Chapter 1

Introduction:
Migration and Folksongs

This thesis is concerned with folksongs of Bhojpuri women who experienced the migration of their men. The Bhojpuri region is a socio-linguistic and socio-cultural entity which spreads across western Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. The history of folksongs and folk memory in the Bhojpuri region takes us back to antiquity. However, colonial and post-colonial anthropologists, demographers, sociologists and folklorists mark 19th century as a watershed in the history of migration and cultural expressions in this region.¹

The vexed caste system coupled with the economic policies of the colonists primarily dispossessed labouring castes in agrarian society (including Bhojpuri region) (see Aloysius 2012: 22–56). The abolition of slavery in England, France and the Netherlands led to a ‘labour crisis’ in offshore imperial plantations. Thus, 19th century Bhojpuri-speaking region witnessed mass migration to Mauritius, Fiji and the Caribbean; the British planters were facing an acute shortage of labour in their plantations overseas. They tried importing workers from continental Europe, West Africa and China, but that did not work. When all other efforts failed, attention was turned towards India, as the Mauritius experiment of bringing ‘hill coolies’ (Dhangars of Chotanagpur) to work in plantations there was hugely successful (Mukerji 1936; Mookherji 1962; Sinh 1980; Arora 1991; Jayaram 2004; Lal 2006).

Initially, they recruited labourers available at Calcutta (now Kolkata) and Madras (now Chennai) ports; when supply fell short, they hired tribal people (Tinker 1977). After the 1840s, these tribal labourers found work in Assam tea gardens, after which the recruitment shifted to Bihar. Arrah, Ranchi, Gaya, Chhapra and Patna became the main recruiting districts which further extended to eastern districts of present day Uttar Pradesh – Gazipur, Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Allahabad and Lucknow (Arora 1991).

¹ Arjan de Haan (2002) argues that many scholars subscribe to a notion of immobile rural population, which is debatable because out-migration in Bihar existed before the colonial rule. He asserts that migration is not a ‘transitory’ phenomenon, but a central element of Bhojpuri-speaking districts. Udai Narain Tiwari (2011) confirms that men from Bhojpur and Buxer districts used to migrate to become part of the Mughal Army in the 17th and 18th centuries.
The regions mentioned above are mostly from western Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh which is a socio-linguistic region, the Bhojpuri-speaking region. George Grierson in his *Report on Colonial Emigration from Bengal Presidency 1883* wrote that that Bhojpuri-dialect region was a major ‘sending region’ (Look Lai 2007). It is a well-established fact that most of the labourers were recruited from North India, that too from this region. In other regions, such as in western India, indentured embarkation was less frequent, as workers found work in the newly established textile mills and road construction (Lal 2006). Between 1834 and 1910, over a half million indentured migrants entered Mauritius; between 1860 and 1911, 152,189 entered Natal; between 1879 and 1916, 60,965 entered Fiji (Rajan and Kumar 2010). According to the *Report of the United Provinces Banking Enquiry Committee* of 1929–30, there was rarely any family in Banaras Division where at least one member had not migrated to the eastern plains (Deva 1989). More than one million people migrated over a century to plantation colonies (Jayaram 2004; Lal 2006).

The Bhojpuri-speaking region was facing acute poverty and penury due to several socio-economic reasons. A historical analysis of the conditions prevailing in British India explains the connection between ‘British expansionism’, ‘consolidation of upper castes’ and ‘international commoditization’ of Indian labour. Several reasons combined to aggravate poverty of this region like landlordism, disproportionate revenue demands, commercialization of agriculture, and change from rent in kind to rent in cash, decline in indigenous handicrafts, and unfair taxation on Indian goods, continual famines and epidemic (Rajan and Kumar 2010).

The indenture labour migration was predominantly a male phenomenon and acute shortage of women in the migration destination had adverse social consequences (Jayaram 2004). Most of the men migrated single, leaving their wives and womenfolk back in the village. This point is proved by a planter’s plea in his letter to a recruiting firm: ‘one female to nine or ten males for cooking and washing is enough’ (quoted in Tinker 1993: 63). According to the figures of emigration to Mauritius, in 1834, 75 males were sent and there was no woman. Next year, only 72 females were for 1,182 males; in 1838, for 11,567 males only 241 women were sent (ibid.: 70). Between August 1834 and May 1837, only 200 women were sent from Calcutta to Mauritius out of a total of 7,000 (Lal 2006). Wives were avoided; instead widows, ‘unfaithful’ deserted wives, prostitutes, dancers, kidnapped women, women on pilgrimage, etc. were used to fill the female quota.
(Carter 1996). This imbalance in sex ratio of migrating people created problems in both the destination place and in the left-behind society (Jayaram 2004).

Similarly, in the last decades of the 19th century, when mining industries emerged in India, migrant landless lower-caste workers from the Bhojpuri linguistic belt became the overwhelming majority in the labour force (see Report of the Indian Factory Commission 1890). Male out-migration is not transitory, but central phenomenon to Bhojpuri lives. Even today, the Bhojpuri men constitute a large chunk of cheap informal labour in cities across India; presently, they not only go to metros like Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata, but also to other cities like Ludhiana, Jallandhar, Panipat, Karnal, Surat and Ahemdbabad (Roy 2011).

Migration and Cultural Ramifications

Consistent male migration had several socio-cultural ramifications in the Bhojpuri society. Folksongs and music were a cultural medium to articulate these consequences. Bhojpuri folksongs are the vastest cultural repertoire in which migration of men folk has been articulated and protested and this is axial to the instant research. Jatsaari, ropani, sohani, jhumar and kajri are women’s folksong traditions performed and sung by women (see Chapter 4), whereas purbi, chaita, nirgun, gond, kaharwa are men’s folksong genres (see Chapter 5). Some of the song genres are work songs like jatsaari, the grind-mill songs. Some are seasonal songs like chaita, which deal with separation and union of lovers; jhumar genre has songs of joy of meeting, whereas purbi and jatsaari are virah (pangs of separation) songs. The songs with migration motif are numerous in the Bhojpuri region.

Migration produced the ‘migrant’ and the migrant’s ‘left-behind’ wife and family. Folksongs epitomised them as creative subjects. These songs have many metaphors for migrants. The most popular one is bidesia, which is said to have become prominent during the colonial era and since then. Though there are studies conceptualising bidesia as

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2 Genre is a system of classification derived from French and Latin. It means ‘kind’, ‘a class’ or ‘sort’ (Harris 1995). I have used folksongs genres and folksongs traditions interchangeably.

3 Motif is a recurring theme, idea or subject in a folklore and other artistic works (See Dundes 1966, 1997).
**bidesia** culture, it is not any conventional genre of folksong, but a metaphor and a theme.\(^4\) However, since it is one of the dominant expressions and terms of address in Bhojpuri folksongs of migration, such songs are commonly termed as **bidesia** songs. Another reason for these songs becoming popular as **bidesia** songs is that they were adopted by the famous Bhojpuri folk-artist Bhikhari Thakur to develop the **bidesia** theatre form in the 20\(^{th}\) century. Bhikhari Thakur used many Bhojpuri folksong genres and their lyrics to develop musical dialogues of **bidesia** plays which articulated the everyday reality of Bhojpuri male migrant and his left-behind wife.

As stated earlier, there was migration from the Bhojpur region even before the indentured labour migration and hence, already there were metaphors in the folksongs related to this theme. The presence of fixed tunes in Bhojpuri folkson genre make them more flexible in their content, rendering the songs to respond to contextual changes (Deva 1989). So, qualitative changes in contents, metaphors and terms of address took place with changing contexts. It was **banijiya** (merchant) for men who migrated for trade, **paltaniya** (army man) for men who migrated for joining the army, and **bidesia** (a person who has gone to **bides**, that is, foreign land) for men who went overseas under indentured labour migration (Prabhakar 2009). There are two other terms, **pardesia** and **batohia**, which are also metaphors for migrants. **Pardesia** connotes a migrant whose chances of returning home are more than that of a **bidesia**. **Batohia** is a metaphor used for those who travel to establish communication ties between migrants in destination place and their family in the left-behind village (Majumder 2010).

That migration from the Bhojpur region was predominantly a male phenomenon is reflected in the form and content of folksongs. Generally, songs are in woman’s voice protesting and/or lamenting migration of her man. Women-specific and even men-specific performance genres have woman as the protagonist who expresses agony and pain caused due to separation. These Bhojpuri song genres are thus an important cultural source to understand the expressions of the left-behind women, in particular, and the left-behind society, in general.

\(^4\) Scholars like Tiwari (2003) and Chandrashekhar (2011) have conceptualised Bhojpuri migrants’ culture as ‘**bidesia** culture’. Also, the songs with migration as a prominent theme have been popularised as **bidesia** songs by commercial/popular singers.
Overview of the Problem

This research is about women’s articulation(s) of men’s migration in Bhojpuri folksongs. I would engage with these articulations by exploring ‘women’s voices’ in Bhojpuri folksongs. I am primarily interested in folksongs as reservoirs of unlettered women’s expressions and, secondarily, in migration as the motif/theme in these songs, which have been majorly articulated in women’s voices. These songs are sung collectively, but more often in singular voice. They cannot, however, be read as stories of individual pains; they are reflections of women’s collective suffering, in particular, and a social phenomenon of Bhojpuri migration, in general. However, it is important to caution ourselves from reifying folksongs. They must not be confused with the reality they represent; they are at best a social index, revealing the pulse of the society in a particular context.

The women’s voice in Bhojpuri folksongs with migration motif is primarily the represented voice of the gendered and ‘encasted’ ‘left-behind wife’. My emphasis on migrant’s wives emerges from the fact that, generally, married males of working ages migrated (Deva 1989), and hence the repertoire of folksongs is dominated by songs in which the protagonist is a young bride or a married woman who is lamenting/protesting her husband’s absence.

The Bhojpuri folksongs are worthy of sociological attention not only due to their articulations and expressions of women’s perspectives, but also due to the fact that they profile the culture of migration in the region. The Bhojpuri-speaking society is largely a rural and peasant society and its women are mostly the ones who have preserved and reworked on its oral literature. Also, as has been stated earlier, there is a remarkable influence of emigration on the Bhojpuri folk literature, especially folksongs, which are a living folk literature. These folksongs are very important source of data for a student of sociology, as songs vastly spread in this region are rich in meaning and metaphors.

By documenting and analysing cultural data on Bhojpuri migration, that is, folksongs, I have sought to explore the voices of Bhojpuri peasant women. I hope to capture expressions of sorrow, pain, struggles, desires, and aspirations of left-behind women. However, Bhojpuri women are not a homogeneous category; they vary in terms of caste, age and labour. Hence, their folksongs are also differentiated by caste and gender. These differences have been explored and documented.
Objectives and Research Questions

Broadly, my research has the following four objectives:

i. to explore how folksongs reflect women’s perspective about their life in the context of male out-migration;

ii. to observe the difference in the attitudes, concerns, contexts and metaphors in women’s and men’s folksongs traditions;

iii. to analyse folksongs as an epistemic resource which captures the complexities of caste and gender; and

iv. to document, examine and explain the continuities and changes in the folksongs with migration motif.

These objectives are the basis for the following research questions:

a) How have the migration of men and the situations of ‘left-behind women’ been articulated through folksongs?

b) How folksongs have expressed the conjugal concerns and separations caused due to male out-migration?

c) What are the joys and pains, desires and frustrations (and other feelings) of the left-behind women expressed in the folksongs of Bhojpuri society?

d) Are the songs only discussing absence of men and the left-behind women’s relationship with them or are they reflecting on something else?

e) Is there any difference in the conceptualization of issues and concerns between women’s and men’s folksong traditions?

f) Have the folksongs survived with time and the changing contexts of migration from the Bhojpuri region and what changes have they undergone over the years?

Bhojpuri Folk Culture under Academic Lens

Before embarking on this study of left-behind Bhojpuri women through the lens of Bhojpuri folksongs, I surveyed the existing academic literature on Bhojpuri folk culture. My line of inquiry was focused around (a) whether migration motif of Bhojpuri folk culture has been explored and studied analytically and (b) whether the left-behind Bhojpuri women and society have been addressed in these studies.

Cultural formations around Bhojpuri migration have caught the attention of scholars recently. As mentioned before, scholars have conceptualised these formations as bidesia
culture. Especially, the *bidesia* theatre form developed by Bhikhari Thakur has gained prominent attention. Scholars have theorised *bidesia* in the context of its history, political economy, performance, culture and meanings.

Taiyab Hussain Peedit\(^5\) (2008) established that migration theme existed in Bhojpuri folksongs even before Bhikhari Thakur’s *bidesia* theatre. Bhikhari Thakur composed several *bidesia* songs, but the ‘tek’ (a word that is repeated in each line of the song) such as *bidesia*, *batohia*, *pardesia* and *banijia* (synonyms of migrants) were already used in Bhojpuri folksongs, and this confirms the prior existence of this theme. He argues that Bhikhari Thakur borrowed songs from rural Bhojpuri women to develop *bidesia* theatre.

Mritunjay Prabhakar (2009) in his MPhil dissertation on *bidesia* theatre argues that *bidesia* is a narrative of separation like folksongs. He further elaborates *bidesia* theatre as synthesis of the various cultural material created by men and women of Bhojpuri society. In the play Bhikhari Thakur has developed a narrative of a migrant Bhojpuri man whose wife is left-behind in the village. The musical dialogues of the story have been developed using conventional Bhojpuri folksongs like *jatsaari*, *jhumar*, etc. Also, dance forms like *launda nach*, a Bhojpuri dance form performed by female impersonators, has been used to create the drama.

Chandrashekhar (2011) dialectically interrogated *bidesia* play as a popular culture which is representative of Bhojpuri-speaking people’s desires and aspiration. He argues that *bidesia* play was an outcome of the existential realities of Bhojpuri society. *Bidesia* was always conceived as ‘low culture’ which expressed the desires of lower classes. He further argues that though *bidesia* had no revolutionary ideas, it was a kind of cultural resistance to the upper class of the society by the lower class/labouring class who migrates in order to defeat the dominant and exploitative upper class. Thus, Chandrasekhar reads migration as an act of resistance. According to Chandrasekhar, the ‘migrant’s wife’ is conceptualised differently from women of ‘high culture’ who can be either a chaste wife or a prostitute.

Brahmaprakash (2012) in his doctoral thesis has looked at the contemporary *bidesia* style of theatre in Bihar, an extension of the legacy of Bhikhari Thakur. He argues that how *bidesia*, the 20\(^{th}\) century theatre form demystified the existing spiritual-cultural form [like *nirgun*] and transformed them into a realistic form, because *bidesia* was an outcome of displacement of real bodies through migration on a large scale.

\(^5\) Taiyab Hussain Peedit is one of the earlier PhD degree holders on Bhikhari Thakur.
Apart from the above studies, which are rooted in the analysis of Bhikhari Thakur’s theatre form, there are studies which have conceptualised *bidesia* as a broad category. Such a conceptualization tries to understand *bidesia* as not just a theatre form, but a culture. Badri Narayan’s (2005) exploratory documentation of *bidesia* expressions [expressions of separation and longing] in Bhojpuri folksongs is an example. He, besides documenting songs with migration theme in it, attributes the emergence of *bidesia* culture largely to the indenture labour migration of the 19th century.

Similarly, Govind Ballabh Pant Institute, Allahabad, in its ‘Bidesia Project’, has done a documentation of *bidesia* ‘culture’ in the countries where the Bhojpuri diaspora is settled and also in the Bhojpuri region of India. They have spelt out and conceptualised indenturated labour migration as a socio-cultural phenomenon and explored the concepts connoting migration like *bidesia, pardesia,* and *batohi* and linked them with the different nature of migration (Majumder 2010).

There are anthropological and sociological studies on folksongs of north India in which we find passing references to *virah* (separation) or *bidesia* form. In an empirical study to trace impact of male out-migration on rural households in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Surinder Jetley (1987) has argued that more than social science literature, folksongs have captured the sufferings of women whose men migrated. Sociologist Indra Deva (1989) in his work on the sociology of Bhojpuri folklore does the same. Charu Gupta (2002) in her research on love and sexual pleasure in colonial India explores non hetero-normative and unconventional expressions of love. Gupta cites *bidesia* and a Bhojpuri folksong in which a woman is lamenting for her migrant husband as an example. Archana K. Roy (2011) in her demographic study of ‘left-behind women’ of Bihar has acknowledged that folksongs are an account of the lives of such women. Smita Tiwari Jassal (2012) in her ethnographic work on folksongs of north India has documented some of the songs depicting the changes in the life of women due to migration. These scholars have recognised the potential of studying Bhojpuri folksongs in the context of migration.

Most scholars have studied *bidesia* theatre, which is a derivative of Bhojpuri folksongs. While they have tried to analyse Bhojpuri migrant society through the lens of theatre, my study is based on Bhojpuri folksongs across genres. I would like to argue that studying Bhojpuri folksongs can generate wider and comprehensive sociological insights on the culture of migration of Bhojpuri society than studying one particular theatre form.

Secondly, studies on *bidesia* theatre and ‘*bidesia* culture’ are masculine in nature. Though they have acknowledged women as bearers of oral culture, they could not
recognise that performance of migration and the subsequent pain and sorrow of the left-behind wife in *bidesia* reproduces structures of gender. *Bidesia* mirrors the expectations of the male migrant from his wife and his ‘left-behind’ society. It often understands the left-behind society as a society ‘frozen in time’ waiting for its men to return. Such a portrayal is anchored in male supremacy. Thus, women are only pictured as ‘wives who wait eternally’ without recognizing the other roles they play – as workers, singers, etc. Scholars of *bidesia* dealt with women as characters/subjects and not as creators of the culture. While my study writes the story of migration keeping the woman protagonist in centre not just as a subject but as active creators of discourse around culture of migration.

Additionally, folksongs illustrate the inter-connections of caste, gender and region. It is important to point out that caste does not emerge as a systemic, historical and analytical category in the works of *bidesia* scholars. My study, on the other hand, reckons caste and gender in folksongs at multiple levels. Cultures of migration are heterogeneous. This heterogeneity is primarily characterised by caste and gender. I understand caste and gender as not just realities which produce diversity in the monolithic discourse of migration, but also as realities which produce conflicts and contradictions in this discourse. For example, we have scholars who convincingly frame migration as an act of resistance. However, they do not engage with the gendered nature of migration. Such disengagement, knowingly or unknowingly, invisibilises women’s (especially ‘lower-caste’ labouring women’s) experience of male migration. Folksongs sung by women in the context of migration can act as important registers of this experience. I would argue that this experience is both gendered and encasted.

Beside this academic rationale, my personal journey as a migrant’s daughter has also been a provocation for this study of Bhojpuri women and their folksongs (see Chapter 2).

**Analytical Framework: Sociology of Folksongs**

As the disciplinary vantage point of this study is sociology and the area of enquiry is folksongs, with the help of sociological studies on folklore/folksongs and music, an outline of the analytical framework for the study is in order. From my reading of the sociological studies on folksongs three themes have emerged, which I want to use as the basis of my analytical framework: (i) the use of folksongs as sociological data; (ii) gender dimension in the folksongs and (iii) aspects of folksongs which make them respond to contextual changes.
The English term *folklore* was coined by British writer William John Thoms in 1846; it is applied to oral traditions of all kind, including folksongs (Emrich 1946; Basu 1964). According to folklorist Maud Karpeles,\(^6\) folksongs differ from art songs as they are not products of the creativity of a single person, but the work of many generations of common people (Gupta 1964). Other old-school folklorists define folksongs as songs whose authorship is unknown, which are products of collective creativity and which are mostly circulated orally. On the other hand, folklorists like Mazharul Islam (1985) define folklore in a more democratic way: even an individual creation can become folklore over a period of time if it is based on shared experience of a community.

Generally, folksongs are not activity of leisure; they are associated with processes of labour. Activities in domestic sphere like pounding and grinding grains are the contexts where women sing folksongs. Similarly, folk music is created at site of agricultural, pastoral activities (Nketia 1982). Also, folksongs cut across all ‘fields of social action in which interpersonal relations and roles have to be acted out, affirmed or re-defined, or occasions on which spontaneous interaction is encouraged [wedding, birth ceremony, etc..]’ (ibid.: 640).

**Folksongs as Sociological Data**

Unlike other literary creations, socio-historical value of folksongs is more than their literary value and they have intensely human attitude towards life (Gupta 1964; Joshi 1982). Folksongs are an important source of sociological data; songs may or may not deal with social themes directly, but they are capable of hinting and suggesting. Highlighting their sociological value, sociologist Indra Deva (1989) asserts that scholars should not treat folksongs as simple documents, nor should they take them at ‘face value’ as they are not ‘scientific monographs’. He further argues that folksongs are not a reliable account of actual happenings, but they reflect the attitude of people towards those happenings. In other words, folksongs represent people’s perception about incidents, situations and relationships.

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\(^6\) Maud Karpeles (1885–1976) was a dance teacher and collector of folksongs. Born in London, she was the founder of International Folk Music Council. She was a collaborator of Cecil James Sharp of England who revived folklore collection in the early 20th century. In her late 40s she travelled to Newfoundland [an island in easterly province of Canada] to collect folksongs (Rhodes 1977).
Folklorist Alan Dundes argues, ‘folklore is an autobiographical ethnography—that is, it is a people’s own description of themselves’ (1969: 471). Through the study of folklore one can see another culture ‘from the inside out’, instead of looking at it ‘from the outside in’ (ibid.). In this study too, Bhojpuri folksongs have been used to look at ‘left-behind women’ from an inside-out perspective.

Folksongs are a medium of ‘social communication’; they are a reservoir of those expressions which do not find a place in everyday social interaction (Jassal 2012). Musical traditions are ‘mode of interaction’; they are produced through interactions and make interactions possible; they embody cultural assumptions; they express and constitute social relations (Etzkorn 1982; Nketia 1982; Silbermann 1982).

Musical traditions, folksongs included, can be sociologically studied either as ‘object’ or as ‘activity’. Musicologist Christopher Small uses the concept ‘musicking’ to describe music as a process (activity). He argues that music establishes a ‘set of relationships’ in its conception, performance and reproduction; the meaning of the song lies in these social relationships (Roy and Dowd 2010). Thus, music is much more than ‘organised sounds’; it becomes an adjective of its people and an abstraction of social action and actors (ibid.). Pointing out the inseparability of music from social life, sociologist of music Tia DeNora observes that music is mobilised through a range of strategies as a ‘resource’ to produce the ‘scenes, routines, assumptions and occasions of everyday social life’ (ibid.).

Knowledge can be generated by interrogating social categories and the musical genres related to them (Henry 1988). A sociological enquiry into the relationship between the women left-behind by migrating men and the folksongs generated by them can provide us valuable knowledge on and incisive insights into the ‘left-behind society’. The left-behind women and migrating men are two broad social categories that I have conceptualised for the present study. I am, however, aware that there are more fundamental social realities like caste with which certain musical genres are associated.

**Women and Folksongs/Gender and Genre**

As women protagonists in Bhojpuri folksongs are my focal concern, I would like to discuss the relationship between folksongs and women. During my field visit, I used to begin my conversation over songs by asking who in the village will help me get some songs. The most common answer was ‘geet-e ke dukh hawa, sab aurat-laikiyan gawalis-
“a, ekani ke muhon na dukhala’”, which roughly translates as ‘there is no shortage of songs here, all women and girls sing songs, their mouth are never shut’. In the Bhojpuri rural society, folksongs and women are inseparable. Usually, women’s participation in the cultivation of mainstream literature is very less, but rural oral tradition has a different story to tell as women have the maximum share (Deva 1989).

Folksongs are integral to women’s life. One can find uncompromising expressions in women folksongs which are absent from their daily speech and are rarely revealed in mainstream literature (Deva 1989). In these songs, one can find resistance to the patriarchal system in which women are grounded. Though there is awareness among the women folk who sing, the songs are not the exact representation of social life, they are reflections and wishful thinking (Narayan 1997). It is, in a way, becomes a medium of social criticism.

Women’s songs often subvert ‘social distances’ in their verses (Jacobson 1975; Narayan 1997). Rural geography in India is characterised by systematic segregation based on caste and gender. Even under the all-pervasive patriarchy, women have a social space away from male surveillance which enables them to sing the ‘unspeakable’ (see Flueckiger 1996; Raheja and Gold 1996).

Folksongs of men are different from those of women (Jassal 2012). The songs of women are generally songs of rites of passage and work songs, whereas male genres are epics and heroic narratives. Though there are male genres that discuss women’s issues, they are differentiated by content and attitude (Gold 2003).

Women, including Bhojpuri women, however, are not a ‘monolithic folk’ singing collectively (Narayan 1997). They are differentiated by caste, age, life-stage and many other factors. While analyzing their folksongs these differences should be taken into account.

Academic engagement regarding women and folklore looks at (a) women in folklore, (b) women’s folklore and (c) women as folk performers. The first one is concerned with

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7 Kirin Narayan (1986) highlights how folksongs are a shared tradition and an inevitable part of women’s and girl’s life. ‘Individual’s passage’, like wedding, in which the pain of women leaving her natal house and migrating to conjugal house, is dealt collectively with folksongs (Suhaag genre).

8 Prem Chowdhry (2014) identifies ‘gendered geography’ in rural areas: there are men and women exclusive spaces. Her focus on gender segregation of space is in socio-political terms. This applies equally to performance of folksongs: women perform songs in women’s exclusive spaces.
image and representation, the second one is about differential usage of genres by women and the third is not just about the text but also its performer (Jordan and Caro 1986). This study will try to take into account all of them.

**Changing Folksongs**

Dundes dismisses the idea that folklore is ‘relic of past’ and argues that folklore reflects current issues and concerns as well (Bronner 2007). Kirin Narayan (1993), while reviewing British based folklore studies in India, argues that colonial administrators and folklorists like Sir Bartle Frere and William Crooke sought ‘authentic’ folklore and folksongs, that is, ‘traditional’ folksongs which are not contaminated by modern forces. Narayan challenges this conception and shows how folksongs creatively respond to social change. Other folklorists, like Islam (1985) also subscribe to this idea and argue folksongs/folklore are not static but dynamic and they can embrace the changing order of the society.

Folksongs respond to larger processes of modernization, urbanization, mechanization, etc. The changing social milieu in rural societies has an imprint on all these processes (Blackburn and Ramanujan 1986). Hermann Bausinger in his book *Folk Culture in a World of Technology* argues that shifts in communication-technology do feature in folksongs (cited in Narayan 1993). For example, in Bhojpuri folksongs, initially boat used to be the mode of transport, which later became train.

In other words, the text of songs keep changing and modifying itself over time and place based on societal changes. However, it is important to note that folksongs also mark important continuities. These continuities are often in terms of form, metre, and prosodies. Also, certain contexts, broad themes and social relations continue in the folksongs.

The longevity of a folksong also lies in its diverse reproductions. The same folksong is often sung in many different versions and ways. Such changes emerge over time when songs are transmitted from one generation to the other. These changes also emerge out of migration, particularly due to marriage in the case of women. For example, during my fieldwork, I came across three different versions of the same grind-mill song. The differences are often subtle without disturbing the core theme. Changes are often in terms of vocabulary, metaphors and places (in the song). Another interesting example that I came across during my fieldwork is that the same song sung by elderly women had *babuji*
as an address for father while the song sung by younger women had ‘Papa’ (the English equivalent of babuji) as the term of address. Such changes reflect the fact that folksongs, like society are in a constant process of ‘becoming’. The core theme of separation from one’s husband in the context of migration remains intact as it characterises both the physical and emotional realities of Bhojpuri women.

Data Collection and Interpretation

Procedure of ‘Data’ Collection

Folksongs constitute the ‘data’ for this study. I have sourced this ‘data’ from secondary sources as well as primary field work. In the case of folksongs, one may find two kinds of secondary sources: (i) songs collected and documented by folklorists and scholars available in the form of published anthologies and (ii) songs available in their audio-visual form. As it is very important to contextualise folksongs in their place and time, a careful selection of secondary source was required. I wanted a genre-wise collection of folksongs because knowledge of genre facilitates contextualization as it provides the performance-context. Beside this, three points were taken note of (a) from ‘where’ the songs are/were collected (b) ‘when’ the songs were collected and (c) ‘who’ was the song collector. Because of the expanding Bhojpuri music industry, a lot of audio-visual material in the form of cassettes and VCDs of Bhojpuri folksongs is available in the market. However, I decided not to use these audio-visual sources because the three points mentioned in the preceding sentence would not be sufficiently answered in this case. Genre-wise records were not available.

Since ‘left-behind societies’ of Bhojpuri region in western Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh provided me ground to anchor my study, I wanted songs collected from this context (Bhojpuri homeland) only. A lot of cultural production in Bhojpuri is happening in cities where Bhojpuri migrants reside and one could look at that material as well. However, this would require a separate enquiry.

I decided to stick to systematically documented and sufficiently contextualised anthologies of Bhojpuri folksongs. I came across anthologies of Krishna Deva Upadhyaya (1984, 1990, 1999, 2011), who is recognised as the first Bhojpuri folklorist to collect and document Bhojpuri folksongs from the Bhojpuri-speaking region in post-colonial India. His collections were systematic, genre-wise and contextualised and hence were useful for
an academic enquiry. The question ‘Who is the song collector?’ is important for several reasons. The identity of the ‘song collector’ plays an important role in the process of data collection and its transaction with an academic audience. It can explain the relative advantages and disadvantages the collector faces in the field, owing to her/his identities. In other words, it tells us a great deal about the politics of knowledge production (see Chapter 2).

Besides sourcing data from secondary source, I wanted to do a fieldwork to collect songs afresh to fulfil one of my research objectives, that is, to map the continuities and changes in the Bhojpuri folksongs. Being part of a migrant Bhojpuri-speaking family residing in Madhya Pradesh, I was brought up with Bhojpuri folksongs my mother used to sing. Moreover, I have been visiting my village Dihari in Bhojpur district, Bihar every year. When I briefly visited Dihari in 2012, after conceptualising the present study, my perspectives had changed. I was now looking at them as sociological documents and epistemological sources. I decided to collect songs from Dihari. Also, I wanted to enhance and nuance my understanding of the Bhojpuri society by staying in the field and engaging with my people. Hence, I went again in 2014 and spent two months systematically collecting songs from not only Dihari, but also from my mother’s natal village Bhairotola and paternal aunt’s village Ratanpur in Bhojpur district. The interesting co-incidence is that Bhojpur district is part of the Shahabad region of Bihar from where Upadhyaya had collected songs apart from other Bhojpuri-speaking districts. My engagement with the field in Bhojpur district is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

**Method of Interpretation**

I have analysed the folksongs documented by others and those collected by myself from a ‘cultural insider perspective’ of Bhojpuri society. My aim was not just to analyse the contents of the folksongs but to attempt an ‘informed interpretation’ of their socio-cultural location. Analysis of Bhojpuri folksongs has been guided by the insights gained

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9 See Prem Chowdhry (1994), who too, beside her own fieldwork, has used material, collected by others and situated them in her understanding of rural Haryana.

10 Anthropologist Narayan who has worked extensively on oral traditions of South Asia, uses the term ‘informed interpretation’ as a method to analyse the folktales and folksongs collected from rural people. Her formulation is inspired by Dundes who emphasises on studying folklore in the light of commentary provided by the people from whom the respective folklore has been
from the people in Bhojpuri-speaking region during fieldwork. Historically, there has been a division between literary scholars, who studied only text, and anthropologists who emphasised more on context. Dundes proposes to combine the pursuit of textual and contextual approaches (see Bronner 2007). I have tried to analyze the Bhojpuri folksongs (text) in the historical and contemporary context of male out-migration from Bhojpuri region.11

The ontological assumption behind this method is that folksongs are the embodiment of experiences of women. The epistemology is concerned with the way folksongs assimilate and express women’s voice, in particular, and social phenomenon, in general.

After sourcing Bhojpuri folksongs, I identified and indexed folksongs across genres having migration as the motif/theme. Since women’s articulations of male migration are the central plank of my thesis, I delineated the voice of the woman protagonist articulating the migration of her man in various songs in women’s genres. While doing this I realised that women’s voices were present not only in women’s folksongs, but also in men’s folksongs. Thus, I indentified the men’s folksong traditions with woman’s voice. Finally, the folksongs with contemporary motif/modern element were classified.

I began with an overall analysis of Bhojpuri folksongs with migration motif to find out how the phenomenon of migration has been sketched and discussed in these songs. After having developed a sociological understanding of how migration is a prominent motif in the Bhojpuri folksongs, I focussed on the woman protagonist in folksongs across genres. Such a focus meant asking the following questions: (a) Who are the women protesting and/or lamenting male migration: are they wives, young brides, mothers, etc? (b) What, how and why do these women express the consequences of male out-migration? And (c) What were their issues and concerns? These questions aimed at exploring how women performing specific gender roles (characterised by spatial restrictions, familial and caste honour, gendered labour etc.) face/confront specific vulnerabilities, challenges, possibilities in the context of male out-migration. One finds out that these issues are thematically expressed as women’s voices in folksongs.

Women’s voices are executed in men’s folksongs as well. However, there are marked differences in their portrayal, performance, contexts and content. Thus, a comparison collected. Dundes conceptualises this method as ‘Oral Literary Criticism’(Narayan 1995). Also see Dundes (1966).

 Folklorist Islam (1985) too suggests that folklore should be collected and analyzed in the light of historical background.
between men’s and women’s folksong tradition was essential. Such a comparison showed how gendered expectations are orchestrated and expressed through folksongs in different caste contexts. I realised that differences of caste had pronounced impacts on gendered experiences. Thus, portraying women (or men) as a homogenous entity was dismantled in such a comparison. The recognition that folksongs are not static but dynamic cultural expressions has been reiterated by many scholars. Therefore, it was important for me to understand this dynamic nature and highlight the continuities and changes in folksongs in the context of migration as a phenomenon in Bhojpuri society and a motif. Thus, I have briefly looked at the continuing significance of migration in Bhojpuri society’s political economy and changing metaphors, prosodies of migration in women’s articulations through folksongs.

**Organisation of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, including the instant introduction, which has the stage and sketched the background of the study. The second chapter, ‘Of Places, Peoples, Songs and Me: Engagement with Folksongs and Folk Society’, is an account of my journey through the study starting with the conceptualisation of the problem to how I went about the field study. This chapter gives a glimpse of the kind of data I could get from the field. Also, I have discussed in detail the predicament of an outsider by virtue of my physical location, but a ‘cultural and caste insider’ who goes to her native place to conduct social research. In brief, this chapter constitutes a methodological account of my social and gender location that facilitated the fieldwork, on the one hand, and proved to be a disadvantage, on the other.

The third chapter, ‘Bhojpuri: Language, Cultural region and People’, situates the study in the Bhojpuri-speaking region. As the crux of the thesis is Bhojpuri folksongs, this chapter provides a description of Bhojpuri-speaking region as a backdrop to the interpretative analysis of Bhojpuri folksongs. I have not drawn upon histories of kings and chieftains of this geography, but confined myself to providing a brief historical overview of people of the region. This chapter also discusses the spread of Bhojpuri language across different administrative boundaries which make ‘Bhojpuri’ a socio-linguistic construct.
The fourth chapter, ‘Of Women, by Women: Bhojpuri Folksongs and “Absent” Husbands’, is based on an analysis of the women’s folksongs traditions. Keeping the woman protagonist of the song narrative in the centre and migration motif as an anchor, I have identified various themes. This chapter is an account of issues and concerns expressed by left-behind women with reference to their migrant husbands. This chapter also outlines how folksongs across genres are not only marked by gender, but also by caste.

The fifth chapter, ‘Of Women, by Men: Understanding the “First Person Feminine” in Bhojpuri Folksongs’, provides a comparative analysis of women’s genres with those of men’s. Songs with migration motif have been compared in both genres to observe the differences and similarities in issues and concerns expressed with respect to male out-migration. This chapter examines the possible reasons for the use of feminine voice in men’s genre.

The sixth chapter, ‘Trends in Migration and Folksongs: Continuities and Changes’ argues that folksong traditions are not static past-oriented traditions but respond to changing contexts. The nature and direction of male out-migration from Bhojpuri region has changed and this is reflected in the folksongs too. This chapter maps and explains those changes. The seventh chapter, being the conclusion, recapitulates the objectives, summarises the findings of the study, and draws conclusion from there.

The original songs that have been reproduced in Devnagari script in the main text are followed by their translation. I myself have translated material from Bhojpuri including all the songs. The main text of the thesis is followed by an appendix. Songs that appear in Chapter 4, 5 and 6 have been serialised and have been given in the appendix. Full length of the songs has not been reproduced in the main text, but only the relevant lines from the songs. Songs in their full length have been reproduced in the appendix in the Devnagari script. Song translations do not appear in the appendix. Lastly, a glossary of local expressions appearing in the text has been given.