

## **Singing Resistance:**

### **Counter-Publics in the Folk Songs of Peasant Women in Rural North India**

In the patriarchal society of Haryana in rural north India where cultural beliefs among males are conditioned through proverbs like *lugāī ādmī ki jūttī ho sai* (“woman is no better than a man’s shoe”), a majority of the oral-performative traditions, like the *Sāng* tradition of Haryana, also inherit the same “masculine” voice. The dominance of this voice is such that even when women enter the territories of these male-dominated traditions, they too are compelled to embody the same misogynistic voice. On the other hand, in the *Jakaḍī* songs—songs pertaining to the family relationships; composed and sung exclusively by women in their intimate, women-only gatherings—a different image emerges. The *Jakaḍī* songs of Haryanvi peasant women not only focus on the whereabouts of their everyday mundane lives in an agriculture-based society but also speak of eroticism, female sexuality and desire, and “feminism.” These songs offer a resistance to traditional patriarchy and the “masculine” ethos of Haryana’s collective imagination by providing an insight into the private lives of Haryanvi women. This paper attempts to trace this *jugalbandī* (duet) between co-existing traditions by drawing upon a combination of existing literature, personal experience, and field notes to study the reception of the voices of Haryanvi women. It also explores the contradictions, limitations, and possibilities embedded in their “visibility” through an analysis of their subaltern oral-performative traditions.

- Sanchit Toor, 2020