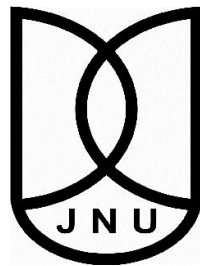


**RE-EXAMINING FOLK CULTURE AND FINDING NEW WAYS
OF INTERPRETING HISTORY: A STUDY OF GENDER AND
POWER IN BHOJPURI FOLK SONGS**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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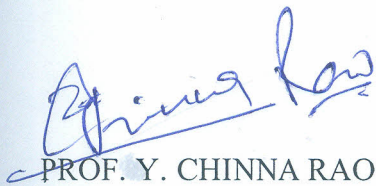
DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "RE-EXAMINING FOLK CULTURE AND FINDING NEW WAYS OF INTERPRETING HISTORY: A STUDY OF BHOJPURI FOLK SONGS" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.


Nidhi Mishra

CERTIFICATE

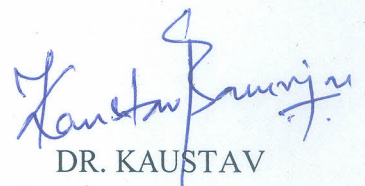
We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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Dedicated to my Parents

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INTRODUCTION

The Popular element 'feels' but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel.

-Antonio Gramsci

The binary of classical and folk is an extension of the enlightenment project. Folk was constructed as the opposite of modern values. Folk was regarded as irrational, naive, superstitious and meaningless and it had to be made rational. The enlightenment values do not recognize the feelings and belief-system of common people (K Satchidanandan, 2010). Folk world is largely associated with agriculturalist society and pastoral communities. However, practices of these communities have been seen in opposition to modern values. Longman dictionary defines peasant as 'uneducated person of low social status.' Still folk is considered as regressive and opposite to the idea of progress.

It was Antonio Gramsci (*Prison Notebooks, 1948*) who realized the power of people/common sense/folk world. However, he rejected Croce's view that every common man is a philosopher. Gramsci was also against those tendencies according to which people were reduced to the Party and the Party was reduced to Politburo. Gramsci argued that Bukharin's "Manual" was meant to spread Marxism among ranks and files of the Party, it had nothing to do with ideas or activities of workers. For Gramsci, structures of commonsense of subaltern people were contradictory. It possessed both progressive and regressive elements. For the first time, Gramsci emphatically accepted that common people or folk tradition can also have progressive elements.

In Indian case, colonialism reinforced the binary of folk and classical. Traditions, rituals and philosophy were interpreted with the help of written texts. Colonial government tried to fix or make rigid our rituals and traditions. Lata Mani (*Contentious Traditions, 1989*) has shown that not only colonial government but also our reformers depended on texts for any deliberation on our tradition and religious practices. Lata Mani has given various examples where texts got more importance than oral traditions, particularly in the case of debate on Sati. Folk traditions are vibrant, evolving, flexible and are open to different kind of interpretations. Colonialism silenced or marginalised alternative voices or traditions by giving importance to classical texts. Bernard. S. Cohn says "The idea of the

primacy of the Sanskrit component became the determinant of action, policy and structure, not only for rulers but for many of the ruled. What had been fluid, complex and even unstructured became fixed, objective and Tangible¹.”

Myths are integral part of folk world and therefore any theory on myth has direct implications for power relation between folk and modern. In the analysis of myths Levi-Strauss, a structuralist philosopher, regarded one myth as a central myth and he treated other myths as variants of the central myth². The schema of centre and periphery is extremely violent. This schema marginalises those myths which belong to smaller communities. In Indian case, too, we see that Valmiki or Tulsī Ramayna is regarded as Classical texts. Regarding them as classical texts means that we regard them as central texts and all other stories of Ramayna as variants of these central texts. By marginalising oral stories of Ramayna we also marginalise those communities which recite oral Ramaynas.

Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and other psychoanalysts thought that myths are reflection of sub-conscious. By relegating myths to sub-conscious zone these philosopher declared them irrational. The division of conscious and sub-conscious is problematic. Regarding myths as reflection of sub-conscious or repressed desires is extension of enlightenment project which believed that thoughts of common people are irrational. As myths are large component of folklores, psychoanalysts reinforced those stereotypes according to which everything in folk tradition is irrational.

Gender in Folk Tradition

Gender is intimately associated with caste, rituals, work-culture, power relations, social hierarchies and everyday violence. Language is one of the most powerful mediums through which gender is constructed in everyday life. In my research, I would focus on folk songs which form grid of intelligibility through which gender is perceived and performed in rural areas. These folk songs are rich linguistic archives and they powerfully capture the complex interplay between gender, caste and work culture.

George Grierson and many other colonial scholars think that Bhojpuri culture is virile and patriarchal. Grierson in his long essay accepts that in Bhojpuri *Birha* songs Lord Rama

¹ Bernard S Cohn, *An Anthropologist among Historians and Other Essays*, New Delhi, 1994, p.46.

² Levi Strauss, *The Structural Study of Myth*, The Journal of American Folklore, Vol.68. No.270, pp.428-444.

has exalted position compared to lord Krishna. He further explains that inclination towards Lord Rama reflects martial culture of the region. No doubt the war of 1857 and valour shown by Bhojpuri people were haunting in the mind of Grierson and other colonial writers of district gazetteers³. Hence there is a need that Bhojpuri songs be decolonized from colonial discourses. We will find that folk songs are cultural wrestling grounds where conflict between different castes, genders, ideologies and sexualities is a perpetual phenomenon. On the one hand, folk songs stereotype and stigmatize lower caste women and men; on the other hand, these songs become tool of everyday resistance for women against the patriarchal world.

Chapter 1 will examine the inter-relation between gender, caste and rituals. Gender and rituals constitute each other. A lot of songs in Bhojpuri language are associated with different kind of rituals. In Bhojpuri region, many rituals are part of everyday life. Some rituals are manifestation of Hindu philosophy and religion while others are result of local beliefs, customs and practices. Rituals are not always guided by a centralised religion. Sometimes they are also developed in village households independent of any priestly interference. Folk songs construct, define and magnify the complex interplay between gender, rituals and society. From birth to death at every stage a Hindu family observes different kind of rituals. At the birth of a male baby *Sohar* is sung in a household while at the birth of a female child there is always an environment of hopelessness and despair. In a Bhojpuri folk song a woman says, “ O Daughter if I had known that a girl child would be born I would have aborted it earlier. Since your birth it has become dark like *Bhado* month. In-laws are not lighting lanterns inside the home. From where will I manage dowry for your marriage?⁴”

After the birth of a male child the ritual of naming is performed in elite households. The linguistic ritual of naming is very important because one of the powerful methods through which gender is imposed by society in the very act of naming. Through the act of naming gender is not imposed only on a child but it is also imposed on outer material world. A male child is never named like Sarita(river) Lata, Sudha. Linguistic tradition which evolved over long time has ascribed different genders to objects of material world. This anthropocentric and androcentric linguistic practices has constructed the world in an engendered way where female is always dominated by male. Many Sanskrit names of

³ See, li. S. S. O'Malley, Sahabad District Gazetteer.

⁴ Krishnadev Upadhyay(ed.) *Bhojpuri Lokgeet*, p. 38.

objects of non-living world are given attribute of gender by using different type of suffixes. Surya(The Sun) is made feminine by using *chap* suffix and it becomes Suryaa. Bhojpuri is an Indo-aryan language and it draws a lot of linguistic rules and structures from Sanskrit language. The table-1 shows the matrix of names of living beings and non-living objects. In the matrix the top-left is considered most powerful and these names are assigned to male children of elite class. Though there is no naming rituals for a girl child yet her name is chosen from the right side of the matrix. The naming practices of a girl child shows that how non-ritualistic practices are also influenced and guided by andro-centric ritual practices.

Table-1

Names of Gods/men/ mail animals	Names of Goddesses/rivers/ women	Names of gender neutral animals
Names of masculine objects	Name of feminine objects	Names of gender-neutral objects

In many folk songs we find that different venerable terms like the son of Yashoda, the son of Kaushalya, the son of Ganga are used for a male child. However, still a child is considered property of his father and it was Bhikhari Thakur who first challenged the notion of patrilineal family in his play *Gabarghichor*.

In the chapter, I would try to explore how songs related with different rituals help to construct gender in a complex manner. In this regard I would try to engage my research with songs related with Janev, marriage, and death rituals. Janev or Yagyopaveet is prerogative of male children. Women are not allowed to wear the scared threads. It is believed that in ancient time people used to leave their home after sacred thread rituals and they spent many years in *gurukuls* for traditional education. Sacred thread ritual signifies that education is the prerogative of men. Though now-a-days many girls are also getting education yet the ritual of sacred thread helps to construct the binary of male and female.

These folk songs not only conform to but also challenge patriarchal world-view prevalent in the society. Nabaneeta Dev Sen, in her scholarly article, has shown that in many regions folk songs give voice to oppressed women. She has shown how women use

narrative of Sita to express their own sorrow and misery. In Bhojpuri language, too, we find many instances where women critique or ridicule patriarchal world through their songs. In the genre of marriage songs we often see that women are ridiculing their child bridegroom. In a *Birha* song a woman says that in the backyard of my home there is a bamboo grove which makes noise without any flow of wind and in my legs there are sounding anklets; these sounds make my husband scared. In the twentieth century, mismatched marriage was a common phenomenon in Bhojpuri speaking areas. Sometimes bridegrooms were small children at other times they were old men in their eighties and nineties. Legendary dramatist Bhikhari Thakur composed many songs which criticised mismatched marriages and challenged the commonsense of rural people for whom gender inequality was a natural phenomenon. It is a bitter truth that many girls belonging to poor families were sold for marriages in Bhojpuri speaking areas. In one of the songs composed by Bhikhari Thakur a girl whose marriage has been arranged with an old man says, “ O father! you have taken money from bridegroom...and now you are offering your daughter to a butcher.”(Ropaya Ginai Lihala/ Pagaha Dharai Dihala/ Cheriya ke Chheriya Banila A Babuji). Due to mismatched marriage women had to face the curse of widowhood at early age.

Chapter-2 will discuss the inter-relation between Gender, work and time which are intimately related with each other. In rural areas, many difficult works are assigned only to women. Different genre of songs is associated with different kind of works. When women run millstone or janta they sing *jantsar*. In Jantsar songs, sometimes women make fun of their brother-in-laws and at other times they express their pain and suffering. In Bhojpuri speaking areas many poor people migrate towards metro cities in the search of bread and butter. These people leave behind their families to suffer in villages. Many forlorn women work in rich households for their livelihood. In one of the jantsar songs composed by Bhikhari Thakur a woman, whose husband has migrated to earn the bread for the family, says that the generous people’ millstone are too large to handle with my small hands⁵. The song shows how in the narrative of generosity the fact of coercive labour and exploitation of women are suppressed. Rural people knows that Jantsar(Millstone house) is a site of everyday protest for rural women and the protest is well-articulated through folk songs before their in-laws by these wise women. When seedlings are planted on the field women sing songs of plantation (ropni ke geet). In these songs

⁵ The song says, “Bade Bade Datwa Ke Bade Bade Jantwa.”

they ridicule seductive gaze of their land-lords. A *song of plantation* says that a Koeri woman was abducted by a king when she was going to sell vegetables in nearby villages. Later the king tried to sleep with the woman. And when the woman started crying the king asked, “O woman for whom are you crying? Are you crying for your father or for your mother?” The woman replies that she is crying for the Koeri youth who helped him in making *kyaries* in her field. These songs show that resistance to exploitative forces is inherent in work-culture of rural life. Work is both subjugation and resistance; it is simultaneously a chain of slavery and will to liberation.

Along with work-culture the question of gendered construction of time is also closely associated. Time is a cultural construct. It does not lie outside the culture. In Chaumasa and Barahmasa songs we find that women have different notion of time than that of men. While male –centric calendar (panchang) starts with *Chait* month, the *barahmasa* songs of women start with Asadh month. Asadh is the month when rainy season starts and women whose husbands are not at home starts facing different kind of problems. When drizzling of *Sawan* starts the roofs of huts starts pouring and women cannot make their roofs because the work is not considered suitable for women. A Bhojpuri Barahmasa says, “*Piya aitan buniya me rakhi lihtan duniya me/ Akhrela adhik sawanwa batohiya.*” (If my husband had come I would have been saved in the world. My restlessness increases in the Sawan month.)

In Barahmasas songs the cyclical notion of time is present which reflects the vicious cycle of pain and poverty in which these poor women are trapped. These women could not easily step outside the vicious cycle which was structured by patriarchal world-view and colonial exploitation. Many Barahmasas draws a lot from the poetry of Surdas-the famous poet of Pushtimarg. The popularity of Surdas in North Indian villages should be understood through the lens of gender. Throughout the colonial period Surdas’s poetry becomes the voice of oppressed women. Women resisted the violence of patriarchy and colonial exploitation through these songs. A Bhojpuri song says-*Reliya na bairi, jahajiya na bairi, Saiyan ke le gaye videswa i paiswa bairi.* In their songs women also curse the metropolis. These non-literate women knew through their experience that metropolis are exploiting village economy and destroying the social fabric of village-life.

Chapter-3 throws the light on the complex interaction between gender, caste and sexuality. Only by controlling the sexuality of women any society can maintain its caste

hierarchy. In folk songs many instances are found in which women belonging to upper castes react violently when lower caste men try to seduce them⁶. In a Bhojpuri song, an upper caste woman, Rajlo, mistakenly marries with a lower caste man, Chorila, and later when Rajlo comes to know about identity of his husband she immediately starts threatening him. In the song it has also been mentioned that how Rajlo is being harassed and taunted by her lower caste mother-in-law⁷. These songs stereotype lower caste women and men and conform to those kinship patterns which help to maintain caste-hierarchy. Girls are “educated” about caste and kinship through these songs since their childhood. Folk-songs function as a medium of informal education in rural society. Girls and boys learn about the performance of caste, gender and kinship. In a Bhojpuri ballad Sorthi, its main character Sorthi at the time of her birth requests her mother not to allow a Chamar woman to cut her umbilical cord because she fears that her *dharma* will be sacrilged by the touch of a Chamar woman⁸. The hatred towards lower castes is an integral part of folk culture. Any romanticization of folk culture needs a serious deliberation on the issue of caste and gender questions.

Folk-songs are archives of sexual behaviour of rural people. In *Chaita* songs, which is generally sung by men, women’s body becomes a source for pleasure. However, these songs cannot be categorized as obscene. Obscenity is a social and cultural construct and its conception varies from culture to culture. However, in Bhojpuri culture, at some occasion obscenity is ritualized and it needs to be studied by our anthropologists. In Viveki Rai’s novel, *Sonamati*, women cross all limits in their folk songs at the occasion of *Matikod* rituals which is performed before a Hindu marriage. Though the author does not give a satisfactory explanation for the transgression yet his observation is keen enough to capture everyday lives of women. At the occasion of *Matikod* ritual women use the language which is generally considered obscene in Bhojpuri culture.

It can easily be experienced through folk songs how wrong understanding and misconception about sexuality helps to construct social stigmas in rural society. In some songs girls of Netua caste are stereotyped as sex-worker. Prostitution, in Bhojpuri-speaking areas, partly results from caste-system. Many songs also describe the complex

⁶ Krishnadev Upadhyay, *Bhojpuri Lok Geet*, p. 61.

⁷ Krishnadev Upadhyay(ed.), *Bhojpuri Lok-Geet*, p.105.

⁸ Satyavrat Sinha, *Bhojpuri Lokgatha*, p.208.

situation which arises from extra-marital affairs. The genre of *Gali/Gari* songs shows an interesting example of kinship construction through linguistic practices.

In classic texts women have always been exalted for their role of motherhood. However, in folk songs women resent their reproductive role in the society. In a Bhojpuri song, which was collected by George Grierson, a woman hates her own womb-“O Rama, the she tortoise has borne a he-tortoise, and the Ganges has borne a sand-bank, little girls have brought forth boys. May a thunderbolt fall on all these wombs.” Such a hatred for wombs is not coming from a radical feminist school, instead it is the by-product of women’s own experience. In folk- songs women often resist the ideal role of a mother fixed for them by the society. They challenge those norms which reduce woman body as a machine of reproduction. These non-literate women critique and challenge patriarchal world-view in their everyday life through their ordinary act of singing. Singing becomes the act of everyday resistance.

Folk traditions are flexible and fluid. It has both progressive and regressive elements. Neither one should romanticize the folk traditions nor one should reject it by thinking it as irrational. Bhojpuri folk songs sometimes stereotype gender and at other times they resist discriminatory practices. Some Bhakti songs have fluid idea of gender, and in the songs of Advaitwadi saints even the distinction of caste is also obliterated. However, there is disjuncture between social world and spiritual world and progressive ideas of *Bhakti* songs could not bring any revolutionary change in the society. Though many marginalised groups mobilised the philosophy of egalitarian notion of Bhakti for upliftment of their communities. Egalitarian views of Bhakti tradition and Advaitvadi Philosophy inspired *Janev* movement in Bhojpur region. Later Triveni Sangh was formed to unite backward castes. The transition from Triveni Sangh to Socialist Party is a long history of political journey which is not the subject of this dissertation⁹.

⁹ For a brief history of politics of the region, see. Paul Brass, *Radical Politics in South Asia*, London, The MIT Press, 1973.

CHAPTER- 1

GENDER AND RITUAL

Village life is full of various kinds of rituals. Rituals are sites where power relations are constituted and reconstituted in everyday life. Power speaks through these rituals. Every ritual has a gender dimension and generally through these rituals gender is performed. Rituals help to construct a grid of intelligibility in which gender is located, perceived and performed by women and men. Inevitably, rituals are sites of contestation where norms of gender, caste and sexuality are challenged. Understanding the power of rituals requires deep engagement with folk songs because folk songs are inseparable from rituals. Folk songs capture everyday nuances which are performed along with rituals. Folk songs are so intertwined with rituals that they themselves have become an integral part of rituals.

Briefly, I will try to trace the trajectory of ritual theory. Classical theory perceives rituals as expression of the authority of larger social order¹⁰. Durkheim(*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912) thinks that society is consolidated through the act of rituals. And at the same time individual internalizes group ethos thereby it builds its own sense of self which conforms to larger social order. In Durkheim's view an individual participates in a ritual in a passive way. Bourdieu's(*Outline of A Theory of Practice theory*, 1972) of practise dramatically changed the understanding of the role of rituals. In post classical theory of rituals individual became an active participant in ritual. Some scholars like Greetz(1973) and Leach(1976) think that through rituals the individual conveys his message to others¹¹. Some other scholars think that an individual manipulates rituals for his private purpose. Bruke(1974) and Goffman(1967) believe that the individual fashions rituals to represent their self to the outer world¹². Contemporary ritual theory focuses on agency and interactional purpose of the individual.

Ritualization of gender in everyday life

¹⁰ Jenifer A Johnson, *GenderRituaization: The Customization of Doing Gender*, International Review of Modern Sociology, Vol. 34, No.2,pp. 229-251.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

In village life, the line between rituals and everyday life is often blurred. From birth to death a human body is reinscribed by many rituals. At the occasion of the birth of a male child, *Sohar* is sung in villages while female child is seen as a curse to the family. Through the simple act of singing *Sohars*, a habitus is created in which a female child is always considered an inferior creature in comparison to its male counterpart. Everyday activities such as cooking, grinding and playing are also ritualized in village life. In Bhojpuri speaking villages one can easily realize this fact. For women, cooking is also equivalent to performance of a ritual. The space for cooking is reserved for women, and it is considered one of spaces which should not be contaminated by any impurity. Meat, fish and other non-vegetarian items are not cooked in interior part of households. Even there are well-accepted rules regarding which type of food can be cooked at a particular day. For example, generally *khichdi* is cooked on Saturday night; it is not cooked on Sunday.

This ritualization of everyday need to be deconstructed to understand the various motives of rituals which are performed in a village society. Though it appears that ritualization of everyday makes village life vibrant yet its repercussions are deep. Even everyday activity comes under the gaze of patriarchal, castiest and class-conscious society. In this process of ritualization of everyday, agency is often erased and structures become prominent. Ritualization of everyday is dangerous for any society because it helps to maintain status-quo. However, in the following passages it can easily be seen that women are aware of dangers of ritualization of everyday and most of the time they challenge patriarchal norms which are set by these rituals. For women, rituals become sites of everyday protest or in other words everyday protest is ritualized through these village folk songs. A millstonesong says:

My husband went to other country and carried away all the pleasure with
him.

He has locked his heart with iron door

.....

In between Ganga and Yamuna there is a garden on sand

The beautiful woman is standing there with her eyes full of tears.

A man riding on the horse comes and asks, “ O beautiful woman! why are you crying?”

The woman replies: My husband, who is as slim as you are, went to another country.

I am waiting for him and that is why my eyes are full with tears.

The young man says, “O beautiful woman take this basket which is full of gold..and take all these precious stones.’

Leave that mad person and come with me

The woman says, “I will burn your gold and precious stones”

“O rich man ! When that mad person will return he will loot all your property¹³.”

A woman knows that she is vulnerable when her husband is far away from home. Generally these millstone songs are sung in households and through these songs women indirectly warn male members of their family that any wrong intention would invite trouble for them. In another song a younger brother tries to seduce the wife of his elder brother who is not at home. The woman threatens her bother-in-law that his hands will be chopped off when his brother will return¹⁴. Though devar-bhabhi relationship has always been represented as sweeter than other relations yet folk songs define limits of sexual behaviour in that relationship.

It is hard to separate everyday life with rituals. However, there are some rituals which have been well institutionalized in village life. I would try to look at some of these rituals through the lens of gender.

Sohar

The genre of Sohara usually describes the condition of a pregnant woman or it celebrates rites and rituals related with the birth of a child. Sohara songs exalt motherhood and declare it as a precious virtue of womanhood. A woman is incomplete without attaining motherhood. And barrenness or *banjhpan* is constructed in opposition to motherhood and

¹³ Krishnadev Upadhyay(ed.), *Bhojpuri Lokgeet,Part-1*, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Prayag, 1990, p.215

¹⁴ *Ibid*,p.203

womanhood. Barrenness is curse to a woman and she is debarred from participating in family rituals. As motherhood is the essential virtue of womanhood, Sohar songs always give special attention to pregnant women. Pregnancy needs special care for a woman and in such a critical condition if there is negligence from the side of her in-laws family, her sorrow finds articulation in folk songs by invoking familiar story of abandonment of pregnant Sita by lord Ram. In a Sohar song, Sita is exiled to woods by her husband¹⁵. In very adverse condition Sita gives birth to twin children. She sends a messenger to Ayodhya to deliver the news of birth of her sons. However, she instructs her messenger not to inform Ram whom she refers to sinful and unrighteous. Unlike religious text books where Ram always appears as Maryada Purushotam, in women's folk songs sometimes Ram appears as a mean man. It is beauty of Indian society that these acts are not considered blasphemous by rural people. In another Sohar, Sita declines Vasistha's offer to return to Ayodhya¹⁶. In rural areas the pregnant woman is often sent back to her father's house for better care. Most of the time, this is humiliating for the woman and her pain, humiliation and suffering finds expression in the genre of Sohar.

In many Sohar songs the husband has been depicted as a gambler who is busy in playing *pasa* at the time of birth of his child¹⁷. Perhaps Premchand's (1936) story *Kafan* draws on this popular tradition. In *Kafan* a woman dies at the time of delivery but her husband and father-in-law do not come to see her. However, husbands of folk songs are more generous in comparison to Premchand's characters. In a *khelawna* song when some gambler friends ask a man why he is so sad, he replies that her wife, who is leaner than a beetle leaf and beautiful like rose, is suffering from pain, this is the reason for his sadness¹⁸. The severity of the pain is highlighted by depiction of woman body like a flower. Ironically, the pain has been depicted as opposite to womanhood despite this fact that every woman suffers intolerable pain during the entire period of pregnancy.

Motherhood is venerated in Bhojpuri-speaking region and folk songs express women's desire for motherhood. In Bhojpuri society barrenness is a disgrace to a woman. In a sohar song a woman says that I never wore red and yellow cloths and never sat with my

¹⁵ I. Srivastava, *Women as Portrayed in Women's folk songs of North India*, Asian Folklore Studies, Vol.50, No. 2,p.276.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Krishnadev Upadhya, *Bhojpuri Lokgeet, Part-1*, p.99

¹⁸ *Ibid.*p.104.

husband to perform rituals, without a child my life has become absurd¹⁹. Barren women are not allowed to participate in many rituals.

However, the love for children is unparalleled in Bhojpuri culture and pregnant women get special attention of their family members. In *Dohad songs* generally in-laws of a pregnant woman ask which kind of fruit she likes, which kind of dress she want to wear. The family tries to fulfil the wishes of a pregnant woman. A Bhojpuri song says,

The mother-in law is sitting on *machia*

She is asking to her daughter-in-law: Which fruits do you like? The husband asks: which clothes do you like²⁰?

Another song describes the pain suffered by the woman at the time of delivery of her child. The woman says ,her waist and head are aching, the whole world is disappearing, and only my fingers are alive²¹. The husband replies that if I had to build a house I would have called workers and finished the job. But this basket of pregnancy can only be opened up by God. The time of the birth of a child was a critical situation for family members . In some songs there is reference to the knowledge of traditional medicine which was used after the delivery of a child²².

According to folk songs, a woman is different from a man because of her reproductive power. Motherhood becomes the essence of womanhood. The woman who is not capable to give birth to a child is always considered as a lesser woman. Such women are considered abnormal and harbinger of ill omen. A childless woman is called *banjh* (a barren woman) in Bhojpuri society. Barrenness is considered as a disgrace to a woman. Motherhood is a pre-requisite to become a full woman and women's desire for motherhood can often be found in folk songs. Without reproduction a woman life is meaningless. She has not full-fledged status of a woman and she cannot participate in family rituals.

As barrenness is considered as a curse it is also perceived as a contagious disease. In a Chhath –pooja song, a woman goes to take cow-dung from a milk-man. The milk-man scolds the woman and does not allow her to enter his cow-shed. He fears that his cows

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.92.

²⁰ *Ibid*. p.87.

²¹ *Ibid*. p.99.

²² *Ibid*. p.100.

will also become barren due to ill omen brought by the barren woman. Barrenness can invite trouble for a woman. In a folk song a woman describes how she is rebuked by her in-laws and how finally she is ousted from her house. No one helps her because everyone has fear that her contact would bring barrenness to them. Even her mother does not accept her. Not only human beings but also animals reject her due to the same fear:

Woman: "My mother-in-law calls me banjhin [barren] and my husband's sister calls me brijvasin. And the man whom I am married to since my childhood, has turned me out of the house. Rejected by her husband, the woman turns to the forest.

Woman: " O lioness, please come out of the forest and eat me up."

The lioness comes out of the forest and asks her welfare.

Lioness: "O my lady, tell me what grief drove you to the forest."

Woman: My saas calls me banjhin and my nanad calls me brijvasin. And the man whom I am married to since my childhood, has turned me out of the house. O lioness, please eat me up and give me deliverance from this grief."

Lioness: "O my lady, please go back home. I cannot eat you up. If I do so I shall become barren myself. Disappointed by lioness she goes to the poisonous snake

Woman: O female snake come out of your hole and bite me with your poison. The snake comes out of its hole and asks her welfare.

Snake : "O my lady tell me your grief. what drove you to me?"

Woman: "My sas calls me banjhin and my nanad calls me brijvasin. And the man whom I am married to since my childhood, has turned me out of the house. O female snake please bite me and give me deliverance from this grief."

Snake: O My lady please go back home. I cannot bite you. If I do so I will become barren myself. Disappointed by the female snake she goes to her parent's house.

Woman: O mother please come out and give me, a sinner, a shelter in your house.

Mother comes out and asks her welfare..... And finally the mother also rejects her daughter.

For most of the people, barrenness is a sin. Many folk songs claim that children are gifts of God. In *Devi ke Geet* the most commonly expressed desire is to have many male children in family. Even “barren” women think that gods and goddesses can fulfil their desire. Women offer *chunari* to Goddess Ganga to fulfil their desire of motherhood. Ironically, in Mahabharat, Ganga is said to have killed her own sons except Bhisma. People believe that children are gifts from gods and goddesses and therefore barrenness is perceived as the outcomes of sin committed in previous life. The idea of universal God and the concept of sin is so intertwined in folk culture that it appears that the very idea of a universal God is a tool of violence. However, rural women believe in gods and goddesses and pave the way for self subordination.

In folk world everyone fears from a barren woman. In the aforesaid song even animals are not ready to kill a barren woman out of fear that they themselves would become barren. The virtue of motherhood has been imposed on animals to show that a childless woman is even inferior to animals. It is argued that folk world is not anthropocentric. However, one can easily find that folklores impose human virtues on animals. However, this anthropocentrism is also androcentric. In practise people who enjoy power universalize their norms and values to maintain status-quo.

However, no power structure is so pervasive that it could suppress the voice of resistance. Transgressive behaviour is always present in any society. In Grierson’s collection a woman curses motherhood. She says, “ O Rama! The she-tortoise has borne a he – tortoise, and The Ganga has borne a sand bank. Little girls have brought fourth boys. May a thunderbolt fall on all these wombs!”²³. The extreme hatred for wombs does not conform to those values which celebrate motherhood above all virtues. However, this hatred is not without reason. Child –marriage was widely practised in the region and many girls became pregnant in their teenage. In many cases of delivery the life of the mother was at stake and those who survived faced serious health hazards. The celebration

²³ G A Grierson, *Some Bhojpuri Folk Songs*, The Journal of The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol.18,no.2, P.230

of motherhood was always at the cost of the mother's health. In such adverse circumstances hatred for womb shows misery of a woman's life.

A childless woman is considered not suitable enough for caring other children. Barrenness not only implies her incapacity to reproduce, it also signifies the absence of maternal instinct which requires soft attitude towards children. In a folk song a woman snatch his child from a childless woman²⁴. In social habitus, motherhood is exalted to such an extent that childlessness is considered an abnormality and a woman easily internalizes those virtues which appreciate motherhood. At any cost, a woman tries to attain motherhood to avoid unwanted circumstances in her life. In one of the Sohar songs a woman laments that earlier she was respected by her husband but now her husband does not look at her face. She says that without a child her heart is burning slowly like a brazier.

Folk songs reflect the ground reality of the society. The humiliation faced by barren women has also been described in other works. Tulsi Ram recounts in his auto-biography how the presence of an old Brahman woman was considered inauspicious by villagers²⁵. People did not like to meet her. They believed that after seeing her they would not be successful in their work. If someone met her he would immediately return his home and tried to erase the inauspicious-effect brought by her presence. Tulsi Ram does not forget to mention that the widow was a nice woman despite this she had to face humiliation time and again. Even dalits did not like to see her. Childless persons are seen as deviant in society. Even a childless man is considered harbingers of ill-omen. Tulsi Ram mentions in *Murdahiya* that in his village an old man, Jangu Pandey, was humiliated by villagers because he was not married²⁶. He describes that once this old man came in Dalit hamlet and looked at a mango tree. People started to believe that the mango tree would not give fruit because of the inauspicious gaze of the old man. As the old man was not married people thought that his presence in Dalit hamlet would bring barrenness to their women.

Sohar songs are generally sung at the occasion of the birth of a male child, it is rarely sung at the birth of a female child except in some rich and educated families where the birth of a girl child is long awaited. Generally, the birth of a female child is the occasion of mourning. Hardly in any *sohar* one finds an account of the birth of a female child.

²⁴ Krishnadev Upadhyay (ed.), *Bhojpuri Lokgeet*, p.92

²⁵ Tulsi Ram, *Murdahiya*, Rajkamal Paperbacks, New Delhi, 2015, p.13.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.12.

Even the “potential birth” of a female child brings dishonour to a woman. In one of the songs a woman carrying cowdung in her hand asks her mother which room she should clean for her delivery. Her husband’s daughter interrupts and says that it appears that she is going to give birth to a female child therefore she does not deserve a room and she should clean barn. Contrary to this situation, at the time of the birth of a male child there is great celebration in family. In a sohar song a woman requests her husband to invite all relatives and give them the customary gifts(*neg*). The tradition of customary gifts(*neg*) helps to construct gender hierarchy since the very birth of a child. Absence of *neg* signifies lower status of a female child in society. However, if a female child is born after the birth of three male child she is considered auspicious and *neg* is given to relatives. The girl is known as *tetar*(one who has born after three male child). It is worth to mention that even a *tetar* girl is considered auspicious because she has come after the birth of male children. The status of a female child is ultimately decided by her relation to a male child.

Not only sohar songs depict the hopelessness and mourning at the birth of a female child, many wedding songs also express similar emotion. In one wedding song the birth of a daughter has been depicted as a source of misery. The mother remembers how her misery began from the very day she became pregnant. From the initial days of pregnancy she started feeling sick. At the time of the birth of her daughter the night became as dark as the night of Bhado²⁷. At the time of her birth her mother-in-law and daughter-in-law did not light the lamp. Woman’s husband was also disappointed at the birth of a female child. However, the woman had hope that later the situation will become normal because through this girl the family would be able to perform the rite of kanyadan. Here it is worth mentioning that the rite of kanyadan is considered equivalent to performing many Yjnyas. The woman narrates that at the time of her girl’s marriage, the bridegroom’s family demanded a huge amount of dowry. The mother throws all the utensils on the ground to raise the money by selling them to fulfil the demand of the dowry. She wishes that even her worst enemy should not have a daughter. She says that had she known that there was a girl child in her womb she would have aborted it by consuming chillies. Since her birth the female child is seen as a burden on family. The problem of dowry is not one-time problem. In poor families anxiety for arrangement of dowry starts since the birth of a female child.

²⁷ Krishnadev Upadhyay, *Bhojpuri Lokgeet-part-2*, p.38.

Janev (Sacred Thread Ritual)

The ritual of sacred thread is still practised among upper castes. It is interesting to explore why the ritual of sacred thread is still prevalent in the society despite the fact that its essence has completely been changed over time. In rich families the ritual is performed with the help of a *Vedua* from Kashi, who is expected to have good knowledge of Vedas²⁸. It is believed that in ancient time after sacred thread ritual, boys went to Kashi to learn traditional knowledge. Till the end of nineteenth century, there were schools of traditional education in Vanarasi. Veteran peasant leader Swami Sahjanand Sarswati had got education in one of such *Maths*. His long association with Aparnath Math is well-known where Swami got education of *Shastras*. However, only few families used to send their boys in these centers. It is surprising that still at the time of sacred thread ritual the young boy begs money from his relatives so that he can go Kashi to get education. In the practise, the boy moves some` steps towards the door and then he returns back and it is assumed that he has made a visit to Kashi. Although the whole ritual seems pretentious, still it is practised with much of enjoyment.

It is intriguing to find that in modern time where traditional knowledge has almost been abolished sacred thread ritual is still practised by using metaphors of old education system. To understand the real motive behind sacred thread ritual one needs to be acquainted with long history of sacred threads. Sacred threads has always been a marker of *Dwij* identity. Many religious texts describe which type of sacred threads should be worn by a particular caste. Generally Shudras were not allowed to wear sacred threads. With the influence of Aryasamaj's principle of equality lower castes started wearing sacred threads . Many prominent Aryasamaj leaders played a proactive role in Janev movement²⁹.

Janev became a site for cultural contestation. Bhojpuri speaking areas witnessed intense struggle and ideological debates over the question of sacred thread ritual in the first half of the twentieth century. *Janev Andolan* was started in Bhojpur villages by Triveni Sangh-an organisation which worked for the upliftment of upper middle castes. Triveni Sangh had its support base mainly in Yadav, Koeri and Kurmi castes³⁰. Swami

²⁸ *Bhojpuri Lokgeet, Part-1*, p.110.

²⁹ See. Badri Narayan Tiwari, Introduction in Badri Narayan Tivari(ed.) *Upekshit Samudayon Ka Aatma-Itihas*, Vani Prakashan, New Delhi, 2006.

³⁰ Prasann Kumar, *Bihar Me Samajik Parivartan Ke Kuchh Aayam*, Vani Prakashan 2001, pp.112-172.

Sahastranand Saraswati, a man belonging to Kushwaha caste started a campaign for wearing sacred threads by lower castes³¹. To attract wider support from his caste men, he even went to Burma where many Bhojpuri people were settled for their livelihood. Now-a-days many lower caste people also perform this ritual for their boys.

However, the story of sanskritization is not linear. Naxalite movement which started in seventies from Ekvari village of Bhojpur also impacted the culture of Bhojpuri region. With the influence of Anti-brahmanical and atheist ideology of the Naxalite movement many people started ridiculing sacred thread rituals. Some men were killed by Naxalites only because they had worn sacred threads³². However, Naxalite movement could not alter Bhojpuri culture in a significant way. People of all communities practise their religion enthusiastically and impact of atheism is limited only to some educated comrades.

Generally sacred thread rituals are celebrated in a joyful environment. Relatives come from distant places to participate in the ritual. In a folk song a mother invites her female friends to participate in the *janev* of her son.

Panch Sakhi Aaho! Milike

Hardi Chadhawa Hamara Lal Ke

Barho Bajan Bajaike

Hardi Chadhawa Hamra Lal Ke

(Please five *sakhies* come together and cover the body of my son with turmeric powder. Play twelve kinds of musical instruments and cover the body of my son with turmeric powder.)

Though Sacred thread ritual is considered as the most exclusive in its nature and women are never allowed to wear sacred threads. However, this exclusive ritual is also made inclusive by folk songs. Here the mother's enthusiasm is unprecedented. The mother is "doing" her gender by her participation in ritual. At the same time she is fulfilling her

³¹ *Ibid.* p.164.

³² At many occasions Naxalite movement had casteist character. See. Kalyan Mukherjee, *Naxalism in The Plains of Bihar*.

emotional desire by “using” gender. Similarly sisters have their own roles and they cooperate in the performance of the ritual. In a Bhojpuri song a woman asks:

Kavni Suhaiya Sut Kateli Bhal Otehi

Purele Kavan Ram Janev Kavan Barua Parihasu.

(Which girl is spinning cotton and which man is preparing sacred threads and which boy is going to wear it?)

Reference to *barua*'s sister often comes with respect in Bhojpuri folk songs. In another song the sister prays to God to avoid rain in sacred thread ceremony. Sacred thread ritual not only ensures participation of mother, father, sisters and other relatives but also ensures participation of many lower castes like Nai, Kumhar and Badhai. In a Bhojpuri *janev* song first a Brahmin comes with some texts in his hands and asks the address of Barua³³. After then a Nai comes with some stuffs in his hand and repeats the same question. Next to Nai a Kumhar comes and he also asks the same question.

Galian Galian Pandit Ghumai Hathwa Pothiya Lele

Kavan Bakhariya Raja Dasrath ta Ram Ke Janev

.....

Galian Galian Nau Ghumai, Hathe Kisbat Lele

Kavan Bakharia Raja Dasrath Ta Ram ke Janev

(The priest is walking from street to street with religious texts in his hands and asks the address of Dasrath's palace where Rama's sacred thread ritual has to be performed. Then comes barber and he also asks the same question.)

In village society, lower caste persons also participate in many rituals of upper caste households. Though there exist caste and gender hierarchies, yet participation of different groups is ensured by different means. In folk songs, names of different castes come with respect and affection. Brahmanical system does not always work with the help of coercion. At many occasions it survives because of its inclusive nature which is not visible in classical texts. Folk songs show that patriarchy and caste system because they

³³ Vidynivas Mishra (ed.) *Vachik Kavita: Bhojpuri*, Bhartiya Jnanpith, Delhi, 2003, p.54.

provide some space to others. It may be claimed that this inclusion is also a tool of oppression.

Marriage Songs:

Many rituals are still performed in villages at the time of marriage. Some people think that these rituals are reminiscent of ancient time. In Bibeki Rai's novel one character thinks that these rituals (Karmats) are ruins of ancient culture.³⁴ However, a close observation will show that by considering all rituals as the residue of past we often become ethnocentric. What appears as opposite to modern values and norms is easily described as the residue of past. Generally people create a hierarchy among different times where modern time is celebrated as rational and all other times are categorized as primitive and irrational. At the occasion of marriage a drum which is played by Chamar women, generally called *manar*, is worshipped by village women. Many people, like the educated character of Bibeki Rai's novel, think that the worship of *Manar* is residue of an ancient custom. However, villagers know that *Manar* still plays a central role in marriage rituals in villages. Its music evokes the sentiment of collectiveness of village life and playing *Manar* is the symbol of joy in north Indian villages.

Participation of women in these rituals (*karmats*) is seen as an irrational act by educated people. On the one hand, the society puts the burden to perform rituals on the shoulder of women on the other hand the same society stereotype women as irrational on account of their participation in rituals. The close observation of these rituals can help to understand what messages women want to give by performing these rituals. Sometimes they fulfil their emotional need by performing these rituals.

At the time of marriage women sing *Mangal songs*, one can easily find how they negotiate their emotional need by these songs. In one of the *Mangal* songs a father asks her daughter, O daughter why are you going with your husband? You did not return anything for love given by your family." The girl says, "O father why did you love me so much? You did know that I belong to other family³⁵." Through these songs the family members share their emotion with their daughter and they prepare her mentally to adjust in a new family in which she is going to live after marriage. Through songs all virtual scenes are constructed where in-laws are portrayed as cruel. Many songs portray

³⁴ Bibeki Rai, *Sonamati*, Prabhat Prakashan, Delhi, 1995, p. 167.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 160.

Bridegroom's family demanding a huge amount of dowry. The message of these songs is to prepare brides to face these adverse situations in their in-laws' family.

One of the rituals which are practised at the time of marriage is *Matkod*. In this ritual women sing erotic and obscene songs. Many songs with double meaning are also sung. They abuse each other and transgress all norms of patriarchal society. This occasional subversion of norms is seen at other occasions too. Through these rituals women find an opportunity by which their repressed feelings get an outlet. However, this subversive interpretation of *Matkod* ritual would be a reductionist explanation. *Matkod* ritual is linked up with other rituals and the clay brought by women is used in making *chulhas* on which rice of *kohrath* is prepared which is served to bridegroom and bride after marriage. *Kohrath's* rice has become an integral part of many folklores³⁶. Generally the ritual of *matkod* is performed with great enjoyment by women. The emotion attached with this ritual cannot be captured in few words. Every ritual has an emotional dimension and outsiders cannot easily understand the role played by rituals. Married women wear new *saries* and they gather at Kali temple where the ritual is performed. Generally it is thought that Kali is worshipped in Bengal. Contrary to this popular belief one can easily find small temple of Goddess Kali in many Villages of North India. A song vividly describes the ritual of *Matikod*.

Kahnwa ke piyar mati. Kahnwa ke kudar ho

Kahnwa ke saat suhagin mati kode jaat ho.

(From which place this yellow soil belong? Where has this hoe come from? From which place these seven married women belong?)

Widows are not allowed to participate in marriage rituals. Widowhood should not be perceived as one time phenomenon resulting from the death of the husband. Widowhood is a social construct and like gender it is also performed through rituals. Widowhood is also seen as an ill omen and rural people strongly believe that participation of a widow woman in marriage rituals will bring widowhood to the bride. Jaishankar Prasad, the famous litterateur of Hindi, once said that Hindu widow is one of the filthiest resort³⁷. (Hindu Vidhwa Sansar Me Sabse Tuchh Aasray Hai). Jaishankar Prasad had

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.168.

³⁷ See. Jaishankar Prasad, *Titli*.

spent a long time in Kashi and he was well aware with discriminatory practices with widows. In his novel *kankal*, he describes how a widow is ousted from her house by his brother-in-law just because he was interested in usurping her property. There is a popular phrase in Varanasi which says that one should always be aware of Widows, Bulls and stairs. (Rar, Sadh aur Sidhi se hoshiyar rahna chahiye). The comparison of widows with bulls and dangerous stairs of the *Ganga-ghats* shows that widowhood is considered as a curse by Bhojpuri society.

In this context one should try to understand how widowhood is constituted in everyday life. Rituals are the sites where widowhood is constituted and reconstituted in everyday life. In marriage rituals, too, a widow woman cannot wear sari of her choice. She is compelled to wear a white sari. She does not participate in the ritual of *parichhawan*. In this ritual even small girls participate and they touch the body of the bride or the bridegroom and offer rice, *gud* and other sacred materials. However, widow women are not allowed to touch bride or bridegroom at this occasion because widowhood is considered similar to contagious disease. Only by segregating widows from such rituals society becomes able to construct widowhood in opposition to the institution of marriage. It can also be argued that the institution of marriage is defined by constructing widowhood. It is why various norms are imposed by the society on these widow-women who reside at the margin of the society.

Marriage rituals contain diverse type of cultural messages. In Shiv-Vivah songs many songs describe the marriage procession of the lord Shiva. The popular myth says that Shiva was a Yogi and he is sometimes referred to as Yogiraj. Lord Shiva married Parvati only after practising long life of austerity by her. In Shiv-Vivah songs Lord Shiva is always depicted as a renouncer who always stands in opposition to householders. The tension between renouncers and householders is an old one. These songs represent renouncers' lives as dangerous and infested with snakes, scorpions and ghosts. In most of the songs, it has been said that just after first encounter with lord Shiva, Parvati's mother lost her consciousness. Almost all songs of Shiv-vivah genre depict the encounter as a shock. It is worth to mention that this encounter is not between a renouncer and a householder man. The encounter happens with a householder woman. Through these songs society tries to impose virtues of householders on women, women cannot be renouncers and the construction of renouncers life is always in opposition to a woman's life. Even in those songs where Parvati is said to be practising austerity, her ultimate goal

is to become a householder. In Shiv-Vivah songs the identity of woman is ultimately associated with a householder's identity and renouncer's life is represented against the virtue of womanhood. A woman cannot transgress householder's life.

One pleasant aspect of Shiv-vivah song is that women use these songs to ridicule bridegroom and his family. Recitation changes the meaning of songs according to context. Shiv-vivah songs also signify the devotion of a lover for his love. Women invoke Parvati for successful marriage of bridegroom. Ironically, there is no place for love marriage in Bhojpuri society. Only guardians can take decision about marriage of their sons and daughters. Through marriage institution the society controls the sexuality of men and women and helps to maintain caste structure. Due to poverty mismatched marriage was also in vogue. Legendary dramatist and poet Bhikhari Thakur wrote many songs to criticise these mismatched marriages. In one of his songs a girl says to his father:

Ropaya Ginai Lihala

Pagaha Dharai Dihala

Cheria ke Chheria Banaila A Babuji

(O father! You are selling me for money. You are treating your daughter like a scapegoat.)

The song became a protest slogan against the custom of mismatched marriage. Bhikhari Thakur and his songs were popular in Bhojpuri speaking areas of UP and Bihar. The voice of protest in Bhikhari's song is not a new one. If we look at different genre of folk songs we can trace the dissenting voice in many songs which are sung at the occasion of marriage rituals. In many songs women lament on their young bridegroom who behave like children. In some other songs women express their anger on their old husbands. These songs are often recited by women at the occasion of marriage. And through these songs they want to give a message that mismatched marriage is painful and therefore family member should search for a suitable bridegroom.

Reference to mismatched marriages is found in other genre of folk songs, too. In a *birha* song a woman says that there is a bamboo-grove behind my house. And whenever air flows its leaves make sound. In my legs there is an anklet and all these sounds make my husband scare.

Mor Picchuari Ghani Re Bansvariya

(In the backyard of my house, there is a thick bamboo grove)

Binu Puruva Gaharai

(Without Eastern wind it makes sound)

Hamara Godwa Me Badi Vajni Pairiya

(In my legs there are anklets)

Suni Suni Piyawa Derai

(After hearing it mu husband becomes scared)

Mismatched marriage was always seen with suspicion by village elites. Rich men of villages always claimed that poor people sell their daughter in the name of mismatched marriage. Not all mismatched marriages were an act of daughter-selling. However, One should accept that the custom was prevalent in many poor families. Bhikhari Thakur wrote his play *Beti-Bechwa* in which he addressed this issue and considered it as a shame to society. In Sanjeev's novel *Sutradhar*, which is based on the life of Bhikhari Thakur, the author suggests that the custom of daughter selling was prevalent among poor people in Bhojpuri speaking area and Bhikhari's play and songs brought a new awareness against this bad custom³⁸.

Surprisingly, songs which are sung by women at marriage rituals never give any allusion to the custom of daughter selling. Women ridicule the practice of mismatched marriage but they never criticise the evil practice of selling young girls to old men in the name of marriage. This clearly shows that there is a complete silence on some issues in folk songs which are associated with household rituals. These silences can only be understood by unmasking power-relations which shape rituals. Many marriage rituals are still performed with the help of Brahmans. These Brahmans still recite Vedic Mantras in marriage. And society generally accepts that Brahma-Vivah(the marriage which is arranged by Guardians) is superior to other kind of marriages. As there is no space for love marriage, people generally claim that all "arranged marriages" are imitation of Brahma-Vivah. And therefore there is complete silence on those practices which deviate from Brahma-Vivah.

³⁸ See. Sanjeev, *Sutradhar*.

The other reason for silence on the issue of daughter-selling is that the act brings stigma to the family. In villages many poor families are stigmatised as *Betibechwa* or daughter seller. These families suffer from many discriminatory practices of villagers. These families are humiliated by villagers in everyday life. As the act of daughter selling brings stigma to the family, women prefer to remain silent on these issues. Household rituals give not any space for dissent in such serious issues. Performance of these rituals is always constrained by larger power structures which operate at various layers of the society. It is said that even Bhikhari Thakur faced humiliation at various occasions whenever his play *Betibechwa* was performed. In Sanjeev's novel, *Sutradhar*, which has been written after good research on Bhikhari Thakur's life, one also finds various instances when the performance of *Betibechwa* was interrupted by people and it led to social conflict.

One amazing thing is that in marriage songs we never find the voice of the bride or the bridegroom. In Bhojpuri speaking rural areas marriage is not a personal affair, it is always social. Marriage is not just about union of two souls, it is also union of two families and two villages. In one of rituals grains of bride's and bridegroom's villages are mixed which signifies a new relationship between these two villages. A new grid of kinship is constructed through marriages. And this new grid of kinship takes its validity and is constituted through gali songs.

Gali songs cannot be dismissed only on account of its vulgarity. Obscenity is always a social construct and the notion of obscenity changes with time and space. In gali-songs, which are generally sung at the occasion of *Tilak* or marriage, women use abusive language for in-laws' family and their priest. For various reasons the priest of a family can also be included in kinship grid of the family, despite his different caste status. However, ethnocentric sociology cannot easily acknowledge this fact. Special gali-songs are sung for the priest which are known as *Panditji ke gali*.

In these gali-songs generally women of both families are targeted without using their name. One can argue that in these songs women are humiliated by women. However, gali-songs have been institutionalized in such a manner that nobody feels bad after hearing it. People love these songs and they never find it derogatory. Generally gali-songs are perceived as the start of a new relationship between two families. Gali-songs help to constitute a new grid of kinship which is constructed after the marriage alliance. Women

use abusive songs for in-laws and their relatives. For example many songs ridicule the father of bridegroom. Gali-songs recite the name of every male member of the family. The names of male relatives are also taken in gali songs. It is like an introduction session where every male member finds his place in complex network of kinship. The absence of female members is complemented by making reference to them as someone's sister or mother. At the time of *gurhathi* ritual many abusive songs are sung for brother-in-law who performs the ritual.

It is important to mention that in most of these gali-songs the target are women. One major reason for the use of this kind of language is that it is women who are mobile in the formation of kinship. Men hardly leave their houses after marriage, only women are forced to leave their houses. It is believed that due to women mobility kinship are formed. Since their childhood girls are regarded as belonging to other's family. In gali-songs woman body is seen as a site through which kinship is formed. The abusive language used for women in these songs show that songs belonging to marriage rituals are reflection of larger power structure where patriarchy dominates. Though in kinship formation men and women play equal role, yet it is believed that burden of this kinship is on women. It also reflects the thought which believes that marriage means the loss of virginity for a woman while men remain sexually unaffected.

Conclusion: No ritual is performed without folk songs. Folk songs are integral part of rituals. Power-relation is embedded in rituals and they create different type of social hierarchies. Caste and gender hierarchy is embedded in almost all rituals. I have chosen some particular rituals to show how gender is constituted through different acts of rituals. Generally it is believed that Sohar songs are sung at the happy occasion of the birth of a child. However, these songs also do many subtle works. Folk songs have constitutive power and It has been shown in the chapter that Sohar songs help to construct the binary notion of barrenness and motherhood. Sohar songs show that womanhood is incomplete without motherhood. Sohar songs also tell much about the stigmas attached with a "barren" woman. Similarly Marriage songs help to construct widowhood in opposition to the institution of marriage. In folk songs widows are always represented as an ill omen.

Folk songs have magical linguistic power and they are capable to make an exclusive ritual as inclusive. Sacred thread ritual is extremely exclusive, however folk songs make this ritual inclusive by exalting the role played by women and lower castes. Folk songs

are the site where emotional need of different groups is negotiated. However, folk songs are silent on many social evils. We should read these silences in the context of larger social structures where diverse kind of power-relations operate.

CHAPTER-2

GENDER, WORK AND TIME

The division of labour can be found in rural society in conformation to caste and gender hierarchy. Though the inter-relation between caste, gender and work is a complex one, yet some general trends can be found in folk songs because work is inseparable from music in folk life. Work is also associated with the notion of time and folk songs have different notions of time which differ from the dominant notion of time described in classical texts. In rural society work is equivalent to work-culture. The notion of time is always mediated by work-culture. However, in rural society the interrelation between work and time is different from that of the industrial society. At many occasions, the disjuncture between work and time can be explored. The notion of time in Bhakti songs is quite different from the notion of time in women's *Barahmasa* songs. Unlike industrial society time is not linear and teleological in folk songs. Though the notion of linear time is present in Indian calendar, yet folk songs celebrate cyclical time. The notion of time is also different for women and men. Time is a cultural construct and it always mediated by myths, narratives and other structures of culture.

Despite their limitations, folk songs prove rich archive for writing history of labour and gender. Folk songs do not talk much about industrial labour, their focus remains on agricultural labourers and domestic chores. However, these songs record migration of male population from Bhojpuri region towards industrial hubs of West Bengal during the colonial period and afterwards³⁹. Many people were lured by *Sirdars* and were fraudulently deported to Fiji, Mauritius and other colonies of the British Empire where they were forced to work as indentured labourers⁴⁰. Many of these innocent people were not aware about the place where they were being sent to⁴¹. Many indentured labourers never returned to their villages and their family waited them for years and years. In Purvi songs women have been depicted lamenting for their husbands who never returned. A Purvi song which was composed by Mahendar Misir beautifully captures the pain of migration.

Satal Me Rahni Nandi Dekhni Sapanwa

³⁹ *Purvi* and other songs talk about migration of male population.

⁴⁰ See. Totaram Sanadhya, *Fijidweep Me Mere21Varsh*, www.hindisamay.com

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

(I Saw A Dream When I Was Asleep)

Kalkatwa Se Mor Balmu Ailan Ho Ram

(That my husband returned from Calcutta)

Tu Kaise Janat Badu Lahuri Bhaujaiya

(How do you know that, O my sweet Bhabhi)

Kalkatwa Se Mor Bhaiya Aile Ho Ram

(That my brother will come from Calcutta)

Pair Piraile Nanadi Uthat Ba Daradiya

(My legs are aching and the pain is becoming intolerable)

Se Kaga Bhaiya Agam Janile Ho Ram

(The Crow brother has informed me)

Kahat Mahendar Misir Sunu Nyari Sakhiya

(Mahendar Misir says , O lovey sakhi)

Se Terah Baras Bit Gaie Ho Ram⁴²

(Thirteen years have been passed in such a way)

The interesting thing is that composer of folk songs were aware of the fact that villagers were being exploited by metropolises. In many songs women can be found cursing Calcutta. This antagonism towards the metropole can also be found in Trilochan's poem where a girl says, " *Mai apne balam ko sang sath rakhungi/ Calcutta Kabhi Na Jane doongi/ Calcutte par vajar gire⁴³.*" (I will keep my love with me/ Never allow him to go to Calcutta/ May lightning fall on Calcutta)The hatred for Calcutta/British Empire was not limited to symbolic protest. Bhojpuri speaking areas offered great resistance to the British Empire⁴⁴. The enemy was not only political structure of the empire, economic

⁴² Krishnadev Upadhya, *Bhojpuro Lok-Geet*, p.339.

⁴³ Trilochan, "Champa Kale Kale Achhar Nahi Chinhati" in Kedarnath Singh (ed.)Pratinidhi Kavityen, Rajkamal Paperbacks 2008, p.65.

⁴⁴ In 1857, Kuwar Singh revolted against the Mighty British Empire.

structure was also oppressive. A Bhojpuri song says, *reliya na bairi jahajiya na bairi/ saiya ke le gaye videswa e paiswa bairi*. (Railway and ships are not enemy, it is money which is real enemy which took away my love to a distant territory). Folk singers had identified the real enemy. Mahendar Misir, the greatest folk singer of Bhojpuri, left his comfort zone of art and music and started to print fake currencies in order to destroy the colonial economy⁴⁵. It is said that only after a long effort of CID he could be arrested. Jatadhari Prasad, a CID personnel, worked as his servant for a long time to collect evidence against him. It is said that the influence of Mahendar Misir on Jatadhari Prasad was so immense that the latter also started to compose songs. When Jatadhari Prasad arrested Mahendar Misir, he immediately composed a song, “ Hansi Hansi Panwa Khiyawle Gopichanwa/ Pritiya Laga Ke Na/ Mohe bhejwaile Jehalkhanwa Pritiya Laga Ke Na.”(You pleasantly offered *pan* and developed a good relation with me. You are sending me jail after developing an affectionate relation with me)⁴⁶ Jatadhari Prasad had changed his name as Gopichand while he was working as a helper of Mahendar Misir. Jatadhari Prasad also replied in a lyrical mood:

Notwa chhapi chhapi giniya bhanjawla ho Mahendar Misir

(Mahendar Misir! You printed fake currencies and earned ginnies)

British Ke Kaila Halkan Ho Mahendar Misir

(You created havoc for Britishers)

Sagri Jahanwa Me Kaila Bada Nam Ho Mahendar Misir

(You have become popular in the whole world)

Paral Ba Puliswa Ke Kam Ho Mahendar Misir

(Now you will know what Police is)

Chhapra se Patna le Jutela Parman ho Mahendar Misir

(The evidence has been gathered from Chhapra and Patna)

Jatadhari haue hamro nam ho Mahendar Misir

⁴⁵ Manikant Thakur, A Documentary in the Memory of Purvi-Samrat Mahendar Misir. See also *Sutradharby Sanjeev*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

(My name is Jatadhari Prasad)

Not all women and men were as courageous as Mahendar Misir was. Nor they were wise enough to understand the impact of colonialism on their everyday life. In the absence of their husbands women had to face a lot of difficulties. Many poor women had to earn their livelihood by doing menial jobs in rich households. They had to run millstone (jaata) of landlords. In a song composed by Bhikhari Thakur, a woman says that these big landlords have big millstones and my hands are too small to handle it⁴⁷. The other grinding equipment was *dheka*⁴⁸ which was run by women with the help of their legs. Even women of rich households had to run *jata* or *dheka*. Lower caste women had to participate in agricultural work too. Even now-a-days they plant seedlings in the paddy field, and also harvest crops.

Image No. 2.1 A Woman Running Millstone



Source: Grub (2011), “Chakki- Millstone form Indian Subcontinent”, Avalibale at: <http://drgrub.com/2011/07/chakki-millstones-from-indian-subcontinent/>.

⁴⁷ The song says, “bade bade datwa ke bade bade jantwa”

⁴⁸ Dheka is still used in villages to grind grains.

Image No. 2.2 Women Threshing Crops



Source: Amerita Learning Network (2017), Available at: <http://aven.amritalearning.com/index.php?sub=99&brch=291&sim=1447&cnt=3292>.

In rural India, work is inseparable from music. Work, life, music and sexuality blur into one another. Every work has its own genre of songs. It seems that the rhythm of work is in harmony with musical notes. When women run millstone (jata) they sing *jantsaar* songs which deal with different aspects of everyday life. Sometimes they ridicule their *jeths/bhasur* (husband's elder brother) and at other times they complain about sexual harassment done by their *devars* (husband's younger brothers). In the following song, a woman has been depicted as being absorbed in her daily chores. She happily cleans her house and then she goes to the village pond to bring water. In the way, she is stopped by her husband's elder brother. The woman resists and threatens her brother-in-law and then she complains about her behaviour to her husband.

Patar Jirva Patri Karihaiya

(Jirwa is slim and her waist is also slim)

Thumuki Thumuki Aangan Baharli Ho Ji

(She is happily cleaning her aangan)

Angana Bahari Duara Dhoorwa Lagavli

(After clening aangan, she gathered dust at the door)

Chhuch Ghailwa ham Dehno Ho Ji

(I gave her an empty pot)

Ghaila Uthai Jirwa Challi Panighatwa

(Lifting the pot, Jirwa went to the pond)

Unkar Bhasurwa Baat Rokela Ho ji

(The elder brother of her husband is stopping her)

Choodu chhodu Bhasura Re hamro Dagariya

(O Bhasur! Satnd away with me)

Osiyan Bhije Lami Kesiya ho ji

(My hairs are becoming wet because of dew)

Kesiya Ta Bhinje Dehu Hamri Bhawahiya

(O Bhawah(the wife of younger brother)! Let it become wet)

Apni Chadariya Tamua Tanibi Ho ji

(I will make a tent from my chadar (to save you from wet))

Aagi Lagi Bhasura Re Tohri Chadariya

(O Bhasur! May your chadar catch fire)

Hamara se karu na majakwa Ho Ji

(Do not make joke with me)

Ghaila Uthai Jirwa Angana Patakli

(Jirwa fetched her pot in the aangan)

Geduri Ke Fenkli Sami Agwa Ho Ji

(Not clear)

Aagi Lagi Prabhu Tohri Jinagiya

(O my husband! Your life is absurd)

Bhasura Ta Batiya mor Rokela Ji

(The Brother-in-law stopped me)

Hokhe Da Vihan Fah Fate Da A Dhaniya

(O my love! Wait for morning)

Dhanuhi Chadhai Bhaiya Marbi Ho Ji

(I will kill my brother with arrow)

Image No. 2.3 Women Harvesting Crops



Source: UC San Diego News Centre (2014), "Ozone Pollution in India Kills Enough Crops to Feed 94 Million in Poverty", Available at: http://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/pressrelease/ozone_pollution_in_india_kills_enough_crops_to_feed_94_million_in_poverty.

Jatsar songs are sung in households and sometimes in these songs women make fun of their husband's elder brother. At the same time, women also warn male members of in-laws or they indirectly define the limits of sexual behaviour. They draw the line between what is permissible and what is not permissible. Folk songs clearly show that work and sexuality are not two distinct spheres. Work does not mean repression of sexuality. Women openly talk about their sexual desires and behaviours during the performance of their everyday work.

Modernity has very different notion of work. Work is considered as opposite to sexual pleasure. Industrialization not only alienated work from sex, sex itself became fractured. Karl Marx talked about disjuncture between *sexus*(sexual instinct of pleasure) and *eros*(life instinct of procreation) in industrial labourers⁴⁹. In Bhikhari's play *Gabarghichor* a labourer returns from Calcutta and he wants to take away his son with him who is not his *legitimate* child. In labourer's view, his *own* son is a resource. When an altercation broke out between the mother, the biological father and the labourer (social father) regarding the right over the boy, a *sarpanch* comes and decides to cut the boy into three equal pieces. Both men become agree with *sarpanch's* decision however the mother does not accept this proposal. Ultimately *Sarpanch's* gives the decision in the favour of the woman and she is accepted as the guardian of the boy. *Gabarghichor* beautifully captures the disjuncture between *sexus* and *eros* in an industrial labourer. However, for the woman in the play *sexus* and *eros* are not two different things. She still has emotions for her child.

Many songs like *jatsar*, *ropni geet*, *sohni geet* show that work, sexual desire and discussion on sexuality go hand-in-hand. Discussion on sexuality in these folk songs helps to constitute and reconstitute caste, gender and sexuality in different ways. In one of the songs a girl elopes with a boy belonging to lower caste and later she finds that his

⁴⁹ Gabriela Stoicea, *Reproducing Class and Gender Divide:Fritz Lang's Metropolis*, Comparative Literature Issue, Vol.119, No.5, pp 21-42.

mother is grazing pigs. She comes to know that the boy is from Dusadh caste and then she starts threatening him. The translation of the song has been given here.

Image No. 2.4 Women Planting Seedlings



Source: The Hans India (2016), “Measures taken by Indian government for upliftment of Women in Agricultural Sector”, Available at: <http://www.thehansindia.com/posts/index/National/2016-08-03/Measures-taken-by-Indian-Government-for-upliftment-of-Women-in-Agriculture-Sector-/246373>

O Chorila! You play flute in cities

Why do you not play your flute in my city

O Rajlo! Dogs bark in your city

And guards become conscious

O Chorila! I will give milk and rice to dogs

And will make these guards drunk

You can afford milk and rice

And I survive on the flour of gram

O my love! I will leave milk and rice

But I cannot live without you

O Rajlo! You have dresses of Southern countries

And I can afford only cheap sari

O Rajlo! You have costly utensils

And I have only wooden pots

I will leave all these luxuries

But I will not leave you

She walks through one forest and she walks through the other forest

And then she meets Chorila's mother who is grazing pigs

O the daughter of the King! Put off this southern country's sari

And wear this lugri and graze these pigs

Put off these gold jewels

And wear these jewels made of kansa

O Chorila! had I known that you belong to Dusadh caste

Then I would have hanged you in my parent's city⁵⁰

In the song, work is not detached from caste and gender. In Bhojpuri speaking areas, only Musahars and Dusadhs rear pigs. Later, Dusadhs sanskritized themselves and claimed *kshatriya* status⁵¹. Most of the Dusadhs left the occupation of pig-rearing along with those rituals and practices which brought stigma to their community. Classical texts like Bhagvad Geeta and others treat every work as equal. For *Geeta* no work is superior or inferior. It thinks that work should be done according to one's own natural inclination. However, the last chapter of the Bhagvad Geeta says that every *varna* has been assigned its *natural karma*. Thus radical thinking of Bhagvad Geeta also falls in the trap of *varna-vywastha*.

⁵⁰ *Bhojpuri Lok-Geet*, p.105.

⁵¹ Prasann Kumar Chaudhary, *Bihar Me Samajik Parivartan Ke Kuchh Aayam*, p.55

Contrary to the philosophy of Bhagvadgeeta, in folk world work is always associated with different kind of stigmas. Stigmas help to essentialize caste and gender. For example, only Mushas and Dusadhs rear pigs, only Chamars handle with dead cattles and only Doms and Mahapatra Brahman help in the last rite after death. Only *Badhai* can make furniture. More or less stigma is associated with every work. If an upper caste man does these works he can easily loose his status in the society. Folk songs reinforce stigmas attached to different kind of works.

Work: Subjugation and Protest

In Bhojpuri speaking areas, upper caste women are not allowed to participate in agricultural work. Except few occasions they cannot go outside their houses. It does not mean that they live a life of comfort. They are engaged in different kind of household chores which is no less than coercion. The lower caste women have to do both agricultural work and household chores. In a Bhojpuri song, a woman says that her father has fetched her on the heap of dust and she complains that her in-laws do not give enough food.

Kauna Hi Mase God Paki Ho Chuni Chuni Khaibi A Ram

(In which month God will be prepared? I will collect it for my food)

Kahia Biran Bhai Aihe Ho, Naihar Jaib A Ram

(When will my brother come? When will I go to my parental house?)

Katik Mase God Paki Ho, Chuni Chuni Khaibi A Ram

(In the month of Katik God will be prepared, after that I will collect it for my food)

Aghan Mase Bhaiya Aihe Ho Nahiar Jaibi A Ram

(In the month of Aghan my brother will come and I will go to my father's house)

In another song a woman, whose husband has gone to Calcutta, has left her home because her in-laws are harassing her⁵². She goes to the village garden and starts her life as a *gor* woman (Gor/God collect dry leaves for fuel and fry grains for villagers). The woman does not go to her parental house. Folk songs show that even illiterate women have a sense of self-respect and they can take any risk to save their dignity.

In another song, a woman describes her reluctance in pulling water from the well. She talks about the pain which she has to suffer during the work. She rejects the offer to sit in the lap of her husband. The song beautifully captures how coercive work affects the relationship between a man and a woman. In the song the protest to coercive work is reflected in the sexual behaviour of the woman.

Patar tori Kuiya A Balam, Resham lagli Dor

(O my husband, your well is narrow and there is a silk-rope to pull water from it)

Thar Paniya Bharile A Balam, Manwa Na Lage Mor

(I pull water by standing there, I do not like to do it)

Nihuri Ke Paniya Bharile A Balam, Godwa Thahrai

(I pull water by bending at the well, my legs are aching)

Birha Ke Matal Dhaniy Korwo Na Samai

(The angry wife is not sitting in the lap of his husband)

Gender and Time

Time is a cultural construct. It does not lie outside culture. Different cultures have different notions of time. Many tribal groups of South America do not have past tense in their language⁵³. John Zerzan, an anarchist scholar, says that absence of past tense in the language of these tribal groups does not signify that they are stupid. John Zerzan rightly says that it is we who are ethnocentric. Powerful groups always try to impose their notion of time on others. After industrial revolution clock time was imposed on labourers.

⁵² Krishnadev Upadhya, Bhojpuri Lokgeet, Part-2, p.98.

⁵³ John Zerzan, *Interview with John Zerzan*, Journal of The Study of Radicalism, Vol.2, No.1, pp.155-168.

Peasants generally adjust their activity according to sunrise and sunset. They have their own notion of time and they follow different calendars. However, modernity has different notion of time. It tries to impose mechanical time or clock time on cultural time.

Folk songs have different notion of time(s) which is reflection of culture and environment. In *Barahmasa* folk songs of Bhojpuri we find that time reflects apprehensions and celebrations of agricultural society. Agriculture is not only an occupation, it is a culture and time flows through these cultural terrains. Rainy season has special place in agricultural society. *Chaturmasa* songs vividly describe the nature during the month of *Asadh, Savan, Bhado* and *Kuar*. Many *Barahmasa* songs also describe different activities related to agriculture during different months of the year.

The tradition of *Barahmasa* was found in Sufi and Bhakti poets. *Barahmasa* is believed to be derived from the tradition of *ritu-varnan* of Sanskrit Poets. Tulsi, Sur and many other classical poets have composed *Barahmasas*. These classical poets sometimes depict the scenic beauty of nature while at other times they are interested in exploring the deeper layers of human nature. *Barahmasa* songs of classical poets starts with the month of Chaitra or Chait. Contrary to these classical poets, most of the *Barahmasa* songs composed by women start with the month of *Asadh*. Women also describe the scenic beauty of nature. However, most of the time they express their grief and sorrow which they face in the absence of their husbands. The following *Varahmasa* (translated version) vividly describes interaction between nature and culture.

Pratham Maas Asadh He Sakhi, Saji Chalela Jaldhar Ho

*The first month is Aasadh, the stream of water is flowing*⁵⁴

Umadi Ghumadi Meh Barsan Lage, Bhiji Gaili Lami Kesh Ho

Clouds have gathered in the sky, and my long hairs have become wet

Savan He Sakhi Shabd Suhavan, Rimjhim Barsele Boond Ho

The word "Savan" gives the pleasure and the sky is drizzling

Sabke Balamua Rama Ghare Ghumi Aile, Hamro Balamua Pardesh Ho

⁵⁴ Ramnarayan Tiwari, *Bhojpuri Barahmasa Aur Chaturmasa*, Varanasi, Mahavir Press, 2016, p.82

The husbands of other women have returned while my husband is still in foreign country

Bhado He Sakhi Raini Bhayavan, Dooje Anhariya Raat Ho

The nights of Bhado are horrible, it is overcome by darkness

Malkaje Mare Rama, Thanka Je Danke, Sehu Dekh Jiyara Deray Ho

When lightning fall, the heart becomes frightened

Asin He Sakhi Aas Lagawli, Aas Na Poorle Hamar Ho

Ashwin month has also not fulfilled my wish

Aash Je Poorle Rama Kubri Savati Kera, Jin Kant Rakheli Lobhay Ho

It is Kubri⁵⁵ whose wish is fulfilled in this month, who has mesmerised my husband

Katik He Sakhi Pooran Mahina, Sabh Kare Ganga Snan Ho

In the month of Katik women are going to take bath in the holy river of Ganga

Sab Sakhi Pahire Rama Pat Se Pitambar, Ham Dhani Gudri Puran Ho

All my friends have worn yellow saris and I have worn an old sari

Aghan He Sakhi Ang Sohawan, Chahu disi Upjal Dhan Ho

In the month of Aghan paddy has grown, and the body is also looking beautiful

Chakwa Chakaia Rama Keli Karatu Hai, Se Dekhi Jiya Hulsay Ho

Chakva and Chakai are making love, and after seeing it my heart is getting pleasure.

Pos He Sakhi Os Pari Gaili, Bhiji Gaili Lami Kesh Ho

⁵⁵ It is believed that Kubri was maid of Kans with whom Krishna had affair. In rural society, the name is given to those women who are considered characterless.

In the month of Pus dew is condensing on my long hair

Choliya Je Bhije Rama Kat Katarwa Kera, Jovan Bhijela Anmol Ho

My blouse and breasts have become wet

Magh He Sakhi Aaye Basant Ritu Rahi, Gaili Jaad Ab Sesh Ho

In the month of Magh, Basant has come

Sab Sakhi Sute Rama-Apna Balmu Sange Hamra Balmu Pardesh Ho

All women are sleeping with their husbands

And my husband is still in the foreign country

Barahmasa generally starts with the month of Asadh. It is against the traditional calendar which starts with the month of Chaitra. With the very first line, women attack on the traditional notion of time. Asadh is the month when rainy season starts, and in the absence of male members they have to face a lot of difficulties in this month. Generally roofs of huts start pouring in the rainy season and women cannot repair their roof because they are not allowed to do it.

Savan brings pleasure. Women play on *jhoola* and they sing *Kajri* songs. In the month of Bhado the rainy season is at its peak and all roads and subways are submerged in water. Women are not able to walk outside their home. The lightning in the dark night of Bhado makes the situation worst. In the month of Bhado women face the scarcity of food and vegetables. They cannot buy anything as village roads are submerged. Nature becomes cruel for these women in the month of Bhado, and this cruelty is further increased by the absence of their husbands.

Image No. 2.5 Kajri Dance in the Month of Savan



Source: Jargon Junction Blogs (2017), Available at: "<http://www.jagranjunction.com/2017/07/19/o-kajri-come-once-in-this-monsoon/>."

In almost all Barahmasas women talk about separation, anxiety for their husbands, or they talk about their repressed sexuality. It seems that time becomes the manifestation of the repressed sexuality. The repression of sexuality is due to colonial structure. However, songs of pre-colonial era also talk about separation of man and woman. Surdas's *Bhramargeet* talks about separation of *Gopis* from Krishna. Many Barahmasa songs still recite the name of Surdas, however the language shows that these songs have been composed by Bhojpuri speaking people. The pain of separation increased in the colonial period. And in almost all genre of songs women can be found lamenting for their husbands who had left them to earn their livelihood in Calcutta. For women time and pain become inseparable. Time changes, seasons change but their pain is static, only intensity of the pain changes.

In Barahmasa and Chaumasa songs time becomes the manifestation of repressed sexual desire. In one of the songs a woman asks "where has my kanhaiya gone in the month of Asadh?" She says that in the month of Savan the bed of flowers is biting like a poisonous snake. The woman further says that in the month of Chait she has become a cuckoo and

wandering around for her love⁵⁶. Another song describes the change in the body of a woman with the change of months. As it seems that time is embedded in her body. In many Barahmasa songs women describe their different stages of pregnancy. Time is seen through the lens of gender.

Jeth Mas Baba Mor Biahlan Asadh Bunwa Tapkela Re

(In the month of Jeth I got married, In Asadh the rain starts)

Savan Saiya Sej Sutli Bhadua Deh Garuawela Re

(In Savan I slept with my husband, and in Bhado my body became heavy)

Kuar Me Garabh Janailan Katik Dehiya Dhamkela Re

(In Kuar I felt pregnancy, In Katik the body starts burning)

Aghan Piya Suni Pawlan Manhi Manwa Hulsela Re

(In Aghan my husband came to know about my pregnancy, and he became happy)

Puswa Me Baithlo Na Ja La Uthlo Na Ja La Re

(In the month of Pus I was not able to sit or stand)

Maghwa Basant Manaila Fagun Rang Ghor La Re

(In Magh I celebrated Basant, In Fagun I prepared colour)

Chait Me Babua Janamle Baisakh tha Chhathiyo Pujila Re

(In the month of Chait the baby was born and in Baisakh we celebrated his *chhathi* ritual)

In the above folk song the baby was born in the month of Chaitra. Chaitra has religious importance and it is believed that Lord Ram was born in this month. In folk songs myths and realities merge into each other, the line between mythical time and real time is also blurred. In many folk songs, using the story of Krishna and *gopis* women express their own suffering. Mythical and non-rational language are unacceptable in public sphere and therefore the voice of these women is repressed. Nancy Fraser rightly points out that non-rational language should also be accepted in public sphere to make it inclusive.

⁵⁶ Bhojpuri Barahmasa Aur Chaturmasa, p.43

Sometimes Barahmasa and Chaturmasa songs are also sung by saints and religious persons. In the rainy season Sadhus avoid travelling and they stay four months at one place. Veteran peasant leader Swami Sahjanand Sarswati who himself was a *Dandi-swami* has severely criticized the inert behaviour shown by saints during the rainy season. However the inertness shown by saints was the result of environmental and geographical conditions. During the stay of *Chaturmasa* saints felt separated from their *Ishtdevs* and they composed beautiful songs in their memory. Saint Shivdas says in his *Chaumasa* that his *ishtdev* is not far away, if someone concentrates upon him, he can meet with him very easily.

Balam mor chhaye videswa re, ki rahi-rahi jiya ghabrai

(My lord/ishtdev/husband is in a foreign country)

Chadhat asadh gadh mohe lage, ghan ghamand ghahray liyo

(With the arrival of Asadh I feel serious, the proud of clouds have been washed away)

Bijuri chamak rahi chahu oriya acharaj ajab dekhay re

(Lightning falls everywhere, and it shows the miracle of the world)

Sawan shok nashawan sajni hame kaho tarsay loy

(Sawan removes all sorrows, why I am not getting pleasure?)

Sabh sakhi jhule rang hindola, mohi taj gayo paray re

(All sakhies are playing on jhoola, they have left me)

Bhado virah badh me baithi , jiya bude utray loy

(In Bhado the feeling of separation is increasing, heart is drowning up and down in the sea of the emotion)

Madan mahip amaki dam saje kar sar chap chadhay re

(Kamdev(the lord of love) has raised his arrow)

Lagat kuar shard ghas chhayo, darad dusah apnay loy

(In the month of Kuar the pain has increased)

Aap piya sautan sang roye, hamri sudh bisray re

(My ishtdev you are with other woman, you have forgot me)

Kahai Shivdas aas sab chhode niyati vitan badhaye lo

(Saint Shivdas says leave all hopes)

Jnyan lagay dhyan dhari dekho piya pas mili jaye

(Remember your lord! You will find him)

Saint Shivdas depicts bhakta as a *virahni* (a separated woman) and *ishtdev* as lover. It seems that these metaphors come from the fusion of bhakti and sufi traditions. Here we can see that the gender relation is embedded in *Bhakti* songs. However, these songs depict every *bhakt* as feminine, and thus celebrate femininity over masculinity. The idea of time, in Bhakti songs, tries to subvert gender relation because time itself has become the manifestation of femininity. Here time celebrates femininity over masculinity. Every bhakt is feminine regardless of her/his gender, age and social location. Thus by feminizing bhakti, bhakt-poets and singers abolished gender hierarchy in spiritual world and they offered a different ideology of gender.

Religion has both progressive and regressive ideas, it depends on us which idea we choose and propagate. In Buxar(Bihar) there was a saint who was popular among his followers as *Mamaji*. Mamaji belonged to that tradition of Bhakti cult which worships Sita as a sister. It is believed that this cult originated in Mithila, the birth-place of Sita, and spread at other places. For Mamaji, Sita had higher place than Rama and therefore in his sermons women enjoyed greater status than men. Mamaji used to organize *Ram-Sita* vivah once in a year. At the occasion of *Ram-Sita* vivah he arranged marriages for poor girls without any dowry. From rich to poor everyone belonging to the city used to participate in *Ram-Sita* vivah. Here we can see that mythichal time and real time merge into each other. For these poor girls the occasion of marriage for Lord Ram and Sita is also the occasion of their own marriage. The mythical event coincides with the real one and inseparable from personal memory. The merger of mythical and real time is not regressive in this particular case, it is emancipatory for poor people.

One dimension of time which cannot be captured by discourses is its *punctum* part- one's personal and emotional engagement with an event. In his book, *Camera Lucida* (1980), Roland Barthes mentions how a photo of his mother of her childhood evoked personal memory of his emotional attachment with his mother. Roland Barthes says that for others it was a photo of a fourteen year old girl, but for him it evoked memories of her mother when she was very old and looked like a child. Roland Barthes has vividly described his emotional attachment with his mother and he recollects emotional events of past. Though Roland Barthes has not described the *punctum* part of time and his discussion remains to be limited to analysing pictures and photos. However, his argument can be extended to analyse one's personal bonding with time. An event can be replaced for Barthes' photo. For others an event can be very simple and natural but for a person who is engaged with that particular event, it can have special importance to him. For example, the occasion of marriage, death and other events can have deeper impact on person. The other people cannot realize it easily. Discourses cannot capture this dimension of time. However, folk songs can capture the *punctum* part of time, atleast during the performance of these songs. One can find that when women sing sometimes they become emotional, the memory of certain events prick them. Folk songs talk about events of everyday with which women are emotionally attached. Discourses cannot capture the emotional intensity attached with particular events which have special importance in life of women and men.

Time and Timelessness

Some Bhojpuri Barahmasa songs composed by saints describe this world as *maya*. For these saints all events of this world are absurd. For them time itself is absurd, they want to transcend the worldly time. No doubt these saints are inspired by Sahankaracharya's philosophy of Vedant. The doctrine of *maya* is found in Upanishads, however it was later developed by Sankaracharya⁵⁷. The impact of Shankar is unparalleled on philosophy. Though philosophical system developed by him is a complex one, its impact can be found on folk songs, myths, narratives and also on art and literature. Many people have accused Shankar's philosophy of propagating escapism. However, these people have not read his philosophy thoroughly. Shankar accepts the existence of world in *vywhar* he rejects its existence only in *Parmarth*. His epistemology believes knowledge is always about a real

⁵⁷ See. Surendranath Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy.

objects⁵⁸. For him even illusion is also not possible without object. Unlike *Vijnyanvadi* he never believed that everything is a dream. His philosophy is also different from *Shunyavad*.

Brahmanand Das, a Bhojpuri saint, says in his *Barahmasa* that this body is a bubble which would be destroyed by a single drop of rain. For him this world is *maya*. He believes that this *maya* would be dispelled with the help of the great guru(*sadguru*). Despite regarding the world as *maya* these saints always preached to overcome sexual lust, anger, selfishness and egoist nature(See the last sentence of the following *Barahmasa*.)

*Chait mas chit chet bhayo moh maya laptai*⁵⁹

(In the month of Chaitra the mind has become conscious)

Abhi se Ram Ke Yad Karo aakhir tan mit jai

(Since now start remembering your God, at the last the body would be destroyed)

Baisakh ram se prem karo darmati sabh nasai

(In the Baisakh love! Rama, then bad thoughts would disappear)

Binu prem hari rijhat nahi koti karo upai

(Without love Hari does not become happy whatever you do)

Jeth mas jadta ko chhodo, chhodo kutumb sagai

(In the month of Jeth leave inertia, also leave your family and relatives)

Aakhir me kou sang na jaihe, matu pita au bhai

(at the last moment no one will give company to you)

Aail asadh sab din bital, maya moh fansai

(The month of Asadh has come, we are still trapped in Maya)

⁵⁸ M Hiryanana, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi.

⁵⁹ *Bhojpuri Barahmasa Aur Chaturmasa*, pp.2-3.

Yah tan hai pani bula, bund padat mit jai

(the body is like a water bubble which would be destroyed in a moment)

Savan me satsang karo tana, barkhat param suhai

(In Savan one should attend sermons of saints, which would feel pleasant)

Jo koi santan sang karai aawa gaman mit jai

(Whoever will attend these sermons, he would be get liberation from the cycle of death and birth)

Katik karam kar man re tan ki karat safai

(In the month of Katik wash your body⁶⁰)

Kam krodh mad lobh chhadi ke, charan saran lapitai

(Leave sexual lust, leave anger and greed, go to the feet of your God)

Aghan agam satguru pratham se sheet parat adhikai

(In the month of Aghan The importance of Guru is increased, the environment has become cool)

Jadta jaad lagat ba tan ko kawan uhan chahupai

(Winter is inert, who will help us to reach there)

Poos mas tan kaanpan lage, chauthapan niarai

(In the month of Poos the body is shivering, and the fourth stage of Life(Sanyas) has come.)

Tinopan tu khel gawayo, ab kahe pachhitai

(You have destroyed the third-fourth of your life, now why do you feel regret for your action?)

Magh, maas muh baye badha, badha jo muh bai

⁶⁰ In the month of Katik there is a tradition of having bath in the pious river of Ganga.

(In the month of Magh problems have come)

Ek din panja lagi bagh ke, kehu na hot sahai

(One day The tiger(Death) will hit with its paws, that day no one will help you)

Fagun Fag macho satguru sang, man ke rang banai

(In the month of Fagun change the colour of your heart with the help of your Teacher)

Aasah trishna chhadi jagat ke guru se lao lagai

(Leave all hopes and and love your Guru!)

Brahmanand Das pad gawat, barah maas bitai,

(After twelve month Brahmanand Das is singing Barahmasa)

Kaam, krodh, mad aur lobh sakal dosh miti jai

(Sexual lust, anger, ego and greed all will be washed away)

Materialists will ridicule the philosophy of Vedant. However, the philosophy of Advait Vedant might prove emancipatory if it would have been used to bridge social and cultural differences. In Vedant philosophy, the difference between self and other collapses. Many philosophers of Vedant schools treat men and women as equal. Regarding historical time as *maya* by Vedant can be used to resolve historical conflicts and to show that mankind has a greater purpose.

Conclusion: Folk songs show that there is an inter-relation between gender, work and time. The division of work helps to constitute gender in a particular hierarchy. Most of the time, work is coercive for women and they express their reluctance or resistance through the help of folk songs. Work and sexuality/ discussion on sex go hand-in-hand in the village society. The disjuncture between work and sex is a modern phenomenon where sex is seen as opposite to work. In folk songs, time itself becomes the manifestation of sexual desire. Different genders have different notions of time. Time is a cultural construct and thus dominant groups try to universalize their values, norms, practices and beliefs through the notion of time. However, marginalised groups do not

always accept the dominant notion of time. They have their own notion of time which can have emancipatory potenti

CHAPTER-3

GENDER, CASTE AND SEXUALITY IN BHOJPURI FOLK SONGS

Many non-Bhojpuri speaking people regard Bhojpuri songs as obscene, abusive and full of sexist comments. Manager Pandey, a literary critic of Marxist tradition, thinks that obscenity in folk songs is a recent phenomenon⁶¹. He argues that these songs became obscene because earlier folk songs were composed by women while new songs are composed by men. Contrary to his argument one can easily find that “obscenity” and the language of sexuality was present in songs of both women and men. These songs were composed long before the emergence of music industry. Many *Chaita* and *Poorvi* songs which were prerogative of men were replete with sexist idioms. No doubt emergence of a big market of Bhojpuri music has its impact on Bhojpuri songs and it will be discussed in the chapter. Obscenity is a social and cultural construct and instead of talking about good and evil in the culture I would try to explore the complex relationship between gender, caste and sexuality.

Metaphorical constitution of Gender

Like poetry Bhojpuri songs often use different type of metaphors to make distinction between women and men. Through metaphors these songs try to make a distinction between thought, action, sexual behaviour, physical appearance of men and women. By using different metaphors a corporeal schema is constructed in which body of man is always superior to that of women. In this androcentric corporeal schema the body of man is always stronger than that of woman, the former is always an active agent while the latter is regarded as passive and inert. In many songs a woman is represented through the metaphor of flower while a man is represented as beetle. Our mind is so structured through everyday language that these metaphors appear natural and unconsciously with the help of these metaphors we normalize corporeal schema that is totally unscientific and biased. These metaphors have become part of our everyday language and they constitute our commonsense. At first glance, nothing appears wrong in representing woman’s body through the metaphor of flower but a deeper analysis show that through this metaphorical representation woman is represented as a passive object whose maximum capacity is to lure men.

⁶¹ Interview with Manager Pandey on 5 May 2016

One of Bhojpri songs represents woman as the moon and man as the Sun⁶². In Indian literature moon has always been considered as having the property of coolness. It is believed that herbs get nutrition from the moon-light. Though in one of Vedic hymn the moon has been represented as fearless as the Sun- Yatha Suryasch Chandrascha Na Vibhito Na Rishyatah/ Ava Me Pran Ma Vibhe. It seems that the moon was not always attributed to feminine quality. According to some myths Brihaspati's wife Tara eloped with lunar God⁶³. It has also been said that lunar God was married with 27 daughters of Daksha. The gradual feminization of moon can be traced in literature. However it will not serve our purpose. My intention is only to acknowledge the fact that every metaphor has its own geneology and the meaning of metaphors varies with time and space. For example, in the oeuvre of Muktibodh, Moon is the symbol of capitalism which protects the interests of owls, bats and jackals⁶⁴. To undo gender one requires exploring the alternative usages of metaphors.

If a metaphor carries a particular meaning it does not mean that it cannot signify other meanings. Through the help of long linguistic and literary tradition, a society produces some familiar metaphors which signify in a particular direction. Through the help of these grid of metaphors gender is made intelligible. The constitution of gender can be understood only by deconstructing these metaphors which has shaped our social habitus. In one of the Bhojpuri songs the fairness of a woman is compared with the brightness of Moon⁶⁵. In many songs the face of bridegroom has been described as beautiful as the Moon. The imposition of gender on these celestial objects by singers is a two-way process. On the one hand they impose their gender ideology on inert objects and on the other hand they create a language which helps to construct gender hierarchy. In one of play- songs of children moon has been regarded as maternal uncle of children. Here again we see that Moon is a relative from matrilineal side. Chanda-Mama of children loses its meaning when they become young and every beautiful woman becomes *chandramukhi*.

A Bhojpuri song says the bridegroom is like the sun and the bride is like the moon. The difference between two genders has been compared with the difference between the

⁶² The song says, "Chand Aisan Ladho Suruj Aisan Banra Re" See, Sri HansKumar Tiwari, Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, Bihar Rashtra Bhasha Parishad, Patna, 2000, p.270.

⁶³ This myth comes in many texts, a similar story is also found in Mahabharat

⁶⁴ See, Gajanand Madhav Muktibodh, *Chand Ka Muh Tedha Hai*

⁶⁵ The song says, "Goriya Ke Chand Ke Anjoriya Niyan Gor Badu Ho"

properties of two celestial objects. It would be interesting to explore the effects of objects on epistemology and linguistics. This object oriented linguistics can unfold the process of linguistic constitution of gender. Many actions which are attributed to a particular gender is also linguistically expressed through modification in the property of objects. In a Bhojpuri song, a bridegroom plucks a *supari* in the garden of his father-in-law and he twists the branch of *supari*'s tree(Arica Nut)⁶⁶. The whole song complains the behaviour of the bridegroom-the way which he plucked *suparies*. Bridegroom's act of the twisting the branch of the tree is a metaphor which emphasizes his masculine character.

The occasion of the marriage emphasizes the gender distinction because the very concept of marriage was based on the opposition of genders. The same-sex marriage has not social acceptance in the society. At the time of marriage, the line making the distinction between "opposite" genders becomes sharp. There are various cultural tools through which this distinction is sharpened and one of these cultural tools is the genre of Shiv-Vivah songs. The lord Shiva has more masculine feature than lord Rama, and it is the explanation of the fact that while in other genre of songs Lord Ram is more popular, in the genre of marriage songs it is lord Shiva around which the whole story is inter-woven. A Bhojpuri song says-

Purain Paat Par Sutali Gaura dei

(*Gauri is sleeping on the leaves of lotus*)

Dekhli Sapan Ajgut he

(*She saw a surprising dream*)

Tolawa Paroswa Ke Tuhu Mor Gotini, Sapana ke karana Vichar he

(*She is sharing her dream with women of her village*)

Kawna Desh Bajan Ek Bajela Kekar Hokhela Viah he

(*Where the musical instruments are being played? Who is going to be married?)*

Morang Desh Bajan Ek Bajela Sivji Ke Hola Viah He

⁶⁶ *Bhojpuri SanskarGeet*, p.249. *Supari* is not grown in Bhojpuri speaking area. Folk songs construct its own geography, and flora fauna mentioned in folk songs are not necessarily belong to that region.

(In Morang land⁶⁷ musical instruments are beng played and Lord Shiva is going to marry)

Basha Bail Shiv Palki Banawlan , Bhut-Baital Bariyat He

(The Basha Ox is his Palki and ghosts are coming in his marriage procession)

Dui sau sahas saanp pithi par lotela, sakhi sab gail derai he

(Two hundred thousand snakes are scrawling on his back, all friends of Gauri felt scared)

Parichhan chali bhaili Sasu A Madagin, Saanp Chhodela fufkar he

(When the mother-in-law came to perform the ritual of parichhawan , A snake hissed at her)

Lodhwa Patak Sasu Ghar Me Samili , Lei Gaura Thokeli Kewar He

(The mother-in-law threw the Lodha(which is used for Parichhawan) and locked herself in the room.)

The song helps to constitute and differentiate genders in a dramatic way. The Gauri has been depicted as sleeping on the petals of lotus to emphasize her feminine nature. The Shiva comes in his dream as the *opposite* of her self. She finds her *other* in the masculine character of Lord Shiva. It is interesting to find out that Lord Shiva's masculinity is constructed through the help of his juxtaposition with Ox and snakes. In many other songs Shiva has been depicted as having ash on the whole body. The juxtaposition with objects (ash) and non-human beings (Ox and snakes) helps to constitute the masculine character of the Lord Shiva. In the body of Shiva there is nothing which will help to essentialize his masculine character therefore his masculinity is constituted through the help of objects and non-human beings and supernatural beings whose existence is outside his body. Lord Shiva's confrontation with his mother-in-law is also dramatic. His mother-in-law runs away after seeing him and locks herself in a room. What appears at first glance as a natural outcome might be the result of cultural disciplining. By imposing

⁶⁷ In Bhojpuri songs we find reference to Morang Desh. It is believed that it was centre of commerce and business. However, scholars have different opinions about its present location.

extra-masculine gender on Shiva/man the self of Gauri/ woman is constituted. Shiva becomes the constitutive outside of feminine character of Gauri . Representation of self and other is always in relation to each other. Gender is also a relational category. Through talking others(Shiva / Man) the self of Gauri/ woman is constituted. Through invoking Shiva in marriage songs gender is also “invoked”. Before marriage a girl might live in happy limbo of his/her non-identity. However, at the occasion of marriage the gender is imposed on her by various methods of cultural disciplining. The girl’s choice is very limited, generally at the occasion of marriage, it is expected that the girl should not talk loudly, should not walk outside her house, she is not allowed to laugh for a longer duration.

It is worthwhile to mention that the first wave of feminism(Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century) thought that sex and gender are different . Simon de Beauvoir(*The second sex*, 1949) believed that sex is biological while gender is cultural. Judith butler(*Gender Trouble*, 1990) has shown that sex is not the foundation at which gender is constructed. Judith Butler believes that sex is also shaped by discourses and power relations. In this chapter our focus would be limited to the constitution of gender however the discussion will intersect the issues of sex, gender and sexuality. In the case of Shiv – vivah songs we find that the masculinity of Shiva is constituted without mentioning his sexual organ. However, it is well known fact that Shiv- linga is worshipped in north Indian villages. By invoking Shiva in marriage songs, an indirect relationship between sexual organ and the gender is established in a subtle way. Though scholars have shown that there is not any direct link between sex and gender the lacuna between sex and gender is fulfilled here by a grid of narratives which manifest in folk songs. For an outsider who is not acquainted with the practice of ling-pooja, sex and gender will seem segregated in Shiv-vivah songs but after paying a little attention on different cultural practices he will find that sex and gender blur in each other. This relationship between sex and gender is not pre-given, it is a cultural construct. The body is not natural it is shaped by power-relations which are implicated in culture.

In one of Bhojpuri songs a woman is going to market and the king becomes attracted towards her. He asks , “O woman! Where your body has been moulded? Which goldsmith has made you?” The woman replies that “neither my body has been moulded anywhere nor the goldsmith has made me, my mother and father gave birth to me.” The woman thinks that her body is not unique while for the king it is special. The body does not lie

outside the cultural grid. Various cultural techniques are also used to mould body in the way which conforms to normalized gender pattern. In Bhojpuri region there is a popular saying which claims that womanhood is destroyed by eating sweets and manhood is destroyed when men eat pickles⁶⁸. Food habits are imposed since childhood; teenage girls are not allowed to drink milk while boys are forced to drink milk. Boys are trained in stick-fighting, *wrestling* and other martial games. These cultural practices which try to normalize body always get inspiration from the existing language and its metaphors. In one of the Kahar's songs a man has been seduced by a woman belonging to nearby city. When his wife asks how the woman looks like, the man answers that the woman is as slim as the leaf of betel is, she is as knotty as cloves are, and her waist is as soft as fresh greenery is⁶⁹. These metaphors shape the psychology of common people and normalize the "ideal body" for different genders. Any transgression is regarded as abnormal and ridiculed by people.

The genre of Chaita songs is more or less centred on Woman's breast. Male members of village sing these songs in the month of Chaitra. In one of the Chaita songs, a yadav-woman is going to sell curd to the city of Mathura. Suddenly Krishna comes and holds his *aanchal*.

Aaho Rama Chhoti Moti Gwalin Hai Paniharin Ho Rama

(She is a small Gwalin)

Chali Gaili, Mathura Nagar Dahi Baechan Ho Rama

(She has gone to sell the curd to the city of Mathura)

Aaho Rama Ah Paar ganga Oh Par Jamun a Ho Rama

(This side is Ganga and that side is Yamuna)

Bichwa Me Pari Gaile Retwa Ho Rama

(The dust lies in-between)

Aaho Rama Tah Bich Kanhar Dhaile Acharwa Ho Rama

⁶⁸ The phrase says, "Gail Marad Jaun Khaye Khatai, Gail Mehraru Jaun Khaye Mithai"

⁶⁹ Krishnadev Upadhyay, *Bhojpuri Lokgeet Part-2*, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Prayag, P.301.

(In the meanwhile, Kanhaiya caught aanchal of the Sari)

Tahi Biche , Aanchar Dhari Belmavle Ho Rama

(He is making me late(for home))

Aahu Rama Chhodu Chhodu Krishnaji Aancharwa Ho Rama

(O Krishna please leave my aanchal)

Pari Jaihe Dahi Ke Chhitikwa Ho Rama

(You will get spots of the curd on you)

Aaho Rama Tore Lekhe Gwalin Dahi Ke Chitikwa Ho Rama

(O Gwalin! For you it is curd)

Hamra Lekhe Barsela Atar Gulabwa Ho Rama⁷⁰

(For me it is the perfume of rose)

In another song a prince catches the breast of a woman when she asks to lift her water-pot on her head.

Aaho Rama Koharwa Ke Kahra Garhela Gharilwa Ho Rama

(This pot has been made by the potter of which place?)

Kahwa Ke Sundari Hai Paniharin Ho Rama

(This beautiful paniharin belongs to where?)

Aaho Rama Gokhula Ke Koharwa Garhela Gharilwa Ho Rama

(The potter of Gokhula has made the pot.)

Mathura Ke Sundari Hai Paniharin Ho Rama

(This beautiful Paniharin is from Mathura)

Aaho Rama Gharila Bhariya Bhari Aarara Chadhawli Ho Rama

⁷⁰ Bhojpri Lok Geet, p.212

(After filling the pot she palced it on the bank)

Kehu Nahi, Gharila Mor Algawe Ho Rama

(No one is helping me pick up the pot.)

Aaho Rama Ghumat Firat Aile Raja Ke Kuwanrwa Ho Rama

(Wandering around has come the prince)

Ek Hathe Gharila Algawe Ho Rama

(With one hand he held the pot)

Aaho Rama Ek Hathe Gharila Algawe Ho Rama

(O Rama with one hand he held the pot.)

Duje Hath Jovan Dhai Belmawe Ho Rama

(He held her breast with other hand making her late for home)

Aaho Rama Chhodu Chhodu Kuwanrji Hamro Jobanwa Ho Rama

(O Prince! Please leave my breast and let me go.)

Ghare Badi Sasu Nanadi Bairaniya Ho Rama⁷¹.

(Mother-in-law and sister in law are waiting, they are scoundrels)

In these songs woman is reduced to her body and further her womanhood is reduced to a particular part of the body. According to one of the songs a woman has lost her *bindi* at the bank of the river and she is requesting the boatman to help her in finding the *bindi*. The boatman asks what he will get as reward. The woman offers her necklace however the boatman rejects it. Finally the boatman says, “O woman! You have two oranges and give me one of them.” The woman says referring to her husband that one who has spent lakhs of rupees has also not tasted these fruits and she threatens her that she would get both his hands chopped off.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* pp.221-22.

In these songs the body of woman always faces the threat of aggression. The body of woman is vulnerable because of its difference with the body of man. It is remarkable that the difference itself is constructed through cultural idioms and narratives. The metaphor of orange normalizes the difference between the chest and the breast. The difference which is constructed through cultural narratives is internalized by both men and women. In one of the Kahar's song a woman goes to the shop of Bhandbhooja to fry gram. As soon as she starts frying the gram her *aanchl* slips, and after seeing her breast the Bhandbhooja lost his consciousness and fell down.

Ser Bhar Chanwa Sasu Jokhi Dihli, Nandi Napi Lihli

(The mother-in-law and siser-in-law gave me one ser gram)

Mor Balamua Ho, Sanwro Chaleli Ghunsari

(The woman is going to ghunsari.)

Dabila Chalawli Ta Chhotal Acharwa

(When she was frying the gram , the aanchal slipped)

Mor Balamua Ho , Gondwa Giral Murjhai

(The Gond fell down)

Ki Tora Gondwa Re Aili Jada Judiya

(Not clear)

Mora Balamua Ho Ki Tora Bathela Kapar

(Is your head aching?)

Nahi Mora Sanvro re Aile Jada Judiya

(Not clear)

Mora Balamua Ho, Nahi Mora Btahela Kapar

(My head is not aching)

Tahro Surati Dekhi Ham Murchhaili

(I lost my consciousness after seeing your beauty)

In the above song it is clear that the woman believes that her breast makes her body different from the body of a man. This belief is internalized through a long process of *encounter* with her *own* culture.

The inter-relation between gender, caste and sexuality

In the above songs one finds that at the moment of sexual harassment women react differently to persons belonging to different social locations. When lord Krishna harasses (as he holds the *aanchal* of a woman) the lower caste woman requests him to stay away from her body otherwise his cloths will become dirty due to the spots of curd. In this particular case Roland Barthes(*Mythologies,1957*) argument seems right that myths universalize the values and norms of bourgeoisie society⁷². The myths of Krishna Leela universalize that gender ideology which believes that as a sexual partner woman is always passive. The other song talks about the molestation of the woman by a prince. Here again the woman shows less resistance and says that she has to reach her house where her scoundrel mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are waiting. Folk songs often legitimize kingships and thus they also give legitimacy to the dominance of upper castes who are present in villages as representatives of local kings. The other instance of sexual harassment discusses the verbal abuse made by the boatman. No doubt the woman belongs to upper caste because caste has been transcended in her prosperity. The woman threatens the boatman that she would have his hands chopped off. In the song the upper caste woman seems more masculine than the lower caste boatman. The ideology of gender is always embedded in caste relations.

The other instance where Bhandbhooja lost his consciousness after seeing the breast of the woman is also remarkable. Earlier in the case of the prince the breast was vulnerable to the aggressive behaviour of the prince. But in the case of the Bhandbhooja, the woman indirectly becomes aggressor by unconsciously showing her breast to Bhandbhooja. It is interesting to find out that men belonging to lower castes are considered as feminine by women of upper castes and sexual behaviours of these men represented in folk songs also conform to the gender ideology which believes upper castes are more masculine in comparison to persons belonging to lower caste. Through the help of infinite cultural

⁷² See. Roland Barthes, *Mythology*.

narratives the notion of masculinity and femininity are constructed which also conform to caste hierarchy.

Overtly or covertly the identity of caste is present in folk songs and it often intersects with the identity of gender. In Lorikkayan, a famous Bhojpuri ballad, Lorik -the mythical hero of Yadvas – requests his mother at the time of his birth that the Chamar woman should not be allowed to touch him. Generally Chamar women cut umbilical cord of a new born child⁷³. However, these myths and narratives legitimize the untouchability practiced by upper castes and middle castes. Lorik, the Yadav hero, kills Bethva Chamar⁷⁴. He also kills Harwa-Barwa brothers belonging to Dusadh caste⁷⁵. The Domraj of Katalpur is also killed by Lorik. These lower caste persons appear as villain in the story of Lorikayan. The inevitable victory of Lorik on these lower caste persons shows that the degree of masculinity conforms to caste hierarchy in the most of cultural narratives. Lorikayan is still sung by a group of male Ahirs(Yadav) and thus gender and caste hierarchy is reproduced and reconstituted at these cultural sites.

Other ballads also help to constitute caste and gender hierarchy in different ways. In Sorathi, at the time of her birth Sorathi, a semi-goddess, requests her mother not allow the Chamar woman to touch her body⁷⁶. The body of an upper caste woman is different from the body of a lower caste woman. The category of woman is not a coherent one and one need to focus on caste gender intersectionality. The famous feminist scholar Kimberley Crenshaw showed that a black woman is more vulnerable than a white woman. When a black woman is harassed it becomes difficult to analyze whether she has been harassed due to her race identity or due to her gender identity. The black woman is vulnerable from both sides due to the intersectionality of race and gender. Similarly, in Indian case, the lower caste woman stands in intersection of caste and gender and she is vulnerable from both sides. Folk songs capture the complex dynamics of caste gender intersectionality.

⁷³ Satyvrata Sinha, *Bhojpuri Lokgatha*, Hindustan Acedmy Alahabad, 1957, pp.259-266.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Bhojpuri Lokgatha*, pp.295-311.

How Caste is transcoded ?

Folk songs do not always discuss about caste overtly. Often it is discussed in covert and subtle way. Different layers of languages exist in folk songs. The caste is transcoded in money, prosperity and knowledge. In marriage songs women always compare bridegroom with the king of Kashi. The kingdom of Kashi belonged to Bhumihaar caste and it was not an old one in comparison to other kingdoms. However, in popular myth the King of Kashi is believed as the incarnation of Lord Shiva. In folk songs “The King of Kashi” signifies the dominance of the culture of upper caste. A Folksong says

Kahwa Ke Hathiya Singaral Aaweale, Kahawa ke jhinn lahas ji

Kahawa Ke Raja Re Viahan Aaweale, Hanthe Chawar Mukhe Pan ji

Bhojpur Ke Hathiy Singaral aaweale, Banaras Ke Jhinnlahas Ji

Are Kashi Ke Raja Biahn Aaweale, Hathe Chanwar Mukhe Paan ji

.....

Jhar Re Jharokha Chadhi Koshila Nirkheli, Aksar Aawe Sriramji⁷⁷

The presence of elephants, horses and precious jewels in folk songs tell much about the caste of its narrators. In the song, the way Kaushalya looks at Sriram through her windows also tells much about the relationship between caste and property. In Bhojpuri speaking areas only upper caste people live in big houses. Many lower caste people still live in huts made of earth and cow-dung. Similarly in many other songs the bridegroom has been depicted as wearing costly dresses. The marriage in folk songs represent the marriage of upper castes. Why caste is not overtly discussed in folk songs except some exceptional cases? The answer is simple-by transcoding caste in property, jewellery and mythical characters upper castes universalize their norms and values and they establish cultural hegemony on lower castes.

⁷⁷ Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet, pp.244-245.

Magic, Music and Sexuality

The inter-relation between magic and sexuality is an old one. Bajryan, the *tantric* Buddhist sect, popularized magic in Indian sub-continent. In the Eighth century many followers of Bajryan ,who were known as Siddhas , became active in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar⁷⁸. For Siddhas sex was an integral part of their rituals⁷⁹. And, it is said that The last Siddha Matsyendranath was indulged in sexual pleasure⁸⁰. With the rise of Gorakhnath, the disciple of Matsyendranath, the trend established by Siddhas turned upside down. Gorakhnath emphasized the need of *Brahmacharya* for salvation. Gorakhnath became a legend and many stories were woven around his life to show his magical power. The impact of Gorakhnath is unparallel and Gorakh became an integral part of folk culture. Gorakh was the founder of the Nath sect, however his disciples are known as *Yogis*.

Raja Bharthari and *Raja Gopichand* these two Bhojpuri ballads tell the stories of kings who became the followers of Gorakhnath. When Raja Bharthari decided to become the disciple of Gorakhnath her queen tried to stop him by using her power of *sat*⁸¹. Finally the queen put the condition that if Raja Bharthari will win the game of Chaupad he would be allowed to become the disciple of Gorakhnath. However, the queen was defeated in the game of *Chaupad* by Raja Bharthari with the blessings of Gorakhnath.

It seems that women did not lose their hope and they never wholeheartedly accepted this mythical defeat. Rural women turned the Gorakh's *yog* upside down. In Bhojpuri, there is a genre of folk song called Jog through which women try to control the sexuality and behaviour of men. A Bhojpuri song vividly describes how every persons and things from bridegroom's side have come under the influence of *Jog*. However, no one is aware about the influence of *Jog*.

Jog Kaise Lagi, Jog Kaise Lagi Re Mai Na Jano

Jog Mauri Lagi Jog Seha Lagi Re Mai Na Jano

Jog Chanan Lagi Jog Rori Lagi re Mai Na Jano

⁷⁸ Bachhan Singh, *Hindi Sahitya Ka Doosra Itihas*, New Delhi, Radhakrishna Prakashan, 2006, pp.27-32.

⁷⁹ Many authors have talked about sexual behaviour of Siddhas. Panch Makar was an integral part of their sect. See. Hajari Prasad Dwivedi, *Hindi Sahitya Ka Adikal*.

⁸⁰ It is believed that Gorakh himself composed the song-“Jag Machhandar Jag”

⁸¹ *Bhojpuri Lokgatha*, pp.321-330. It seems that *Sat* is the power of *Satitva*

Jog Kaise Lagi Re Mai Na Jano

Jog Sona Lagi Jog Moti Lagi Re mai Na Jano

Jog Kaise Lagi Re Mai Na Jano

Jog Hathi Lagi Jog Hauda Lagi Re Mai Na Jano

Jog Ghoda Lagi Jog Palki Lagi Re Mai Na Jano

Jog Dulha Lagi Jog Dulhin Re Mai Na Jano

*Jog kaise Lagi Re Mai na Jano*⁸²

In another song, the mother of bridegroom requests the mother of bride not to do *jog* to her son. However, the mother of the bride refuses her request and says that it is due to the influence of *Jog* her daughter will get respect in her in-laws' family. In one of songs a bride says that she will rule on her in-laws' family by the influence of *Jog*. Apart from *Jog* there is another genre of songs called *Tona* which is sung to save the bride and the bridegroom from evil effects of magicians. It seems that *Tona* is etymologically similar to Tantra. However, contrary to *Tantric* practices the genre of *Tona* is sung only for the limited purpose.

It can be argued that through *jog* illiterate women contested the ideology of Gorakhnath which was against the institution of marriage. Generally the sexuality of women is controlled by men. But in the genre of *Jog* songs women try to control the sexuality of men. Is it a revolt against patriarchal world or does it conform to patriarchal gender ideology? No doubt in *Jog* songs there is will to control the sexuality and behaviours of men by women but sometimes resistance becomes the acceptance of existing norms. In *Jog* songs women also try to mesmerize their grand-mother and sisters-in-law so that they help her in household chores. One woman wants the subjugation of the other woman.

⁸² *Bhojpuri Sanskar Geet*, p.328.

The Impact of Music Industry on Bhojpuri songs

During the Eighties Bhojpuri speaking area became market for new emerging Music industry. Many songwriters and composers were hired who were earlier writing for brothels. It is true that art and music were appreciated only in brothels. However, it would be wrong to think that every musician working with prostitutes were not aware with social problems. During the first half of the twentieth century Mahendar Misir a versatile genius-poet, musician, lyricist- was also writing for prostitutes. It is said that his songs were popular in all brothels from Varanasi to Calcutta. Mahendar Misir is known as *Purvi-samrat* and it is said that the genre of Purvi songs was creation of his mind⁸³. In *purvi*- songs the pain and suffering of women have been depicted whose husbands had migrated to Calcutta in search of better opportunities. Purvi songs were not obscene and it were so touching that soon it became integral part of folk tradition. Later Bhikhari Thakur also drew much on Purvi-songs in his *Videsia* theatre.

To fulfil the demand of brothels Mahendar Misir composed many erotic songs. And he can be regarded as the father of modern item-songs. Despite the fact that seventy years have passed since his death(1948) , many of his erotic songs are still popular among prostitutes who perform dance at the occasion of marriage. In Basukha village many prostitutes have still preserved rare songs composed by Mahendar Misir. In Bhojpuri speaking area only few people know about Mahendar Misir but everyone loves those songs which were written by him. “Patna Se Vaida Bolai Da Najra Gaili Guiyan”-the song has been sung by many singers and it is still popular. The other song which is still popular in brothels is-“Anguri me Dasle Biya Naginiya Re nanadi diyara jara da/ Nase Nase Uthela Lahariya Re Nanadi diyara jara da...Aapan Bhaiya Ke Jaga Da...Kahata Mahendar Nanadi Piyawa Bula Da Unhi se Utri e lahariya diyara jara da...”

A brief discussion on Mahendar Misir is necessary to understand the fact that erotic songs are not a new creation of music industry. What music industry did a new thing was that it flooded the market with erotic and obscene songs. The main consumer of these songs were truck drivers. Many songs were composed in which the body of the woman was described as a vehicle⁸⁴. Generally these songs were extremely vulgar. These erotic

⁸³ See. *A Discussion in The Memory of Purvi-Samrat MhendarMisir*-a documentary made by Manikant Thakur.

⁸⁴ One song says, “Badi maja aawela egarah number gadi pe”

songs also became popular among prostitutes and soon it spread in villages through orchestra groups. This culture of vulgarity and obscenity was resisted by villagers. Old people still not allow their children to listen this kind of music. However, these songs became popular in entire Hindi-belt due to the mobility of truck drivers. Now for many non-Bhojpuri speaking people Bhojpuri is known for its obscene songs.

I have mentioned that obscenity was always present in Bhojpuri songs. The genre of Chaita songs and many women's songs would be considered as obscene though the parameter of other cultures. Songs like *Chaitas* are limited to male audience and songs like *Matikod* are limited to only women audience. While many marriage songs (like *Gali songs*) which are obscene are sung in the mixed gender crowd. However, these songs have cultural legitimacy and they are sung at the particular occasion for particular audiences. The problem with market songs produced by music industry is that these songs can be played anywhere and at anytime. In public transportation vehicles people often feel offended by this kind of music. The audience finds itself as passive and he is forced to listen the music which is not desired. The main problem with these market songs is that they have not cultural legitimacy and they do not fit in grand narratives of culture. Therefore people regard it as obscene. Only at one occasion, at the occasion of marriage, these songs are not considered offensive when it is sung by prostitutes. Thus in a particular culture what is obscene at one occasion might turn normal at other occasion.

Can these market- songs produced by music industry be regarded as folk songs? The answer is no. Because folk songs are integral part of culture and they are associated with rituals and cultural practices. They are sung at special occasions and thus they are part of meta-narratives of a particular culture. Though culture is not closed and it is always expansive. There is possibility that these market songs would also become the part of folk songs. Till the date market songs exist only at the periphery of Bhojpuri culture(s).

Music as a Site of Cultural Encounter

When people encounter with other culture they inevitably become ethnocentric. After having encounter with other cultures people always fall in the trap of reductionism. When for the first time a non-Bhojpuri speaking people listens a vulgar song produced by music industry, he immediately thinks that Bhojpuri culture is a vulgar culture. Cultural encounter often happens at selective sites and people become judgemental without

knowing much nuances about that culture. Market songs leave an impression on the mind of people that Bhojpuri society is a society of sexual- freedom. The truth is opposite to this illusion.

After hearing a Bhojpuri song on YouTube one of my Bengali friends said, “These people are senseless, they are molesters by birth, they have not any culture, their upbringing is wrong. They cannot produce a good literature ...the best they can do is to write these vulgar songs⁸⁵.” My friend’s first intimate encounter with Bhojpuri culture happened at the site of social media through music. She does not know that these songs are not integral part of Bhojpuri culture. Her reductionist view of culture is due to her unwillingness to see the culture in its *totality*.

My friend’s knowledge about Bhojpuri culture is also very limited. She thinks that Bhojpuri speaking people are illiterate and ignorant. The perception suddenly changes when one travels in Bhojpri speaking areas. These illiterate people know much about Sur, Tulsī, Kabir and other poets. Their everyday language is so vibrant that even the best literary mind would appreciate their communication skill. Till the nineties, in every village the text of *Ramcharitmanas* was recited everyday and people of all castes used to participate in it. These “illiterate” people often quote couplets of *Ramcharitmanas* in their everyday language. For example, when a rich man does something wrong, villagers quote *Ramcharitmanas*-“Unch Niwasu Neech Kartuti Dekh Na Sakhi Parai Bibhuti”. When someone accidentally meets to his friend he says-“Jehikar Jehi Par Satya Sanehu/ TehI Milahi Ati Kachhu Na Sandehu”. Once, in my village, two men were arguing about the behaviour of an ideal son. One of them said, a son should be like Lord Parshuram and he should cut the head of his mother if he is order by his father to do that.” The other person countered, “ A son should be like Lord Ganesha and he should happily offer his head for his mother.” The people who were present at that place were persuaded by the argument that Ganesh was a better son in comparison to Pashuram. Villagers use non-rational or mythical language but it does not mean that they are irrational. Non-rational/mythical language also possesses many progressive elements. Villagers also quote Kabirdas and followers of Kabirpanth still preach Kabir Bani.

My friend does not know that Kabirdas was from Bhojpuri region and Ravindranath Tagore also got impressed by his progressive views. How can we say that people having

⁸⁵ A perception survey on Bhojpuri Folk song in Jawaharlal Nehru University on 9 April, 2017.

command on the oeuvre of Tulsidas and Kabirdas are illiterate? Are they illiterate only because they cannot write? The binary of literate and illiterate is problematic and we should create a new word non-literate to understand the true potential of these people. Bhojpuri has not its own script, some Bhojpuri writers use Devnagri script. Educated people from Bhojpuri region prefer to write in Hindi. Ramchandra Shuka, Premchand, Namvar Singh and many other great scholars of Hindi literature come from Bhojpuri speaking areas.

My Bengali friend's allegation that Bhojpuri men are molesters by birth also shows her lack of sensibility towards other cultures. One of my friends told a story about an old man from Kathrai village of Bhojpur. His name was Durga Pandey who died some years ago. At the occasion of marriage, in *samyana*⁸⁶ a prostitute came to him and demanded some money from him. The old man replied that if she will call him Bhaiya (brother) then he will give all his money to her. His courage was appreciable because before his villagers he was ready to accept a prostitute as his sister even for a temporary period. Many men like Vishwanath, Mahendar Misir and Bhikhari Thakur wrote in Bhojpuri Language for the cause of women. Bhikhari Thakur, who was not educated, always raised the issue of gender. In his play Gabarghichor he shows that a child is not the property of his father. Bhikhari also raised his voice against discrimination with widows in Hindu society. His play, Betibechwa, strongly condemns the evil practice of daughter -selling which was prevalent in poor people of the region. The remarkable thing is that Bhikhari(1887-1971) was not educated and he raised these issues before the arrival of feminist movement(s) in India.

There has been a long tradition of revolutionary songs in Bhojpuri language. Naxalbari movement first reached in Ekvari village of Bhojpur. Though theory and praxis of Naxalite movement can be criticized, its struggle for agricultural labourers was unparalleled. During the Naxalite movement, many songs were composed which is still the source of inspiration for different revolutionary groups. Gorakh Pandey composed many revolutionary songs and these songs became so popular that they have become an integral part of the folk tradition. In Gorakh's songs women challenge patriarchal view and they have courage to fight with oppressive structure. In Jawaharlal Nehru University , when students from different states encounter with revolutionary Bhojpuri songs they

⁸⁶ The tent which is temporarily made for friends and family members of bridegroom.

become surprised with the emancipatory potential of Bhojpuri Language. Gorakh's song "Gulamiya Ab Ham Naahi Bajaibo Azadiya Hamke Bhavele" is still popular among students, peasants and labourers. Many other Bhojpuri songs are also popular in Ultra-left parties. "Jam Kara shasan ke Chakka, Balam Leke Lalka Pataka"-this song is still used for mobilization of people for protests and demonstrations. However, for different reasons music industry does not give space to these revolutionary songs. Left wing parties also show reluctance towards commercialization of these songs. Bhojpuri music has a broad spectrum and it has different colours, which colour becomes visible and which one becomes invisible it all depends on the context.

Conclusion: The chapter briefly discusses the constitutive power of language/ folk songs. It has been discussed how metaphors used in folk songs help to essentialize gender in a particular cultural context. It has also been highlighted that at the time of marriage the gender difference is sharpened through the help of *Shiv- Vivah* songs. Folk songs are also tool of cultural disciplining and they remind the different roles of respective genders.

An interrelation between gender, caste and sexuality has also been explored. In folk songs lower caste men often appear as less masculine in comparison to their upper castes counterpart. Gender relation is embedded in caste hierarchy. In folk songs sometimes caste is discussed overtly and at other times it comes in a subtle way. It has also been discussed how folk songs transcode caste into something else and thus easily universalize androcentric norms and values of upper castes. A brief discussion on the relation between magic and music shows how magic/music remains to be a site of contestation between different gender ideologies. Music is a gateway to culture, and it is the site where cultural encounter takes place. After hearing music we easily infer many conclusions about gender-relations and sexual practices of a particular culture. However, this easy inference is not free from ethnocentrism.

CONCLUSION

The binary of classical and folk is a construct of modernity. After enlightenment folk was regarded as emotional, irrational and regressive, and common people had no place in discourses, debates and deliberations. Antonio Gramsci accepted that common sense/perception of common people is of contradictory character having both progressive and regressive elements. India under aegis of colonial power reinforced the binary of folk and classical. Rituals, religion and philosophy were interpreted through the help of classical texts. And thus tradition, rituals and religious practices were made fixed, monolithic and homogenous which were earlier fluid, flexible and heterogeneous.

History writing also marginalised folk traditions. In the politics of Nation-making classical was celebrated over folk which proved a metonymic act. Folk traditions are good archives for writing history of gender, labour, caste, sexuality and stigmas. Power relation is embedded in folk traditions. Folk traditions talk about different type of social hierarchies. My study is limited to the tradition of folk songs in Bhojpur region and I have shown the interrelation between gender, caste, sexuality and power-relations. Folk songs discuss about different kind of social evils like child marriage, mismatched marriage, prostitution, domestic violence etc. In folk songs one can find the site of oppressions, at the same time there is also the voice of resistance.

Using folk songs as a source for history writing offers some challenges and opportunities. One cannot decide which song belongs to Bhojpuri region and which one has come from other territories. Songs and stories travel across culture and linguistic region. Many Bhojpuri songs are also found in Avadhi, Maghi and Maithili language with changed versions. At linguistic boundaries multiple languages are used. The penetration of Ramcharitmanas and Brajbhasa songs of Bhakti poets are deep in North Indian villages. Irrespective of their place of origin, popularity of these songs in Bhojpuri region tell much about ideological beliefs of common people.

Similarly many ballads like Alha, Sorathi and Bihula have come in Bhojpur from other regions. It is believed that Sorathi belongs to Saurashtra region(Gujarat), Alha represents the culture of Bundelkhand and Bihula is inspired from Bengali story. Alha tells the story of the medieval past where war were fought for pleasure. As a historian one should

explore why these stories remain popular in the region for centuries. Caste and gender hierarchy represented in these songs and ballads still match with mindset of common people. Recitation of these songs and ballads in everyday life helps to constitute and reconstitute caste and gender and thus these ballads and songs should not be seen only as sources, they are active agents of history. They make and unmake history.

Grierson and other colonial scholars tried to interpret these songs grammatically. Grammar became a new marker of linguistic identity. Grierson and other linguists tried to differentiate between grammar of Bhojpuri, Mathili, Avadhi, Braj and other languages. A historian should keep in mind that rural society cannot be ascribed a sharp linguistic identity. In Bhojpur region, *Ramcharitmanas* is recited everyday and this text belongs to Avadhi language, Many poems of Surdas and other saints are recited and they belong to different languages. People frequently use couplets of *Ramcharitmanas* in their everyday language. In a certain sense rural society can be regarded as a polyglot society. And only by addressing this polyglotism one can understand cultural exchanges that have been taking place for centuries.

Folk songs are also good archives for writing history of caste, stigmas, labour, gender and sexuality. However, one should be cautious about the fact that each and every song is not sung by all people. Some songs are sung by women, some are sung by men, some others belong to a particular caste group. For example, Sorathi is sung by lower castes, while Loriki is popular among Yadavs. Some songs represent culture of elite class and I have shown how caste is transcoded in folk songs. Caste is always transcoded into property, kingship, food-habits and religion. One should always be conscious about this transcoding of caste otherwise one cannot understand the inter-relation between caste, gender and sexuality.

To define linguistic boundary is also a challenging task. Some people believe that the language spoken in Chhotanagpur is also Bhojpuri language. Bhojpuri is not a standardised language and its different variants are found at different places. A popular saying believes that the taste of water changes after one *Kos* (a unit of distance) and language changes after five *Kos* (*Kos Kos pe badle pani/Panch Kos pe badle Bani*). Bhojpuri is spoken over a large territory and culture varies from place to place. Most of folk songs which has been used in the research has been collected from Bhojpur, Rohtas, Buxar(Bihar) and from Gazipur, Balia(Uttar Pradesh). Generalization made by these

songs cannot be applied to Chhotanagpur region or other places. Keeping all these facts in my mind I have reconstructed history of caste, gender, labour, stigmas and sexuality in Bhojpuri region.

In the first chapter I have shown that rituals are sites around which power is constituted and reconstituted. Rituals are not always the outcome of organised religion, they can develop freely in households. Rituals are not residue of past, they can be understood only in their own context(s). We cannot understand gender and caste without understanding complex nuances of rituals. Folk songs are integral part of rituals, and they themselves have become rituals. Every ritual has its own genre of songs. I have shown how Sohar songs, which are normally believed as the song of happiness which is sung at the occasion of the birth of child, help to constitute “barrenness” and “motherhood.” In folk songs the essence of womanhood is motherhood. A woman who cannot give birth to a child is seen as lesser woman. In villages, issueless women and men are considered as ill omen irrespective of their castes. Even a Brahman man or woman, who is issueless, is treated inhumanly. However, sometimes women also show disgust to motherhood.

The genre of Janev songs shows how an extremely exclusive ritual is made partly inclusive by different techniques. Only Dwij are allowed to perform sacred thread ritual. The ritual of sacred thread remained a site of contestation for a long time. Aryasamaj, which was partly influenced by the philosophy of Vedant, advocated the right for sacred thread rituals for Shudras. Due to the influence of Aryasamaj’s egalitarian views, *janev andolan* started in different part of Bihar. In Bhojpur, Triveni Sangh, a congregation of Yadav, Koeri and Kurmi castes, was organised to claim the right of wearing sacred threads. Sacred thread became a site for the construction and reconstruction of identities. The question arises here why this ritual sustained for a long time in villages despite the claim that it was exclusive for women and Shudras. The answer can be traced in folk songs. Folk songs show the participation of women and lower castes in the ritual. They are assigned different roles and folk songs celebrate their participation. Folk songs provide emotional bondage between women and men, between lower castes and upper castes.

The constitutive power of language is magnified in folk songs. By using different metaphors it constructs the binary of women and men, where former is represented as emotional, irrational and weak and the latter is shown as rational and strong. Folk songs

create a corporeal schema in which the body of woman is represented as opposite to the body of a man. Body is not outside culture; it is constructed and shaped with the help of different kind of cultural tools. Folk songs help to normalize the boy-schema which is extremely androcentric.

Folk songs also help to constitute kinship in rural society. Many folk songs include the name of male members of seven generations of the family. The absence of women in these songs shows that they are not considered as permanent/important members of family. Gali songs also help to construct a complex web of kinship during the time of marriage. Gali songs are not thought as obscene by women and men.

This shows that the notion of obscenity varies with time and place. What is accommodated in culture through various narratives is not considered as obscene while market songs which are not validated by culture are considered as obscene and vulgar. Similarly Chaita songs which are sung by men in the month of Chaitra can be considered as vulgar from the parameter of other cultures. However, it would be wrong to think that songs sung by women are not vulgar. Gali songs are generally sung by women, at the occasion of Matikod, too, women sing vulgar songs. One may argue that matikod songs are example of occasional subversion of social norms which do not allow women to articulate their voice. However, a deeper analysis shows that the target of these songs is the body of woman and indirectly women accept that patriarchal worldview which subjugates them.

Folk songs also talk about the complex inter-relation between caste, gender and sexuality. In folk songs, when women face sexual harassment by upper castes they react differently, generally their attitude seems submissive. While in the case of sexual harassment by lower castes they react violently. Women of upper caste think lower caste men as less masculine. Folk songs also talk about stigmas associated with women of Netua/Nat caste who are regarded as prostitutes. Folk songs legitimize caste hierarchy and reinforce stigmas associated with lower castes. Folksongs also legitimize kingship. As Bhojpuri kings/big landlords were generally upper castes, legitimacy to kingship clearly meant legitimacy to caste hierarchy.

Folk songs are integral part of household and agricultural work. In these songs there is voice of resistance to exploitative culture of coercive work. Women show their resentment towards domestic chores in which their whole life is trapped. Folk songs show

that disjuncture between work and sexuality is a modern phenomenon, in rural life work and discussion on sexual behaviour go hand-in-hand. Work is also associated with the notion of time. Barahmasa and Chaumasa songs show the inter-relation between agriculture and the notion of time in agricultural society. These songs also show that time of women is different from that of men. In the case of women time becomes manifestation of pain and sexual desire. Apart from women saints also have their own notion of time. Many of them think the world as manifestation of God, and for them time is absurd. These saints believe in caste and gender equality. They have not a teleological notion of time and they do not think material progress as a right path. Therefore these saints have not to face the question of re-distribution. However, they give recognition- which is essential part of justice- to marginalised people.

I have also briefly discussed how music transcodes caste in something else. Sometimes caste is transcoded in property at the other times it is transcoded in jewellery or something else. By transcoding caste folk songs invisibilize caste and thus they easily universalize norms and values of upper castes. Caste is the bitter truth of Bhojpuri society. Bhojpur became the ground of struggle between labourers and peasants when Naxalite movement reached in the plains of Bihar. Folk songs can prove good archive for writing history of Naxalbari movement.

On the one hand, revolutionary songs inspired downtrodden people to remove the chain of slavery; on the other hand, market songs spread vulgarity in the society. However, market songs quickly spread through the help of technology. Truck drivers also made these songs popular in other regions, too. Market songs have little respect for women. These songs have become a marker of Bhojpuri culture. Music is a site of cultural encounter and whenever such encounter happens there is a chance of falling in the trap of ethnocentrism.

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GLOSSARY

Aaaho -	O!	Dekhni-	Saw
Agam-	Intution	Dulha-	Bridegroom
Ailan-	Came	Dulhin -	Bride
Aile -	Came		
Babuji-	Father	Galian-	Streets
Badi -	Are	Ghani-	Thick
Badu-	Are	Ghoda-	Horse
Balmu-	Husband	Ghumai -	Walk
Banaila-	Made	Ginai -	Count
Bansvariya-	Bamboogrove	Godwa-	Legs
Baras-	Year	Hamara -	My
Bhaiya -	Brother	Hardi-	Turmeric
Bhaujaiya-	Sister-in-law	Hathi -	Elephant
Binu -	Without	Hathwa-	Hands
Chadhawa-	Put-up	Janev -	Sacred Threads
Cheria-	Daughter	Janile -	Know
Daradiya-	Pain	Jog -	Jog
		Kaga -	Crow
		Kahat -	Say
		Kaise-	How
		Kalkatwa-	Calcutta

Kavan -	Who	Piyawa-	Husband
Kavni -	Who	Pothiya –	Religious Text
kudar -	Hoe	Puruva –	Eastern Wind
Lahuri-	Lovely	Rahni-	Was
Lal -	Son	Ropaya-	Money
Mati-	Soil	Sakhi-	Friend
Milike-	Together	Sapanwa-	Dream
Mor -	My	Sona -	Gold
Nanadi -	Sister-in-law	Suhagin -	Married
Nyari -	Lovely	Suhaiya-	To look beautiful
Pair-	Leg	Suni -	Listen
Panch-	Five	Sutal -	Asleep
Pandit -	Brahaman	Terah-	Thirteen
Picchuari-	Backyard	Uthat -	Awake
Piraile-	Ache		