Chapter One

Introduction

"...One dark night an old woman was searching intently for something in the street. A passer-by asked her, "Have you lost something?" She answered, "Yes I have lost my keys. I have been looking for them all evening."

"Where did you lose them?"

"I don't know, may be inside the house."

"Then why are you looking for them here?"

"Because it's dark in there. I can see much better here under the street lights"...

A.K.Ramanujan(1991a:xiv)

Ramanujan believes that traditionally guided quests carried out in the light of classical texts, much like the search of the old woman, could not make any inroad in the dark stores of meanings. This means that the analyses informed by the Sanskrit classics could not explore what folklore consisted of. Hence, it is a legitimate need to have a folkloristic enterprise where the classical does not dictate terms and conditions. The present research aims to interpret those meanings, imbued in folk narratives, which the folk display only on occasions, through their contextual performances. Otherwise kept in collective memory, such meanings constitute a key to understand the worldview as present in Maithili folklore. By Maithili folklore, I mean folklore of Maithili speaking people from the linguistic region Mithila located roughly in North Bihar and abutting region of Nepal. The ambiguous status of Maithili language on one hand and the mythical significance of Mithila on the other renders ‘worldview’ into worldviews. The song culture of Mithila, along the categories of social groups, consists of genres associated with specific groups. Despite heterogeneity, however there are genres performed across social groups with unity of meanings. Especially the Maithili folk songs of everyday life in which notions of life and death figure prominently are replete with what I propose to call ‘folk philosophy’. Apart from the

1 This is a Kannada folktale retold by A.K. Ramanujan, of which there may be various meanings but Ramanujan is interested in one (aforementioned) meaning

2 I am trying neologism for heuristic purposes by using the term folk philosophy. It will be explained at length in the later part of this work. The preference for the term lies in the response to the popular perception in intellectual-scholarship that holds villagers as ‘unreflective many’ as part of the ‘little
ritual wailing/mourning/tuneful weeping on diverse occasions of meeting and separation and especially on the event of death is a genre of folklore not so widely discussed and explored. On those occasions of crying, the meanings that characterize worldview come all bare and the richness of folk philosophy is intelligible. The present research intends to carry on with the knowledge on folklore generated by the folklore studies/folkloristic, ethnomusicology, linguistics and of course anthropology as well as sociology. The interdisciplinary format of this work is imperative for arriving at what in scientific discourse has been often prerogative of the classical/the literate/great tradition. In sum and substance, this research project is aimed at understanding the songs the folk of Mithila sung on several occasions, on the event of rite of the passage as well as otherwise. Songs, presented in this work, are gathered from the village named Fulhara in the southern part of Mithila located in Samastipur district. For some clarification on the songs and to cross check the variety of them, other villages such as Navtol, Beri and Bhindi (located in the district of Darbhanga) were also visited. These songs were gathered during their contextual renditions, such as during the celebrations of festival, in rites of the passage for example on the event of birth of a baby, tonsorial rite, marriage, sacred-thread giving ceremony, and death, and also in every day set up. Most of the songs presented here are sung by the women folk, while some songs of everyday life are sung by both men and women. Songs in the rite of the passage are sung by women only. By understanding these songs, as they are rendered in their respective performative contexts, the present research aims at understanding the worldview of Mithila. Unlike the preexisting works which focus on ritual aspects in the rite of the passage, this work abides by the distinctions of the songs alongside rituals. While the folk do not say much about the performed rituals in specific, they do express the meanings and motifs in their songs. By disclosing key aspects of the Maithil worldview, this project intends to unearth the folk engagement with the ideas of life and death. As to how life, with its various junctures marked by the rites of the passage, is visualized and how death is perceived through the prism of life, holds the centrality of discourse in this project. Death is not a separate phenomenon in the worldview of Mithila, as these songs reveal that departure of soul from the body is similar to that of a bride from her natal home. Also, this project reflects on the intersection between religious and social,

Folk Philosophy is a category to denote the intellectualism of the folk, whereas the category of worldview still deprives the philosophic significance of the thoughts of the folk.
metaphysical and material, and sacred and mundane, to draw the total picture of Maithil worldview. The analytical understanding of the songs also establishes a notion of complementarity that rules the relationship between men and women in a patriarchal society such as of Mithila. Maithil women's songs, underpinning the social structure, bring about a rethinking on the feminist arguments about women's position. In order to arrive at an understanding, the researcher undergoes a process of 'Becoming' one of those who sing and feel the import of the songs.

The reason why a project of this kind assumes significance is mainly three fold: the singularity of focus on the thoughts of the folk and how these thoughts as expressed in their songs regulate every day lives; the focus herein is beyond the spectacle of rituals, which may be occasional phenomenon, and on the repeated renditions and circulation of motifs; and that thereby the thoughts of the folk also influence their practices and social institutions. Additionally, the relentless need in social anthropology to draw the totality of the worldview, with respect to the gendered roles and performances, places this research in the place of significance. By researching tradition, without dismissing the influence of modernity, this work produces knowledge impregnated with the possibility of conceptual regeneration. The conceptual dichotomy between tradition and modernity takes a rest here to allow the intertwined nature of them to surface. Especially in a socially globalised world, allegedly homogenizing as well as hybridizing in effect, when the intellectual and imaginative realm is restricted to predominant notions of our time, a study of folksongs, thereof meanings and philosophy in association with the folk practice, assume values for a researcher of indigenous tradition. Apart from these all, the present research also offers a peek at the undercurrents of a patriarchal society by focusing on dominance of women's songs. In the kinship structure and ideology, otherwise favoring men folk, women are not merely either subjugated agency as a dormant volcano of repressed anguish or unleashed agency up to demolish a structure. A research of this kind takes the onus of presenting women as a complementary partner, who can protest, plead, redefine and reconcile, with as well as without the freedom of agency in a structure. This dimension of the present research makes it significant from the feminist perspective as well, especially in a time when notions of feminism have been subject to creative rethinking. Lastly, this research dwells upon the premium of the philosophical import in the folk songs, by engaging with the notions of union-separation, merging-parting, material-spiritual,
divine-mundane, and broadly life-death. The philosophical temperament of this work reaffirms the fundamental suggestion of sociology and social anthropology, that human social institutions are also reflective of deep thoughts.

To make the objectives and themes of this research substantial, I will begin with a cursory survey of the folklore studies and anthropology. It will disclose the inherent prejudices with which folklore was looked at in the days of beginning and thus generate a sensibility to guide this research. Secondly, it will throw light on the very ideas of the ‘folk’ and their ‘lore’, and their changing/evolving connotations with respect to changes in the approaches and milieus. Besides, in the second part, this discourse is streamlined to figure out the concept of ‘worldview in folklore’ and its viability as a variable in this research. It also reviews literature to understand the significance of women as far as worldview in folklore is concerned. It hints that folklore also entails act of contextual crying, in which like in other genres of songs, women provide us with narratives. The third part, briefly, attempts to elucidate the field of this research Mithila, its significance for the present research, and the objectives of this research in relation with the research problems arising from the understanding of the field. Interspersed is the concern, as an objective of the research, to understand the folk engagement with the ideas of socio-religious significance. A question whether Hinduism is to be identified with the classical categories of Dharma, Karma and Moksha or is there a counter-perspective on it, figures as part of the analytical conclusions. In spite of obvious incorporation of the notions from the Sanskrit-classical tradition, which is prerogative of the learned Brahmins, the folk worldview offers novel innovations, as both: defiance and reconciliation. It means that no social criticism of society is an absolute attack on society. Any instance of resistance is located in the social-structural framework, as are the instances of reconciliation. This is why, elsewhere, some anthropologists have characterized the folk by words like ambiguous and ambivalent. That is strategic on their part to persist in society with their leverages. In the same vein of arguments, the research aims at disclosing the folk philosophy inherent in the worldview articulating the folk engagement with existential issues of Being - pertaining to life and thereof various events including death. It also encourages to revisit the concepts of ‘Little tradition’ and ‘Great tradition’ which, however refers to the civilizational interaction, perpetuate evolutionary ideas about the folk. Opposed to it, the present work finds an antithesis
that is suggestive of the autonomous forces of the so-called little tradition which can assimilate both great tradition and popular contemporary media, by the virtue of the oral media, to refashion and re-present them in the form of folklore.

The focus is here on what women's songs say about these, rather than on rituals in the rite of the passage. This research is distinct as it intends to learn of society by paying attention to what the folk say while they enact a ritual. Secondly, there are occasions when no ritual performance determines the folk articulation. In the everyday life set up, the folksongs reveal issues bereft of the spectacle of ritual events. Acts as simple as waking up early morning is not amusical. Thus, the present research put together songs on the occasions of rites of the passage, associated with performances of rituals, known as Samskara geet, and songs of every day life. Not only this, there is a brief thrust to denote the relationship between the popular culture and the folklore. The intent is to note the possible birth of the hybrid cultural forms, within the intersection of folksongs sung by the folk and the songs in Maithili popularized by the audio tape industry. The folklore rejuvenates itself by the means of popular media. Some of them become folklore of contemporary times while some others remain confined to market place. The songs being popularize by the audio cassettes and compact discs, in Maithili, sung by the local artists, have almost similar impact as the songs aired by the Darbhanga branch of the All India Radio. The folk tend to welcome those songs as their own with a sense of ambivalence in varying degree across age-sets: while youngsters are keener toward them, the older men and women listen to them with a tinge of doubt whether those songs belong to them. The older folk would listen to the youngsters humming those songs with amusement, without accepting them for their own rendition or decrying them altogether. There are evidences that elderly women sing songs of unknown composer in tune with the known filmy geet or music from movies, (as they call it). Especially, some songs of devotional connotations often sung by women are in tune with the 'hits of Hindi cinema'. Be that as it may, these renditions under the influence of cassette industry or Hindi cinema are made to appear like folksongs. It makes it nearly impossible to argue that the hybrid exists in purely hybrid form when it is accepted and rendered by the folk. There is a process, apparently of 'folklorisation', of the hybrid in the fold of the folk. They are hybrid only until they are on aired by the cassette-players, as it were. Folklore assumes more depth in its nature and scope in interaction with the hybrid generated by the popular
media. The latter comes to serve the oral media of the folk, so to say. The folk urge to retain the mythological motifs in their songs is present in all those songs, either influenced by the popular media or directly lifted from the industry. Additionally, the rendition of even these songs is not devoid of the folksy lilt, melodious notes of the local, and untrained dedication. Put together in a systematic framework, aimed at explaining as well as felt meanings, these songs present the possible totality of the worldview.

This research also contributes to the corpus of knowledge on methodology in social science. An alternative methodological paradigm, without compromising on critical enquiry, emerges from the discussion, can be called a methodology of Being. It invites a researcher to realize that the pursuit of knowledge/meaning in the field is also a process of becoming. Thereby, a researcher trained in the usage of methods and techniques can arrive at the varied layers of meanings: literal and figurative, said and felt. In fact, the methodological orientation chiseled out in this research enables to write social history of a cultural region Mithila in slightly different light. For, inheres emerges to the foreground, the crisscross between history and mythology, and ambiguity as a tool of story telling in historical garb. Thereby the present work unearths ideas, embedded in worldview, constituting philosophical bedrock of a folk society.

The 'folk,' the 'lore' and Cognitive Approaches
Getting back to the tale quoted at the start of this chapter, we find that folklore studies have been guided by meanings/preconceived notions, of course owed to 'street lights'\(^3\). Dorsan (1978) informs us that the quest of hidden, forgotten and backward has been since the beginning bound by exoticism, romanticism and evolutionism. Folklore was considered a preoccupation of primitive people, signifying an epoch of savagery. In the nineteenth century, synonyms of folklore such as 'bygones, popular antiquities, and survivals', figured frequently. All these terms had pejorative connotations about the folk society. Still later, Dorsan suggests that terms such as simple, unspoiled, pastoral, close to nature - viewed them in a nobler light. Whether

\(^3\) Here the use of 'street light', obtained from the Kannada Folktale retold by Ramanujan, is metaphorical. It stands for all those influences that made us perceive folklore as the set of knowledge of 'the other'.
admired or despised, the folk represented a world different from the centers of power; wealth, and progress, industrial, intellectual and political activity in the metropolis. The stated features of the folk intrigued the pioneers of folklore studies, and thus investigation was set on. It started in Germany in the late eighteenth century, when philosopher and poet Johann Gottfried Herder called for volunteers to collect what he called ‘songs of the people’. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm responded to this call and began to enrich the treasure. The Grimm brothers popularised the intellectual values of folklores. Their examples and concepts inspired nascent folklorists in European countries to emulate their models of collecting and interpreting folk traditions as emblem of people’s proud antiquities. As a ripple effect, John Brand in England titled his miscellany of notions, customs, and practices ‘Observations on Popular Antiquities’, in 1777. Very many antiquarians in England followed this and Europe was inclined toward this newfound vogue. By 1846, another antiquarian, John Thoms, perceived in Brands’ accumulated mass of folk materials, the subject matter of a separate branch of learning, which he proposed to call ‘folklore-the lore of the people’. But then like ‘popular antiquities’, the new term also stressed on pastness. The classic cliché of the folkloric enterprise was, Dorsan notes, “The old traditions and rites are disappearing; hurry up and collect them as fast as you can” (Ibid.: 13). Each new generation of folklorist echoed the death of folklore in the wake of modernity. Max Muller propounded the concept of ‘disease of language’ according to which men in the mythopoeic age of the Aryan race forgot the original meanings of the words and used them metaphorically. E. B. Tylor formulated his doctrine of survivals according to which the folklore of today represents the survivals of animistic thinking of humankind. Max Muller and Tylor stand on the same line of arguments sharing a big chunk of basic assumptions. Largely, the endeavors of anthropologically guided folkloric studies were meant to collect peasant folklores in their fossilized forms to identify survivals. ‘Pastness, backwardness, and peasantness’ were thus held as primary attributes of folklores, by the great team which comprised of Andrew Lang, Edwin Sidney Hartland, Alfred Nutt, George Lawrence Gomme, Edward Clodd and others. Contributions to the survivalist theory also came from British colonial administrators and their wives and daughters who were interrogating peasants in India.

4 Max Muller’s ‘Disease of language’ is best explained in the term ‘good morning’, in which Muller found the metaphoric use of ‘morning’ is to express a wish. Muller also called it ‘solar myth’. 
and tribesmen in Africa. The same theory haunted even Nordic, Russian, Japanese, and American folklorists and anthropologists. Dorsan recognizes the germ of romanticism in addition to the survivalist assumptions in American folkloric approaches. The romantic view associated with evolutionary understanding is at the base of Cecil Sharp’s folklore studies. Alan Dundes (1966) confirms the confusion vis-à-vis the then popular unilinear tripartite evolutionary scheme of savagery, barbarism and civilization in which American folklore studies emerged. In the first issue of the Journal of American Folklore in 1888, William Wells Newell echoed the very same European concepts restricting folklore to past, illiterate, and oral. American Anthropological folklorists, under the influence of Franz Boas, continued with historical approach that presupposed it a ‘people’s autobiographical ethnography’ located in past, to be fathomed with the help of given text, in search of origin. Dundes argues that this tendency ignored the fact that folklore entails a present too, which is exhibit in the context where it is performed. For literary and anthropological folklorists, “folklore has been thought to be ruled by laws which operated independent of individuals. In theory, one could discover these laws and mechanics without reference to the humans who were subject to them” (Ibid.: 243). A recognition of context renders folklore broad and alive despite potential changes in form and content.

Getting back to Dorsan, there are two sides of the historical development of the folkloric studies. “Folklore studies have been associated from their beginning with antiquities and ‘primitive’ country folk. But another side of the story depicts folklore studies in quite a different light, presents them as contemporary, keyed to the here and now, to urban centers, to the industrial revolution, to the issues and philosophies of the day” (1978: 23). Hence folklore, however prerogative of the folk, need not apply exclusively to the country folk (peasantry and rural masses), but rather signify anonymous masses of tradition-oriented people. The ‘contemporaneity’ as opposed to the antiquity of folklore is the latest development in the folklore studies (Dorsan 1973). Besides, Dorsan also reckons the presence and prevalence of fakelore in urban

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5. Ruth Benedict wrote an article on folklore for the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, in 1931, and argued that folklore is a dead trait in the modern world.

6. Dorsan explores the contemporaneity of folklores under four categories, the city; industry and technology; the mass media; and nationalism, politics and ideology. Besides Dorsan warns to distinguish between folklore and fakelore where the latter stands for folksy songs or stories recorded, printed and sold in the market.
centers (1963). Fakelore are artistic creations in the age of mechanical reproduction, which unlike folklore have great finesse and are pleasing to the audience.

Indian folklorist A K Ramanujan also targets exoticism and romanticism. According to him, the sharp distinction between Marga (classical) and Desi (folk) or between great tradition of the reflective many and little tradition of unreflective and anonymous lot, is misleading. When cultural performances are looked as texts, says Ramanujan, “we need to modify terms such as ‘great tradition’ and ‘little tradition’, and to see all these cultural performances as transitive series, a ‘scale of forms’ responding to another, engaged in continuous and dynamic dialogic relations” (1991a: xviii). In this way, texts are also contexts and pretexts for other texts. This scheme puts the classical, and, the folk and the popular on the interacting continuum. The line of difference between literate and non-literate, pertaining to the attachment with the folklore, hence, cannot be approved of. Ramanujan argues, “In a largely non-literate culture, everyone—whether rich or poor, high caste or low, professor, pundit or ignoramus, engineer or street hawker—has inside him a largely non-literate subcontinent” (Ibid: xiv). And in this line of argument, none of the societies is considered thoroughly literate or having no connection with the non-literate past. Jawaharlal Handoo (1999) goes to the extent of tracing many methods of mass-mobilizations to the folk culture, marking the pervasiveness of folklore even in the literate societies. The folklore study in India was not free from the evolutionary stance. It was also due to manifold vested interests. One of those was to rationalize colonialism and civilization mission in the third world countries (Dorsan 1968, Raheja and Gold, Blackburn 2003). Poitevin (2003) calls it empire theory of folklore that was premised upon superstitions, beliefs and practices of tribes and low castes and also elaborate rituals of the twice-born. R Carnac and W Crook were pioneers among the British Officers, civil servants, scholars or civilians, and foreign missionaries who assumed the role of folklorists in the last decade of the nineteenth century India. George Campbell, ethnologist and later the Governor of Bengal (1871-74) was a vocal proponent of this and requested the Asiatic society to add an ‘exhibition of aborigines’ in the agricultural section of the exhibition in which the specimen people

7. Allen Dundes (1966) talks of use (or abuse) of folklore. Its falsification serves the purpose of the capitalist in the US while its distortion serves that of communists. In similar fashion, Guy Poitevin discusses the folklorisation of Poitics in India in an unpublished paper.
of the tribes would sit, to be conversed with and photographed by the visitors. The colonial construction of the other vis-à-vis the folk was thus effected (Prakash 2000, Chatterji 2003). Some native folklorists continued with the colonial tune, especially with regard to high respect for the Brahmanic perspective. Pundit Ram Naresh Tripathi and Shiv Sahay Chaturvedi, followers of Gandhi and champions of upper caste views at once, spoke through the magazine Braj Bharat published by the Braj Bhasha Academy in 1940.

The colonial folkloric ventures were carried out under the instructions of scientific methods owed to Anthropology and Ethnology. These methods were devised on the Cartesian philosophical tenets, which eventually resulted in to construction of ‘orient’. In agreement with Edward Said, Handoo says that ‘orient’ was seen as fixed texts. “Moreover it was also felt that by doing so, it would be useful for understanding the past, present and perhaps, the future of mankind and will thus accelerate the process of transformation of these primitive societies and usher them in the world of the civilized” (1999: 2). Hence, it is no wonder that Madhav Parasad in 1938 collected Lorikayan, Rani Reshma Chuharmal ka geet and other folk legends that were neglected by the Barhmanic gaze. The early indigenous publishers such as Doodhnath Press and Loknath pustkalaya of Calcutta, Gaighat Press of Banaras and Sansar Press of Arrah were publishing simpleton booklets on Chuharmal ki katha, Sahleh ka geet, Kunvar Vijaymal etc. The value inversion in these lesser known literature on folklore stress the continuity in folklore with reference to their performance in the social context. This development marks two features: one is folklore, that was thought to be restricted to oral tradition, thrived in print and became a matter of use in the age of mechanical reproduction. Secondly, it also ushered Indian society in a value inversion as the folklore of the unheard, from their point of view, began to occupy space, however modest.

Roma Chatterji (2003), in agreement with Allen Dundes, offers the counterargument to the pastness (and past stance on) of folklore. Thus ‘folk’ continues to haunt even modern humans, but nonetheless retains its archaicness. Chatterji tends to believe that

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8 Poitevin mentions these instances in an unpublished paper. Pundit R N Tripathi valorized the practice of Sati, using folk songs, in an article Sati Dharam in Braj Bharat.
9 Roma Chatterji agrees with Dundes that among physicists, “it is not their shared scientific knowledge that makes them a ‘folk’ but rather a shared expressive tradition”.
the very archaïcness vis-à-vis community life, sentimental bent and oneness has been instrumental in whipping up the sense of nationalism among people under the political leaderships.

"...in the nationalistic discourse the term folk carries the connotations of primordial essence and is seen as the expression of an unselfconscious and timeless community life", says Chatterji (Ibid.: 568). This is by the frequent use of the folk categories, the curious process of 'mythicisation' ¹⁰ is executed. This renders the leadership extraordinary and in many cases charismatic. Chatterji looks at the examples of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union to corroborate her point. The nationalistic movement in Bengal presents similar features. She follows Bakhtin to argue that the intrinsic ambivalence of folk culture and folklore is manifest, as it on one hand generates legitimacy for a regime, and on the other it constructs an ideology to subvert another or the same regime. This is however a regime that happens to be at the receiving end of folk culture. Elsewhere, Chatterji (2004) discusses the continuity in the folklore, with reference to Chho dance of Purulia, through the intervention of popular culture. The hybrid is thereby an equally significant a category determining the survival of the folk in the age of the mechanical reproduction of art work¹¹.

The continuity of archaïcness of the folk, as a descriptive category, is dealt with by Ramanujan who would say, "The signifiers, whether they are images or characters or episodes; or even so called structures and archetypes, may be the same in different periods and regions, but the signification goes on changing... (Because) meaning of a sign is culturally and contextually assigned"¹² (1991a: xiv). Folklore, hence, possesses a transformative character of a significant kind, which can be best understood by an anecdote: Ramanujan presents: a philosopher meets a village carpenter who had a beautiful antique knife. When asked by the philosopher as to how old the knife was,

¹⁰ By 'mythicisation', Roma Chatterji means a process in which, by the frequent use of folk categories, individuals are accorded sanctity in terms of religious values and legitimacy in terms of socio-political values. Not only individuals, but also quite many events assume extraordinary significance in popular imagination due to the effect of mythical categories implicit in folklore.

¹¹ Pertaining to this is the argument, this research arrives toward the conclusion, of folklorisation of art forms, be it of the classical tradition or that of popular culture circulated by the culture industry. Briefly, any form of expression, in songs or paintings, that the folk takes to, acquires an aura of collectivity, and thus retains the mythic sacredness.

¹² Note that Ramanujan underlines continuity and discontinuity in the folk on the one hand and attributes the changes to the process of signification, which is largely process of consciousness, whereas there may be images pertaining to unconscious.
the carpenter says, "Oh! The knife has been in our family for generations. We have changed the handle a few times and the blade a few times, but it is (still) the same knife" (Ibid.: xx).

From the aforementioned arguments, this is obvious that folk as a category and folklore studies as a systematic search of knowledge have come a long way, continuing as well as discontinuing quite a few things of days bygone. In South Asia specifically, the study of folk expressions and performances has indeed come of age whereby it is no longer limited in terms of method, complexity of data and subtlety of interpretations. As Arjun Appadurai puts, "South Asian folkloric studies no longer occupy that strange semiperiphery between the studies of folk phenomena in Europe and America on one hand and of native performances and practices in allegedly untouched small scale societies on the other"(1991: 467). Nevertheless Appadurai questions the validity of terms like 'folk' and 'lore'. Like the word 'belief', he says, "lore is a term that implies knowledge that is somehow more weak in its epistemological foundations, more evanescent in its relationship to social life, and more hazy in its grasp on history, than words like knowledge, theory, and worldview.... lore is a poor word to describe the very rich variety of texts and practices, of strategies, of structures, of arguments, and of counterarguments" (Ibid.: 468). Similarly, the term folk continues the conventionally attached romantic values and it is also "intrinsically self-referential and essentialist idea, which did facilitate the kind of fantastic and horrifying spectacle of nationhood which the Nazi regime erected around the German term volk" (Ibid.: 468). To a large extent, the folklore studies have exorcised the master terms such as folk, primitive and native that created illusion of synchronic homogeneity and historical and geographical fixity. An implicit move from text to contexts, occasions, and what Appadurai calls 'the variety of regimes of reception' augurs well for folklore studies. The context vis-à-vis performance has been however relatively small scale and confined to variety of immediate and intricate micro features of performances. Appadurai looks forward to trends, which invite us to move towards the larger scale of contexts in which broader ideological framework, historical currents and social formations are brought in. Furthermore, Appadurai finds that the contemporary writing on folklore show not cultural consensus, but debate on central matters of power, status, gender, genre and reality itself. The polyphonic situations depicted in these analyses remind us that the folk (themselves multiple) have many lore and forms of representation. This indeed
suggests that folkloric texts are translucent rather than transparent, entailing inner dynamics of prose, parody and meter, of tone or style, of structure or ethos. Appadurai does not find folklore fading even ‘in the age of mechanical reproduction’. Rather, “there is a great deal of evidence to show that indigenous traditions have always been plastic and pluriform, that certain forms and texts were standardized over large spaces and long periods, and that individual ‘signatures’ and prestige are not wholly a product of the new mechanical age” (Ibid.: 473). Stretching the same line of arguments, Appadurai (1986), postulates the idea of ‘hybrid forms and popular culture’, which by and large, envelop the life of middle class.

Thus, folklore studies took a turn toward the performance context broadening the framework in which not only ‘verbal art’ as Bascom had us believe was the subject matter but also non-verbal aspects of performance assumed intellectual significance. Dundes draws a long list as to what can be called ‘lore’ including “myth, legend, folktale, joke, proverb, riddle, superstition, charm, blessing, curse, oath, insult, retort, taunt, tease, tongue-twister, greeting or leave-taking formula, folk speech (e.g. slang), folk etymologies, folk similes (e.g. as white as snow), folk metaphors (e.g. jump from the frying pan into the fire), names (e.g. nick names or place names), folk poetry....epitaphs, latrinalia (graffiti)...practical jokes (or pranks), and gestures...the coments made after body emissions (e.g. after burps or sneezes), and sounds made to summon or command animals.” (1966: 238). The coming of age of folklore studies entails not only recognition of diverse subject matter but also acceptance of the folk in literate as well as non-literate society, the relation between the oral and the written, printed, or recorded, individual and communal authorship, survival as well as revival etc.

Mazharul Islam (1985) amending the old and essentialist definitions of folklore, proposes,

“Folklore is the creation of people who live in a particular geographical area, share the same language, culture, mechanism of livelihood and living conditions; whose way of life and traditional heritage are bound by a common identity. Folklore is the outcome of the creative ideas of people expressed through verbal art as well as material forms– it may originate from a community or an individual, it is transmitted orally or through written process from one generation to another and from one country to the other- it exchanges its position from written and oral tradition... folklore may belong to a non-literate or literate society, to a tribal or non-tribal
community, to villages or town-dwellers” (Ibid.: 6). Mazharul Islam classifies diverse
genres of folklore on the basis of his understanding pertaining to Indian Folklore in
general and Bengali Folklore in particular:

1) Folk Literature
2) Folk Practices (day-to-day and occasional practices of folk).
3) Folk arts or artistic folklore (performing and non-performing)
4) Folk Science and Technology.

Following this standpoint, folklore can be found anywhere in any form provided there
are folk who practice. Interestingly enough, in this scheme, individual assumes
significance. Hence, any Folklore may be named after any individual poet or writer.
Meanwhile, the orthodox understanding that Folklore is composed anonymously is
not denied.

There have been numerous approaches to folklore since the beginning of folklore
studies. A synoptic outline of approaches comes from Richard Dorsan (1972), which
can be put under seven broad categories.

1. Mythological school, originated from the works of Grimm brothers.
   Their comparative methods in diachronic linguistic field intended to
   show the unity of Germanic languages and to discover the parent
   Germanic as well as the Indo-European parent languages.

2. Migrational theory emerged from Benfey’s school, which operated
   with the diffusionist assumptions. German indologist Theodore
   Benfey13 argued that folklores from India and thereof motifs diffused
   across Europe.

3. Anthropological theories, were in the beginning preoccupied by the
   evolutionist assumptions. Frazer, Andrew Lang, and Tylor were
   pioneers who strengthened theory of polygenesis, putting Victorian
   England at the acme of civilization. Later anthropological inroads in
   the domain of folklore could be made possible furthermore due to
   interests of Franz Boas in the folklores. Disciples of Boas, such as
   Ruth Benedict, Alfred Kroeber, Paul Radin and others continued this.
   M Herskovits and his student William Bascom operated with
   Malinowski’s anthropological insights.

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13 He was popular for his translation of Sanskrit Panchtantra in to German.
4. Finnish or Historical Geographical School, adopted Benfey's framework of migration and diffusion. Kaarle Kohn of Finland and C W Von Sydoh and Anel Olivik of Denmark were pioneers of this school. The studies by them dwelt upon statistical methodology to establish the hypothetical archetype of individual cultural traits.

5. Psychoanalytical school, consisted of non-formalistic folkloristic theory based on the interpretation of folklore by the use of sexual symbolism. Sigmund Freud's theory provided premises upon which his students like Ernest Jones, Erich Fromm and Gaza Roheim built up their interpretations. Dream, for Freud, was individual myth. Myths, in the same vein, was social dream, which revealed the psychic repression of the childhood of the whole race or culture.

6. Structural school, consists of syntagmatic structural theory of Russian folklorist Vladimir J. Propp and paradigmatic structural theory of French Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. The syntagmatic theory aims at the morphology of folklore. In morphology, structure is described in terms of component parts, their mutual relation and relation with the whole. Propp thus lays emphasis on the description of the phenomena rather than on the discovery of the origin. To do this, components of folklores are put on the linear sequence as constants and variables. Propp's analysis is like grammatical study of poem rather than aesthetic study of hidden meanings and beauty. Levi-Strauss' paradigmatic analysis is concerned with the latent content for which the linguistic theory of De Saussure is applied. Myth, for Levi-Strauss, was a linguistic code. To decipher it linguistic theory is prerequisite. In this scheme, the hidden predominates the apparent, as the method is preoccupied by the latent rather than the manifest.

7. Thompsonian concept of motif/classificatory systems/tale types, is basically about Stith Thompson's motif index of folk literature.

\[\text{Curious enough, Dorsan does not make even a passing reference to C G Jung who contributed significantly to the psychoanalytical discourse on folklores and myth. This invisibility can be somehow related to the monopoly of Freudian school in the realm of psychoanalysis.}\]
One more dimension in the trajectory of folklore studies, to be added in this list, with reference to folklore studies in India is, of performance analysis. Using semiotics as well as musicology and communication theory, many studies have shed light on hitherto uncovered terrain.

To summarize, folklore in a broad sense consists of not only oral but also written, not only tradition of past but also the present and contemporary, not only the text but also context, not only cultural but also political, not only continuity but also changes, not only (performance, authorship, and protagonist) collective but also individual and so on and so forth. Secondly, the folk is not necessarily the category of the unreflective, non-literate lot confined in the self-subsistent little tradition. In a broader sense it is everywhere in a dynamic relation with the classical lore, fake lore, and the most recent medium of expression. In the light of the aforesaid conclusions, the present research identifies folklore along the lines spelt out by Islam (1985), steering clear of the prejudices pointed out by Dorsan (1978) and others, which can be put succinctly in the following points:

a). lore, inclusive of several denominations, of a specified region in which the folk share a language;
b). lore, entailing the creative works of known as well as unknown authors, individual and collective performances;
c). lore that is accepted as that of the folk by the rendition by the latter in several institutionalized contexts and occasions, with patterned frequency;
d). lore that is reflective/expressive of the belief and practices of the folk;
e). lore that underlines the dialogue on the time line with continuum among past, present and future, collapsing the fixed notions of tradition and modernity, and making every expression appear like traditional;
f). lore that survives as independent force in spite of the discursive predominance of the classical, and assimilates the imports of both the classical and the popular.

Having understood the basic features of the folklore, in the milieu when it assumed researchers’ interest and later on when critical reflections led to diverse modifications in the conceptual designs, it is imperative to turn to the content of the folklore. The

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15 Some of such works are by Susan Wadley (1978), Stuart Blackburn (1988), Beck (1982), Blackburn and Ramanujan ed. (1986), Beck and Claus (1986), Poitevin (2007). Many more such studies share the tendency of studying folklore in the context with specific focus on the performance, stylization and presentation of the content.
specific contents of folklore, when cobbled together in the meaningful manner, suggest of worldview. It is generally believed that folklore of a region is descriptive of worldview of the folk (Dundes 1971 & 1995, Jones 1972, Degh 1994).

**Worldview in Folksongs**

The generic meaning, with inherent intricacies, of the term worldview stems from German Philosophy and epistemology. The German equivalent of worldview, *weltanschauung*, refers to the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world. 'It originates from the unique world experience of a people which they experience over several millennia. The language of a people reflects the weltanschauung of that people in the form of its syntactic structures and untranslatable connotations and its denotations'. It is also held as a product of politico-environmental, climatic conditions, the economic resources available, socio-cultural systems and the linguistic family. The importance of the concept of worldview emerged in the wake of crumbling claims of the Enlightenment project that all truth can be attained through deductive reasoning by the use of mathematical logic and axioms. In this regard, 'a worldview can be considered as comprising a number of basic beliefs which are philosophically equivalent to the axioms...These basic beliefs can not, by definition, be proven (in the logical sense) within the worldview precisely because they are axioms, and are typically argued from rather than argued for'. Hence, worldview is a system of folk reasoning. But it may be at both levels, community and individual. While worldview at the level of the whole community is widely accepted notion, at individual level it acquires interesting features. *Wikipedia* mentions certain elements of worldview proposed by Apostel, such as,

1. An ontology, a descriptive model of the world
2. An explanation of the world
3. A futurology, answering the question 'where are we heading'
4. Values, answering the ethical question 'what should we do'
5. A praxeology or methodology or theory of action, answering 'how should/could we attain our goals'

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16 See [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

17 Based on the conclusions offered by the center Leo Apostel for interdisciplinary studies. Interesting to note that these elements are suggested in terms of an individual’s constructed worldview. However, they can be identified in the worldview in general.
6. An epistemology or theory of knowledge, answering 'what is true and false'

7. An etiology or a constructed worldview should contain an account of its own building blocks, its origin and construction

The enlisted features are premised upon the argument that an individual can construct his/her worldview. It is a common found argument in the folklore research that refuse to accept individuals as passive receivers and actors in/of worldview. Jones (1972) dismisses the scientific behaviorism, allegedly found in the anthropological works, which restricts the concept of worldview to a socio-cultural-collective system of beliefs. Raising a vital question Jones suggests that worldview is termed so variously that it is certainly doubtful to believe in one concrete-all pervasive meaning of it. This vagueness of the term accords a chance to enlarge its scope and following verstehen understand the study worldview of an individual.

On the other hand, however, worldview is defined and understood at the level of community. The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology defines worldview as "the set of beliefs constituting an outlook on the world characteristic of a particular social group, be it a social class, generation or religious sect...However the analytical problem consists in what justification the sociologist has for putting particular elements into a worldview, for it will never be the case that all members of a group believe all elements of the worldview that is ascribed to them" (Abercrombie et al. 2000: 398). The question pertaining to the worldview, of group and of individual, creates a space for reflecting on the dynamic relationship between the social group and individual and thereby understanding the concept of worldview in its fullest (contextual) originality. Perhaps the question becomes a promising key when we look at the concept of worldview in relation with folklore. In fact, the folklore studies, as discussed in the foregone section, are studies of folk worldview (Degh 1994). Degh argues that folk narrative study brings about context and text in relation with humans (the folk). Thereby "observed live narration led to the introduction of the concept homo narrans: the idea that homo sapiens, fabers and ludens, is by nature also a narrator" (Ibid.)

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18 What Redfield (1952) and others call worldview is called 'primitive categories', 'cognitive maps', 'ethos', 'forms of life', 'ideology, theme', 'style, super-style', 'ultimate cosmology, pattern', etc by Anthropologists. I am not mentioning the name of the respective Anthropologists and philosophers who coined these terms to mean more or less the same thing.

19 By folk narrative study, Degh means folklore study concerned with folk narratives.
245). *Homo narrans* observe verbalization of distinctive mental (spiritual) attitudes as a creative force. Degh quotes Kurt Ranke, “as long as human being perceives, thinks and represents the world, as long as he creates the world primarily in his own language, he will have given his various emotional and mental processes a form of expression corresponding to them” (Ibid.: 245). Thus, their worldview is not an ideal type, a cognitive construct in abstraction for scholars’ analytical purpose. It is a natural type with all practical vagueness and confusions, instead, a natural type vis-à-vis worldview is ethnic/native/local variants of perceptions. The vagueness of the term, as found in the context, holds blessings in disguise as it enables a researcher to abstain from a certitude that anthropologists have been perpetuating. Notwithstanding worldview means, “sum total of subjective interpretations of perceived and experienced reality of individuals. Any human action is motivated by such a perception. It contains beliefs, opinions, philosophies, conducts, behavioral patterns, social relationships, and practices of humans, related both to life on this earth and beyond in supernatural realm. Worldview then permeates all cultural performances, including folklore. Narratives, in particular, are loaded with worldview expressions: they reveal inherited communal and personal views of human conduct - this is their generic goal” (Ibid.: 247). Degh, furthermore, discusses genre types, essentially legend-tale type, which yield narratives pointing to the folk worldview. Interestingly, a narrator (may) offer a sense of two worldview at once. “The one inherent in the traditional type, and the other, the specific worldview of the narrator. Evidently, the individual’s worldview is revealed already by his or her choice of stories from the available repertoire and further shown by the creation of new variants” (Ibid.: 249).

On the other hand, Dundes (1971, 1995) steers clear of the confusions arising from the taxonomical and classificatory concerns of the folklorists as far as the study of worldview is concerned. Reflecting on the idea of worldview Dundes (1995) infers from Sandor Erdesz and proposes two notions. First is the older one that suggests worldview to be synonymous with cosmology, viz. man’s view of man’s place in the world. The second is a more modern one that suggests worldview to be cognitive and structural. It refers to the way people perceive the world through native categories or unstated premises or axioms. Without denying the presence of the elements of worldview in tales, Dundes emphasizes that a genre is not important in this regard. While primary concern of folklore studies may be classification and taxonomical ordering of genres, the study of worldview in folklore can dwell upon folk ideas.
Dundes argues, “by folk ideas, I mean traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of man, of the world, and of man’s life in the world. Folk ideas would not constitute a genre of folklore but rather would be expressed in a great variety of different genres” (1971: 95). Folk ideas are found in folklore as well as non-folkloristic items such as cinema and popular literature. In Dundes schema, folk ideas are akin to the terms popularly used in anthropology such as ‘basic premises’, ‘cultural axioms’, or ‘existential postulates’.20 Furthermore, “All cultures have underlying assumptions and it is these assumptions or folk ideas which are the building blocks of worldview” (Ibid.: 96).

Besides, Dundes offers a twofold warning. First that folk ideas are not traditional stereotypes. The idea, for example ‘the French are great lovers’, is stereotype which Dundes call folk fallacies. They are demonstrably false and the folk are mostly aware of them. In contrast “folk ideas would be more a matter of basic unquestioned premises concerning the nature of man, of society, of the world, and these premises although manifested in folklore proper might not be at all obvious to the folk in whose thinking they were central. Folk fallacies would therefore be part of the conscious or self-conscious culture of a people whereas folk ideas would be part of the unconscious or unself-conscious culture of a people” (Ibid.: 101). The folk use folk ideas the way we all use language (speaking and understanding) efficiently without an authenticated knowledge of the grammar of the very same language. In analogy, it is just like a fish is not aware it is in water since it knows no other medium21. The second point to remember, in the process of understanding worldview of the folk through folk ideas, is about a potentially conflicting heterogeneity of folk ideas. “One need not assume that all the folk ideas of a given culture are necessarily mutually reconcilable within a uniform and harmonious worldview matrix” (Ibid.: 99). For example, in the American worldview linearity is valued more than non-linear. In fact, any thing circular, curvaceous, or crooked is despised as undesirable. But both exist as indispensable denominators of folk reasoning. It is beyond imagination to reconcile pure capitalism and pure socialism. Despite, as Dundes argues, “both principles are taught to American children and the fundamental opposition is left unresolved” (Ibid.:

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20 Dundes (1971) draws a line of parallel between his notion of folk ideas and Clyde Kluckhohn’s ‘unstated assumptions’ and H. E. Adamson Hoebel’s ‘cultural postulates’.
21 Dundes does not use the idea of unconscious in the Freudian or Jungian ways. Another allusion, to understand the usage of folk ideas by the folk in their folklore, Dundes cites Ruth Benedict’s idea that ‘we do not see the lens through which we look’.
Furthermore, folk ideas cannot be restricted to certain genres. At this point Dundes breaks away from other folklorists and argues, “proverbs would almost certainly represent the expression of one or more folk ideas, but the same folk ideas might also appear in folktales, folk songs, and in fact every conventional genre of folklore, not to mention non-folkloristic materials” (Ibid.: 95).

The main emphasis, so far, has been on a few aspects of worldview. First of all, it is at both levels, individual and group/collective. Secondly, it entails elements, such as folk ideas, which are unstated and the folk are not conscious of it. Third, that it may be myriad and in conflict and thereby not a very harmonious whole. Fourth, it may be comprehended through any genre because folk ideas or such postulates or axioms etc. recur across diverse genres of folklore. After the synoptic view at how the folklore studies conceptualize worldview, in agreement as well as disagreement with anthropology, it is important to take note of the way it is understood in phenomenological (in the sociology of knowledge in general) discourse.

The description of everyday life world entails people's worldview. In agreement with Max Sheller, Luckmann carries forward Schutz's proposition of worldview as a relative-natural domain. It means, in simpler terms, that worldview is relative to a people and most of it is taken for granted as if it were naturally pre-given. It does not form 'a closed, unequivocally articulated' and clearly arranged provinces. Its validity is beyond questioning 'until further notice'. Reasoning (Luckmann calls it 'explication') with issues, objects, events etc of the world is through a host of a priori knowledge within worldview and the individual experiences. "Each step of my explication and understanding of the world is based at any given time on a stock of previous experience, my own immediate experiences as well as such experiences as are transmitted to me from my fellow men and above all from my parents, teachers and so on….In the natural attitude, I only become aware of the deficient tone of my stock of knowledge if a novel experience does not fit into what has up until now been taken as taken-for-granted valid reference schema" (1974: 7-8).

In the face of a problematic/unfit experience of an individual, a further explication (reasoning) by the concerned individual takes place, and due to such a possibility a worldview is often subject to diversification and individuation despite its collective nature. Notwithstanding, no amount of questioning on the validity of a priori dismisses 'socially transmitted traditional solutions of problems'. Driven pragmatism in everyday life and in terms with the paramount reality of rela
natural worldview, social actors have to follow intersubjective format to put forth their subjective explanations. For every individual, as a bottom line, seeks to ensure meaning of social existence. "In short, within the natural attitude I do not act only within a biographically determined hierarchy of plans. Rather, I also see typical consequences of my acts which are apprehended as typical and I insert myself into a structure of incompatibilities that is lived through as being obvious" (Ibid.: 20).

The phenomenological conceptualization of worldview, in terms of the concept of life world, brings about a conjunction of meaning and structure of meaning making. It occurs in Dundes' and Degh's formulation of worldview as well. But the folkloristic approach to the question of worldview is not geared to address the issue of meaning and its structure. Now when it is established as to what worldview is and how the folk are related to it, it is imperative for this research to turn the focus toward women's involvement in folklore, especially in folksongs, and how the folk worldview may be highly indebted to their women. By the virtue of singing songs women establish a social order which permits resistance as well as reconciliation in the folk society. The existing literatures, in this regard, suggest various currents of arguments which will be subsumed in the following perusal.

Implications of the feminine domain

Worldview in folklore, as reflected in diverse genres and elements of folklore, brings about an interaction between perspectives of diverse social groups, pertaining to caste, religion and gender. While both male and female social actors use certain genres, there are some specifically for women (Jordan and Caro 1986, Henry 1988 & 1998). The Akam (inside the domestic domain) and Puram (outside the domestic domain) division of genres in the folklore from south India establishes that

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22 The theme of meaning, structure of meaning, in the sense of Hermeneutic and phenomenological construction of worldview would be discussed at length in a later section of this thesis. It is pointed out at this juncture for heuristic importance.

23 This is one of the key arguments which this thesis develops and offers in the light of the songs sang by women folk of Mithila. The nature and scope of resistance to the ideology in currency, and upheld by men folk in general, are however suggestive of a quixotic tendency. It is not a radically nihilistic resistance. As it would appear toward the fourth chapter of this thesis, the resistance is for reconciliation with the folk society including men, with emotional sensibility.

women narrate stories from Akam genre (Ramanujan 1991b, Hart 1973, 1999). The Akam genre consists of narrative on child rearing, moral tales, love poetry, and devotional songs. The domain of folksongs, except songs in folk epics, theatre and other public performances, is especially women’s prerogative. Following Jordan and Caro (1986) women’s association with folklore is twofold. One, what and how much is the space for women’s participation in folklore; two, how are women figured out in the folklore. Jordan and Caro classified the folkloristic literature into three broad areas of concern. Firstly, the projection of women in folklore, which initially was mostly negative; secondly, the roles of women in the social order which was mainly patriarchal and their influence on the female creativity; thirdly, whether women are recognized as artist or not. On one hand there are literatures depicting women in stereotypical roles (Upadhyaya 1970, Indradeva 1989), as goddesses (Bachofen 1977, Wadley 1988) and, ideal types and scare warnings to make women accept sex roles (MacLaughlin 1974). On the other hand, some of them also present the narratives of struggling women, as heroines who may destroy the threatening male villains.

Women hold place of significance in the song culture of Maithili and Bhojpuri speaking regions (Upadhyay 1970, Henry 1988 & 1998, Indradev 1989), for women’s predominant position in the Bhojpuri speaking region lies in the act of singing of folksongs at several stages of life cycle is concerned. No wonder that Ved Prakash Vatuk (1979) dedicates his ‘Studies in Indian folk traditions’ to his mother, who in his words “was the best carrier of village traditions- particularly of rituals and folksongs” (Ibid.: 6). Notwithstanding the nostalgia, it helps us to understand women’s engagement with folklore, which on one hand socializes them for their roles and on the other, provides them exclusive space. A K Ramanujan (1991b) marks this clearly in the distinctive realm of women’s tales where time and again women’s alternative worldview becomes visible. In yet another context, Ramanujan emphasized the instrumentality of folklore, saying, “The aesthetics, ethos, and world view of a person are shaped in childhood and throughout early life, and reinforced later by these verbal

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25 George Hart III. (1973 & 1999) classifies the ancient Tamil poetry in to Akam and Puram. The former comprises those poems, which deal with life inside the family, and specifically the love between men and women, while the latter comprises those songs, which deal with life outside the family and, usually with the king.

26 Jordan and Caro (1986) refers to Stone (1975) to argue that reinterpretation of folklore offered a categorical picture of women.
and non-verbal environments."27 Thus, women's worldview is shaped and reinforced time and again by the folklore, which they have been exposed to and engaged with since childhood. This is equally true for men who learn their way of 'doing' and 'not doing' in the same context. Women, as Sudhir Kakar (1978 & 1989) suggests in his psychoanalytical discourse on femininity, motherhood in relation with child and inner world, gain in cultural consummation in the form of motherhood in Hindu society. The mythological icons surround Hindu women and orient them in typical value configurations. The phenomena of womanhood in Hindu society especially entails folklore in great deal. Studies in oral tradition in South India, especially in Tamil context, have been centered on women, considering women 'Sakti' (the power or energy of the universe)28 (Hart 1973, Beck 1974, Wadley 1980, Egnor 1980). In the same line of arguments, suggestive of socializing bearing of folklore upon women, is the work of Veena Das (1988), which elaborates the orientation of women and development of feminity through the verbal mode of communication. The body of a woman receives characteristic fundamentals throughout the life cycle, until the end of life, which is death. In this line of argument, based on the study of Punjabi kinship, Veena Das underlines the 'double register' of law and language, and, of poetry and metalanguage. Women's subversive assertions against the official kinship ideology, which are occasionally mentioned in Das' analysis, are in the 'register of poetry and metalanguage'. This is apparently dominated and set off by the 'register of law and language', the mainstay of masculine domination in the patriarchal structure. But coexistence of both closed and wider morality, registers of law and language, and, poetry and metaphysics cannot be denied. This point is well elaborated by Ann Gold (2003), whereby the legitimacy and viability of women's assertions in their folksongs is stressed. Raheja and Gold argue that women's songs from north India are not only a counterargument to the colonial construct of meek and silent women of rural India but also a source of complexity in the patriarchal social

27 Here verbal and non-verbal environment, discernibly, is constituted by the symbolic language of nonliterate people and their culture.

28 Susan Wadley (1980) terms Sakti as power or energy of the universe in her work. This idea of power of women breaks the misconceived notion of women's passiveness on the one hand and denotes their relationship with the sacred power of goddesses. As the Tamils believe and practice, women are controlled by the male authority as well as by themselves to contain this sacred power in order to bring about fortunes for her family. This containment is, interestingly, also meant to enhance her same power.
structure. The duo establishes the inherent ambivalence/ambiguity in the women's songs is, arguably, strategic on the part of women.

If women's place is significant in folklore as not only performers but also as characters of the narratives, then women's contribution vis-à-vis performance of songs and perpetuation of meanings in worldview is foregone conclusion. It is however debatable whether the functional significance of folklore is only for the socialization of women. And if it is so, what is this socialisation for: conformity or resistance, or for both. The debate appears toward the end of this thesis.

Acoustic effect and the anthropology of death

Having understood the relation between/among categories of folklore, worldview and feminine, it is interesting to turn toward this particular dimension in the performance of folklore. The extreme of folklore performance, arguably, is when songs are replaced by crying. It is an improvisation, in sync with the event at specific junctures of life, which has an evolving script as the performers (the crying social actors) voice it with sobs and hiccups. Within the domain of folksongs, this subgenre, which was ignored until late, was of ritual lament song. Also called tuneful weeping and ritual wailing, these are performed across folk cultures the world over. On painful separation from the family, kiths and kin after (during) marriage in India or China or on the occasion of greetings (or as an extreme example on the occasion of death) (Alexiou 1974, Tiwary 1978, Blake 1979, Briggs 1993, Urban 1988) the tuneful weeping is performed by the women folk. It is significant to note that in such instances of women specific performances men folk are somber party as though accepting the vulnerability of social order. This subgenre of folksong in the ambit of folklore, like any other, entails narratives vis-à-vis statements. These 'wept statements', akin to statements in poetry or sung statement, carry emotive power of the women. Tiwary suggests, "It is institutionalized weeping prescribed as a right kind of response to given social situations" (1978: 25). As found in the Magahi, Bhojpuri and Maithili region of Bihar in north India, these wept statements express memory of past, the fear of an unknown future in an unknown place, apologies for any guilt and

29 Of late, in ethnomusicology studies were conducted to understand the significance of tuneful weeping as one of the categories of folklore. Not only intonation, melism, and the musical structure over all but also the narrative in the wailing were analyzed. The narrative of this genre offers a potential alternative to that has been offered so far in anthropological texts as people's perception (largely mythological) of death and life.
plead for forgiveness, and plead to not forget the weeping person. Not only on marriage, farewell to daughter and arrival of somebody after long time, tuneful weeping takes place on death in family in society. For the latter, the content and style of renditions change. Urban (1988) argues that ritual wailing by womenfolk in Amerindian Brazil wails to reaffirm social order and for acceptance in the audience. By the virtue of musical design, icons of crying such as creaking voice, voiced inhalation, falsetto vowels, cry break, with proper intonation implicit in wail “one emotion (sadness) points to or ‘comments upon’ another emotion (the desire for social acceptance)” (Ibid. : 386). This amounts to a meta-affect because other actors find the rendition appropriate and intelligible. In this the ‘hearer’ is an ‘overhearer’ and especially men are passive participants without joining them. Urban concludes that it shows the socialization of affect and hence wailing contributes to social order and social control. On the other hand, Briggs highlights the polyphonic and intertextual character of laments that also plays a role in the cultural construction of women’s social power. On the basis of study among Kwamuhu and Murako in the delta of Amacuro of Venezuela, Briggs uncovers the musical and emotional construction of social disorder, which can be also read as social order due to the polyphony of text.

“Wailing exhibits a double relationship to agency. The content of textual phrases draws attention to agency by providing a comprehensive account of the way that particular words and actions contributed to death. Nevertheless the dynamics of lament performances transform the individual agency of particular wailers into a shared sense of agency. The performance dynamics of wailing thus create a sort of inflation in the economy of agency such that agency becomes highly diffuse and can no longer be attributed to a single individual” (1993: 949). The subversive narrative of wailing to which even the audience submits, inverts the discursive power equation between male and female participant on the event of death. While anthropological texts have enhanced our knowledge of people’s engagements with death, they have not established the essential relationship between the event of death and the folk engagement with the same beyond the rituals. Death is a focus only because of the associated rituals rather than the folk imagination of it. The former is largely conditioned by what the classical texts offer on it, while the latter is an ingenious blending of insights. The distinctions of metaphors borrowed from the social situations to imagine death renders death as a phenomenon larger than mere ritual performances.

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The conventional anthropological works on people's perceptions of death are by and large of functionalist orientation (Malinowski 1947, Hertz 1960, Parry, Bachofen 1967), or structuralist (Levi-Strauss 1969; Das 1976 & 1986) and taxonomical (Van Gennep 1960). Apart from detailed description and analysis of piacular rites, these works highlight the beliefs associated with death. In sum, according to Hertz (1960), these are threefold: Beliefs pertaining to, body of the dead, soul of the dead and mourners. Two point exegeses, befitting the present work, is following:

Firstly, life and death are conjoined realities in people's perception. Bachofen (1967) demonstrated it in his analysis of Greek and Roman mortuary symbolism. Hertz (1960) pointed out signs of fertility and sexuality in the mortuary rites among Malaya-Polynesian people. Studies on the death, using symbols of sexuality and fertility, derive common conceptions, which strike connection between death and many other event of life. “It is clear that such conceptions imply that death is a source of life. Every death makes available a new potentiality for life, and one creatures loss is another’s gain” (Bloch and Parry 1982:8).

Secondly, mourners, universally women, are considered only as functional tools in the course of last rite of the passage, preparing the dead's body for funeral rite on one hand and helping the family of the deceased in reintegration into society. Das (1986) does a little more by drawing cognitive/structuralist conclusion as she argues, “rituals of mourning have to provide mediation between these two opposite poles in which life and death are seen to be completely conjoined and which are seen to be in complete disjunction (1986: 197). Though Das considers women's/mourner's noise and silences meaningful and points out the dialogic format of the performance she falls short of carrying it forward to locate it in the matrix of life. It is furthermore revealed in the analyses of the symbolic representation of death in the Hindu worldview and the rules in the piacular rites amongst the Hindus (Das 1976, Kaushik 1976). The process in the last rite, to which the dead as well as the living are

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30 I am using ‘people’ as a generic category, instead of ‘folk’ which is used mostly in relation with folklore. Besides, the anthropological works on people's idea of death do not claim to have studied folklore. They are conventional anthropological studies on the worldview of people rather than worldview of folk.

31 Both Das and Kaushik separately share the main interest of discussing the symbolic significance of the rules: lateral, spatial and acoustic. Somehow the last, the acoustic dimension is understated in their analyses, and if any recognition of the sound waves in the ritual process it seems only about what the pundits and the chieft male-mourner voice. What assumes centrality are the distinctions of left hand and right hand, the categories of profane and scared, and the debate on the Durkheimian distinction. Das' discussion is based on the scriptural injunction in the Garud Purana and the Grahya Sutra (1976).
subjects, cosmization of the departed soul, is in sync with the classical injunctions according to which the folk behave. The functional significance of the rite is that the both the dead are reincorporated into the social, the dead in the socially envisioned domain and the living in the society. The last rite is to address the attributes of liminality that the incident of death brings about. But, in this scheme of analysis, death appears like a phenomenon of the collective, as an event in public, controlled by the normative social. There is no disputing about it, but the possibility of more to the event of death is missed out: such as the associations of individual mourner, the folk imagination of the death in close association with other events of life, and the totality of worldview that entails the notions of the classical texts in different fashion, and more over the entirety of the acoustic effect which entails the Vedic hymns being chanted by the pundit on one hand and the folk expressions on the other.

To study tradition and thereof Meanings
In this regard anthropological works fail to do justice with the whole of worldview of people, precisely because of the preoccupation with the theoretical concerns and because people’s perceptions/belief is not discussed in association with people’s emotion. As Das herself points out, “Anthropologists have been very successful in studying formal aspects of life when individuals can be shown to be playing their roles, or when they are engaged in formal exchanges or when people are acting out rituals whose format is collectively agreed upon. But in the entire mushy area of life when the individual emotion seems to confuse the formal pattern or when the context is not formally structured as in Levi-Strauss32 example of two strangers sharing a restaurant table in Paris, the models of the anthropologist begin to falter” (1986: 185). No wonder that, elsewhere, Das (1987) discusses cognitive structure of Hindu society vis-à-vis caste through rituals and the frame of reference is the Brahmanas. In the same vein, the categories of Dharma, Karma, Moksha, and moreover Hinduism are discussed mostly in the light of the classical texts (Kakar 1976, Madan 1991, 2006). If any difference, that is expressed in the extreme form of an alternative Hinduism

and Kaushik’s based on the ethnographic study of the doms of Varanasi (1976). The appearance of these works is at the juncture of sociological studies in India when the debate on the sociology of India was rife with validity claims of diverse kinds. It shows that the notions from the classical Hindu texts were employed as though the absolute ones.

32 Das, here, refers to the example of strangers in a coffee house from Levi-Strauss’ (1969) work ‘The Raw and the Cooked’.

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projected to be completely different form the mainstream Hinduism\textsuperscript{33} (Srinivas and Shah 1968). Even the ethnosociological approach of Marriott does not go beyond the categories from the classical texts when it comes to devise the list of indigenous cognitive categories of Hindu society (Marriott 1990). No wonder that the conceptualisation of ‘Little tradition’ and ‘Great tradition’ on one hand and that of the processes of Universalisation and Parochialisation runs the risk of objectivity (Marriott 1967). Not only the underlying evolutionary scheme, the ethnosociology also failed to notice the widespread significance of the ‘folklorisation’ in the context of Indian society in general. The latter is more apt a category to understand the processes of change than the allegedly value-loaded \textit{Parochialisation}\textsuperscript{34}. In summary, the available literatures do not present the totality of folk worldview, let alone thereof \textit{folk-philosophising} that deals with finer nuances attached to the events of life including death. They do not look at the possible improvisation of the classical Hindu categories of \textit{Dharma, Karma} and \textit{Moksha} in the folklore, which resist as well as reconcile with the Brahmanic-Sanskritik textual ideas. They also do not shed light on the instrumental role played by the category of emotion, with empirical manifestations at the level of social, in the socio-cultural expressions.

The second set of challenge that the present research work grapples with is the impact of modernity conditioning our thinking of life and death in the folk context. On one hand death figures as a ‘sequestered reality’ (Clark 1993) or the focus is on the loneliness of dying in the modern society (Elias 1985, Kearl 1989) in the sociological enquiries and on the other the anthropological literatures have discussed death only in terms of rites of the passage and ritual performances (for example a work by Vitebsky 1993 or Myerhoff 1984, among so many). Some works of Indological nature also restrict the discourse to the domain of the classical literature (Schombucher & Zoller 1999, Fillipi 2005, Saraswati 2005). It becomes challenging indeed to understand the traditional social structure, by fathoming the acoustic dimension vis-à-vis folksongs, and arrive at the folk notions of living and dying.

\textsuperscript{33} M N Srinivas hints at the potentially distinguishable version of Hinduism, emerging from the practices of the people rather than the ancient texts. It however fails doubly to note that Hinduism is not either textual or practical. It consists of both. The folksongs from Mithila,

\textsuperscript{34} The conclusion of this research draws on the criticism of the works related to Indian society, especially Hindu society, suggesting amendments in these categories in the light of the emerging arguments form the corpus of songs presented in the fourth chapter. We shall back to these ‘questioned notions’ toward the conclusion with more detailed nuances.
To sum up, the conventional way of studying tradition has been prepossessed with the notion of order and disorder. Everything that belonged to tradition has been looked at with the objective of discovering the structure of order, and how disorder is avoided or coped with in a traditional society. Hence, studying death meant understanding the issue of order and disorder. While it is a valid concern of a study on traditional society, it somewhere lost the basic prerequisite to understand the traditional society as a normal and routine social structure. Let alone the dynamics of day to day social relations and occurrences, the studies on traditional society and thereof meanings did not move away from the classical/sanskritk texts and the social exotica of rites and rituals. The prepossession with the issue of order and disorder vis-à-vis the phenomenon of death and dying in traditional society has reached a stage whereby sociologists perceive a modern society where death is sequestered reality and dying is a lonely act. In this light, it is significant to notice the recurrence of traditional notions of death and dying in the folk society in modern times, where doctors are important part in the folk society. But the modern-medical injunctions are almost same as the classical-textual ones, as they are both subject to the folklorisation. The folk philosophy works in close collaboration with other sources of insights and ideas without compromising on its own accord. Hence, in our times, the study of tradition demands an orientation toward neither modernity nor traditional, as it were. The study of tradition, as this research work claims to be, is beyond the binary opposition of conceptual categories. An event in the life-cycle finds cultural expressions according to the worldview of the folk which may be inclusive of the features of both tradition and modernity or hybrid, or something that is beyond such categorization. The present work intends to discuss ‘folk philosophy’ vis-à-vis perceptions/beliefs about life and death as found in narratives within folksongs without simplifying the complex of emotion and participation of both men and women. Moreover, emphasis must be laid upon the fact that this research evaluates women’s position in the Hindu society on the basis of the songs they sing. As already stated in the beginning, the context of the work is Mithila.

Mithila, Maithili and worldview

Mithila and Maithili have been intriguing for ethnologists in the colonial India who thought it could be clubbed into yet another constructed category (Burghart 1993). Mithila is more mythical than historical in terms of territory, for it was never as a
politically demarcated geographical territory. Nevertheless, every study dwells upon a perception of Mithila, which is deduced from the worldview of the Maithili speaking people. No wonder then, Burghart suggests to look for ‘speech marks’ rather than ‘landmarks’ in Mithila. Thus, in rough estimate, Mithila covers the region northward from the Ganga river across Bihar and into the Nepalese Tarai from where the Shivalik foothills of the Himalaya emerge. As a civilizational region Mithila (Makhan Jha 1982), like another civilizational region Mahakoshal in Chhatisgarh, can not have fixed cultural-linguistic boundaries. However, in accordance with presently existent administrative boundaries, the region of Mithila is conceived as comprising the districts of Darbhanga, Madhubani, Sitamarhi, Muzzafapur, Samastipur, Chamaparan (East and West), Saharsa, Purnia, parts of Mungher and Bhagalpur. The region falls in between 25.28° and 26.52° north latitude, and, 84.56° and 86.46° east longitude (Roy Chaudhury 1980, Jha 1982, Jha 2002 and Mishra 2003). As for language Maithili, Grierson was highly puzzled and eventually hastened to call it a variant of an abstract construct called Bihari language (Burghart 1993). But, Maithili is as varied as the heterogeneous category Maithil, the folk who inhabit/ belong to Mithila. To understand this it is imperative to note the stratification and belief system of Mithila. The society of Mithila is highly stratified along caste lines, where superiority of status lies with Brahmins whereas powerful position in terms of land and property ownership is with other ‘forward caste(s)’ such as Rajput, Bhumihar, Kayastha, Bania etc. Every caste is further classified in to subcastes, which renders caste system highly complex. The backward castes such as Koeri, Kurmi, Ahir, Mali, Kewat, Mallah, Dom, Dusadh, Tanti Mushar, Pasi, etc. have internal hierarchy of their subcastes. Most of the castes are named in accordance with their hereditary occupations they have in the Jajmani system of village society. Muslims are also interspersed throughout the region. They are also classified status-wise. Makhan Jha stratifies Muslims according to their class and birth, where Mughals, Pathan, Sayyed,

35 Burghart presents a critical analysis of the whole trajectory of Grierson’s research on Maithili language. To begin with Grierson treated maithili as a distinct language despite his sole dependence on the information provided by the Srotriya (the culturally superior category of Brahmin in Mithila) Brahmin. But as he took note of the intriguing variety within Maithili language, and the colonial interest in classifying and simplifying the people’s practices for administrative purposes, he zeroed in on an abstract construct of Bihari in which he placed Bhojpuri, Magahi along with Maithili.

36 I am using the term ‘forward caste’ in accordance with the general usage among the people of the region, rather than meaning any conceptually clear term, to indicate those caste groups who are socially perceived to be higher in the caste hierarchy, as opposed to the ‘backward caste’. The perception of location in the social hierarchy is shared by both, the groups in question and the perceiving groups.
Sekh etc are in the upper class. The lower class Muslim comprises Bakkho (nomads), Dhunia (cotton-carder), Dhobi (washer man), Darzi (tailor), Ansari and Momin (weavers), Kasai (butcher), Pamaria (singers), Rangrez (dyers) etc. Apparently, all the lower class Muslim subgroups are classified in accordance with their occupation, which is akin to the hierarchy of caste on the basis of occupation.

The Hindu are further classified in to sects such as Shakti, Shiva and Vishnu. Among all sects, followers of Shakti are in predominance. The Hindu in Mithila invoke various deities such as Kali, Durga, Tripur Sindhuri, Jwalamukhi, etc. Each Maithili family has a household deity belonging to Shakti cult commonly called Gosaun. But then, Makhan Jha (1982) also underlines that followers of any particular sect worship gods of the whole Hindu pantheon. Especially lord Shiva has a very significant space in folklife, which is revealed in the devotional folksongs, called ‘Nachari’. In fact Hindus in Mithila worship Panch-Devata (compound of five gods), which consists of Shakti, Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesh and Surya (the sun god). The richness of philosophical thoughts has posterity in Mithila, with reference to both mythology and history. Mishra writes, “Mithila is the land of the founders of Buddhism and Jainism; the birthplace of the scholars of all six orthodox branches of Sanskrit learning such as Yajnvalkya, Bridha Vachaspati, Ayachi Mishra, Shankar Mishra, Gautam, Kapil, Sachal Mishra, Kumaril Bhatt and Mandan Mishra” (2003: 93). In association with the philosophical supremacy of the Maithil, the maithili folklore is given a place of dignity. There are more than one hundred and fifty styles (genre of folksongs) such as Parati, Sohar, Baagabni, Tirhut, Jog, Uchili, etc. “The exclusive privilege of women in rendering these songs without any formal training, mainly in terms of creation and recreation of the stories of Sita’s marriage, on several occasions, like marriage and

37 Makhan Jha writes in the endnote that Nachari songs (songs in the praise of Shiva) were so popular during the Mogul period that Abdul Fazal (the famous writer of Ain-e-Akbari) mentioned it in his book. Famous Maithili poet Vidyapati (14th to 15th century A.D) was a renowned devotee of lord Shiva and wrote Nachari in numbers. Jha also notes that Nachari and Gosaunik geet (songs in the praise of Shakti) of Vidyapati are quite diffused in all the performances in Mithila and constitute quite a considerable part of Maithili folksongs.

38 Needless to mention- that almost every work on Mithila, by native scholars as well as those from abroad, has continued with a commonality, that is ‘glorified Mithila’. The glorification is still on not only in research works but also in everyday conversations of the folk. Many songs, from folklore as well as songs composed by individuals perpetuate the idea of culturally supreme Mithila, running the risk of ethnocentrism. The present work is aware of it and careful about the pitfalls of any such indulgence while describing the socio-cultural structure and the historical-mythological position of the region.
other rituals, (which) make the Maithil folksongs distinctive" (Jha 2002: 14). Besides there are caste specific folksongs and ballads, such as the Salhesa songs of the Dusadhas, the Deenabhadri of Musahars, the Loric of Yadavas, the Jat-Jatin of Mallahs, etc. Some of the common found categories of folklore in Bihar (in Mithila in particular). Roy Chaudhury suggests, are cumulative songs, non-sense rhymes, pastoral songs, folk plays, etc. Cumulative songs are various integrated songs, which give an impression of rhythmically moving tale. Non-sense rhymes are yet another element of folklore of Bihar, which are often used to lull the child in to drowsiness and finally sleep. Pastoral songs occupy great deal of space in the folk life. Mostly sung by lower caste men and women from various caste groups, these songs “express the thoughts, aspirations and sorrow of the villagers” (1980: 36). Folk plays are not plays in typical sense. These are often aided by cumulative songs in association with real life performance of the social actors. The example from Maithili folklore is of ‘Shama-Chakwa’ and ‘Bhaiya Dui/Bhardutia(Bhratri Dwitiya)’.

The deep stratification and complex of belief system in Mithila along with multiple genres of folk songs tempt to believe in what many ethnomusicological researches concluded elsewhere: the genres are allocated in accordance with social structure to different social categories/groups (of the folk) (Lomax 1962, Blacking 1973, Feld 1984). On the other hand though, Henry observes, “genres may cross social categories, that is genres may become dissociated from their categories of origin, and linked with other categories, a process that can be called genre drift” (1988:224). Hence a possibility to discover a hermeneutic unity amidst the heterogeneity of genres is never ruled out.

Going back to Maithili songs, in his introductory note to the compilation of songs by Smt. Kameshwari Devi, Mohan Bharadwaj writes, “This is an interesting paradox that uncultured songs are rendered on the occasion of the rites which are meant to transform individuals into cultural”39 (1980: g). This paradox accords significance to women as they execute ‘Lokpakshiya kriya’ (folk aspects of activities) of the rites. The Lokpakshiya is not less important than the ‘Dhrmapakshiya’ (classical religious aspects of activities), which are executed by the pundits in rites and rituals. The songs,

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39 Mohan Jha, in Kameshwari Devi(1980) says, “Ee ektu adbhut virodhabhasi sthiti aichh je manushya ka susanskrit karaywala amushthanak awsar par asanskrit geet gaal jayet achhi”. Here ‘Asanskrit geet’ refers to the folk songs in contrast with the classical songs. Translation is mine.
which constitute the Lokpakshiya, are equivalent to the hymns and mantras chanted in the Dharmapakshiya.

In this introductory note based on the review of available literature on Mithila, Maithili, the folklore and thereof worldview, it is important to mention that all the available printed literature on Maithili folksongs do not mention anything for the last rite occasioned by the event of death. The most favoured songs are Samskar Geet, literally meaning the songs of the rites of the passage. They, however, do not include the songs of the last rite, the rite following the event of death. They, albeit, mention songs of everyday life and seasonal songs. Samskar geet is prerogative of women folk and they are context specific (associated with the auspicious occasion of life of the passage such as birth, pregnancy, tonsorial rite, sacred thread giving ceremony, marriage, etc.). The songs from the category of every day life such as Parati and also seasonal songs can be sung by both men and women and are free from the spectacular occasions associated with rites of the passage. Unlike Samskar Geet, they can be sung by individual for himself/herself in solitude or otherwise without any audience at hand. Interestingly these songs present narratives replete with paradoxical tones and tenor. They speak of devotion, faith in the divine, existential question of being, social matrix in which the individual is located, the pain and pleasure of being social and invitation to the unseen for final release from the cycle of pain and pleasure and so on.

The notion of meeting and separation that is found in the songs of everyday life, are also present in the songs sung on spectacular occasions observed through rites of the passage. The notion of transition from one stage to the other in the life cycle of individual gives an occasion, as if, to the whole community of the folk to narrate for themselves a tacitly present story of life. The sohar geet, songs on the occasion of the birth of a baby and during the pregnancy of the mother-to-be, vent out pain of bearing the unseen and pleasure of graduating in the life cycle. The marriage songs such as Udasi/Bidagiri are mixed with the joy of a successful marriage of one's daughter, her fear of unknown destination, and over all dilemmas between social and existential. Last point, in order to introduce the variety of Maithili folksongs for the purpose of this research, is that though there are songs under the title of Mrityu geet, the ritual wailing/mourning/tuneful weeping is indispensable. This applies to other

40 in this regard the only exception is the collection of songs by Anima Singh (1993), wherein among more than a thousand songs three songs are under the category of Mrityu geet. I draw attention to the fact that this category of song is conspicuous by absence. The meaning of this absence is two fold: singing in typical form ceases in the face of death, and, secondly that ritual wailing substitutes singing.
situations of life as well, such as marriage wherein tuneful weeping is never to be substituted by a clearly structured song. Besides, there is believed to be a social institution of Nepobhatin\footnote{Most of these assumptions are gathered from the respondents during the pilot observation in the field. I am using them to support my hypothetical points and research questions. Nepobhatin is somewhat akin to svapa in Punjab and Rudali in Rajsthan. The institution of Nepobhatin is said to be extinct now. But then, social wailing by the kith and kin along with family on the event of death is in place.} that performs wailing on the event of death. Given this, the broader questions that guide this research are mainly twofold: firstly, what is the significance of tuneful weeping/ritual wailing/crying/mourning as a folkloric element in the social structure; how and why do they become indispensable markers of folk’s worldview; does weeping connote an acceptance of fragility of social order or is it only a socio-cultural tool to restore the order? Whether tuneful weeping on several occasions bears a subversive tone and if so what is the reaction of the society to it, is a moot point. Secondly, what is/are worldview/s found in the Maithili folk songs of everyday life and in the Samskar Geet, and, what is the equation between the notions of life and death in them. Whether maithili worldview perpetuates the binaries of life and death or it encapsulates a spectrum wherein every color is two-dimensional vis-a-vis life and death, is another moot point. Besides, overlapping with these two broad questions, there are questions of heterogeneity of worldview vis-a-vis social groups (along caste, religion and gender) and genres in the same linguistic-folkloric context, and, the dynamic relation between folklore, the classical texts, and the popular media. Not less important are questions pertaining to sociology of religion. Precisely, if heterogeneity rules the linguistic and folkloric landscape, what are the characteristics of religious structure in Mithila? A more over question would be on the nature and scope of interaction between religions and sects in the socio-cultural context of folklore in Mithila. On the account of worldview in folklore, the question would be with regard to the performance and meaning. How do the folk make sense of their performance, the context and the text they deliver? What are the co-ordinates in the meaning-making exercise? What are the avenues of conflict and reconciliation in the meaning making within worldview/s? All the above stated questions point to the neologism I began with, i.e. folk philosophy. In the context of maithili folklore, folk philosophy is a confluence of diverse concepts discussed above. In prime, it is the operational version of worldview that brings about a parallel between their theory and praxis. In other words, what they communicate in their
songs, in their crying, and in their practice characterize the concept of folk philosophy. Besides, it also entails numerous folk ideas/ unstated postulates/taken-for-granted assumptions on the basis of which the folk reason with matters of every day life. It is widely accepted that in the communities of the followers of Hinduism everything is religious and philosophical. Religious and philosophical aspects of the folk, as articulated in their songs, offer a vast array of meanings, and it figures in the outcomes of this work. This research, in a nutshell, aims at the folk philosophy of maithili speaking folk. With these objectives, questions, and hypothetical assumptions this research would not only decipher the narratives within each songs, instances of crying, and performances in context, but also seek for the interpretation and explanation of the folk in the context.

**Thesis: in a nutshell**

With this introduction on what this research is about and what are the central notions in the background, I move onto discuss as to how it would be carried out. In other words, the following chapter of this thesis, second in sequence, raises question of ‘interpretative understanding’. This entails a detailed discussion on hermeneutic philosophy to devise the methodology that could aptly suit to arrive at answers to the forgone questions. In addition to the hermeneutic philosophy, this chapter gathers insights from the *Upanishads* and the *Geeta*, two famous ancient texts widely read for inspiration, amongst the Hindus. The arguments emerging from the analysis are re-evaluated in the light of the experience from the field. The thrust is here to bring about the interface between the epistemological and ontological aspects of knowledge, bridging the text and context, so that the ‘book view’ and the ‘field view’ are not separate entities in the act of interpretative understanding. Also, that the dichotomy between the subjectivity and the objectivity, which has ruled the roost of methodological reflections in social science in general and in sociology in particular, is questioned. A research of this kind warrants this critical orientation, as part of methodological preparation, so as to render the hidden and the obvious in juxtaposition for arriving at meaning. Understanding, as a prerequisite for interpreting, summons the researcher for a methodological orientation of the kind which can locate the researcher in the socio-emotional matrix of the folk society. In other words, the methodology of *Being*, by the virtue of which the researcher becomes the folk, is the aim. In search of meaning, thus, a researcher of folklore, would have to
undergo the methodological process of becoming one of the inhabitants of the field, who is not merely a guest who has come to do research, but rather an insider who is also a researcher. It is not very imperative in this kind of research to ponder upon the tools and techniques, for any rigidity about it is often counter-productive. In a methodological openness a researcher of folklore could comprehend the meanings, with the help of the folk performers of the field. Having established this preparedness, the third chapter accounts the historical background of the region, Mithila, in which the field is located.

In the third chapter of the thesis, mainly three of the predominant and taken for granted categories, such as Mithila, Maithil and Maithili, are critically examined. It is in the background of history wherein recurrent mythology offers a sense of the uniqueness of history of a cultural region, that the broadness of the notions becomes clearer. Dispelling the ethnocentric air, without indulging in the never-ending glorification of Mithila or even denigrating the same, this chapter discloses the limits of the glorification. Here we get a glimpse of formation of Maithil pride in historical as well as mythological context. Various religious denominations, nurtured in the historical contexts of Mithila, also express multiplicity of versions, and thus humility rather than arrogance. This chapter also reveals the polysemy in the categories of Maithil, the people of the region who belong to various caste groups rather than only the Shrotriya Brahman, and the plurivocal character of the language Maithili, which is not only the chaste (pure sanskritik) Maithili of the Shrotriya. It is in this broadened framework that the wide ambit of Maithili folksongs makes sense. This chapter also establishes the significance of Mithila where the rulers were as much into philosophical, poetic and artistic vocation as were the courtiers, patronized and non-patronised scholars. Besides, this chapter highlights the missing link in the conventional historiography between the historical based on the deeds of the mighty and the contributions of the unsung-ordinary people. This is ironical because the region of Mithila has been described that of unconventional kingship: any politically ambitious king met with utter failure. The reason why a chapter of this kind is significant for the furtherance of this thesis is mainly three fold-
a) It helps understand the inner dynamics of the region vis-à-vis thereof people, socio-religious varieties, stratification, linguistic complexity, and over all the contributions of history and mythology together in the evolution of the Mithila etc.

b) It offers a continuum on the time line to imagine past and present of the society, thereof people, their religious belief and practices, thereof language and knowledge.

c) It lays out the context in which the field work in one of the villages of this region can be presented for some microscopic analysis. In other words it also bridges the gap between the historical and the sociological.

With this, thereby, the thesis moves onto the fourth chapter with singular focus on the village Fulhara where extensive fieldwork, in the span of a year’s time was conducted. It presents a descriptive glimpse of the every day life in the village, with keen interest in the sound and sight in the routine across seasons. It charts the demographic composition, spatial arrangement, main occupations- agricultural as well as otherwise, etc. to render the ethnography into narrative of pulsating lives. The chapter also encapsulates the calendar of festivity in the village and thereof songs, followed by the songs in the rite of the passage, and songs in every day life. The presentation of songs is peppered with the slices of biographies as part of the ethnographic details along with the spontaneous interpretation offered by the singers. Through these categories of songs, consisting of innumerable genres, the chapter extends the interpretative analysis by connecting all the loose threads. The interpretative analysis in this chapter aims at drawing the totality of worldview. It emerges that the Maithil worldview, elucidated in the songs, projects a particular notion of dying and death in the folk context. Hence, the next chapter discusses specifically this notion, which is conceptualized as art of dying. The intent is here to elaborate upon the holistic idea of death, without resorting to the generic binaries often apparent in the commonsense. In association with the events of life, the imagination of death, involves emotional responses of the folk to it. It is not bereft of what this chapter conceptualizes as emotional truthfulness of the folk. Thus ubiquity of metaphors of death seems to be an artistic expression of the same, when all the events are perceived on a timeline with a relation among them through punctuating rite of the passage, and all the emotions in connection. In this chapter, ‘art of dying’ thus forges a connect between the special events of life and the ordinary everyday life. In addition to the songs, everyday life conversations disclose deeper motives.
At last, the sixth chapter, with an attempt to summarize the thesis, encapsulates these interspersed in this thesis. The idea is that in one single whole of a thesis there are significant peripheral expositions which ought not to be put into oblivion. Also, the conclusion is not drawn in theoretical vacuum. This is evident that the chapter tends to place them in the larger, theoretical discourse, to make sense of the sociological implications of these findings. Lastly, the conclusions leave room for further research, by stating the futuristic dispositions behind these conclusions.