

Himachali Folk Songs *Ainchaliya*: Echoes of Indian Knowledge and Philosophy

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Abstract

The elements of music are all around us, from the chirping of birds to the rhythmic rustle of leaves, the murmuring flow of rivulets and the falling droplets of rain; it can be felt everywhere. It is an intrinsic part of creation itself. Even long before the development of spoken language, humans danced and sang to express their emotions and communicate. As human societies evolved, the essence and form of music also evolved. Humans began to align their musical compositions with societal needs, ideals, and aspirations. *Ainchaliyas*, a distinctive genre of folk songs rooted in the cultural heritage of Kangra, Himachal Pradesh is a fine example of this. Though these songs were traditionally performed during pre-wedding festivities, they served a greater purpose by catering to the moral, spiritual, and educational needs of the society. They were informal yet impactful means of imparting Indian philosophical knowledge to the commoners. This article explores the lyrical themes, performative contexts, and cultural significance of the folksongs, *Ainchaliyas*. It situates them within societal transformations and explores their role as repositories of Indian philosophy and knowledge. It also examines the contemporary challenges that threaten their survival. Through detailed documentation of the artistic and social dimensions of *Ainchaliyas*, the paper underscores their importance as cultural artefacts and stresses the urgent need to preserve this living tradition.

Keywords: Kangra folk songs, oral tradition, cultural heritage, rural India, moral education, Indian knowledge system.

Introduction

“Our folk songs are not just melodies; they show us the way to live,” reflects Subhash Chandji, a septuagenarian,

whose voice carries the weight of years and memories. Sitting on a simple wooden chair outside his modest home in *Rajol, Kangra*, Himachal Pradesh, he gazes toward the Dhaula Dhar hills, their shining white peaks standing still as silent witnesses to changing traditions. He offers tea with biscuits and gestures for me to join him; his tone softens with reverence. “*Ainchaliyas* are a treasure trove, they embody the essence of the Indian knowledge system.”

For Subhash Chand ji and his contemporaries, *Ainchaliyas* (folk songs) have been a reservoir of tradition and profound insight, imparting guidance and shaping perspectives across generations. Today, however, he notes, his voice heavy with sorrow: “The practice of singing these songs has greatly diminished... they are slowly fading into oblivion... slipping away like grains of sand through the fingers of time.” His words hang in the air, carried off by the soft gurgle of water flowing through the *kulh* (a small Canal) nearby, whispering stories of the past, just like the songs once did.

Folk songs, known as *Lok Sangeet* in Hindi, are a spontaneous and deeply rooted expression of diverse cultures and traditions. Beyond their melodic and lyrical composition, they function as an interactive social phenomenon. The shared performances, traditions and behavioural patterns foster a collective emotional experience, and reinforce a sense of belonging and cultural continuity (Lomax 928). The personal and emotional nature of these folksongs allows listeners to connect closely with the people and events they depict. It makes these songs a powerful medium for storytelling and cultural preservation. This deep emotional resonance has contributed to the lasting significance of folk songs across generations and regions (Mills 29). The organic nature of folk songs, passed down through generations, aligns with the 1954 definition by the International Folk Music Council, which describes folk music as “the product of a musical tradition that has evolved through the process of oral transmission.” The council identifies three fundamental elements shaping this tradition:

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continuity, which links the past with the present; variation, which emerges from the creative expressions of individuals or groups; and selection by the community, which determines the forms in which the music survives (Lloyd 15).



Fig. 1: Pictures of Traditional Houses of Kangra

Folksongs of Kangra are the living chronicles of the region's rich cultural and historical heritage. Kangra is one of India's historically significant regions, which was initially called *Bhimagar*, after the *Pandava Bhima* and *Trigarta*, the land of the three rivers (Beas, Sutlej, and Ravi). Over the centuries, Kangra's identity evolved, influenced by a series of invasions, including those by Muslims, Gurkhas, Sikhs, and the British, each leaving a lasting imprint on its cultural fabric. After independence, Kangra transitioned from Punjab Province to Himachal Pradesh during the state's reorganization in 1966. Despite these changes, the state steadfastly preserved its unique cultural identity. It is blessed with a mesmerising natural beauty accentuated by the Dhauladhar mountain range and the serene Beas River. The valley's landscape often appears like a divine canvas, painted by the Goddesses themselves. This canvas comes alive with lush green terraced fields, shimmering streams, flourishing tea plantations, and the seasonal blossoms of *kachnar*

(*Bauhinia variegata*). In this idyllic setting, the people of Kangra live in harmony with nature, celebrating life's joys through dance and song.



Fig. 2: Traditional Art on Doorways and Windows (Likhnus)

Folk songs of Kangra come in various categories such as wedding songs (*Suhag*, *Galiyan*), birth songs (*Hansu Khelnu*), groom's songs (*Sahere*), songs of marital suffering (*Pakharu*), monsoon songs (*Barsati and Dhorlu*) devotional songs (*Bhajan*) and more, many of which are still sung today. However, one distinctive form of folk song, *Ainchaliyas*, which has played a crucial role in shaping the emotional, moral, and spiritual fabric of Kangra's people, is now on the verge of extinction. This paper examines the social and cultural significance of these folk songs to understand how they served as a vital communal tool for imparting value education. By analyzing their lyrical content, performative contexts, and the fading tradition of singing *Ainchaliyas*, this study highlights their role as both cultural artefacts and pedagogical instruments in Kangra's heritage.



Fig. 3: Sketch of Folk singers gathered for singing in the Pahari Miniature Style of Painting



Fig. 4: A Picture of Folk Singers Subhash Chand Ji and his Son Ashok Kumar

Beyond the Melody: Understanding the *Ainchaliya* Genre

The folksongs *Ainchaliyas* were primarily sung during pre-wedding festivities by a group of men in the village. Folk singer Vazir Singh Ji, an octogenarian from Rajol in Kangra, reminisces about the significance of these songs and shares how and why they were once woven into the fabric of wedding festivities:

Ah! These songs... we used to sing them at weddings, but they were more than just songs. They were like teachers, telling us about life—what is good, what is bad, what's right, what is wrong. They showed us how to live properly. And it was all so simple, no need to be a big scholar to understand. Anyone could learn from them, young or old, rich or poor. They were for everyone.

He then pauses for a moment, as if lost in the memories, before continuing.

Ah re! Those days... those gatherings! The whole village would come together, like one big family. Invitations were sent to the singers' days before, and everyone knew—*Ainchaliya's* time had come. We would sing them, but always in turns. For two days, the women would sing *Suhaag* songs only. Then our turn would come. We, the men, would gather and sing all night...just like that. That was how it was, how it always had been."

Vazir Singh Ji then describes that the *Ainchaliyas'* performances would unfold in the evenings, once the villagers had completed their work in the fields or finished their household chores. As dusk draped itself over the hilly landscape, families would quickly finish their dinners before sunset. According to him, for the older generation, dining before sunset was more than just a routine—it was a practice deeply rooted in tradition, believed to support digestion and overall well-being. With a twinkle in his eye, he takes us on a journey once more, his voice carrying the echoes of a time when music and community thrived under the open sky:

If it were summer, the evenings were pleasant, and the air carried the sweet scent of wild blooming flowers. But in winters, when biting cold winds swept through the valley, these gatherings were no less than an adventure. We would wrap ourselves in *pattus* (thick woollen shawls) and set out into the frosty night. Taking oil lamps in hand, sometimes we braved the cold, traversed narrow *kawals* (slender trails etched into the hillside) or sometimes even had to cross rivulets and *khuds* (mountain streams) to reach the wedding house. The journey was difficult sometimes, but as soon as we arrived, we were greeted by the warm glow of crackling fires in the courtyard.

He then chuckles softly. While Vazir Singh Ji speaks, an elderly woman, Indira Devi Ji from the village of

Ketlu, near *Rajol*, sitting nearby, listens intently. She shifts slightly on her wooden chair, leans forward, and draws my attention with a gentle nod. “Ah, beta, it was not just the songs,” she says, her voice rich with nostalgia.

It was everything—the whole feeling of it! The *binnas* and *pands* spread out for people to sit, the cool *kutchha* floors freshly plastered with cow dung, giving off that earthy smell. The walls were dressed in *likhnus*—bright, colourful floral patterns; we painted with our own hands. And the people! Their warmth, their laughter, the way voices mixed with the echoes of *Ainchaliyas* in the night air... it was something else. Something you do not see anymore. She sighs, shaking her head, her wrinkled hands resting in her lap. And children these days? They do not know anything! No interest in songs, no respect for traditions... all they want is their phones! Fingers tapping away all day long. No gatherings, no togetherness. Where have those days gone?

Indira Devi Ji was quite right—things have changed, the world she once knew is slipping away. The old songs, the ones that carried the wisdom of generations, are fading into silence. Curious, I asked her if she still had some of those old traditional mats or *likhnus* painted on her home walls. At the mention of it, her face lit up with joy, as if I had touched upon something deeply precious. She smiled and promised to show me a few on my next visit to her home. Below are the pictures of the mats, *binnas* and *pands* shared by her.



Fig. 5: Traditional Mats (Binnes and Pands) are used for seating



Fig. 6: Traditional Mats (Binnes and Pands) are used for seating

These pieces are not just simple weaves of straw; they are pieces of history. In many homes like hers, they lie tucked away in dusty trunks, like forgotten artefacts, their once-vibrant patterns dulled by time. Perhaps, one day, these mats will find their way into museums, where people will stare at them behind glass cases, reading plaques about their significance. But will they be able to understand the stories woven into their fibres?

This brief digression intends to highlight how every aspect of life, from material objects to architectural elements, contributed to the beauty and significance of these special occasions. The sloped slate roofs, open courtyards, walls decorated with vibrant colours and patterns and verandas supported by sturdy wooden columns created an inviting atmosphere. It was within these richly adorned spaces that singers would gather in a circle, their voices rising in unison as they began the soulful performances of the folk song *Ainchaliyas*.

The first *Ainchali* to be sung is always a prayer to Lord Ganesha, known locally as *Aad Ganesha*. Vazir Singh Ji sang it for me, his voice raw yet resonant, shaped by years of devotion. As the ancient prayer filled the air, I couldn't help but wonder—how many generations had sung these very words, in this very way, beneath these timeless Dhauldhars?

*Pehle Ganpat pujiye
Magro kariye kaaj
Vo Jai maa o maiye sabhe bhari vich beth ke
Laaj rakhe bhagwan o jai maa
Hariyan bhariyan ped khajura
Upper chade so digi pove
O maiye sabhaa bhari vich beth ke laaj rekhe Bhagwan*

English Translation

First, worship Lord Ganpat, then proceed with your tasks.
Oh, hail the Divine Mother, as we sit in the grand assembly,
May God protect our honour—hail the mother!
Lush green trees of date palms,
Whoever climbs too high may fall.
Oh, Mother, as we sit in the grand assembly,
May God protect our honour.

This folk song is more than just a spiritual invocation—it is a cultural lesson as it carries within its verses the wisdom and traditions. It provides advice on humility, spirituality, and even environmental awareness. The folksong's reference to specific plants, such as "*Hariyan Bhariyan Ped Khajura*" (date palms and green trees), emphasises the importance of nature in human existence. Vazir Singh Ji then shares that certain folk songs are specifically meant to instil respect for musical instruments and to emphasize that they should be treated with care and reverence. These songs serve as reminders that instruments are not merely objects but sacred carriers of tradition and devotion. One such example is:

*Avaar ghada paar tholki
Tholkiya runjhun layi ho
Avaar tholki paar thali
Thaliya runjhun layi ho
Hath thoke Kangani layi
Gur apne nu yaad kerke
Ta baje nu hath laye
Mei tari bahkto ho*

*Kaviye de charana te sheesh navaya
Jis kaviye ne binna banaya
Binne de upper ghada chukaya
Ghade de upper thali chukayi hei
Koi kangni lagayi hei
Sava rupaiya bhet Chadhahi hei
Gude di roti naal hoMari taari bhakto ho
Kaviye de charana te sheesh navaya...*

English Translation

A pitcher here, a drum there,
The drum pounds, and its echoes hum.
A pitcher here, a plate there,
The plate beats, and its echoes hum.
Hands should be washed before one touches
And wears Bracelet for playing.
Before the music fills the air
Take the Guru's name first.

O my devotees, bow your head,
Honour the poet, whose verses are spread.
With hands so true, he wove a mat,
To be placed beneath the pitcher.

A plate is placed, a bracelet tied,
An offering is made with humble pride.
One and a quarter rupee is put,
With jaggery bread, rich and brown, into the pot.

O my devotees, hear my plea,
Bow to the poet, blessed be he.



Fig. 7: Metal Plate (Kanse ki Thali) used as a Musical Instrument

As mentioned in this folksong, the singers used a range of musical instruments, such as clay pots, metal plates for lids, rings, *kansi* (two small metal plates held by a length of rope), *chimta* (a pair of iron tongs), etc. The instruments are sanctified first by tying a *molly* (red thread), putting some rice and jaggery, and a one-rupee and twenty-five-paise coin in the pot. These simple acts would teach them the importance of giving before receiving, gratitude, and the deep interconnection between art and spirituality in community life. The constant usage of phrases in this folksong, such as “*Guru apne nu yaad karke*”, emphasises the custom of paying respect to the Guru before performing any important deed.



Fig. 8: Items used for sanctifying Musical Instruments

Through this folk song, the *Guru-Shishya Parampara*, a cornerstone of Indian philosophy, is gently introduced to the public. Below are pictures of the musical instruments and items used for the sanctification of these instruments. The next *Ainchali* (folk song) is based on the story of *Amarkatha* and has its roots in *Puranic* literature and mythology.

It serves as an interpretive extension of the profound spiritual themes found in the Vedas and transforms abstract Vedic concepts such as the eternal soul, the cycle of birth and rebirth, and the nature of divine knowledge into a format that is both entertaining and enlightening. The song begins by narrating how Goddess *Parvati* is instigated by *Narad Muni* (known for his role as a divine messenger and instigator) to learn the ultimate truth of immortality from her husband, *Lord Shiva*.



Fig. 9: Clay Pots Used as Musical Instruments

Encouraged by *Narad Muni*, she implores *Shiva*, who agrees and chooses the caves of *Amarnath* as the secluded place where he can share this secret without the risk of anyone else overhearing. The lyrics of the song are as follows:

*Jeida aad ganesh manya
Berang jodiya bajaya laya
Oye thal kada mirdang tol ke
Chainya run jhun laya
O tere paun da roop suyaha
Koi narad phera paya
Ghar paraoti de aaya
Jisdi tel kere meri mata
Usto kya fal paya
Kai yug beete dhuna laya
Narad chugali layi
Ve sun gaura bholi mayi
Amarkatha hei kol shiva de tenu nahi sunayi
Shivan ne jata vich ganhga lukai
Shivji ji chal paye Kadam uthai
Ve sankalp li Gaura mayi
Shiva ne godhar chadar bichai
Te Panchi ray ana manas ki
Parvati Shiv dono beteha Amarkatha sunai
Ta gora jo ninder aayi*

English Translation

The one who invokes Ganesha first is blessed,

His grace brings peace, where discord rests.
With *thali* and *mridang*, the music soared,
Chimes rang out, as joy outpoured.

Narad wandered, then returned,
To *Parvati's* home, where lamps still burned.
He whispered softly, with a questioning gaze,
"You serve with love, yet what do you get?"

Ages passed, yet *Shiva* stayed,
In deep meditation, withdrawn, indifferent.
Narad's words, like restless waves,
Stirred *Gaura's* heart in silent rage.

"O gentle mother, pure and wise,
Shiva holds truth behind closed eyes.
The tale of immortality he keeps apart,
Unshared with you, locked in his heart."

The *Ganga* is bound in his matted hair,
He roams afar without a care.
And *Gaura*, strong in her intent,
Seeks the knowledge, her will unbent.

Beneath a tree, in hush so deep,
Shiva spoke—and she fell asleep.

Up until this point, Subhash Ji, the folk singer, recalled the lyrics vividly, but beyond that, they had slipped from his memory. However, he shared something truly fascinating, something that stood out as especially intriguing. He explained that while Hindu texts mention pigeons as the ones who overheard the sacred tale, the *Kangri* version of the story replaces them with parrots.

This regional variation not only reflects the adaptability of oral traditions but also offers insight into cultural symbolism. The prominence of parrots in this version of the tale likely explains why they are considered auspicious in *Kangri* culture and are depicted as symbols of wisdom, longevity, and divine blessings. Their significance is evident even in wedding mandaps, where they feature as motifs, representing love, prosperity, and a harmonious union.

The folk singer further narrates how *Shiva* got enraged that a parrot had overheard the tale and hurled his *Trishul* (trident) at it. The parrot escaped, travelled across realms before ultimately ending up in *Ved Vyas Ji's* home, where it was unknowingly swallowed by his wife. Ultimately, *Narad Muni* intervened and made *Shiva* forgive the parrot. The parrot was later reborn as *Shukhdev Rishi*, who went on to write the *Garud Puran*, one of the eighteen *Mahapuranas*.

So, through simple storytelling, rich symbolism, and poetic narration, profound concepts such as *moksha* (liberation), *punarjanma* (rebirth), and immortality are seamlessly taught to the "Folk". By narrating stories from Hindu epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, as well

as *Puranic* texts, these folk songs make sacred wisdom accessible to those who may not be able to read the Sanskrit scriptures. Following is the sketch of the *Pahari* miniature painting depicting *Lord Shiva, Parvati, and Lord Ganesha*.

This *Ainchali* was shared by *Vazir Singh ji*, who narrates the life and teachings of Saint *Kabir*, the revered 15th-century poet-saint known for his profound spiritual insights and call for unity beyond religious boundaries. What makes this *Ainchali* particularly remarkable is that despite *Kabir's* origins in *Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh*, it finds mention in *Kangra* folklore. It points to a period when cultural and philosophical exchanges were fluid and uniting different regions under the broader ethos of a unified India, or *Akhand Bharat*. The song begins by narrating the story of *Kabir Ji*, born to a Brahmin widow and abandoned at birth. His life is portrayed as a shining example of simplicity and humility, which offers valuable lessons to common people on how to live a life grounded in these virtues. The song unfolds with the following verses:

*Ek balak bhes banaya
Koi matr loke aaya
Jamda balak bolan laga
Char ved padi aaya
Iss tarah
Bhadro mahine ho loko din parvishta aaya
Ta Neriya raati ho loko chadya siyanu tara
Mangle di raat ho bhagat Kabira aaya
Chukya daayiya ho mau di godi paya
O hilaya singhasan ho lolkotakht chatare khave
Hukm je hoya kya banaya snasare
Vardaan kaise khali pawan
Sutiya nagari ho loko maraya balak nayana
Dhan Daulat chod wo loko lekha dharamraj jo dena...
Sun loyi gal sun moiye saade parone saade aaye
Na ghare aata na ghar kota na ghadye vich pani*

English Translation

In a child's form, he came to be,
Into this world of mortality
The moment he was born, he spoke,
With wisdom vast, the Vedas recited.

Thus, in the month of *Bhadra*, the day dawned bright,
And as night fell, the wise star took flight.
On a Tuesday night, *Bhagat Kabir* was born,
Lifted by the midwife, laid in his mother's arms.

The throne trembled, the palaces shook,
If destiny willed it, what a change it took!
How could a divine boon go in vain?
Yet the sleeping city wept in pain,
For a child was born, yet seen as a curse,
While fate had written a tale far worse...

Wealth and riches shall fade away,
 Before *Dharamraj* (a Hindu deity of death and justice) all
 debts we pay...
 Listen, O *loyiye* (Wife of Kabir) hear my plea,
 Guests have arrived, yet what do I see?
 No grain in the house, no meal to prepare,
 Not a drop of water to quench or share...

The song narrates the tale of a sage who blesses a widow, leading her to give birth to *Kabir*. However, bound by societal constraints and the fear of stigma, she attempts to abandon the infant *Kabir*. It is then that *Neeru*, a weaver, discovers the child and, along with his wife *Nimo*, lovingly raises him as their own. At its core, the folk song highlights the themes of compassion, kindness, and selfless nurturing. *Kabir* grows into a deeply spiritual and generous soul, renounces material possessions and dedicates himself to service. One day, *Lord Vishnu*, seeking to test *Kabir's* devotion, appears in disguise as a weary traveller. Without hesitation, *Kabir* offers him food and shelter. This reflects the significance of values such as humility, faith, and unwavering kindness. In return, *Lord Vishnu* blesses him. The song carries a symbolic message, a teaching that even in times of hardship, one must never lose hope, faith in God, or the spirit of generosity. This lesson is further reinforced through the episode of *Kabir's* daughter's wedding, where his family struggles to arrange the necessary provisions. In their moment of need, *Lord Vishnu*, disguised as *Kabir*, comes and provides the family with everything required. Thus, folk songs play a crucial role in shaping moral values, fostering resilience, and promoting a positive mindset within society.

The next folksong taken for study in the paper is also shared by Subhash ji and is based on the story of *Roop Basant*, a renowned folklore popular in northern India, especially in states like Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. The inclusion of this story in the folk repertoire of Kangra once again underscores the timelessness and vast reach of these compositions. The widespread popularity of this tale highlights the interconnectedness of communities through trade and cultural exchange, both within the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

The Kangra version of the *Roop Basant* folk song has its local nuances. While the tale in other states often focuses on the love and intrigue surrounding *Maharaj Chandrasen* and his two wives, the Kangra rendition shifts the narrative to feature *Rani Roopmati and Raja Khadak Singh* as the central characters. The song lyrics are:

Sangaldeep da Badshah koi raj kamave
Roopmati uski rani hei per badi ho banta
Khadaksen ke lal hei do Roop aur basanta...
 ...*Gum laga dadya beriya da*
Roopa chum chum kari ke roye
Kafani layoya Misr sahar jayi ke

Bina Kafani na tera sanskar hoya
Kafani len chalya misr sehar nu roopa Ghode de sawar hoya
Aadhi raat puja misr sahar jayi kea age sahar da bazar band hoya
Raat kati roop ne bahar bayi ke bela vakt Prabhat char hoya
Gum laga dadya beriya da
Roopa chum chum kari ke roye
Kafani layoya Misr sahar jayi ke
Bina Kafane na tera sanskar hoya
Kafane lena chalya misr sehar nu roopa Ghode de sawar hoya
Aadhi raat puja misr sahar jayi kea age sahar da bazar band hoya
Raat kati roop ne bahar bayi ke bela vakt Prabhat char hoya...
Tere rajya vich raja andher hei chaya
Raati ek chor aaya mera haar churaya
Phad liya Beer Basanta phir jaila paya
Kuda rudi te ek din sutna hi hei na
Meinu isdi choli vich payi daya
Ma boldi Chup ker ni tere sahare de aaya banjara
Maalin aakhe te kare pukar loko tuha payi laya fula de haar loko
kapde kitne mehngge hon phool honde gale da haar loko
rani akhdi sun wo maye Meinu ni sajde haar singar maye
jina de pati chir unha nu sajda haar singar maye
mere pati sagar beh gaye jeda lang gaye sindha di dhar maye

English Translation

The King of *Sangaldeep* ruled the land,
Roopmati, his queen, is beautiful and gracious.
 To *Khadaksen* and his queen are born two sons,
Basanta and Roop, like the morning light...

But fate was cruel, the queen soon died

Grief descends like a darkened sky...

The father lost in the new queen's sway

Exiles both sons from their own country

Roopa weeps with a mournful cry...
 and is stung by a snake in the forest

To fetch a shroud, *Basanta* rides afar,
 For without it, there is no farewell rite.

Through the city of *Misr*, he rides in haste,
 On his steed, through the midnight waste.
 But the market was shut, silent and deep,
 So he waited, with tears to weep...

And the next morning *Basanta* was made a king by chance

Roopa and Basanta are separated, and tragedies befall
Roopa...

The gatekeeper tells King *Basanta* a false story, presenting
Roopa as a thief:

O King! Darkness looms over your grand domain,
 A thief arrived in the night's cold reign.
 He stole my necklace, my jewel so rare,
 So without a glance, without a plea

Basanta caught *Roopa* and locked him in jail

However, *Roopa* fled and escaped

Oh, what is wealth but dust and sand?
One day, we all must leave this land.
Mercy, I found in embrace,
A kindness that time cannot erase...

Roopa is spotted by a princess who tells her mother to get her married to him.

Her mother scolds, 'Be silent now,
The wanderer seeks no vow...

Both get married, but tragedy again strikes him...
Now *Roopa* takes the help of the gardener lady to be reunited with his wife, who goes to the princess and sings,

"Here's a garland of flowers so rare!

Why don't you buy it?

For even the costly clothes you may wear,
Yet flowers make the lady look fair.
The princess speaks, "Listen, mother dear,
I need no jewels, no ornaments here."

"For my husband is lost
What use are jewels that fade each day?
My love is lost beyond the sea,
Where the Sindhu waters swallow free..."

The folk song narrates the tale of *Rani Roopmati*, who, before dying, made her husband, *Raja Khadak Sen*, promise never to remarry. However, he broke his vow and married a much younger woman. The new queen became infatuated with *Basanta*, one of the king's sons, and upon his rejection, falsely accused him of dishonouring her. Enraged, the king sentenced *Basanta* to death, later reducing it to exile. *Roopa*, his elder brother, chose to accompany him.

During their journey, *Basanta* died from a snakebite, and *Roopa* travelled to *Misir* to find a burial shroud. By fate, he was declared king upon entering the city at dawn, forgetting his past in his newfound power. Meanwhile, Lord *Shiva* and Goddess *Parvati* resurrected *Basanta*, but he faced further trials, including a doomed love affair with a princess. With the help of a kind-hearted flower seller and a potter, *Basanta* eventually reached *Roopa* and revealed the truth.

Justice prevailed, the wrongdoers were punished, and the brothers reclaimed their rightful place. *Roopa* continued ruling *Misir*, while *Basanta* became king of *Sangaldeep*. The story emphasizes fate, justice, brotherhood, and moral integrity, ultimately celebrating the triumph of truth and righteousness over betrayal and hardship. Justice prevailed, and the wrongdoers were punished, while those who had helped *Basanta*, including the flower seller and a potter, were rewarded.

The story concludes with the brothers learning of their father's death and launching an attack on *Sangaldeep*.

Basanta ultimately ascended the throne of *Sangaldeep*, while *Roopa* continued to reign in *Misir*. Their rise to power brought justice, redemption, and peace to both kingdoms and ensuring a hopeful and harmonious ending to the tale. The folk song highlights themes of fate, justice, and resilience. Despite betrayal and hardships, truth and righteousness ultimately triumph, and the wrongdoers are punished. The tale teaches important lessons of life, such as the unpredictability of destiny, the power of brotherhood, and the importance of moral integrity.

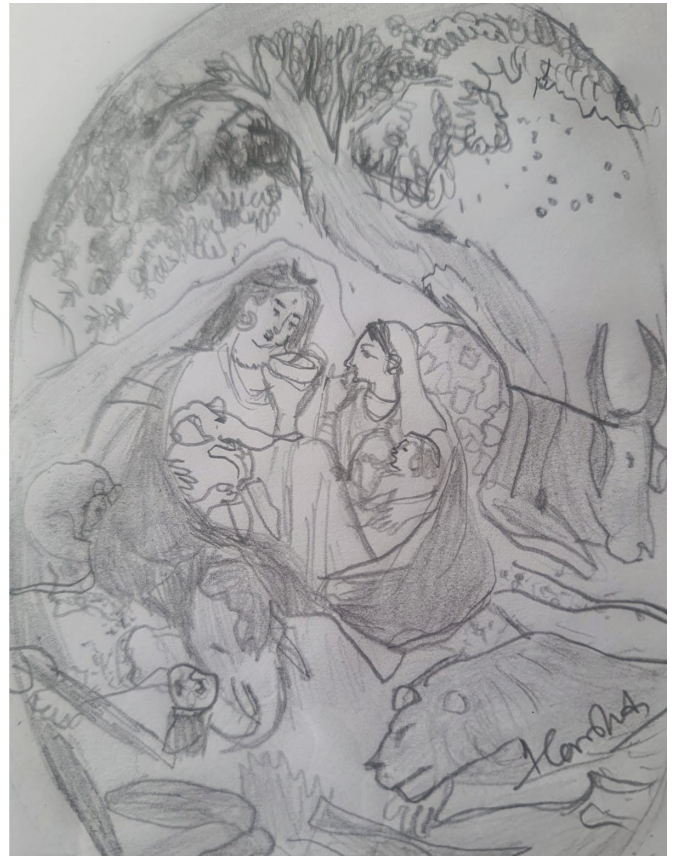


Fig. 10: Sketch of Pahari Miniature depicting Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati in conversation

Thus, by examining the aforementioned *Ainchaliyas* (folk songs), it becomes quite evident that they serve as vital cultural custodians in carrying forward the wisdom, traditions, and spiritual values of the community. These songs not only preserve ancient philosophies but also reflect the collective consciousness, reinforcing social norms and historical narratives. Their significance extends beyond mere entertainment, as they function as oral archives, passing down traditional wisdom from one generation to the next. However, their gradual decline signals a profound cultural loss as it is distancing younger generations from their linguistic and artistic roots. The influence of globalization and modern media

is leading to the homogenization of cultural expressions. It is crucial to recognize and preserve these artistic traditions to maintain cultural diversity and foster deeper connections to our heritage. Subhash ji, the man who had dedicated his life to singing and preserving traditional folk songs, has tried to pass on this rich legacy to his son, Ashok Kumar, who, like his father, is now a folk singer. When I asked him to sing these songs at social functions, he chuckled and said:

Arre bhai, nowadays these young boys and girls only want DJ music and fast beats. And then they have their phones all the time... Who listens to slow, soulful *Ainchaliyas* anymore? No one cares for them now. What can we do? We must earn a living, too! We have to sing what people want to hear.



Fig. 11: Vazir Singh ji playing flute and singing Ainchaliyas

I could see his point; times have changed, and so have people's preferences. But I could not help but encourage him to keep the tradition alive. These songs carry so much history and meaning," I said. "They're more than just music; they're a connection to our roots."

Despite his initial reservations, Ashok Kumar smiled knowingly and said he would try, no matter how small, to keep the tradition alive. His response, filled with quiet resolve, reflected the enduring belief that, even in a world that is constantly evolving, some traditions are worth preserving for future generations.



Fig 12: Smt. Indira Devi ji displaying traditional mats \and sharing her views on Ainchaliyas

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