Chapter Four

The Maithil Worldview in Folksongs: A perspective on life and death

Arriving at the worldview presupposes a synoptic view of the spatial-temporal structure of the society in question and an elaborate account of the key source for the data on the same. For this research, the key source is the folksongs of the Mithila in general, and the village Fulhara in particular. However, features related to time and space, pertaining to everyday life and calendar of festival, also appear as premises for the reflections on songs. Fulhara is like any other village as found in the linguistic region of Mithila, presenting diverse occasions of performances in the fold of the rites and rituals, and in every day life set up. Pieced together in totality these songs, their renditions, and associated actions disclose a set of folk knowledge that is the central attraction of this chapter, detailed toward the end.

The village, where most of the songs presented in this chapter are gathered, Fulhara is situated in the southern part of Mithila, nearly at the junction of two districts Darbhanga and Samastipur. For train route, a local passenger train starts from Samastipur railway station, bound to Saharsa, via Nayanagar. To get to Fulhara, a passenger has to get down at Nayanagar station wherefrom there is no other means than a bumpy ride of four kilometers on horse-ridden Tonga.

The Way to Fulhara

The roadway is easier and shorter for one who is starting from the district Darbhanga. It is a journey of about fifty kilometers, divided into two halves of forty-kilometer
smooth ride to a subdivision called Singhia, and ten kilometers’ ups and downs via Dudhpura bazaar to Fulhara.

**Fulhara: In a Bird Eye’s view**

The entire village is criss-crossed by bricked road with regular patches of disappeared bricks. A larger village Deodha on one side, and the bank of Kareh-Bagmati (a tributary of the river Baghmati) on the other, flank Fulhara. Sprawling around the village are the tracts of field, which belong to the villagers. Season-specific crops, at various stages of growth, glisten in the sunny day of the season, in these outstretched fields. Bordering on the fields are Gachchi (orchard) with trees of aam (mangoes), kathar (jackfruit), leechi/litchi (chinensis in Latin), jamun (syzgium cumini in Latin) etc. Bamboo groves also dot the topographic landscape, in the fields as well as inside the village. Rustling bamboo leaves, and if the weather is gusty tall bamboo trees rift, produce an eerie sound. Reserves of water, mainly ponds, of all sizes, are interspersed all over. If not makhana (fox nuts), these reserves are full of fishes. A makhana planted reserve looks clad with large-circular-spiked leaves afloat on the surface of water, as if the entire space is green-leafy landmass rather than a pond. As we move toward the human habitations there come across humans of all kind of physical appearances, some sturdy and some haggard, some wheatish and some fairly dark. Pigments of skin however do not determine the social group one belongs; despite a Maithili saying that suggests ‘doubt a black Brahman and a fair Chamar for their lineage’. They may be donning almost same variety of clothing, kurta-payjama/ dhoti-kurta/ shirt-pant/ lungi-ganjil/ sari-blouse etc, some with an ostensible stain of time and some without a single streak of oldness. No uniformity is end unto itself, though. Before specifying the categories of groups, it is interesting to lay out the spatial locations.

It is fairly small village in terms of spatial coverage, in length and breath, but densely populated and hence tightly woven with gulli (alleyways) from inside. Some of the gullis are too narrow to let two men pass side by side. Walking in a single file in those earthy passages one gets a feeling of claustrophobia defining the spatial structure of the village. This is mainly in the part of the village where the lower caste folks inhabit. The passages are relatively broader in the part Brahmins inhabit. But then within the parts where Brahmin inhabits there are similar narrow lanes connecting one house with the other and one lane with the other. As per a rough estimation, provided
by the village elders corresponding roughly with the official record, the over all population in the village is

![Population Distribution Diagram]

about five thousand and fifty. The demographic distribution consists of fifteen hundred *Dusadh* (mostly with a surname *pasman*), a thousand of Brahmins, same number of *Dhanuk* and *Koeri* together, five hundred of *Chamar*, a thousand of *Kayasth* and *Baniya* put together, and there is a small bunch of fifty *Dom*. The latter are situated toward the northern end of village, at the periphery, as outcaste. Interestingly, Brahmins' inhabitation is also toward north of the village, but it is not the fringe of the village. In the center of the village are situated households of *Baniya* (known by the surname of *Poddar*), while the *Koeri* live toward the south, *Chamar* toward the east, *Kurmi* and *Dusadh* toward the west. Every house, of upper caste or of lower, has a small or big part outwardly that is meant to accommodate guests, known as *Dalan*. There are half-dried, almost abandoned wells outside *Dalan*, especially adjacent to some of the household of the upper caste folk. These are apparently the houses of the old *Zamindars* of bygone times. The main source of drinking water is the tube well, which is found in every household of the upper caste, while it is unevenly found in the lower caste household clusters. Tube-wells are a leveler and connector as common tube-wells are shared between people of different caste groups. Toward this end, even some of the benign business outlets play significant roles, though they are distributed in different part of the village. There are three spots where *kirana dukan* (general store, selling everything of basic needs) are situated. At the junction where the pathway to Fulhara meets that to Deodha, the main *chowk* of the village, there are a couple of *paan dukan*, shop of sweet-meat, a cobbler in the corner, a carpenter in the center, and a puncture repairer at the end. The other spot of the shop is inside the village, along the pathways surrounding the inhabitation of the Brahmins.
Over here are two *paan* shops, one tea shop in a thatched hut, and one simple bamboo-stick built barber shop. A few steps toward the interior, not far from the tea-shop are two general stores and one shop for fertilizers and seeds. Villagers buy seeds and fertilizers from this shop only to fulfil an urgent need, else the bulk of shopping of seeds and fertilizers is preferably done in the Dudhpura bazaar or the best is the Rosra Bazara (Rosra is a new district, nearly ten kilometers away). One *kirana dukan* is oddly situated toward the end of village on the bricked road toward Dudhpura bazaar. Lastly, one *kirana dukan* is in the midst of the lower caste inhabitation.

There are two schools in the village, one middle school at the main chowk and the other is a primary school toward the end of the inhabitation of the lower caste from where the tracts of the field starts. In between there are tuition centers, almost convincing in their look that they are a proper school, where classes are held every morning and evening without conflicting with the timing of government-schools. Though the cites of religious festivities are innumerable, as on occasions various trees (mainly *peepal*) assume the role of receivers of the folk faith, the main temple is one at the bank of a pond known as *thakurbadi*. This is the site where every Tuesday, as well as on other auspicious occasions, villagers organize *kirtan* (collective devotional singing by men folk). The participants in such *kirtan* cut across caste groups, of course not the outcaste such as *Dusadh* and *Dom* do not participate. On special occasions villagers also conduct *ashtajam* (an eight-day kirtan programme in which they keep reciting the name of the god who is to be thanked for some wish-fulfillment) and exhibit religious rapture. Such an occasion brings about a crossing of caste lines and anybody who is known as a *kirtaniya* (efficient singer of *kirtan*) merrily participates. There is another place of worship, a small temple built under a huge *bargad* tree, known as *Brahmasthan*, where women gather to invoke and make offerings to the *Brahman devta* on special occasions such as any rite in the household or on wish fulfillment. Curiously, every household has a place for *Brahman devta*, as *kul devta* (god of the clan). The village elders inform that earlier the village had only *Brahmasthan* where the folk, across caste groups, gathered to make their offerings. The presiding god in the *Brahmasthan* is *Brahman Devta* also known as *Budhaa baba* iconised in a godly statue saddled on a horse inside the simplest structure of the temple beneath a fairly old banyan tree. There is another version, that *Dusadh* never went to any temple ever, they instead have their alternative religiosity. They have
their priest who conduct slightly different rituals, of a more benign kind, and worship Raja Salhesh, a legendary character, whose story is on the tip of the tongue of the villagers. Interestingly however Dusadh, under the instructions of the officiating priest from their own caste, also hold Satyanarain puja, which is not confined to only upper caste groups. Dom, an outcaste associated with the menial job of digging toilet and cleaning filth, seldom go to any temple other than the one in the neighboring village Deodha, called Singhewarsthan, where doms from afar congregate once to worship the legendary character Singhewar singh. They sacrifice pigs, cook at the site, eat and drink local liquor, dance and also end up fighting and injuring one another every year.

In general, every household is a site of religious operations with all kinds of tidbit items exhibiting sense of religiosity. A tulsi chaura (the basil plant on a raised platform like structure, with shape of Hanuman carved on the outer surface and smeared in vermilion) is something that can be found in every household. Men and women both pour water every morning in the plant while they look at sun with squinted eyes. Women, especially, are attached to tulsi chaura and they lit diya (earthen lamp) and dhoop (incense sticks) every morning and evening. Of course, when women worship they sing. They actually sing while doing anything. They may be found singing while working in the field. Men and women both indulge in the agricultural drudgery, of sowing and reaping, of harvesting and carrying the crop home. But the mellifluous effect in the field is mainly attributed to women, who break into singing at any juncture of their work. The main crops in the fields of Fulhara consists of lentils of all kind (moong, arhar, masuri and chana), the Rabi crop (wheat, maize, pea) in summer, spices (coriander, black chilly, turmeric, ginger) and sunflower in summer as well as winter. The specific crop in winter is Kharif (paddy, maize) and sugarcane. Most of the upper caste folk get the agricultural works done by the lower caste folk under their supervision, while the latter do it by themselves. For agricultural labor, the labourer is paid in kind rather than in cash preferably. Roughly, the division is as follows: for reaping ten bundle of paddy the laborer receives two bundles, or for assisting in the thrashing of the wheat the return will be five kilogram of the thrashed wheat. For other occupations, the villagers have cattle, cow and buffalo, at the khuta (tether). It is a local idiom to express the prestige
of household: if a household has a *khuta* with a cow or buffalo at it and producing milk every day, it is considered to be a marker of prosperity for the household in the village common sense. A distinction in this regard to be noted is that upper caste household has preferably a cow or two at theirs, whereas the lower caste may have both cow and buffalo. It is a part of daily chore in every household to arrange for timely fodder for the cattle, collect and clean their excreta-dung and milking of them duly. Mainly women take onto themselves to clean and gather the cattle dung in a corner of cowshed, which they knead and smash onto the wall to make *goitha* (a fuel made of dried cow-dung cake). Women also use a bit of the collected cowdung to smear on the floor for bringing the auspiciousness of the surroundings on religious occasions. In wealthier households, where men are not available to do the chore themselves a servant is deputed to discharge the needful. There are families, in upper caste as well as lower caste, where men go out to do official works in the daytime. Before leaving for the work, and when they come back in the evening, they serve the cattle. Men, who have no work to do outside the village, spend their afternoon playing cards in the *dalan*. The tea-shop also becomes place of play-card shuffling, winning and loosing, in the afternoon when life comes to the slowest in the day time. Men and women while away afternoon differently. Women may indulge in the sewing and embroidery, sieving and winnowing, and so on. For men, the sonic companion in the afternoon is radio airing songs and intermittent news bulletin. Women themselves provide with melodic company to their work. There are also a lot of those who while away the afternoon with a siesta.

The every day life in the village is neatly woven with the notion of time and sound. Every morning, they wake up slightly before the sun-rise, responding to birds’ twitters and cows’ mooing. Sparrow and Myna begin to fill the atmosphere before crows start cawing. It is good if people leave beds before cawing of crows reach the ears. Especially elderly men and women get up by three or four in the summer and four and five in the winter. Youngsters have a habit of getting up around six and seven, after their parents have set the tone of morning. A far-removed megaphone, in the temple blare some devotional songs wafting gently to every ear. A very nearby sound bite on the radio, from All India Radio of Drabhanga station, airs devotional songs in Maithili. Long before this, about five in the morning, while passing by a *dalan*, or *angna* (inner part of the house meant for women only) we get to hear elderly men and
women of the village softly singing a specific category of folksongs called *Parati*. At this hour when the darkness of night is on the way out and the effect of light is sneaking in well before the day breaks, when village is yet to wake up to cause the rural din, the early morning songs are audible enough, no matter how ordinary is the way of singing. Because these songs are not associated with any big ritual event, they are not sung with a sense of display, and hence remain audibly limited.

With the crack of dawn, life begins to roll on the path as people are seen running, with a *lota* or any small container filled with water, toward the field. Women too do the same, almost stealthily and slyly. The intention is to empty their bowels. Many of these early morning runners find places in bamboo groves, or by the side of the pond, or the field-sides. The places are never completely filled with excreta as the discharge is biodegradable and becomes soil in a week's time. Some household also have the most primitive form of toilet, with a long whole dug inside the earth and slightly raised platform of bricks, on which women sit with perfect aim to shit. Such a toilet is covered from three sides with bamboo and leaf woven walls up to the height of human body. Some households, especially of those who were Zamindars in the bygone time, have a proper toilet. But then, men from these households too are seen frequenting fields for the purpose of every day. It is considered a new trend to have proper toilet. With the mellow and crimson sun turning sharply bright, people intend to be done with bathing. Children are exceptions if there is a holiday or they have not started to school yet. There are two options for bathing, one is the pond and the other is tube well. Mostly however, is the use of the tube well. Women bathe in the covered parts of the *angan* and men have no qualms bathing in open. In the lower caste inhabitation, one can see women collectively bathing in open with their *saari* reduced to a skimpy body-cover. Women, generally, bathe later than men and children, after finishing routine chores of cleaning and cooking. Elderly women and widow are exceptionally early in bathing. Men and women bathe their children with utter religiosity scrubbing their whole body with *Lux* or a similar bathing soap. About this time, when cows

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115 My facilitator’s house did not have a toilet and they noticed my discomfort in the practice of going to the field like other men. I was provided with a facility to use the toilet of a neighboring house, of a well-to-do family. Six months later when I went back to Fulahara to resume my field work I found my facilitator has had a toilet built, costing them around Rs. Five thousand. When I asked as to why they got it done so quickly, they said it was for the guests like me.
begin to moo for routine fodder and milking, breakfast is almost ready, except that milk is yet to be boiled. The sound wave of the village, by this time, carries a film song from a remote radio, or a megaphone blaring a Maithili chart buster. Post breakfast, while school-goers are off to school and men are to their destinations outside village or within, women stay home unless they have something specific to do outside. If it is the time of season when agricultural activity is at the peak, with either sowing or reaping, women may go to supervise or get the work done in the field, especially when men are away. Around this time the sound of the village becomes sparse, with some urchin fighting in distance or a passer by pedaling the bicycle away or a woman calling out for her son who ventured out in the afternoon to play with friends. Taking a walk in the village in the afternoon is an experience of distinct kind. Especially late afternoon, after women and men are through with the lazy break, they gather at different gendered spaces: men at the site for playing cards and women for gossiping in some angan. Some women would be squatting with tresses unwound and a little girl (teen in the age of nine or ten) would be searching for lice in woman’s head with her nimbly moving fingers in the parting of hair. If it is winter, the bevy of women will be busy with multitasking in such a gathering, knitting yarn and glibly talking about the neighborhood issues. Just in case, it is a household of a woman where an auspicious occasion, of rite of the passage for any body belonging to the family, is afoot, there gathering of women will be helping in the preparation and also singing off and on. If it is a household, post any rite of the passage, the women will discuss the bygone with glee of success and glum of some amiss. It is never a vacuum of ideas or issues for them. But it is not always a sight of ‘everything fine’, for this is where disagreements also emerge and bickering also starts. It is more frequent and uninhibited with women in the lower caste inhabitations, while the upper caste women keep the acoustic manifestations of the fights
low, unless it is the fight amongst relatives on the issue of grave injustice and humiliation. More often men folk show a condescendingly dismissive attitude toward bickering and quarrelling initiated by women. But then, if such things flare up in a fight based on the issue of family prestige, men folk join in vigorously. At times, it amounts to an issue of the village to be discussed in the panchayat in front of village elders, unless the trusted elders resolve it within or without the family. If nothing works out, the fighting parties take the issue to the police and then to the court. There are innumerable cases pending in the courts pertaining to the issues that started with disagreements, informal bickering, and ensuing process of the interventions by the village-elders.

The afternoon is as much responsible for setting the tone and tenor of life further, hence. Toward the early evening, when disciplined children are slackened and parents get back to the rest of the day, the sound of the village assume a greater octave. This is the time when sound waves are filled with strokes of retreat. Hence, some men gathered at the dalan will ask a passer by aloud as to how the day was and what all happened at his end. If the passer by is free enough and feels like spending some time sharing with the fellows, he will join the gathered men for a while, else he will answer from the pathways in higher pitch of sound. Some men, on the way back from the field, may be herding oxen back, and the tinkles of the tiny bells around the neck of ox, speechlessly suggest the farmer’s day-end. This is when some of the tired men can also relax for a while on way by the roadside and gulp down a clay-glass full of taari
(a local toddy, the secretion from the palm and date tree, fermented and sold by a particular caste group called paasi). Only low income men however resort to taari consumption. Those who have sufficient money buy a bottle of rum or Bagpiper whisky. Women of the household, in upper caste or lower, always resent men’s consumption of any such things. But then, there is one more thing, which is culturally accepted in the pattern of consumption. Tendril plants of Bhang (cannabis) are ubiquitous in the village. The villagers select the best of kind and dry the leaves with care for cleanliness. In the evening men make the paste of Bhang by rubbing the leaves in between two pieces of rocks with black pepper and other dry fruits if available. Men swallow the rolled paste of Bhang, generally in the evening, with a raucous hailing of lord Shiva, with a belief that consumption of it brings an ecstasy that only the god who is creator and destroyer can enjoy. Some men also smoke up ganja (marijuana), yet another plant belonging to the same botanical family. Unless this consumption affects general effectiveness of men’s abilities, women do not oppose it. Additionally, there is a socio-cultural acceptance for the consumption of khaini (dried tobacco leaves rubbed with lime before consumption) too. There is strong folkloric attitude toward khaini, and one proverb reads assi chutki nabbe taal, takhan dekhu khaini ke haal (eighty rubs of thumb and ninety times tapped winnowing makes a solid pinch of khaini). Also there is a popular song in Maithili, in which a nephew asks his maternal uncle for a pinch of khaini, in order to show that consuming in his company would keep their relation ticking. In the winter, some of the men cultivate khaini, bhang (cannabis) and ganja (marijuana), especially for their personal consumption, apart from the agro-economic interest.

The evening brings changing soundtrack for women and children too. Young girls frolic to kansar (a place where five-six joint hearths under a thatched roof are put together by the Kansarin- the owner woman, and clients visit her in the evening to get their grains parched and puffed). The visiting girls chitchat about village trivia while ladling the sticks in the clay pot in which they have their grains mixed with sand for puffing.
An evening at *kansar*

Women and girls waiting for their grains to be puffed at *kansar*, while the *kansar*-owner women are at their job providing with skilled services.

Women in the meanwhile wind up everything else to unwind the kitchen for the cooking of dinner. In between, they lit clay lamps in *tulsi chaura* and inside home at the place of household deity, dovetailed with recitations of some of the devotional folksongs. children come back from the play, which is largely hide and seek, touch-me-if you can etc, and settle to study under open sky in summer (in verandah in winter and autumn) huddling around a dimly lit lantern. Men are also around, at *dalan* or in neighborhood; unless some late evening agricultural work is on in the field during the season of harvest. It is seven in the summer or five in the winter, quietness of village descends, except the sound of the *kirtan* in the temple especially on days like Tuesday or any other day of significance. On the night of Krishnastmi or Shivratri, it is a festive occasion when people are awake to celebrate. In the month of *Falgun* (around February-March of the Roman calendar), with a blend of summer and winter, people walk even in the thick of night. Albeit, it is largely the reign of silence that defines late evening of the village. It looks like the whole village retires by eight in the winter and latest by ten in the summer. Lanterns, that were lit in the evening,
Dangle from the hook of the veranda inside as well as outside the house until morning. In the thick of darkness of moonless night, the light of lantern is the only anchor for eyes. But on the nights when moon showers silvery beams on the earth of this village, human eyes are not dependent on lantern only. For dark nights, people also depend on the ubiquitous Eveready battery torch; in fact, they sleep with the torch. These days some Chinese models of battery torches are popular among villagers, which are sold by hawkers, and these like many other such electronic goods are smuggled into this part of India from Nepal. The nights of summer also has an extra attraction of innumerable glowworms beaconing human eyes on the pathways. The nights of winter, mostly foggy, has a special sound in the background, of howling foxes in the fields, adding to the eerie nocturnal silence of the village.

Calendar of festivity in Fulhara and Songs
In Fulhara, the folk follow the pan-Maithi Punchang (the lunar calendar with dates in accordance with the movement of moon), which instructs for the days for religious festivals and thereby rituals. Many of such days are month-specific, while many others are to be observed throughout the year or half of the year. It begins with the month of saon (roughly corresponding with July-August) when monsoon showers summer, and snakes begin to crawl out in full folk view, pertinent to worship Shiv and his consort Parvati/Gauri. Women folk in particular consider the month auspicious, for it is in this month they start to observe fast every Monday (sombari) and worship Shiv with various objectives, protection of husbands or finding a right husband. The day of Sombari is a mini-festive occasion involving older and younger girls, and also boys who get pleasure of festivity in accompanying women to the temple. Men and women both, also undertake a strenuous journey to a distant shivlinga to pour water and milk by the way of worshipping. There is popular kamar yatra toward the babadham (Deoghar, now in Jharkhand, where is situated the famous temple of Shiva) or any other destination in the region of Mithila itself. In the month of Saon the folk also celebrate Nag panchami whereby they worship snakes in general and a particular snake, mythically called Bisahara, by offering milk and corn. It is yet another festive occasion on which mainly women observe fast for the amelioration of family conditions. In this very month falls the festival of Raksha Bandhan, a pan-north India festival, to celebrate the bond of a brother and sisters. Most important in this month is the festival of Madhushravani, a specific of Mithila, held in the
household where a wedding took place in the preceding year. A festival that invites women of locality to participate in the folkways and story-telling for thirteen to fifteen days, involving the newly wed couple, at the natal home of the bride. Women sing innumerable songs on this occasion, starting with gosaunik geet (song in praise of the mother goddess), gauri k geet (songs in praise of Gauri, the consort of Shiv), Bisahara k geet (song in praise of the Bisahara; the snake goddess), and songs associated with rituals such as aankhimunawwal k geet (blindfolding the eyes of the bride), temi-dagba k geet (dabbing the wick on the thighs of the bride).

The month of saon is abuzz with these festivals in Fulhara exhibiting socio-religious structure of the folk society. It however does not stop in following months. The month of Bhado (the month of rains) offers the occasion of Krishnashtami (the birth of child god Krishna), Anant (to invoke prosperity and dispel pathos). Most important in this month is Chaudchan, celebrated in every household, across caste groups. It has astrological significance, for this day is also known to be the one when moon received blemishes. Worshipping the moon and Ganesha, devotees pray for wish fulfillment. The preparation for this festival brings about joyful moments for entire family, as new wheat is washed, dried, crushed, kneaded and fried with jaggery, for offering. Children are excited about it, women prepare for it, and men folk participate religiously in this festival of dark evening when the lunar reign is explicit. The month of Ashin (roughly September-October) is popular all over north India for Durga-puja. But in the villages of Mithila it is also known for other festivals such as Pitar-paksha (worshipping and bidding adieu to the dead father or the teacher of the clan) and Jitiya (women observe fast for twenty four hours without even drinking water wishing for the longer life of son). A famous Mithila specific festival, in the month of Ashin, is major attraction in Fulhara too, called Kojagra. On this day a newly married groom receives a bundle of gifts from his father-in-law. Generally, on the evening of kojagra every household worships goddess of prosperity and celebrates by eating dishes made in milk. The celebration entails preparation by women such as making of aipan (the tantrik design made on the floor with the paste of rice and vermillion), cleaning of house with cow-dung. The following month, of Kaatik (October-November) is generally associated with the festival of light Dipawali. But in Fulhara, like any other village in Mithila, Bhardutiya, Sama-Chakeba, and Chhaith are also highly popular.

116 Chaudchan has an established historicity. It came in popularity after king Hemangad Thakur, of the Oinwara dynasty, began to observe it considering the importance of moon in astrological framework.
Bhardutiya (Bhrati-Dwitiya in sanskrit) is the day when sisters invite their brothers, express their adoration them with betel leaves, nuts, flowers and feed them the special food they cook. In return they get tokens of gifts and also a mythological assurance that their lives would be full of joy. In every household on this day in Fulhara, there is a special preparation in which elderly women help and young siblings are in awe of happiness. Sama-Chakeba too has similar import involving siblings and women of the household. Every night women sit together to sing songs relating stories of Sama, the daughter of Krishna who was cursed to become a bird, and in pathos her husband Chakeba too became a bird. Sama’s brother Samb did penance to rescue her from the curse and also destroyed the sinister design of Chugla. Women also sing songs, in which the real life actors, brothers and sisters, are named and transformed into protagonists of the songs,

[SAMA KHELAY GELHU PHALLA Bhaiya KE ANGANA
DALWA LAY GEL CHOR
EK MUTHTHI KHARHI HO Bhaiya SEHO PHUKI KARAH EJOT...
In the courtyard of my (name) brother, I went to play sama
My baskets and all my dolls
Thief stole away
Light a fistful of straws, o brother!
Spark the light, and catch the thief...

The motif of the song underlines sister’s dependence on brothers for the protection of their happiness. Sisters invoke brothers to catch the thief and recover the stolen wherewithal of play and pleasure. The folkways of celebrating this festival brings about an opportunity to rejoice and experience the bonding between brothers and sisters. Every night, following Bhrati-Dwitiya, till the full moon night, women and children celebrate this festival with folksy fanfare. The most auspicious and sought after of all the festivals of this months is Chhaith (also called Pratihar shashthi or Chhathi), in devotees cutting across caste groups, even outcastes, participate with fervor. With doubly aimed devotion, one to the sun god and the other to the goddess Chhathi (who is otherwise not known in the Hindu pantheon of deities), the devotees seek for various kinds of wish-fulfillments. The method of preparation in this festival is of the toughest kind as the person who is the main carrier of the respect to the god is to observe strict fast for thirtysix hours, starting with the special dinner on the night of panchami. It is almost for a week that the entire household is kept away from all
kind of forbidden influences; strict food-regime without even usage of onion in food, let alone non-vegetarian, reigns. The festivity acquires its manifest form on the evening of sixth day of the lunar calendar and morning of the seventh day, when with parbatin (the main person through whom the family worships sun god and goddess Chhathi). Entire Fulhara surrounds the ponds of the village to worship sun god on evening and morning. Children wear new clothes, like they do on Durga puja and Dipawali, and they also fire crackers. Alongside women sing numerous folksongs, of course against the deafening megaphones airing similar songs sung by a one-time popular folk singer Sharda Sinha and some new singers as well. Within the household, on the way to the pond in the evening and the subsequent morning, and on the bank of the pond, women sing songs in praise of Chhathi Maiya and the sun god. But these songs also involve the significance of social relations in the devotional festival. A song says it all,

APNE TA JAI CHH HO BHAIIYA, DES RE BIDESWA
HAMRO LE LABIHA BHAIIYA GAHUM SANESBA
AABI GELAI HO BHAYA CHHTH SAN BARTIYA
GAHUM TA CHHAI GE BAHIN BADD RE MAHAGBA
CHHODI DAHIN GE BAHIN CHHATHI SAN BARTIYA...
You travel far and wide, o brother!
Bring me some wheat in gift for me too
As approaches the festival of Chhathi
Wheat is, but, so very dear, o sister!
Leave the vrata this time, you...

The song reveals a dialogue between brother and sister where the latter requests the former to bring wheat in present for her so that she can make Prasad of it and offer it to Chhathi. The brother talks rationally and points out the expense in getting wheat and suggests her to forego the vrata this time around. The sister, then goes on pointing out all the favors the goddess has done to him, and hence refuses to accept brother’s rational suggestion. Thus she asks not only for wheat but all the necessary items, such as coconut, banana, and so on. To do the vrata, in thanking the goddess for everything she has been blessed with, the sister is ready to even sell out her bangles.

During the festival the Vratis/Parbatin (one who does the Vrata), men and women both, are conversant enough to highlight the dedication toward the goddess Chhathi, almost in sync with the notions emerging from the songs. With a wink however, elderly women reveal that these days nobody is actually too poor to smoothly arrange
for the festival. Some of these elderly women slip into the memory lane, especially while they are sitting together, and reminisce the hard time of penury when they were young. Those were the days perhaps when a song detailing the hardship in arranging for the Chhathi festival, and the idea of seeing out the possession for the same, was the truth in many instances. The song now expresses however the strong conviction, that we will do it no matter what comes, by referring to the socio-economic impediments in arranging for it. Curiously, this song is sung by all, women from well-to-do families as well as women whose men earn hand to mouth. Some elderly women would interpret this as the recognition of the real status of all, the rich and the poor, in front of the goddess Chhathi - everybody is poor in front of the Mother.

Another song paints the caste society nullified in the face of devotion to the Chhathi and the sun god,

**DOMIN BETI SUP NENE THAAD CHHAI**
**UGA HO SUSRUJ DEB, ARGHA KER BER**
**HO PUJAN KER BER,**
**MALIN BETI SUP NENE THAAD CHHAI.**
**NIRDHAN-KODHI SUP NENE THAAD CHHAI.**
Standing in the pond is the daughter of sweeper
So is the daughter of gardener
And also the destitute and leper
Beseching the sun god
For your crimson rise
For your favor, wise
to accept our devotional offerings...

No social group is exclusive when it comes to worshipping this goddess and sun god on this occasion, and hence everybody across classes and castes equally seek for the divine favor. But then, social hierarchy finds a way in the festival and the bank of the pond exhibits divisions along caste lines, with upper caste on one side and the lower caste on the other. The leveling effect of the worshipping does not alter the social structure of caste. If at all, the mitigation of the caste division is only instantaneous and in spiritual realization, rather than in concrete, empirical sense. The manifest behavior of the upper caste devotes still bear the imprint of the socially prescribed behavior, such as appearance in public with veil on and talking softly etc. while on the other side of the pond, the lower caste women continue with their own socially-prescribed behavior. Also, the quality of fabrics they wear (the cotton *saari* of saffron colour) varies across caste lines. Curiously though, the visibility of the devotion of utmost kind is more amidst the lower caste devotees. Many of them come prostrating.
all the way from their home to the bank of the pond while their kith and kin would be surrounding them. Some of them also accompany their main devotee with beat of drum or local band-party playing along side. In fact, some women from the upper caste take to the harder ways of paying tribute to the Chhathi, emulating the ways of the lower caste devotees, as they would surmise. Some elderly women, from the lower caste, become popular for expressing the maximal devotion by taking the extreme kind of measures, even among the upper caste. An hour before the sunset and sunrise, all the devotees across caste and class groups, stand in the pond half-dip, folding hands toward the sun. That is when it appears that the festival bring about at least symbolic collapse of hierarchy. The celebration is actually a sight of the negotiations between the caste ideology and the ideology of devotion. There is also variety as well as commonality in the offering the devotees make along caste and class lines. In general however, the Prasad (eatable offerings) include coconut, lemon, sugarcane and dishes fried in ghee with utmost care for purity, is distributed after the arghya (offering of water/milk) on the morning of seventh day of the calendar. One respondent, adding to what she sings, would say- the Mother knows about each caste but she is not interested in discriminating.

In addition to this, there is a humble celebration of Devotthan Ekadashi, in the month of Katik, which marks the beginning of observation of fast, on the eleventh day of every month, through out the year. This is very peculiar of Maithil, especially Brahmins, to observe this fast, invoking gods of the pantheon, without specifying any single god, for the welfare of family. The beginning is celebrated with rituals under the instruction of a priest, while the fast is almost free from the frills of rituals every month following the beginning. Similar is the beginning of the fast on Sunday called Raib brata, which is observed with minimal rituals, and invokes the sun god for the better health and prosperity. These kinds of fast, revealing the everydayness of religiosity, are prerogative of the elders of the family and children have no occasions in them. The month of Maagh (January-February) opens the festivity with Tila-Sankaint (generally known as Makar Sankrianti in North Indian which has almost fixed date that is 14th January every year). Like any other village, Fulhara gears up on this day, with everybody bathing at the earliest possible time defeating the challenging chill of the month. The special food on this day, a fascinating attraction for all age groups, include lai-murlai, tilkut-tilwa, chura-dahi and khichdi in the
evening. Children spend whole day munching on the puffed rice rolled in jaggery and tilwa-tilkut, apart from chura-dahi in lunch. This festival also marks the beginning of the usage of the new harvest of rice. Other festivals in this month, which gives the inhabitants of Fulahara opportunities to experience religiosity and socio-cultural unity, are Narak-Niwaran Chaturdashi (observing total fast, without even drinking water whole day, devotees worship Shiv), and Vasant panchami (worshipping the goddess of knowledge, mainly youth, occasion an opportunity to elders to experience religiosity). Of these two, Narak-Niwaran is yet another peculiarity of Maithil festivity, while the latter is famous all over North India. The month of Fagun (March-April) is generally famous for Holi which underlines the hidden cultural talents of the village Fulhara, like any other village. Almost a week before the day of Holi youth of the village, mostly lower caste, start taking out regular procession after finishing with dinner early evening in which they sing jogira (a genre of reciting funny lines on the beat of anything, tin-drum or a mere piece of pot). While the youth sing Jogira, the male elders surround them enjoying the performance and clapping for them. Women, standing from the window for a glimpse, are not a direct audience, except some young girls popping up to have a slice of fun and reporting the same to the older women of the household. The Jogira culminates into the Holika Dahan (burning the piles of wood to mark the defeat of a mythical monster) on the night before the day of Holi. Early in the day, women finish the kitchen-work, and cooking some special dishes, especially maal-pua (made of flour, mixed with milk and banana, and fried in ghee), mutton/chicken, dahi-bada (a dish in curd) etc. Women play with women folk using powdered colors while men go out in the alleyways, Chowk or to the dalan of other men to exchange colours. Kids also start roaming about with friends early morning after eating the special dishes cooked at home. With the gentle wind of the month, the proverbial Fagunahat, in the silky-soothingly warm sun, everything form the inanimate objects as roads, shops, to the animate beings including even cattle, bears a patch of colour. The sound wave carries a crescendo of Holi-hai (its Holi) here and a loud burst of exclaim Bura Na Mano Holi Hai (do not mind it, for it is holi today) there, against the background of the beat of tin-drum (made with the tin sheet of the empty oil-container). In addition to the intermittent eruption of sounds of the live rendition of songs, there are songs from Hindi films or albums in Bhojpuri and Maithili playing on loud-speakers, tape-recorders, and transistors too. The tinge of melodious renditions erupts in the atmosphere every now and then. The canvas of the
festival offers a sense of freedom in celebration. No wonder then, men also use dirt, wet-soil, to smear on each other. In the frenzy of fun, they also tear clothes of each other. Probably, hence, they go out in the discarded clothes (a torn kurta-payjama or so). Walking in the bands these men appear to be the defiant of the routine mannerism and appearance. Each band, consisting of friends, starts visiting the dalan of the member of the band. Besides, they also visit the dalan of some prestigious elderly men, or the man who wields social clout in terms of wealth. The visiting bands are treated to the dishes cooked in the kitchen of that household. Women of the household take pride in sending their cooked items to their dalan. Also, they are treated to Bhaang-Sharbat (paste of cannabis mixed in milk). The current trend has replaced Bhaang with liquor (whisky of brands such as Bagpiper/officer's choice and even rum are commonly popular). Some of these bands of men also perform singing of all kinds of songs related to the festival of Holi and the month of Fagun. Women, standing in the alleyways, or by the window of the house, happen to enjoy the rendition of their menfolk. Women sing only inside the household for themselves, while men intend to reach out to the audience across gender. The songs, on the day of Holi are mostly sung by men folk, carries the effervescence of the season, playfulness and also a notion of melancholia. A song, apparently incompatible with the occasion, moves emotionally, blending joy and sorrow, is

HORI KAI SANG KHELAB MADHAV HUMRO BIDESH RE
APNO NAI AABTHI, LIKHI NAI PATHABTHI...
Who do I play holi with, my madhav is abroad
Neither writes to me, nor comes back...

By the late evening when men are back to their household and a fatigue of the day descends on the social horizon, incidents of bickering leading to fights during the day time also come to notice, for which women blame men’s excessive consumption of liquor. In course of playing holi, the villagers also confront ramifications of taking too much of liberty.

Yet another festival Shiv-Rait (also known as Shivratri in Sanskrit) is the festival with two folds: the diurnal celebration entails fasting and worshipping shiv-linga and the nocturnal celebration showcase wedding ceremony of Shiv in which noted villagers take out a barat (procession in which the groom side walk reveling in joy) of ghosts and goblins. Women have an interesting role in the celebration of Shivrait, like on many other occasions, of singing the folksongs of Shiv-Vivah. The categories of songs
they sing are Nachari and Maheshvani. While women sing these songs within the periphery of the household, men take out procession, a quasi-entourage accompanying the Shiv who is on his way to marry Gauri. Most of these men are doped on this day, in Bhang and Ganja, one enacting Shiv and others as ghost and goblins. This is an occasion also disclosing devotional paradox of the Maithil folk of Fulhara, aiming at invoking Shiv for his compassionate intervention in woeful social life, and also mocking the buffoonery of apparently unsocial Shiv. Thus a woman singing a song from Nachari would say,

\begin{verbatim}
KAKHAN HARAB DUKH MOR HO BHOLE NATH
KAIHYA HARAB DUCKH MOR...
When would you rid me of these woes
Bholenath! When will be off these sores...
\end{verbatim}

And, so much is the faith and affection with Shiv, that they sing

\begin{verbatim}
BHOLA NENE CHALU HAMRO APAN NAGRI
APAN NAGRI HO KAILASH PURI
PARBATI KE HUM TAHAL BAJAYAB
NIT UTHI NIR BHARI GAGRI...
Take me along to your world
The world we call kailash nagri (abode of Shiv, the mountain of Kailash)
Serve you, and your wife Parvati
Every dawn, will I fill pitcher...
\end{verbatim}

Devotion notwithstanding, they sing songs of mockery on the outlook of the groom Shiva, when men are out with Shiv-barat,

\begin{verbatim}
HUM NAHI JANAL GE MAI
EHAN BAR NARAD JOHI LOUTA
DEKHTAHI SAB PADAY...
Did we ever know! Oh!
Such a groom narad will fix
Awful and shocking
None stays to take risk...
\end{verbatim}

As comes the month of Chaitra, the village gets ready for the festival of Ramnavami, on the ninth day of the ten-day worshipping of the goddess Durga. While this is a well known festival of north India, there is Judshita\textsuperscript{117}, another peculiarity of the calendar of festival of Mithila, which has place of importance in Fulhara. The rituals are household-specific, like cleaning and preparing for food, worshipping the pitar (dead ancestors) and household deity, and also feeding Brahmins. The offering of food

\textsuperscript{117} Judshita corresponds with, Satuain of the Bhojuri speaking region of North Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and Baisakhi of Punjab.
made to the deity is consumed next day and therefore the hearth is kept cold. Children, and also enjoy the activities associated with judhiatal, such as flying kites and organizing wrestling.

In addition to these festive moments reflecting religious as well as socio-cultural structure of the rural Mithila in general and Fulhara in particular, there are occasions when Satyanaran puja is held in some or other household of the village, on any day chosen and suggested by the Brahman who can read punchang. Almost every next month it happens in the village and entire village is invited to appear, hear katha (the sacred story told by the officiating priest that discusses the power of doing this vrata). The main carrier of the vrata observes fast, only eating fruits or nothing, and invokes not only god styanarayan, a variant of god Vishnu, but also almost every mythological icons form the Hindu pantheon. The end of puja has a special singing performance of arti by women in which men also participate with their humble voice or just remain quiet during it. Children often find it an occasion to mingle with playmates and receive prasad when puja is over. The inhabitants of Fulahara discharge this vrata with an objective in their mind, for thanks-giving to god for some favor met or for requesting for some favor in future. A very informal and women specific vrata is Brihaspatibari katha in which individual woman fasts and read story of benefactor lord Vishnu on the Thursday all through the year keeping an objective in her mind. Similar is Shanibari observed on Saturdays. There was a time when a Vrata katha of Santoshi Mata was very popular in the village, is now however an ebbing fad.

**Festivity in Rite of Passage and songs**

In addition to the festive occasions, determined by the calendar of Mithila, Fulhara also has other innumerable occasions arising from the events of socio-cultural life. These are events pertaining to rite of the passage that occasions the gathering of men, women and children from not only Fulhara, also from other villages. Some or other such events take place in some or other household every year. The auspicious months and dates, determined by the Maithil Panchang, with the help of learned Brahmans, witness such events. In case, there is no such opportunity in a household, the members of such a family willingly participate in others within or without village. Kinship network, through these participations, come into the picture. These are called samskar
in priestly terms, which is nearly indispensable in the everyday life of Fulhara. The involvement of kin and fellow villagers is not merely formal; it stretches to the level of informal as all the participants begin to enjoy it as if it were happening in their own household. But then, an event happens in the life cycle which does not belong to the category of samskar, only exceptionally that some Brahman family calls this event by some sanskritik names and involves a priest for auspiciousness. It is famously known as Chhathihar, celebrated on the sixth day following the birth of a baby, without any priestly intervention, across caste groups. Women conduct the folkways with the intent to protect the baby from any evil eye by smearing kajal (collyrium) in the baby's eyes, and sing songs from the category called sohar and khilona. The eldest of the household leads and is accompanied by the bevy of women, as song goes on,

*Lalna re kathi dekhi hanslain horil ke baba*
*Aabe bans badhal he*
*Hathi dekh hanslain falla (name) ke baba*
*Aabe bans badhal he...*
*Friends, what sight triggered a laughter of Horil's father*
*That now descent moves ahead*
*Saw an elephant and burst smiling (name) that Baba*
*That now descent moves ahead...*

The celebration of the arrival of the new member in the family, especially a male child, is also a manifest preference for son in the folk society of Mithila. But then, another sohar song occasions an expression of remorse on the birth of a son, if it has association with something morbid/undesirable,

*Sita ban mei khari pachhtay*
*Lav kush janmal yo*
*Jyo aaj rahtathi raja dasrath ji*
*Lutaybtathi ayodhya san raj*
*Sita ban mei khari pachhtay...*
*In the midst of forest, Sita regrets*
*Born are luv-kush here*
*Had there been, Dasrath king*
*Would have donated all his kingdom*
*In the midst of forest, Sita regrets...*

The song recounts the key characters from the Ramayan to express the remorse of Sita who is however stranded in the forest with her new-born babies. The happiness of
having a son is diminished by the sadness of not having those around who could have liked celebrating it.

Another sohar presents a criticism of the socio-cultural celebration of a son while secondary status of daughters,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jahi Kokhiya He Amma} \\
\text{Bhaiya Ke Janam Dehal} \\
\text{TaHi Kokhiya Hamro Janam Dehal...}
\end{align*}
\]
The womb that delivered my brother,  
O mother! 
That is where I was nurtured too...

The categories of Sohar and Khilona also conveys the upheaval of a new mother, who is either laboring, or has just delivered a baby. Such songs underline the paradoxes involved in the process of becoming a mother,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pahil Bedan Jab Uthal Angna Mei Mudiya Patkal He} \\
\text{Sasu Aab Nai Kelayab He Tora Beta Sang Latgenma} \\
\text{Sasu Aab Nai Kelay He...}
\end{align*}
\]
As arose the first pang, I threw my head in angana  
No more play of love, Sasu (mother-in-law), with your son  
It just made me miserable...

The song mentions all those who are related to husband and tells them all what the laboring mother experiences: regret for having given into desire, having conceived, and the joyful possibility of becoming mother of a child.

In the course of rendition, the singing women break into conversations and disclose the general acceptance of the superiority of male child. Without mincing words they would say- after all this is a son who can secure the future of existence while a daughter would extend only sympathy from distance. The gendered roles limiting women to traditionally defined spaces and performances make them visualize the significance of a male child. Also that it reveals the helplessness in the face of the social structure while seeking to express the same in their songs. Significant is the paradox of acceptance as well as criticism of the socially structured gendered positions of male and female child. Women would say that they invoke emotional parity between male and female child in the folk consciousness. In fact, female children are valued more in terms of emotional attachment despite the associated burden of getting her married when she grows up. Male children are valued for the strategic purpose of existential kind vis-à-vis socio-economic support. Some men would offer a typical answer to this idea: men are nothing without women for all
practical purposes, but the inheritance right is with the male child only. Women would substantiate it by pointing out that all the suffering of biological vicissitudes a woman goes through is for her own home with children and husband, and thereby she keeps the emotional life of men folk ticking. More to this argument appears in the songs during the marriage of a daughter.

In a *Mundan Samskar* (tonsorial rite) of a child in a family, the lower caste women turn up to deliver their services in sweeping, mopping the floor with cow-dung, and cleaning utensils.

Lower caste men folk deliver all kinds of stuff made of bamboo sticks and also turn up to help in cleaning the spot where the feast takes place. The barber plays the most significant role, apart from the Brahmin who hardly pronounces anything consequential in this *samskar*, of shaving child’s head. They are all paid in cash and kind, and of course they are not always happy with the amount they have been paid or things they have been presented. Upper caste women join in the preparation for the event, by contributing labor in dying *Dhoti* with the turmeric paste, drawing *aipan* on the floor, and of course the most important is their singing while the rite is underway on the sideline of their active role in helping in the smooth passage to the rite. The site of any rite is inside the home, *angan*, where even men gather to watch the event take place. But generally men await the event to be over at *dalan* where the child who is the protagonist of the rite appears for the blessings of the elder after he is through.

The acoustic companion to the whole process of *Mundan* never ceases, as women sing non-stop. It often begins with songs invoking deity and ancestors in the songs, such as

*JAL PHOOL LAY NAUTAB GHARAK GOSAUNI HE*
*HARSIT HOTI BHAWANI BARUA KE AASHISH DETI HE*
*SWARGAHI NAUT PATHAYAB KI PITAR ANAND HOT HE*
In this song, *pitar* is for the ancestors and *barua* is the child protagonist of the *mundan samskar*. Such songs invoke not only deities but also all the chief ancestors, at least three generations back, for divine interventions to ensure fruitful implementation of the rituals and meaningful occurrence of the rite.

There are many songs women sing to point out the roles of various relatives of the child protagonist in *mundan*, such as,

*KONE BABA CHHUDIYA GADHAOL BENT MADHAOL HE
KONE AMMA LEL JANAM KESH KE SHUBH SHUBH HOYET HE...*

Who is the father of this boy, who gotten the blade made
Who is the mother of this boy, who delivered this hair sacred...

Many songs of this genre reveal the name of the child protagonist and establish the relation between the child, the parents, close kin, and the divine cosmos. Another song of similar kind relates the whole story on the selection of this day, with the help of the Brahmin priest, placing all the actors involved in a narrative context,

*RANI JE CHALALI SHAYANGRIH RAJA SE BICHARAL HE
RAJA, BALAK ATI SUKUMAR KARAB JAG MUDAN HE...*

The mother queen, in the bedroom, discussed it with the father king
The child is too tender, let’s have his tonsorial rite done, on a day, that is good...

Also, there are peppy songs addressing the barber with pun and humor,

*DHEERE DHEERE KATIHE HAJMA KESH,
KE BAUA BAD DULAR CHHAIK RE
BAUA KE MAAMI HAJMA TORE DEBO RE
KE BAUA BAD DULAR CHHIAK RE...*

Be tender in cutting hair, o barber
For, baby is rose of our eyes
Gift for you is the maternal aunt
For, baby is rose of our eyes...

The socio-cultural tendency is to make fun of the maternal kin. This song says that the barber would get to have, on a subtly sexual note, the maternal aunt of the child, if he does his job with due care and tenderness.
Not to be ignored are the songs wherein aunts of the child, his father’s sisters, lodge a complaint of neglect shown to them,

KEHEN KATHOD BHELIYE YO Bhaiya
PAHILE BETA KE MUDAN KELON
BAHINI BIDAGIRI BISARLON YO Bhaiya...
How heartless is it of you o! brother
Had have first son’s mudan
Forgot inviting your sister o! brother...

The song goes on revealing the list of compensation, for the insensitive injustice done by the brother of not inviting the protagonist of the song, the sister expects. It seeks for all kind of material compensation for the brother’s folly.

The festivity in-rite of the passage includes janeyu (also called yagnyopavit, sacred thread giving ceremony), which is larger in implication and design spanning three days for the main event and almost a month in preparation. Mainly a rite of the upper caste, with specific claim of the Brahmans, it is equal to a yajnya, the religious event in which all gods are invoked for participation, through the help of innumerable Brahmin priest who have knowledge of the Veda and greater level of seeking takes place. Invites to the relatives in the kinship network are sent well a month in advance. The daughters’ arrival from their in-laws’ home is marked by the crying at reception, joined by mother, aunts, and other women, and the same is repeated at departure too. Apparently the former is crying in happiness to see the visiting daughter and the latter is crying in the sorrow of separation. Incoming women immediately join the workforce of the household, while men actually while away at dalan, passively overseeing the event. The function becomes a focal of public discussion until it is over. Almost the whole village participates in such an event in different capacity, such as a kumhar (potter) supplies the needed clay pots, dom makes the bamboo-baskets available, barbers who use to traditionally do the job of messenger are now reduced to only shaving on the day of the event, women of Dhamuk caste group serve to cook and clean, and of course women from the upper caste household are always there for all purposes. Women sit in the afternoon spinning cotton on the wooden charkha (loom) and make threads, which they subsequently colour in turmeric paste. These threads are put together in a delicate way, in six folds (or three, as per the tradition of the caste group), and this is what is called janeyu after chanting the hymns of the Veda. The invited guests start gathering four days before the day of event so that they could
also contribute their labor, if possible, toward the event. Every day is nearly festive with preparation on and women singing the songs meant for this occasion. At least two days' feast, for the whole village and also some of the other villages, is for sure. Thus, there is another level of preparation in this event, about gathering all the necessary items to be cooked and catered to the guests in the feast. Curd is a sought after item in the feast, and therefore the household where the event is to take place gathers huge amount of milk, which is duly boiled and kept in clay-utensils for transforming into curd. Other sweet dishes of milk are also prepared. All this while women sing songs of all kind, let alone the days of event. In addition to the songs in praise of deity and ancestors, there are songs for the main actions associated with rituals in \textit{janeyu}. Songs during the cutting of bamboo trees (meant to raise the structure, called \textit{madba}, under which the event takes place), of the construction of \textit{madba}, of the purification of \textit{madba} by mopping the floor under it with cow-dung, of the spinning of the threads for making \textit{janeyu}, and so on, are the main ones sung. In the elaborate rituals, there are songs during the shaving of the head of teen protagonist/s, when they are given the enchanted \textit{janeyu} with the hymn recited in their ear by the supporting preceptor (a Brahman from the kinship), and when the \textit{barua} go out on symbolic begging as a celibate Brahman boy who has just scaled up in the cycle of life. A song that presents the scenario in narrative form is,

\begin{center} \textit{LAL PIYAR ACCHI MADBA PAANE PAAT CHHARAL HE}\n\textit{TAHI MADAB BAISALAH BABA SE 'FALLAN' BABA HE...}\n\textit{RAHU RAHU BABU AAI AHAH BRAHMAN HOYAB HE}\n\textit{KE LAL JANEYUA DEB KI PIYAR JANUYUA DEB HE ...}\n\end{center}

Red and yellow \textit{madba}, thatched with betel leaves overhead
Sat beneath such \textit{madba}, the father, who is such a father
Go slow my child, you are becoming Brahman today
Red one or yellow one, which \textit{janeyu} shall we give him today...

The story reveals the names of the father and other kin involved in helping the child graduate into a Brahman with sacred thread. It celebrates the becoming of a Brahman. But then there is another song sung on the same occasion that also ridicules the socio-cultural tendencies of a Brahman,

\begin{center} \textit{BAKLEL BABHNA CHURA Dahi CHATAY ELA HAMAR ANGANA}\n\textit{CHAUR DEVIEN DAIL DEVIEN DHELNI ANGANA}\n\textit{EK RATI NON LE KARAI CHHATHI KHEHNA...}\n\end{center}
Idiot Brahmin, greedy for *chura-dahi*\(^{118}\), came over our *angana*
Gifted you with rice and lentils, you hoarded them away
A bit of salt makes you crib about, not expected of you...

The song targets greedy priests who often end up asking for more and never feels content about what has been already given to him. Despite the criticism of Brahman priests, there is whole lot of arrangement to help the child become a Brahman with a symbolic acquisition of *janeyu*, for this is what continues the social status of the family. In general women do not shy away from ridiculing Brahmans for their conduct of superiority and contradictory meanness. These women are from both the sections, the upper caste including that of Brahmans, as well as the lower caste. Whenever an elderly woman will have to say something harsh to a young boy from the Brahman family, she would address him as ‘*re babhnaa*!’ which connotes a disregard for the unbecoming Brahmans. Women remind the men of Brahmin caste the socially expected behavior with attributes such as scholarly, generosity, compassion, grandness etc. A befallen Brahmin, who is greedily seeking for wealth and property rather than sacrificial tendency leading to the acquisition of wisdom, is always the butt of ridicule among women across caste groups. In fact when a lower caste man tends to exhibit radically contradictory behavior, or arrogant superiority, or unkind haughtiness, he will be compared to the Brahman men. The whole society however supports in the *janeyu samskar* of a Brahman boy, of course by the way of offering services for return in money and gifts, as though the whole society is interested in the social existence of a valuable Brahman who could be epitome of humanity. the feeling of offering a son to the social cause, that is in the nurturance of a Brahman, is overwhelming that mother of the children who are going through the rite shed tears, marking a sense of separation. Also, women of the household share a sense of pride that they are offering a boy to the process of becoming a Brahman- for the values of being Brahman rather than occupational status. Women and men both agree on the point that nobody is occupationa\(\text{ll}"{l}"\)ly Brahman any more, except some who have priesthood alongside other profession. It is all about becoming better human rather than wearing an insignia of the caste Brahman, articulates. a pundit who is also a teacher in the government's high school. The emulation of Brahman among some

\(^{118}\) *Chura-Dahi* is the combination of crushed paddy and curd, a renowned diet in Mithila, and Brahmans are generally associated with it for their ever satiable greed for it. Maithil Brahmans are laughed at for their habit of gluttony in general otherwise. On any occasion they compete in eating the largest quantity of any good dish, especially sweet dishes.
lower caste men, in wearing sacred thread, is also explained as an attempt to inculcate that scholarly quest for wisdom and sensibility to human kind which have been traditionally (at least in principle and with some examples) attached with the Brahmans. However, the elderly folk mark that *Janeyu smaskar* is merely lip service now a days, for nobody really observes the rules of chastity and austerity until marriage anymore. Hence, the show of the *samskar* is merely to assert caste hierarchy and distinctions rather than the process for inculcation of values. The *Janeyu samskar* is almost a prelude to the *Vivah samskar* (the wedding), and hence these two events overlap in terms of ritual performances, as well as songs. A little more spectacular than the *Janeyu* is the level of preparation for and occurrence of wedding ceremony. The process of match-selection itself ripples all over the village involving even those who do not belong to the household. An intermediary called *ghatak* (also called *Agua*), facilitates the primary broaching of the proposal for both the parties. If a potential bride’s side comes to visit a potential groom’s side, to adjudge his socio-economic status, people form every corner of the village get to know of it. Similarly, if the father of a daughter is visiting places to find an eligible match for his daughter, it is not a secret for the village. The amount and property promised to be given away in dowry is often the main attraction of the village talk, indicating the socio-economic abilities and status of the family of giver and taker of dowry. The potential bride’s side visiting the village of the potential groom enquires about the groom and his family from some anonymous people of the village too, at the *paan* shop or elsewhere. If the groom side has a bad name in the village, there is possibility that villagers may inform about the reality to the daughter’s side and thus jeopardize the deal. On an average, as noted these days, the daughter’s side is not very inquisitive about the details and they intend to marry off the daughter, anyhow, at the lowest possible dowry. Many of the families, that belong to Fulahara, but has been living in towns, come to village to have the wedding ceremony executed, with the help of immense manpower available in the village. Once the proposal is accepted by the both sides, the preparation begins in manifold. Several rounds of shopping of clothes, ornaments, daughter’s trousseau and son’s wedding-wear, and also the heavily bargained shopping for the grand feast for the *barat* (the entourage accompanying the groom), takes place. On the other hand, women in the household, including all the daughters the family who have turned up on invitation, do the needful of preparing for everything, from the nitty-gritty of *bidhi-bidhan* (folksways) to the aesthetics of
wedding ceremony. The frills in the preparation for daughter’s marriage are more than that in son’s, for the event consummates at the bride’s natal home. Most of the preparation therefore happens where the bride resides and entire village gear up to offer paid as well as unpaid services. One of the many such actions women do is writing *kobar*, which is an art work they do on the borders of the walls of the particular room in which the newly married couple is supposed to spend nights, in continuity with rituals. The humble paintings made on the wall of the *kobar* has telling effect as they intend to convey tales of marriages of the mythological icons such as *Sita and Ram*.

![A Kobar writing in progress](image)

A *Kobar writing in progress*

Songs however accompany the action at both the places. At son’s household women, the mother, sisters and aunts, may be singing something emotionally appealing like,

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JAAHI DIN AAHO BABU TORO JANAM BHEL
ANN PAIN KICHHU NE SOHAY HE
SEHO BABU CHALALA GAURI BIAHAN
DUDHBA KE DAAM DEHU NE CHUKAAY HE
DUDHBA KE DAAM AMMA SADIHYO NAI SAKACHHI
POSAI KE DAAM DAI DE DEB HE...
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The day you were born, my grown up child
No food no water, in the labor pain, I had liked
That grown up child of mine on the way to marry Gauri
Can you pay for the milk I gave you, is there a price
Priceless is the milk you fed me o mother
We will however reciprocate for my bringing up...

The songs presents a dialogue between would be groom, who is on the way to marry his selected bride. It never takes place in the real sense between the son and the mother. However it discloses a passionate desire to possess son and seek for his
assurances that wife would not obscure his view of the mother. The son promises that his wife and he would tender utmost respect and care for the mother, without even thinking of paying back for the feed she gave him, for that is beyond bargain. Curiously though, while singing songs of happiness expressed and occasioned by son’s marriage, mother also sobs here and there, relating stories of bringing up her son. On enquiry, they say these are ‘tears of happiness’\(^{119}\), and always muted is what the song expresses, that is separation. Some of the mothers of the groom manage to articulate the potential emotional separation, that the new woman in son’s life would change the degree of emotional proximity between mother and son. With tearful eyes, a mother would disclose- it is not easy to give away own child to another family and a woman thereof. The notion of veritable separation from son is present in many such songs. Women related to the groom would also express a hope that the bride is of good conduct and not the kind that separates a son from his mother. The mother and her friends may also be singing songs comparing the vanity and resplendence of son in groom’s wear to that of mythological icons such as Ram, Krishna and Shiva.

On the other hand, at bride’s place, before the advent of wedding, women may be telling another story through their songs,

\[ \text{SITA KE DEKHI DEKHI JHAKHTTI JANAK RISHI MOTI JAKA JHRAIN NOR} \]

\[ \text{SITA JUGUT VAR KAT BHETAT, QTHI SE LAYAB JAMAY YO...} \]

\[ \text{Anywhere it exists an eligible groom, will go get it, for Sita...} \]

Drawing parallel between the woes of any father and the mythological father of a daughter Sita, the songs in question-answer format, reveals the perennial anxieties daughter’s parents have with regard to finding the right person to marry their daughter with. A search of Ram like character is often a characteristic of the process of match-selection. The dilemma whether the selected match is the best for daughter comes clearly again in a song, sung when women do parichhan (receiving the groom) when the barat has reached the house of bride,

\[ \text{HAMRO GAURI CHHATHI PANCHE BARAS KE} \]
\[ \text{EK SO BARAS KE JAMAY GE MAI} \]
\[ \text{KONA KE GAURI SASUR BASTI} \]
\[ \text{CHHATHIN ATI SUKUMAR GE MAI...} \]

For a tenderly aged Gauri

\[^{119}\text{The similar sobs, expressive of the so-called happiness, was ubiquitous during Mundan and Janeyu too.}\]
So old a groom, alas!
How would Gauri live with him
So very soft and swave...

When women have to criticize a likely mismatch they intend to compare the groom with savage Shiva in tatters. But then, by the end of the song they voice a need to correct their impression of the Shiva, which was based on the external look, and they celebrate the same lord for his clout and caliber. The end of dilemma is almost happy, mostly generated by rethinking on the perspective, resorting to the theory of possibility.

In between the rendition of such songs, some women from the groups of singers would also relate the story about finding the eligible match for the girl for whose wedding the women have gathered. The difficulty that the male kin of the girl go through, and especially a father's trauma, is common motif of all such stories. Other women also chip in short pieces of similar stories. The younger ones would participate by throwing their bit about their fathers' trial. They would also offer a spontaneous critic of the whole baggage of anxieties which only girl's father has to carry. The groom's side is often painted as that of thugs who present their boys as the best by even using deceit and lies, mainly to attract good dowry from families of high status. They would also mention some girls' fathers who were cheated and their daughters are eventually married to some unemployed or not very well-to-do men. Many of such thug families use their feudal background, ownership of land and property, and employment of their boys. These days many of such boys are presented as well-employed in some multinational companies in metro cities and drawing handsome salaries. But they turn out to be some petty-earners, even watchman or security guards in metro cities. Elderly women would sigh at these murky stories and reminisce their times when it was benign deceit, if at all. Though there was a risk of getting married to lazy and callous men even then, but the amount of dowry was certainly not so excruciatingly high and based on the lies about the boy's economic status. Meanwhile, they would also site examples of some unfortunate women whose husbands turned out to be drunkards and who sold off all their property to leave their widows penniless. All these stories would however come to a halt with reference to the match for the present girl whose wedding these women are attending. They would all unanimously believe that this is the best match the girl's father has found after diligent efforts and also by agreeing to offer requisite dowry. Some women would go
to the extent of suggesting that these songs also offer a reality check to men folk who are mainly responsible for finalizing a match for the girl. A sense of utmost care in the match selection, failing of which men would be subject to ruthless criticism through these songs, is conveyed through these songs.

All the while, during preparation for daughter’s marriage, the singing of songs is imbued with breaks of a sob or two here and there. For, while it is a happy occasion to have daughter married off, a sense of separation for the daughter also looms large in the background. Listening to those songs of women, even men, father and brothers, break down and start sobbing quietly while continuing the daily chores. Some men, exasperated by the emotionally moving moments of this kind, run off to the paan shop to get a change for the affected mind, or scream at women to stop generating such an effect. It however seldom prevents women from singing and moving every body present in the surroundings. Even women from neighborhood or otherwise, guests as well as women from the same village, join in the quiet weeping. Way before the weeping finds a ritual consummation, there are socio-culturally defined situations for the celebration of the new marriage taking place. The elaborate ritual underway, in the rite of marriage which appears equal to a religious event of magnanimity, gives opportunities to sing songs for each bit of ritual- such as songs of songs for aam-mahua vivah (marriage of trees before the marriage of the couple takes place, to ensure that all the bad astrological effects, graham-dasha, is received by the trees rather than humans), naak pakarbaak geet (the elder sister of the would be bride, or any other women in sisterly relation, ushers the groom by holding his nose, in a jocular way), laaba bhujbak geet (songs when corn is popped), othangar kaal (when the would be groom is made to join the men of the household in thrashing the seed in a wooden plank, as symbolic of sexual act of reproducing), saunth kaal and senurdaan (when the hair of the bride is parted by her mother to receive the vermillion smeared by the groom), bedi kaal (when the couple is taking rounds of the auspicious fulcrum made of tender bamboo trees), kanyadaan (when the daughter is, through apt ritual, given away by the father in the company of other men), and kobar (when the ritually married couple is ushered by the women in the special chamber designed and prepared for them) etc. Songs, women sing, when the couple is on the way to the kobar, are amorous and suggestive of mythologically supported romance, such as
On the bank of the river, in the garden
Stood a sandal wood tree
Spread a bed on the couch, the daughter of gardener, beneath
plays over there hunting, the son of king, of fame...

But the sense of romance is not devoid of a fear of the same, as a song speaks for the protagonist (the bride),

HUM NAI JEBAI KOBAR GHAR HUMRA DAR LAGAY YE
DAR LAGAY YE, HO BABA LAAJ LAGAY YE
JAKHNE MAHADEB, BASAHA PAR BAIŞALANI
ANGE BHIBHUT RUDRA MAAL SOBHAİYE
HUM NAI JAIBE...HUMRA DAR LAGAY YE
JAKHNE MAHADEB MADBA PAR BAIŞALAIN
BHOOT-PISACH SAB TAAL MARAY YE
JAKHANE MAHABED KOBAR MEI BAIŞALANI
BIŞDHAİ NAAG FUŞKAR MARAYE
HUM NAI JAIBE KOBAR GAHR HUMRA DAR LAGAY YE...
No, I cant go to Kobar, for it scares me of the possible
Fears of the possible and that I am too shy for this all
As Mahadeb sat upon his favorite ox, Basaha
Ashes on his body silvered
Garland of rudra too peered
No, cant go to kobar, for it scares me of the possible
As Mahadeb sat beneath the scared madba
Ghosts and goblins all roared in upbeat
As Mahadeb sat in kobar
Venomous cobra, dangling his neck, hissed all over
No, I cant go to kobar, for it scares me of the possible...

The song has deep sexual connotations, describing the groom from a bride’s point of view, who is entirely unfamiliar with the man she has been wedded to, and thus he appears to be a source of awe and fear. While the very same description turns out to be different for a groom, who also ensures satisfaction in pleasure-seeking. Sexual romantic imagination, in the mythological frame, with reference to the most adored god Shiv, presents another example of conjunction between the social and mythological.

Women not only initiate the couple in the romantic frame, they also rejoice in teasing the newly wed groom. They sing songs abusing the whole barat and men folk listen with rapturous joy,
Nil Kul Kamini Samdhin Chhinro
Sagar Nagar Eko Nahi Chhorlai
Ke Thik Apan Paray...
The mother of the groom, the wife of the man in red robe
Such a beautiful whore
Bewitching for the whole world
Not thinking who are others or own...

Such outrageously sexual and ribald songs waft the air, along with aroma of the food served to the barat, while the father of the groom is at the center of activities. It specifies all those men whom the samdhan (mother of the groom) has been dating. Toward the end of the ritual, at the last leg of the rite of marriage, women sing songs called Samdaun, expressing the grief of bidding adieu to the daughter.

Bad Re Jatan Se Hum Siya Dhiya poslau
Seho Dhiya Ram Nene Jaay...
Brought up my daughter with utmost care and love
Such piece of my heart, Ram takes away...

While singing such songs women do not shy away from venting their emotions and men slip into the same fold more often than not. The occasion of final separation, of groom setting off for a patri-local family with his newly wed wife, occurs either just after marriage or after a year or three years later, as the rule suggests. This is called Dwiragman (meaning second marriage), executed with almost same fanfare as marriage. But the level of melancholia overshadows that of joy due to the imminent separation of daughter, and also an unrequited attachment with the groom, as a song says,

Bad Re Jatan Se Hum Ram Thagi Lelhu
Seho Ram Jai Chhaith Apan Gharbe ho Lal
Je Hum Janitahu Ram Chal Jaytah
Panma Khuway Ram Ki Rakhitahu ho Lal...
So much I did, all deceit, to win over Ram
That beloved, deceiving me, on his way back
If I knew he will go away
Must I have fed him nice betel leaf

On such a occasion, women's singing and weeping blend so neatly that the chocking throat and thereof hiccups appear as part of the musical score accompanying the words of the song, adding to the emotive effect. A song reads,
Had I cared for a parrot
I would have sang songs of god to it
What did I get caring for a daughter
A pitcher-full of butter was it
like my son, I loved my daughter
Such a daughter, my child, goes away
Leaving this home, and us all, aside...

It so happens that most of the time, singing of these kinds of songs on such occasions are left incomplete due to sudden outburst of loud and rapturous crying. Songs get lost in the words addressing each other with undiluted affection. This tendency also characterizes the event of death, where wailing replaces any other forms of folklore, as though wailing itself assumes the tone, temperament, content and implications of folklore.

Apart from Mundan, Janeyu, and marriage, there is antim samskar (the last rite) post death. There is no practice of singing songs on the event of death. Nevertheless there are songs, called Nirgun, which some men from lower caste sing. This paradox is often glibly explained by the knowledgeable elders of the village by referring to an extinct institution of Nepobhatin, of which even many of the scholars/teachers at Mithila University are not informed. Without much historical substantiation, they narrate that particular groups of women used to be professional singers on the event of death and their songs were in the format of wailing. It was largely singing while mourning. The commonality of sight of singing on the occasion of death is missing in the larger community. There is however a practice of ritual weeping slotted on a particular day, the ekadasha (eleventh day), when the karta (the main carrier, often the eldest son of the deceased or the eldest brother, or an equivalent kin) comes back from the site of the karma (the worshipping and sending the departed soul to heaven).

Before this elderly women prevent the members of family from crying and they focus on listening to the stories of the Garuda Purana. But then, the aforesaid is only about the upper caste in general and the caste of Brahmans in particular. Singing still holds true among lower caste: while men sing well-composed songs of Nirgun category, women sing their sorrow out in the manner of grieving.
Antim Samskar generally refers to the post death rituals. However, as it happens, it seems to begin right when the person is dying, unless the death was brought by an accident or it happened in the surroundings of a hospital. There is a notion of ‘good death’ and ‘bad death’, the former alluding to dying in household in the presence of all the near and dear even if the dying person was ailing and the latter is a despised way of dying in which the dying person has met with a situation of utter loneliness and fatal accident. If a person dies at an unexpected turn of life, such as dying young and unwed or death of a young child, due to sudden discovery of a disease or by meeting with an accident, it stirs the folk conscience negatively. These are the occasions when recovery of the social selves of the surviving members of the family happens to be more challenging. Bad deaths, nevertheless, the folk have a tendency to subject the corpse to a ritual process and thereby render it almost a ‘good death’. S/he is taken out from the enclosed space under the roof of the house to the open space, in the aangan often, near tulsi-chura (the platform of the basil plant). As the news spreads that the person is about to die, villagers start gathering and streaming inside. While men seem to be active in terms of conducting the rite, women and kids snuggle up in corners consoling the kids and women of the household. As part of the beginning of the last rite, they administer some droplets of gangajal (the pious water of the sacred river Ganges) stored in a pitcher in the household to the dying person by opening his/her mouth. Some well-to-do families also conduct go-daan (donating a calf) believing that holding the tail of the calf the dying person would have a smooth journey from this world to the other world, and it is assumed that the priest who would officiate in the rite will receive the calf in gift. But then, even without go-daan, the folk believe that a well-conducted last rite ensures a potential liberation for a departed soul. More often than not, it is believed, that praan (life-force) is released from the body through mouth wherein the droplets of gangajal has been poured. An eerie silence punctuated with burst of crying and din of hurly burly mark the situation as the dying person is finally declared dead. In some cases doctors are involved in the scene to make sure the death is biological. Despite this, as in the instances where no doctor is present, the folk themselves declare the body of the dying person fit for cremation process. All this while, kids and women, even some adults, are in close proximity to the dying person: holding hand or feet and caressing the head etc. Once death is declared, a loud outburst of waiting charge up the scene while some male members of the household gear up to prepare the arthi (the bed of bamboo-sticks) to
carry the dead body to the cremation ground. If the dead is a woman who has died as a *suhagin* (her husband still alive) she will be decorated by some women of household as a bride in new *saari* of vermillion colour on her and other such things. Otherwise, the dead-body would be generally covered from head to toe in a single piece of white cotton-fabric. But then, the dead body is not simply so for the folk, as it will be for the doctor who would leave the place after pronouncing the biological death. The dead body still has the name and the social status, and it persists even after the cremation has happened. On the way to cremation ground, which is generally at the far-fetched land by the side of a pond or a *gaachhi* (orchard), it is a procession carrying the *arthi*. The procession consists of near and dear from cross the households in village. The four sides of the *arthi* are soldiered by either sons or other kith and kin of the dead, in turn. Some families also take the dead for cremation to the bank of the Ganga (Simariya, in the neighboring district of Begusarai, is the place where many of the villagers take the dead to, for a more auspicious cremation). This involves a bit of journey on a mini-bus for three to four hours. The funeral-bed for pyre at the cremation ground is set with huge logs at the base atop which the dead would lay covered with logs around the body. With some ritual performed in the instruction of the *Mahapatra Brahman* (a particular group of Brahmans who specialize in conducting the *antim samskar* only, and they are of the lowest status among the upper caste all together). With the help of *dom* (the outcaste who specialize in scavenging and all the defiling works), the pyre is lit and offered to the funerary bed. The scene and sound is somber and profound. This is where no crying or any singing takes place. The entire team awaits the cremation to be over, until the body gradually turns into ashes and some bones remain. In the process of burning, some men form the village feed the fire with more logs and also keep adjusting the funeral bed so that the flames engulf the whole of the body. The smell at the moment of burning is inexplicably charging. At last, the oldest of the household offer the remains to the river, or if the cremation has taken place in the village the left over is gathered in a pitcher for offering to the river later on. Including the day of cremation, the rite extends for eleven days during which the oldest son of the deceased or any body of equivalence, who will be called *karta* (the doer), offers all kind of sacrifices, and the *preta* (the spiritual remain of the deceased) is propitiated everyday at the bank of any river/pond in the village. On the eleventh day, it is assumed that the deceased has finally departed to the abode of the *Pitar* (ancestors), and when the *karta* comes back
to the household to finally offer gifts to the officiating priests. These include the wherewithal of everyday existence, such as clothes, cot, mattress, utensils of brass, gold ornaments etc, on the pretext that the effect of the items given away would help the departed soul sustain their everyday existence in the pitarlok. This is the day when a ritual weeping takes place with the belief that the deceased has really departed the earth finally, not existing even as preta hovering around his/her family. In principle weeping is not allowed before this day and the family is engaged in listening to the Gadud puran which tells the mythological tales of dying, departing, attributes of soul and impact of deeds after death, significance of dharma and karma, so on so forth. Albeit, the ritual weeping, beyond the pale of ritualistic control never ceases in effect, ever since the death happens. So much so that, any death seems to be a bad occurrence, no matter how diligently the social tends to render it into a normal. All the arrangements for the re-incarnation of normal in the social lives appear fictive and temporary, for the sense of abnormal after the death of a close kin torments the survived. Intermittent wailing by the closet kin surviving the deceased occurs in defiance to rituals as well as the event of death, as many of the members of family may pretend as if nothing untoward has happened. Songs sung by men folk are imbued with symbolism, such as,

\begin{verbatim}
NIRGUN PIYA GELA JE BIDESH
BHEJAI CHITHTHI NAI SANDES
KONA JEBAI SASURARI, SUNU HE SAINI
PIYA AILA JE HAMAR
BHEJAI DOLIYA KAHAR
AAB TA JEBAI SASURARI, SUNU HE SAINI
KARI KAI SOLHO SINGAR
BHELHU DOLIYA SAWAR
GAURI KAANEI JARE JAR
CHHUTAL NAHAR PARIVAR, SUNU HE SAINI
SANTO KAHAIYE PUKARI
ATAI RAHINAI DUI-CHARI
AAKHIR JAYNAI SASURARI, SUNU HE SAINI...
\end{verbatim}

Beloved beyond compare, went off the shore

\begin{verbatim}
SENDING a word was sent long
How would I get to the abode of my beloved, listen o friend!
When would I get to the abode of my beloved, listen o friend!
As and when arrives my beloved
And sent a palanquin for me
Now likely, I will be going to the abode of my beloved, listen o friend!
I doll up myself
Aboard the palanquin sent for me
Gauri, within me, wept copiously
\end{verbatim}

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As I left the whole world of known behind
And saint said it aloud
living here, for a day or two
to go to the abode of beloved is the truth, listen o friend!

The song unwittingly draws a parallel between departures of a soul from a body and that of a bride from her natal home. The paradoxical attachment to the world of known near and dear finds a resolve as a willingness to set on the last journey occurs in the mind of a protagonist.

The elderly women would hush up any curiosity pertaining to death, but they would also speak of the limits of deh (physical existence) almost accepting the inevitable ending. Some of them, the widows, also regret for living so long after the death of their husbands. Awaiting death is an abiding feature of elderly lives, not only for the reason of difficulties in the socio-economic sustenance of existence, but also because they all aspire a timely death. One such account would mention the story of Ashwathhama, a character from the Mahabharta, who was son of the great teacher of the scions of Hastinapur: Ashwathhama regrets immortality of his physical existence even now. While these women and men would like to bless their younger grandchildren with a long life (they address the kids with a word chiranjeevi, meaning ‘live-longer’), they would seek for themselves a timely death from their gods.

**Songs of Season**

In addition to the songs, associated with the rituals in the rite of the passage, there are songs women, and also men, sing for seasons, celebrating the motifs occasioned by the seasons in the span of the year. Songs from these categories are also becoming rare on the lips of the women of the village, for they are more attached to the songs in the rite of the passage, or the songs they sing in everyday life context. Though these songs do not draw as much attention as do the songs in the rite of the passage, they do have a place of significance in the everyday life of the folk of Fulahara. Besides, to capture the worldview of the villagers it is imperative to have a synopsis of these songs as well. Some oft-sung categories of songs are *Chaitawar, Tinmasa, Chaumas, Punchmasa, Barahmasa, Faag, Kajli and Malar*. These songs establish the centrality of the idea of intimate relationship, socio-sexual, with the loved ones and the painful distance that is caused by various factors. A song form *Malar* suggests it clearly,
SAKH RE BISRAL MOHE MURARI  
PRATHAM ASHADH TEJAL MOHI MOHAN  
KAUN BIDHI KHEPAB ANHARI...  
O friends, I am out of Mohan’s mind  
Forsaken in the month of ashadh  
how do I while away the dark nights...

The protagonist, the singer through these songs, tend to account for the fear of living away from the loved one who, generally equated with mythological icon, must have been beside her, as well as him, in the times of crises. By expressing longings for the companion, in subtly sexual sense, these songs establish the attachment with the idea of separation, although the apparent notion is of love. Similar is the stance in a song from Barahmasa, that says,

CHAIT HE SAKHI FULAL BELI NIKAS KUNJ NEBAR YO  
TEJI MOHAN GEL MADHUPUR HAMAR KI APRADH YO  
BAISAKH HE SAKHI USHAM JWALA GHAM SE BIJAL DEH YO  
RAGRI CHANDAN ANG LEPTAHU GHAR JE RAHITAITH KANT YO...  
About the doorstep bloomed jasmine, had there been him around yo  
For what err of mine, Mohan left me alone and went off to Madhupur yo  
Drenched in sweat in the heat of Baisakh my body is helpless yo  
Wish I had smeared sandal pastes all over, had there been him around yo...

Of course this is another song with the similar leitmotif, of love for the one who has left for some destination for socio-economic purposes, and also a longing for the fulfillment of the desires of mundane kinds. But on a larger scale, these songs also reveal a longing for the ideal type of Being, whose presence is intuitively felt, and longed for concrete realization. This is recurrent in the songs from Chaumasa and Barahmasa as well. It requires to be interpreted along the question as to why celebration of season, and thereof changes, are through an acknowledgment of suffering in separation, unrequited love, and longing for an ideal type of Being. There is a tendency of the folk, manifest in these songs, to correct the act of the mythological hero, such as Ram and Krishna, who left their beloved behind for a reason.

It is interesting to note that while songs of season have not disappeared entirely, songs associated with different kinds of work in the seasonal cycle or otherwise, such as sowing, harvesting, winnowing etc are out of practice. Women do not sing the

120 Women of Fulhara, across caste groups, inform that their grandmothers knew such songs. But they hardly sang them. And thus it disappeared from the collective memory. One old woman hummed a line

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songs which talked of their engagement with the act of agriculture. If at all, they end up singing songs which they sing otherwise in the frame of every day life.

_Songs of Everyday life_

The eldest daughter of a parent is almost 'little mother' to her younger ones. She performs some of the works mothers are supposed to do for the younger kids. From changing nappies to cleaning the excreta of the baby, these little mothers are spotted in every household, and heard singing-humming. They however do not sing all those songs they have heard their grannies singing. The songs on their lips are also not very much of what they have heard from their mothers. Notwithstanding the changes, these 'little mothers' join in quietly, as a learning spectator, whenever an occasion of singing arises. While the elderly women would sing, these little mothers would watch and hear them in awe, thinking whether these songs really existed at any point of time. They find them difficult to sing, given the antiquity of wordings, and languid pace at which they are sung. They sing songs in Maithili they have heard played out in loudspeakers or sound-boxes by cassette or CD players, the songs popularized by the local music disc industries. To their singing, no elderly woman ever objects, they hear them agape instead. Some boys, mostly of the age around ten-twelve, become amused spectators and audiences to their sisters' informal renditions. And when sisters will be bored of being the object of attraction, they will persuade their brothers to sing some peppy songs or just dance wildly for them. To such an unusual pleasure, girls will giggle in amusement. Not only girls, who tend to be the little mothers, exhibit this tendency, their mothers also enjoy such random events. In fact, women, mothers by the age of twenty five on, also like to hum songs which the little girls sing. There is also a popular habit of singing songs in Maithili on the tune of some very popular _fими_ song. It is followed by women of all age group, more or less, while elderly women’s songs are dominated by the categories of older songs which are yet not captured by the local music industries. A seven year old child Palak sings,

*OOPAR PAHAD NEECHA KANKAR*
*HE SHIV SHANKAR*
*PUJA KONA KARU …*

The peak above and grimes beneath

---

or two which was associated with the act of _Othangar kutti_ (thrashing grains in a wooden block with a wooden staff by more than one woman). Seldom, though, anybody sings it, or other such songs. While the act of _Othangar kutti_ is itself disappearing from practice, as everybody goes to the flour mill or the thrasher, there is little scope for a song like this.
O Shiv!
How do I worship you...

Following her, elder sister Radha (12) sings, as her grandmother looks on with admiration,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{CHHOTI SI MERE PARBATI SANKAR JI KI PUJA KARTI HAI} \\
\text{HARI BAG MEI JAATI HAI} \\
\text{FULO KI DAAL LIBATI HAI} \\
\text{FULO KI KALIYA KHOTI HAI} \\
\text{CHHOTI SI.....} \\
\end{align*}
\]

A little parbati worships Shankar unfailingly
Goes to sacred garden
Toils to reach the flowering twigs
Plucks each flower lovingly
A Little Parbati...

An unusual song, in Hindi, sung in Maithili tone and tenor, counts the hard work a little girl child does, such as gathering flowers, Belpatra (Aegle marmelos), and sandal wood, to worship lord Shiv. While singing this song, she actually feels she is a 'little Parbati' (the young consort of Shiv) and she has to devote herself irrespective of her age and limited abilities.

In between the song the grandmother would gently scold the girl for messing up with bhas and laya (meter of song and intonation) even though there hardly is any training in the style of singing for the folk women. Thus for the next song another girl attempts to be better and sings,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{BABA JOHAB TORA BATIYA KATEK DINMA} \\
\text{BHARAL SHISHI GANGAJAL SEHO SUKHI GEL} \\
\text{ACHCHAT CHANDAN MEI BABA GHUN LAGI GEL} \\
\text{JOHAB TORA BATIYA KATEK DINMA...} \\
\end{align*}
\]

How long do I see for your way
The bottle full of Gangajal (sacred water of the Ganges) has dried too
Achchat (pious rice) chandan (sandal wood) have been eaten up by termites
How long do I see for your way...

The song makes the young singer sound precocious as it divulges some of the existential concerns that only the songs sung by the elders articulate. It interrogates the divinity, here in this song represented by Shiv, for the unfavorable social condition due to the lack of divine intervention. Apart from demanding a favor from the supernatural, the song also intends to reflect the intimate relation between the divine and the mundane, the proximity between social and extra-social.
In addition to these, children also sing a song which echoes contemporary concerns vis-à-vis patriotism, revealing the socially constructed relationship between the nation and the mythological divinity,

\[
\begin{align*}
    & \text{BRAHMA } \text{O BISHNU } \text{MAHESH } \text{NIKLA} \\
    & \text{APNA } \text{BHARAT } \text{KE } \text{HARNE } \text{KALES} \text{H } \text{NIKLA} \\
\end{align*}
\]

The trinity of Brahma, Bishnu and Mahesh stride
To rid Bharat (India) of her destitution, in a ride...

The song recounts the effectiveness of each key gods of the Hindu pantheon in the amelioration of the problem-struck nation India. While the elders appreciate the song, they say it has come to the children via their school education. Elders are not averse to the intervention of the contemporary influences, though in slightly different manner.

A grandmother, about sixty five, sings a song while cooking the meal of the day,

\[
\begin{align*}
    & \text{SIB JOGIYA GAURI KE PIYA} \\
    & \text{TUNE DAMRU BAJA KE MERA DIL LE LIYA} \\
    & \text{MATHE ME JATA HAI} \\
    & \text{JATA ME GANGA HAI} \\
    & \text{TUNE GANGA BABA KE MERA DIL LE LIYA} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Gauri’s husband, O Sib! You austere saint
On the beat of your Damru (a small drum), you won over my heart
Matted locks
The ganges in it soaked
By streaming the Ganges, you won over my heart...

On the tune of a song from a movie starring Amitabh Bachhan\textsuperscript{121}, this songs divulges the reason why lord Shiv is so endearing, such as his ability to entrap the Ganges in his matted locks and let it flow in the form of a duly directed river.

Women, in the midst of their daily hurly burly and seasonal-occasional extra frills, do not cease to sing the songs every morning, from before dawn to the day-break. These songs are however not in the format of performance vis-à-vis rituals in the rite of the passage. Each woman sings within the household, individually, in the softest of tone and tenor. Interestingly, men also sing these songs, outside beneath the roof of the dalan. If to be called performance, these renditions focus the individual singer’s orientations in thought and values rather than singing abilities as per the folk norms.

\textsuperscript{121} The tune of the film song, pardeshiya ye sach hai piya...From the film Mr. Natwarlal, guides the flow of this particular song a woman named Gulab Devi, age sixty seven, sings with the same ease with which she sings some of the old folk songs.
The songs are from the category they call *parati* (to be sung at *prat*, early morning). The songs of men and women overlap at this juncture.

*The songs are from the category they call *parati* (to be sung at *prat*, early morning). The songs of men and women overlap at this juncture.*

A post-*parati* tea (over a discussion on the songs)

Songs with religious appeal at the surface, these also mark the existential location of the folk thought. A song reads,

```
KICHHU NAI RAHAL MORA HAATH, HE UDHO
KICHHU NAI RAHAL MORA HAATH
GOKUL NAGAR SAGAR BRINDAWAN
SOON BHEL JAMUNA GHAT
BRINDAWANAK TARUNI SAB KANAY
JHAHARI JHAHARI KHASU PAAT
EHI PATH RATH CHADHI GELA MANMOHAN
KAI DIN TAKBAI BAAT
SAHEB JAA DHARI PALATI NAI AOTA
BRAJ BHEL AGAM ATHAH...
Nothing in my reach
O Udho! Nothing remains with me
The whole of Gokul, all of Brindawan
And lonely bank of Jamuna as well
Beautiful women of Brindawan, sobbing and crying
Ceaselessly falling leaves
this way he passed by, atop his chariot
I remain on path, looking for it
My master! he went off, not to even turn back
the city, Braj, is orphaned, in glum
nothing in my reach
O Udho! Nothing remains with me...
```
With an ease in face and calmness in voice men and women sing this while the dawn is yet to appear on the eastern horizon. The song represents the eternal sense of losing somebody or something very dear. With reference to the story of women sharing their pain on the departure of Krishna from the city Gokul, and thus deserted Brindawan where he used to frolic with them, song articulates a greater message, that pursuit of pleasure is bound to be over. While the singer, who is himself a protagonist, is longing for the departed, wailing for the loss, shedding tears, there is also a sense of acceptance of the status quo, as though loss is but inevitable. Often singing men and women acquire a contemplative face and if goaded for a conversation under the effect of these songs, they tend to be reticent and offer a simple notion- this is all about our lives.

On the same line is a song,

\[ \text{AWADH ANHAR BHEL} \]
\[ \text{EK RAGHUWAR BINU} \]
Darkness envelopes Awadh with the mere absence of Ram...

There is also a song that conveys a sense of end, and thereof notions of judgment,

\[ \text{KON GATI HOYAT MOR PRABHU} \]
\[ \text{KON GATI HOYAT MOR} \]
\[ \text{JANAM JANAM HUM PAP BATORAL} \]
\[ \text{KAHIYO NAI BHAJLAHU TOR...} \]
What am I destined to
What will be my fate
All my life I did but sins
Never did I devote to you
Now it is so late...

Expressing the religious unpreparedness, as the protagonist of the song who is singing these lines, the song confesses of his excessive indulgence in the inevitable pitfalls of life. The notion of readiness to face the end is conditioned by the notion of religious engagement with the divine, despite being worldly. For the expressed belief, in a song like this, is that only such engagements can absolve oneself of the sense of sin and inability to face the end-unseen. In the same breath, a song also instills the idea of negation and renunciation of the excesses of the world,

\[ \text{KARAM KE BAAT NIHAR HE UDHO, KARAM KE BAAT NIHAR HE KAHE PIPRA PAKUA FARAT HAI} \]
\[ \text{KAHE LATI FAL BHARI HE UDHO, KARAM KE BAAT NIHAR HE KAHE MURKHA DHAN PAR LOTAYA} \]

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KAHE KE PUNDIT BHIKHARI HE UDHO, KARAM KE BAAT NIHAR HE KAHE BAGULA SET BARAN BHAYO
KAHE KOYLI KAARI HE UDHO, KARAM KE BAAT NIHAR
KAHTHIN KABIRA SUN BHALI SANTO
DHANI TORE BEBHARI HE SANTO, KARAM KE BAAT NIHAR...

Your deeds will be adjudged, Udho! Your deeds
Why so much, a peepal, laden with pakua
why so heavy with fruits this tendril, Udho! Your deeds
why this clinging to riches, of foolish
why a scholar so stupid, Udho! Your deeds
why the crane we hail for white
why the crows neglected for black, Udho! Your deeds
says Kabeer, must listen and see
wealth is your own deeds, Udho! Your deeds....

The song reflects, to begin with, a close influence of the Nirgun devotional stance propounded by the medieval poet and social critic Kabeer. These kinds of songs are more popular with the lower caste men and upper caste elderly women. While singing such songs they exhibit profundity of thoughts and perspective on life and death. These songs do not rule out the significance of the material world, these correct the orientation toward the same instead. Some of these men who sing parati without failing every morning puff marijuana every evening or even consuming toddy, yet they express the finitude of indulgence in their songs. It is not only said, they also believe that life is however about acknowledging and accepting these limits. By doing so, as they would put, they look forward to their next journey after death.

In addition to these oft-sung Parati songs every morning, there are songs from the category called Nachari. A famous song from this category, sung by both men and women, is

KAKHAN HARAB DUKH MOR HO BHOLE DANI
KAHYA HARAB DUKH MOR
DUKH HI JANAM LEL DUKH HI GAMAOL
SUKH SAPNAHU NAHI BHEL HO BHALANATH
KAHYA HARAB DUKH MOR
When would you free from these woes, ho Bhole dani (generous Shiv)!
When would my pathos be over!
Wasn’t I born in this!
Wasn’t I have been languishing in this!
Never did I even dream of bliss, ho Bhole nath!
When would my pathos be over...

Women tend to add some more nuances to it by singing the same song further, not used by men folk when they sing it,
By adding these extra lines, women tend to draw the line of limits even along the web of relationships. They would not shy away from accepting that everything and everybody dear to heart separates, as though separation is the absolute rule governing lives in the *samsar* (the world of cognition). This acknowledgement does not amount to total detachment from the endearing relationships or things of social existence. They remain attached- as women would say that the chaff is attached to the grain until the final thrashing takes place. They however seek the divine intervention to smoothen the process of separation, by telling their gods their woes. Yet another function is also that by articulating these notions they prepare themselves for the acceptance of the idea of separation.

While singing this *Nachari*, women and men tend to be exquisitely soft in rendition as though the effect of the wording and devotional beseeching nudge them to an experiential profundity. Nobody cries yet a sense of crying in supplication hovers. The song stresses that life is in deep pathos, of being on this earth and of loss of myriad kinds. The only way of redemption and thereby salvation is the submission to *Bhola* (*Shiv*, who is generous and adorable). Some of the losses, apparently, are beyond any redemption, such as death or physical separation, for which only *Shiv* is responsible and has to be blamed. The song also carries that sense of blaming god for it while also seeking for god's favor as far as coexistence with the sense of loss is concerned.

A rare song, addressing the monkey god *Hanuman*, a character of significance from the epic Ramayana, also perpetuates similar motif,
Listen O Hanuman! Said mother Sita, with her eyes welling with tears
How has forgotten me my own Lachhuman, has forgotten me Ram too
The roar of Rawan frightens me so much I am wilting as a tendril tender
My words are my promises, O mother Sita! Says Hanuman, with tears as proof
The sea must yield a way as the god has launched a bridge for sure...

Songs sans Occasions
Of all the categories of songs abovementioned, these are some sung any time, depending upon the mood and need of the women who hum them individually in their isolated domestic space. It becomes a sort of random performance revealing the mind of the singing woman, and an unexpected luxury for a listener who stays put home.
These songs, sung in leisure are nachari, samdaun, maheshvani, gosaunik geet, batgabni, etc. One such song, gosaunik geet, is actually a poem composed by the medieval poet Vidyapati\(^\text{122}\), which in the passage of time became a folksong is,

\[
\text{JAI JAI BHIARAVI ASUR BHAYAUNI PASHUPATI BHAMINI MAYA} \\
\text{SAHATI BAR DIY HE GOSAUNI ANUGATI GATI TUW PAYA...}
\]

Hail the mother, fear of monsters, humans' nurturer
Bless us all with sense of submission, blessed are we, thus your children...

The song, in the earliest/archaic form of Maithili with the influence of Sanskrit in idioms, details the attributes of the mother goddess, Durga/Kali, denoting the paradoxical quality in the devotional bent. The song reveals the benevolence and malevolence of the great mother; she slaughters demons, to protect her devoted humans; she is fierce destroyer as well as a compassionate nurturer. Needless to say, the upper caste women are more comfortable singing this song than their lower caste counterparts, for the presence of tatsam words (pertaining-to Sanskrit). Another song women often sing, in praise of the great mother, is

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\(^{122}\) A historical account on Vidyapati is in the third chapter of the thesis, which establishes not only scholarly and poetic excellence, also his contribution to the evolution of Maithili language, with a stress on the fact that he was the first ever scholar who decided to write in Avahatta, the earliest version of Maithili, the lingua-franca of the common Maithili, breaking away from the convention of Maithili scholars. Many of his poems, of devotional temperament, now belong to the treasure of folksongs, especially in the category of nachari and gosaunik geet.
Atop a lion is lotus, and upon is mother of all
Conch shell in a fist, discus in another, to protect us all
Chattering teeth, flicking tongue, and spattered blood in her face
Drinks blood, drop by drop, reveals her colossal form
Brahma descended, so did Bishnu, and also it was Shiv
Atop a lion is a lotus, and upon is mother of all...

The description of the great mother, triggering awe and fear, is source of assurance to all those who remembers her. By invoking her on all kinds of occasion, of ritual event in the rite of the passage as well as in leisure, women intend to ensure her kind eyes toward her home and family. Not necessarily in the face of a crisis situation, they also sing a song, in the praise of deity that lodges complaints against her. A rebellion in devotion, while maintaining the humility in supplication, presents meanings of greater significance,

**HEY BHAWANI DUKH HARU MAA PUTRA APNA JANIKE**
**DAY RAHAL CHHI DUKH BHARI BEECH BHANWAR MEI AANI KE**
**AABI ASHA MEI PADAL CHHI KI KARU HUM KANIKE**
**BISWAMATA CHHI AHA MAA AHA SE MANIKE**
**KOTIYO NAI PAID CHHODAB HAATH RAKHAB CHHANIKE**
**DIN PRABHU HUM NITYA Pujab NEM VRATA KE THANIKE**
**HEY BHAWANI DUKH HARU MAA PUTRA APNA JANIKE...**
Rid me of my sorrow, for I am yours, o mother!
In the middle of tides you are inflicting this on me
Clung to hope I am yet here, for no crying helps, o mother!
For you are mother of the world, that I believe and so does everybody else
I will not leave your feet and will clasp your hands, for ever
Day in and day out, I must worship you, with utmost devotion
Rid me of my sorrow, for I am yours, o mother!

In the gentlest manner possible the devout singer blames and also rests within a balmy hope that mother who has inflicted it all on him (or her) will help out. A strange rule of gender in this song appears as the song mentions putra, as if the singer were a male, while the singers of this song are female more often than not. Only in select situations, such as durga puja, saraswati puja, and so on the male youth sings this song. The lax rule of gender in the songs of devotion to the great mother is oft-noted
phenomenon. When pointed out to the female singers, they would say there is no distinction between men and women in front of the mother; any child is same and deserves the blessings of the mother; it is only these social rules delimiting the space which the mother does not care for. Humans also conform to the social rules, as women would opine, nevertheless they also intend to learn the ways of the great mother, and hence break the social rules in extending love and care for children irrespective of their sex and gender.

Another song, sung irrespective of any occasion, in leisure, is Nachari,

*BABA BAIDYANATH*\(^{123}\) HUM AAYAL CHHI BHIKHARIYA
AHA KE DUARIYA NA
BABA BAD BAD AAS LAGAYAL
HUMRA UPAR HOYAO SAHAY
EK BER DAARI DIYO GARIB PAR NAJARIYA
AHA KE DUARIYA NA
BAGHAMBAR KE JHAAD OCHHYAB
HUM T DAMRU KE SARYAYAB
FUL-DHUTHODH TODI HUM LAYAB
BELPATRA SEHO CHADHAYAB
BHOLA BHANGIYA PISI CHADHAYAB
SANJH-PRAT-DUPAHARIYA NA...
Baba Baidyanath (Shiv who rests in Baidyanath Dham)
I have arrived at your door, as a beggar
With high hope, of your favor, of redemption
Of a chance to serve you, for ever
I must clean your attire
I must tidy your drum and all
I must gather flowers and belputra
I must all make cannabis of your choice
From dawn to dusk, day in and out
For, Bhola, I have come as begger...

The song discloses the submission of the singer devotee to Shiv, so much so that s/he aspires to live in servility, for only Shiv can find a resolve and redemption. But it is not all, as in another song women voice a critique of the living with Shiv,

*BAIosal GAuri MONE MONE SOCHTHI*
BHANGIYA KE SANG KONA RAHABAI GE MAI
BAISAL BHANGIYA, BHUKHLE TAHAL KON AKARBE GE MAI
APNE T BHOLA BABA PUJA PAR BAISTHIN

\(^{123}\) *Baba Baijnath/ Baidyanath is another name the Maithil use for Shiv, especially with reference to the Shiv located in the district of Deoghar, also called Baijnath dham (abode of Baijnath), which now falls in the region of the state Jharkhand. This song is often sung by the *kanwariyas* (the devotees who walk for miles over hills from Suhangunj filling the pitcher with *Gangajal* to the temple in Deoghar) in the month of Saon and Bhadab (months of rain).*
Mulls Gauri sitting quietly
How do I lead my life with the dope, Mai (common address for mother)
Such a laidback he, earns nothing
Starving me, how do I work for him, Mai
He meditates for hours, forgets others
How do I serve with my empty stomach, Mai
Tearing anchal (a corner of saari) I use for paper
Endless woes, how do I write all, Mai...

While it does not ignore the respect for Shiv, who is adored with a unique way of living in austerity, fulfilling everything with the means of meditation, it reveals a wife's trepidation, who identifies herself with the mythical consort of Shiv that is Gauri. The intermingling of mythological, the sacred and eternal, with the social which is finite and here, characterizes such songs.

**Interpretative Analysis**
In the foregone sections, select songs present a panoramic peek at diverse aspects of the Maithil Worldview. First of all, every song presents a presupposed prerequisite socio-structural background, which is basically foregrounded as though it were the central notion. Secondly there is always a deep undercurrent of meanings, constituting the background in true sense, inviting hermeneutic interpretation. To begin with, the foreground alludes to socio-cultural patterning, the folkways of discharging occasional activities as well as that of every day life. Not absent are the socio-economic aspects, of material interests and necessity for existential survival, and of economy driven bonding/relationships. The socio-political questions too are humbly present as politics of gender, of caste, class and social stratification and hierarchy define social relations across social groups. With an eye for contemporaniety, we can also perceive changes and continuity, influences of socio-historical developments, interventions of culture industry pertaining to cinema and cassette industry. All of this however does not obscure a possible continuity in motifs and meanings that belong to tradition. Thus the second aspect, appearing in the foreground itself, takes us to reflect upon something that is a matter of core, the background assumptions as it were. In the interplay of background and foreground, meanings evolve without blurring the distinction between the two.
The songs presented in this chapter are owed to women, children and also a few men from across caste groups. The differences in the kinds of songs, thereof motif and meaning, are present not only along caste lines, but also along age groups. Only if 'narcissism of differences'\textsuperscript{124} is the central interest of an analysis an interpretative attempt will get lost in the prismatic reflection of diversity. The difference, and of course distinction, of the set of idioms and metaphors, of the degree of linguistic-cultural sophistication in the presentation of a motif, in the songs of men and women in lower caste groups such as dhanuk, chamar, dusadh, do not rule out the universality of the meaning. Especially when it comes to the worldview, distinctions vis-à-vis diversity and universality of meaning coexist. And the latter appears as core of the worldview surrounded by the differences of stylizations and implementation. Similarly, the persuasive bent to changes in the songs of younger folk, mainly female children, does not separate them entirely from their adult counterparts. A quixotic rule of paradox reins the regime of songs and singing- that we are different but we mean the same. Hence a constant interplay of background and foreground, of socio-structural and belief and practices, does not obscure the universality of meaning. Put together, as worldview, this can be suggestively called \textit{folk philosophy} to which we return later after understanding the details of the worldview. It broadly consists of folk attitude toward life and death, amid the flurry of symbols and euphony of songs, expressing through practices, as to how activities pertaining to life and death interject. Also, constituting the core of the worldview, is the image of the humans always aiming at transcendence without jettisoning their everyday concerns and questions.

\textbf{Orbiting in the Worldview}

The elements of meaning orbiting around, however too manifest to be called peripheral, disclose the varying degree of freedom from ritualistic practices for diverse social groups. The folkways, which Brahman women discharge in the rite of

\textsuperscript{124} By ‘Narcissism of Differences’ I mean the excessive and hyperbolic celebration of distinction of groups. For political interests, there may be a tendency toward this excess in order to distinguish oneself from the other. This is a reality a various levels- the village would be presented as the best of all, each group thereof would present itself as the best of all in comparison with others in the same social set up, the region of Maithili speaking folk would be mounted as the best of all other linguistic parts of Bihar, and so on so forth. Everybody tends to give in when it comes to establishing superiority. However, this tendency is relegated to backburner when it comes to folkways, practices, and most importantly singing. The underpinning nuances of the songs, in particular, overcome the distinctions of the style of presentation, usage of idioms, variety of songs, literary and metaphorical visions, allusions to aspects of the specific groups, etc. Along the lines of motives, it seems, the culture constitutes a unanimity and unequivocality.
the passage, are largely in an unequivocal collaboration with the Brahmanic-Sanskritik tradition represented by the pundits. Not totally absent however is the ritualism in the lower caste or non-Brahman caste groups. The Dusadh have a whole gamut of religious performance in which they have priest form their own caste performing rituals almost similar to their upper caste folks. Notwithstanding the latter is more non-Brahmanic in ritualistic orientation than the former, and thereby lower caste women more at liberty in celebrating here and now rather than worrying about the proper discharge of the rituals. Thus in the orbit circulates 'ritualised as well as semi-ritualised celebration of the movement in rite of the passage'. But it would be only half-truth to conclude that a focus on ritual writes off the celebration of here and now for Brahmans as it is evident in their active roles in the performance of rituals. The songs of the upper caste women afford them opportunity to be lewd, subversive, and amorous, celebrating pain and pleasure incurred due to the social existence.

Songs of every group reverberates with the concern for material situations too, though the selection of idioms, metaphors and other expressive devices vary, with emphasis on the intervention of the unseen power (the divine authority). Similarly, weeping is common-place despite the diversity in texts and tenor of the act across groups. An instance of raucous weeping with non-stop uttering of confounded words or a weeping in hush-hush without any textual content, have the same functional significance. They intend to render the emotional intent of the folk explicit. Weeping, or wailing, in the face of separation from near and dear or radical movement in the rite of the passage, blurs the parameters of distinctions of the social groups. This is the act that, partially as well as completely, replaces songs of women and everybody joins in as emotion comes to dominate culture. As a variant of weeping, mourning is a traditionally ritualized practice for Brahmans as they are asked to wait till a certain day, the last and eleventh day of the eleven-day long rituals of the last rite post death. While non-Brahman women are relatively free from preconditioning of rituals when it comes to weeping, Brahman women and children too tend to break away as they weep every now and then in hush-hush manner until the arrival of the eleventh day. Some non-Brahman men, on the incident of death, burst into singing as well. The text in mourning is, more often than not, independent of the styles and genres of songs, as though songs in wailing acquire amorphous character. Applicable across caste groups, weeping/wailing brings about a chance for the resistance to the host of the factors including social acceptance of the end of the physical being, the natural-dictate
resonant in the occurrence of death, and the extra-natural held responsible for a death. The commonly uttered words, lacing the main flow of crying, questions as to why the incident took place, why the deceased met with such a fate, why the god has been so merciless. It seems in the first place a psycho-emotional denial to the reality, which is partially seconded by society as women, children and select men under the influence of the emotional outburst give in to the emotive situation. But then this is not the simplistic conclusion about the phenomenon. Paradoxically, every instance of resistance is also exemplary of understanding the incident and thereby accepting it. For, the same bunch of people, the mourners and others join in the rational conversation to decide the course of action following a death. Socio-cultural acceptance to psycho-emotional resistance to the fact of death enriches culture for a more agency oriented structuring, and thus every individual mourner develops a sense of inevitability of the undesirable occurrence of this kind.

Not to be called mourning, but the weeping on the occasion of farewell to daughter is not less in affect and effect. It happens not only when the daughter is leaving for her in-laws’ place for the first time, but also on all the occasional arrival and departure of the daughter at her natal home. The tenacity of the action, in terms of affect and effect, is greater when the first instance of farewell occurs. Perpetual squeals of crying, rhyming hiccups, and hum of sobs envelop the surrounding so efficiently that men folk too jump in the fray. Free from any ritualistic prescription or priestly intervention, this act is also common found in the orbit of worldview. Presenting yet another instance of resistance to socio-structural principle pertaining to Maithil kinship, that a daughter is supposed to leave natal home, it underscores the interplay between structure and agency/agencies. Songs for this occasion, from the category called samdaun, across caste groups, set the tone of the weeping. Mostly, however, songs submerge in the shadow of sorrow, a typical example of crying/weeping becoming an ultimate resort of the folklore as though where songs stop crying/weeping begins. Men folk, otherwise averse to crying in the entire process under rite of the passage, do not shy away from following the suit set by women.

There are other songs, of devotional orientation from the categories of Nachari, Parati, Barahmasa, Chaita, Chhaumasa etc wherein suffering of social existence (Being) is central motif. Instead of crying/weeping, these songs put forth the similar resistance, understanding and also acceptance, in words.
Furthermore, the differences in the ritual performance of caste groups, does not establish as simple a tale as of caste factionalism, for the song culture offers a peek at both diversity and commonality. Songs, from the category *Brahmanak geet* criticizing a *greedy-treacherous Brahman*\(^\text{125}\) is popular among Brahman and non-Brahman women. But then, celebration of Brahmanhood is also a common feature in the songs of the same category. Secondly, despite the differences exhibit in the orbit of the worldview, there is a ubiquity of celebration of events of life, especially in the life-cycle. The rite of the passage for any individual brings about occasions for entire folk society to celebrate and constantly reaffirm their worldview. No celebration is a simple tale of joy at the juncture of progress in the life cycle of an individual. Joy is often punched with some other notion of sorrow. It is a modest recognition of the pain involved in the process of *Becoming*. Through these phases, marked by rites and rituals, men and women acquire social status and roles. A would-be wife is ridden with anxiety of unforeseen future with her would-be husband, the anxiety and fear recurs when she is expecting, she voices repentance for making love with her husband due to the labor pangs, a mother frets if the groom is not up to the expectations, a father is anxious of finding the right match for his daughter, a mother cries with a sense of separation when her son in groom’s garb sets on for his would-be wife’s place to marry her, a mother-in-law is filled with sorrow when her son-in-law is set to return after marriage, and the whole community expresses sorrow when a daughter is leaving her natal home after marriage, and so on. At every juncture is expressed a sense of separation from the individual who is the main subject in the rite of the passage. So the same women, who sing songs, playfully abusing the visiting in-laws when marriage has taken place, or mischievously promise the barber in a *mundan* to gift him with the maternal aunt of the boy, also reckon with the pangs of an individual’s move toward some unforeseen event. Progress in life cycle is a marker of move toward an imagined end, and, every sense of separation is a fragment of the sense of absolute separation at the event of death. But what has already ended, the physical being of the ancestors, the *pitar*, finds a place of prestige and reverence in the folk worldview. The end to a physical being is thus a starter for the other being.

\(^{125}\) The category of *greedy Maithil Brahman* refers to those who never shy away from gluttony in community feasts and demanding higher returns from the clients in offering priestly services. These are the Brahmans who emerged as power-seekers and property-makers in medieval times. Also they took advantage of hypergamy, and were criticized by some noted poets and thinkers of Mithila. See chapter three that presents a historical account on the category of *Maithil* Brahmans.
who have been given a status of immortal belonging to the *pitarlok* (abode of ancestors) almost beside *devlok* (abode of gods). On any occasion of the rite of the passage *pitar* is invoked alongside gods, for blessing the protagonist who is progressing in life cycle through the rite and rituals. It thereby forges connection between the dead and the living, the ‘immortalised mortal’ and the ‘immortalising mortal’. A clear line of thought that rules this connection is that every living being, moving in the life cycle, has to die and become imperishable *pitar*: it is an ambitious target that the folk recall at various junctures during rite of the passage. Everybody aspires to move in the life cycle toward *pitarhood*, by dying a ‘happy death’.

However at face value, invoking *pitar* is for their blessing for smooth operation on the occasion and blessing for the main protagonist, the deeper meaning is that it helps recall the connection between life and death, joyous progress in life cycle and end of physical being.

**Social system of Invocation**

Apart from socializing protagonists, as well as others attached to him/her, for the new status and roles, songs in the background of the rite and rituals also pave a way for the eventual immortalisation of the mortal. It happens every now and then, in the rite of the passage, that a human is identified with a mythological icon, a god, a sacred character that belongs to religious imagination of the folk. In songs a father of a daughter is called Janak, that of a son is Dasrath and conversely the daughter is Sita and the son is Ram. This goes on calling a mother Kousalya, Maina, and Yasoda. Invoking these mythological characters, through songs, the folk aim at instilling a value of Being in not only the protagonists of the rite of the passage, his close relatives other than parents, but also all the participants present on the occasion. The unstated dictum is that none of the mortals is non-immortal, that no human is devoid of scared capability, that none of the humans is mere biological accident in the large chain of existence. On the other hand, this trend in the songs, of invoking immortal characters from the Hindu mythology to immortalise social humans, also bears another implication. It is that these songs also mortalise the immortal characters of...

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126 The folk tendency to immortalize the mortal is a crucial feature of songs, which appears in analysis in the next section of this chapter. The whole of the rite of the passage is a gradual process of immortalizing the mortal and mortalising the immortal.

127 Only those who have gone though the upheavals of life- the pleasure and pain in union and separation- will graduate stage by stage, to die happily. More on the notion of happy death appears in the next chapter under the discussion on *Art of Dying in Mithila*. 

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mythology. Thus, Shiv is no longer an abstract character from Shiv Purana, Ram is not a mere imagination enshrined in the Ramayan, Sita is not just a creation of the Hindu devout. Women, through their songs, intend to find all these characters in the living social human beings, and thereby these characters find breath and flesh, life and death as though they were indeed mortal characters. Thus, a father who is called after Janak is said to show the anxiety for not finding right match for his daughter who is identified with Sita. The latter exhibits fear as well as fascination for sexual intimacy marking a state of ambivalence. The social face of Sita, who is a living being, also walks into kobar ghar to spend the first night of sexual intimacy with her husband who has been already equated with Ram for his resplendence and with Shiv for his wild-virile powers. Moreover, Sita would also persist with her ambivalence when she is in labor and expecting her baby. The personalization of the impersonal characters form mythology continues in the festival of Madhu Shrawani, a peculiar of Maithil festivity. The eleven day long festival, perpetually, instills identification with Gauri and Shiv in the newly wedded bride and groom. Thereby inculcated in them is a sacred power which mythological characters are supposed to wield. The power invested notwithstanding the vulnerability and fallibility of humans is not cast to abeyance. These invincible characters, however in social avatar, are acknowledged for their failure as well, without any contempt intended.

Soteriological Seeking

Despite the systematic invocation of the sacred characters from religio-mythological texts and identification of the same with humans, with twin implications of ‘immortalising the mortals’ and ‘mortalising the immortals’ there is a sense of incompleteness expressed in the songs. It applies across caste groups, irrespective of the varying degree of freedom from Brahmanic rituals. Freedom from ritual or no freedom, folksongs echo the aspiration of transcendence for all. No matter how much freedom for the celebration of here and now, everybody bemoans pain of social existence, seeking for the divine intervention for redemption of both kinds, this worldly as well as other-worldly. The pretext for the yearnings for emancipation lies in the range of seasonal songs which underscore a meaningful paradox: on one hand they disclose the occasion of the celebration of seasonal here and now and on the other they disclose the sorrow of separation and distance from the near and dear, more felt on such occasions. In the fold of seasonal cycle the categories of songs such as
Chaumasa, Chhaumasa, Barahmasa and Chaita reveal that everything is not fine, especially when the seasonal circumstances offers an occasion to be fine with. For diverse socio-economic reasons men are away from home and therefore no occasion is really joyous. But when they sing such songs they are not all without their men around. Even then they sing the songs of melancholia as though it were only truthful acknowledgement of what is real of human experience, sorrow. Even an occasion of Holi is not untouched by songs of this note in addition to songs celebrating the motif of freedom and playfulness.

The truth of finitude vis-à-vis attachment and affection in social relationships, already disclosed in songs from the category Samdaun and Udasi, is recurrent in the passage of life. An affectionate daughter goes off to live with a new found love interest after marriage, a very dear son emotionally parts from mother to marry, and the entirety of the rite of the passage ensuring progress in life cycle also paves way for an imagined end: some of the accepted truth for the social humans living within the social structure. Meanwhile the constant invocation of the sacred, as though sacred were social, ignites the aspiration for transcendence of the heteronomy of the material world. This does not, albeit, amount to renunciation of the world, as ascetics would have opted for. On the contrary it takes place within the situation of here and now without jettisoning the material world, and meanwhile yearning for a liberation from all. There is another level of paradox expressed in these songs. On one hand humans are immortalized and the divinity is invoked in them, but on the other hand the songs also establish inevitability of pitfalls in the life of social humans. It is confessional in non-catholic sense. They know they can not be perfectly upright as they are humans; they reckon with the indulgence in sensuous pleasure at the cost of virtuosity. By articulating it candidly in their songs they minimize any sense of guilt whatsoever. This is the emotional-intellectual truthfulness of the folk imbued in their songs. The ease behind this recognition also emerges from the fact that they celebrate their gods befalling in their stories of indulgence. Hence they seek for divine intervention.

Soteriological seekings, for the emancipation and salvation as expressed in the songs mainly from the category of Parati, unfolds at broadly two levels. One is apparently guided by utilitarian motif, consisting of redemption in this world. Worshipping sun, moon, snakes, Shiv, Pitar, goddess Chhathi, various forms of the great mother goddess Gosauni, etc. articulate this motif. It is on the festive occasions in accordance with the calendar (Panchang) as well as in everyday life set up. A satyanarain
bhagwan vrata katha is occasional event in the everyday life setting, but the most numerous and unorganized occasions are ubiquitous for the same purpose. Many songs, known as Gosaunik geet, invoke Gosauni (the mother goddess) describing goddesses’ fiercely malevolent and endearingly benevolent attributes, for an intervention to bring about a difference in the situation of the destitution. These songs assume dialogic form, as though the singer converses with the divine and lodging complaint sullenly against the indifference of the divine. The intimacy between the devotee and the goddess is not obscured by the awe and fear the latter causes. The goddess Chaathi, who is worshipped utmost precaution to avoid any folly of impurity, is known for her curses as well as favors. The songs relate the relationship of the devotee with the goddess inspired by her benevolence while the malevolent attribute is a reassurance of goddess’s power. The higher level of intimacy with the divine enables the devotees/singers to even blame the former for all kinds of social woes and existential crises. Shiv is always commended for his kindness and generosity while songs chided the same for his failure to open eyes for the devotee. The humble form of protest imbued in these songs echoes the strength of the devotees in the power relation with the divine rather than mere matter of servility. This is however not devoid of the faith in the divinity against which a devotee takes on to protest.

But the seeking for redemption in this world does not end up with a simpler utilitarian motif as it appears to be part of a larger frame of soteriological seekings. This is where the second level at which this-worldly uplift is pronounced to be for a better passage to and place in the other-world figure. The latter is of course already denoted as pitarlok (the abode of ancestors). The songs expressing this motif, are charged with philosophical overtones, revealing mainly two dimensions of human existence. One is the eternal suffering of the social humans and the other is an absolute refuge in the imagined other-world. Songs form Parati and nirgun songs of Mrityu, help imagine the other-world with the usages of idioms and metaphors of this-world, as a new home for a newly wed bride away from her natal home. It also depicts the resignation to the suffering of existence, which a singer confides in the power-within while confiding in divine power-without. For the power-without, the divinity, has been already declared within humans on so many occasions in the rite of

128 The parallel between songs for the farewell to a daughter, Samdaun, and Nirgun songs in the category of the not very popular Mrityu geet and the most common found Parati, is an attraction in the maze of Maithili songs, about which I have discussed in the previous section of this chapter.
the passage through innumerable songs. It is as though every human contains a considerable amount of divinity inside, thus the more one talks to the gods, the better one converses with one’s own self. A process of telling the self that suffering of existential being on earth is as much a forgone conclusion as is joy, paves way for submission to Nothing, which is both at once, an abstract divinity as well as a socio-cultural construct of the divine. Hence Nothing, a superlative form of Being, is out there, nowhere, and in-here with everybody located in the folk matrix. Parati songs resonate this for elderly men and women every morning.

In a nutshell, the folk society, through folksongs, intends to believe that death begins with birth of an individual making its presence felt at various junctures in the life cycle, associating itself with every moment of joy in the progress, and manifesting itself every now and then in the form of separation from dear ones, eventuating into a finale when physical being ceases to exist. Persons, the institutionalized individuals, experiencing it are in close proximity with the divine power, which is imagined inside as well as outside, as pire to transcend the realm fraught with woes of social existence. But then the folk also implement techniques of expression, such as crying/weeping/mourning, in the process of transcendence, for the latter is not a denial of this-world altogether. Women, mainstay of songs in the folk society of Mithila, play a significant role as they dovetail reason and emotion, in the social matrix, helping even men to come to terms with the reality of life and death. Thus folk philosophy, emerging from the songs and practices along with them, underscores a worldview that offer a totality of life, with admittance of ups and downs, resonance of both joy and sorrow, union and separation, living and dying in the same breath. It is not intellectually overzealous to draw a conclusive remark stating that folk philosophy inculcates a sense of art of dying in everybody present in the socio-emotional matrix of folk society. The totality of design of life is an allusion to the idea that every bit of life, within social framework, is lived to attain a happy death, for only can this complete the circle by finding a place for the living in the pitarlok. It is thus imperative to reflect a little more on the art of dying that emerges from Maithil folk philosophy.