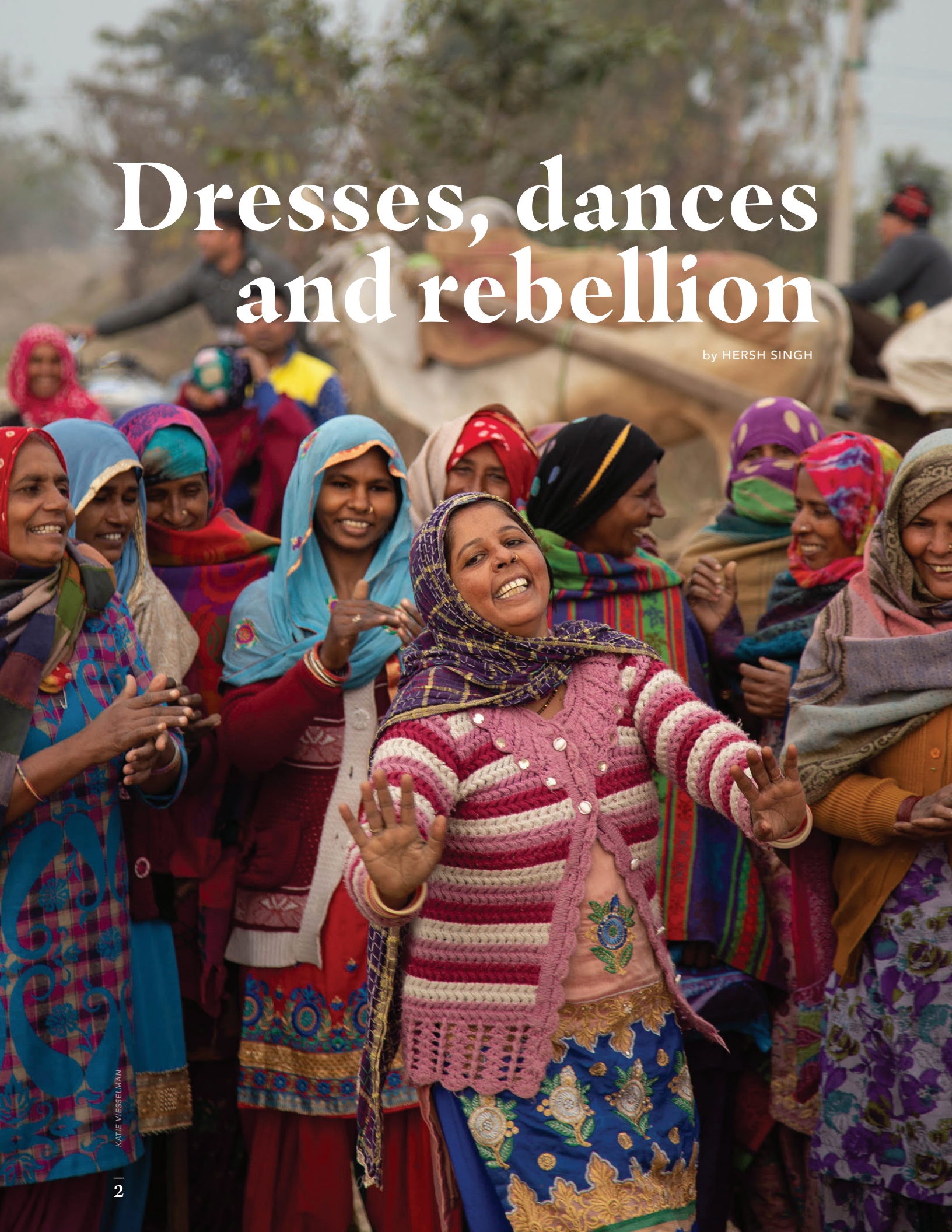


# Dresses, dances and rebellion

by HERSH SINGH



My mother locked our house and ran toward our neighbor's door in the village of Titram. While we tried to hide, my father stood outside with a gun. We were afraid, and he was looking for us.

I didn't understand why we were rushing out into the night. I tried to ask my mother, but she wouldn't answer. I was 5.

"Don't ever be afraid," My mother said to an 8-year-old-me before she dropped me off at school one day.

She fought for her rights against my father and his family. My mother, who now displays her freedom through brightly colored dresses and a wide smile, was denied access to her salary and couldn't wear clothes of her choice. A woman who is now known for her extroverted and kind nature was forced to sit in a house and cut off contact with the outside world. She couldn't be herself. Patriarchy, social pressure and her family – my mother fought against them all. She had my father arrested and filed for divorce.

The social structure binds us in a prison of patriarchy. It may protect what many men call pride and honor, but it eats our freedom from within.

Walking through the villages of Haryana, you'll feel the eyes of women looking through veils. You'll see men staring while they smoke Hookah. Go deeper, and you'll hear whispers and screams for help from girls stuck behind 300-year-old ideologies, customs and heavy metal doors.

Out of pride and fear, men take away women's rights through force. Women

of Haryana have seen the worst of humanity.

The oppression is hidden in the name of tradition and culture. History shows us that with oppression comes rebellion. Women of Haryana, through their vibrant dresses, songs and dances, come together in the fields and streets of their villages every day. Through their language and actions, they protest.

Haryana is a complex pattern of norms, traditions and interactions, beyond poverty and discrimination. The first Indian independence protest, partition riots and the Green Revolution are all part of its history. Yet, they continue working in their wheat, rice and sugar cane fields all year, surviving on little. But the people of Haryana still smile and invite you into their homes for tea, or a meal. There's a saying in Sanskrit "अतिथिर्देवो भव," which translates to "Guests are like gods." Although people have little money, their hearts are wealthy.

I cannot remember if I ever talked to my father. He left when I was 2. Almost 16 years ago, he walked into our home without speaking and handed me his revolver. My mother pulled me away and made him leave. People tried convincing my mother to get back with him: the patriarchal thing to do. In the end, they lost.

My mother, like many women here, was stronger than they were.



*Hersh S*