

From Mythology to Modern Media: The Evolution of Haryanvi *Raagni* through the Works of Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Jat Mehar Singh, and Rajender Kharkiya

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Abstract: Oral traditions have played a vital role in preserving cultural memory, indigenous knowledge, and collective identity across generations. Within this broader tradition, Haryanvi folk poetry has emerged as a significant literary and performative form that reflects the region's social values, historical consciousness, and cultural identity. Although existing scholarship has largely focused on individual performers or specific themes, limited attention has been given to the historical evolution of Haryanvi Raagni across successive generations. This study addresses this gap by comparatively examining the literary contributions of Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Jat Mehar Singh, and Rajender Kharkiya, representing three distinct phases in the development of Haryanvi folk poetry: literary-philosophical consolidation, historical-nationalist expansion, and contemporary revitalisation. Using a qualitative comparative methodology supported by textual analysis, historical sources, and secondary scholarship, the study traces the transformation of thematic concerns, literary expression, and performance practices. The analysis demonstrates the thematic shift in Raagni from mythology and morality to history, rural realities, and modern cultural expression. The study highlights the dynamic evolution of Haryanvi Raagni and its contributions to Indian folk literature, oral traditions, and performance studies.

Keywords: Haryanvi Folk Literature, Haryanvi Raagni, Oral Tradition, Comparative Literary Analysis, Folk Poetics, Cultural Continuity.

Introduction: Folklore constitutes one of the most significant expressions of a community's cultural identity, preserving its beliefs, customs, values, and collective memory of its communities across generations. Rather than representing a static inheritance, folklore is a dynamic cultural process that reflects the lived experiences of the communities that create and transmit it. Alan Dundes broadened the concept of folklore by arguing that “the term ‘folk’ can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor” (Dundes 2), thereby recognising folklore as a universal form of cultural expression rather than the exclusive preserve of rural or traditional societies.

William Bascom further explains the social functions of folklore by identifying four primary functions: entertainment, validation of cultural institutions, education, and the maintenance of social norms (Bascom 333–49). Closely associated with folklore is oral tradition, which Jan Vansina defines as “verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation” (Vansina 27). Through oral transmission, communities preserve historical memory and cultural knowledge while continually adapting them to changing social contexts.

India's linguistic and cultural diversity has produced a rich tradition of folk literature, including folk songs, tales, ballads, epics, proverbs, riddles, myths, legends, and performative traditions. As A. K. Ramanujan observes, “No tradition can exist without variation” (Ramanujan 46), emphasising the adaptive nature of oral traditions. Among these forms, folk poetry occupies a distinctive position by combining literary expression with music, oral performance, and collective participation, thereby serving as an important medium for preserving cultural identity and social memory.

Within this broader Indian tradition, Haryana occupies a distinctive place because of its rich oral literary heritage. Haryana possesses a rich folk literary tradition that reflects the region's history, agrarian life, social values, and cultural identity. Preserved through oral transmission by performers and local communities, this tradition encompasses diverse genres, including folk songs (*lok geet*), folk tales (*lok kathā*), ballads, proverbs (*kahāvāt*), riddles (*paheliyān*), folk theatre (*Saang*), devotional compositions, and folk poetry. Together, these forms preserve Haryana's intangible cultural heritage while expressing the collective experiences and traditional knowledge of rural society.

Among these genres, *Raagni* occupies a distinctive position because of its literary depth, musicality, and performative character. Similarly, *Saang*, the traditional folk theatre of Haryana, integrates music, dialogue, dance, and dramatic narration to communicate mythological, historical, and social themes while functioning as a medium of entertainment, education, and cultural transmission. Through vernacular language and oral performance, Haryanvi folk poetry preserves historical memory, articulates shared emotions, and addresses ethical, social, and cultural concerns, thereby remaining closely connected to everyday rural life.

The historical development of Haryanvi folk poetry is closely connected with the evolution of Haryana's society. Emerging from oral traditions, it initially served as a medium for preserving collective memory, religious beliefs, and community values through performances at village gatherings, fairs, and seasonal festivals. As the region underwent social, political, and economic transformation, the thematic scope of folk poetry expanded beyond mythology, devotion, and moral instruction to include patriotism, social reform, education, gender relations, and rural transformation. This evolution demonstrates the adaptability of Haryanvi folk poetry while preserving its traditional foundations.

The literary richness of Haryanvi *Raagni* is reflected in its expressive language and artistic techniques. Despite its accessibility, it employs imagery, symbolism, metaphor, repetition, rhythm, and dialogue to communicate complex emotions and social realities. Consequently, *Raagni* functions not merely as a form of entertainment but also as a medium of cultural education, moral reflection, and social commentary. The artistic and literary dimensions of Haryanvi *Raagni* may also be understood in the light of Aristotle's theory of imitation. Discussing Aristotle's contribution to literary criticism, Rakhee Singh explains that poetry is an imitative art through which poets represent human life and experience. Unlike Plato, who regarded poetry as being removed from reality, Aristotle considers poetic imitation a creative representation of life that expresses universal truths rather than merely reproducing particular events. This perspective provides an appropriate framework for understanding Haryanvi *Raagni*, which draws upon mythology, history, rural life, social relationships, and collective experiences. Through language, rhythm, melody, dialogue, and performance, *Raagni* does not merely reproduce social reality but interprets and reshapes it for cultural, ethical, and aesthetic purposes. Its artistic value, therefore, lies in its ability to transform individual and collective experiences into meaningful literary and performative expression (Singh 29–30).

The performative nature of Haryanvi folk poetry is best understood through Richard Bauman's theory of performance. In *Verbal Art as Performance* (1977), Bauman argues that folklore should be

understood as performance rather than merely as a fixed text, defining performance as "a mode of communicative behaviour" through which meaning is created in the interaction between performer and audience (Bauman 11). This perspective is particularly relevant to Haryanvi Raagni, whose significance lies not only in its poetic content but also in its oral presentation, musical accompaniment, and audience participation. The performative dimension has enabled the tradition to remain dynamic, continually accommodating new themes and historical realities while preserving its distinctive regional identity.

The evolution of Haryanvi folk poetry was neither sudden nor uniform; rather, it developed gradually through successive historical periods, each contributing new themes, literary forms, and modes of performance. The interaction between religious movements, social transformations, political developments, and oral performance traditions shaped the character of Haryanvi folk poetry over time. To understand this process of continuity and transformation, it is necessary to examine its historical development across different phases, beginning with the medieval period, when the religious and cultural movements of northern India profoundly influenced the oral traditions of the region.

The medieval period marked an important phase in the historical development of the oral traditions that later evolved into Haryanvi folk poetry. Between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, northern India experienced significant religious, social, and cultural transformations through the *Bhakti* movement, the *Nath* tradition, and *Sufi* influences. Although a distinct written corpus of medieval Haryanvi folk poetry is limited, these movements profoundly influenced the ethical values, linguistic expression, performative practices, and thematic concerns that later became integral to the Haryanvi *Raagni* tradition. Their emphasis on vernacular expression, oral transmission, and community participation created a fertile cultural environment in which regional folk poetry gradually developed.

The colonial period marked a significant turning point in the evolution of Haryanvi folk poetry. British administrative reforms, changing agrarian relations, military recruitment, and the rise of nationalist consciousness transformed the social landscape of Haryana. While earlier oral traditions primarily revolved around religious devotion, mythology, and moral instruction, folk poetry increasingly began to reflect contemporary social realities, including rural hardships, patriotic sentiments, community identity, and the experiences of ordinary people. *Raagni* gradually evolved into a medium through which rural communities expressed both cultural continuity and responses to colonial modernity. The colonial period also witnessed the emergence of identifiable folk poets whose compositions transformed *Raagni* from a predominantly anonymous oral tradition into a more self-conscious literary form. While remaining rooted in communal performance, these poets increasingly engaged with contemporary history, rural society, and nationalist consciousness, thereby expanding the thematic and aesthetic scope of Haryanvi folk poetry.

Following India's independence and particularly after the formation of Haryana as a separate state in 1966, Haryanvi folk poetry entered a new phase of cultural recognition and institutional support. Government cultural academies, universities, literary organisations, *Saang* festivals, and *Raagni* competitions played an important role in documenting, preserving, and promoting the tradition. During this period, folk poetry expanded its thematic scope to address education, social reform, gender relations, rural development, and changing cultural values, while continuing to preserve its close association with regional identity and collective memory. The transition from exclusively oral circulation to printed collections and audio recordings further strengthened its literary status without disrupting its performative foundations. Richard Bauman's concept of performance helps explain this transformation, since the growing popularity of public *Saang* performances, cultural festivals, and broadcasting technologies extended the communicative context of Haryanvi folk poetry while preserving its performative character (Bauman 11).

In the contemporary period, Haryanvi folk poetry has continued to evolve through new modes of performance and digital communication. Live performances, television broadcasts, music recordings, and digital platforms have significantly expanded the reach of *Raagni* beyond village communities to

regional, national, and global audiences. While commercialisation and changing audience preferences have introduced new themes and performance styles, the tradition continues to retain its characteristic use of vernacular language, oral performance, and cultural symbolism. This capacity to adapt to modern media while preserving its regional identity demonstrates the resilience and continuity of Haryanvi folk poetry. Alan Dundes' understanding of folklore as the expressive culture of a social group is equally relevant in the contemporary period, where digital media have altered modes of transmission without diminishing the communal significance of Haryanvi folk poetry (Dundes 2).

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the evolution of Haryanvi folk poetry has been characterised by continuity and transformation rather than rupture. While preserving its oral foundations and regional identity, the tradition has continually responded to changing religious, political, social, and technological contexts. Against this historical background, the works of Lakhmi Chand, Mehar Singh, and Rajender Kharkiya represent three significant stages in the literary evolution of Haryanvi folk poetry, each redefining the tradition in response to the cultural realities of their respective periods.

The evolution of Haryanvi folk poetry reached a decisive stage of literary maturation with the emergence of Pandit Lakhmi Chand (1903–1945), whose works fundamentally reshaped the *Raagni* and *Saang* traditions. While earlier Haryanvi folk poetry was sustained primarily through anonymous oral transmission and community performance, Lakhmi Chand transformed these forms into sophisticated vehicles of literary expression by integrating mythology, folk philosophy, ethical reflection, and dramatic narration. This transformation did not sever the tradition from its oral roots; rather, it demonstrated that vernacular folk poetry could attain literary complexity while remaining deeply embedded in the cultural life of rural Haryana. Consequently, Lakhmi Chand occupies a foundational position in the history of Haryanvi literature, representing the stage at which folk poetry acquired a coherent literary identity without losing its performative vitality.

The exceptional literary stature of Lakhmi Chand is reflected in the titles "*Kalidas of Haryana*," "*Surya Kavi*," and "Dada Lakhmi Chand," which were conferred upon him by scholars, performers, and the people of Haryana in recognition of his unparalleled contribution to the region's literary and cultural heritage. Among these, the title "*Kalidas of Haryana*" is particularly significant because it recognises his role in the Haryanvi tradition in much the same way that Kalidasa occupies a central position in classical Sanskrit literature. As Hawa Singh Dua observes, Pandit Lakhmi Chand elevated *Saang* and *Raagni* through artistic refinement, philosophical depth, and dramatic excellence, establishing them as the highest expressions of Haryanvi folk literature. Similarly, O. P. Grewal identifies Pandit Lakhmi Chand as the foremost representative of Haryana's folk literary tradition, noting that his works blend literary artistry with rural cultural values. The comparison with Kalidasa, therefore, is not based on imitation but on comparable literary influence within two distinct linguistic traditions. Just as Kalidasa systematised and enriched Sanskrit poetic and dramatic literature, Lakhmi Chand endowed Haryanvi folk poetry with narrative sophistication, aesthetic coherence, and enduring cultural authority.

Lakhmi Chand's literary corpus consists primarily of *Saangs* and *Raagnis*, many of which reinterpret mythological, historical, legendary, and social narratives through the cultural lens of rural Haryana. Among his most celebrated compositions are *Raja Harishchandra*, *Satyavan Savitri*, *Raja Gopichand*, *Bhagat Puranmal*, *Heer Ranjha*, *Meera Bai*, *Nal-Damayanti*, *Puran Bhagat*, and *Padmavat*. Rather than merely retelling these stories, Lakhmi Chand adapted them to the socio-cultural realities of Haryana, making classical narratives accessible to rural audiences through the Haryanvi dialect, folk idioms, dramatic dialogue, and musical performance. His works illustrate how mythology and legend could be transformed into vehicles for ethical reflection, social instruction, and cultural continuity.

From one of his compositions reads:

सती सावित्री नै छोड़या ना,
धरमराज का साथ/अपने सत के बल पै ल्याई, फेर पति के प्राण॥

Literature Review:

The study of folklore has evolved from viewing folk traditions as repositories of ancient customs to understanding them as dynamic forms of cultural expression that continually adapt to changing social contexts. Early folklore scholarship established the theoretical foundations for analysing oral traditions, while contemporary cultural and performance studies have expanded the understanding of folklore as a living and evolving cultural practice. Within this broader framework, Haryanvi Raagni represents an important regional oral tradition that combines poetry, music, performance, and collective memory. Although a considerable body of scholarship exists on folklore and oral traditions, comparatively little attention has been devoted to the historical evolution of Haryanvi Raagni across successive generations of folk poets.

Alan Dundes (1965) fundamentally redefined the concept of folklore by arguing that "folk" refers to any social group sharing common traditions, values, or experiences rather than only rural or tribal communities. This broader understanding establishes folklore as a universal cultural phenomenon expressed through oral narratives, songs, rituals, and performances. Dundes' perspective provides an important conceptual foundation for understanding Haryanvi Raagni as a form of expressive culture that reflects the collective identity and social values of Haryana.

William Bascom's influential essay *Four Functions of Folklore* (1954) remains one of the most significant theoretical contributions to folklore studies. Bascom argues that folklore performs four principal social functions: entertainment, validation of cultural institutions, education, and the maintenance of social norms. These functions are particularly relevant to Haryanvi Raagni, which has historically entertained rural audiences while simultaneously transmitting ethical values, preserving historical memory, and reinforcing community identity through oral performance.

Jan Vansina's *Oral Tradition as History* (1985) significantly advanced the study of oral traditions by demonstrating that orally transmitted narratives constitute valuable historical sources. Rather than treating oral traditions merely as fictional or symbolic expressions, Vansina argues that they preserve collective memories and historical experiences that often remain absent from written records. His work provides an important framework for interpreting the compositions of Jat Mehar Singh, whose Raagnis document rural life, patriotism, and military experiences while functioning as vernacular records of social history.

Performance studies have further transformed the understanding of folklore through the work of Richard Bauman. In *Verbal Art as Performance* (1977), Bauman conceptualises folklore as a communicative event in which meaning emerges through interaction between performer and audience. This perspective is particularly relevant to Haryanvi Raagni, whose significance extends beyond written lyrics to include musical presentation, dramatic narration, audience participation, and live performance. Bauman's theory also helps explain the continuing popularity of Rajender Kharkiya, whose performances demonstrate the adaptation of traditional oral forms to contemporary stages, recorded media, and digital platforms.

Despite these valuable contributions, existing scholarship remains fragmented. Most studies examine Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Jat Mehar Singh, or Rajender Kharkiya independently, concentrating on biography, literary appreciation, or thematic analysis. Very few studies investigate the historical evolution of Haryanvi Raagni across successive generations, and even fewer adopt a comparative framework integrating folklore theory, performance studies, cultural memory, and literary criticism. The transition of Raagni from mythological narratives to historical consciousness and finally to digital performance has therefore received limited systematic academic attention.

English Translation:

The virtuous Savitri never abandoned Yama, the Lord of Death. Through the strength of her chastity, truth, and unwavering devotion, she succeeded in restoring her husband's life.

These lines show that Savitri's unwavering devotion, truthfulness, and moral strength enabled her to persuade Yama, the Lord of Death, to restore Satyavaan's life. Lakhmi Chand presents her as a symbol of courage, virtue, and the triumph of righteousness over death.

Following the literary consolidation achieved by Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Jat Mehar Singh represents a significant phase of historical and nationalist expansion in the evolution of Haryanvi *Raagni*. His contribution lies in transforming folk poetry into a medium of historical awareness, patriotic expression, and rural representation. While Lakhmi Chand employed mythological narratives to explore moral, philosophical, and existential concerns, Mehar Singh shifted the focus of *Raagni* towards the immediate realities of colonial India, including military life, national struggle, agrarian society, and the emotional experiences of ordinary people.

Mehar Singh's poetry demonstrates how folk literature functions as a form of people's history, preserving experiences that often remain outside official historical narratives. His *Raagnis* document the aspirations, hardships, and emotions of soldiers, farmers, and village communities, thereby transforming personal experiences into collective cultural memory. In this sense, his compositions align with the broader understanding of oral traditions as carriers of historical consciousness, where communities preserve their past through performance, storytelling, and collective remembrance.

A major dimension of Mehar Singh's literary contribution is his construction of vernacular nationalism. His patriotic compositions connect national identity with the lived realities of rural Haryana, presenting the soldier not merely as a military figure but as a representative of village honour, sacrifice, and social responsibility. His poetry reflects the intersection of regional belonging and national consciousness, demonstrating how folk traditions participated in the larger discourse of Indian nationalism through local cultural expressions.

One of his works reads:

देश की खातिर जान देण तै, बड़ा कोई धरम ना हो।
भारत माँ की सेवा करना, हर जवान का करम हो॥

English Translation:

There is no greater duty than sacrificing one's life for the nation. Serving Mother India is the highest responsibility of every soldier.

These lines present patriotism as the highest moral duty, where military service becomes an expression of courage, sacrifice, and national commitment. Mehar Singh links national identity with rural values, portraying the soldier as both a defender of the nation and a representative of Haryana's collective honour.

Furthermore, Mehar Singh introduced a stronger element of rural realism into Haryanvi *Raagni*. His compositions engage with agricultural life, social relationships, family emotions, and community values, allowing folk poetry to move beyond legendary and mythological themes towards contemporary social experience. This realistic orientation expanded the representational capacity of *Raagni* and established it as a cultural archive of twentieth-century Haryana.

The evolution of Haryanvi *Raagni* enters a new phase with Rajender Kharkiya, whose contribution demonstrates how folk traditions negotiate continuity and change through contemporary performance practices, mediated platforms, and digital forms of preservation. The contemporary phase of Haryanvi *Raagni* is marked by processes of revitalisation, performance transformation, and wider cultural circulation, in which Rajender Kharkiya occupies an important position. While earlier poets such as Pandit Lakhmi Chand and Mehar Singh expanded *Raagni* through mythology, social commentary, history, and nationalism, Kharkiya represents the transition of this oral tradition into modern performance spaces and mediated platforms. His contribution demonstrates how folk traditions survive not through static preservation but through continuous adaptation according to changing cultural environments.

Rajender Kharkiya's performances maintain the traditional foundations of *Raagni* while incorporating elements of modern stage presentation, audience engagement, and wider dissemination. His renditions preserve the characteristic features of Haryanvi folk performance vernacular expression, musical narration, dialogue-based presentation, and community participation while making the form accessible to contemporary audiences. The interaction of poetry and music in *Raagni* may also be understood in relation to Aristotle's concept of artistic ornament. As Rakhee Singh explains, Aristotle identifies rhythm, harmony, and song as artistic elements that enrich language and enhance the

aesthetic effect of a literary performance (Singh 34). These elements are integral to *Raagni*, where poetic language acquires its full expressive force through melody, rhythm, vocal delivery, and interaction with the audience. His recorded works and albums have contributed to the circulation of *Raagni* beyond traditional village gatherings, allowing folk poetry to reach listeners through audio platforms and digital archives.

From the perspective of performance studies, Kharkiya's work illustrates the transformation of folk literature from a primarily community-based practice into a mediated cultural form. As Richard Bauman argues, folklore is not simply a fixed body of texts but an event of communication created through performance, interaction, and audience response. Kharkiya's stage performances reinforce this understanding by presenting *Raagni* as a living cultural practice where meaning is continuously produced through the relationship between performer and audience.

A significant aspect of Kharkiya's contribution is the role of mass media and digital technology in cultural preservation. In the contemporary period, recordings, online platforms, and digital circulation have created new possibilities for preserving oral traditions that were previously dependent on memory and live transmission. The availability of Rajender Kharkiya's *Raagnis* through recorded albums and online music platforms reflects this shift from oral circulation to digital dissemination. Through these new forms of circulation, *Raagni* has acquired a wider cultural presence among younger generations and audiences beyond Haryana.

Furthermore, Kharkiya's performances contribute to the preservation of Haryanvi linguistic and cultural identity. By continuing to perform in the regional dialect and addressing themes connected with social life, relationships, humour, morality, and everyday experiences. He maintains the connection between traditional folk expression and contemporary society. His work reveals that folk literature remains dynamic because it negotiates between heritage and innovation.

Therefore, Rajender Kharkiya represents the contemporary revitalisation of Haryanvi folk poetics, where tradition encounters modern performance practices and digital technologies. If Lakhmi Chand provided *Raagni* with literary and philosophical depth, and Mehar Singh expanded its historical and nationalist dimensions, Kharkiya ensures its continuity through performance innovation, technological mediation, and cultural dissemination. His contribution highlights the adaptability of folk literature and confirms that *Raagni* continues to function as a living repository of Haryanvi cultural memory. One of his *Raagnis* reads:

झूठी यारी यार भी झूटे,

मतलब के सब रिश्तेदार।

English Translation:

False friendships and false companions surround us; many relationships endure only while they serve personal interests.

These lines criticise relationships based on selfish interests rather than genuine trust and loyalty. Kharkiya highlights the moral decline in contemporary society and reminds audiences of the importance of honesty, sincerity, and lasting human values. The *Raagni* demonstrates how contemporary Haryanvi folk poetry addresses everyday social realities while continuing its traditional role as a medium of ethical reflection and cultural education.

The contributions of Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Jat Mehar Singh, and Rajender Kharkiya, though shaped by different historical and cultural contexts, share a common foundation in the preservation, development, and dissemination of Haryanvi folk poetics. All three have played significant roles in sustaining the *Raagni* tradition as a living cultural form rooted in the experiences of rural Haryana. Their works employ the Haryanvi dialect as a powerful medium of expression, reflecting regional identity, collective memory, and the social values of the community. Lakhmi Chand transformed *Raagni* into a refined literary and philosophical form through mythological narratives and moral exploration. Whereas Mehar Singh expanded its scope by incorporating historical consciousness, patriotism, and rural realism. Similarly, Rajender Kharkiya contributed to its contemporary continuity by adapting the tradition to modern performance spaces and mediated platforms.

Despite these differences, all three artists maintain the oral and performative essence of *Raagni*, where poetry, music, and audience interaction come together to create cultural meaning. Their compositions engage with common human concerns such as morality, identity, relationships, social responsibility, and community values, making folk poetry a reflection of collective life. Together, they demonstrate the dynamic nature of Haryanvi folk literature, showing how tradition evolves through reinterpretation, historical engagement, and new forms of cultural transmission while preserving its connection with the people. The evolving nature of Haryanvi *Raagni* reflects Stuart Hall's view that cultural traditions are continually reinterpreted to meet changing social contexts (Hall 225). This perspective aptly explains the contributions of Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Jat Mehar Singh, and Rajender Kharkiya, whose works demonstrate how folk traditions sustain cultural memory while continuously adapting to new social, historical, and technological contexts.

The evolution of Haryanvi *Raagni* reflects a continuous negotiation between tradition, society, and changing modes of cultural expression. Within this historical trajectory, Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Jat Mehar Singh, and Rajender Kharkiya represent three significant yet distinct phases: literary-philosophical consolidation, historical-nationalist expansion, and contemporary revitalisation. Although all three contributed to the preservation of Haryanvi cultural identity, their artistic orientations reveal the changing functions of folk poetry across different socio-cultural contexts.

Pandit Lakhmi Chand occupies a foundational position in the literary development of Haryanvi *Raagni* by transforming an orally transmitted folk form into a sophisticated medium of philosophical reflection and ethical inquiry. His compositions draw upon mythology, legends, and traditional narratives, yet reinterpret them to address questions of human conduct, morality, social responsibility, and collective values. His contribution corresponds with Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of cultural expression as dialogic, where traditional voices interact with contemporary social meanings (Bakhtin 272–73). Through his reinterpretation of inherited narratives, Lakhmi Chand created a dialogue between the past and the present, enabling *Raagni* to function as both a cultural memory and a literary form.

Jat Mehar Singh marks a transition from mythological imagination towards historical consciousness by expanding the thematic boundaries of *Raagni*. His compositions engage with colonial experiences, military service, agrarian life, patriotism, and the emotional realities of rural communities. Unlike Lakhmi Chand's symbolic engagement with mythology, Mehar Singh's poetry emerges from immediate social experiences, transforming the struggles and sacrifices of ordinary people into collective narratives. This aspect may be understood through Pierre Nora's concept of "sites of memory," which explains how cultural expressions preserve collective memory and identity (Nora 7). Mehar Singh's *Raagnis* function as vernacular records of social history, preserving memories of a community whose experiences often remain outside official historical narratives.

Rajender Kharkiya represents the contemporary transformation of *Raagni* through performance innovation, mass media circulation, and digital preservation. His contribution differs from earlier poets because his significance lies not only in composition but also in the transmission and popularisation of folk tradition within modern cultural spaces. By adapting *Raagni* for contemporary audiences, he demonstrates the ability of folk forms to survive through technological and performative transformation. This process reflects Néstor García Canclini's concept of cultural hybridity, where traditional practices interact with modern forms of communication and acquire new modes of existence (García Canclini 5–6). Kharkiya's performances, therefore, represent the movement of *Raagni* from local community gatherings into wider cultural networks.

The distinction among these three figures lies in the different cultural functions they assign to *Raagni*. Lakhmi Chand established its literary and philosophical authority by transforming inherited narratives into reflections on human values. Moreover, Mehar Singh expanded its social and historical relevance by articulating rural experiences and nationalist consciousness, and Rajender Kharkiya ensured its contemporary continuity by introducing new modes of performance and dissemination. Together, they demonstrate that folk poetry is not a fixed remnant of the past but an evolving cultural practice that continuously responds to changing historical circumstances. As Raymond Williams

argues, culture emerges from everyday lived experience rather than solely from elite artistic traditions (Williams 4). In this sense, the journey from Lakhmi Chand to Mehar Singh and Kharkiya represents the ongoing transformation of Haryanvi *Raagni* from oral expression into a dynamic cultural archive of memory, identity, and social change.

The comparative trajectory outlined above demonstrates that the evolution of Haryanvi *Raagni* cannot be understood merely as a succession of individual artists but as a continuous process of cultural adaptation. Across different historical periods, *Raagni* has responded to changing social, political, and technological contexts while preserving its essential characteristics as an oral and performative tradition. Its thematic concerns have expanded from mythological and ethical reflection to historical consciousness, rural realism, and contemporary cultural dissemination, illustrating the flexibility and resilience of Haryanvi folk poetics. This continuity through transformation affirms that *Raagni* remains a living cultural practice capable of negotiating tradition and modernity without losing its regional identity.

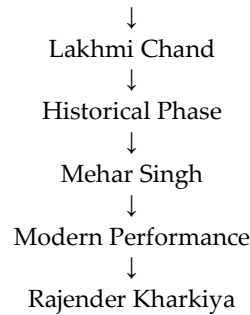
Comparative Analysis of Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Jat Mehar Singh, and Rajender Kharkiya: The historical development of Haryanvi Raagni is best understood through a comparative examination of the literary contributions of Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Jat Mehar Singh, and Rajender Kharkiya. Although these poets belong to different historical periods and responded to distinct socio-cultural realities, together they illustrate the transformation of Raagni from a traditional oral genre into a dynamic literary and performative tradition. Their works reveal both continuity and innovation, demonstrating how Haryanvi folk poetry has preserved its cultural foundations while adapting to changing historical circumstances.

Aspect	Lakhmi Chand	Mehar Singh	Rajender Kharkiya
Period	Colonial	Nationalist	Contemporary
Themes	Mythology	Patriotism	Social Reality
Literary Style	Philosophical	Realistic	Popular
Performance	Saang	Raagni	Digital Stage
Contribution	Literary Foundation	Historical Expansion	Modern Revival

The comparison demonstrates that the evolution of Haryanvi Raagni reflects changing social priorities while maintaining its essential identity as an oral and performative tradition. Pandit Lakhmi Chand established the literary prestige of Raagni by transforming mythological narratives into profound reflections on ethics, morality, and human values. His works elevated folk poetry beyond entertainment and established it as a sophisticated literary form capable of philosophical inquiry and dramatic expression.

Jat Mehar Singh broadened the thematic horizon of Raagni by shifting its focus from mythology to lived historical experience. His compositions foreground rural life, military service, patriotism, and collective sacrifice, thereby transforming Raagni into a medium for recording vernacular history and strengthening regional and national identity. This transition illustrates how folk literature adapts to political and social change while preserving its cultural roots.

Figure 1
Evolution of Haryanvi Raagni
Mythological Phase



The evolution of Haryanvi *Raagni* reflects the dynamic relationship between literature, performance, and cultural identity. Through the contributions of Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Jat Mehar Singh, and Rajender Kharkiya, the tradition has progressed from literary and philosophical refinement to historical engagement and finally to contemporary revitalisation through performance and digital dissemination. Although each figure represents a distinct historical phase, together they demonstrate that Haryanvi *Raagni* is a living tradition that continually reinterprets inherited forms in response to changing cultural realities. The study argues that the strength of Haryanvi folk poetics lies not only in preserving the past but also in its ability to adapt, innovate, and remain relevant across generations. By tracing its evolution from literary-philosophical consolidation to historical-nationalist expansion and contemporary revitalisation, this study demonstrates that Haryanvi *Raagni* remains a dynamic repository of cultural memory and a significant contribution to Indian folk literature, oral traditions, and performance studies.

Conclusion: The evolution of Haryanvi Raagni demonstrates the dynamic capacity of folk traditions to preserve cultural memory while continuously adapting to changing historical, social, and technological contexts. Through a comparative analysis of the works of Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Jat Mehar Singh, and Rajender Kharkiya, this study has shown that Haryanvi Raagni has progressed through three interconnected phases: literary-philosophical consolidation, historical-nationalist expansion, and contemporary revitalisation. Although each poet responded to the socio-cultural realities of a different historical period, all three contributed significantly to sustaining Raagni as a living tradition that reflects the collective experiences, values, and identity of rural Haryana.

The comparative analysis reveals that Lakhmi Chand transformed Raagni into a sophisticated literary form by integrating mythology, ethical philosophy, and dramatic narration, thereby establishing its literary legitimacy. Mehar Singh expanded the thematic and historical scope of the tradition by foregrounding patriotism, agrarian life, and the experiences of ordinary people, positioning Raagni as a repository of vernacular history and collective memory. Rajender Kharkiya further ensured the continuity of the tradition by adapting it to contemporary performance practices, recorded media, and digital platforms, demonstrating that folk literature remains relevant through innovation rather than static preservation.

The study also highlights that the evolution of Haryanvi Raagni is best understood through interdisciplinary perspectives drawn from folklore studies, performance theory, cultural studies, and literary criticism. The theoretical insights of Alan Dundes, Richard Bauman, Stuart Hall, Mikhail Bakhtin, Pierre Nora, and Néstor García Canclini provide a useful framework for interpreting Raagni not merely as oral entertainment but as a dynamic cultural practice that continually negotiates tradition, identity, memory, and modernity. In doing so, the study contributes to broader discussions on Indian folk literature by demonstrating how regional oral traditions adapt to changing cultural environments while preserving their distinctive linguistic and performative identity.

By tracing the literary evolution of Haryanvi Raagni across three generations of influential poets, this article fills an important gap in existing scholarship, which has largely examined these figures individually rather than comparatively. The findings affirm that Haryanvi Raagni is not a static remnant of the past but an evolving cultural archive that continues to articulate social values, historical consciousness, and regional identity. Future research may extend this comparative

approach by examining the role of women performers, audience reception, digital media, and the global dissemination of Haryanvi folk traditions, thereby further enriching the study of Indian oral literature and performance cultures.

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