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Folk and Freedom Struggle: A Study of National Consciousness in Select Braj Folk Songs

Dr. Kopal Vats*

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur, India

**Corresponding author E-mail: - vatsakopal01@gmail.com*

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Abstract

The Indian Knowledge System drew heavily from oral traditions as the accumulated memory of a civilisation, a source of values and of social consciousness. The folk songs as they have been sung and felt all over the world contain within them every human feeling that we experience towards Nature and towards other humans. In the region of Braj these songs became a special aspect of folk tradition and a dimension of human experience. Just as the whole of India fought valiantly for freedom from colonial rulers and gained independence, the folk songs of Braj felt the same passionate hankering for human freedom. And, indeed, the songs also expressed a strong feeling of belonging to the Indian nation. In this article some of the folk songs of Braj have been discussed which were composed and sung during the India's freedom struggle. Many of these songs contain message of national struggle and inspire to serve country to make it free from bondage. These songs filled with patriotic feeling in vernacular language rendered great vibrations in the rural society as these are part of common life of Braj folk. In this article attempts have been made to analyse and discuss some of the patriotic songs in order to know the spirit of nationalism. This study is based on qualitative and interpretative approaches to read into the thematic trends, imagery and narratives in a select set of songs. It endeavours to grapple with songs that carry ideas of nation, sacrifice and collective combat through local idioms, symbols and cultural references particular to the Braj region. It also explores the role of folk traditions in bridging local cultural expressions with the larger national movement. The paper treats the Braj folk songs as part of the Indian Knowledge System and argues that oral traditions are a vital and largely unrecognised repository of nationalist thought and feelings.

Keywords- Folklore, Braj language, Cultural Nationalism, Freedom Struggle, Anti-Colonialism, Indigenous Literary Heritage.

1. Introduction

Braj region is known as Braj Bhoomi, with the center at Mathura, Uttar Pradesh in India. Braj is a cradle of Indian culture where arts like music, dance, painting and literature have evolved in a unique way. The region has inspired numbers of poets, artists, musicians, and writers to write and compose devotional songs and dances, notably ones narrating Krishna's life. These folk songs of Braj are very popular and are remembered as pure soulful renderings. They have contributed a lot in the evolution of the oral tradition of Braj region.

The term Braj is derived from the Sanskrit word Vraja, first referred to in the hymns of the Rigveda, the oldest of the Indian Veds. Vraja means Pasture or a place of shelter and grazing for Cattle and Bulls. It is also referred to as Vraj, Brij or Brajbhumi. Historically, Braj encompasses the North Bank and parts of the South Bank of the Yamuna River. Its core is located in the districts of Mathura and Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh. It further extends to the Haryana districts of Palwal and Ballabhgarh; the Rajasthan districts of Bharatpur and Karauli; and the Morena district in Madhya Pradesh. In Uttar Pradesh it extends to the districts of Mathura, Aligarh, Agra and the forested sugar cane tracts of the eastern part of the Braj region including the districts of Hathras, Farrukhabad, Mainpuri and Etah. This area is called Braj-bhoomi, an area of hills, ponds, groves, forests and pastures, called van and upvan of Braj, and specifically the area of the Yamuna River where Krishna tended the Cows and Buffaloes of Yashoda and played with the *gopis*, cowherd boys, parents and friends of his childhood. This area is also home to many sacred places and places of Pilgrimage associated with the youth of Krishna.

Braj is a Western Hindi language, descended from *Shaurseni Prakrit* and used primarily in the region known as Braj. A large amount of Hindi literature came forth in the region of Braj in the medieval period. Most of this literature is classified into two categories of the period, the early medieval era known as *bhakti kal* and the late medieval era known as *riti kal*. Braj Bhasha is written with the Devanagari script and is one of the most prolific Hindi dialects, containing a large number of words derived from Sanskrit. Folk culture of Braj is centuries old and has greatly contributed to national culture. There are hundreds of *Lokgeet* of Braj and every song is unique and special. The Braj *Lokgeet* has great significance as the songs are rendered from childhood to grave. More than a hundred songs are sung on all the occasions, celebrating birth, growth, festivals, seasons and death.

Braj culture has its own place in the comity of Indian culture and, consequently, the folk songs of Braj have their own characteristics different from other regions of India. The Braj folk songs are very rich in thought and have many subjects to sing and compose songs on them. Generally, these songs lack classical touch as these are composed by simple rural men and women of Braj *bhoomi*. Braj folk songs are not only rhythmic but have also flourished because they are meant to be sung. Various proverbial sayings, famous words and comparisons are utilized to enhance

the beauty and depth of these melodies and rhythms. Braj folk songs have evolved considerably based on geographical location, time and the needs of man and society.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study employing an interdisciplinary theoretical framework of nationalism, cultural nationalism, subaltern studies and ethnomusicology analyzes selected Braj folk songs of pre and post-independence periods. Employing this framework goes beyond the purview of the dominant nationalist historiography that mostly centers on the leaders and the movements, emphasizing institutions and ideologies, and seeks to explore alternative forms of nationalist expression. Reading folk songs beyond their aesthetic forms requires us to examine them as socio- political texts. These songs are a part of the cultural domain of everyday life in rural areas and consequently get embedded in the process of construction of national consciousness. Remembering the past through these songs becomes possible and they are essential to nation building as:

The very concept of folk music, along with many other terms incorporating the descriptor ‘folk’ or ‘national’, emerged out of the philosophy of the late 18th century, particularly the ideas proposed by Johann Gottfried Herder regarding the ‘soul of the people’ (*Volksgeist*). In the 19th century, the concept of ‘folk’, ‘people’ or ‘nation’ [the German word *Volk* encompasses all these meanings] acquired a new and political meaning with the emergence of the nation-state ideal. (Djupsjöbacka)

Thus, this study attempts to explore how folk songs participate in the larger agenda of nationalist movement, and can be used as socio- political tools for mobilization.

For Benedict Anderson, nation was a modern political formation that functioned as an ‘imagined community’ because

The nations and their states are of such size that what binds its people cannot be established by personal relationships and interests, as would be the case in smaller communities, but must be accomplished by ideas and identities that are shared by all. A nation can consist of millions of people, but they nevertheless share this feeling of belonging together and to the country in which they live. For this reason, nations and states are also called ‘imagined communities’. (Berger 65)

According to Anderson, even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members; yet they carry an image of communion in imagination to make and/or maintain the nation. While for him print capitalism was the medium that enabled the imagination of the nation to reach its audience most effectively, the present study shows that even in regions where literacy was either non-existent or very low, folk music and songs played the role of the medium to imagine the nation. While the Braj region was home to many different castes and communities, the folk songs that emerged from this region during the freedom movement carry the imagination of the single unified nation. Therefore, one can say that the Braj folk songs were an expression of imagining the nation. While the folk songs had their roots in the local contexts, they contributed to the emerging ideology of nationalism by turning the local sentiments into a single narrative of national unity. In addition, there were many songs that got

embedded in the collective memory of the region articulating anti-colonial sentiment, the desire for freedom and martyrdom. Ernest Gellner writes:

Nationalism usually conquers in the name of a putative folk culture. Its symbolism is drawn from the healthy, pristine, vigorous life of the peasants, of the *Volk*, the *narod*. There is a certain element of truth in the nationalist self-presentation when the *narod* or *Volk* is ruled by officials of another, an alien high culture, whose oppression must be resisted first by a cultural revival and reaffirmation, and eventually by a war of national liberation. (57)

Anthony D. Smith writes in his book titled *Ethnosymbolism and Nationalism*:

[...] ethno-symbolism regards ethnic identities and communities as crucial for the formation and the persistence of nations. Although nations may be partly forged by political institutions, over the long term they require ethno-cultural resources to create a solidary community, mainly because of the critical importance for a sense of national identity of subjective dimensions. That is also the reason why nations cannot simply be seen as elite projects. We need to understand the often-complex interplay between elites and various sections of the wider population whom they may seek to mobilise in terms of symbols, myths and memories that resonate with them. (21)

According to Smith, the national imagination is a product of myths, memories, symbols, and traditions that are shared and continuously reinterpreted by the members of a particular ethnos. Wilson thus writes “The cultural and historical pattern of a people—the national soul—is expressed best in its language and particularly in its folk poetry, the loftiest expression to which language could aspire” (Wilson 144).

Braj folk songs, with their myriad references to historical events, legends, myths, sacred landscapes, and social issues, represent the cultural continuum of the national imagination. Symbols, values, and customs, which carry the collective memory of the ethnic group, serve as symbolic resources that, through their performance and reinterpretation, contribute to the shaping and maintenance of the nationalist identity. The other concept borrowed from modern history is that of “invented traditions” by Eric Hobsbawm. These are cultural practices that are invented and reinterpreted to create social cohesion and to underscore the legitimacy of new institutions in the period of modernization.

Folk songs can be understood to challenge colonial hegemony through a reinforcement of indigenous values and through the production of emotional solidarity amongst subjugated peoples because it can create a “collective identity among Indians” and “Even though the British had divided India into several administrative regions, folk songs helped weave a sense of shared destiny among the people” (Verma). These songs were often played out within the cultural cosmos of the subaltern groups and offer valuable insights into their lived experiences and shared imagination. Folk songs offer an entry point into the world of a mass of ordinary people who imagined their future during the colonial period.

Approaching folk songs through an ethnomusicological lens can provide the most salient methodological tools to grapple with Braj folk songs as living performance practices. As communitywide activities played during social events, during cultural rituals and ceremonies, and during agricultural or other labour activities that involved many people, Braj folk songs

can absorb nationalist ideology within lived experiences of community rather than simply as the theoretical construct of a political ideology of nationalism. Timothy Rice hence, writes “Interpretive musical descriptions, which Clifford Geertz (1973) called “thick descriptions,” involve the reading of musical practices for their social and cultural meaning, and more recently for the sorts of power relationships they express or challenge” (116).

3. Discussion

The Indian Independence struggle as led by Mahatma Gandhi was marked by a strong feeling for self-reliance and economic independence. The charkha or the spinning wheel was at the centre of the swadeshi movement as a potent and non-violent symbol of financial freedom. In the following folksongs of Braj, the charkha is thus celebrated-

1. Charkha laayi day re moye bhartaar, soot kaantu nhainau nhainau...(Madhukar 110)

Translation-

O my husband, bring me a spinning wheel, I would spin yarn a little

2. Bhaiya rakh Bhaarat ki laaj bhaat khaddar kau laayiau re (Madhukar 111)

Translation-

Brother, honour the country, bring gifts of Khadi for *Bhaat*

In the above two lines, the woman once a wife to her husband and the other time a sister to her brother is asking for gifts from them. She requests her *bhartaar* or husband to bring her a spinning wheel. The spinning wheel was popularised by Gandhi during the freedom struggle. Her request for the charkha is a desire to contribute to the National freedom struggle by following the footsteps of Gandhi who led by example and spun yarn himself. His request to the fellow Indians was plain; ensure your economic independence in the face of the British pressure. He emphasised the need to adopt the practice of manufacturing local goods and preparing one's own cloth in the form of khadi was a groundbreaking approach. The woman wants to spin her own yarn at home, learn the skill gradually to honour her motherland. Since the woman's life was more or less restricted to boundaries of her home, adopting the charkha satisfied both the conditions; first, not having to step out into the material world and second, to not stay oblivious of her national responsibility. Partha Chatterjee thus writes:

The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world—and woman is its representation. (120)

As per the tradition, the Indian mother while marrying off her children, receives abundant gifts or *bhaat* from her brother. In the above line from a song, the woman asks for appropriate gifts, in times of national struggle. She asks for khadi, the simple fabric popularised by Gandhi. She believes that by gifting her khadi, her brother must uphold the honour of their nation first.

3. Gharar ghar gharar chalaee charkhaa re

Chalaee chaak paae maal tau charkaa karaee soot bharkhaa

Ghar Ghar kaatau soot ot sab kapda ki keejau

Taj deu sab aalsya kifaayat paisaa ki keejau

Gharar gharrar chalaee charkhaa

Shuddh soot ke kapdaa pehau swachh rahaeen din raat

Paisaa baahar naa jaaye tau sadaa rahaee apne paas

Gharar ghar gharar chalaee charkhaa (Madhukar 111)

Translation-

Gharrrrrrr Gharrrrrrr ...the spinning wheel rotates and rumbles

When fibre twists on the wheel, the yarn comes forth

And thus, comes forth the cloth from yarn in each home

Give up the sloth and be thrifty now

As the wheel rumbles

Wear the homespun clean cloth, stay clean all day

Save your money, spend it not outside

As the wheel rumbles

The significance of the charkha as a potent symbol of economic freedom is further emphasised in the above song. The rumbling charkha is welcomed by the Indian households. It runs with a rumbling sound but it produces the yarn using which each household can prepare its own cloth. The lazy must give up their sloth and save money by spinning their own cloth. On one hand the purity of the homespun fabric is unmatched and on the other hand, the outward flow of money is hindered helping people save.

4. Araee tero charkhaa halledaar parausin suniyau behnaa

Aa din te meri kati kataaee

Nath saune ki banwaee

Banwaayau gare kau haaroo, parausin suniyau behnaa (Madhukar 111)

Translation-

O my neighbour, O sister, your wheel is noisy

After you spun yarn for me

You have a new nose-ring of gold

And a necklace around your neck now, O sister!

The above song reflects the abundance that follows economic freedom of the women when they use the charkha. In the song, a woman notices the prosperity of her neighbour ever since she has started spinning yarn using her noisy charkha. She was a customer herself and finds that the neighbour has recently bought a new nose ring of gold and a new necklace indicating her augmented earnings.

5. Mere charkhe ko tootae na yaar, charkhaa chaltu rahaee

Kaahe kau charkhaa banbaayau kaahe ki daaree maal

Chandan kau charkhaa banwaayau, resam ki daaree maal

Prem kau maine takuaa banwaayau, gyaan kau taar nikaalau

Suddh soot kau kapdaa pehinau, garmi lagayee na thand

Gandhi ji ne karm karikaen, kiyau Bhaarat aajaad

Jo charkhaa nit prati, kaataee, kataeenge dukh apaar

Jaeese naam amar Gandhi kau, taeese ee rahaee merau taar (Madhukar 111)

Translation-

Never should the chord of my wheel come apart, let my wheel run

What is this wheel made of? What do I put into it?

Of sandalwood tis made, and silk I feed it

The spindle that I built of love, yields yarn of wisdom

Donning the homemade cloth, I feel neither heat nor chill

Gandhiji in his efforts have gifted freedom to my country

If you spin yarn on spinning wheel, there shall be no more woes

As immortal is the name of Gandhiji, so shall remain my yarn forever

The above song employs metaphysical conceit to determine the significance of the charkha. Not just the spinning wheel is a means for economic freedom and a signifier of national clamour for independence, it somewhat transcends the obvious benefits to a sense of higher consciousness. The song denotes the true value of the spinning wheel. The singer wishes for the charkha to run consistently and never suffer from any mechanical breakdowns. Its parts must continue to function without fail because in addition to the income it facilitates, the charkha has transformed its user. In response to this obvious fascination with the charkha, when the user is asked to disclose its real value, she is only compelled to explain that though the charkha is physically made of sandalwood and is fed silk as a raw material to deliver the yarn but it has yielded far greater results for its user. The spindle that was handled with love and care has gradually infused a newfound wisdom in the user. In the process of creating yarn from

the charkha, the user has discovered a higher consciousness towards the Indian condition. The Indians have been saved by Gandhi and his teachings. By introducing the charkha, Gandhi has shown a path towards emancipation to the Indian people and as long as his name shall bear respect, the charkha would be celebrated for its significance. It is possible to escape the drudgery of life through the adoption of charkha, muses the speaker.

6. Jaag utthe hain bhaaratvaasee ab sovan kau kachu kaam nahin
 Deshbhakt navyuvkan koon, kahoon milyau karaee aaraam nahin
 Baddhe chalau baa ran bhoomi paae jahaan saban kau hai adhikaar
 Aaj desh ki seema maahin machi rahe kaise atyaachaar
 Saancho dhan hai aaj hataame ran se paache paanm Nahin (Madhukar 111)

Translation-

Indians are awakened now for sleep is in vain
 Young patriots have no time for rest
 March to the battle ground, it belongs to us all
 Tyranny has made its way through the borders
 Valour is the real wealth, do not step back from duty

Here, the song becomes a call for strong action, to remind the youth of their duty towards their country. The young have awakened to action. This is to remind them that the battle ground belongs to all and not just a few leaders and thus Anderson writes about the 'nation' that "it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7). That it is essential for the youth to participate in the battle for freedom because the desire for freedom is always followed by shouldering of responsibility towards the motherland. Courage is the true wealth in times of national struggle and it is unbecoming to a true patriot to step back from the duty at this stage of struggle. A tyranny has been unleashed by the foreigners within the borders of our motherland and it is national duty to chase them away.

7. Jaaku apni maatrubhoomi saun, antartam saun pyaar nahin
 Keh deo tum logan kun, jeebe kau adhikaar Nahin (Madhukar 112)

Translation-

Your hearts if stay unmoved by love for motherland
 Are beating in vain, lifeless, I tell you.

The lines are self-explanatory of their firm message. Those who do not carry love within their hearts for their motherland have no right to breathe on the soil of their motherland. They are more or less dead as people and are traitors of the nation.

8. Khelau ri prem ki hori

Rang- sangathan ki mili khelau, tyaag gagari ko ree
 Teen rang ki laee pichkaari, nirbhay hai kae baddhau agaari
 Dekhau apni apni baari khoob karau barjoree
 Raanaa Shivaa sehaj hi khele, tan pae kasht anekan jhele
 Khele Bhagat Singh jat pyaare, Raajguru Sukhdev sitaare
 Baapu khele Hari ke aage, hum dekhat reh gaye abhaage
 Date rahe sab mamta tyagi, preet raashtra saun jori (Madhukar 112)

Translation-

Play Holi with love
 Smear the colours onto each other, leave aside the pot
 Burst forth the tricoloured jet stream, trot fearlessly
 Wait and show mischief on your turn
 Rana Shiva played so well, bearing wounds on their bodies
 They were star players too, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev
 Bapu played with the Divine, alas, we were left to stare
 They played to the end, in love with the nation, dismissed the self

Braj region is particularly known for its unique Holi celebrations. Holi is a festival of colours played in the Hindu month of *Phaalgun* corresponding to the month of March. As a festival of colours, the event is marked by playful and uninhibited celebrations that involve smearing colours on each other, throwing water and eating delicacies to one's heart's content. It is meant for resolving old discords and coming together for celebration to ensure unity and kinship.

The above song is marked by the spirit of the Holi festival to improve kinship in the face of national struggle for independence. The tricoloured *pichkaari* or water jet stream is symbol of the Indian flag and a reminder to unite and move forward without fear. The song alludes to the brave sacrifices of Maharana Pratap of Mewar and Shivaji Maharaj of Maharashtra who had fought valiantly against the Mughal invasion. The youth must be reminded that in a similar vein should they vow to fight against the British. The heroes had continued to strive ahead despite terrible wounds all over their bodies as if it were a mere sport to them. So must the youth play in the national struggle without flinching at the physical pain. There is further mention of revolutionaries who gave up their lives playfully for the motherland. They are Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev, the heroes of the Indian youth. The young must learn from their example. Mahatma Gandhi is said to have played with *Hari*, God himself, which is a reference to his assassination while returning from his prayers. These Indian legends

sacrificed themselves at the alter of their motherland and did it out of sheer love and no other ambitions whatsoever.

In his book *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Anthony D. Smith highlights:

For though the basic pattern is laid down in the community's 'genetic code', it requires human, and superhuman, agency to bring it to fruition. The achievement of its various stages requires assistance from voluntary agents; otherwise, the community could well remain in an arrested state at an early stage of its trajectory. The basic identity code sets the pattern and direction; but humans and heroes alone can 'realize' it. That is why the legends are personalized, and why the golden age is also the age of 'heroes'. The 'uses of history' are the virtues of great men. (192)

The importance of superhuman figures, legendary heroes can never be over emphasised in the context of communal myth building. Hence, the song refers to the Indian legends such as Maharana Pratap and Shivaji to remind the people of their glorious past and thus follow in the footsteps of the legends.

9. Bhool na jaeeyo bhaaratvaasee un veeran ki kurbaani

Haste haste praan gabaaye amar rakhaun maa kau paani

Jaat paat au majhab naam pae aaj machaau halla

Dharam bachaau, shakti baddhaau, jagah jagah par hai gilla (Madhukar 113)

Translation-

O Indian People, forget not the sacrifice of the brave

They gave up their lives with a smile, immortal are their mothers' tears

In the name of caste and faith, you raise hue and cry

Save religion, secure the might, such are the callous slogans now

After the independence was won, the country had a long way to reinvent itself and become a self-sufficient nation after centuries of oppression and exploitation. The task ahead was a difficult one and the road not smooth to this end as the country was infested with internal hardships especially those that were a result of communal and caste-based friction. The Indian society as a diverse multitude is vulnerable to problems of discrimination and discord. The above song is a reminder to the Indian people that independence was won at a great cost and no citizen should ever forget the sacrifices made by their freedom fighters. Those who chose to give up their lives with a smile to ensure the national integrity and home rule. However, just a few years after independence people have forgotten their freedom fighters. It is reflected in unreasonable and vile practices of communal discord and untouchability. The song is a reminder to keep the spirit of the freedom struggle alive by living in harmony and give up the divisive practices.

10. Maa kathin museebat jhel hind li aajaadi

Atyaachaar angrejan kiyau bahut janta daee maar
 Bade bade veeran chadhaaye diye faansi bahu kooan diye daar
 Kareeyai atee barbaadi
 Siree mahaatma Gandhi ji ne naare diye lagwaaye
 Bhaarat koo aajaad karyau diye angrej bhajaae
 Roye rahee shehjaadi
 Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru ban gaye ab pardhaan
 Haath tirangaa jhandaa liyau, rajneeti me maan
 Pehar tan pae khaadi
 Mantri Laal Bahadur ji ne kahi khule maidaan
 Eent kau jawaab milae patthar te bhagjaa Pakistan
 Seema sena laadi (Madhukar 113)

Translation-

O mother, with troubles was this freedom of Hind begot
 The British were ruthless and killed its people
 Many a fighter were hanged, others thrown into the well
 Wreaking havoc on this land
 Led by Gandhi, people yelled slogans
 Freedom was then won, the British ousted from power
 Cried the Queen that lost her land
 Pandit Nehru is the new Head, the Prime Minister
 Won respect with tricolour in his hand
 And khadi on his body
 Laal Bahadur in his turn, called out in the open
 Tit for tat shall be delivered, should hear Pakistan

(Note- All the above Braj songs have been translated into English by the author of this paper)

The above song reflects the immediate circumstances of the country right after independence was won. It talks of the terrible hurdles that were endured by the Indians in the hands of the British. Several freedom fighters were hanged to death and so many were dumped into the wells to die. The atrocities of the English should never be forgotten and it must also be remembered that thousands of people willingly sacrificed their lives in the process of gaining

independence. Inspired by the fervour of Mahatma Gandhi, people were driven to chant slogans and when India won its freedom, the Queen of England, *shehjaadi* must have cried out of her defeat. The new leaders who took over were great figures like Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and Laal Bahadur Shastri, each of them had their own unique qualities.

Nehru won the respect of his people by honouring the tricoloured flag and wearing Khadi in the spirit of *swadeshi* as can be seen by what Eric Hobsbawm writes:

The National Flag, the National Anthem and the National Emblem are the three symbols through which an independent country proclaims its identity and sovereignty, and as such they command instantaneous respect and loyalty. In themselves they reflect the entire background, thought and culture of a nation. (11)

Laal Bahadur Shastri showed utter determination in calling out the depravity of Pakistan. As a new nation born out of communal hatred, Pakistan's consistent attacks on India became the new challenge for the Indian people after independence. Leaders like Shastri believed in a tit for tat strategy in handling Pakistan and its belligerence.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to analyse the select Braj folksongs with the thematic concerns of nationalism especially in context of the feeling of solidarity associated with the Indian national struggle for freedom from the British. The analysis of these songs reiterates their importance as essential carriers of Indian historic past and cultural legacy. The theoretical framework consisting of concepts of Imagined Communities, Ethno-symbolism, Ethnomusicology under the broader rubrics of cultural nationalism established the significance of the Braj folksongs as special repositories of Indian heritage especially with reference to the Struggle for Independence. The songs carry within them not only the gradually fading Braj vocabulary but also a vast reference to Indian myths and legends such as Maharana Pratap, Shivaji, Bhagat Singh, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri to name a few. The songs evoke the nationalist symbols such as the charkha or the spinning wheel that was popularised by Gandhi during the struggle for independence to ensure that Indians can successfully and proudly assert their economic freedom. The songs also throw light upon the women's role in the freedom struggle. Even though they were confined within the household but this did not prevent them from being actively involved in the Indian freedom movement. Significant cultural symbols such festival of Holi, traditions associated with Indian marriages are contained within these songs and need to be preserved through remembrance and practice.

This study combines cultural nationalism, subaltern studies and ethnomusicology to analyse Braj folk songs as political cultural performances that contributed to the making of nationalist consciousness. Folk songs are approached as socio-cultural practices, which together produce collective identity, resist marginalization and communicate emotions of solidarity. The study argues that the Indian freedom struggle was not confined to the formal institutions of politics and nationalist leadership but was also enacted and experienced within everyday cultural performances that enabled the voices and collective aspirations of the people to be expressed.

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