously and periodically looked in the direction of Kalo and a wicked and barbarous plan had started to germinate in his rotten brain.

"The contractor handed over the darkish cigarette he had held in his hand to him. Pheenu had wanted many a time to smoke a sweet smelling cigarette. He had tasted the stubs of such cigarettes found in the

sweepings. But they did not taste like this. Pheenu squatted and started pulling at the cigarette. The long faced one opened the packet of sweets and placed it in front of him, "Come, have some." Pheenu wanted to refuse but couldn't. His mouth had started watering and the words of offer floated with the sleeping saliva down his throat."

The moment the contractor saw Kalo, he made up a plan, discussed it with his friends and started acting upon it to fulfil his desires. He invited the poor Pheenu over and started buttering him up by offering him cigarettes, sweets and preferential treatment. Deprived as Pheenu was, this sudden on-pour of kindness and sympathy was too difficult for him to refuse. He had never had such costly cigarettes and tasty sweets. He was instantly mollified and his servile nature swayed towards the contractor's group. It is obvious that when you reward in excess to a man who has experienced nothing but deficiency and inadequacy in life, he would come jumping and running to receive it. The contractor shrewdly exploited this fragment of Pheenu's nature to make him submit to himself. All of these shenanigans were performed to bring the contractor one step closer to the object of his increased libido, Kalo.

After this, the contractor and his group forcibly and under his continually dwindling protests made Pheenu drink liquor in excess.

It is quite apparent and discernible that Pheenu was extremely drunk right now, and his muscle control had evaporated into thin air. Thus, the first objective of the contractor and his friends was achieved. They had successfully gotten the man of the house in an incapacitated state and the only barrier and hurdle to their prey had vanished. Pheenu had gone straight on home and had fallen unconscious on his broken cot.

Now that Pheenu was out of the picture, the corrupt and iniquitous band of bastards went on to the next phase of their foul plan. They planned torture Kalo out of the house by producing a lot of noise and by calling names. Disturbed by this, defenceless Kalo would come out, and they would fall upon her. But what happened was unexpected and unanticipated, to say the least. Instead of Kalo, Amman had come out to teach these deviants a lesson. Swathed in darkness, the ignoble batch of men mistook her for Kalo, and excessively intoxicated as they were, proceeded to violate her. The complete and utter helplessness of Amman is conveyed in this scene. Against a group of men, even the formidable

Amman could do nothing. The men tortured her in such an unreserved manner that Amman became unconscious as she could no longer endure the activities being performed on her. On concluding the foul action, the men departed hurriedly and immediately, leaving A man for the dead at the bottom of the canal, amongst bottles of liquor and garbage, in a naked state with her injuries visible all over her body. They had ravaged her so furiously that her body was covered with blood and she had, in due course, given up on her life and died. A dog was sniffing the ground around her and parts of her body covered with blood. It must have tasted or even bitten the lonely cadaver.

When Pheenu realized what had happened to his Amman, he knew that the fault lay with him. The contrast put forward by Om Goswami is disconcertingly unnerving. While the body of a woman lay in utter negligence, the bells at the nearby mandir dedicated to the deity Hanuman was being rung. Perhaps the very perpetrators of this horrifying crime would go there to offer their prayers. Amman, who was the strongest 'brick' in Pheenu's family had become dislodged and there was no way it would be put back together again.

Women writers, all over the world, have occupied a distinct place in the realm of world literary canon, marching ahead by entering the domain restricted for them and even surpassing the male writers through their path breaking writings. Why did women, who were supposed to be confined to the four walls of home, performing their stereotyped role of an ideal daughter, mother and wife, get inclined towards writing? As Juliet Mitchell in *Women: The Longest Revolution* says that "we have to know where women are, why women have to write a novel, the story of their own domesticity, the story of their own seclusion within the home and the possibilities and impossibilities provided by that" (289). The answer to this is that women wanted to make themselves heard and to be attended to, sincerely, in a male dominated society.

Ik Kroh Uchha Dharam – The Dharma Heights penned by the notable author Madan Mohan Sharma is an exceptionally moving and painstaking journey of a woman who had been used and thrown away by Man and the social structure of Dogri society. It is also a story of the guilt and contrition experienced by a man who had been in charge of this particular girl since her father's death and on having found a good match

for his own daughter failing to safeguard the future of his deceased partner's daughter. The sheer willpower and undeniable sense of morality used by the daughter, Kaki, to never descend from the Dharma Heights to protect the happiness and honour of a household which had been cruel to her is commendable and just goes to show that in spite of being hurt, Kaki refused to resort to her baser instincts and calumniously malign the family's reputation. She preferred to punish herself than bring shame upon her father's business partner and bosom friend. The Dharma Heights here is the walk of shame and penance that Sukh Ram had to endure for his sins against his friend's daughter. He was the head of the family yet he had refrained from protesting the misuse of the trust placed on his family by Kaki, when his own wife abused and maltreated her. He had prioritised the wedding of his own daughter before Kaki's even though her marriage had been fixed with the son of a well-to-do and established family.

Kaki had become pregnant and the name of the father of her unborn child could never pried from her unmoving lips. She had left Sukh Ram's family and as if on self-exile gone to live in the house of her deceased father's handyman, Lachhu Thakkar which sat atop the Dharma Heights. She had been forgotten by everyone except Sukh Ram and it was as if she had never existed in the first place. The triviality with which Kaki had been cast aside and the clear conscience of Sukh Ram's wife and his family will never cease to amaze readers. Kaki's sacrifice had become meaningless in the eyes of society and no one knew the pain that she had to undergo to do a deed that would never be appreciated. The author here highlights the honour of a single woman over the countless wrongs committed upon her by the very ones on whom her father had placed his trust. Thus "The Dharma Heights" symbolises the walk of self-mortification and atonement of Sukh Ram over the groundless sins he had committed against an innocent girl, prime among them being that of a bystander. He had stood by and done nothing as Kaki's life deteriorated before his very eyes.

The author helps us visualise the treacherous Dharma Heights and Sukh Ram's apparent sense of despair at being approached with the daunting task of climbing the mountain trail. Sukh Ram's goal was to reach the house of Lachhu Thakkar, his deceased business partner Sain Das's

former handyman, where Kaki, the daughter of said business partner lived as well. She had given birth to a baby and was now extremely sick. Lachhu had called upon Sukh Ram when bid by Kaki. Each step was important on this trail and a single misstep or mistaken footing would send any man tumbling down to his death. The climb had no resting places where a traveller could stop and gain his breath. It was as if the Dharm Dhar was God's punishment to men forced to climb it; a walk of penance to assure the deities of one's karma and remind humanity of all the sins that had been committed in one's life.

The strength of his guilt was such that Sukh Ram heard the voices of Kaki' dead father demanding an explanation for the downfall and ruin of his daughter. He heard Sain Das raging at him, pulling his eyes to images he did not want to see. His guilty conscience, in Sain Das's form asked him the reason why Sukh Ram' daughter, Satto was now living the life which was originally meant for Kaki, and why Kaki was now the unwedded mother of a child and was now lying on the bare earth breathing her last. Sukh Ram trembled inwardly at these thoughts and hurriedly turned his mind away from them by reciting "Ram, Ram, Ram".

When Kaki compared her own son to Satto's son, Sukh Ram thought that her illness had affected her brain and that she was rambling nonsense. He dismissed her words and blessed Satto's husband hoping that God would grant him a long life. At the very mention of Satto's husband, Kaki flared up and vehemently cursed "Satto's husband!" Little did Sukh Ram know of the wrongs committed against Kaki by that man and his back handed ways. Kaki instantly, wasting no time, accused Sukh Ram of his fateful intervention which changed the entire course of her life. The man who was engaged to be her husband became Satto's, along with the life of comfort and luxury that had been promised to her by Sukh Ram.

Thus, the sordid and stained life of Kaki came to an eventful conclusion after her startling revelation of her reason for running away from Sukh Ram's house. Now that he finally grasped the truth, Sukh Ram could not believe what Kaki had to go through for the last six years, since her father's death. She left his house because she wanted to protect both him and the groom's family from libel and slander. She did not want harm to befall the family of her father's closest friend.

Her dharma was so unassailable and impregnable that she did not care what anyone said about her as long as Sukh Ram's family was safe from the eventual rumours that would come about if she gave birth to her son in their house, and when the father of her child was wedded to another woman. So she decided to let the rumours and hardships befall her only as he bore the weight of this crime against her, alone. Even though she had been treated with nothing but unkindness from Sukh Ram's family, she shielded them, instead letting herself be impaled by the spears of isolation and deprivation. Thus, we see in this story the indestructible strength of character possessed by Kaki and the diametrically antagonistic characteristics of Sukh Ram's family and the groom. The strength of a single woman outshines that of all those around her in this story as Kaki ultimately passes away atop the Dharma Heights, leaving behind a trail of empty promises and broken vows.

Research Gap

Feminist criticism of Indian literature has often concentrated on major languages like Hindi, Bengali, and English. Dogri literature, despite its rich cultural significance and reflection of the socio-political realities of Jammu, has not been extensively studied through a feminist lens. The unique representation of women's lived experiences, particularly in the context of patriarchal violence and suppression, remains under-explored in feminist literary criticism. This paper aims to fill this gap by providing a feminist analysis of key Dogri short stories.

Analysis

Violence and Patriarchy in Dogri Short Stories

In Om Goswami's story "Dislodged Brick," the patriarchal violence against women is brought to the forefront. Kalo, a young girl, becomes the object of lust for a contractor and his associates. Her grandmother, Amman, ultimately falls victim to the group's cruelty in a tragic turn of events. The narrative vividly portrays the stark vulnerability of women and the societal disregard for their dignity and safety. Om Goswami uses Pheenu, the father, as a representation of male complicity in this system of oppression, emphasizing the ease with which men surrender their responsibilities in a patriarchal framework.

Resistance and Survival: The Case of Kaki in Madan Mohan Sharma's "The Dharma Heights."

Kakis character in *The Dharma Heights* represents the silent strength of women who resist patriarchal dominance. After suffering betrayal by Sukh Ram's family, Kaki chooses to exile herself rather than bring dishonour to the household. Despite the immense injustice done to her, Kaki maintains her moral stance, protecting the family reputation at the expense of her own well-being. This story brings into focus the often-overlooked aspect of female agency in patriarchal societies, where women choose self-sacrifice as a form of silent resistance.

Conclusion

The selected Dogri short stories reflect a critical engagement with the gendered experiences of women in a patriarchal society. Through their nuanced depictions of violence, oppression, and resilience, writers like Om Goswami and Madan Mohan Sharma underscore the everyday realities of women who face brutality and marginalization. The stories highlight how patriarchal structures in Dogri society contribute to women's suffering, while also emphasizing the silent, often overlooked forms of resistance that women employ to reclaim their agency. This paper contributes to the growing body of feminist literary criticism by offering a focused analysis of Dogri literature, demonstrating how regional stories can deepen our understanding of gender dynamics in India. The exploration of these unheard voices not only sheds light on women's struggles but also serves as a testament to their enduring strength and moral resilience.

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