



The Sociology of Silence: Missing Female Voices in Punjabi Folk Tales

Iqra Almas¹, Dr. Nizar Ahmad², Dr. Sajjad Ahmad³

¹ Phd Scholar, Department of Sociology, Bacha Khan University, Charsadda

Email: iqra.almas@iub.edu.pk

² Supervisor, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Bacha Khan University, Charsadda

Email: nizar@bkuc.edu.pk

³ Co-Supervisor, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Bacha Khan University, Charsadda

Email: sajjadahmad.eng@bkuc.edu.pk

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Received:

April 16, 2026

Revised:

May 04, 2026

Accepted:

May 29, 2026

Available Online:

June 20, 2026

Keywords:

gender roles, power dynamics, class struggle, patriarchy and decision making

Corresponding author:

iqra.almas@iub.edu.pk

The present research paper discusses and analyzes the social construction of gender roles in Punjabi folk tales. In this research it is highlighted that the culture is the backbone of any civilization and it plays a vital role in human society. Storytelling is a cultural tradition in Punjabi society. In every folk tale there is depiction of human life in context of their gender roles either they are male or female but they are very close to the culture and its expectations. It is the diverse and heterogeneous constituent of daily life from the folk tales from secondary data collection like: Heer Ranjha, Sassi Punnu, Mirza Sahiban and Sohni Mahiwal. The main goal of this work is based on feministic viewpoint and their social standing in society. Secondly this study discern the importance has been given to Female emotions and their voices toward their life decisions. In the age of patriarchy either they are free to enjoy their lives as their own. This research is qualitative by nature. Critical discourse analysis has been adopted in this work. Different themes explains power, authority, female standing and patriarchal ideology. The final phase of this study involves documenting the findings, which encompass a review of the interpretations. This research has led to three primary conclusions. Firstly, it addresses the recognition of women across different cultures. Secondly, it examines the sacrifices, emotions, financial toxicity, and societal conflicts encountered by female characters within the narrative. Lastly, the research indicates that women are often required to assume responsibilities for matters typically not undertaken by men. Furthermore, girls and women experience greater stress and are often not permitted to make independent.

Introduction

Folktales, often referred to as traditional narratives, are stories that are primarily shared orally over many years. They serve to both educate and entertain. These tales often explore themes of virtue versus vice and convey important lessons. The four primary types of folktales include fairy tales, fables, mischievous stories, and representations. These categories often overlap. Folktales are stories that have been handed down through generations for centuries, originally shared verbally rather than in written form. They use everyday language and were intended for common people. As a dynamic collection of cultural expressions, folklore has proven to be a valuable resource for examining gender perspectives. Societies utilize it to illustrate their values, roles, and gender norms, offering sociologists critical insights into the foundational social structures of both historical and contemporary cultures (Ahmad, 2019). Folklore, rooted in customs and traditions, typically reflects societal treatment of women. There are various methods to assess this hierarchy, notably among others. They often emphasize social

norms by depicting male heroes as brave adventurers while portraying female characters as nurturing figures or helpers. Men are frequently shown in aggressive and authoritative roles, whereas women are often depicted in stereotypically feminine roles. These portrayals commonly exhibit biased participation, highlighting the differences and roles assigned to each gender (Ahmed, 2019). The vibrant and diverse tradition of Punjab is known for its rich history and love for adventure. It represents a magical blend of customs, rituals, and stories. The traditional narratives of Punjabi culture hold significant importance when examining its core elements. These tales are more than mere stories; they are invaluable treasures that offer profound insights into the essence of Punjab. These legends are shared and cherished across generations, providing a glimpse into the customs, beliefs, and values of the Punjabi community (Zipes, 2011). The portrayal of male and female genders in legendary tales also encompasses social, psychological, emotional, and economic dimensions. Gender is defined by one's identification as male or female. This distinction is based on social and cultural factors rather than biological ones. Therefore, the perception of a man or woman within the community is referred to as gender ideology or gender role. According to Al-Barazenji (2015), beliefs regarding the appropriate position, responsibilities, and rights of men and women within a society are known as gender role ideology and gender identity. Many scholars have been researching this area for several generations. Their main objective is to highlight the inequality and gender disparities that exist within human literary and oral traditions.

Traditional gender role ideals suggest that men should be providers while women should manage the home and family (Opoku-Agyemang, 1999). Women were expected to behave in ways deemed necessary—loyalty, subservience, and obedience. Preston (2004) notes that a good woman in classic fairy tales is one who submits to her hero and waits for him to rescue her, whereas a strong woman is often depicted as an ugly and evil figure.

However, since the 1980s, women have become aware of their rights and how to advocate for them. Today, women are voicing their concerns about gender issues and fighting for their rights. In a narrative, clever tactics and intelligence have enabled the female character to advocate for the acknowledgment of women's fundamental rights. Her husband's view of women has changed; he once regarded them as impure and immoral. In informal contexts, people used stories to share their knowledge and insights. As humans developed the ability to communicate, they began creating narratives. Given that human interactions are filled with tensions, fairy tales often commence with conflict. Through dialogue, individuals seek solutions to their conflicting needs and problems (Zipes, 2011). It is widely recognized that fairy tales feature elves, beasts, magical practices, monarchs, queens, supernatural elements, and enchanting spells. A tale that fulfills someone's wishes and dreams is referred to as a fairy tale according to Rice (2000).

Rationale of study

The present study investigate how patriarchal gender roles are both reinforced and contested by folktales, concentrating on the portrayal of female protagonists. It reveals underlying narratives of female embodiment, interactions between gender norms and class struggles, analyzed through a feminist lens. The depiction of female figure such as Heer, Sahiban, Sassi and Sohni from various folktales examines themes of love, women's societal roles and power dynamics.

Research objectives

- To see the social standing of female in Punjabi folktales
- To explore female identity and power dynamics in Punjabi folktales
- To examine how society expect gender roles especially females in Punjabi folktales

Significance of study

This study helps us understand education, culture, and how power works between genders. It looks at women in folktales to show how they fight old stereotypes and take control of their lives. The research uses an intersectional view to connect gender with social status and power. Gender shapes how people see the world. Power and control drive most human behavior. Because power and gender are tied together, they create unfair gaps in society. This happens because culture and long term learning teach people to treat the genders differently.

Literature review

Many writers and scholars study love by looking at gender roles. Butler (2007) argues that patriarchy is not just one thing. She sees it as a set of ideas used to keep power and privileges away from women. Butler does not believe in fixed roles for men and women. To her, gender changes based on the role a person plays. Taimoor (2018) says gender differences help people bond. Her work shows that American women are often more direct. Men may be more passive because they are unsure or too confident.

Lazar (2007) used a feminist lens to look at power and identity in talk. She viewed gender as a tool for control that splits people into two groups. She used feminism and the Oedipus complex to show why relationships fail. Khan (2010) used a similar feminist style to study gender in Harry Potter.

Mills (1995) says language helps set the power balance between men and women. These patterns can be local or global (Mehboob, 2015). Feminist narrative analysis is a main tool for this kind of study. This method helps explain the feminist side of the tale Heer Ranjha. This research looks at how power works between men and women and the roles they take.

Since these stories are often a child's first look at gender, characters should be realistic (Chan, 2016). These stories affect kids deeply. Just swapping roles does not make a story feminist (Chan, 2016). A true feminist story has a strong main character, no matter their gender.

Literature helps us see how gender roles work. Since the 1900s, researchers have changed how we see these roles. Some poor countries still hold onto old stereotypes. Fischer (1963) says books can keep these bad ideas alive. This affects how kids grow up. Feminism asks for equal rights for women. Some feminists believe women must be judged by other women, not men. Writers like Virginia Woolf and Henrik Ibsen brought a lot of attention to this. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* were early works of feminist thought. Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, and Helene Cixous also added to this movement.

Gender links to law, politics, and class. Its meaning changes based on the culture. Some people use the word gender as a weapon in politics. Gender expression can change every day. Most people find a spot on the scale where they feel right. Gender is easier to understand when we stop saying biology defines everything.

Marx saw social classes as the main force of change in society. He believed struggle and division were normal parts of how the world works. To Marx (1847), class is about who owns property, not how much money they make. Property owners have the power. This creates a system of production and consumption. Marx wrote a major theory on how workers are cheated. He said workers get paid less than what their work is actually worth. He believed this happened in all societies, even old ones. Class desire turns social bonds into a fight for power. People act similarly when they share the same class struggles.

Mansfield often wrote about how women saw themselves in the early 1900s. Most of her main characters are women. These women struggle against a society that stops them from being themselves. They are forced to follow old rules about how a woman should act. Mansfield shows the private battles women face while dealing with these social norms. Using Marxist feminist theory, we can see how money, class, and gender shape these lives. This view shows the fight between the rich and the poor. It also questions how capitalism and men in power run society. In this way, the Marxist view helps us see how women are mistreated because of their class and gender (Ullah, Saif & Alam, 2023).

Culture is how people live. It includes things we can touch and the ideas we hold. It comes from patterns of thought, values, and laws. People learn culture from others, not from their parents' genes (Colby, 1966). Every culture is different. It grows from a group of people sharing feelings and things, not from one person. Many cultures use oral tradition to pass down rules and beliefs. Two thirds of people in the world prefer speaking to communicate (Wu, 2023). Pakistani culture is a mix of many others. It was influenced by India, Iran, Central Asia, and the Arab world. Pakistan has a long history. The Indus civilization combined Islamic, Persian, and Indo-Greek styles. These are all part of Pakistani folk tales. British people living in the area first started collecting these stories (Report of SARRC Tourism of Pakistan, 2010), (Ashraf 2010). People in Pakistan speak many languages. Each language has its own songs, poems, and stories (Ultey, 1968).

Some say Marxism takes away human freedom. They claim it is a cold system that ignores the individual. They think it treats people like puppets of fate. These critics do not see how different ideas can work together. They think life is either totally planned or totally random. This is a choice between fatalism and voluntarism. Both views are wrong. Fatalism became popular in the 18th century when people tried to use science to explain society (Morley, 2023).

Marxists are materialists. They believe our ideas come from our real life experiences. Our feelings and goals start with our need for money and food. Marx said the past does not just happen to people. Instead, people create history by working toward their goals (Morley, 2023). Postmodernists call Marxism racist or fascist. They say it suggests the West is better and should rule others. But Marxists actually hate imperialism. They see how everything is connected, though they sometimes make it sound too simple. They act as if one thing always causes another. In reality, many things happen at once to cause an event.

Some think Marx hated the idea of being a good person. He said the fight between bosses and workers broke old rules of ethics. Yet, he used moral language to call capitalism a vampire (Blackledge, 2008). Marx based his morals on workers fighting their oppressors. He believed these struggles show why capitalism lacks freedom. They also teach people how to

work together. Hobbes thought humans only care about staying alive. He believed that if resources are low, people will fight everyone else. To him, right and wrong just mean whatever helps you survive. Strength decides what is right (Hobbes, 1998).

Marx disagreed. He noted that in the past, people saw themselves as part of a group. Tribal links gave people an identity. Capitalism changed this. It turned people into tools for someone else's gain. When workers join together, they start with a goal like better pay. But they soon find a new desire for community. The group stops being a tool and becomes the goal itself. Workers fighting together in labor conflicts show the teamwork needed for communism. These struggles reveal and prove that oppression is real. Marxism uses these worker conflicts to explain and criticize how capitalism works. Modern normative thought instead reflects how capitalism separates people.

Feminist theory is powerful. To challenge power, it must move in two ways. First, it must act against the current system. It should question and condemn today's social and political ties. Without this goal, feminist theory is irrelevant. It might even keep old hierarchies alive by ignoring them. But if it only criticizes, it may end up supporting the very ideas it wants to change. It has to stay engaged with the things it fights (Joys, 2013).

Patriarchy is a system where men hold most of the power. Men usually control leadership, money, and land. In some old cultures, only men can inherit titles or property (Cohen, 1978). Gender roles affect jobs, school, family, and social habits. This setup often leads to unfairness and violence. Patriarchy exists across all races and social classes. It is not limited to one group.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders describes gender dysphoria. This happens when a person's lived gender does not match the one they were given at birth. People who feel this clash often struggle with the strict male or female labels of society. This can lead to judgment from others. It often hurts relationships with family and friends. It can cause stress, depression, and drug use. Many people experience low self-esteem or thoughts of suicide (Marwaha, 2023).

Research Methodology

This research is purely qualitative in nature. Storytelling is a cultural tradition in Punjabi society. In every folk tale there is depiction of human life in context of their gender roles either they are male or female but they are very close to the culture and its expectations. This research is performed in the Punjab province and related to Punjabis. It is the diverse and heterogeneous constituent of daily life from the folk tales from secondary data collection like: Heer Ranjha, Sassi Punnu, Mirza Sahiban and Sohni Mahiwal. For the selection of books and related data is purely meet the criteria of the research objective and published other work on folk tales. (Daas, et al., 2012). Data collection from the secondary source i.e. from books and other published work as well as documenters on folk tales has been used in this research. And analyzed by critical discourse methods for gender representation in folk tales. (Lazar 2008)

Analysis And Discussion

Theme 01: Power Dynamics and Social Hierarchy

Marxist feminism looks at how capitalism and private property hurt women. These thinkers say women are underpaid in capitalist systems. They believe the only way to be free is to tear down these structures. To them, class bias is the root of the problem, not just sexism. They argue that capitalism uses gender roles to keep productivity high. Armstrong (2020) notes that this view helps us see how the economy is gendered and how social habits keep capitalism going, even if some old ideas do not fit today.

In the story of Heer, her father and family control her life. This shows patriarchy, where men hold the power and limit what women can do. Marxist feminism explains how this male power supports the capitalist system. Heer is forced to marry a man because of money deals. This proves that financial needs often matter more than a woman's wishes. The story ends in tragedy when Heer and Ranjha die. Their deaths happened because their families and society blocked them.

Pakistani folk tales often show these power struggles and class ranks. Stories like Heer Ranjha, Sassi Punnu, Sohni Mahiwal, and Mirza Sahiban give a glimpse into South Asian hierarchies. They show how love and loyalty clash with strict social rules.

Sohni Mahiwal tells the story of a poor woman and a rich trader. Their love shows that feelings can change a person's social standing. Sohni fights against what society expects of her. Her strength shows that a person's worth is not tied to their bank account. This story suggests that love can break through class walls.

Mirza Sahiban features a high-class woman and a man from a lower class. Sahiban's family refuses to let her be with Mirza. Their sad ending shows what happens to people who fight the social order. The story warns that breaking these rules can lead to disaster. It criticizes a rigid system that causes pain for everyone.

Theme 02: Expected Ideal Behaviour from Females

Heer and Sohni are famous women from South Asian stories. They show how love can lead to tragedy and rebellion. Both women fight against the strict rules of their times.

Heer Ranjha tells the story of Heer and her love for Ranjha. This love broke the rules of her society. Heer came from a rich family, but Ranjha had a lower status. Her parents tried to force her to marry someone else. At first, Heer tried to follow their wishes. But she could not forget Ranjha. In the end, her death next to him was her final way of saying no to the laws that controlled her life.

Sohni Mahiwal focuses on Sohni, the daughter of a potter. She loved Mahiwal, a merchant from a different group. Every night, she swam across a river in a clay pot to see him. She risked her life for this love. Like Heer, Sohni was forced into a marriage she did not want. She kept meeting Mahiwal in secret. One night, her sister-in-law replaced her pot with one that was not baked. The pot broke, and Sohni drowned. Her death showed a love that ignored class and culture.

Heer and Sohni both fought the rules set by their families. Their love was a way to defy what society expected from women. The sad endings show how hard life was for women back then. They were held back while alive, but their stories live on. Now, they are known as symbols of true love.

Theme 03: Gender Role and Social Change

The feminist movement changed Western society. It won women the right to vote and better schools. It pushed for equal pay, the right to divorce, and the power to make their own choices. Radical feminists wanted to change society by attacking the root of oppression. They saw a male-led system as the cause. Socialist feminists viewed gender bias as just one part of a larger struggle (Napikoski, 2023).

Female characters in the folk tales Sohni Mahiwal, Sassi Punnu, Mirza Sahiban, and Heer Ranjha also fight social rules. Their actions show a clash between what they want and what society tells them to do. Heer, from Heer Ranjha, rejects her family's high status. She loves Ranjha even though he is poor. This choice defies the strict class rules of her time. Her sad end shows how hard it is to pick love over honor. Her story asks for a change in values so that happiness matters more than rank.

In Mirza Sahiban, Sahiban loves Mirza despite his lower social class. Her feelings go against her parents' wishes and community bias. Her tragedy shows the danger of fighting these barriers. Her story criticizes a rigid social hierarchy and the people who keep it in place. It shows that discrimination based on rank is unfair.

Sohni Mahiwal tells the story of Sohni, a potter's daughter, and Izzat Baig, a merchant. Her family forces her to marry another man. To see Mahiwal, Sohni swims across a river using a clay pot. One night, her sister-in-law swaps her baked pot for one made of raw clay. Sohni drowns because the pot melts. Patriarchy controlled Sohni's life. She had no say in who she married. Looking at the story through multiple lenses shows how gender and class worked together to trap her. It is not just a love story. It is a tale of how race, status, and tradition create a web that leads to a tragic end.

Conclusion

The concluding phase of this study involves articulating the findings, which include an analysis of the interpretations. The research has produced three key conclusions. Firstly, it explores the recognition of women within various cultural contexts. Secondly, it delves into the challenges faced by female characters in narratives, including sacrifices, emotional struggles, financial burdens, and societal conflicts. Lastly, the study highlights the expectation for women to assume responsibilities typically avoided by men. Moreover, it is evident that girls and women endure greater stress and are often restricted from making autonomous decisions.

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