

Transforming the Folk: Songs of the Radical Peasantry of Bhojpur

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***Abstract:** This paper seeks to analyse transformations in the folk idiom under the influence of a radical agrarian movement in Bhojpur, Bihar from the 1960's. The folk here get pulled out of the private sphere and metamorphose into a tool in political mobilization. It overturns the very meaning and purpose of singing. This transformation of the folk is the entry point for this paper. There is an attempt made to understand the trajectory of this transformation through analysing song -texts, their poetics and aesthetics.*

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Introduction

Folk songs are an integral part of the expressive traditions of agrarian and tribal societies. They are seen as lyrical documents that reflect lived realities of the social groups that produce and practise them. Folk songs usually are associated with creative energies of women who entertain themselves by singing while getting through their daily chores or performing rituals. These songs are expressions of love, longing, lament but never rebellion. This paper seeks to analyse transformations in the folk idiom under the influence of a radical agrarian movement in Bhojpur, Bihar from the 1960's. The folk here get pulled out of the private sphere and metamorphose into a tool in political mobilization. It overturns the very meaning and purpose of singing. This transformation of the folk is the entry point for this paper. There is an attempt made to understand the trajectory of this transformation through analysing song-texts, their poetics and aesthetics.

The paper has been divided into four sections: the introduction situates the study theoretically. The literature on folk songs in India particularly in the Bhojpur region has been analysed thematically.

This thematic survey of literature going back to Grierson's collection of songs will identify varied perspectives from which folk has been interrogated. It will simultaneously identify paradigmatic shifts in the purpose of engaging with folk songs at different points in history. The second section recounts a brief history of the radical peasant movement in the Bhojpur which came to be known as the Naxalite movement. The cultural reverberations of this political movement was difficult to ignore. Several songs produced, adapted and sung during this period were using the tune and form of the folk for its recall value to connect with people. However, the traditional lyrics could not serve the purpose of revolution hence lyrics were often turned over its head while retaining the tune. An analysis of this reworking of lyrical content, symbols and motifs of select songs forms the bulk of this paper in the third section. The last section concludes with insights on the transformation of folk in the service of a 'revolution'.

Folk Songs: Ideational Location

In Europe and America folk songs have been conceptualised as 'musical utterances' of those uncorrupted by education and machine civilization. The romantic search for the lost idyllic village took collectors like Cecil Sharp, James Child and others to the English countryside. They were looking for the soul of the English nation in the songs of the peasantry. The social divisions and conflicts created by the Industrial Revolution it was believed could be overcome by going back to the roots. The growing nationalist fervour in the backdrop of the First World War even led to the introduction of folk songs in school curriculum in England. Musical potentialities of the nation had to be found in its folk which symbolised a 'great tradition... stretch(ing) back into the mists of the past' (Sharp, 1907; p3). The American search for its folk was in certain senses guided by the European condemnation of America's lack of 'roots'. The idea that America had 'no peasant class' hence 'no folk songs' was to be refuted. John Lomax was out on the streets, saloons, ranches, even prisons with his recording equipment and son as assistant to prove that America had its own folk. Once again the search for the 'genuine wild flower', a product of the primitive mind songs created by the common people who led 'a life of isolation without books or newspapers, telephone or radios' (Lomax, 1967; p XXV-XXVII).

In colonial India- particularly in Bihar, where languages like Bhojpuri, Maithili, Magahi, Bajjika are spoken- this search was guided by GA Grierson a Civil Servant of East India Company. Grierson's love for literature of the 'rustic' had orientalist administrative underpinnings. Colonial administrators like Grierson, William Crooke and their Indian assistants like Babu Jadunandan Sahay and Ram Garib Chaubey respectively wanted to know the mysterious 'other' (Said, 1979). The search and compilation of folk was part of the post-colonial discovery and reconstruction of a national culture. Folklorists like Pt. Krishnadeva Upadhyaya focussed on Bhojpuri *gram geet* or village song. The village was the site of Indianness and Pt Upadhyaya's collection lauds folk as being connected to people and away from 'artificiality' of the city. Hence, world over folk and its search has been linked to the search for the 'uncorrupted' spirit of the nation and post-colonial India was no exception (Upadhyaya, 1948).

There have been debates about how folk originates. Is it created by a community collectively or by an individual. The collective origin argument forwarded by Grimms brothers, Motherwell and others is that folk 'makes itself', 'springs up and spreads', just as language. The counter argument sees it as 'composition of a skilled musician' which becomes property of the people yet in its origins it is the work

of an individual as proposed by Schelegel and Percy (Sharp, 1907). The origin debate nevertheless gives way to agreement on the fact that folk lives, changes and grows through oral transmission hence folk is in a perpetual state of flux. The intrinsic link between folk and agrarian as well as its transformations are the entry points for this paper on folk traditions of the radical peasantry in Bhojpur region. In an interview, Hanns Eisler the German composer once said, 'folk songs arise under primitive economic conditions, especially in agrarian economies. Modern capitalism is unsuitable ground for the growth of folk songs. Folk culture is dying off just as the handicrafts are'(Grabs, 1978, p. 99). However, in Bhojpur folk thrives as the economy remains predominantly agrarian.

The region has witnessed migrations starting from 'Girmitiyas' of colonial times finding work in Fiji, Surinam, Mauritius etc. later large numbers migrated to Calcutta, Bombay and other industrial towns. These migrants carried their rhythm, tunes and verses as a memory of the land and life they were leaving behind. Jahaji music, evening singing amongst Calcutta workers being cases in point. Migrants particularly those within the country often returned home during harvest season or other occasions. The agrarian links of the migrants were never snapped completely. As a result, folk culture survived not as an obsolete artefact, but as a lived social practice. The 'lived' social practices were also tuned to the needs of political mobilisation at different periods in history. The folk forms were used for political mobilisation during the Independence struggle and later in the movement of agrarian poor 1970s onwards. Social turbulence transformed these forms unimaginably with fresh poignancy and relevance attached to them. This paper seeks to document a few transformations of these folk forms. The forms under the scanner are songs associated with social functions like *sohar* and *gari*; songs of religious gatherings *chaat geet* and *hori*; work songs associated with particular occupational groups like *dhobiuvwa*, *lorik*; songs of separation *birha* and *barahmasa*. The songs used by the peasantry in their struggle in the 1970s and further will be taken into account. The paper would focus on Bhojpuri songs and poetry of organic intellectuals like Gorakh Pandey, Vijendra Anil Ramakant Dwivedi Ramta and others. In the next section we shall briefly look at the major political movements that shaped the peasantry in this region with particular focus on the naxalite movement.

Agrarian Labour: The Makings of a Class

The political reality of Bhojpur as a hotbed of agrarian strife has a definite historical trajectory since the intervention of British colonialism in the 18th century. A radical alteration in the socio-economic fabric of Bihar happened with Lord Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement of 1793. This arrangement for Zamindar's, 'quiet enjoyment over their profitable estates' vested all property in soil with landholders, dispossessing the class of actual cultivators. The size of estates in Bihar was smaller than those in Bengal but their numbers were large (Das, 1983). The Permanent Settlement introduced an elaborate system of hierarchies within the agrarian structure. The agrarian labourers were at the bottom of this structure constituting 1/3rd of the population of which half were bonded labourers. Their wages were 2 or 3 annas in cash or 2 seers and 8 chattanks in kind per day. For a minimum of three months they could not find any work to feed themselves hence their seasonal migration to *pardes* was an annual affair. *Daura* or migration of impoverished *raiya*t defined rural life in Bihar (Chowdhary and Srikant, 2000).

The occupancy *raiya*t were equally distressed despite the introduction of Tenancy Act, 1859 which confirmed rights over plots under cultivation for over twelve years. The zamindars however,

rarely provided rent receipts to scuttle any claims of *raiyyats*. The mode and manner of appropriation of agricultural surplus became a defining factor of the agrarian structure. Quantum of revenue and rent extracted from the peasants was never fixed but was a result of annual haggle. There were a range of *abwabs* or revenue like *motoravan* (tax for zamindar buying a car), *Zanmavan* (tax when zamindar bore an offspring), *Bhusawan* (husk for zamindars cattle), *Hathiyavan* (tax for zamindar buying elephant) etc. which also had a clear caste link. Raiyats of 'lower castes' were subjected to higher amounts of revenue and *abwabs*. The social indignities suffered by the agrarian labourers and *raiyyats* including rape of women through institutionalised practises like *doli pratha* as well as in random encounters was a lived social reality which shaped the world view of the agrarian masses. In order to understand where the songs of the radical peasantry of Bhojpur are coming from, it is important to trace the political trajectory of this class in Bhojpur.

The freedom struggle starting with 1857 was a landmark episode of rural masses getting mobilised for a political cause. Mangal Pandey and his associates were company soldiers from this region. Babu Kunwar Singh the legendary leader of the 1857 struggle fought against the British forces with his military consisting of peasants from this region. The revolt was crushed by the British with the help of loyalist Zamindar of Dumraon (Dutta, 1957). Jolted by the massive uprising, the colonial government in Bhojpur was keen on providing efficient administration and promoting agricultural development. Bhojpur was the first to implement Indian Penal Code in Bihar. Agriculture was to be modernized by introduction of canal irrigation with construction of the Sone Canal System. This canal system made agriculture profitable, however concentration of land amongst Rajputs- Bhumihars resulted in 'junker capitalism' (Das, 1961). The commercialisation also led to backward classes profiting out of their occupancy status. The differentiation within the peasantry and depeasantization of the lowest in the hierarchy were incumbent phenomena.

There were isolated cases of peasant uprisings in Bhojpur specifically and Bihar in general. It was only after the First World War that the peasant movement became less sporadic and acquired a continuing form. The Champaran Satyagrah of 1917 became the landmark movement whereby 'traditional' peasantry was drawn into the vortex of contemporary agitation under a modern leadership. This movement nevertheless was an attempt by the rich tenants to remove hurdles on profitable cultivation placed by despotic indigo planters. The nature of the leadership placed limitations on the movement. Since the movement was directed against the planters the local internal contradictions of peasantry did not find a stage. The Gandhian phase of mass mobilisation saw agrarian labourers and the poor peasantry as militant participants yet their militancy was condemned by the leadership and specific concerns of this mass were subsumed by the demands of the agrarian elite (Bandopadhyay, 2004).

This class cut its political teeth in the struggles of the Kisan Sabhas, but could not be integrated with it. The movement led by Swami Sahajanand Saraswati under the aegis of Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha saw common not so rich Bhumihar raiyats raising their own demands. The Great Depression led to a flare-up of agrarian unrest particularly on commutation of produce-rent into cash rent. Bhojpur saw the growth of Kisan Sabha led to peasant unrest. The Congress had a fleeting engagement with Kisan Sabha: at times it was sceptical of the demands but later incorporated some of the demands. The Kisan Sabha could not enlist overwhelming support of the vast majority of tenants in its militant

struggles due to its social base being essentially upper-caste. Walter Hauser the biographer of Swami Shahjanand Saraswati has underlined this fact (Hausser, 1961). The backward caste raiyats found no place in the leadership of Kisan Sabha and their issues of caste based oppression were left unattended on the agenda. Kisan Sabha naturally also failed to give voice to those on the lowest rung of the agrarian hierarchy, the agricultural labourers.

Triveni Sangh, which emerged as a movement of backward caste peasantry after 1933 also did not give any prominence to the questions of landless, dalit and extremely backward poor peasantry. Triveni Sangh came up as an attempt to foster solidarity among the backward castes who had by now mobilised themselves into caste associations. Yadavs, *koiris*, *kurmis* started bridging their mutual social distances and were hoping to emerge as a force in representational politics at local level. Triveni Sangh initially lobbied with Congress for tickets in the Legislative Assembly elections of 1937 but failed resulting in their decision to contest alone. They fielded candidates in Pero and Arrah in Shahabad district and supported independent candidates in several other districts of Bihar. The Sangh candidates lost by huge margins and communities faced violent backlash from upper caste landlords. In the subsequent district elections five of Sangh candidates secured victories marking their emergence as a political force. They launched several local movements with the one against Dumraon Raj being most significant. Quit India Movement saw a decline in activities of Triveni Sangh and its virtual wrapping up. The leaders and activists joined Congress, Backward Caste League and Radical democratic party of M N Roy. Later many of them joined Ram Manohar Lohia's Socialist Party.

Following the 1946 elections a wave of peasant struggles rocked Shahabad. The district magistrate reported 'Kisan Sabha, RDP, Socialists were stopping labourers from working and forcibly occupying *bakasht* land... threat(en)ing life and property of zamindars' (Chowdhary and Srikant, 2000). The organised agrarian struggle of 1930s in Shahabad/Bhojpur were primarily led by Kisan Sabha and Triveni Sangh. These organisations by virtue of their leadership and social base were unable to bring dalits and agrarian labourers into their fold. The plight of landless labourers who were predominantly dalits was not touched upon in the name of larger unity against Zamindars. The question of agricultural labourers was relegated to the footnote of the agenda of these organisations. Post independence land reforms even when limited, increased the power and clout of this section. The backward caste groups which emerged as a class of *kulaks* - pitted itself against the rural proletariat. Agrarian labourers and poor peasantry failed to find natural political expression even in the mainstream, 'official' Communist parties like the Communist Party of India (CPI) and its breakaway group the CPI(Marxist). As both these political formations allied with the backward caste middle peasantry to the chagrin of the agrarian labourers. The issue of peasant unity just like it was for Kisan Sabha and Triveni Sangh remained important for these parties.

A fresh wave of movement identified as Naxalite uprisings brought issues of the dalit agricultural labourers to the centrestage. This movement subsequently crystallized into a third Communist stream CPI(Marxist Leninist). The emergent class-consciousness was marked by the rise of popular leaders and organizers from amongst the erstwhile 'lower castes'. The movement in Bhojpur was unique in the sense that issues around dignity for women and the 'lower' castes were raised even before struggles for land or wages. The social base of this movement was largely dalit agrarian labourers and poor peasantry. This fact is evident from the listings of those identified as accused or killed in

police encounters. A list of forty 'hardcore Naxalites' prepared by Bhojpur district administration for a meeting with officials of the Home Ministry included names of ten *dusadhs*, seven chamars, two musahars, eleven other scheduled castes, seven *yadavs*, one *gareri* and one *тели*. The list of those accused, of violence and attacks, in twelve incidents in the first phase of the movement similarly includes names of fifteen *chamars*, ten *dusadhs*, nine *musahars*, thirteen *koiris*, twelve *ahirs*, two *kurmis*, one *kahar*, one muslim and five of other castes (Chowdhary and Srikant, 2000). Almost all killed by the police and landlords from 1972-76 were dalits and other backward castes (Flaming Fields, 1986). Therefore, the music that emerged from this movement has concerns of dalit landless peasantry at the centre. We find issues of dignity, wages, unequal social structure as central themes. There is a distinct cultural striving, a hallmark of the coming of age of a subaltern, subjugated class as a political force in its own right. The sharp and contentious class struggle in society and the contention in the field of culture are virtually indistinguishable.

III

The thousand-year-old silence was being broken in the revolutionary songs sung in the southern 'tolas' of the villages where the landless poor and the lowest castes had their hovels. To sing these songs, to even imagine them, was an act of insurgency unimaginable to their oppressors. Cultural performances routinely faced violent repression and assault. Badri Narayan in his book 'Documenting Dissent' talks of people's theatre groups-expressing Naxalite politics- being active in the Bhojpur region. The performances by these groups were often banned and the performers arrested. He has documented incidents of oppressive attacks on the actions of the people's theatre groups in Bhojpur district during 1979-82. However, these assaults did not stop the groups from staging their performances (Narayan, 2001). This section will analyse the mutation of the folk forms traditionally associated with routine life events under the influence of a vibrant movement of a radicalised peasantry.

Sohar: Birth of a New Social Order

The traditional sohar is sung by women to celebrate the birth of a son, perpetuating the preference for a male heir and discrimination against the female child. It is difficult to romanticize the sohar if one recalls the culture of female infanticide and discrimination that have produced it. Because many of these songs are sung and written by women, it is natural that the pain of the woman unable to produce a male child, and the despair and isolation of the barren woman, often find expression in these songs, but traditionally they do not challenge the discriminatory practices. Some songs portray the heart-rending lament of the childless woman, taunted as 'barren', whose very touch is considered 'inauspicious', and who is therefore rejected by her own mother, by the earth, heaven, and water and even by wild animals. In desperation, she fashions a wooden 'baby' and claims to have given birth; when people come to see it, her prayers turn the false baby into a real one. The pain and the suffering of the woman are depicted, but there is no word of protest. (Singh, 17) Several sohar songs portray the pain of the pregnant Sita, exiled unfairly by her husband, forced to give birth to her twins in the forest; many of them begin with the lament, "Who will cut the umbilical cord for me?" (Singh, 27-43) The only hint of protest in these songs is the fact that they always end with Sita refusing to go back to Ram, being swallowed up by the earth instead. Sohars have been used for political purposes during the freedom

struggle, there are several sohars where the mother celebrates a son's birth by asking her friends to spin the charkha, a symbol of swadeshi, and to wear khaddar, hoping that her son will grow up to serve the nation. (Upadhyaya, 3-7) Interestingly, the essential pre-requisite birth of a son does not get transformed even in these 'swadeshi sohars' so to say. It would take the socio-cultural upheaval of the 1970's-80's to radically transform the conservative ideas while using folk forms for political purposes.

One of the most powerful songs using the sohar form is Gorakh Pandey's 'Sapna' to describe the birth of a dream of an egalitarian world. In this song a poor peasant woman describes a dream to her friends. She describes how her tears turned the field golden, she breaks the landlord's lathi as if it were a radish and chases off the moneylender. The song ends with the reign of money being wiped out, and the woman finding her lover eventually. The yearning for a lover, in this case coalesces with the longing for an egalitarian world, and stands both in comparison and contrast to the longing for a son described in traditional sohar songs. Another unusual and moving traditional sohar- still used by the cultural troupes to point out injustices perpetrated by the feudal order. It is in the form of a narration by a female deer whose mate has been killed for the feast at Ram's birth, she mourns and appeals to Kaushalya to at least give her the skin of her dead mate. Kaushalya refuses, saying she will use it to make a toy for her new baby. The female deer's sense of loss and the queen's hard-heartedness contrast with the mood of celebration traditionally associated with the sohar form.

Hori: Celebration of Resistance

Traditional horis, sung at Holi celebrations, cover a variety of themes- many describe Ram or Krishna playing Holi, others describe the separation of a woman from her lover at Holi, still others have overt and forbidden sexual themes considered "allowed" during Holi. Gorakh has used the hori dhun to sing 'Zamin' (Land), designed to help landless poor formulate the question, "in whose name is the land, patwari? He whose life is spent in dust alone/ how does his name disappear (from the records) while he who keeps away from the land enslaves it? Eventually the dam of patient tolerance of this injustice breaks, and the singers declare; now we, the peasants and workers will together snatch our rights from the thieves." (Krishna, 100) Gorakh uses a tune his potential singers, the peasantry, is used to singing. He infuses it with a fresh content that educates the agrarian poor about appropriation of property by the powerful through trickery, and the need to fight for their rights to land. This makes the hori truly a mass fighting song.

Chhath Geet

The chhath geet, is traditionally sung in reverence to the Sun god, at the Chhath festival. Chhat songs often begin with the line 'Kanchahi baans ke bahangia', a description of cutting tender bamboo shoots for the chhat pooja. Ramakant Diwedi Ramta uses the chhat song to describe instead, how the singer will cut a shoot of tender bamboo, plant it in a ground and unfurl a red flag on it. (Ramta, 50) Another song by Vijendra Anil uses the chhat geet form, it calls upon people to break their slumber and wake to the morn of struggle. Descriptions of natural beauty like greenery of *palash*, *peepal*, *mahua* flowers and bamboo shoots are followed by the lines your lathi (stick) will be your gun, and your sickle will be your sword. (Anil,16) A religious song takes on a new meaning; it becomes a rousing call to class struggle, without for a moment losing its beauty.

Gari: Satire for Mobilisation

The gari form, traditionally sung at weddings by the bride's family in the form of colourful abuses aimed at the groom's family, is a form that lends itself particularly well to satire. Vijendra Anil uses it repeatedly, as does Gorakh. One such song, written by Vijendra Anil, is a satire on the general elections of 1980. This election was significant because Congress made a comeback after its historic defeat at the hands of janata coalition in 1977 post Emergency. Here this gari employs humour and an energetic beat to call the 'democratic' bluff of the janata government and lampoon both janata and the congress as being dictatorial like Hitler. It also lampooned most of the hypocrisies of bourgeois elections- from ballot and booth capturing to the empty promises and pouring of big money (Anil, 10). This song, sung during the elections would not only be entertaining and amusing, but would also serve to expose the main ruling parties. Another simple song, also by Anil, uses the gari form successfully to expose the behavior of the ruling class and its brokers and intermediaries during a famine. The song begins with exposing the hoarders who become rich by raising prices during famines, and dalals or middle-men who connive with the Block Development Officer and overseers and embezzle funds meant for 'food for work' schemes. The song satirises state repression that punishes people's protests and attempts to divert attention from the anger at famines by provoking riots, or fanning up jingoism by resorting to a war on the borders. (Anil, 10) In 'Samajvad', Gorakh uses the gari form to satirise the ruling class slogan of 'socialism', adopted variously by the congress as well as components of the janata coalition. (Krishna, 11) Deceptively light hearted and humorous this song has immense potential to educate the rural poor and equip them to recognize the reality of the ruling class' socialist pretensions.

Birha and Barahmasa

Birhas describe the pain of separation of a woman from her lover, the *barahmasa* form traditionally expresses this pain month by month (hence its name). These forms have been imbued with radical content in the context of out-migration of males to the urban centres. Gorakh's moving long poem '*Mehnat Ka Barahmasa*' (Pandey, 17) is a dialogue between a poor labouring couple. The journey from hopeless despair to an enlightened consciousness and a determination to fight happens in the course of the poem, and with the passage of time and exchange of ideas that the poem describes. One section of the poem does stick to the original form of month-by-month description, but rather than describe love and longing, the wife describes the suffering and injustice that each month of hard labour in the fields brings.

Work Songs: Art in Labour

Bhojpuri has a rich tradition of work songs associated with different castes and occupational groups. Gorakh has innovated with several of them, the tune and form is that of the folk song, but the language used is hindi. Sohni, mallahon ka geet and dhobiuva are specific examples of transforming work songs into protest songs. Sohni ka geet uses the traditional setting of women singing in the fields, but it carries an unusual element of rebellion and resistance. It bleakly describes the hunger and destitution of those whose labour actually makes grains grow in abundance. The women sing- "marks of the whip on our backs/ the beat of the king's horse in our songs" recognizing how even most of their songs are forced to conform to the oppressive ruling ideology. Instead, this song wishes for the whip

to be burnt, for the king's horse to be reduced to ashes; and once these symbols of oppression are destroyed, for their songs to be suffused with the greenery of crops, and for them never to have to beg before anyone. Similarly, Gorakh's *mallahon ka geet*- the song of the boatmen is also in hindi. At one level, it is an ordinary description of the beauty of the water and the waves, but each image, despite its simple language, has profound meaning. In the movement of the waves and its depths, the boat people see their own lives reflected; in the fear and disturbance of the fishes, they see their own state of mind. There is the poignant contrast between the hungry boatmen plying their trusty oars, and the owner of the boat who spends away the tax that he extorts from them. The mind that is thirsty for water, certainly expresses a longing for dignity and secure life. (Krishna, 83). The *dhobiuva* (song of washermen) has been adapted by Gorakh to become a song sung by coal mine workers in 'Koila'. Here, the '*chakachaka*' rhythm of the washerman beating clothes becomes the sound of the train carrying coal.

Gender in the New Folk

Folk culture abounds in songs by women, addressing their husbands or lover, and this form has been used in many of the revolutionary songs. Some are an adaptation of the traditional exhortations to go to battle with the enemy. For instance, Vijendra Anil's song 'Bahal basanti beari, piya banha pagariya' begins with the woman exhorting her mate to 'tie his turban', that is, ready himself for a battle. A similar song by Gorakh, which is both a moving love song, as well as a materialist celebration of the power of labour and the determination- to struggle is, 'Neh ke paati' (Love letter), the woman sings "You are the sun of labour, and I'm your ray." She goes on to say "if your hammer instils fear in the capitalist (he is presumably a worker in the city), her sickle makes the landlord tremble "there is an inversion of the usual image of the man fighting battles while his mate never uses arms . The unity of a man and woman in love has been equated with the unity of hammer and sickle, workers and peasantry. The song ends with the line "you are the call to struggle, I'm your trumpet", together, they make a call to war against injustice. (Krishna, 106)

Gorakh's songs and poems are rich with a sense of gender justice. Maina, written in Bhojpuri in the style of a folk tale is an indictment of the feudal sexual exploitation of lower caste women- a phenomenon rife in rural Bihar. As a metaphor for sexual exploitation of dalit women is Gorakh's poem 'Maina' where a king captures a maina and gifts it to the prince as a plaything. Prince torments and eventually kills the maina, but complains to his father that the toy is useless- the maina won't cooperate. The father tells his son you can only enjoy her when you learn to suck her blood and savour the taste." (Krishna 105). Gorakh in his poem '*Kaithar Kalan Ki Auratein*' (Kaithar Kalan's Women) documents a remarkable episode of Kaithar Kalan village in Bhojpur. He describes the momentous nature of this occurrence when a police raid party was chased away by the village women. "Everyone took the docility and dumbness of the women of Kaithar Kalan for granted.how did this unthinkable happen? In a country where, Draupadi was disrobed in a full assembly and all the heroes remained silent! In the same country/ such an affront to male pride? Anyhow, this was just Kaithar Kalan's little *mahabharat*/ where the women of Kaithar Kalan fought/ shoulder-to-shoulder with poor men/ Remember this/ those who wish to change history/ and they too, who want to turn history back". (Pandey, 92)

Conclusion

The 'main and supreme value' of folk songs 'lies in the fact that they constitute a very authentic record of the outlook of the people whom they portray' (Joshi, 4) This paper attempted to put forward a brief history of the agrarian labour as a class in Bhojpur with focus on the transformations in their folk forms. There is an intrinsic link between culture and politics. The link goes beyond cultural forms being used simply as conspiratorial tools in political mobilisation. Culture and politics are neither external nor autonomous of each other. The traditional songs and genres constitute the cultural milieu of a radicalised peasant movement.

It is believed that the truest, the most intimate folk music is that produced by suffering. Folk which is usually associated with pathos; women expressing their pain in verse and tune. Traditionally songs would evoke sympathy, pity, tears but no outrage. The suffering however gets overturned with the changes in the peasant consciousness. The songs are rich in descriptions of daily life of the rural poor yet they are not mere reflection of reality. Each song brims with a sense of empowerment that comes from the realisation that this appalling reality is not inevitable, it can be fought and changed. These songs perform the crucial function of presenting complex political ideas in a simplified manner without diluting their profundity. The ideas about relations between labour and capital, feudalism and other political issues are communicated in a familiar idiom making them accessible. Thus, culture and its varied forms see a transformation.

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