

Gender Construction in Patriarchal Punjabi Society: A Critical Appraisal of Contemporary Popular Music

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Abstract

The genders have not been discriminated by nature but certainly the patriarchal norms have estranged all the genders apart. Indian society presents one such social structure which shows the hierarchy of genders, due to the patriarchal mindset still prevailing in the society.

Due to this societal complication the men have become a bread winner having economic authority in his hands whereas the women have provided with the duties of house keepers and unfortunately, the third genders still are not being considered as humans. This study therefore presents a thesis for discussion on the issue concerning gender discrimination in Punjabi society. The popular Punjabi lyrics have been studied and analysed from gender perspective in this study in which it has been found that the patriarchal culture is still prevalent and discriminating women. The music is a popular genre in contemporary era which contains the people's subjective and objective consciousness concerning to women.

Keywords: Gender Construction, Gender hierarchy, Music, Lyrics, Punjabi, Patriarchal social structure

In its long history, women were not only deprived of educational and political rights but also they had to struggle against male dominant social ideology. Even the women's image in religious scriptures were sketched in a way to perpetuate their obedient positions. In the earlier literary sphere the male writing was dominated but, it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth century England and France when women writer such as Aphra Behn, Anne Bradstreet and Mary Wollstonecraft started the movement. Wollstonecraft has asserted that "the ideals of the Revolution and Enlightenment should be extended to women, primarily through access to education" (Habib 667). In India, the struggle for women's freedom started in the nineteenth and

twentieth century where the evils such as sati system, dowry, unequal wage, unequal access to education and political activities, were customary. Various positive changes in the life of conventional woman is witnessed in present society but there are several other issue which are generated due to the prevalence of patriarchal society, such issues are studied further through the intertextual study of songs, videos and texts of India. The social evils, conservatism, irrationality, gender biasness, and unequal treatment of sexes in the society is presented in this study.

The subjugation of women has regrettably remained a common grievance of Indian societal structure. The issues are studied through a comparative insight at the popular Punjabi songs widespread in the society; these are “Breakup Party” and “Yaar Bathere”. Song consists the lyrical words set to music and, is sub-genre of poetry. With the advent of the Romantic Movement, the importance of lyrical form has increased that leads to an emphasis on the formal construction and unity. The Greeks defined a lyric as a song and the “songs in a musical are known as lyrics” (Cuddon 481). Thus the range of lyrics in literature vastly inculcates the individual as well as shared outlooks in a particular region. The female aspect is historically ignored whether in written as well as oral literature. The socio-economic condition of women can be efficiently outlined through the logical and critical analysis of prevailing songs which examine the social ideology of Punjabi society. Many significant issues can be traced through the comparative study of songs, films and other texts.

In modern times, the interrelation of art especially music and literature can be recognised as a field of study. The idea reduced in music, painting, sculpture and other arts is coherent but reflects its vastness of the subject. Daniel Webb wrote in his *Observations on the Correspondence Between Poetry and Music* (1970), “I shall suppose that, it is in the nature of music to excite familiar vibration to communicate familiar movements to the nerve and the spirits” (Webb 6). It can be analysed that the music is capable of depicting the individual and social sentiments of humans. Calvin S. Brown opined that the relationship between the literature, music and other arts can be considered as the essential part of comparative literature (Brown 101). Hence, the lyrics of “Breakup Party” and “Yaar Bathere” are to be considered as the prevailing notions in the Punjabi society.

In the present Indian society in general and Punjabi society in particular, women are subjugated in many ways in the hands of male dominant society. After achieving the political

independence, there are much significant domain where gender inequality can be explicitly examined. These are; economic inequality, social injustices and superstitions, educational inequities, political, health & survival inequalities. While recognising the gender complexity, it is important to understand its biological and natural capabilities. Simone de Beauvoir investigated the term 'woman' simply as a womb, an ovary. Her assertion; "she is a female": this word is enough to define her. But despondently, the epithet 'female' in man's mouth "sounds like an insult" (Beauvoir 41). Thus, it becomes apparent to have hostility which produces the resentment for womanhood. Such a patriarchal consciousness against female can be examined through the lyrics in "Breakup Party".

It is significant enough to understand the extent of patriarchal consciousness which have discriminated the womanhood in many ways considering the place of a woman inside the house. But on the other side the man in the same society has middling interest in the household issues because he is free to experience the entire universe. The boundaries are demarcated for a woman inside which she is being expected to limit her life. She "is locked into the conjugal community: she has to change this prison into a kingdom" (Beauvoir 535). The similar condition of women is defined by a male in the selected lyrics, "*dhoyegi to kachhe aur gande bartan*" (Singh) [you will wash the underwear and used utensils], shows derogatory temperament regarding woman. It is an outcome of patriarchal societal structure which has limited the women's role by considering her unable to perform well outside the house. By the use of unpleasant and discriminatory words such as "*dhoyegi tu kachhe*" lyricist has tried to perpetuate his position as superior to a female partner, degrades her by entitling her to be only spending her life doing nothing but household work as she had rejected a man. This presents the intolerance of a man to accept the disapproval of a woman. And ridiculously, "[h]er attitude to her home is dictated by this same dialectic that generally defines her condition: she takes by becoming prey, she liberates herself by abdicating; by renouncing the world, she means to conquer a world". (Beauvoir 535). Singer has made an attempt to perpetuate the past gender role of a woman as the only work she is capable of doing with the help of such patriarchal discourse, "*dekhegi bas saas bahu aur durdarshan, ban ke reh jayegi tu house biwi aur chobis gante hoga yar tera on tv*" (Singh), [You (woman) would not be able to accomplish anything in your life and will spend the rest of your life by only watching t.v.]. The role of a house-wife if mocked upon in the present song. The lyricist presents a house

wife inferior in all ways to that of man. The hard work of a house-wife is compared to her being incompetent as a result she spends most of her time watching T.V. Thus, the concerned opinion by Beauvoir is justifiable with the women's condition in Punjabi society in the contemporary era. Pierre Bourdieu has aptly asserted:

The social order do functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded: it is the sexual division of labour, a very strict distribution of the activities assigned to each sex, of their place, time and instruments; it is the structure of space, with the opposition between the place of assembly or the market, reserved for men, and the house, reserved for women, or, within the house. . .” (Bourdieu 9)

Woman is portrayed in the selected songs as completely dependent on the mercy of man, even for her identity. But, this identity is created and conferred by patriarchal structure as according to his own ideology. The decision making authority in the family have remained in the hands of man from ages, which is still prevailing in Punjabi society. The lyrics shows, “*ja kar le tu usse shaadi fir shuru teri barbadi*” (Singh), [get married to that man of your choice and you will see your destruction]. The lyrics of “Breakup party” delineates that if a woman acts against man's will, she is destined to be devastated. The lyrics of the songs infer the patriarchy ridden mentality of the lyricist where he represents woman as an indecisive, weak, as well as irrational being who is incapable of making her own career, rather she ruins her life if do not accept the proposal of man. The context added by lyricist, reveals the several discrimination with the women. Taslima Nasreen in her book *No Country for Women* (2010) asserts “women is identified in the society not on the basis of even her gender, not by her name, not by education, not by her accomplishment, not by her talents, but on the basis of her relationship with a male” (Nasreen 234). The phrase justifies that as illustrated in the songs woman’s identity is recreated after her marriage. The patriarchal norms that she is made to follow on the name of culture and traditions completely changes her identity and make her dependent on man. It is anticipated that when a girl gets married it becomes her duty to do all the household chores, take-care of children and in-laws and prominently live her life in accordance with her husband.

Hence, the partial construction of ethics in the male dominant society set a patriarchal culture which directs woman to behave in a certain ways. Such partial beliefs in Punjabi society,

can be traced from the critical analysis of the song “Breakup Party”. There is a stanza such as, “agar galti se mujhse na hota hai ye paap, to yehi hote bachho tumhare baap” (Singh), [if I would not have committed the sin of rejecting him then he would have been your father, children!]. Here, a man while regretting over his breakup with a girl, is furiously condemning the woman simultaneously. He mocks at the woman and relates that ‘breakup’ as a ‘paap’ [sin] that she has committed. These imposition of patriarchal moral authority can be analysed from the direct or indirect reflection of common behaviour of all the genders. The similar description is traced in the text *That Long Silence* (1989) of Shashi Deshpande. Through the depiction of matrimonial institution Deshpande represents the Indian social structure where woman’s need for social and economic self-determination is always curbed by patriarchal society. The ideals of woman’s silent self-submission are made so customary in the society that women find it difficult to revolt against man-made standards. Such as, Vanitamami advised her niece Jaya, “[a] husband is like a sheltering tree . . . Without the tree you're dangerously uprooted and vulnerable. This followed logically. And so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to waste it with deceit and lies. . .” (Deshpande 32). It is much deplorable to witness such anti-woman beliefs in the existing society where women are always expected to follow the man-made principles.

The superiority of males who disregard women's role in outer world, is partially justified through the predominance of male consciousness over the periods. There are hardly the social taboos on men whether they are morally wrong but at the same time women are being questioned even after the unexpected incidents happened with them. While looking at the graph of crimes done to women in the state, it is important to note that *The Pioneer* of the state edition in the year 2015 wrote Ludhiana as “rape capital of Punjab” where two rapes are being reported every week and three in entire state daily. Despite, this paper shows, “about four women in the State were molested daily, while four others were harassed on the pretext of dowry every day in Punjab” (Malik). Now, the endless questions arise on men who work behind such incidents and who consider women as the burden and stigmatic as well. Unfortunately, Indian people have never ending faith in religious scriptures which contain discriminatory rules for women. And the scriptures are advocated later by the laws of Manu, which has become a source to perpetuate the male supremacy in Indian society. It is asserted in *Manusmriti*, for instance:

... a young woman or an old lady should never carry out any task independently. As a child, she must remain under her father's control; as a young woman under her husband's; and when her husband is dead, under her son's. She must not seek to live independently. She must never want to separate herself from her father, husband or son's for by separating herself from them, a woman brings disgrace on both families. (qtd. in Olivelle)

The aforementioned margins created for woman are evident in Punjabi society too, which can be observed through the study of selected songs where a male intends to certify woman as a bad reputed when she doesn't care about his interests. Such partial laws exist even in the present society where the primary powers are centralised in the men's hands. In context of Punjabi society, one can find men's privileges by analysing the lyrics of selected songs; "*Na aisa na tu soch re chhori everyday meri new love story*" (Singh), [don't underestimate me, I have a new love story every single day], in which a man claimed of his having multiple relation with women and is justifying his multiple relations. In the similar manner, if one take the example of a Bollywood movie entitled *Kis Kis ko Pyar Karu* (2015), in which a man married four woman and justifies himself later in the movie. It is self-justification of males, but, when a woman does the same, she becomes a source of disgrace for the whole family. The double standards of patriarchal structure can also be observed in the song, "*saddi maa nu putt ni labne tenu yaar bathere*" (Alfaaz) which means [my mother will not have another boy child but you will find many other lovers]. Here a discrimination in the mindset of patriarchy is portrayed. Undoubtedly, his mother is a 'female' which have been respected but when it comes to another girl who does not belong to his family, is criticised, abused, tortured, and assaulted. The last stanza of "Breakup Party" contains; "*ab uski best friend ko fasaunga, long drive pe usko le jaaunga, usko jalau, use bada tadpau apni ex ko aaj main sabak sikhau*" (Singh), [now, I will romance with her bestfriend and will get her to a long drive, to infuriate his ex and make her feel jealous]. When a man is refused for the relationship he starts hounding over the woman as if she is his property. The lyrics present the mentality of the lyricist that for him his ex-girlfriend is nothing more than his property. The representation of woman as an object or property is shown in the selected songs. In another song named "Blue Eyes", woman is referred as "bomb figure". The discourse which objectify women can be traced in Indian cinema which was prevalent in eighties and

nineties. A song in Bollywood film *Mohra* (1994) contain the lyrics such as “*tu cheez badi hai mast mast*” (Narayan and Krishnamurthy). The lyrics consider female as a thing which is beautiful. The words such as ‘*cheez*’ is an object or a thing by which she is being defined. The song deliberately presents woman’s body parts for the objectification of woman’s body. It shows the affecting commercialization by means of the portrayal of women’s body. Such representation of woman as once, Jane Austen in her *Persuasion* (1818), counters the conditioning of women by asserting “I hate to hear you talking so like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures (Austen 103)”. Thus, while looking at the whole Indian society through the lens of Indian songs it is analysed that the women are always being objectified and commodified.

Such objectification of woman is satirized in *Angry Indian Goddesses* when a director directs a new actress to move in a way so that he can have the close-up of her body parts and rejects the idea of having a strong female protagonist. The reason of such commodification is explained by Taslima Nasreen as “women are a commodity in this patriarchal society . . . for consumption of men” (Nasreen 22) and they are being prepared to make the appearance according to men’s desire. Many such derogatory phrase of lyrics insults or hurts the feeling of woman which may cause psychological violence for woman.

There are several recent audiovisual songs which portray women in quite downright demeaning way, where female actress, dancer and performer is customarily being expected to objectify herself. The visuals of the selected songs present certain women too dancing and enjoying the songs which are derogatory towards woman. Such incidents present woman being an advocate of patriarchal structure. The presence of female performers in both the selected songs “Breakup Party” and “Yaar Bathere” and also voice of female singer, and equal gestures, and acting response of actress in audiovisual songs “*Tu cheez badi hai mast mast*” is against womanhood by her own allies. Here, it would be significant to note that not necessarily a man discriminated a woman but a woman also hold such opinion for another one. Such complication of the patriarchal system is further elucidated by Marxist Feminists such as Ara Wilson in her publication *Patriarchy: Feminist Theory* and hold the opinion that “subordination of women was created by capitalism, colonialism, and world system” (1496). While clarifying the term he asserted; “just about any form of ranking or oppression, so that highly structured and hierarchal

forms of teaching, thinking, theology, or decision-making can all be said to be patriarchal, whether or not they suppress women in particular”. In this way “the analysis has shifted away from the systemic social structures to the behavioural and individual (Wilson 1496). Thus, Wilson described the obscurity of the concept as the ‘global sisterhood’ voicing against the ‘global patriarchy’, and brings into light the ignored facts concerning domination of women, who belong to a higher class. Much alike in “Yaar Bathere” the woman is portrayed as deceiving and wicked by nature. Woman is shown holding two men who are tied with a steel chain signifying the control of women over men. This is distorted reality which itself shown the negative image of womanhood but certainly the actual condition of women is not unknown to the individuals.

This study has also investigated those causes by which female remain subject to male. A women’s relation to economic means is weaker and not been accepted similar to men. She is expected to rely on her male partner for the economic fulfilment. This historical process of women’s subjugation can be analysed from Frederich Engels’s view of women’s condition in the different economic modes of production in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1942), he asserted:

Women are originally equal to, if not more powerful than men. . . [she] lose power when private property comes into existence as a mode of production. Men’s control of private property, and the ability thereby to generate a surplus, changes the family form to a patriarchal one where women, and often slaves, become the property of the father and husband. (qtd. in Ferguson and Hennessy)

Thus, the women’s economic deprivation has been perpetuated through the men’s control over private property. And, the limited freedom for women gradually limit their life as a whole. In Punjabi society particularly, the situation is similar to abovementioned argument. The man proves dominant in household and commercial domain as well. The lyrics; “[r]ehndi khundi peali vikati ki kehne kudiye tere” (Alfaaz), [Remaining property is sold out due to the expenses of his girlfriend]. Here, a male makes the allegation on his female partner that he has sold his hard earned property for her pleasure. It contradictorily depicts that the women are the reason for the men’s deprivation. The lyrics like, “nakhre vikhaundi c . . . kharche karaundi c” (Alfaaz) [girls is mocked by the singer for her pompous attitude], shows man’s unjust interpretation that fashions the women’s image as extravagantly spending the wealth of their partner. The phrase in

“Yaar Bathere”, such as; “[p]ehla mang payi tu gaddi di, chhoti bhi nahi baddi di . . . tu ta cotton county paundi c ni ohne gant laita” and “tu kitthe PG vich sardi c ohne flat laita” (Alfaaz). These lyrics portrayed the age old tradition of woman being economically dependent on man which has improved with the passage of time. But the lyricist with the help of such lyrics want to prove the inferiority of the second gender and wants to portray that a woman needs a man so that she could fulfill her economic needs as she herself is incapable of meeting her expenses. Indeed there is a change in the economic independence of woman in Punjabi society but still in most families man has to bear the earning responsibilities. While expressing her own experience, Virginia Woolf hold the opinion as she wrote *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) that the “freedom to think for oneself rest on financial freedom” (qtd. in Habib 677). Therefore, it becomes necessary to make women more economically independent so that she could have a life of dignity and self-respect.

In the contemporary period, the process of all kind of human development is slowed down by the gender discrimination throughout the Indian society. Undoubtedly, some places have been reserved especially for women in various field but their self-participation in social, economic and political activities, is still not satisfactory. While discussing the role of gender in the development process, it is observed that to promote the consciousness of gender equality, has become an issue of development in itself. When it comes to international level, India has ranked 130th out of 155 countries in Gender Inequality Index (GII) for 2014, where Bangladesh and Pakistan ranked 111th and 121st according to data in the United National Development Programme's latest Human Development Report (HDR) 2015 (Nair). Hence, it can be conferred that the gender injustices prevalent in Indian society are higher than that of neighbor countries. Therefore, the need to overcome such inequities is must for the healthy development of our society.

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