

THE RADICALISM OF WOMEN'S FOLK AESTHETICS: A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Dr Punam Gupta*

Each human being has the spark of humanity within himself/herself. Interacting with others who have the same spark in them allows for the exercise of humanity. This humaneness enables survival.

The position of woman has been especially unique down the ages and across the world. For her it has been a personal necessity, as it were, to keep the human spark within her ignited and to pass it on as a precious matri-lineage to the sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and great granddaughters of her community. Women, as we know have been the victims of the patriarchal/capitalist/racist (communal) orders across nations and cultures. But they have managed a dignified survival with the means at their command. The folk heritage of their respective cultures, of which women have been a vital preserver and practitioner, offered them a unique stage for performance, sisterhood and survival. The paper sets to explore the radicalism of women's folk aesthetics across two seemingly distinct and spatially far apart cultures: that of the Punjabi (Indian) women and of the African-American women. My historical focus would primarily be on the period of slavery in 18th -19th century America and the near parallel period of feudalistic/agrarian/patriarchal Punjab. As far as culture goes, both are oral societies, in which narrative has dominated, and hence social relations are very powerful.

To be black and female in the 18th and 19th century America was an area of historical/political confrontation as much as being a female in the Punjab of this period.

The socio-economic structure of Punjab has been predominantly agrarian and highly patriarchal. Land and property were at the core of this patriarchal ideology. W.H. Rattigan says, "The woman was clubbed with man's other possessions in the family". C.L. Tupper adds, "The girl is

* Associate Professor, Dept of English, Dev Samaj College for Women, Chandigarh

a valuable piece of property, betrothal is a contract to transfer it, and marriage is the transfer of ownership and *muklawa* is the transfer of possession”. Customs prevailed that were obsessed with controlling the female through complete control of her sexuality. Women and girls had no economic independence. The British compiled ‘rivaj-e-aam’ or customary practices which clearly show the exclusion of daughters and widows from rights of succession because of community of interest.

This feudalistic/agrarian/patriarchal setup of the society of Punjab which led to physical/social/economic exploitation of the Punjabi woman could have led to her complete dehumanisation. To me, however, this woman proved resilient enough to strike back .She made no frontal attack. She struck back with the only weapons at her command: her creativity and her imaginative power rooted in her rich oral and folk culture.

Ditto for the African-American woman. The plantation society of the American South in which black men and women lived was strictly patriarchal in which an imperialist socio-economic order based on White supremacy prevailed. But this was not all. The Black woman was a victim of multiple oppression---the White woman dubbed her an ‘evil temptress,’ after the former had been sexually victimised by the White men, very often the husband of the White woman who cursed her. Added to this was the oppression that the Black woman suffered at the hands of the Black men. More often than not, the Black man was left unemployed, forcing the Black woman to be the breadwinner. Feeling a loss of masculinity and having internalised the white sexist ideology, the Black men called her a castrating bitch and tortured and humiliated her.

Did this physical/social/economic exploitation of the African-American woman lead to her complete psychic dehumanisation? How did this nameless, faceless, voiceless, multiply oppressed woman ensure her survival? Here I like to quote Nghana Lewis, who suggests, “... even the most oppressive forms of domination ... are not hermetic and, in fact, have cleavages, spaces, margins, and gaps that ‘the other’ can search to acquire agency.”

It is precisely such a sense of agency and subjectivity that the African-American woman found in her folk foundationalism. Like a nimble manipulator, she bowed to the demands and limitations of the outer world, but crafted a ‘womanist space’ all her own, in which she attained self-actualisation, dignity, self-worth and group cohesion.

The Punjabi women and the African-American women, both amazingly found the same means of putting their chaotic lives in order—using the subversive power of their respective folk cultures to empower themselves and to celebrate their lives. They sang, danced, joked, dreamt dreams, played, clubbed, crafted, and cared for and shared a community bonding with their sisters, mothers, daughters, grandmothers and great grandmothers.

Culture, as we know, evolves as a result of lives lived by people and the socio-historical context.

The tribal/agrarian roots of both the societies made them heir to rich oral expressive cultures. Walter J. Ong opines, “Today primary orality in a culture hardly exists, since every culture knows of writing and has some experience of its effects. Still to varying degrees many cultures and sub-cultures, even in a high-technology ambience, preserve much of the mindset of primary orality.”

In a culture of oral tradition, words are existence – they are a sign of power. Oral traditions lead to the transmission of cultural material from one generation to the next through vocal utterance. The folkloric process of repetitiveness not only authenticates folk art and orality but also ensures their survival.

1. ORALITY

Folk traditions of Punjab

The oral tradition of Punjab as practiced by its women folk is rich and varied. The first manifestation of this is in its folk songs which depict different facets of life. There are folk songs of marriage – sithnies, ghories, suhags, songs of love and separation from husbands, quarrels with the sister-in-law, brother-in-law and mother-in-law and also of remembering one’s own mother, father and brothers. Jokes and satires in cross-relationships form the basis of most marriage-related folk songs. They give ample opportunity to the bride and her family to voice through indirection to the groom and his family what they could never have done directly:

Laare di **amman** char gayi dek

Tutt gya dahna aa gayi heth

Bocho bocho ve mundeoo

Shagan manaavo ve chhoreo

Laare di **bhain** char gayi dek

Tutt gya dahna aa gayi heth

Bocho bocho ve mundeoo

Shagan manaavo ve chhoreo.

(The groom's mother has climbed the tree. Catch hold of her you boys. Come let's go merry go round you bachelors.)

Folk texts are open-ended. By improvising and creating the text on the spot, women could wrest textual control to their advantage and thus empowered themselves.

We all understand that voicing one's feelings is by itself cathartic and integrative. When to this talking can be added the elements of bantering, jiving, lampooning or one-upmanship to get down on figures of authority, then the cathartic value of this increases manifold. In the following oral ritual of insult, the groom is being insulted through indirection and humour:

Kudi tan saadi tile di tar ae

Munda tan disda koi ghumiari ae

Jori tan phabdi nahin

Jori tan phabdi nahin, nilajyo

Laj tuhanu nahin.

(Our daughter is as pretty as a delicate thread of gold. Your son looks like a potter. It is an ill-suited match, you shameless creatures.)

Following is an instance of one-upmanship:

Mapian ne tor ditti

Gal pa ke janjiri wala kurta

Lai ja chhalian bhuna laein danen

Dhiaie tere dur sauhre

Asan dane ki karne

Agge aan ge singha tere nanke

Vekhe singha tere nanke

Chulhe agg na ghare vich pani

Vekhin singha mere nanke

Talan purian te bhujan daane

Vekhe singha tere nanke

Tutti manji atte van purana

Vekhin singha mere nanke

Ratta plang sunheri pave.

A temporary advantage or position of ascendancy is gained through this kind of wit and satire. It is a mechanism to avoid overt conflict. Sigmund Freud too has said, "Humour has in it a liberating element...it is rebellious". There is subversive merit in full throated laughter. To my mind, this fun filled verbal play besides being a sign of self-knowledge and self-worth, was also a compelling psychic drainage system that became a catalyst for female sanity.

Folk traditions of African-American Women

African-American women, too, repeatedly testify to the dynamics of empowerment they gained through their folk orality. Though African-American women were the most marginalized section of society, yet they gained self-ascendancy through subversive use of their language rituals like woofing(engaging in courtship rituals) , specifying, sweet-talking, jiving, rapping, telling lies, playing the dozens (insults), lampooning, joking, lying.

Zora Neale Hurston, an African-American writer narrates the story of an Alabama woman who told her how her husband once came and told his wife that he had found someone else and so he needed her no more. When Zora asked the lady what did she do then. The lady replied, "Den

Zora, Ah wuz so outdone, Ah jes opened mah mouf and laffed.” (I felt so let down that self-laughter was the only recourse for me) .

Barnard Wolfe says that this self-laughter and experience-sharing helps the woman treat bitter reality as a joke.

Janie of Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* remains unhappy in her relationship with the ‘rich’ Joe Starks, because he stifles her voice and prevents her from attending ‘lying’ sessions on the store porch. She plays the dozens with him when he openly insults her by talking under her clothes, as it were. Janie gets even with him: “Humph! Talking ‘bout me lookin’ old! When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life.” (Playing the dozens is an African-American verbal duel of mounting insults, in which one who can give bigger insults is the winner). Janie is able to lead a full life only when as TeaCake’s wife she “could listen and laugh and...tell big stories herself -- from listening to the rest.”

Woofing is a courtship ritual where women indulge in co-operative communicative behaviour with men and empower themselves. In another Hurston novel, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, Lucy, the central female character, negotiates for her self-respect by deliberately acting dumb, when John, her suitor woofs with her by asking her if she would like to be a flying lark or a sitting dove. The knowledge of this folkloric tradition empowers Lucy because by not being overtly self-aggrandising, she makes John love her even more. (Lucy herself has been loving John all along).

Hurston’s female characters are also testimony to their active participation in lying(story-telling) sessions with men in public places like store-porches. On one occasion , when a male character narrates a story about a man having concurrent love affairs with three women, a female character immediately safeguards the position of women by capping the story this way: “Well, de way Ah know de story, there was three men after de same girl.”

She then goes on to narrate the heroic feats all the three men have to perform, in order to woo the girl.

At another time in the same book, when men and women are gathered on the Eatonville store-porch and a lying session is going on, the women realise that the comments are getting derogatory about women. At this point, Mathilda, a female character takes over and narrates a ‘lie’ about “Why Women Always Take Advantage of Men.” She narrates that once man went to

God to ask for more strength than the woman, so that he can whip her. God granted his request. But the woman was not going to take this lying down. She took help from the Devil. Devil, a powerful trickster himself, advised her to win her battles by cunning trickery. He told the woman to go to God and ask for the keys. After securing the keys to the bedroom, the kitchen and the cradle, she comes back to the Devil. The Devil now advises her not to “unlock nothin’ until [her husband] use his strength for yo’ benefit and yo’ desires.” Mathilda, thus makes it clear that though the woman is unable to rise in open defiance of the male, yet she wins without “outside show of force.”

Bell Hooks suggests, “For us (Black women) true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges the [gender] politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless.”

Very often this(oral) voice has been conjured into permanence through its symbolic use in the written form by African-American writers. Alice Walker writes, “So many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother’s stories. Only recently did I realize this: that through years of listening to my mother’s of her life, I’ve absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke; something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories -- like her life -- must be recorded.” And further, “She (My mother) has handed down a respect for the possibilities and the will to grasp them.”

2. WOMEN’S CLUB OR COMMUNITY SPACE:

Trinjen (The Punjabi Woman’s Social Club):

One of the popular forms of work and entertainment for women and young girls in Punjab has been trinjen, which is a kind of social club where women spin, sing and dance. The spinning wheel has played a special role in the life of women as companion and counselor. A lot of the oral and folk music of Punjab revolves around this. A newly married girl gives vent to her emotions:



Charkha mera rangla, vich sone dian mekhan

Ni mai mein tenu yaad karaan, jad charkhe val dekhan.

Mothers were responsible for transmitting the art of plying the spinning wheel to their daughters, so the wheel became a reminder to the girls of their mothers love and they expressed their deepest emotions through these songs. This club also became the centre for the 'unschooled' women to empower themselves through knowledge-sharing of contemporary affairs:

Ral mil sarian matta pakao

Maal badeshi band karao

Khaddar naal preet lagao

Sun lao karke dhian

Mun lo gandhi da farman

(Let us resolve in a body to boycott foreign goods. Let us patronize khaddar. Hear attentively and obey the call of Gandhi).

And

De charkha nun gera

Lor nan topan di.

(To eliminate the need for guns, ply your spinning wheel)

The African-American Women's 'Club'

Numerous references in the writings of African –American women writers suggest the presence of an exclusive community space that was a transformative space that helped women recover wholeness through joking, talking and woofing. Triumph here rested in transcending disappointment with a vision that is all one's own and thus by conferring subjectivity on oneself. Paule Marshal in her essay 'Poets in the Kitchen' tells about her own making of a poet in the childhood kitchen, where her mother and neighbourhood ladies gathered and talked endlessly, passionately, poetically over an impressive range...Their topics included war, home – the old country Barbados. She goes on to add that this talk "... was highly functional. It served as therapy, the cheapest kind available to my mother and her friends...it restored them to a sense of themselves and re-affirmed their self-worth. Thro' language they were able to overcome the humiliations of the work-day." But more than therapy, Marshal suggests this "...exuberant talk functioned as an outlet for the tremendous creative energy they possessed." She adds, "My work is a testimony to the rich legacy of language and culture passed on to me in the wordshop of the kitchen." If the Punjabi woman discussed Gandhi's clarion call for khaddar and the boycott of foreign goods, for the 'unschooled' African-American women the topics were Roosevelt and the state of the economy, in their afternoon 'club' gatherings.

Another African-American woman writer Maya Angelou, who was raped by her mother's boyfriend when she was eight years old that made her descend into silence for the next five years, says, "You may encounter many defeats but you must not be defeated". She says she just listened to and absorbed the voices around her, especially the positive, life-affirming values of courage of her community. For this Angelou particularly credited her grandmother, who to her was an embodiment of strength in the face of adversity. Angelou's afternoon sessions with another older woman, Mrs. Flowers (granny's friend), helped her regain her voice.

In Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, it is in the privacy of the back porch of their house that Janie narrates the story of her life's experiences to her friend, Phoeby. She thus shares with her all the wisdom she has gained from her experiences, so that Phoeby will benefit herself and also clear the air of misunderstanding in the community surrounding Janie.

3. FOLK DANCES

Punjabi Giddha and Sammi

Giddha is an exuberant dance form with extremely fast movements. The number of participants is unrestricted. The dress of the dancers conveys a celebratory mood. The positioning of dancers in a circle is almost equivalent to framing a community.



Giddha translates into gestures and boliyan – verses of different length satirizing politics, the excesses committed by in-laws, evils of society, nature's bounty or legendary battles. A famous series of bolis is of the 'bari barsi khattan gaya si' type:

Bari barsi khattan gaya si

Khat ke layanda patasa

Saure kolon khund kaddi

Nanga rakhdi clip wala pasa

Girls empower themselves by picking up the refrain from each other and by revealing their socially suppressed feelings in a dauntless way. They dance while moving in a circle, raise their hands to the level of their shoulders and clap in unison. Then they strike their palms against each other's. Rhythm is provided by clapping. Psychologists and medical scientists confirm that clapping induces pleasurable hormones in the brain. Mimicry is also a popular part of giddha. One girl may play the aged bridegroom and another a young bride or one a quarrelsome sister-in-

law and another a humble bride. They then just laugh and dance away the blues. In a boli where a girl even sings of her sadness in a joking way – it helps in emotional survival:

Har ve, har ve, har ve

Mere bhole babla

Sade sak naa kar ve

Sade te jat bure suninde

Gutton lainde phar ve

Mera udde doriya

Maihalan wale ghar ve.

(O God, O my simple father, don't get me engaged because my husband will pull me by the hair. I dream of palatial houses.)

Singing of the bitter reality of domestic violence in a joking way and transcending this reality through dreams and imagination has immense therapeutic and emancipatory potential. The content as well as the performative style have subversive components. All this is radical aesthetics because there is a capacity for joy and self celebration.

If giddha is more or less an uncontrolled dance form, Sammi, another popular folk dance is a dance of controlled movements. It gives women the opportunity of patterned motor movements. What is interesting is that most of the time it is not the linguistic meaning of bolis and songs that is important. All this is a complex system of cultural communication based on the lived experience of its practitioners. The understanding of in-group-lingo by all participants leads to identity-formation and communal bonding, which by itself empowers.

African-American Women and dancing:

Impromptu ceremonies and performative skill punctuated almost every aspect of their lives, despite restrictions from all quarters. A very vibrant example of this compulsive joyfulness appears in the behaviour of the eleven-year old Isie of Hurston's story, *Drenched in Light*.

“Music to Isis meant motion ... Isis’s feet were gifted – she could dance most anything she saw.”
We are told that “Isis danced because she couldn’t help it.”

4. FOLK BELIEFS AND SAYINGS

Punjabi beliefs

Folk beliefs are the result of group experience of centuries, strengthened by tradition. Restoring oneself to these communal sensibilities brings calm and quietude:

Tulsi diva baliya

Menu mardi nun sambhalaya

Tulse divat bali

Jamm di peed tali.

and

Buddh kamm shudh

In his book, ‘*Mera Nanka Pind*’, Dr Sohendra Singh Bedi says that once he saw his grandmother hang a ‘dayan’ like face on the façade of their house. When he asked her what it was, she replied “putraa, ehde naal kotha nazardiya nahin jaana...bus jeda sade kotha wal buree nazaran nal takkega, osnu ae dayan kha jayegi”. Similarly he remembers that during solar eclipse an old woman of the village told his grandmother that, all water and food in the house should be purified with tulsi leaves. Women have been a storehouse of this elemental knowledge and wisdom. These culturally-oriented beliefs and myth-making give women an alternative power not only to understand the cosmos and to assign reasons for its existence, but also to control it. It helps them perceive themselves as actors, rather than as passive receptors.

African-American Hoodoo Practices

Among African-Americans, the belief in magic (hoodoo/voodoo), was one of their most vital supernatural faiths. In hoodoo, power was not gender-specific but decentered. Women were the spiritual equals of men. The first and last hoodoo practitioners were women. The greatest teacher

of all, as introduced in *Mules and Men* is the dead New Orleans priestess, Mary Leveau. “The fundamental premise of hoodoo,” as Lawrence Levine tells, was, that “life is not random or accidental. Events are meaningful and human beings can understand their causes by reading the phenomena surrounding and affecting them because they too are a part of the natural order. Once people delve into the causes of adversity or misfortunes in their lives, they can end or reverse it.” Cheryl Wall suggests, “Psychologically, hoodoo empowered all of its adherents; it allowed them to perceive themselves as actors in the world, not the passive reactors the dominant society held them to be.” Women exercised their creativity in gaining power through hoodoo.

Alice Walker tells of an incident where her grandmother was turned back in a humiliating manner by a white woman after being denied flour. The grandmother was not one to take it lying down. She used her knowledge of voodoo to take revenge on the white woman. The old woman grew old, senile and crippled. Alice Walker’s grandmother read divine justice in this.

In Hurston’s story *Black Death*, Docia, the youthful, naïve and vulnerable girl suffers mental and physical anguish in her relationship with Beau Didley. But her mother does not allow her daughter to waste away. The mother takes charge of the situation. The communally-oriented, culturally-informed mother approaches a hoodoo doctor and shoots the ‘woman-conquerer’ Didley dead. The mother in the story becomes a symbol of female co-feeling, resourcefulness, determination and power. She makes hoodoo her vehicle to give herself power and seek vengeance for her heart-broken and victimized daughter.

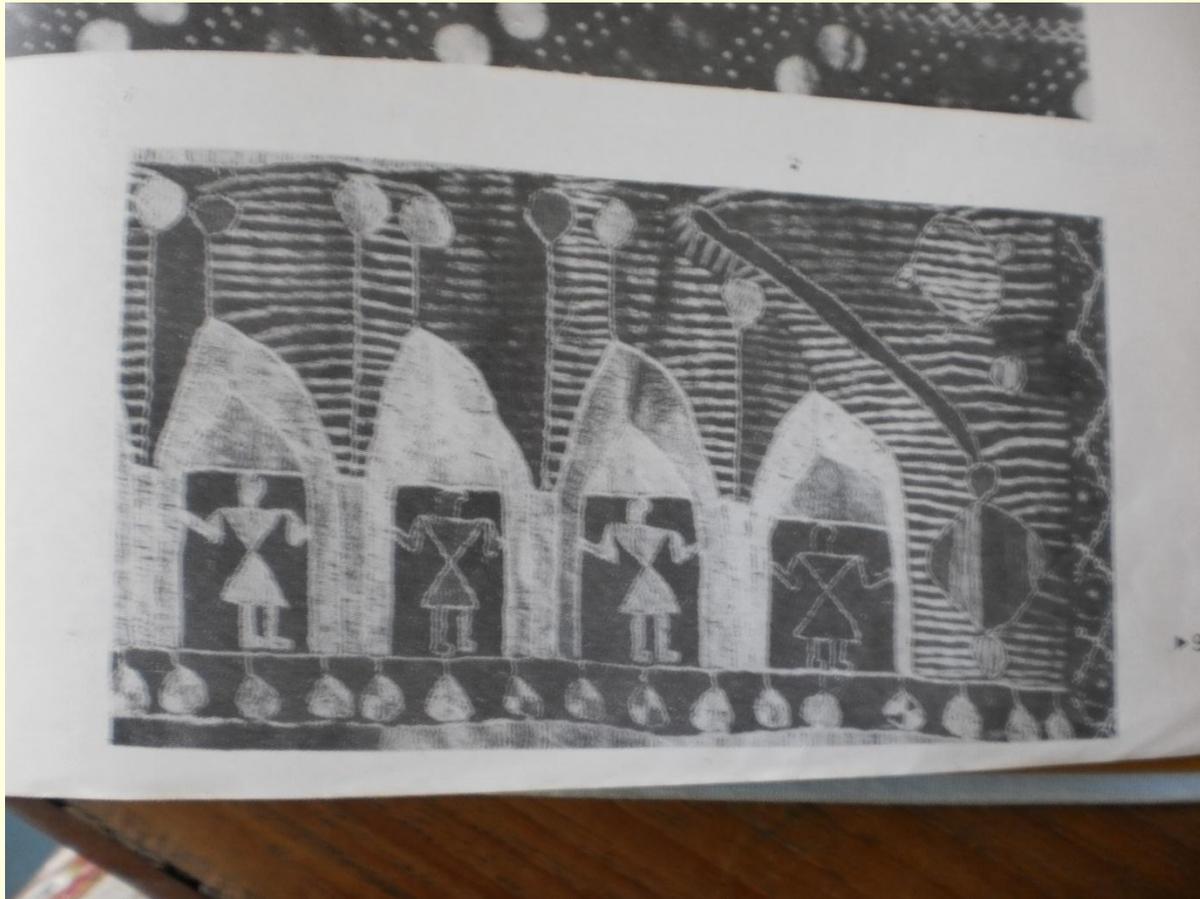
Folk one-liners of women were a storehouse of what Maya Angelou calls ‘Mother Wit.’ She goes on to tell us that her mentor and godmother Mrs. Flowers made her believe “that some people, unable to go to school were even more educated and even more intelligent than college professors.” Mrs Flowers encouraged Angelou to listen carefully to the talk of these country people because “in those homely sayings was couched the collective wisdom of generations.”

5. FOLK CRAFTS

Punjabi Phulkari and Mud Wall Painting

The unselfconscious, unexceptional skills of the ‘ordinary’ Punjabi women find one of their best manifestations in the folk craft and arts. I will focus on two – phulkari and mudwall painting.

Phulkari was purely a domestic art which reflected the creativity of village women with designs and colours. The main characteristic of this embroidery is the skilful manipulation of the darn stitch on the wrong side of coarse cotton cloth with coloured silken thread. It has infinite highly imaginative patterns and free hand motifs that prove the creative ability of the needle women. K. C. Aryan has given pictures of figurative phulkari with birds, rath, train and ornaments stitched to them.





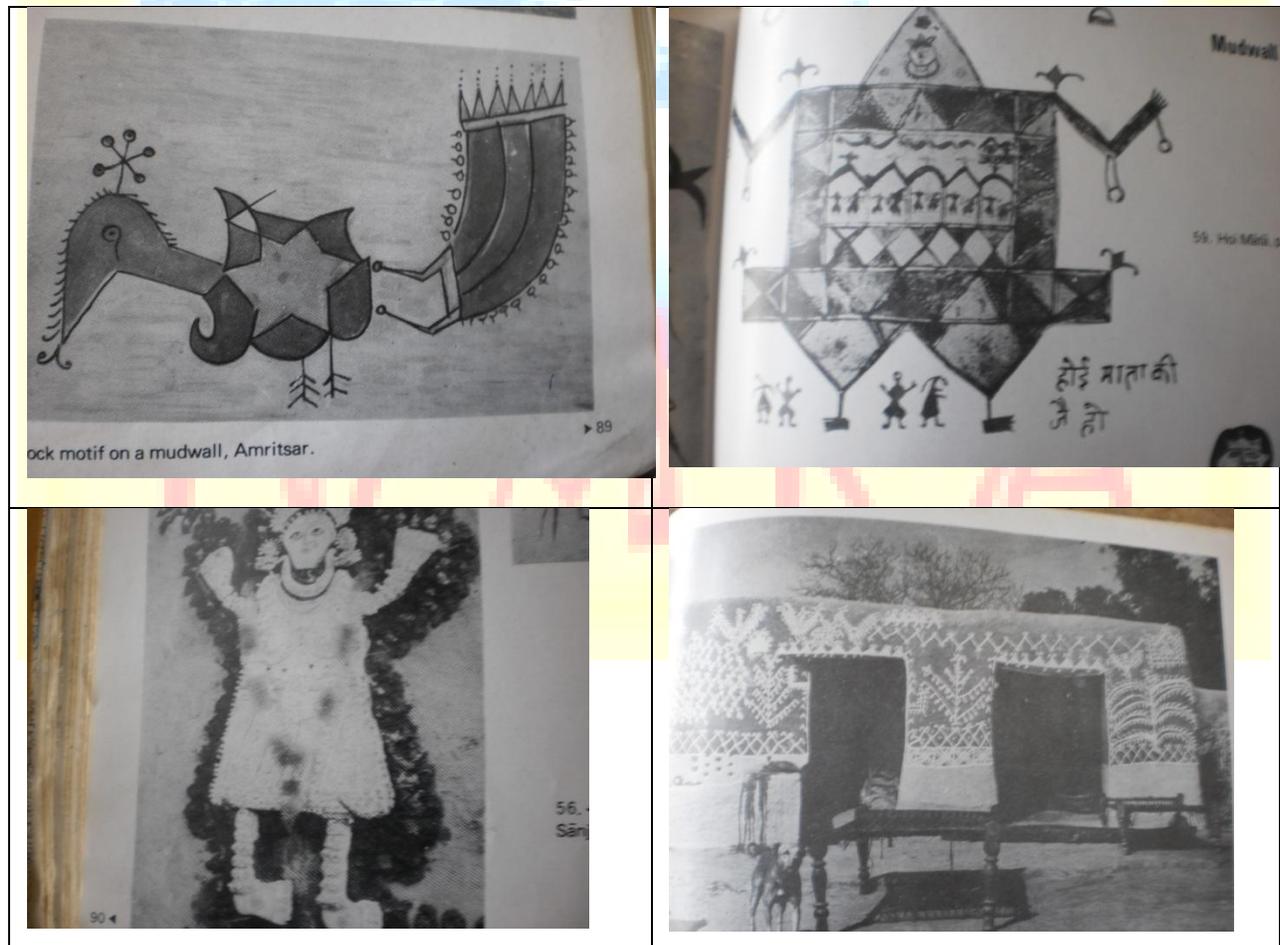
Aryan further observes “It is an art because of its capacity to give satisfaction through design and blending of harmonious colours”. The colours used on a bagh/phulkari are always resplendent – red, the colour of life and well being; yellow – the colour of sunshine; green – the colour of hope, restfulness, coolness and of nature.



Women stitched their emotions, thoughts, aspirations and observations of life around them into each of these artifacts. *The Indian Express* of January 17th, 2011 carried a news item titled ‘Punjab gets its first GI – for phulkari.’ It has been patented as a traditional art form in which women artisans have given affidavits that they had learnt it from their mothers, purely as a domestic art. To my mind each phulkari was a ‘stage for performance’ for its creator, which gave patterned wholeness to her life. There is yet another aspect to it. Gifting a phulkari on the daughter’s wedding is not the gift of a material object alone. It is a precious maternal legacy that brings with it a sense of belonging and rootedness. Aryan quotes the following couplet:

<p>Main ghut ghut booklan maran Pekein diyan phulkarian nun</p>	
<p>(I fondly wrap around my phulkari gifted by my parents.)</p>	

Mudwall painting, also known as chowk porna in Punjab is yet another art that girls pick up from their mothers or elderly women. Especially around festival time village women do these drawings and paintings to decorate the walls of their houses. They are not trained, yet very creative. Painting the mudwall was the only means for them to add colour and richness to their poor, humble and lowly surroundings. Motifs symbolize joy and pride. Certain symbols express the wish of the creators for boons of plenty, progeny and well being. A red berry tree which commonly grows in Punjab and is a fertility symbol is often found. The only materials that these women had access to were the colours gerua, neel and white chuna. They used these with the help of a wet rag. K C Aryan observes “their intention is not merely to brighten up and beautify their lowly dwellings, but ...also ...to give free vent to their urge for self expression.... The mudwall paintings testify to the creative genius of peasant women”.



Figures which appear are mouse, peacock, or designs and motifs born of the unconscious and ancient knowledge, potent with power and energy and used by women as auspicious mark for worship, beautification and protection of hearth and home.

African American Women's Craft

African-American women were equally adept at practising and passing on the folk crafts legacy to their daughters, grand daughters and great grand daughters. Among the crafts that find repeated mention in the writings of African-American women are stitching, embroidery, quilt-making and gardening. In her autobiographical essay, 'In Search of Our Mother's Gardens', Walker explores the dynamics of empowerment she gained through her matrilineage. In the same essay she goes on to give an example of heartwarming craft of one of her race grandmothers:

"In the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. there hangs a quilt like any other in the world...It is considered rare, beyond price. Though it follows no known pattern of quilt-making and though it is made of bits and pieces of worthless rags, it is obviously the work of a person of powerful imagination and deep spiritual feeling....One of our grandmothers—an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use."

Even tending a garden becomes a 'stage for performance' for the African woman and leads to the 'recovery of wholeness'. In the abovementioned essay, Alice Walker refers to the constant movement that Alice's family faced when she was a child. But she applauds her mother's home-creating and gardening skills by saying that "Whatever rocky soil she [my mother] landed on, she turned into a garden." The women had the ability to hold on even in very simple ways. Alice Walker's phenomenal lines read:

Be Nobody's darling

Be an Outcast

Take the Contradictions

of your life, And wrap around

You like a shawl,

To parry stones.

To keep you warm.

In her autobiography *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou, too, mentions, “We were required to embroider and I had trunkfuls of colourful dishtowels, pillowcases, runner and handkerchiefs to my credit....I mastered the art of crocheting and tatting...” In the same book elsewhere she mentions “...everyone we knew ... could stitch competently...” She tells that her granny, Mrs. Henderson stitched all the clothes for her children.

I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise

I rise

I rise.

6. FOLK GAMES

Folk games, too, are an integral part of the letting-go ability of both the Punjabi and the African-American women and girls.

Punjabi Women's Games

The popular games of north Indian women are kikli, kokla chhapaki, stapoo(kidi kada), Lukan Mitti (Hide and Seek), gitta pathhar and chicho chich ganeria. In kikli , for instance, generally younger girls let go of their bodies and swing round and round while holding hands. It is ecstatic. The game is accompanied with songs about mother/father/brother/mother-in-law, etc. The most common refrain goes like this:

Kikli kaleer di, pag mere veer di,

Dupatta mere bhai da

Phitte muhn jawaai da.

Kokla chhapaki is similar to the game blind man's buff played by children round the world. The song sung with this game is:

Kokla chhapaki jume raat aayi je

Jehra agge piche dekhe, udhi shaamat aayi je.

In chicho chich ganeria , two teams are formed and they draw as many vertical lines as possible. Gitta patthar is played with stones and earthenware, after breaking it into many pieces. It is played while sitting on the floor.

African-American Games:

Writer Zora Neale Hurston refers to many folk games enjoyed by the children of her community. Most of them are played in the streets , by both boys and girls. Once when she was sitting alone on the store-porch, she could see children playing her childhood games on the streets. The games she mentions are 'Goin' round de mountain two by two', 'Little Sally Walker', 'Drain a bucket of water', 'Sissy in de barn' and then what she calls the "most raucous, popular and most African of games 'Chick mah Chick, mah Craney crow'." Among the many game songs quoted by Hurston in her anthropological masterpiece, Mules and Men, is this one:

Going around de mountain two by two

Going around de mountain two by two

Tell me who love sugar and candy.

Conclusion:

As I see it, the women in these two cultures had strong need for self-expression because they were reservoirs of tremendous creative energy. They conferred subjectivity on themselves by being artists in their everyday lives. Anthropologist Elaine Morgan had said that only women "had acquired a method of further species survival that had nothing to do with their wombs. They could remember; they could think; and they could communicate their memory and their thoughts". In patriarchy, where men become the arbiters of identity for both males and females, because the cultural norm of identity is male identity or masculinity and any female perspective on life is ideologically dismissed, my intention has been to suggest that women have the power

to alter this reality through their imagination. The Punjabi women and the African-American women built their coping strategies by immersing themselves in their folk ethos. This amniotic community space which they built for themselves was a transformative space that helped them recover wholeness. It was both – art and therapy. Above all, this practice of their folk traditions made these women the progenitor and saviour of a resplendent culture and ensured its survival. The folkloric process of repetitiveness not only authenticates folk art and orality as an inseparable part of the ethos, but also perpetuates it. This leads to a symbiotic relationship between the myriad folk forms and the women. Both have nurtured each other. Just as we talk of women's empowerment through education and through economic self-dependence, it will be relevant to talk of creative self-empowerment also. It is a precious matrilineage that focuses on many unsung, unrecorded women, leading lives of oblivion across nations and cultures.

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