

# The Baars (folk ballads) of Mian Dido and Gugga Nath: A Retelling of Dogra History in Folk.

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## **Abstract:**

*Folk literature has always been at the fringes of the main stream academic discourse. However, in the recent years there has been an increased understanding of the importance of folk studies, particularly in a country like India that has an eclectic composition.*

*The ever expanding study of myth, orality and folklore encodes deeper understanding of the world order, including people's relationships within the social set up, with nature, with metaphysical entities and of the cosmic order. Folklore and community literature suggest the way in which human mind apprehends various relationship with in and outside the social function. Apart from these, the study of orality and community literature sheds light on the creation and evolution in life and also present an alternative to main stream discourse.*

*Thus in my paper, I attempt to present folk as an alternative discourse to history with particular reference to the legend of Mian Dido and Gugga Nath who are celebrated as a hero in the dogri folklore but*

*described as a rebel in the history of Jammu and Kashmir.*

## **Key words:**

Folklore; Orality; Folk songs; Baaras; Duggar; Lok; Lok-Varta

Folklore is a traditional art, literature, knowledge and practice that is disseminated largely through oral communication and behavioral example. The term 'folklore' was first coined by William John Thomas, a British antiquarian in 1846. It is Saxon compound word meaning lore of the people, and it was used to describe the study of the ancient systems of customs and beliefs practiced by common people. Duncan Emrich in his *Folklore on the American Land* defines folklore:

Whenever a lullaby is sung to a child; whenever a dilly, a

riddle...whenever, out of habit or inclination, the folk indulge in songs and dancer,...Then we have folklore in its own perennial domain, at work as ever, alive and shifting. (13)

Folklore is usually associated with orality and therefore not considered as 'literature' per se. Taken from the Latin word *Litteratura*, literature implies 'writing' and it indicated anything that has been written down and copied over 'to achieve a measure of social circulation.' But for preliterate societies without a written script, literature is whatever culture deems worthy of sufficient repetition to assure it will remember and passed along. Thus for cultures of any nation, oral songs, tales, myths, legends, riddles and proverb, which are circulated orally through generations from a part of their literature, oral literature does not require the identification of a particular 'author' because it becomes 'cultural property'.

The term folklore has always remained a debatable subject since its coinage by Thomas in 1846 among the European and American scholars, and in India the situation

is not much different. Indian folklorists have using the term *Lok Varta* given by V.S Agrawala in 1920 parallel to the term folklore. The word *Lok* in strict sense of the European folk has different connotation in east in respect to west. By the folk in other countries is generally meant the common mass of people who lives outside the civilized circles of the society. But in Indian sense *Lok* stands for the total cultural unit.

However, oral tradition is the main characteristic of this term *Lok Varta*, which is the Indian folklore as we may put it, and it now implies the materials of folklore as well as the science of it. The *Lok Varta* is mostly explaining by the scholar through the sidelight of anthropology, or ethnology and sometimes through history and culture. Nonetheless, the main points of this branch of study in India can be roughly outlined as follows:

1. It studies the survivals of tradition, customs, belief and manner in a local society.
2. It includes the study of folksongs, narrative songs, stories, riddles, proverbs, children's game, fairs, and festivals, worship of domestic deities, chants, fasts, ceremonies,

rites, magic, witchcraft, totems, taboos, devils, folk arts, folk crafts, and history, philosophy, psychology too to a certain extent.

3. It is an independent discipline, having certain principles of its own and its stylistic aspect too is not negligible.
4. Its material is mainly oral, but sometimes written material can also be included.
5. It offers a comparative method of study.
6. Besides a traditional part of the folk-life, it is still a dynamic force in the society.
7. Broadly it analyses the human culture, and it chiefly concentrates on all the basic fields of folk culture.

But in the western sense the examination of the history of folklore provide simply an outlet for the obsession with collecting. It diverts the energy of enterprising folklorists from collecting tales, songs, proverbs and log cabins to the gathering of historical facts. The roots of folklore studies resides in the fertile ground of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries thought and art, folklore is commonly associated with romanticism and nationalism, the literary

and political movements, are considered as phase in its emergence. The Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin observes correctly, "The narrow concept of popular character and folklore was born in Pre-Romantic period and was basically completed by Von Herder and Romantics" (*Rebelais and His World* 4).

Of course, the epoch that began with the Brother Grimm's recording of tales from oral tradition and ended with Thompson's monumental indexing the available texts, are not unified. The impression that the biographies of the Grimm brothers and the history of British folklore yield is that folklore is basically "intellectual slumming" whom the middle and the upper class people study as socially inferior.

Folklore studies formally considered as a respected genre in the studies of folk literature, but folk poetry is considered as the best method to express emotions and sentiments. Until recently, poetry has always taught as a form of written literature, a passage set in some deliberate arrangement of lines with rhyming pattern written or typed out on a page. But the capacity for artistic development in oral poetry is as great as the artistic capacity associated with

printed poetry. In fact, the art of poetry has its roots in oral song, and not in print. That the language of traditional societies itself is poetical and they are better understood in the words of Otto Jespersen “primitive man expressed his thoughts in the language of poetry” (432).

Poetry may be defined as a form of literary art in which language used to show the intensity of emotion using such devices as alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, repetition and rhythm to achieve musical or incantatory effects. The earliest poems evolved from folk songs, such as the Chinese *Shijing*, or from the need to retell oral epics, such as the Sanskrit *Vedas*, *Zoraastrian*, *Gathas* and the Homeric epics, *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*.

The forms of folk poetry are very numerous, wide- ranging and non- static and they vary according to context and function. Often only parts of a poem or verse are remembered, used or adapted by people for specific genre used, whether the poem is long or short, or the particular method of transmission chosen, whether the poem is read, recited or sung. The important factor is: whether the form of folk poetry and the particular method of presentation chosen are

the most appropriate for specific occasion at a specific place and moment in time. Folk poetry, like storytelling, is not a stagnant activity and that is why the forms of poetry are non – static and the factors like spontaneity, immediacy and creativity are important.

Folk songs as a part of dynamics, ongoing tradition continually undergoes changes as performers or singer adapt received knowledge to specific circumstances. As folk song, in its natural state, is orally transmitted, a song usually does not circulate in a fixed form but undergoes changes from singer to singer and place to place. R.L Thanmawia gives a brief identification of the various genres of folksong and recognizes five classes of songs:

1. Those bearing names of individuals.
2. Those named after traditional musical instruments.
3. Those named after modulation of the voice.
4. Cradle songs.
5. Invocations and incantations.

The Dogri folk poetry, which I have taken for my present study is not different from that of the western concept of folk

poetry. They also marked as variegates hues and shades. They range from round lays of love and fulfillment to requiems of sorrow and separation. Dogri folk songs are poetic encyclopedia of human emotions and hold a key to understand the psychological mysteries of the mind of Duggar. The songs of Duggar land are a musical index to the spiritual history of Duggar as much as achieves of its social ups and downs. To study the folksongs of Duggar seems like to live the Duggar culture and tradition in imagination.

Historians always considered the written records as very sacred and valuable, but neglecting the oral tradition, because unlike the document it lacks both authorship and the time of its birth. Oral tradition evolves in a community and comes down in time scale from generation to generation of course, with change in its context, form and spirit. Collective in nature, oral traditions give expression to the beliefs and practices of community life and truly represent its ethos. It is universal as it belongs to everyone in community. It is, above all an impersonal document. It is also a history in which the people are the historians as well as the participants, telling their own story in their own words. It is, in brief, everyman's

history for everyman to read and recite. It is gathered from thousands of unknown contributors and is of the nature of community memory. Tradition which is cumulative social heritage in the form of habits, customs, attitudes and ways of life is transmitted from generation to generation either through written scripture or through words of mouth.

Oral tradition according to Jan Vansina, is a socially sanctioned reported statement or a hearsay account of a testimony of the past. In the context of country like India, oral traditions are not only the testimony of past, but also of contemporary life. Thus, this definition shows that the study of folk culture and oral tradition is complementary to each other; one cannot fully understood one in the absence of other. In order to understand the role of oral tradition in man's life, we must have more knowledge of the culture and cultural behavior of the people.

The oral tradition can be used as a source of history because there is scarcity of literary and archaeological sources of the history of modern Jammu region. It is known that the Modern Jammu was divided into 22 principalities, but the indigenous

historical sources is in the form of chronicles are not available pertaining to the history of these local heroes, peasant leaders, sufi saints and ruling class are available on large scale. Therefore, the study of oral tradition is very significant in terms of tracing the history of the region in the absence of historical sources. The study of various aspects of folk culture and oral culture thus contributes to understand the culture and its functioning in human societies. The study of various aspects of folk culture and oral tradition such as manners, customs, traditions, superstitions, folksongs, folktales and myths may eventually solve many difficult problems of ethnology. It throws light on numerous aspects of social organization. These also make local material more useful to other social researchers concerned with development programs

The oral tradition available in Jammu region is in the form of legends, myths, folklores, folktales, proverbs, riddles, superstitions, beliefs, customs, traditions, songs, ballads and social life. There are some songs which generally depict the bravery and solidarity of the heroes and these songs are known as *Baran*. *Baran* is unlike the heroic ballads of English. The

characters of Dogri *Baran* are not fabled but men of historical repute. The reality of these characters gives Dogri ballads superiority over English ballads where in, the character like Robin Hood, Rob Boy and Ivan Hoe are only shadows of imagination. These folk songs have no known origin. They are mainly transmitted through oral tradition from person to person or from generation to generation.

*Baran* is a corruption of hindi word *Bir* which means the brave or chivalrous. *Baran* is usually more stirring than *Karkan* because they appeal to the felling of mystery and romance which predominate over all the other feelings in a common man. Heroic note in them never flags partly because of the sound effect of the words (onomatopoeia) and partly because from the telling directness of narration. Dogri language possesses many hard, resonant and rough sounding words. Therefore the heroic themes, clang and clash of fight is rendering in it with great perfection. These ballads weave halo of undaunted valor round the character which grips the heart and arouses a felling of hero- worship.

In western context the word ballad is only a means of amusement with a whirl of



dance. The English word ballad has originated from the French *Ballour* which means *Dance*. Thus, is a symbolic representation of festivity and a merry measure which is either present in a tavern or round the fire amidst sprightly ejaculations. The ballad in the west therefore marked only the festive celebration and has never been endowed with the sanctity it has enjoyed in the Duggar to listen to a Karak or Baar in Duggar is like performing a ritual. All the heroes in Karakan or Baar are persons of noble and elevated characters whose narration carts the mind into a bent of edifying solemnity and also show the social attitude of Duggar towards life which is deeply colored with ethical considerations.

Heroic ballads in Duggar are not an ostentatious exhibition of purposeless gallantry but a commendatory record of the fearless endeavors directed to some worthy end. These ballads are poetical histories with a pinch of imagination which serves to vivify the fact. Though Ballad by its very nature is an objective composition as it is the poetic-reproduction of some body's where personal feeling cannot be brought in without a grotesque unseemliness, yet the man is but a flesh and blood and cannot easily repress the reactions to what befall

others. The human sympathy and antipathy must have their way and they have it in the Dogri ballad too.

I have taken the Baran of two folk heroes, Mian Dido and Gugga Nath. Both are not formed of airy, but are the true sons of the soil and they compelling realism which has grafted them inextricably in the memory of people.

Mian Dido was born in Jagti village of Jammu in the month of chet in 1780. His father's name was Mian Hazari. He distinguished himself for chivalry and prowess in his very childhood. Jammu region at that time ruled by Maharaja Jit Singh, who was a weak king and could not defend the state from the ravages of the Sikhs. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was reigning over the Punjab. The Bhangе chiefs of his court on the instigation of some vile friend of Jit Singh launched an inroad upon Jammu in 1809. The soldiers of Duggar resisted them tooth and nail under the joint leadership of Gulab Singh, Suchet Singh and Mian Dido, and put them to rout. After the death of Jit Singh, Jammu fell under the domination of the Sikhs. Gulab Singh also went in the service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Suchet Singh had already preceded him.

Dido chaffed and fretted at the subjugation of Duggar to an alien ruler and resolved to redeem his land from the dishonor. He organized a group and began to harass the Sikh Army in Jammu. Lahore Raj was alarmed Dido would foil all attempts for capture. Gulab Singh was at last sent to vanquish staked his life for the freedom of his land. Gulab Singh tried to persuade him for surrender and assured him of amnesty and a high rank in the Sikh Darbar but Dido refused. This led to an open conflict between two. An official of the Sikh army, Sardar Attar Singh, dismembered the old father of Dido into four and transfixed the pieces to each wall of his house.

Dido bent his steps towards Trikuta. But he was beleaguered there. He killed the murderer of his father in a single combat at one fell swoop, and himself was shot dead by a soldier of Sikh Army. But Dido was enshrined for ever in the memory of the people. He was not openly extolled because of the fear of Sikhs, but the popular feeling of love for this great hero of Duggar could not remain pent up and poured itself out in Baar of Dido. In this ballad as in others a conservational form is adopted which gives dramatic intensity of the ballad and makes the scenes dynamically graphic and life-

like. In the following verse Dido throws a challenge to the enemy and asks them to vacate his land:

*Samne khadoi Mian Dido lalkara je ditta*

*Beria daiya chodi de*

*Sadi kandi chodi de*

*Apne majhe da mulk samahal*

*Apne lauhre da mulk samahal*

*Pagdi talwar Mian Dido halla je kitta*

*Badi badi mundian beri dian tange garne naal*

*Ladkan baal gane naal*

*Hath aunda nain Dido Jamwal*

*Beri daiya chodi de*

*Apne manje da mulk samahal*

*Kharch patha berien band je kitta*

*“Hun ke khaga Mian Dido jaad?”*

*Samne kharoiye Mian beri gee galaya*

*Sari kandi de pakki ge garne beri ni jande haar siyaal*

*Khai khai garne bang talwar. ( Sharma 92)*



Mian Dido hurled his challenge on the enemy. He asked to clear out his land, and mind their own “Lahore and Majha”. Mian Dido fell upon the enemy with his sword and struck their heads to the “Garna” bushes. Dido Jamwal was not easy to capture. The enemy cut off his supplies. On being asked what he would live upon, he replied to their faces that the ‘Garna’ fruit of the kandi has ripened and berries remain in season throughout the year. I will feed myself upon them and wield my sword. Every word of these verses is charged with patriotic fervor.

The other hero which I have taken for the present study is Gugga Nath and his Baar is considered as the longest of all, but I have taken only a section of it. There is no satisfactory historical evidence about Gugga's birth, but still he is an object of great curiosity and interest. Gugga was the enemy of Nagas, and there are many descriptions of his fights with them. Gugga is worshipped by the people of Duggar and shrines are built to him at several places in the land. Gugga day is celebrated every year in the Duggar region and it falls on the next day of Janam Ashtami. It is called Gugga Navami. An account of his conquests is also available in the different part of India. He is

said to have married a princess from Bengal. According to the tradition, he marched to Gazani to rescue the cow of a Brahman widow from Sultan. The cow asks him to escape in the night with it but Gugga will not play the sneaking thief. He spurns the Sultan out of his sleep and kills him in a fair battle. The ballad contains many supernatural events and describes many miracles of Gugga.

The following extract describes Gugga's march towards Gazani and his scuffle with the Sultan:

*Chadi peya Gazani par raja*

*Chot nagare lai*

*Thum thum chal chale rath neela*

*Jain kumbe par thali*

*Majlo majli dev Gugga*

*Uppar tille de aai uppar tille de aai khrota  
rath*

*Neela gi ronak karai...*

*Kaddi miyana talwar beri ne*

*Sir raje de lai*

*Thraa tote talwar hoie*

*Bajj jamin par aai*

*Tera baar hai geya beriya*

*Hun mera phirya I aai*

*Krodhe bich dev gugga ne*

*Saar beri de bai*

*Dhad reya bich gazani de saar chodya till  
tapai. (Shastri 162)*

Gugga rode towards Gazani with a blast of trumpet. The blue chariot was going at a jog trot. After covering stage after stage, Gugga reached Tilla (the bank of Atak) and threw a signal to the blue horse meaning that he had been brought in tender care by the mother Bachal. The horse sprang over the seven iron walls including the moat. The cow acclaimed her master with her lowing and hoped to be released from the fetters which were cut asunder by him. He led the cow at his left side and held the bludgeon against right. The cow said that she had been in complete fast for the last six days and he should slip away without waking the king up. But Gugga replied that a man should not act like a thief.

Gugga spurned the king out of his sleep who got up growling like a lion. All the four bed posts crashed down. He

clutched at the hinge and smote the head of Gugga with his sword. The sword fell in four pieces on the ground. Gugga said that now it was his turn. He struck a blow angrily on the king whose torso remained in Gazani but whose head flew across Tilla.

Thus, both the baars glorify the exploits of the soldiers in martial campaigns and may be treated as a national tribute to their valor. Baars set up a high standard of soldier ship which extols spirited martyrdom in the field even higher than the victory, and pours indignant contempt on the dastardly escapades. These songs are a universal testimony to the undeterred bravery and fortitude of duggar. The heroism as depicted in these baars is not a cold, heartless savagery which tramples down all soft emotions, but is nobly tinged with feelings of love and sympathy. It is the heroism in which uncontrollable impulse of war is beautifully balanced with deep human sentiments. Thus, these baars tend to reveal both the moral and heroic traits of a soldier. This humanizes their character to a degree which is otherwise not obtain by any other

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