

Blueprint for “**ECHOES: ON THE TRAIL OF HIMACHALI FOLK SONGS**” under the Scheme Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse cultural Traditions of India, sanctioned under Sanction letter No: 28-6/ICH-Scheme/22/2013-14 Dated: 31<sup>st</sup> March ,2014

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

Himachal Pradesh is one of the few states which have remained largely untouched by external influences, owing to its difficult terrain.

But the recent information explosion and mass media intrusion are increasingly posing a threat to its diverse and rich cultural heritage manifested in its folk music, oral tradition and a host of rites and rituals performed to appease and please hundreds of local gods and deities.

Though mainly devotional in nature, the folk songs of Himachal cover a wide range of subjects and in many of them we find deep insight into life.

The Junju, Sukrat, Bhunkh and Roopshu songs of the Chamba valley, the Mohana of Bilaspur, the Jhoori and Bharthari of Sirmour, the Laman of Kulu are all rooted in the daily life and rich folk tradition of the area and each has notable features of its own.

The folk stories of mountainous regions ranging from romance, chivalry and changing seasons, very often finds its way in their music.

Most of the songs require no instrumental accompaniment. Chhinj, Laman, Jhoori, Gangi, Mohana and Tappe are love songs. Dholru is a seasonal song. Bare-Haren are ballads about warriors, Soohadiyan are songs sung at childbirth. Losi and Pakkahad and Suhaag songs are all family songs, Karak are songs of praise in honour of the deities and Alhaini is a song of mourning. All these songs follow a specific style of singing and the geographical conditions have a deep effect on these.

The famous love stories like Phulmu-Ranjhu, Kunju-Chanchalo and Raja-Gaddan are also told through songs, while eremonial lyrics such as Bhayi, Suhag, Suhagare and Vidayi are sung on special occasions like birth, betrothal and marriage. In the Chamba-Pangi areas, the professional singers go from village to village with a khanjari (tambourine) and play on these as they sing. They also use string puppets.

### **Project**

This folk musical tradition/ folklores has survived through centuries because it has been passed over from generation to generation. These “songs of our forefathers” have travelled so far, courtesy certain seasonal and religious festivals (weddings songs e.g.) where they are sung and remembered and relived.

These songs carry with them the memories of our collective past; they are our history in form of myths and metaphors. In fact, the songs from time immemorial seem to me as living beings, for in Himachal these are also used to evoke gods, heal people or even solve community problems.

I believe if the melody is sung with utmost precision in notation its vibration can transform the very being of a person.

My firm belief is that a particular combination of notes, or sonic quality, (especially sung by a group in a ritualistic setting) can take the participants to a wholly different level of consciousness, which is what I would call the 'intangible cultural heritage'.

This oral tradition of musical heritage, however, is vanishing fast as new modes of entertainment take over, and there has been hardly any attempt to preserve what was once sacred to us.

You can still find traces of this tradition here and there but most of its original voice is lost, as it is being diluted, fused and mutilated by market forces.

I desire to work on **"BHARTHARI"** folklore of Sirmour Himachal Pradesh. It is the story of Raja Bharthari who later became a saint, following the lineage of Gorkhnath. This story is sung in many parts of India like Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh etc, but in Sirmour Himachal Pradesh it is very different. It talks about the Vairagya which happens in him by killing a deer and his struggle as a spiritual aspirant which finally makes him find his queen "Pingola".

This folklore is sung for the wellbeing of people in general and occasionally for some special reasons in the village by the artists or the performers. The instruments used to accompany the performance are very less like 'khangari'(tambourine) and 'ghadel', among these 'ghadel' has become very rare. It is a very long folklore and it is said that it doesn't finish even if you keep it singing for nine days and nights, which use to be the real ritual. These days only one or two extracts are sung in general. This very rare form is on the verge of extinction. These days it is very difficult to find a good performer of this ritual because the great masters are no more and the younger generation is not very interested in carrying forward this tradition.

#### **OBJECTIVE AND IMPLIMENTATION:**

I intend to meet that rare breed of old practitioners who are still singing and performing and document their lives and also to know about the performers who are said to be the miracle performers.

I wish to organize a workshop of young actors with the masters of ancient songs to help the former experience the quality of "being" which I have myself felt on many occasions in the ritual performances, which I'll call the "meetings".

The idea is to not only to document the song, but to make young actors understand, or rather feel, the musical current that flows—unheard-- in our veins.

Apart from this I hope I will be able to articulate the process through which I approached them and how they helped me out in this journey towards the past.

### **LOCALE**

**Sirmour, Himachal Pradesh.**

### **DATES/ TIME DURATION**

It is difficult to give the detail of the dates because it depends upon the will of the masters, but hopefully I would be able to commence this research project in coming six months from now onwards. The workshop will be for twenty-five days approximately, which I hope to culminate with a 'Meeting' where I would like to call few witnesses from the same village to be the part of the event.

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DATED:14/10/2014

# **FIRST REPORT**

## **“ECHOES: ON THE TRAIL OF HIMACHALI FOLK SONGS”** **“BHARTHARI”**

### **OPERATION AREA:**

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HIMACHAL PRADESH**

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Scheme: Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse cultural Traditions of India,  
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## **“ECHOES: ON THE TRAIL OF HIMACHALI FOLK SONGS”**

### **“BHARTHARI”**

This is my first visit to Haripurdhar a place in Sirmaur district Himachal Pradesh. Being a resident of Himachal Pradesh I never visited this area of my state because of many reasons, firstly there was no purpose and other is that this was a forbidden area to go because of a taboo that it is full of occult and witch craft. This belief is still ongoing because the today's sensibility has not touched the place thoroughly. It is very difficult to commute because from Shimla only two busses goes to this area in the morning 4 o'clock and 5 o'clock which are not even sure because of the bad roads and many more reasons. Sometimes the bus might stop anywhere and doesn't even find the real destination, again the reasons can be so many, bad roads, bad weather, old and worn out buses etc, etc.

In the first section of my visit I went to few villages of tehsil Shillai, district (Sirmaur) to find out the concerned people. I got a hazy idea of the performers who still sing this folk lore, but it was very difficult to get the real idea of the form and performers because even in those areas the new generation is not fully aware of this tradition and unfortunately they were the ones who could speak Hindi. It was very difficult to communicate because of the vast difference of language. We have few words in common but it is entirely a different dialect. Ultimately I tried to find somebody in Shimla town who can be a bridge to between us. Fortunately I found Kapil, a young actor who attended one of my theatre workshops in 2009 in Shimla.

The journey began with the search of people who knows about BHARTHARI. After few days of search we were able to find only four people who are still singing this folk lore, Doulat Ram, Veer Singh, Hukmi Ram and Deep Ram, who further told that there might be few more but , they have not heard much about this song being practiced by the common folk. They also mentioned that there is one more place called ANU in district Choupaal where this folk tale is sung but in a slightly different tune. They also mentioned that may be that is the place from where this folk lore has started, this I will talk about later while describing the story. These individual meeting were good but not very fruitful because of their shy nature which generally use to end with a lack of articulation. Finally we decided to organize a conference or meeting where all these artist will be together with few village folks and they will converse with each other so that we can get

maximum information. An evening was decided and with the feast of mutton, rice and 'Sidoo' a festive dish made of wheat flour. The event started in the late evening. It was amazing that only by a simple information of these performers coming together many elderly people from few nearby villages gathered to witness this seminar. After the grand feast they started talking about the story but the spectators were more interested in their singing. With lots of hesitation and apology they said 'don't worry we will try to translate and summarize the passages we will be singing to the best of our capacities', one of them said 'generally it is sung with a local instrument 'DAMRU'(a drum made of the mouth of a broken pot covered with the abdominal leather of goat called 'poti' and 'KHANGARI (tambourine) or may be sometimes a small drum 'DHOLAKI' will be used but he, pointing towards his senior, he said he can sing with a thali (plate)also'. A bronze plate was asked and with the 'tin tin' sound of the plate he starts with a prayer to his Guru for guidance and with a short introduction, the story begins;

We are not saying that we are the authority, we don't claim that we know from where it started , we only know our parents, and grandparents and believe what they said , and what they said! ; Long-long years ago there was king Bharthari, the king of a place we don't know but it is said to be known as "AZBA". He was the only son of his mother, whose name is not mentioned and there is no reference of his father. He had a queen named "PINGOLA".[ The original narrative structure of the song is non-linear. The story can start from anywhere and while singing the performer will refer to the previous incidents in a very dramatic way so that the person listening to it first time can also understand the whole background of the present actions.] If told in a linear way it starts ; One day the 'sakhi' or 'dasi', ( the nearest translation to which should be 'maid') of queen Pingola is combing her hair and while she is doing so the queen asks her four questions:

- 1) which water on earth is sweetest and coolest?
- 2) which grains are of the best quality?
- 3) which is the rarest animal?
- 4) who is the most beautiful queen on the land ?

To which the maid responds that the water of mountains, Grains of the plain warm areas are the best ones, the Black Deer is the rarest of the rarest animal and Queen Birma is the most beautiful of all queens.

The King overheard it and asked the maid to repeat what she said, she with lots of fear repeated it and said , this is what I have heard from a Brahmin while listening to his discourse. The King gets fascinated by it and at the same time out of sheer jealousy queen Pingola challenges the king to get this black deer(kaala mriga) and win queen Birma as his bride.

King Bharthari accepts the challenge and starts his quest for the Black deer. After travelling and searching for the black deer in the forest, the tired king finds a pond and a lightening thought flashes into his head, that in this dry forest the animals will definitely come to this pond to quench their thirst. He waited and waited there for days then suddenly he saw one thousand she deer coming towards the pond, following them appeared the black deer with long sharp horns. The king aimed his arrow and killed the deer. Looking at this dreadful sight of this dying Black Deer all the she deer started crying and in this pain they pleaded ,Oh!! hunter !! why did you killed our love ,our life, our soul ! if you were in such need of a kill, you would have killed ten or one hundred of us , why him? In agony they prayed to God. The visual they described is ...sixteen hundred deer placed their back on the dry ground and with their four legs pointing towards the sky they screamed and wailed to the God and then they became silent in deep grief. This sound made the Gods throne tremble. Listening to this divine calling the great tantric sage Gorakhnath appeared. Seeing the horrifying visual he inquires about the incident. He goes to King Bharthari's camp and asks him, who gave you the right to kill the innocent animal and that also out of fun ? King says, No offence but you take your alms and go away , why argue unnecessary? What do you want? To this Gorakhnath replies, you arrogant king, make him alive if you can!? King laughs and says it's impossible, if 'you' do it I will accept your power, here and now I will leave my kingdom and kingship, be your devotee and disciple and put the ashes of your sacred fire over my body..... Gorakhnath smiled and the Deer got up with a shrug . The whole camp was shocked and mesmerized by the fact that a deer which was about to be get roasted did sit.....King left everything there and decided to be a sanyasi, but Gorakhnath said , not now dear King , go to your mother and ask permission. Make her say that she frees you from the bondage of being her son, "From now you are not my son and I am not your mother .....I permit you for the sanyasa !!" Another go to your wife and ask for alms addressing her Oh Mother!!! I seek the Alms!! If you do it I will accept you as my disciple and initiate you in the journey of finding the truth. Then he goes to his wife who also allows him but promises him that till he returns back she will also remain like a sanyasin. So! oh king!! lock your Rang mahal yourself and open it when you return.....He was initiated and when the Guru pierced the kings ears, instead of blood milk poured out of the wounds.

After this they started singing these two episodes very briefly but then also the song went on for at least half an hour each. All the women and men around me were in tears. They said only these two episodes can be sung for the whole night.

Further the story says that his mother takes a promise that he will return to her after twelve years and he will never go to her sister's house during this time because of

two reasons, first she will die if she see her brother has abandoned everything, second the way to her house is full of hurdles, difficulties and pain.

There is one more major subplot in the story which moves parallel. While Bharthari was growing up, simultaneously in a place called Dhaula Desh , there was a King who was the first person to make horoscope of his daughter, which for the local people is the first historical reference of a girls horoscope being made. It predicted that the girl has a problematic planetary position which tells that, either this girl will marry her Father or a sanyasi. The King became sad, he renounced everything and gave his daughters responsibility to his trust worthy people, a couple named Khaliaram and his wife Barja to protect her. She was a beautiful girl named Birma. Handing over her to this couple he said, never let a sanyasi enter into the boundaries of my state, from now onwards I appoint you the officiating authority and the king of the bordering province called Kurangal. Barja was a kind of polluted mystic, expert in witchcraft and occult. She tortured every sadhu who even came in contact with the borders.

King Bharthari's mother might have this hint, so she was trying to convince him from not going towards her sisters place because to reach there he must cross Barja's magical traps. But he decides to go there. This whole episode covers his hard and harsh journey through Shini Ghati(valley of Shini) Kurangal to Dhaula desh.

The performer describes the Valley of Shini as dry,rocky and without any trees and water. It is steep and by walking to the top one finds the place Kurangal. He is tired and in pain. In this state he says, oh Mother!! it is better to die then being in this pain. Suddenly he realizes that his master gave him four thing;

.Pakhiya or shawl which was full of blessings of the divine energies.

.Jholi or a bag to collect alms.

.Kindri an instrument made of the horn, which use to play thirty-six instruments by itself.

.Gorakh-Dibiya, a miraculous vessel.

.Two and a half hands full of rice.

Guru said, when in difficulty spread all these things on the ground and hit the ground with your heel and see your problem being sorted out. He did so, sixty water springs came out, the water started flowing, a huge shady tree appeared to protect him from hot Sun etc.

Here he meets the sadhus who had been tortured by Barja , they narrates their story. He feeds them with miraculous rice, plays Kindri to sooth their pain. After

this he moves to Kurangal to fight Barja. She traps him and locks him behind seven doors inside a cage made of bones. She drenches him in blood cows meat and pollutes him taking away all his magical powers. He prays to Master Guga Zaharvir, who is said to be another disciple of Gorakhnath. Who comes to free him from there. To purify and sanctify himself he travels to Kailash Mansarover, here the Divine Bull Nandi shows him the way to the sacred waters.

Later he reaches Birma .....Then comes the episode in which he crushes and shatters the ego of Birma and teaches her lesson for torturing the wise men .....Rather than twelve years he returns to his kingdom after thirteen years and finds that the Brahmin whom he gave the responsibility of his people is ill-treating them. He punishes him by sending him off with his family far away from his state. This Brahmins family is said to have settled in the place called ANU in Himachal Pradesh from where this story came into existence ....and the story still goes on and on and on to the infinite length with lots of small subplots in between.

The best part of the narrative skill is that the performer goes into the details of scene, visual and action. He will not report or execute the story to the spectator but will make him re-live with the situation engaging all his senses by his description.



After singing till three in the morning they said, it won't finish if we keep on singing this for even nine to eleven nights also, earlier people use to sing it for nine or eleven nights as a ritual,... it is never ending. I said how it is possible? To which one of them responded; you are talking to us then you will go to Shimla then Delhi, your story might finish with your death, it cannot end in our village. Similarly ...

Bharthari is alive. They have this strong believe that wherever this story is sung Bharthari comes to listen and witness the performance in any form, it can be a mosquito, honeybee, a dog or anything. 'We are not truthful enough to realize his presence' he said. Responding to my question about the length of the story they said, there are two words, one is the 'Bhed' which can be translated as the secret and the other a colloquial term 'labeled', by which he meant creative imagination which an individual performer does, responding to his impulses being guided by some strong stimuli. So the performance is a mixture of these two things.

There is no historical evidence that who sang it first. Earlier Nath sadhu's use to sing and the village folks gave them food alms etc in response. The other people or the community was of blacksmiths who sang this folk lore. They were not considered as untouchables. The common village folk use to cook for them, feed them and even pack a lot of food and grains which in those days was "kodon" or "koda" a kind of a millet. Then with a small laughter he said, 'Sir look the real thing is, only the idol person will do all this, because they have time. These black smiths work only for few months rest of the time they travel, they are like nomads and these sadhus are always free. But we are farmers we work on the fields, we are labours, we don't have time to practice. We feel somebody should come, sing and make us sing and dance a little so that we can release our stress. So, during the working seasons in summer we use to have these conferences from twelve to three in the day time and in the winters, heavy snow, long nights, no work, we listened to them whole night, rather we waited for them to come and sing Bharthari etc. Later few young people showed interest in this kind of singing so some of them got initiated to this form because without a master the seeker cannot find the goal.

To our knowledge in fifteen panchayats only one person was there who got initiated, his children didn't followed his legacy, but these two old masters Doulat Ram and Veer Singh got initiated through him and are following the lineage. Younger generation is not paying too much attention to this song. New ways of singing are emerging which is losing the content value and the tunes are soulless. Youngsters are disoriented, confused, outside world is grabbing them towards fake attitude "Fukre" is the word he says, if you teach them something knowledgeable they won't even respond to it. But there are people who seems interested in this kind of social and community singing. On one instance a performer also talked about television, with a laughter he says TB is a new disease in our area now. It is affecting our earlier lifestyle. If it shows something good it is always great, it connects us. We humans are destroying things, like radio it is for our growth but we have demeaned them, our art etc. These days people are trying to record CD also of Bharthari, but it cannot save the tradition it can preserve the song may be...

Finally !!!!It is a tradition which will never end. We are not singing it for money, we just sing. We are not professional artists or scholars as you are but we know the depth of this myth. Even writing the story won't help. How much can we write ? It comes from within, It emerges through the chain of impulses. "Bharthari is still listening....."



This is a small article which somehow summarizes my talking and listening to their singing.



## THE PERFORMERS



### **Doulat Ram**

**Sh.Doulat Ram.** S/o Sh Budhiya Ram. He is Sixtyfour years old and the most senior performer in fifteen panchayats in this District. He is from village Kullah. Farmer by profession he is singing and practising from the age of twentyfive, after his initiation to this form of singing.

**Sh. Veer Singh.** Son of Sh. Mani Ram fiftyfive years old born in the village Kullah is a farmer. He was the performer who sang the most parts. A performer with amazing sense of humour and wit. While talking to some other people of the village on the next day of the conference, they said he was taking care of your comfort thats why he stoped for the interpertations , otherwise when he sings he rarely stops before one hour. His singing invokes devine energies in the space.



**Veer Singh**



## Hukmi Ram



**Shri Hukmi Ram.** Son of Sh. Ramsa Ram. Born in a farmer family of Kinu village can be said as one of the youngest of the four

performers. He is forty seven years old. He says I sing but neither I have right to sing nor I am obliged to be a great singer because I am farmer as well as a labor. But I sing because I feel like singing it. It is precious and divine. It is a great epic like Ramayana and Mahabharata.

One more performer Deep Ram Son of Jatti Ram Resident of Kinu village. unfortunately his photograph got deleted, he is also a young performer of forty five years. He is a farmer as well as he is also running his local food joint or restaurant (dhaba).

By-n-large none of them can be said as the professional singer /artists. They are ordinary common people living with their tradition which is free from cast and class hierarchy. A way to Deal with their complexes, pains and stresses.

To my knowledge the story of Raja Bharthari Hari is also sung in some areas of Chhattisgarh , Rajasthan etc. but while comparing them , this version is very different not only in the narrative structure but also in the tune , style of singing , incidents and even the names of the character, because in the place named Anu in Himachal which I have already mentioned previously , they say the kings name was "Hemchand" which later became Bharthari after getting initiated and his wife

was "Kindra Rani". With the progression of the story it slowly changes. The narrative structure is very non-linear and in an epic form.

According to them also it is an epic like Ramayana and Mahabharata. While talking to them they mentioned that there are other forms of singing also like HARUL, the stories of the victories of their heroes or the Devatas( local deities) which are popular because of the vigorous dancing and powerful music of drums etc. but there are few songs like MAASTI, a song sung while a chastic(pativrata) women use to perform Sati on the funeral pyre of her husband in the time of 'STAYUGA' (this word is colloquial understanding of good times, like a utopia. It does not really refers to the four yugas mentioned in classical Hindu scriptures if the historical evidences are taken ) etc. which are more like the healing melodies for the common society. A group of people sits together , sing with minimalistic instruments and ornamentations, only essentials are required. They talk about their society, culture, divine interventions etc. Treat all theses heroes as the part of them. They relate to them, they have emotional outbursts. Handing over all their suppressed emotional energies etc. they feel rejuvenated and full positivity for some difficult times ahead.

I have recorded some audio of the song as well as few small video clips through a mobile camera, which only works as reference material for myself and not as a document for archival purpose.

For the further research I purpose to organize a small workshop, in which these senior masters will be working with the young local people, so that this tradition can be transferred to the younger generations. Which hopefully if the budget permits will be culminated with a performance for the village people, because if we only document them it will remain a document in the shelves but I feel it should live in its own soil, where it was born and nurtured. So, helping the local people to carry forward this tradition will be the best way to safeguard it.

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.

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DATED:10/03/2016

# FINAL REPORT

## “ECHOES: ON THE TRAIL OF HIMACHALI FOLK SONGS” “BHARTHARI”

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### **MY LAST VISIT**

Every time going to Kinu is like a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage where one goes to pay regards to the ancients and ancestors. In this case the ancestors are the melodies which resonate in the environs of that area. Kinu is a small village in Shilai, District Sirmour of Himachal Pradesh. This was my third visit. Initially I thought of making a documentary on their ritual songs later I fixed my idea on only one ritual song bharthari which is a folklore sung continuously for nine days. Due to the lack of budget it could not happen and I ended with few audio clips.



*Our base camp in village Kinu Sirmour*

Visiting those people, listening to their thoughts and ideas about art and life etc. is always a delight. They don't have great words or the so called literary metaphors but a strong believe and innocence. I was mesmerized by the amount of contentment they have. When I use the word content I doesn't mean they doesn't have desires to be famous, to be seen, to be acknowledged by the world, but it is not their need. Whatever they have they are grateful for that. Besides all the hardships of life they "live" and "sing". How well they sing can be the concern of a researcher, an outsider like me but for them it is a matter of community's wellbeing and theirs as well. I would call it singing "life".

The terrain is difficult. One has to walk miles to reach a destination. People still doesn't meet their relatives often but on occasions because of the difficulty in commuting. Local Seasonal vegetables are grown at home but buying some other vegetables are difficult because of availability and economics. Food grains like "kodon" "rice" etc. and "cereals" like black urad, rajmah, bali, rangun etc are grown in the village itself, which sometimes are not enough and to buy these things..... again walking kilometers. Now few village people have opened some improvised general stores which contain everything from a small tea shop, to a tobacco shop, to a place where one might find an out dated newspaper (baasi akhbaar) occasionally. While talking to the villagers they said, to get a cement bag one has to pay at least double then its original price due to the carriage expenses.

After all this days struggle for survival, they "live" in the evening with these songs which I mentioned in my previous report. Songs like "Maasti", "Harul", "Bharthari" etc. but even these evenings are also occasional. The best time is winter or Maagh mahina (mid-january) which they call it in local language. It is called as 'Dharmi Mahina' meaning auspicious month, plus there is ample of time. It is the time after whole year's hard work and labor. There is less work or no work. The days are smaller. Nights are long. In these long nights people generally spin thread out of the sheep wool to weave it for the coming winters or keep it for the bad times, they say. While this action these songs are sung with the sharing of experiences.

In this visit we camped and assembled in the house of a person named Mani Ram. He was also the local guide who generously hosted us. We worked, listen and talked to them. Earlier also it was similar kind of gathering but most of the time they use to talk in their colloquial language. This time they agreed to talk and narrate some parts in Hindi because I asked them that I want to record some audio clippings. We talked for

many hour about the world, life and changing times, for which they had only one answer; people have no value system for life, earlier there used to be mutual respect, humanity, dignity of labor etc. but now it's fading away slowly. They were happy that they are not so much in contact with the modern world and superficial in behavior. They have this regret (not the right word) that their children don't have similar opportunities and they might lag behind in this modern world, but they were happy that at least they still have a commune and communions.

I asked them few basic questions about the form, its emergence, decline, their livelihood, earnings, further transferring and safeguarding this. I also talked to few old villagers who have been listening to this folklore from their child hood. From their answers whatever I understood I will try to summarize it to make it clear and precise.

In this Kaliyuga ancient tradition, stories, songs have died. It is may be few people, studying, searching and learning who have little concern about it and they are seeking for these things but otherwise in today's time they are almost extinct. All the ancient proverbs are lost. There are very few listeners, and the singers and storytellers are even less. People don't pay attention to values and the myths related to values; anything which is concerned with Gyan, dhyana, buddhi etc. is being forgotten. The World is becoming full of hooligans.

They were astonished that we come only to listen to the tale of bharthari every time. They said it makes them feel proud that there is still something left in these kinds of fossil arts.

It is ancient myth and epic poetry like Ramayana and Mahabharata. It is full of wisdom but one must pay attention to it. Young generation is busy in passing time in all nuisances. They don't pay any attention. The world has become such.

Nobody knows when this form came into existence. People have been singing and listening to it from the times immemorial. It dates back to Vedas, and Puranas. These are all myths but have a similar origin date wise.

They said they have heard their grandparents also talking about the same, but yes there had been improvisations because of the singers knowledge and singing skills and by the travelling, as the dialect and the culture varies the story also gets an add on or a

subtraction, which they say might be common all over but the basic content, the idea and the intent remains the same.

There is no historical evidence that who sang it first. Earlier Nath sadhu's use to sing and the village folks gave them food, etc. in response. The other people or the community was of blacksmiths who sang this folk lore. They were not considered as untouchables. The common village folk use to cook for them, feed them and even pack a lot of food and grains which in those days was only "kodon" a kind of a millet. Then with a small laughter one of them said, 'Sir look the real thing is, only the idol person will do all this, because they have time. These black smiths work only for few months rest of the time they travel, they are like nomads and these sadhus are always free. But we are farmers we work on the fields, we are labors, we don't have time to practice. We feel somebody should come, sing and make us sing and dance a little so that we can release our stress. So, during the working seasons in summer we use to have these conferences from twelve to three in the day time and in the winters, heavy snow, dark nights, no work, we listened to them whole night, rather we waited for them to come and sing Bharthari etc. Later few young people showed interest in this kind of singing so some of them got initiated to this form because without a master the seeker cannot find the goal.

There is no particular way of 'Gurudharana' like in any other classical art. A person who sings it well and is a learned person can be the trainer, but if any Nath sadhu initiates someone into some spiritual practice, it is a common belief that the training is authenticated.

Responding to my question about the length of the story which is measured in days, precisely nine days and nights, they said, there are two words, one is the 'Bhed' which can be translated as the secret and the other a colloquial term 'labeled', by which he meant creative imagination which an individual performer does, responding to his impulses being guided by some strong stimuli. So the performance is a mixture of these two things. And the structure of the folklore is also in the form of multiple circular narratives. It moves in an epic way. There is not only one plot but multiple plots being talked simultaneously. It starts from one point comes back to the same point-from where a new off shoot begins. It is continuous. Apart from this each incident has a very dense emotional content, which the singers explore very less in terms of musical score but more in the poetry. The singing is very monotonous or seems monotonous but is very engaging.



I saw few females and males as well crying sometimes. When I asked them they said, you can't understand Bharthari is in deep pain-as if he was not a character of a story but someone very close to them.



*Rukmi Devi (Dadi)*



*Morning after the sleepless night  
(Neighbors of the host)*

## **The Summary of the Folklore**

King Bharthari is said to be known as "AZBA". This place is not practically known to us; we never heard, never saw or went there. We are not even sure whether it really existed ever or the poet constructed the name. The King was the only son of his mother, whose name is not mentioned and there is no reference of his father. He married a queen named "PINGOLA, somewhere mentioned as "KINDRA". He was preparing for a hunting expedition. One day the 'sakhi' and 'dasi' of queen Pingola is combing her hair and while she is doing so the queen asks her four questions:

- Which water on earth is sweetest and coolest?
- Which grains are of the best quality?
- Which is the rarest animal?
- Who is the most beautiful queen on the land ?

To which the maid responds that the water of mountains, Grains of the plain warm areas are the best ones, the Black Deer is the rarest of the rarest animal and Queen Birma is the most beautiful of all queens.



The King overheard it and asked the maid to repeat what she said; she with lots of fear repeated it and said, this is what I have heard from a Brahmin while listening to his discourse. The King gets fascinated by it and at the same time out of sheer jealousy queen Pingola challenges the king that if he is a worthy king he must get this black deer (kaala mriga) and win queen Birma as his bride. She also takes a solemn vow that till you (The king) return with these gifts for her she will not come out of her chamber.

King Bharthari accepts the challenge and starts his quest for the Black deer. And here the queen becomes confined to her chamber. He found many deer's but not that particular deer. After travelling and searching for the black deer in the forest, the tired king finds a pond and a lightening thought flashes into his head, that in this dry forest the animals will definitely come to this pond to quench their thirst. He waited and waited there for days. One day he was sitting under a tree tired of waiting when suddenly he saw one hundred sixty female deer coming towards the pond, following them appeared the black deer with long sharp horns. The king aimed his arrow. Looking at this frightful visual all the female deer started crying and in this pain they pleaded, Oh!! Hunter!! Why? Why did you want to kill our lover, our life, our soul! If you were in such need of meat, you can kill all of us. Ten or one hundred of us, why him? King replied I am a king; even I won't eat fox or hyena. I will eat a deer for which I have come from "Azba" and precisely this black deer. Without listening to the begging requests of the female deer he shot the arrow.....the black deer got killed. First challenge was won. They started to move back to their place and the sun went down in the horizon. They camped to halt. The king had a companion, son of a washer man. He worked for him as his orderly and body guard. Tents were set, the food was being cooked. Even a part that black deer was being roasted. The female deer became sad. They started following him. When they saw this painful view in agony they prayed to God. Suddenly sixteen hundred deer gathered. All of them lied down with their backs on the dry ground and with their four legs pointing towards the sky in deep remorse and grief they screamed and wailed to the God and then suddenly they went into silence and pathos. This sound made the Gods throne was shaken. Listening to this huge sound the great tantric sage Gorakhnath who was in deep meditation, opened his eyes and told his disciple that there has been some terrible crime and sin created on this earth go and enquire the matter. He saw the visual and reported to the Guru. Guru Gorakhnath got angry because that black deer was also his disciple and loved one. He walked in rage and reached the spot. Seeing the horrifying visual he inquires about the incident. Deer replied, a violent hunter has come, we requested him not to kill our husband, we offered our flesh but he was reluctant to answer our request and did this heinous crime. We pray you, oh! Holy God do justice. He goes to King Bharthari's camp where everybody was in a festive mood ready to eat. The king was in his tent with the washer man's son sitting outside.

He saw Guru Gorakhnath and reported to the king. The king gave some alms and asked his orderly to give it to the sage. He went and called the sage; once twice thrice. Gorakhnath said these are the alms from a sinner and so not for me, go and call him out. He went back and reported the entire event. King came out and offered the alms again. Guru Gorakhnath said, Oh! You sinner, who gave you the right to kill the innocent animal and that also out of fun? King says, No offence but you take your alms and go away, why argue unnecessary? What do you want? To this Gorakhnath replies, you arrogant king, make him alive if you can!? King laughs and says it's impossible, once a life gone can never return. Nobody can make dead alive. If 'you' do it I will accept your power, here and now I will leave my kingdom and kingship, be your devotee and disciple and put the ashes of your sacred fire over my body..... Gorakhnath smiled and the Deer got up with a shrug. The whole camp was shocked and mesmerized by the fact that a deer which was about to be get roasted did sit.....King left everything there, went to Gorakhnath's Dhuni, covered his whole body with the ashes and decided to be a sanyasi, but Gorakhnath said , not now dear King , go to your mother and ask permission. Make her say that she frees you from the bondage of being her son, "From now you are not my son and I am not your mother ....."I permit you for the sanyasa !!! Another go to your wife and ask for alms addressing her Oh Mother!!! I seek the Alms!! If you do it I will accept you as my disciple and initiate you in the journey of finding the truth.



*A click during the singing (Veer Singh, Hukmi Ram, Daulat Ram)*

He dressed in saffron robe went to his mother, who seeing a sage came with same alms. The king in a sage's disguise said I don't need this, what I need...by this time out of pain and happiness tears flowed out of his eyes. In the mean time when he was talking mother saw his teeth one of which was a different colored, obviously she recognized he was Bharthari. She said I recognized you, you are my son. What reasons made you wear this saffron robe? You went as a king and came back as a beggar? He narrates the whole story and asks the permission. She refuses and goes away. But king is adamant, he waits and after some days she come and tells bharthari that your guru had died. But king doesn't accept and promises that he will come back for your funeral rites. Mother still doesn't allow him. Finally the king says that as the sanyasa is not possible it is better I drown myself and jumps into a pond. This sight melts his mother. She asks him to come back with the promise of permission. But she makes him promise that he will never go to "SHINI valley and mountain" and "Dhaulta Desh" because the valley-mountain is too dry and rough and in Dhaulta desh his sister lives, who on seeing him in this saffron robe will die. Bharthari was stubborn; he decides in his mind that only these two places will be his first challenges.

Then he goes to his wife who was confined in her chamber. He lights fire outside her palace. The smoke enters her room and the Queen realizes there is some sanyasa outside. She sends her maid to give him the alms. He returns it back many times asking only her to come out. For which queen "pingola" says that if this time he takes the alms be thankful if not, beat him out of my courtyard. This incident makes him cry. And when his mouth opens to cry, again the coloured tooth gets exposed and so king Bharthari. The moment Queen finds this she get into a state of shock. Bharthari calls his guru to solve this problem. Gorakhnath appears and consoles the queen that, this is all Maya. The body is perishable. She understands also allows him but promises him that till he returns back she will also remain like a sanyasin. So! oh king!! lock your Rang mahal yourself and open it when you return.....Ultimately, He was initiated and when the Guru pierced the king's ears, instead of blood milk poured out of the wounds.

Further the story says that his mother takes a promise that he will return to her after twelve years and he will never go to her sister's house during this time because of two reasons, first she will die if she see her brother has abandoned everything, second the way to her house is full of hurdles, difficulties and pain.

There is one more major subplot in the story which moves parallel. While Bharthari was growing up, simultaneously in a place called Dhaulta Desh , there was a King who

was the first person to make horoscope of his daughter, which for the local people is the first historical reference of a girl's horoscope being made. It predicted that the girl has a problematic planetary position which tells that, either this girl will marry her Father or a sanyasi. The King became sad, he renounced everything and gave his daughters responsibility to his trust worthy people, a couple named Khaliaram and his wife Barja to protect her. She was a beautiful girl named Birma. Handing over her to this couple he said, never let a sanyasi enter into the boundaries of my state, from now onwards I appoint you the officiating authority and the king of the bordering province called Kurangal. Barja was a kind of polluted mystic, expert in witchcraft and occult. She tortured every sadhu who even came in contact with the borders.

King Bharthari's mother might have this hint, so she was trying to convince him from not going towards her sister's place because to reach there he must cross Barja's magical traps. But he decides to go there. This whole episode covers his hard and harsh journey through Shini Ghati(valley of Shini) Kurangal to Dhaula desh.

The performer describes the Valley of Shini as dry, rocky and without any trees and water. It is steep and by walking to the top one finds the place Kurangal. He is tired and in pain. In this state he says, oh Mother!! it is better to die then being in this pain. Suddenly he realizes that his master gave him four things;

- .Pakhiya or shawl which was full of blessings of the divine energies.
- .Jholi or a bag to collect alms.
- .Kindri an instrument made of the horn, which use to play thirty-six instruments by itself.
- .Gorakh-Dibiya, a miraculous vessel.
- .Two and a half hands full of rice.

Guru said, when in difficulty spread all these things on the ground and hit the ground with your heel and see your problem being sorted out. He did so, sixty water springs came out, the water started flowing, a huge shady tree appeared to protect him from hot Sun etc.

Here he meets the sadhus who had been tortured by Barja, they narrates their story. He feeds them with miraculous rice, plays Kindri to soothe their pain. After this he moves to Kurangal to fight Barja. She traps him and locks him behind seven doors inside a cage made of bones. She drenches him in blood cows meat and pollutes him taking away all his magical powers. He prays to Master Guga Zaharvir, who is said to be another disciple of Gorakhnath. Who comes to free him from there. To purify and sanctify himself he travels to Kailash Mansarovar, here the Divine Bull Nandi shows him the way to the sacred waters.

Later he reaches Birma .....Then comes the episode in which he crushes and shatters the ego of Birma and teaches her lesson for torturing the wise men .....Rather than twelve years he returns to his kingdom after thirteen years and finds that the Brahmin whom he gave the responsibility of his people is ill-treating them. . He punishes him by sending him off with his family far away from his state. This Brahmins family is said to have settled in the place called ANU in Himachal Pradesh from where this story came into existence ....and the story still goes on and on and on to the infinite length with lots of small subplots in between.

### **THE Myth's/Truth's Related To Bharthari**

Bharthari is alive. They have this strong believe that wherever this story is sung / narrated Bharthari comes to listen and witness the performance in any form, it can be a mosquito, honeybee, a dog or anything. 'We are not truthful enough to realize his presence' they say. When I asked where does the story ends. They said story will only end when Bharthari will die. But as we told you He is immortal and still comes wherever this folklore is sung.

One of the performer said that 'I had been some twenty five years old. Choupal;a place in Himachal, for which a road was being made along the river 'Tauns'. We were sixty people. Amongst us was 'Bindru' an eighty five year old man. Once he met two sages who were looking very young and charming. He asked them, how old are you? One of them responded, last time when I visited this area 'Tauns' use to touch that mountain. Which means like two kilometers. And the moment Mr.Bindru realized, no one was there. He believe he was Bharthari. Nobody knows whether this is true or false. It might be impossible medically but this small belief keeps them alive from inside.



*Daulat Ram interpreting the complexity of Sanyasa*



**Bharthari is still alive. He is immortal They have this strong believe that wherever this story is sung, He comes to listen and witness the performance in any form, it can be a mosquito, honeybee, a dog or anything. 'We are not truthful enough to realize his presence' .**



*A Break in between the Session*

### **Bharthari (CONCLUSION)**

. “Bharthari” is a song in which there is no dance or physical action like any other singing form of Sirmour, Himachal example “Harul” which are the tales of battle, warriors and bravery. “Bharthari” is generally sung on auspicious occasions like “Satya Narayan katha” Maha shivratri etc apart from the regular winter sessions. Originally sung for nine days and nights. After talking to the performers and whatever they said, I understood that it is very liberal and democratic ritual son. No barriers of cast and class. No hierarchies. No paraphernalia, i.e. no costumes, no make-up, even no musical instruments. Only a khanjari (tambourine) or even a bronze plate. One of the performers said it is not about song it is about musical rendering of the text. He further said, recently one audio CD came out with seventeen minutes version of

Bharthari full of musical instruments, he is not singing bad but we are not able to listen the story. So, I can say that it is a musical rendering of the text which is not written. I heard about a book by Sh. Gopichand on Bharthari. When I asked these performers they said yes he is may be grandson or nephew of Bharthari. But he has written a story like you might write, it will be a summary without nuances which can never be written. It is an artist's inner feeling which adds flesh to the skeleton.

On asking them about safeguarding and documenting the form they said, it is good. Somebody like a PhD. Scholar can come, research and write about it but it will only document it and document only one or two or three versions but not the expanse of the story or the improvisations which happen in every session, but at least it will remain in history.

They have a very strong believe that I will never perish, (amar katha) as they say bharthari is still alive. It is a never ending story.

When I asked them about the response of their parents when they started learning this and how they respond if their children wanted to learn. They replied that our parents were very happy but we will be happy if they do so but they don't pay attention to this story telling method.

I have mentioned this in my previous report also that they don't sing it for money because it is not a profession and cannot be made a way of income. If we sing somewhere people give us 'dan' (gifts, alms etc.). We don't claim we are artists yet we sing for ourselves, but we are cooks, farmers and laborers with a monthly income of around Rs. 5000.00.

## **GENERAL VIEWS:**

I strongly feel that there should be a way to document and safeguard these kinds of ancient forms. I believe they belong to a community and they cherish and blossom in their own environment. There should be a way that they perform there and the whole world goes there to witness the event because if they are called to the towns and cities to showcase or perform the performance as well as the artist lose its context and relevancy.

## THE PERFORMERS



### **Doulat Ram**

**Sh. Doulat Ram.** S/o Sh Budhiya Ram. He is Sixtyfour years old and the most senior performer in fifteen panchayats in this District. He is from village Kullah. Farmer by profession he is singing and practising from the age of twentyfive, after his initiation to this form of singing.

**Sh. Veer Singh.** Son of Sh. Mani Ram fiftyfive years old born in the village Kullah is a farmer. He was the performer who sang the most parts. A performer with amazing sense of humour and wit. While talking to some other people of the village on the next day of the conference, they said he was taking care of your comfort thats why he stoped for the interpertations , otherwise when he sings he rarely stops before one hour. His singing invokes devine energies in the space.



**Veer Singh**



## **Hukmi Ram**



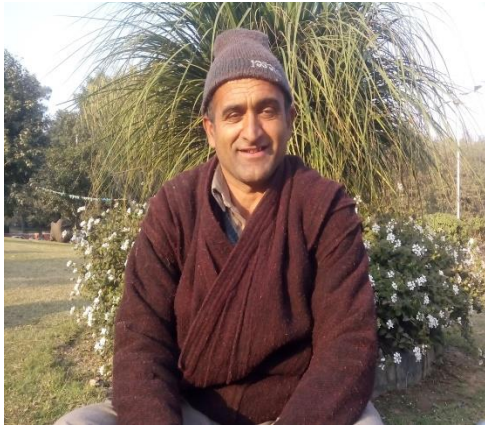
**Shri Hukmi Ram.** Son of Sh. Ramsa Ram. Born in a farmer family of Kinu village can be said as one of the youngest of the four performers. He is forty seven years old. He says I sing but neither I have right to sing nor I am obliged to be a great singer because I am farmer as well as a labor.

## **Deep Ram**



**Sh.Deep Ram.** Son of Jatti Ram Resident of Kinu village.He is also a young performer of forty five years. He is a farmer as well as he is also running his local food joint or restaurant (dhaba) in Haripurdhar.Sirmour

## **Mani Ram**



**Sh Mani Ram** Resident of village Kinu was our local guide. He introduced us to the singers and hosted all the three visits. He is being listening to Bharathari for many years.

## **GRATITUDES**

I pay my deep gratitude to all these people who helped us and my team mates Kapil, Criss and Mukesh who are always there to work with my all idiosyncrasies. A very deep thanks to Sangeet Natak Academy for considering my project and bearing with me for my delays in the reports.

Thank you very much!!!

**With this report I am submitting:**

One DVD with few untreated/Unedited audio clips as references.

The utilization certificate duly signed by a chartered accountant.

Once again, I am very thankful to Sangeet Natak Academy for giving me such opportunity because I feel so proud and honored to meet these people.

Thank You once Again.

Vipin Bhardwaj  
Vill-Loshta  
Po. Kotgarh  
Distt. Shimla  
Himachal Pradesh 172031.

Dated:

DATED:14/10/2014

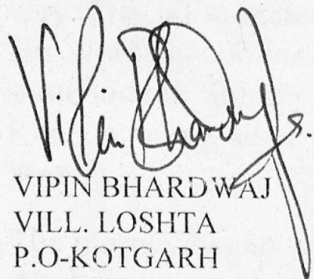
# FIRST REPORT

## “ECHOES: ON THE TRAIL OF HIMACHALI FOLK SONGS” “BHARTHARI”

### OPERATION AREA:

VILLAGE-KINU  
P.O-PANOG  
TEH.-SHILLAI  
SIRMOUR  
HIMACHAL PRADESH

### RESEARCHER :



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Scheme: Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse cultural Traditions of India,  
sanctioned under Sanction letter No: 28-6/ICH-Scheme/22/2013-14. Dated: 31<sup>st</sup> March ,2014

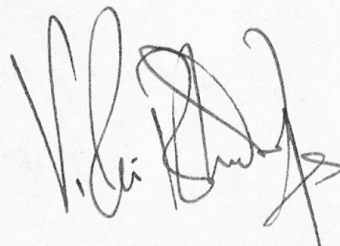
## “ECHOES: ON THE TRAIL OF HIMACHALI FOLK SONGS”

### “BHARTHARI”

This is my first visit to Haripurdhar a place in Sirmaur district Himachal Pradesh. Being a resident of Himachal Pradesh I never visited this area of my state because of many reasons, firstly there was no purpose and other is that this was a forbidden area to go because of a taboo that it is full of occult and witch craft. This belief is still ongoing because the today's sensibility has not touched the place thoroughly. It is very difficult to commute because from Shimla only two busses goes to this area in the morning 4 o'clock and 5 o'clock which are not even sure because of the bad roads and many more reasons. Sometimes the bus might stop anywhere and doesn't even find the real destination, again the reasons can be so many, bad roads, bad weather, old and worn out buses etc, etc.

In the first section of my visit I went to few villages of tehsil Shillai, district (Sirmaur) to find out the concerned people. I got a hazy idea of the performers who still sing this folk lore, but it was very difficult to get the real idea of the form and performers because even in those areas the new generation is not fully aware of this tradition and unfortunately they were the ones who could speak Hindi. It was very difficult to communicate because of the vast difference of language. We have few words in common but it is entirely a different dialect. Ultimately I tried to find somebody in Shimla town who can be a bridge to between us. Fortunately I found Kapil, a young actor who attended one of my theatre workshops in 2009 in Shimla.

The journey began with the search of people who knows about BHARTHARI. After few days of search we were able to find only four people who are still singing this folk lore, Doulat Ram, Veer Singh, Hukmi Ram and Deep Ram, who further told that there might be few more but , they have not heard much about this song being practiced by the common folk. They also mentioned that there is one more place called ANU in district Choupaal where this folk tale is sung but in a slightly different tune. They also mentioned that may be that is the place from where this folk lore has started, this I will talk about later while describing the story. These individual meeting were good but not very fruitful because of their shy nature which generally use to end with a lack of articulation. Finally we decided to organize a conference or meeting where all these artist will be together with few village folks and they will converse with each other so that we can get





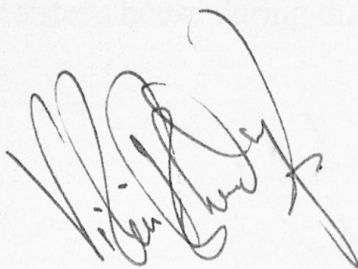
maximum information. An evening was decided and with the feast of mutton, rice and 'Sidoo' a festive dish made of wheat flour. The event started in the late evening. It was amazing that only by a simple information of these performers coming together many elderly people from few nearby villages gathered to witness this seminar. After the grand feast they started talking about the story but the spectators were more interested in their singing. With lots of hesitation and apology they said 'don't worry we will try to translate and summarize the passages we will be singing to the best of our capacities', one of them said 'generally it is sung with a local instrument 'DAMRU'(a drum made of the mouth of a broken pot covered with the abdominal leather of goat called 'poti' and 'KHANGARI (tambourine) or may be sometimes a small drum 'DHOLAKI' will be used but he, pointing towards his senior, he said he can sing with a thali (plate)also'. A bronze plate was asked and with the 'tin tin' sound of the plate he starts with a prayer to his Guru for guidance and with a short introduction, the story begins;

We are not saying that we are the authority, we don't claim that we know from where it started , we only know our parents, and grandparents and believe what they said , and what they said! ; Long-long years ago there was king Bharthari, the king of a place we don't know but it is said to be known as "AZBA". He was the only son of his mother, whose name is not mentioned and there is no reference of his father. He had a queen named "PINGOLA".[ The original narrative structure of the song is non-linear. The story can start from anywhere and while singing the performer will refer to the previous incidents in a very dramatic way so that the person listening to it first time can also understand the whole background of the present actions.] If told in a linear way it starts ; One day the 'sakhi' or 'dasi', ( the nearest translation to which should be 'maid') of queen Pingola is combing her hair and while she is doing so the queen asks her four questions:

- 1) which water on earth is sweetest and coolest?
- 2) which grains are of the best quality?
- 3) which is the rarest animal?
- 4) who is the most beautiful queen on the land ?

To which the maid responds that the water of mountains, Grains of the plain warm areas are the best ones, the Black Deer is the rarest of the rarest animal and Queen Birma is the most beautiful of all queens.

The King overheard it and asked the maid to repeat what she said, she with lots of fear repeated it and said , this is what I have heard from a Brahmin while listening to his discourse. The King gets fascinated by it and at the same time out of sheer jealousy queen Pingola challenges the king to get this black deer(kaala mriga) and win queen Birma as his bride.



King Bharthari accepts the challenge and starts his quest for the Black deer. After travelling and searching for the black deer in the forest, the tired king finds a pond and a lightening thought flashes into his head, that in this dry forest the animals will definitely come to this pond to quench their thirst. He waited and waited there for days then suddenly he saw one thousand she deer coming towards the pond, following them appeared the black deer with long sharp horns. The king aimed his arrow and killed the deer. Looking at this dreadful sight of this dying Black Deer all the she deer started crying and in this pain they pleaded ,Oh!! hunter !! why did you killed our love ,our life, our soul ! if you were in such need of a kill, you would have killed ten or one hundred of us , why him? In agony they prayed to God. The visual they described is ...sixteen hundred deer placed their back on the dry ground and with their four legs pointing towards the sky they screamed and wailed to the God and then they became silent in deep grief. This sound made the Gods throne tremble. Listening to this divine calling the great tantric sage Gorakhnath appeared. Seeing the horrifying visual he inquires about the incident. He goes to King Bharthari's camp and asks him, who gave you the right to kill the innocent animal and that also out of fun ? King says, No offence but you take your alms and go away , why argue unnecessary? What do you want? To this Gorakhnath replies, you arrogant king, make him alive if you can!/? King laughs and says it's impossible, if 'you' do it I will accept your power, here and now I will leave my kingdom and kingship, be your devotee and disciple and put the ashes of your sacred fire over my body..... Gorakhnath smiled and the Deer got up with a shrug . The whole camp was shocked and mesmerized by the fact that a deer which was about to be get roasted did sit.....King left everything there and decided to be a sanyasi, but Gorakhnath said , not now dear King , go to your mother and ask permission. Make her say that she frees you from the bondage of being her son, "From now you are not my son and I am not your mother .....I permit you for the sanyasa !!" Another go to your wife and ask for alms addressing her Oh Mother!!! I seek the Aims!! If you do it I will accept you as my disciple and initiate you in the journey of finding the truth. Then he goes to his wife who also allows him but promises him that till he returns back she will also remain like a sanyasin. So! oh king!! lock your Rang mahal yourself and open it when you return.....He was initiated and when the Guru pierced the kings ears, instead of blood milk poured out of the wounds.

After this they started singing these two episodes very briefly but then also the song went on for at least half an hour each. All the women and men around me were in tears. They said only these two episodes can be sung for the whole night.

Further the story says that his mother takes a promise that he will return to her after twelve years and he will never go to her sister's house during this time because of



two reasons, first she will die if she see her brother has abandoned everything, second the way to her house is full of hurdles, difficulties and pain.

There is one more major subplot in the story which moves parallel. While Bharthari was growing up, simultaneously in a place called Dhaula Desh , there was a King who was the first person to make horoscope of his daughter, which for the local people is the first historical reference of a girls horoscope being made. It predicted that the girl has a problematic planetary position which tells that, either this girl will marry her Father or a sanyasi. The King became sad, he renounced everything and gave his daughters responsibility to his trust worthy people, a couple named Khaliaram and his wife Barja to protect her. She was a beautiful girl named Birma. Handing over her to this couple he said, never let a sanyasi enter into the boundaries of my state, from now onwards I appoint you the officiating authority and the king of the bordering province called Kurangal. Barja was a kind of polluted mystic, expert in witchcraft and occult. She tortured every sadhu who even came in contact with the borders.

King Bharthari's mother might have this hint, so she was trying to convince him from not going towards her sisters place because to reach there he must cross Barja's magical traps. But he decides to go there. This whole episode covers his hard and harsh journey through Shini Ghati(valley of Shini) Kurangal to Dhaula desh.

The performer describes the Valley of Shini as dry, rocky and without any trees and water. It is steep and by walking to the top one finds the place Kurangal. He is tired and in pain. In this state he says, oh Mother!! it is better to die then being in this pain. Suddenly he realizes that his master gave him four thing;

.Pakhiya or shawl which was full of blessings of the divine energies.

.Jholi or a bag to collect alms.

.Kindri an instrument made of the horn, which use to play thirty-six instruments by itself.

.Gorakh-Dibiya, a miraculous vessel.

.Two and a half hands full of rice.

Guru said, when in difficulty spread all these things on the ground and hit the ground with your heel and see your problem being sorted out. He did so, sixty water springs came out, the water started flowing, a huge shady tree appeared to protect him from hot Sun etc.

Here he meets the sadhus who had been tortured by Barja , they narrates their story. He feeds them with miraculous rice, plays Kindri to sooth their pain. After





this he moves to Kurangal to fight Barja. She traps him and locks him behind seven doors inside a cage made of bones. She drenches him in blood cows meat and pollutes him taking away all his magical powers. He prays to Master Guga Zaharvir, who is said to be another disciple of Gorakhnath. Who comes to free him from there. To purify and sanctify himself he travels to Kailash Mansarover, here the Divine Bull Nandi shows him the way to the sacred waters.

Later he reaches Birma .....Then comes the episode in which he crushes and shatters the ego of Birma and teaches her lesson for torturing the wise men .....Rather than twelve years he returns to his kingdom after thirteen years and finds that the Brahmin whom he gave the responsibility of his people is ill-treating them. He punishes him by sending him off with his family far away from his state. This Brahmins family is said to have settled in the place called ANU in Himachal Pradesh from where this story came into existence ....and the story still goes on and on and on to the infinite length with lots of small subplots in between.

The best part of the narrative skill is that the performer goes into the details of scene, visual and action. He will not report or execute the story to the spectator but will make him re-live with the situation engaging all his senses by his description.



After singing till three in the morning they said, it won't finish if we keep on singing this for even nine to eleven nights also, earlier people use to sing it for nine or eleven nights as a ritual,... it is never ending. I said how it is possible? To which one of them responded; you are talking to us then you will go to Shimla then Delhi, your story might finish with your death, it cannot end in our village. Similarly ...

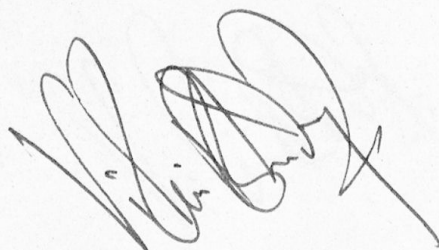
*Vijay*



Bharthari is alive. They have this strong believe that wherever this story is sung Bharthari comes to listen and witness the performance in any form, it can be a mosquito, honeybee, a dog or anything. 'We are not truthful enough to realize his presence' he said. Responding to my question about the length of the story they said, there are two words, one is the 'Bhed' which can be translated as the secret and the other a colloquial term 'labeled', by which he meant creative imagination which an individual performer does, responding to his impulses being guided by some strong stimuli. So the performance is a mixture of these two things.

There is no historical evidence that who sang it first. Earlier Nath sadhu's use to sing and the village folks gave them food alms etc in response. The other people or the community was of blacksmiths who sang this folk lore. They were not considered as untouchables. The common village folk use to cook for them, feed them and even pack a lot of food and grains which in those days was "kodon" or "koda" a kind of a millet. Then with a small laughter he said, 'Sir look the real thing is, only the idol person will do all this, because they have time. These black smiths work only for few months rest of the time they travel, they are like nomads and these sadhus are always free. But we are farmers we work on the fields, we are labours, we don't have time to practice. We feel somebody should come, sing and make us sing and dance a little so that we can release our stress. So, during the working seasons in summer we use to have these conferences from twelve to three in the day time and in the winters, heavy snow, long nights, no work, we listened to them whole night, rather we waited for them to come and sing Bharthari etc. Later few young people showed interest in this kind of singing so some of them got initiated to this form because without a master the seeker cannot find the goal.

To our knowledge in fifteen panchayats only one person was there who got initiated, his children didn't followed his legacy, but these two old masters Doulat Ram and Veer Singh got initiated through him and are following the lineage. Younger generation is not paying too much attention to this song. New ways of singing are emerging which is losing the content value and the tunes are soulless. Youngsters are disoriented, confused, outside world is grabbing them towards fake attitude "Fukre" is the word he says, if you teach them something knowledgeable they won't even respond to it. But there are people who seems interested in this kind of social and community singing. On one instance a performer also talked about television, with a laughter he says TB is a new disease in our area now. It is affecting our earlier lifestyle. If it shows something good it is always great, it connects us. We humans are destroying things, like radio it is for our growth but we have demeaned them, our art etc. These days people are trying to record CD also of Bharthari, but it cannot save the tradition it can preserve the song may be...!!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Veer Singh', written in a cursive style.



Finally !!!!It is a tradition which will never end. We are not singing it for money, we just sing. We are not professional artists or scholars as you are but we know the depth of this myth. Even writing the story won't help. How much can we write ? It comes from within, It emerges through the chain of impulses. "Bharthari is still listening....."

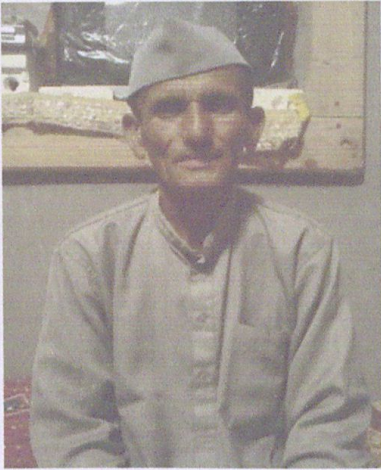


This is a small article which somehow summarizes my talking and listening to their singing.

V. V. V.



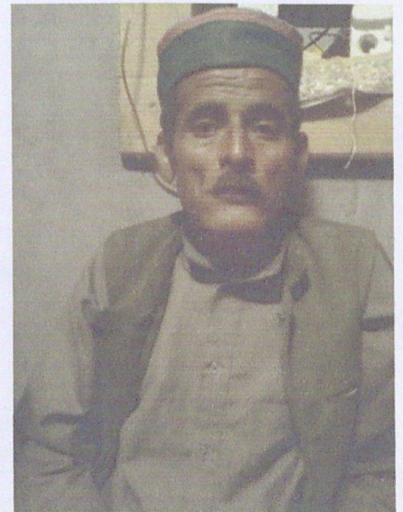
## THE PERFORMERS



### **Doulat Ram**

**Sh. Doulat Ram.** S/o Sh Budhiya Ram. He is Sixtyfour years old and the most senior performer in fifteen panchayats in this District. He is from village Kullah. Farmer by profession he is singing and practising from the age of twentyfive, after his initiation to this form of singing.

**Sh. Veer Singh.** Son of Sh. Mani Ram fiftyfive years old born in the village Kullah is a farmer. He was the performer who sang the most parts. A performer with amazing sense of humour and wit. While talking to some other people of the village on the next day of the conference, they said he was taking care of your comfort thats why he stoped for the interperations , otherwise when he sings he rarely stops before one hour. His singing invokes devine energies in the space.

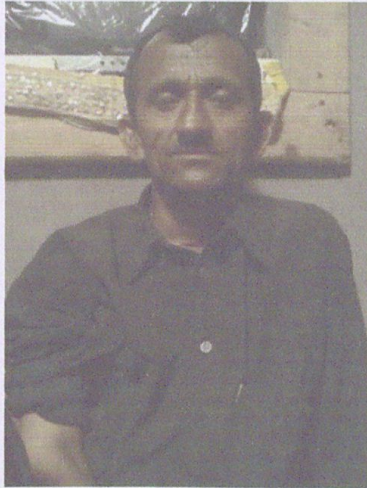


**Veer Singh**

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## Hukmi Ram



**Shri Hukmi Ram.** Son of Sh. Ramsa Ram. Born in a farmer family of Kinu village can be said as one of the youngest of the four

performers. He is forty seven years old. He says I sing but neither I have right to sing nor I am obliged to be a great singer because I am farmer as well as a labor. But I sing because I feel like singing it. It is precious and divine. It is a great epic like Ramayana and Mahabharata.

One more performer Deep Ram Son of Jatti Ram Resident of Kinu village. unfortunately his photograph got deleted, he is also a young performer of forty five years. He is a farmer as well as he is also running his local food joint or restaurant (dhaba).

By-n-large none of them can be said as the professional singer /artists. They are ordinary common people living with their tradition which is free from cast and class hierarchy. A way to Deal with their complexes, pains and stresses.

To my knowledge the story of Raja Bharthari Hari is also sung in some areas of Chhattisgarh , Rajasthan etc. but while comparing them , this version is very different not only in the narrative structure but also in the tune , style of singing , incidents and even the names of the character, because in the place named Anu in Himachal which I have already mentioned previously , they say the kings name was "Hemchand" which later became Bharthari after getting initiated and his wife

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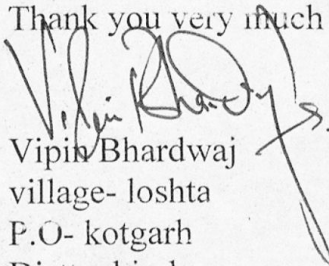
was "Kindra Rani". With the progression of the story it slowly changes. The narrative structure is very non-linear and in an epic form.

According to them also it is an epic like Ramayana and Mahabharata. While talking to them they mentioned that there are other forms of singing also like HARUL, the stories of the victories of their heroes or the Devatas( local deities) which are popular because of the vigorous dancing and powerful music of drums etc. but there are few songs like MAASTI, a song sung while a chhistic(pativrata) women use to perform Sati on the funeral pyre of her husband in the time of 'STAYUGA' (this word is colloquial understanding of good times, like a utopia. It does not really refers to the four yugas mentioned in classical Hindu scriptures if the historical evidences are taken ) etc. which are more like the healing melodies for the common society. A group of people sits together , sing with minimalistic instruments and ornamentations, only essentials are required. They talk about their society, culture, divine interventions etc. Treat all theses heroes as the part of them. They relate to them, they have emotional outbursts. Handing over all their suppressed emotional energies etc. they feel rejuvenated and full positivity for some difficult times ahead.

I have recorded some audio of the song as well as few small video clips through a mobile camera, which only works as reference material for myself and not as a document for archival purpose.

For the further research I purpose to organize a small workshop, in which these senior masters will be working with the young local people, so that this tradition can be transferred to the younger generations. Which hopefully if the budget permits will be culminated with a performance for the village people, because if we only document them it will remain a document in the shelves but I feel it should live in its own soil, where it was born and nurtured. So, helping the local people to carry forward this tradition will be the best way to safeguard it.

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.



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