Chapter Five

Art of Dying\textsuperscript{129} in the Maithil Folk Philosophy

\textit{VIVAH JANM MARNASYA, YADA YATRA BHAWISHYATI}

Baidyanath Mishra\textsuperscript{130}

"The strangest thing in the world is that each man, seeing others die around him, is still convinced that he himself is immortal", says Yudhisthira in the \textit{Mahabharata}.

Kakar (1978: 35)

Yama is a deity who inspires dread. In India, talking about him or simply pronouncing his name is avoided even toady. Paradoxically, the phenomenon of death does not cause similar fear in the souls of Indians.

G G Filippi (2005)

Death is the constant companion of the living.

B N Saraswati (2005)

The notion of death and dying is mainly the concern of cosmogony. The latter is more often than not detected in the classical scriptures, mythological accounts, and rituals performed in the rite of the passage. Put together, these aspects and sources of data, find expression in the folklore of Mithila. In main, the Maithili folksongs present a hint of cosmogony of unique kind. The songs are not preoccupied with the key cosmological questions of the origin and evolution of universe. Here the moot point, instead, is the notion of life and death as present in events of life, special occasion of rites of the passage or the ordinary every day life. In short, the songs discuss the cosmogony in terms of the imagination of death in association with life and the way of dying as to how a happy death is achieved. This however ought not to be mistaken for a merely thanatological preoccupation in the songs. For, these songs engage (and prod the folk to engage) with the idea of death at mainly two levels: social imagination of death at various junctures of life and the philosophical implications of this engagement. Neither the objective-scientific attitude of thanatology nor the mythological focus of cosmogony characterizes the ideas of life and death that the Maithili songs present. Hence, the term \textit{art of dying}, entailing cosmological and thanatological interests in philosophical framework, is more apt to explain the phenomenon that presents death in close relation with the events of life in these songs. This chapter discusses this specific revelation in the folksongs of Mithila, which is

\textsuperscript{129} I am borrowing the phrase \textit{art of dying} from Geetha Hariharan (1993), whose collection of stories, titled the same, presents diverse motives pertaining to death and its relation with life.

\textsuperscript{130} Pundit Baidya nath Misar (Mishra) lives in village Deodha, neighboring Fulhara, and is related to Fulhara village through kinship (affinal) ties with the family of Puna Misar, is renowned as a learned priest. The Sanskrit couplet he recites to explain the relationship of some of the major events of life, birth, marriage and death and their interrelated allocation on the time line. Time is what connects all these three crucial features in the Maithil folk worldview, almost in correspondence with the classical-sankritic view of the same.
arguably a cardinal aspect of the Maithil worldview, explained and sustained by the folk philosophy. Here death is not an event in isolation. It is not imagined in merely metaphysical terms. In simpler words, death is imagined through the idioms of life, and is sought for through indulgence in this world. The more one engages with this world, the better chances to achieve a happy death. The notion of happy death, conversely, is for the end of physical existence which appears after going through all the phases of life and experiencing all kinds of emotions pertaining to human existence. Here death entails both, indulgence and transcendence. Thereby the act of dying assumes the form of an art of dying, so to say. This chapter aims at capturing the complexity of this phenomenon and points out the necessity to understand the conceptual categories of dharma, karma and moksha in the light of the folk experiences expressed in their songs.

Ubiquity of Metaphors of Death

The orientation to death is a central, unstated, motif in the folk socio-cultural arrangement. Songs associated with rite of the passage put together with that of everyday life yield the notion of separation, ending of one stage and progress to the other, sorrow and joy both unfolding in the process, celebration of here and now and yearning to redeem the situation in social existence and aspiration to transcend the constraining and conditioning social. If put in blunt teleological fashion, every act in life, marked by the rite of the passage and thereof rituals or otherwise, reveals the ability and desire to die a happy death. It is evident in the rites, of birth, of Mundan, of Janeyu, of marriage that notion of the end of the physical existence finds mention. The end is thus merely an event that has been already imagined and invoked on occasions aplenty. One Pundit Biadya Nath Mishra, related to the village Fulhara through affinal ties and inhabitant of the neighboring village Deodha, points out an aspect in the rite of the passage in this regard. On the occasion of a daughter’s marriage and the sacred-thread giving ceremony (Janeyu) for sons, there is a ritual to observe a symbolic death. The ritual is termed Aabdhik Shradhdh. Shradhdh is the ritual performance that happens post death, in elaborate fashion, as the last rite (famously called Antim Samskar) in order to obtain a release for the departed soul.

I am borrowing the phrase a happy death from Albert Camus (1975) novel titled the same, in which the protagonist is verily lost in the confusing terrain of desires and seemingly interested in an end of the whole passage in pursuit of desire. By doing everything that humans desire is suggestive of discharging all urges, longings, and restlessness, in order to arrive at an existential resolve.
from the worldly connections and sending them to the pitrlok (the sacred abode of the ancestor’s souls). As to whose shradhdh is observed, the pundit does not offer any clear answer except a probability that it is the death of a stage in the life of the subject to the rite rather than that of a human body. The ubiquity of death and thereof metaphors, is evidently true despite the paradoxical dread of death: nobody talks of it, but everybody feels it and knows that it is there in an unknown corner. The acceptance is not devoid of fear, and the fear is not determinant in the imagination of death. Seldom is a sense of fear explicit on all those occasion marking the progress from one stage to the other in the life span. The folk philosophy is thus in agreement with the tenet of the Garud Purana, a classical text the pundits read for the aggrieved family that has lost somebody to death, which reads, “every actuation or realization signs an inexorable step towards bodily death, the end of human life...death awaits man from the very moment of conception” (Filippi 2005: 36). The marking of each event, no matter how jovial and fanciful at the manifest level, by a ‘notion of ending-beginning’ constitutes the folk philosophy underlying the folk worldview. The centrality of death, neither overtly pronounced nor antithetical to the process of life, is not an unusual idea. An elite version of the same centrality appears in Maithil poet Vidyapati’s Kirtilata which underscores the significance of kirti (good deeds that earn repute in this world, a literary notion for the category of the Hindu worldview known as Dharma) in paving way for a happy death (Jha 2005). Similarly, trends of retiring to the city of Banaras (the mythological city Kasi where dying ensures Moksha according to the Hindu belief system) is an allusion to the centrality of death (Saraswati 1975). But then death is only an end product of the whole process that consists of the stages of life, according to which the folk select songs and voice their imagination of life and death both. In other words the span of life, replete with actions and rendition of songs, express joyous experiences of here and now and movement in the life cycle, which tend to be substantial fragments in the totality of worldview. The expression of joy is never dissociated from the recognition of the end and thereof separation and sorrow which appear in the physical form only when body ceases to exist. The sum total of this experience, as voiced in songs across categories, constitute the folk art of dying. What constitutes the category of art of dying is socio-cultural recognition and actions to live life with emotional
truthfulness\textsuperscript{132}. To be precise, it is about living a life, undergoing the processual demands, with truthful responses to social emotion of the individual social actors' or the group/s.

The whole of process of life, vis-à-vis events in rite of the passage, calendar of festivities, seasonal changes, and everyday living, can be characterized by the motif of sorrow of separation, among various other motives. The sorrow of separation reigns higher and intervenes even during the moments of joy and pleasure. Songs presented in the previous chapter offer testimonials toward it. A few slices from these songs may help in the comprehension of the arguments\textsuperscript{133}.

In the songs from the category Sohar, women reminisce the separation of Sita from Ram as the former thinks of the new born son, as they would say,

SITA BAN MEI KHADI PACHHTAY...

In a song women criticizing the social preference for son and neglect for daughter also voice the potential separation for daughter as they would sing,

BHAIYA KE DEliYEN AMMA RANG MAHALIYA
HUMRO DEliYEN DUAAER...

Similar is the sense when a mother sings, in the company of other women, a song bidding farewell to a son who is going to marry, suggesting the separation,

JAAHE DIN AAHO BABU TORE JANA BHEL...

It finds poignant expression when a daughter is bade farewell, as women would sing,

BAD RE JA TAN SE HUM SIYA DHIYA POSLAHU
SEHO DHIYA RAM NENE JAAY...

Similarly, the sorrow of separation from Ram is sung, when the groom is about to depart from the house of the in-laws,

SEHO RAM JAI CHHAITH APAN GHARBE HO LAL...

The pangs of sorrow find more profound forms in the songs of everyday life, as every song of parati would convey the restlessness in the finitude of social existence and yearning for a merger with the higher truth, be it death or the divine. A song from

\textsuperscript{132} A more systematized reflection on the category of art of dying and emotional truthfulness appears toward the end of the conclusion. It is however not devoid of the notions of Dharma, Karma and Moksha. But these notions are not present in the folk philosophy as they are in the classical-sanskritic texts which are prerogative of the learned Brahmans.

\textsuperscript{133} The songs sited in this chapter appear with translation in the previous chapter and the full songs are in the appendices. I am using only important lines of these songs in this chapter to highlight the motives of different kinds.
Nirgun category would state the evaluation of one’s own existence in the face of ending,
KARAM KE BAAT NIHAAR HE UDHO...
Or
KON GATI HOYAT MOR PRABHU...
Another song would count the waning associations with the material possessions and physical existence,
KICHHU NAI RAHAL MORA HAATH HE UDHO...
In the similar vein, men and women would sing,
KAKHAN HARAB DOOKH MOR HO BHOLE DAANI...

The sorrow of separation creeps into even the songs for festive occasions like Holi and songs for seasons, where the feminine longing would be the means for the expression of the same of both male and female singers. As the folk sing,
SAKHI RE BJSRAL MOHE MURARI...
Or
HORI KAY SANG KHELAB MADHAB HUMRO BIDESHE RE
The prevalence of this motif however does not obscure the indulgence in and engagement with the material pleasure within the limits of social existence. After all, the social existence is the realm in which the process of life unfolds, gradually moving the actors toward the death. Some of these songs would appear in the next section of this chapter after deliberating upon the common notions/categories owed to the Hindu cosmogony. The processual features of art of dying redefine some of the categories which are generic and determinant in defining the Hindu worldview in general. We often tend to take these categories, in consonance with their classical interpretation, as forgone conclusion about the folk society. But then, folk philosophy emerging from the folk worldview as unearthed by stitching folk ideas present in the songs, suggest otherwise. In the process emerges an alternative version of religiosity consisting of a differing notion of Dharma and Karma, the integral categories of Hindu belief system.

Dharma/Karma/Moksha, and Beyond
Dharma, following Madan’s exegesis, “includes cosmological, ethical, social and legal principles that provide the basis for the notion of an ordered universe” (1991:
17). The believer aims at Purushartha (attained perfection of the Being) by the virtue of Dharma-Artha-Kama and Moksha, and Sanyasa (renunciation of social activity) is a way out of this axis for liberation. Building upon the similar understanding of the philosophico-religious categories of the Hindu worldview, emerging from the classical texts, Allen (1982) paints a considerably inferior position of women in the Hindu society. According to this, Dharma is the absolute guiding category for the Hindu men and women are only aids in realizing it. This is because men aim at Moksha- the liberation. Also that, rites of the passage is meant for the men folk only. Hence, Allen, and a large community of scholars who are professed feminists or otherwise, draw conclusion that women are only source of impurity and not of much significance in the religious structure of Hindu society. While there is no denial of the instances of gender discriminations and secondary ritual status accorded to women, such readings compromise on the de facto roles and status of women. The alleged preoccupation with the classical categories, and their taken-for-granted usage, has amounted to such conclusions.

The majority of scholars, explaining the categories of Dharma, Karma, Moksha, have offered however only analytical understanding of the Hindu worldview, with reference to the textual injunctions. It elaborates the intellectualized concepts of the ancient texts which are generally accessible only to elite priesthood. Also that among Brahmans, it is only the select ones who are into the profession of priesthood, that these notions have currency. Even these Brahmans along with non-priest Brahmans and non-Brahmans including the lower caste do not subscribe to these notions exactly in the manner of the classical-sanskritik texts. On the contrary, interpreters have propounded the universality of the usage of these terms. The typicality of this understanding and interpretation is expressed when Kakar (1978) suggests that these intellectualized concepts, of Dharama, Karma and Moksha, percolate down to the literate as well as non-literate masses as 'prescriptive configuration of ideal purposes, values, and beliefs'. Yes, it is based on a hierarchy of values, wherein the textual knowledge of the pundits seems to rule the folk at the lower rungs. It generalizes and

134 Almost similar arguments are made by Hetukar Jha with reference to the Kirtilata of Vidyapati, and we nostalgically think that Maithil worldview is in total conformity with that arising from the great tradition vis-à-vis the classical interpretations. This is typical of any discourse on Hinduism in general that it boils down to these categories for explanation, which is owed to the classical texts of Sanskrit tradition. M N Srinivas and A M Shah present almost similar tendency in the article titled Hinduism in International Encyclopedia of Social Science (1968), and Veena Das makes no difference in her work on structure of cognitive categories in the Hindu worldview (1987).
establishes the universality of the meanings of Dharma, Karma, and Moksha. It does not entertain the possibility of the plurality of means and goals; rather it puts forth a general pursuit of the above-stated values of the texts. Nor does it take into account the folk negotiation with these categories. Only as a passing rider appears some thing very important when Kakar says, “for the vast majority of Hindus, men and women, there are traditionally sanctioned ‘ways’ that also lead toward the ideal state. An individual may choose from among these according to the dictates of his or her temperament and life circumstances” (Ibid.: 29). It may be Bhakti (devoting oneself to the divine), Jnan (by the way of intellectual pursuit), or Karma Yoga (selfless actions) or may be combination of all aimed at the goal of Moksha. This formulation however does not take into account what the folk philosophy offers as the most important undercurrent of Dharma and Karma, namely emotional truthfulness, irrespective of the caste and creed, guiding everybody in the logic of praxis. There is a combination of ‘tragic and romantic’ elements in the Hindu worldview, Kakar suggests. Every social actor undergoes the phases of suffering while experiencing the spates of romances. It inspires the folk imagination for metaphysical destinations such as Mukti-Moksha (liberation from the cycle of birth and death). But then, by the way of correcting Kakar, it is not at the price of the mundane- the physical-worldly, material-sexual and sensuous, and everything that appears transient in the realm of existence. Though in passing, but Kakar admits the possible dissolution of the dichotomies in the worldview, when he notes ‘unitary vision of soma and psyche, individual and community, self and the world, me and not-me’ in the Hindu worldview. This is the socio-psychic structure that manifests in the songs whereby the folk intend to pursue life, oriented toward the goal of the physical end (without stating it to be Moksha), emotionally responding to the events of life in the framework of culture, and expressing unity of beginning and end; life and death. Yes, as evident, it is pursued mainly in the household set up, as Madan (2006) and Kakar (1978) would denote the dominance of household tradition in the Hindu worldview. But the textual and ethnographic reflections of Madan results into a classical notion of Dharma (the

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135 Kakar discusses the significance of Yoga and Samadhi as means for the attainment of the goal that is Moksha. The arcane notions of Moksha, technically efficient Yoga and notions of Dharma and Karma are treated as universal values in the Hindu worldview by Kakar. It does not sincerely explain the possibility of the plurality of means and goals. I am interested in that part of Kakar’s argument which underlines the elements of ‘tragedy and romance’ in the pursuit of life. My argument is that the combine of tragedy and romance brings about a different attitude toward the categories of dharma, karma, and moksha in the folk philosophy.
textually prescribed moral conduct) and *Karma* as the actions vis-à-vis rituals in the
life-cycle (rite-of-the passage) within the fold of *Grahsthya* (household). The
understanding of the ritualistic notion of *karma*, with reference to *Samskar*, makes
Madan argue, “life-cycle rituals constitute *samskara*, that is, the process whereby one
is ‘made complete or perfect’ and ultimately after death, transformed into an
ancestor” (2006: 221). It is like living through everything as a human and becoming
eligible for the ultimate goal. As Kakar puts it, “it is only he who has built a house,
planted a tree, and brought up a son, who is ready for the final effort” (1978: 43). But
then these categorical notions of *Dharma* and *Karma*, reducing the worldview into the
rituals in the rite of the passage, render the social actors into mere passive receivers
and followers for an imagined cosmological goal. While *Dharma* says ‘what one
should do’, *Karma* becomes a reflection of helplessness of humans- one is bound to
do certain things for certain reasons (as the results of the action of past). Without
denying the aforementioned dimensions of the folk worldview, I intend to argue that it
is not a passive acceptance of the classical-textual interpretation of the categories of
*Dharma, Karma* and *Moksha*.

The folk philosophy reconciles with the prescriptive-classical notions only by the way
of refashioning them, by adding the liberty of expressing even those motifs which
may not be congruent with the classical notions. Incongruence is not to be mistaken
for a unilinear resistance or subversion of the classical-Brahmanic by the folk; for we
know that all those who represent the learning of the classical-textual tradition are
happily party to the folk ways as well. If at all the resistance and subversion, it is not
directed against fellow humans, it is rather to bring all to the understanding that the
socio-cultural kinship ideology has limitations. This objective is achieved, through the
rendition of songs, by appealing the emotional elements present in the social structure.
Hence, never do men object to women abusing men in their songs; such as the
following wherein Brahmins are ridiculed,

**BAKLEL BABHNA CHURA DAHI CHATAY ELA HAMAR ANAGANA…**

Or another song in which female kin of the groom are targeted,

**NH-KULKAMJNI SAMDHIN CHHINRO…**

And there are very many such songs in which women would ridicule the male kin in
the entourage accompanying the groom, would be accepted as manifestation of
cultural norm.
Never do men frown upon women breaking into ritual sobbing and crying; as a sister would lodge a complaint saying,
KEHEN KATHOD BHELIYE HO BHIYA
BAHINI BIDAGIRI BISARALIYE HO BHAIYA...
Or another song in which women would narrate the poignant struggle of a father in search for a groom,
SITA KE DEKHI DEKHI JHAKHTI JANAK RISHI...
Never do men find it incompatible to have pitar invoked or have a sense of separation expressed in the songs of women, and songs for this motif have been mentioned in the foregone section. In addition to these songs, there are those instances where crying in free narrative prevail upon all the present in the situation. Be it a departure of the son from the paternal home for the affinal home or the farewell to a married daughter, crying appears to be main folkloric tool. These moments do not bring about any confrontation between men and women. Men are willing party to it instead. In sum, the classical-Brahmanic-Sanskritic appears to be at the mercy of the folk for acceptance, redefinition and reconciliation. Thus it is imperative to look at the folk philosophy underpinning the worldview of the folk present in the folksongs.

For Emotional Truthfulness
The folk philosophy, underpinning their worldview, conceptualizes the categories of Dharma and Karma at the conjunction of existential reality and textual injunctions, drawing a relationship between ontology and epistemology. What they 'sing, say, do and are' appear in one simple principle: do what is spontaneous in a situation. If at a stage of life indulgence seems to be the necessity and natural act, the folk would do it without any moral inhibition. But in the same breath if they have to express skepticism toward indulgence or the limits of the socio-material existence, they would not shy away. In the folk reasoning it is not at all contradictory to express both unstinted devotion and a sort of belligerence toward the divine. They follow emotion as though it were the main reason why they should do or not do certain things. Their norms are in sync with emotion: an act is right if it is in accordance with the prevalent emotion. Say for example, anger in accordance with the situation would be considered for the right action, or if somebody is going away the sorrow of separation would determine the right action. Each song is in tandem with the situational emotion. Abuses by women, in a situation when the barat has settled down at the dalan of the
bride’s father, seem in total agreement with the situation, and hence the whole community relishes them. A criticism of a greedy Brahman is well neigh a product of the situation. Of course, in the backdrop of the situation is a set of values about right and wrong. But these values are also in turn determined by the flowing emotion as the latter are determined by the former. Value of indulgence is according to the emotion stemming form a situation; for example, value of legitimate sexual intimacy is inspired by the emotion of the newly married couple. Similarly, the value of ambivalence toward the sexual union is in sync with the folk emotional confusion whether sexual intimacy is right or wrong. Emotion may be in a flow and hence values are also reshaped. Of course, this does not deny the consistence of certain values, such as that in relation with caste and gender. However, in the volatility of emotion it is but natural that the notions of dharma, karma and moksha would be a little more than what the texts of the pundits suggest. While the art of dying includes this axis of Dharma-Karma-Moksha, and redefines Sanyasa as an act of detachment while living in society and remaining obliged to discharge social responsibility, it is not devoid of the Buddhist and Upanisadik lesson that individual is architect of life-course with its joy and suffering, living and dying. However, it must be added here that the folk art of dying, as it emerges from the compendium of songs, is not merely a system of recapitulation and reaffirmation of the basic tenets of the aforementioned categories of the Hindu worldview. The latter is conventionally perceived as a system of knowledge (belief and practices) centered upon the notions of karma (action with causal efficacy potential to amount into ends in accordance with the means) and dharma (the righteous conduct which is supposed to guide karma). The conventional notion of Dharma is echoed in oral tradition- in katha (the telling of scared tales), bhajan (singing of religious songs), vrata (religious observation of fasts) (Mathur 1991). But in the folk philosophy, and thereof art of dying, it also sets the tone of alternative purity by emphasizing the elements of emotion and acknowledging the significance of textually prohibited actions. The very fact that women can discharge the lokpakshiya kriya (the folkways) parallel to the dharmapakshiya kriya (the textually prescribed ways effected under the instruction delivered by an expert/officiating priest) shows the importance of women’s role as well as their not-so-dharmik actions (at least no dharmik due to the lack of textual support vis-à-vis no Veda, no Smriti backs it up). But then the society accommodates women’s actions, rituals as well as the content of songs, willingly. Furthermore, there are instances in
songs of critical attitude toward not only priests and the patriarch but also the divine is challenged. Songs like,

KAKHAN HARAB DUKH MOR... shakes the authority of lord Shiva by chiding the divine indifference toward the destitute, or another song such as,

HEY BHAWANI DUKH HARU MAA PUTRA APNA JANIKE... questions the great mother as to why the singer (devotee) has been subject to pathos.

These are the crucial evidences of social humans yearning for a better life here (in this world) and better destination there (in the other world). In addition to these motives, of sorrow of separation, motif of criticizing the social as well as the divine, there is also a cultural engagement with the evidently sexual intent. This is a crucial aspect of emotional truthfulness too. Songs when the newly wed couple is being ushered to the special chamber called kobar, express it all,

HUM NAI JEBAI KOBAR GHAR HUMRA DAR LAGAY YE...

Or, in the similar vein, women sing songs from sohar to recapitulate the experience of intimacy with husband. These songs do not only explicate the sexual desire, they also disclose the fear of unseen results of the sexual intimacy. The ambivalent attitude toward the worldly pleasure vis-à-vis sexual intimacy also constitute the Maithil worldview, and is part of emotional truthfulness.

It is this feature that defines the passage of life for the folk in Mithila, which eventuates into the final ending. But the recognition of the limits of the social-material existence and engagements begins to take place much before. For a child also sings a song of this kind, unwittingly, meaning something philosophically profound, like,

OOPAR PAHAD NEECHA KANKAR
HE SHIV SHANKAR, PUJA KONA KARU... which shows the yearning of the singer to reach the level of lord Shiva or request him to descend to the level of humans, so that she could worship the lord.

Similarly all those songs elderly men and women sing every morning from the category of parati, express the yearning for transcendence. A song like,

BABA BAIJNATH HUM AAYAL CHHI BHIKHARIYA... actually seeks the blessing of the lord Shiva, not for any favor in this world's social network, but rather in the world of Shiva where the devotee wants to be an ideal servant of the lord.

In the situation of extremities, crying/wailing/mourning assumes the central place. The act of crying/mourning on the occasion of separation (farewell), venting the
emotional resistance, also bears the testimony to argue against the unequivocal notion of dharma and karma. It is religious cliché to speak of the jiva/atma in relation with paramatma and explain away death, which does figure in the folk philosophy as well, but then it is not devoid of a twist in the form of ritual mourning. The latter is a temporary nullification of the former, only to provide the bereaved a psycho-social preparation for the acceptance of the undesirable event. Secondly, while the classical texts may not mention the significant roles played by women folk, the song culture does highlight the essential emotional moorings women’s rendition of songs provide even men folk to maintain sort of emotional truthfulness\textsuperscript{136}. By the term emotional truthfulness, I mean the parity between action and emotional disposition, beyond the narrow rationalistic judgment that emotion is binary opposite to reason. Emotion is a handy tool in the hands of the folk to rationalize the expression of complaints, constraints as well as possibilities, joy and celebration of desires, association with divine and aspiration to become divine. The role of emotion is experienced in every bit of action, no matter how rationally defined, in the folk context. Men folk, seldom known for crying and sobbing, tend to join however passively, in women’s ritual weeping which replaces songs on all the occasions of emotional vulnerability. A man is made to cry when somebody dies; a man is made to cry when he is starting to go to his bride’s place in the barat; a man is given a folk format to cry when his sister/daughter is leaving natal home with her groom; a man is given a context to think of a guilt for neglecting his sister on occasions; and so on. Not less important to note is that women’s songs also present occasions to celebrate sexuality, in subtle as well as blunt manners. Meanwhile it also enables to understand the significance of the ambivalence toward not only sexuality, also gendered stereotypical roles based on the sexual differences. However there is not absent the glorification of the stereotypical roles, by identifying them with some of the oft-mouthed mythological icons. Arguably though, this identification is not merely to justify the gendered roles as the deeper connotations suggest a metaphysical agenda in the folk philosophy. The

\textsuperscript{136} The term emotional truthfulness has both communicative and non-communicative dimensions. When men give in to the emotionally heightened situation largely steered by women, it basically contains non-communicative dimension. But non-communication vis-à-vis clarity and usage of linguistic codes does not amount to meaninglessness. In the folk worldview, non-communication and no-use of phonic linguistic codes bear same significance as outrightly communicative wherein intelligible codes are used. Silent pauses in between songs, or within songs, have meanings; pauses as precursor to sobbing and finally sobbing have meanings par excellence. It requires a researcher to become their Being to understand the allegedly non-communicative dimension of the folk communication.
metaphysical design in the folk philosophy forges relationship between this world and
the other world, mortal and immortal, temporal and eternal, profane and sacred, and
so on. Women in their songs establish the identification of mortal with the divine so
phenomenally that there appears the twin process of ‘immortalization of the mortal’
and ‘mortalizing the divine/immortal’137. While some may hastily call it folk
trivialization of the divine, or the Sanskritic injunctions on the relation between
humans and their gods, the process holds deeper connotation when looked at in the
larger framework of the worldview. The simpler classical truth, as it appears in Garud
Purana, is “the gods who dwell in all fourteen lokas must also be present in the body
(of human)” (Filippi 2005: 9). The Maithili folksongs presents the very same in such
details that it becomes an alternative worldview, consisting of not only the lessons
from the classical texts of the pundits but also the celebration of mundane by the
divine dwelling in everybody. On every occasion in the life cycle the sense of a being
connected with the Being, a social actor nearly parallels with the sacred-mythological
actor, is melodiously imparted. It is no wonder then, folk actors unwittingly become
indomitable Sisyphus who is ready to smile, slog, suffer, cry and hope in the middle of
inevitable socio-existential absurdity138. For, their relationship with the divine is not
of zero-sum kind as they very often end up fighting and complaining against their
gods in their songs. For, the Faith is not an opposition of Reason and hence there is no
resignation to the divine provenance. However this is not to be misread as ‘death of
gods’ in the folk imagination, or total emancipation from the religious structure of
rites and rituals, belief and superstitions. Demanding or making wishes in front of
various deities and ceremonial fasting and offerings as part of thanks-giving on wish
fulfillment or even otherwise shows the engagement with gods at very instrumental
level as well. Besides, the very same folk also recount the fallibility and vulnerability
of the humans in the life time. Sin is inevitable and fall is indispensable. Thus very
many songs would present a self-reflective folk recognizing that adharm (not in
opposition to dharma though) has been done by them; That, they can not be humans
without committing them; that, this deviation is not actually deviation; that, it is as
much part of Dharma; that, being humans means being fallible and thus sinful.

137 A similar process Louis Dumont (1970) describes in the structural study of a folk deity Aiyannar, a
double of the Hindu god Shiva, in Tamil Nad in the context of performance, whereby the performer is
possessed by the deity. Such a deity has a clear relationship with the Brahmanic god, in spite of the
distinctions of the features. But the effect of the phenomenon is restricted to the expert performer, and
it does not establish a larger relation of the deity with the folk in general.

parati song, mentioned in the previous section, rendered every morning by the elderly folk, offers testimonials to this. But then, this is not simply the Hindu version of the catholic confession. It is an introspective reckoning by the folk in face to face with the immortal they have already invoked within themselves on several occasions. This is the emotional truthfulness that defines the category of Dharma and Karma in the folk worldview and which assures them of a happy death. Moksha (the liberation from the cycle of life and death) is a remote idea. It is rather dying happily by living with emotional truthfulness and seeking a position in the pitrlok. Only learned Brahmans would mouth platitude on the category of the Dharma, Karma, and Moksha. However, they all know that more plausible than these categories is emotional truthfulness. Therefore there songs articulate engagement with death and not Moksha, life in association with the ending and not Karma, pleasure and seeking for sensuous success with a mirroring reminder by emotional truthfulness rather than Dharma. Thus transcendence, for them, is not an absolute antithesis to the engagement with the world.

In the middle of Dharma and Karma the person of Maithil folk context, who is a bundle of relationships, while enjoying the pleasure and suffering the pain in life, begins to yearn for transcendence. Transcendence is thus not a hostile renunciation of the worldly; it is about understanding, accepting and overcoming the fear of it instead. It is in effect in every day life in matter and spirit. Thereby art of dying, anchored with emotional truthfulness, as expressed in the folk philosophy of the Maithil worldview, would relax the categorical notion of Dharma and Karma, rendering everything expedient for humans a natural event. Not committing sin is not Dharma and Karma, it is rather committing it while also confessing that it was a sin, for example. Meanwhile, there is an urge to find liberation from the domain where sinfulness is but inevitable.

Everydayness of Dying

Under the pale of emotional truthfulness, as discussed above, the everydayness of the dying is palpable. It rests in the folk imagination and is articulate in the songs. On the special occasion of rites of the passage it unfolds in ritualistic fashion, while in everyday life set up it manifests without much ado. The manifestation of the motive, the imagination of death and notion of dying, is starker in the articulation of the elderly folk. While the youngsters hint at it in their songs obliquely, the elders do not
mince words. Though the maithili songs are not divided along the age set, there is no such known rule; the singing songs like parati is more common among the elderly. The songs of parati are not exclusive of other songs. The motif of separation, endings, and longing for transcendence, cuts across genres and age sets. Secondly, the spaces in everyday life for the rendition of the songs are not sealed off. When an old man or women sings parati, s/he is likely to be heard by the youngest of the household who would be still in bed as the dawn approaches. Similarly, in the day time, after the siesta any summer afternoon, when an old woman opens up her kitty of threads and needle to do some seams and hems or make a rag-mat, she also tends to open up her veritable box of feelings. She would voice, in a song or even in a biographical reminiscence, the concerns at the fag end of life. What happened in the past and what is at present would appear in close connection. The journey that began in youth knew no fear in growing up and moving ahead on the scale of life. As part of the folk natural attitude, they would articulate it clearly, that the present is the natural consequence of the progress. They all perhaps know it fairly well as to what would happen tomorrow. Some may not speak it, while many reckon with their awaited death with an uncanny ease. Their story would start with the exuberance of those days bygone and end up with the hope of dying as successfully as they have lived everything through. They have rejoiced as well as suffered. They are ready to do the same for the last act, that of dying, too. But then, the sorrow of separation from the social web of relationships and the familiar domain where one did everything can not be rule out. These old men and women do have their moist eyes when they speak of the lurking ending. Yet, a paradox of humanity, they toy with the idea of dying well. Probably, this is why most of the songs on the motif of death are full of the metaphors pertaining to the events of life. The going away of a soul leaving the body behind is paralleled with the departure of the bride from the natal home.

This is in spite of the duress of old age, some diseases and some sense of insecurity or the possible discrimination at the level of household. Yes, there are problems and issues, of even the dependence on the younger members of the family for existential sustenance. But they are not any hindrance in accepting the totality of life. It expresses a deep content and bliss when an old man sitting at the dalan says, dekhlo ai jagat ke khela (I have seen everything), though he has hardly traveled beyond the capital of the state. The travails of life, subsuming all the events of happiness and sorrow, which the elderly folk go through, obtain them a sense of satisfaction. Eketa
aab, ki ant nik bhay jay (the only thing now, that I end up well), is what all of them long for. Reacting to these notions, when a young man or woman would say, 'budhba/budhiya, marbo nai karai chhai (the old, hardly die and speak of only death), the old would offer a humble repartee- toro aihina heto (you too would get here). There is morbidity about dying, which is diluted by tincture of lightness and acceptance of it. Interestingly, the folk also joke about dying as a young man would tell an older one- kahiya marbahak (when will you die). Reacting to which the older says- nai mabo (won't die) or chail jeba ta bujhiyah (you would miss me when I die). So the frowning or kidding young would immediately understand the inevitable outcome of living- indulging in the unfolding events of life. Some of the songs mentioned in the opening section of this chapter would dominate the air in the morning. Similar notion of sorrow, of separation, or even of the ending of one stage and beginning of another, are communicated in songs from other genres. Functionally, this acoustic surrounding prepares the folk for the acceptance of death.

The ease with which the acceptance of death is manifest is also punched with another idea: the merger of private and public. The death of an individual from an individual household is eventually an event in/of public. Though neither cancels the other out, it seems at exterior level that public dominates. But then, individuality of the dying is never forgotten. Everybody surrounding a dying person would call him/her by the name s/he has been known by. Once the death is pronounced, everybody would be informed by mentioning the name of the dead person. It may be individual's name or the social address for the same, such as badka baba/badki kaaki/ fulharawali/pokhramwali etc. All the surrounding kin and friends call the dead by the name, even during and after the mortuary rituals are over. In a rural set up, even a doctor who is brought to examine the dying, does not miss to mention the name. It happens when the dying is a mere patient in a hospital, in the city that a doctor calls him/her a patient. As soon as death happens, and the doctor calls the body dead as if it were without any significance, that the kin of the dead mourn calling his/her name. The social, at odd with the medical, reaffirms the social as well as individual aspects of the dying and the dead. The social for the dead is the network of people around him and the social significance of his/her being. The individual is too intricately related to the social to be extricated. But then, this does not come at the coast of the private of the dying or the dead. During the dying and afterwards, on ample occasions, his/her name and deeds are recapitulated by the mourners. In the fit of crying that engulfs the
close kin irrespective of the textual injunctions and the constant suggestion by the neighbors and other social actors is an act where the name of the dead is pronounced in the most moving fashion. The deeds of the dead are recalled by the crying members amidst the hiccups and tears. In the frame of social even the mourning members of the family experience the expression of their own individuality. Society lets the individuals be as they want to be while operating around them for reincorporation. It is almost in extension of the social provision of singing the songs individually, reminiscing past while grappling with the present and aiming at future, and thus experiencing the strength of the individual in the face of death. Post death, it is not society that incorporates the bereaved individuals. Instead, the latter decides to let the social have its last word.

Conclusion
This chapter draws on the songs presented in the previous chapter, and distills from there the imagination of life and death, as intertwined ideas, which I propose to be understood in the notion of art of dying. For, dying is not an act in isolation and the ideas of it appear in the rites of the passage throughout. Also, the imagination of death and dying utilizes the metaphors from the events of life. Thus dying assumes an art form, which happens to define the whole course of life. Another idea that emerges from the analytical understanding of these songs and the expressions pertaining to death and dying in everyday situations is of emotional truthfulness. The latter is in fact a hinge concept behind the art of dying. It alludes to the folk tendency to indulge in the mundane, discharge everything expedient, fulfill the needs of all kinds, resort to spontaneity, perform ritual as well as non-ritual actions and also engage with the divine and seek for transcendence. It is by the virtue of emotional truthfulness that the folk life becomes a narrative fraught with contradictions and ambivalences, ambiguities and polyphony, and a premise for the dissolution of very many notions which we often perceive in terms of binary oppositions. It is thereby that a rethinking on the classical categories of Dharma, Karma and Moksha are tacitly reformulated in the folk expressions. At the level of practices however, the scriptural injunctions do rule the performance of rituals. But at the same level, there is also an evident inclination toward the notions emerging from the folk expressions. The folk philosophy is thus the philosophy wherein reason and emotion, sacred and profane, transcendental and mundane, the social-mortal and the mythological-immortal, so on,
coalesce to present the totality of life. No wonder, then, in the folk context of Mithila, life is fraught with occasional reminders of death and the latter appears like a much awaited event. This is however not the denial of the problems and conflicts in the social existence, nor is it a denial of the pain and suffering. All the oddities become substantial part and parcel in the Maithil worldview.