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OFFICE of  
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

# हरियाणा की आवाज़

HARYANA KI AWAAZ

Volume III Issue III



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**To,  
Redefining and Reclaiming the Story of Haryana**



## **Dr. Prachy Hooda**

Curator

There is always a stereotypical understanding of Haryana: rustic, rural (read: *dehati*), highly patriarchal and violent towards women. This had led to a very one-sided, homogenous representation of the region and its people, that lacks not just the nuances and complexities of its socio-cultural fabric, but a complete lack of interest and engagement by various stakeholders, in varied capacities (including mass media and academia alike), to acknowledge the depths of and differences in people's lived experiences.

My own experiences in “progressive” university spaces made me first-hand realise the “casual” stereotyping that those coming from the region face, mostly in the form of “jokes” (which aren't humorous) and even passing remarks like “*You don't look Haryanvi*” or that “*You don't speak like Haryanvis*”. This is also partly affected by the caricature-ish depiction of Haryanvis in Bollywood, where actors try to speak a language that is nowhere close to the different dialects spoken in Haryana. In this vast pool of poor projection of what is commonly considered Haryanvi (only by those who are not from the region), recent work by a few actors, social media content creators as well as young academics feels like a breath of fresh air, precisely because it consciously aims to challenge these stereotypes and carve out a space for grassroots voices.

In this backdrop, this monthly issue *Haryana Ki Awaaz* is a small step to counter this over-simplistic view of the region and its people by providing a platform to the people of Haryana, from all walks of life, to share their stories and lived experiences. It is aimed to project them as the active agents that they have always been but have never been given enough acknowledgement for. Each issue will focus on different facets of the socio-cultural fabric of Haryana as well as its diverse social groups.

I am thankful to the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies (IDEAS) at O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU) for its support in conceptualising this initiative.





## Volume III – Haryanvi Religiosity

### Issue III – Ancestral Worship

In Haryana, everyday religiosity is not confined to formalised, mainstream places of worship. It is part of daily life, with structures and ideas like dada than, peers, local Matas, folk deities and deras shaping the spiritual contours of rural Haryana.

Across villages, communities are organised around local saints and folk deities. Rural women play a central role in keeping these traditions alive. Throughout the year, they offer grain from the harvest, jaggery, and simple homemade sweets at village shrines. These offerings are not just symbolic; they are acts of protection and gratitude. People turn to these deities to keep illness and misfortune away, and to ensure the well-being of family and cattle.

While some, like Guga Pir, are followed across regions beyond Haryana; others, such as Kheda or dada than belong to a particular village or a particular clan and are closely tied to its land. The ancestral shrines dedicated to pitars are where families remember their own dead and seek their blessings. In some cases, a small village shrine gradually attracts devotees from neighbouring areas and becomes a recognised place of pilgrimage.

Folk worship of this kind is not unique to Haryana. Yet in Haryana, these traditions have a distinct form shaped by agrarian life and local memory.

This volume brings together reflections on these living practices. By focusing on folk deities, and ancestral shrines, we hope to highlight a dimension of religiosity that remains central to rural Haryana today.



### **Dada Chhulaye, Kabirpur, Sonipat**

In Kabirpur village of district Sonipat, Dada Chhulaye is understood first and foremost as the protector of the village. Local accounts trace his story to a time when settlements were vulnerable to frequent attacks. It is said that Dada Chhulaye, then an elder of the village, took it upon himself to stay awake at night to guard the settlement. During one such attack, he was confronted by invaders. He was injured, and as the story goes, he reached the village well, where he eventually bled to death. That well still exists today, next to the shrine, and remains central to how people remember him.

Over time, this memory has taken a stable form. The structure that now marks Dada Chhulaye's presence is relatively new. Villagers point out that it was only in recent years, after donations increased, that the shrine was built up into its current concrete form. Earlier, it was much simpler. The well, however, is considered much older. It is often described as having healing qualities, and villagers recount instances where its water helped in recovery from illness.

### **Gendered Spaces, Gendered Practice**

Belief in Dada Chhulaye is closely tied to social norms, especially around gender.

Young girls can enter the shrine without restriction. But after adolescence, women do not enter the inner space. The only time a woman formally enters is after her marriage, when she visits once with her husband and family to seek blessings. After this, her access is limited.

At the same time, women's participation in religious life is visible just outside the shrine. Small shrines dedicated to saat matas (seven goddesses) are built around the main structure. Here, women gather regularly, especially during Navratras, to light earthen lamps and perform pooja. Their role is active, but it is organised in a different spatial zone.



**The saat matas**





**Dada Kheda, Kabirpur**

A comparison with Dada Kheda makes this difference clearer. At Dada Kheda, women are directly involved in daily rituals, including bathing the structure. Devotion there is expressed through physical care. At Dada Chhulaye, it is shaped more by distance and boundary.

These shrines of Dada Chhulaye and the Kheda are not limited to Kabirpur alone.

The neighbouring village of Shadipur shares the same belief system. Both villages are largely Saini dominated villages, and local accounts suggest that Shadipur was established by families who moved out of Kabirpur.

This shared origin continues to influence social relations.

There is a strong sense of bhaichara between the two villages, and marriages do not take place between them. Worship at these shrines is one of the ways this connection is maintained across generations.

Belief in Dada Chhulaye remains strong in the present. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many villagers chose not to take vaccinations. Residents state that there were very few deaths in the village, and they directly attribute this to Dada Chhulaye's protection. This view is widely shared and expressed with certainty.

## Changing Landscape, Shifting Lives

Kabirpur has undergone major changes over the last two decades. With land acquisition for roads, institutions, and nearby sectors, much of the village's agricultural land has been lost. Some families invested their compensation money in land farther away, but many moved away from farming altogether.

This shift is visible in everyday life. Younger residents now travel to Sonipat or Delhi for education and work. The village is increasingly connected to the city, and fewer people depend on agriculture as their primary occupation.

Women, in particular, describe a change in their daily routines. Earlier, their work was divided between the home and the fields. With farming reduced, that workload has decreased. Many now have more time within the day, marking a clear shift from earlier patterns of labour.

Despite these transformations, the practices around Dada Chhulaye continue with consistency. The newer structure, the older well, the rules governing entry, and the rituals performed around the shrine all remain part of daily life.

In a setting where the physical landscape has changed rapidly, these practices continue to provide a sense of continuity for Kabirpur and for Shadipur, which remains closely tied to it through shared belief and history.



A family in Kabirpur: extremely generous with their time and hospitality

## Meet our Team



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At its core, IDEAS operates as an intellectual incubator, supporting collaborative scholarship, experimental pedagogy, and research that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries. Through its initiatives and field-based programmes, it promotes critical inquiry, applied learning, and engagement with pressing development concerns.

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