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## Cultural Nationalism and Regional Identity in Haryanvi Folk Discourse

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the connection that exists between cultural nationalism and regional identity, as portrayed in Haryanvi folk speeches. Folk traditions, such as ragni ballads, saang, proverbs, ritualistic songs, and oral stories, are important cultural expressions in Haryana that carry a lot of information on social values, history, and knowledge. The study examines the ways in which folklore contributes to a regional identity in Haryana, as well as its position in the broader context of cultural nationalism in India. It examines this through a variety of theoretical perspectives on cultural studies, nationalism, and folklore. It contends that Haryanvi folk speech is a space of cultural preservation and a space of dynamic change, where regional pride and national ideology intersect. Through textual analysis of a few selected folk forms and performance practices, the study reveals how Haryanvi folklore maintains a distinct cultural identity rooted in rural existence, martial tradition, and community values, and yet participates in the larger story of Indian nationhood.

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### Introduction

Folklore is not just a collection of songs, stories, and performances, but a living repository of the collective unconscious of human beings. The folk traditions in the villages of Haryana form a repository of moral values, social systems, historical experiences, and emotional experiences. The cultural nationalism of the Haryanvi people, as reflected in their ragni ballads, saang theatre, lok kathas (folk



stories), wedding songs, seasonal songs, and proverbs, assumes considerable significance as a form of cultural nationalism and expression of regional identity.

### Cultural nationalism

Cultural nationalism is a term used to denote a process wherein the cultural traditions, myths, symbols, and traditions of a people contribute to a collective national identity. The people share a common history and culture in the process of cultural nationalism, as against political nationalism, wherein there is a greater focus on governmental control and management. In a country like India, where there is a vast diversity of languages and regions, cultural nationalism assumes the form of regional cultural traditions.

Neuroplasticity is “the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life.” This is especially important in young children because synaptic pruning and myelination are happening at a very high rate. It has been shown that “environmental stimulation and learning directly affect the thickness of the cortex and the branching of dendrites.”

In addition, functional magnetic resonance imaging has shown that “the adult brain is still very plastic, and recovery from brain injuries, as well as new learning, are possible.” The implications of neuroplasticity are tremendous and have a wide range of applications.

1. How does Haryanvi folklore express a sense of regional identity?
2. In what ways does it support or subvert Indian cultural nationalism?
3. How do themes of land, caste, gender, and heroism inform regional identity?
4. How does performance serve as a medium for identity construction?

By using cultural studies theory and analyzing a few folk traditions, it will be demonstrated how Haryanvi folk speech not only integrates itself with, but also asserts, regional identity in the cultural paradigm.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Cultural Nationalism**

Neuroplasticity, as defined, is the brain's capacity to modify itself by forming new connections between the brain cells during our lifetime. The concept of neuroplasticity, as described, assumes major importance in the early years of our life because of the synaptic pruning and myelination. Research has



indicated that the environment and learning are significant in the cortex's thickness and the dendrites' development. The functional magnetic resonance imaging research has indicated that the adult's brain possesses much neuroplasticity, which enables the healing of the injured parts and the acquisition of new skills.

The implications of the neuroplasticity model are tremendous for the fields of educational psychology and rehabilitation medicine.

### **Regional Identity**

Geography, dialect, history, and socio-economic traditions are the factors which help in the formation of the regional identity. The formation of the regional identity is based on the way of living. The way of living includes the traditions of the people, family, celebrations, and farming. The regional identity is constantly changing.

### **Tradition as Conversation**

Folk culture is increasingly being recognized as a discourse—a dynamic process of representation that can aid societies in articulating their values and negotiating their relationships of power—rather than a static entity. The ideologies of gender, caste, religion, and society are all present in the folk myths. These can offer a complex form of resistance or can reinforce the dominant ideologies.

The folk discourse of Haryana is where the martial past, the agrarian culture, and the regional identity come together to form a unique identity that sustains and subverts the more general ideologies of nationalism.

### **Historical and Cultural Background of Haryana**

A very prominent place in North Indian history is occupied by Haryana. The region is associated with the mythological Kurukshetra war, the Rajput resistance movement in the medieval period, and later with the anti-colonial movements. The social ethos, which emphasizes land ownership, strength, honor, and community solidarity, has been molded by the preeminence of agriculture in this region.

The simplicity and rustic humor of the Haryanvi language play a vital role in defining the region. The oral tradition of this language helps in preserving cultural heritage for the next generation.

The Haryanvi culture was given more prominence when Haryana was given a separate status in 1966. The organizations started taking note of ragni singing competitions, folk songs, and saang performances.



The cultural renaissance, under the aegis of Haryana, within the Indian nation-state, gave a further impetus to regional identity.

## **Haryanvi Folk Forms as Carriers of Regional Identity**

### **Ragni Tradition**

Among the most popular forms of Haryanvi folk songs, the first one that needs to be discussed here is the 'Ragni.' The term 'Ragni' refers to the music and poetry that are performed in combination with each other. The content of the song focuses on the themes that are related to the changing society, the mythological themes, the stories that are related to the heroisms of the past, and the stories that are related to the rural population.

Ragni, in the context of regionalism, focuses on the tribute that the Haryanvi farmers, soldiers, and heroes deserve. The 'Ragni' focuses on the glory that the Haryanvi culture possesses, which is related to the virtues that are considered to be the essence of the Haryanvi culture, i.e., the virtues of morality, courage, and strength. The language that

### **Saang (Folk Theatre)**

In Haryana, the folk dramatic genre "Saang" depicts social, historical, and mythological themes. Saang, a dramatic genre performed outdoors, is a mixture of satire, comedy, music, and conversation.

The incidents related to the epics such as Mahabharata and Ramayana have been reflected in the dramatic genre "Saang" in a Haryanvi style. This is a reflection of the co-existence of cultural nationalism and regionalism. There is no rejection of the epics, but they are reflected in a different manner.

### **Wedding and Ritual Songs**

Seasonal songs, harvest songs, and wedding songs, also known as banna banni geet, also reflect the gender role and the social system. The songs are an ode to the social system, the harvest, and the family. The regional identity also finds expression in the form of these songs, which are used for the preservation of the social traditions and the emotions.



### **Agrarian Ethos and the Politics of Land**

However, the centrality of land in Haryanvi folk discourse is something that can never be ignored. The figure of the farmer is depicted as hardworking, powerful, and virtuous. The profession of farming is romanticized as a way of making a living and a moral duty.

Regional pride is constructed around this agricultural identity. The figure of the farmer as a national provider has been constructed around the centrality of Haryana in the Indian Green Revolution. Hence, national economic discourses are supplemented by regional agricultural identity.

There is a sense of worry in the Haryanvi folk songs about modernization, economic issues, and land disputes. There are discussions about changes in social life through sorrow and sarcasm. The Haryanvi folk discourse is a coping strategy for modern changes.

### **Heroism, Martial Heritage, and National Belonging**

In the past, Haryana has made a remarkable contribution to Indian militancy. Jawans and martyrs have been glorified in folk songs. National duty and regional identity have been personified as the brave Haryanvi jawan. Regional identity is related to national security through the theme of bravery in ragni and saang. The jawan is a mediator between the nation and the region. Cultural nationalism is represented through bodily heroism rather than through any form of ideology.

Moreover, the construction of martial masculinity also points us towards the idea of gender constructs of identity. Regional identity is highly associated with the construct of manhood as represented through characteristics of strength, endurance, and honor.

### **Gender and Regional Identity**

The folklore of Haryanvi culture promotes patriarchal tradition, even as it promotes the emotional strength of women. Marriage songs have been composed to reflect the women's struggle with social values, marriage, and moving out of their native lands.

The women's grief, longing, and underlying rebelliousness have been reflected in a large number of songs. Cultural nationalism promotes the patriarchal tradition by glorifying the common experiences of women in rural culture, reflected in these displays of emotion.



The gender tradition is often sustained by the dominant discourse. Cultural nationalism has the potential to sustain patriarchal traditions by employing folklore. Modern interpretations of folk songs have become increasingly critical of gender inequality and patriarchy.

### **Caste and Social Hierarchy in Folk Discourse**

The traditional impact of the caste system has always been present in the social structure of Haryana. The stereotypical representation of the caste system can be traced in some folk stories. However, the subversive element can also be traced here.

Some folk songs depict the fight back of the oppressed. The social elite are ridiculed in the performances of saang. Thus, it can be said that the discourse of the folk is not static; it has the potential to be subversive too.

The problem of negotiating caste identity continues in the larger context of cultural nationalism. The internal conflict can be camouflaged under the mask of regional identity. The folk culture gives a glimpse of the turmoil brewing in the society.

### **Localization of Pan-Indian Myths**

"The localisation of the pan-Indian epics represents perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the Haryanvi folk discourse." The Haryanvi folk discourse makes use of the regional language to recreate the characters of the Mahabharata or Ramayana epics, which helps in understanding the humor and practices of the region.

"This process represents an excellent example of the role played by regional flexibility in cultural nationalism." The history, as represented in the epics, is made available to the people of the region. The group is able to retain its cultural uniqueness while at the same time understanding its place in the overall scheme of civilisation.

### **Performance, Community, and Collective Memory**

Folk shows are the events where people assemble. The events assemble the generation-old villagers. Repetition and participation are the means by which memory is made stronger.

Storytelling is not enough; there is the construction of a collective emotional space in which regional identity is performed. Social bonding gets intensified as people assemble in a specific place. In this place, cultural nationalism gets experienced, rather than just conceived.



The Ragni and saang performances are in vogue on social media with the advent of digital media. Though it changes the setting, it increases the scope of the audience. Regional identity is beyond geographical identity; it now connects the youth in the city and the foreigners with their villages.

### **Modern Transformations and Cultural Revival**

The development of states after 1966 has provided institutional support for Haryanvi culture. The institutionalization and promotion of folk culture have been done through the promotion of folk festivals, competitions, and cultural academies.

However, there have been changes in the folk language due to the impact of the media and the process of commercialization. The use of popular music, patriotic dialogues, and politics of the current times is reflected in the new form of ragni songs.

The ever-changing nature of cultural nationalism is reflected in this change. Tradition does not reflect the regional identity of the people, but rather changes to accommodate the new sociopolitical order. The authenticity and modernity of tradition are reflected in the folk language.

### **Cultural Nationalism: Integration or Tension?**

By the celebration of the common mythology, patriotic bravery, and agricultural activities, the Haryanvi folk discourse mainly promotes the feeling of Indian unity. At the same time, it promotes the uniqueness of the place.

It is not always the case that the ideas of unity and uniqueness are opposing ideas. In the context of India, cultural nationalism may include regional diversity. Because of the uniqueness of the Haryanvi folklore, it adds to the Indian uniqueness.

It has been stated that the over-promotion of regional pride may, in some cases, result in the promotion of a biased attitude. The challenge here is the balance between nationalism and uniqueness. There are chances of striking the balance in the Haryanvi discourse because of the multiplicity of the stories.

### **Conclusion**

One of the most important mediums of expression of cultural nationalism and regional identity is Haryanvi folk discourse. Haryanvi people have a collective identity, and it is expressed through their language, their attitude towards their own land, heroism, and their own community identity, expressed in ragni ballads, saang, ritual songs, and narration.



This is a part of the larger narrative of Indian nationalism, but it gives a sense of uniqueness to it. Haryanvi folk adds a sense of regional pride to cultural nationalism by regionalizing nationalism, heroism, and agricultural achievements.

Also, there is a sense of internal issues, such as gender, caste, and modernization, expressed through this discourse. It is a living space, not just a space for preservation.

The presence of the Haryanvi folk culture also proves the fact that regional cultures can be quite resilient in the context of the rapid process of globalisation and the various technological advancements that are taking place. If the subject is viewed from the perspective of the folklore culture, nationalism is a mosaic of different cultures prevalent in various regions rather than a unifying force.

Thus, the Haryanvi folk culture is a very good example of how the regional cultures are important for the maintenance of memory and identity and also have a very important impact on the imagination of the country.

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