

Women's Desire Portrayed in Bhawaiya Folksong in Northern Bangladesh

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1. Initiation

Why study folksong: Bhawaiya?

Music is called a powerful medium of expression. It is Music which is a conscious effort done to represent the human thoughts and emotion. Human cultures, societies, and stages of evolution are mirrored in the variety of music. A researcher's interest to study music as an issue which is the manifestation of human life combining family, love, conflict etc. can be derived from the perception of life events along with the assimilation of social environment she/he belongs to. Music is certainly the strongest outcome of any culture. The folksong as a discipline associated with folk's life and experiences qualifies it to be a worthy area of interest with its evolutionary history and uniqueness. Folksong conveys the way of life, the cultural milieu; is the outcome of the relationship between human and his/her perception of different aspects of life (Khan 1987). Thus there is scope to concentrate on how women and their feeling of desire, separation, sorrows etc. are portrayed in the Bhawaiya folksong. Attributes and kinds of the desire are reflected very saliently through the songs. Bhawaiya is that kind of folksong of Bangladesh which is sung by men about women's experience. Prominent folklorist Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui identifies it as a 'song of women sung by men'. Bangladeshi folksongs, especially Bhawaiya display a picturesque amour which is the main attribute of the songs. This amour in the folksongs is awfully spread in different directions. The universal love is sometimes moonstruck awful affection and sometimes it is encumbered in deep melancholy.

Bhawaiya is the kind of folksong which, is considered a holder and carrier of the tradition Bangladeshi folk culture. It is an invaluable wealth in Bengali folksongs. With regard to the origin of the word "Bhawaiya" Tarkaratna Mahamohopadhyay Jadebaswarsaid that Bhawaiya had been originated with the amorous attraction felt even before acquaintance with the lover (Ahsan 1980). While classifying the folksongs of Bangladesh prevalent folklorists Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui, Dr. Enamul Haque, Muhammad Shirajuddin Kashimpuri asserted Bhawaiya as 'Love Song' (Chowdhury 2001). Other prominent folklorists of Bangladesh namely Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen, Dr. Ashutosh Bhattacharya, Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui Identified Bhawaiya as a 'Song of desire', 'Song of Separation'. They have discussed, in many texts, about the events of love and separation in Bhawaiya folksong,

especially of women's fetterless and romantic love affairs, devotion for love, chastity mounting Bangladeshi society and culture. Women's social status, conjugal life, responsibility to husband and extra-marital affairs; an idea about all these can be assumed from the song's lyrics. Bengali Men-Women's relationship, their tendency towards love and sex, people's viewpoints about those affairs can be studied through the folksongs.

Though there have been many discussions on this ground but women's psyche, physical-emotional sufferings, repressed sexual desire/ consciousness/ sexual depravity, conjugal sentiments, are rarely discussed. Different conditions of women's desire in the context of socio-cultural context, society's attitude toward women's expression and experience of desire and separation, the relation between love and desire, folklorists view on those remain undiscussed. The word 'Bhawaiya' itself pronounces that it is a song of love. The derivative of the word Bhawaiya is Bhav>Bhao + iya = Bhawaiya; which indicate that it is an emotionally charged song. 'Bhav' means is the meaning of 'Love' or the mood of that love in Bengali. The song Bhawaiya has been so named is Rajbongshi language. Later the separation events etc. came into the subject of the song. The happiness and sorrows of the daily life of the people of these areas have been reflected through these songs. The main characteristics of the Bhawaiya song are that the collision between hope and hopeless, the expectation of joy and happiness, the lamentation of enjoyment and sufferings etc. The feelings of daily life have been picturesque through this song. Bhawaiya song is the song of love, separation, long journey of life etc. of the people. The love or separation events of - and women have been reflected through these songs very prominently. In other words, Bhawaiya song is a song of separation. The center of love is the women (Uddin 2003).

Centering the women, the imperishable and eternal love events have been originated. Especially many Bhawaiya songs have been composed basing the hopeless mode of toe female minds. Renowned Bengali folklorist Dr. Ashutosh Bhattacharya thinks, "There is a tendency of exaggerated expression of women's mind and desire in the Bhawaiya

songs. The reason is maybe the songs origination from a matriarchal society” (Uddin 2003). Though there is a description of love events in this song yet here we do not get love events like Radha Krishna or others like them. The content of the song is mainly concerned, with the love events of general people of the society. There is a proverb in Bengali literature that “the youth of females develop as the tips of gourd develop”; the youth time of the females suffers from the burnings of love. The painful separation events have been expressed through the Bhawaiya songs. Even those housewives who could not conquer the minds of their kith and kin in their husband’s house they become very much neglected there. Their mother-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, father-in-law and other relatives imposed their tortures on them. The pathetic events of this type of housewives are also expressed through these Bhawaiya songs.

The basis of Bhawaiya songs are human life oriented and feelings towards love and separation between men and women. In other words, the daily life events of a husband and a wife, such as their love, action-reaction, sorrows etc. have been described through this song. The folksong of rural North Bengal is mostly an articulation of women’s feeling addressing their *Kanai* (Lover, savior), *Gariyal* (Bull cart operator), *Debor* (Husbands brother), *Naiya* (Boat-man), *Baudia* (Vagabond lover), *Bania/Sadhu/Soudagor* (Merchant), *Boiddo/Kobiraj* (Local herbal chemist), *Boideshi bondhu/Mahut* (Outsider), *Moishal/Rakhal* (Cow boy), *Shokhi* (Fellows), *Husband*. Folksongs epitomized them as creative subjects. The happiness and sorrows of the daily life of the people of these areas have been reflected through these songs. The main characteristics of the Bhawaiya song are that the collision between hope and hopelessness, the expectation of joy and happiness, the lamentation of enjoyment and sufferings etc. With regard to Bhawaiya song Ashraf Siddique (Ahsan, 1980) an eminent scholar in Bengali literature said that in the districts of Kochbihar and Jalpaiguri of West Bengal and Rangpur district of Bangladesh where a kind of the song used to sing with a long musical measure was known as Bhawaiya song. Usually, this song was used to sing with a Dotara. It may be said for many reasons that Bhawaiya song is the own song of the people of aforesaid Rangpur, Kochbihar and Jalpaiguri districts.

Narayan (1997) argue that the ethnographic generalizations that emerge from equating texts with collective points of view can be refined through attention to performers. Thus, male absence in Kangra songs is not just an ethnographic fact, but also a multi-vocal symbol on which women strategically draw in order to comment on a range of emotions and situations in their lives (Narayan 1997: 2). Bhawaiya songs are generally in woman’s voice (sung by men) protesting or lamenting separation of her man whom she doesn’t want to be separated from. Because there is a probability of long period detachment or not meeting again. This situation can be understood through the song’s lyrics and idea about the men they had relations with. *Lok Sahitya*, a Bengali book series published by Bangla Academy about the folklore of Bangladesh; in the introduction chapter of its eleventh volume it is said that “the main subject of Bhawaiya is Love/desire and estrangement of the folk men-women. The human being, made of flesh and blood here, is cogitated here with happiness and sorrow, hope and despair of life. So that the main tune of the Love and separation is focused on

folk life; there is nothing superhuman in this”. Thus Bhawaiya is one of the greatest cultural repertoires in which women’s articulation of their feelings of love and separations have been articulated, and this can be axial to my research. In cultures that do not openly discuss inner emotional states, songs are the shared tradition through which emotions are expressed (Jassal 2012: 3). Bhawaiya is thus an important cultural source to understand the expressions of the women in particular, the society, in general.

Prem Chowdhry (2007) has focused upon the incidence of ‘contentious marriages’¹; shows how the ideology of male honor and its ancillary ideology of female guardianship are a concomitant of such an economy and have also remained cardinal to the way in which rural Haryanvi society attempted to cope with the changes and tensions it continues to experience. She thus argues for various continuities in the actions of the colonial and the post-colonial state; both have refused to recognize the agency of women to marry a person of their own choice, first in theory and then in practice. But, in the case of Bhawaiya folks, the rural women’s agency is more discernible in the songs; this can be said from the way their articulation of love and desire portrayed. This dissertation, however, seeks to problematize the idea of women agency in a generalized manner through discussion of women in folksongs.

Music and culture of Bangladesh

Bengali society in the nineteenth century witnessed an explosion of creativity in most aspects its society and culture, particularly its language, literature, performing arts. The heritage of Bengali literature is almost a thousand years old if the language of *Charyapadas*² is regarded as primitive Bangla. Like all other literature, Bangla began with religious poetry or the devotional songs. From the days of Charyapadas to the bulk of medieval literature was mostly theocentric and that includes Buddhist, Hindu, and even Muslim literature.³ Bengal being predominantly rural, its literature, although influenced to a degree by Sanskrit and Persian literature was folk in nature until English education gave it an urban character.

Like its literature, Bangla music has a rich heritage too; Charyapadas and much of the medieval poetry were originally composed as songs. Bengal had developed its own school of classical as well as folk music by the nineteenth. A synthesis of classical and folk music, *keertans*⁴ were created and given their standard form by medieval Vaishnava singers. Another of Bengal’s own variety of devotional songs was created by the obscurantist religious sect, called the *Baul*⁵; remain popular even in the early twenty-first century. Other genres of folk songs, including *Bhatiyali*, *Bhawaiya*, *Kabigan* and *Jarigan*, have also retained their popularity. The musical tradition of Bangladesh is *Baniprodhan* (lyrics-

¹ term referring to many different marital configurations, as reflections of the shifts characteristic of a colonial and post-colonial society.

² is a collection of mystical poems, songs of realization in the tradition from the tantric tradition in Eastern India.

³ Excerpts from Banglapedia. http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Bangali_Culture last accessed: 22.04.17.

⁴ Bengal’s own brand of devotional songs.

⁵ one of the most important exponents of this genre being Lalon Shah.

based) with minimal instrumental accompaniment. Folk music is often accompanied by the *ektara*⁶. Other instruments include the *dotara*, *dhol*, *flute* and *tabla*. Bangladesh also has an active heritage in North Indian classical music. Like Bangla literature, Bangla music experienced an outburst of creativity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A number of noted musicians and lyricists like Rabindranath Tagore, Dwijendralal Ray, Atulprasad Sen and Kazi Nazrul Islam made the most important contributions to Bangla music during the colonial rule. However, the most important variety that emerged and became extremely popular in the middle of the twentieth century is known as *Adhunik Gaan* or Modern Songs, broadly based on a fusion of classical ragas, folk music and western music. Rabindranath Tagore successfully created this genre, which was later transformed significantly in the hands of Nazrul Islam. From *Geetagovinda* and *Srikrishnakeertan* it appears that Bengal had, in the medieval period, a form of amusical play called *Jatra Pala* (Murshid 2006).

Source of the study

By analyzing and documenting the cultural data that is, folksongs (Bhawaiya), I sought to explore the voices of the rural women of North Bengal, to capture expressions of sorrow, pain, struggles, desires, and aspirations of the women who had no voice in the society. Bhawaiya (the folksong) constitutes the 'data' for this study since expressive forms like folksongs and folk narratives have tended to be conceptualized as speaking unproblematically for all participants in the culture under study. Scholars have scrutinized such expressive forms, often cast as "texts" in order to discern the (singular) "native's point of view" or comprehend the mind of a (monolithic) "folk". Scholars generally have interpreted song texts as representing the subjectivity and emotions of a generic woman in a particular regional context. Songs thus become textual objects on which general theoretical statements about women can be based rather than the lived practices of reflective subjects (Narayan 1997:1-2).

I will source this data from secondary sources; mostly printed texts, anthologies, online archives, YouTube and look into the contents. Cheng and Phillips (2014) say in this regard, "the analysis of existing data is a cost-efficient way to make full use of data that are already collected to address potentially important new research questions or to provide a more nuanced assessment of the primary results from the original study". Besides, early scholarship shows the potential that sociology can bring to the study of content. Weber (1958) examined the manner in which various societies have organized the tonal material that comprises music, and he highlighted how the Occident has done so in an increasingly systematic, rather than ad hoc, fashion (Dowd 2007: 18). I will also employ my observations being an insider of the society, from participation in the locale. I will do a qualitative content analysis of selected songs and its creative subjects from the standpoint of a cultural insider and a material outsider. Cheng and Phillips also suggest, Researchers who would rather spend their time testing hypotheses and thinking about different research approaches rather than collecting primary data can find a large amount of data online. Content Analysis is essential here as it can decipher the hidden meanings. Moreover,

Insights gained from my previous study and knowledge about the society may contribute to building my thesis.

Chapter plan

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter here is introductory where I will draw on the background of the study. There will be definition and discussion on folksong, its potential on studying culture, and the introduction of Bhawaiya folksong. Before delving into the analysis of songs, it is important to explore the genesis of the genre, and this is dealt in the second chapter. I will discuss love and desire in folk music tradition of Bangladesh. Different aspects and attributes of Bhawaiya folksong, Bhawaiya as a song of desire. In the third chapter, I will show, how women are portrayed in the songs with reference to selected lyrics. And comparative discussions with academic works. The fourth chapter will be of discussion about the nature of portrayal of women in folksong, politics, and polemic of women's portrayal, criticality of women's agency, and women's legacy. The last chapter will conclude the discussion with an overview of the work summing up the observations, self-evaluation with critical appreciation, devaluation or revaluation, further scope, and limitations.

2. Engaging with the study

Researching through music

This chapter focuses on why we study music in sociology, definitions, and discussions on music, folk music, musicology, Bhawaiya folksong's relevance to the study. Attempting to allocate rigid definition to folk music would be an arduous task worthy of its own dissertation. However, two definitions can be drawn in the context. Firstly, it concerns music originating from the oral tradition. Whilst it may appear later in written forms, its master copy survives only in oral memory. Secondly, it could refer to music by the people, for the people; reflecting the lifestyles, and changing socio-political currents of different classes. There are many branches of music study that have evolved to understand properly the scientific aspects of music, aesthetics of music, and philosophy of music, ethnographical and anthropological dimensions. Musicology, Ethnomusicology, and Folk Musicology are the examples of such divisions of music study (Supicic 1987).

Music does not only mean the lyrics and tune but also the ethnic pattern of people who are involved with the music, their social perspectives, psychological perspectives etc. and within time broad framework of cultural pattern, the discussion and analysis of music in the area of ethnomusicology. The study about people and their society with culture is the focal theme of any Social Science; Ethnomusicology deals with the elements and the study of human societies and ethnology gives the holistic idea of origin, structure, distribution, language, religion and technology of the ethnic, racial and division of humanity, the ethnomusicology deals with the study of social and cultural aspects of music (Merriam 1964). Every folk music style is localized and the pattern possesses a definite regional identity. Music is a means of expression; in its simplest and most elemental forms, it is a means for the expression of pure emotion. When thought is employed some verbal utterance, adequate or inadequate, becomes possible. Because music is the one means of expression of pure emotion it is the only one which may be entirely spontaneous. "Words will not express" many emotions

⁶ an instrument with only one string.

which other sounds express quite clearly and forcibly (Antcliff 1916).

The study of music is an enterprise that involves multiple disciplines. However, sociology of music devoted itself to diverse concerns ranging from the production of music (e.g. Schutz 1951), socialization of musicians, formalization and sense making of the music organizations, genre and distribution of the music fields, the content of music and its forms (e.g. Weber 1958, Adorno 1973, Becker 1982), evaluation of hierarchy and valorization in it, the reception of music; relation with individual to the idea of music as cultural capital influenced by Bourdieu. Sociologists examined music in relation to such issues as subcultures (e.g. Hebdige 1979), to the reproduction of inequality (e.g. Bourdieu 1984). Sociology is equipped to elucidate the context in which music production occurs and to parse patterns of reception, musical content, the expanding array of theoretical perspectives (Dowd 2007). However, music should not be left to anthropologists and ethnomusicologists alone, simply because their disciplines are not equipped to recognize the complex effects of late-capitalistic, urban society; as Weber would suggest. Use of historical trends and texts to illustrate current social phenomena is valuable theoretical implication by Weber in the field of music sociology; especially his idea of rationalization process of western capitalist development (Turley 2001).

Our social life is nothing but the manifestation of the learned behavior which constituted as well as regulated by some elements like the custom, the religion, belief and so on. Music aids just as another media contributing to the learning process of those behaviors. Music stores the information and materials on the previous customary behaviors which are subject to flow from generation to generation and thus contributes very much to the construction of the society. The political history of any civilization shows that music has played a vital role, and that music had the organizational power to motivate people by making people subscribe to a particular ideology. Thus, music has the capacity to reconstruct the social life. Music might certainly be taken for a key to understanding the formation of the structure of a society and its evolution. Music can also be counted as a language; a language of tunes (Khan 2008). The way we use our language to express our intellect, thoughts, views of mind, in the same way, we can use the language of tunes or in another word, the music to express our inner feeling of mind or the melancholic account of feelings. The notes of music thus become the vehicle of expression of the human soul.

In folksong, various experiences of human being are reflected through music. These may be of love, of emotion or of any kinds of feelings. In folksongs, the heart is found to be more important than the head. Thus the human feelings reflecting the affection, love, the tragic end of love, the separation of the lover and loved one become the main theme. Folksongs are mainly inherited from oral tradition. Folksongs being a branch of folklore, communicate the feelings of a person or group of persons, the communication can also be of the whole society or of a nation. It tells the truth of life acquired through experience.

Folksongs are a fertile area of research and discussion since they reflect the social and cultural organization of the group,

which creates them. Folksongs reflect the social, economic and cultural organization of the group which creates them. These songs are handed down orally from generation to generation. The social and cultural realities flow with time through folksong. For example, *Baul* bears the philosophy of their society, in the *Biyer Geet*⁷ the position of the women in society is reflected and in Bhawaiya, the regional psycho-social character of people is visible like a mirror. So, to know the culture, it is must to know the music as per the anthropological view. In this context, Shepherd (1999) said: "to think of music or a cultural text is to imply that social or cultural elements are contained within or passed through its sonic components".

Folksong among others in folklore remains alive being sung by folk people over time. Sometimes, subject matter or popular stanzas of two or more folksongs get mixed or enters into another song and make the song re-alive. A topnotch characteristic of folksong is its language being confined to a local accent. Folksongs confine itself in a particular geographical area despite its global dispersion. Folksong is identified by the dialect it contains; the ethnic group who sing the songs. So to study the dialect group, their folksong can be a great element to understand different aspects of their life and experiences.

Definition of Folksong according to 'Standard Dictionary of Folklore' edited by Maria Leach-

Folksong comprises the poetry and music of groups whose literature perpetuated not by writing and print, but through oral tradition. These groups, primarily rural, are better able to preserve some of the older cultures of the national unit of which they form a part than the population of the cities with its more sophisticated, more international civilization, which is subject to faster changes and fluctuation of fashion. Folksong is thus part of a folk culture which is distinct from that of the cities and represents only certain facts of the culture of the nation.

Folksongs like other elements of folklore also have some 'taboo' in it (Chowdhury 2001). These are actually some customary practice that the folk singers generally abide. For instance, the female songs are sung only by the women, not the men, and love songs are supposed to be sung by the young people only not by the old ones, married women do not sing the songs of love; those are supposed to be sung by the unmarried youth (Bhattacharya 1989). These attributes of folksong can be compared to the taboo side of the European Folksong specified in 'Standard Dictionary of Folklore'-

General participation does not exclude some specialization in folksong. Some types go with age: children's game songs are rarely sung by adults. Many calendric songs, for instance, Christmas carols, may be sung primarily by children or youngsters, because of custom. The love song is not apt to be sung by old people.

Contemporary Bangladeshi folksong has an exception to this; there are instances of male singers singing female songs.

⁷ Songs that are sung during marriage ceremony.

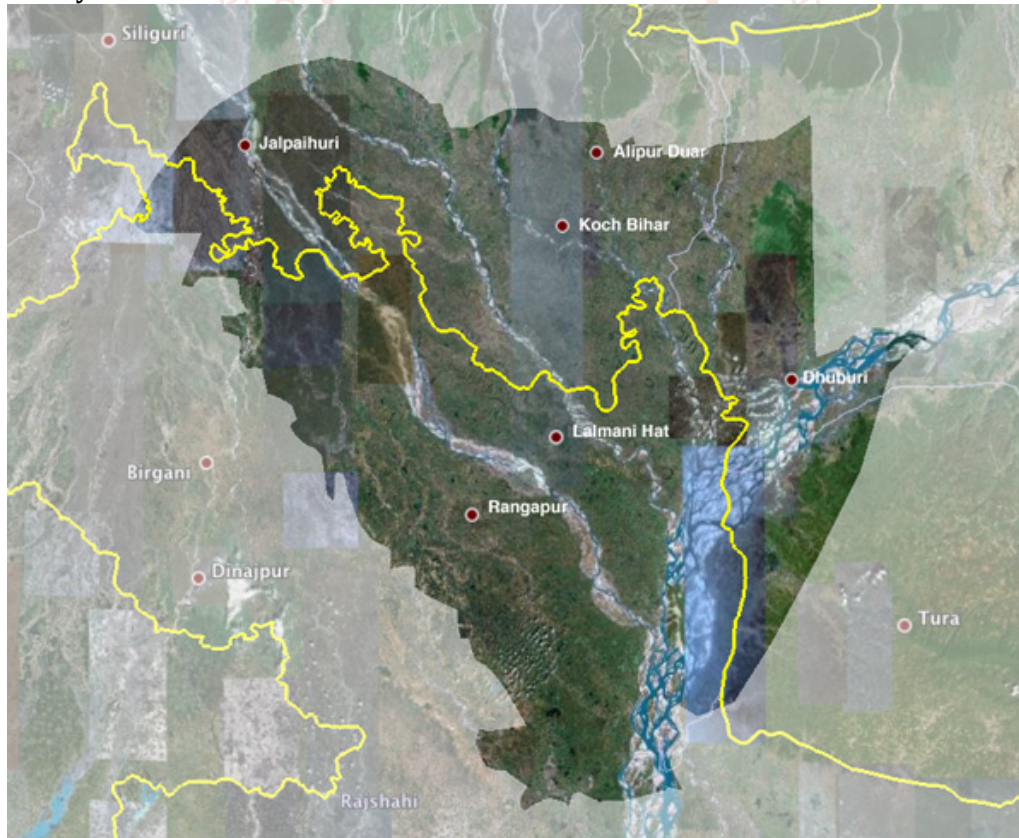
Folksong and Bangladesh/Bengal

There are innumerable varieties of folksongs in riverine Bangladesh which are sung by different cultural groups in different parts of the country. There have been as many as 222 varieties of folksongs most of which are now defunct. Of them, few varieties are most popular that are classified as follows- a) Work song or Occupational songs including harvest songs, *garial er gaan*⁸, *sari gaan*⁹, b) Ritual songs, c) Ceremonial songs, d) Regional songs, e) Historical songs, f) Heroic songs, g) Mystic songs, h) *Jari*, i) *Kavi gaan*¹⁰ (Siddiqui 1976). Moreover, the folksongs of Bangladesh is diverse in nature. Its daintiness and philosophy are highly praised throughout the world and considered as a bearer of Bangladeshi tradition. Folksong is also considered as words of the soul, the language of the heart of the Bengalis; through which, especially the folk people, express their soulful feelings in a plain and simple way. These songs are not as complicated as the classical songs in terms of tunes and ragas. But they have an intimate relationship; the classical ragas are thought to be originated from the folksongs, at the same time it has effects on folksongs. All the music genres of Bangladesh itself is bloomed from the folksongs of Bengal (Karim 2008). Other characteristics of Bengali folksong are its continuity and changeability. The songs are sung by folk people throughout times uninterruptedly but at the same time, there have been variations because the songs are transported to next generation through people's voice.

Regarding the folksongs of Bangladesh, Ashraf Siddique very nicely reported that "If one is to make a historical survey of music including folksongs, ballads and similar traditional materials of Bangladesh he must be acquainted with the social and ethnic condition of the country". The folksongs of Bengal are found in various disguise. Through the folk songs the thoughts and sensations, the laughs and pains etc. of the common people of the country are expressed. It has vast wideness as well as variety. Its history is full of its own tradition and story. Its scope is so wide which can only be compared with the moving nebulas in the ever beautiful galaxy of the solar world. Its wideness is found not only in its theme but also in its tune, instruments and in other aspects. As regards the tunes of most Bengali folksongs most of the researchers agreed that these songs usually consist of two types of tunes. (1) Short and (2) Long. In the case of the short ones, it is the word that matter. In the long measured group, the tunes are half carved, long carved and sometimes full carved. Where most European or American tunes run a straight line, the tunes in Bengali folksongs flow in carves (Siddiqui 1976). This attribute makes the folksongs the song of emotion, the song of love. While carving, the folk singer reminisces certain feelings, experiences, philosophy of life, and love which can be subjected to folkloristic studies.

Abbas Uddin Ahmed, a scholar, accomplished singer and collector of folksongs of Bangladesh, popularly known as the father of Bangladeshi folksong, has an immense influence in the contemporary folklore movement. Hundreds of his genuine folksong records pressed by commercial recording companies became an archive of Bangladeshi folksong, especially Bhawaiya folksong.

The origin of Bhawaiya



Map of Bangladesh and North-East India showing the geographical distribution of the Bhawaiya folksong.¹¹

⁸ Songs of the bullock-cart drivers.

⁹ Sung by boatman in monsoon. Especially during boat race.

¹⁰ Kavi and Jari gaan have both ritual and entertainment aspects containing historical and tragic events.

¹¹ Source:http://chandrankantha.com/articles/indian_music/vaoiaya.html

It is assumed that Bhawaiya song was evolved in the 15th or 16th century and the same have been sung and transmitted orally for centuries together. The first scholarly approach to the subject of Bhawaiya appears to be the work of Sir Abraham Grierson (1851-1941). He was a former British Deputy Collector of the Rangpur district. He collected Bhawaiya lyrics 1898 and used them as an example of the local dialect. It is published in his book *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903), Vol-V, Part-I. Some more examples of lyrics of these songs are available in printed form from the *Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika* published in 1908-1912. But nothing can be known as to when and who composed these songs. George Grierson collected three Bhawaiya songs in about between 1873-1877, most popular in the oral tradition along with their variants collected later by Abbas Uddin and recorded by the 40s of this century. The variants were current in the local tradition for nearly 200 years, if not more though it is possible that some of these songs were shortened or some paras were dropped to accommodate in commercial gramophone records. If more variants of these songs could be collected, it would have been possible to frame the historic- geographic chain with a hypothesis about the probable critical text.

The three songs collected by Grierson (*Linguistic Survey*, Vol. 5) and recorded by His Masters Voice (HMV) company are-

1.
*Partham jaubaner kale na hoil mor biya,
Ar katakal Rahim ghare ekakini haya,
Re bidhi nidaya.
Haila pail mor shonar jauban, maleyar jhare.
Mao-bapemor hail badinadilparerghare.
Re bidhinidaya..*

(Translation)

At dawning youth, I was not by Hymen favored,
How long still am I to remain single at home
O fate marble-hearted.
The full-blown flower of my golden youth yields to Maleya's
softest breeze,
My parents have become foes in not sending me to another's
home in ties hymeneal.
O fate marble-hearted.

2.
*Bidhimornidayare
Bapakanaikaosaramemuimaokanaikaolaje,
Dhikidhikitusheragunjaledeharmajhe.
Bidhinidayare..*

(Translation)

O fate marble-hearted
My heart I cannot open to my father, my mother I cannot
express by maidenly modesty bound,
Slowly is love consuming my frame as the fire within chaff.
O fate marble-hearted.

3.
*Pran sadhu re,
Jadi jan, sadhu, parabas
Na karen, sadhu, parar aash
Apan hate, sadhu, adhiya khan bhato re
Pran sadhu re,
Kochar kari, sadhu, na karen bay*

*Parar nari, sadhu, apan noyay re
Parar nari, sadhu, baadhibe parano re..*

(Translation)

O dear merchant,
If you go, merchant, away from home
Do not rely on others, o merchant,
O merchant, you eat your rice cooking by own hand
O dear merchant,
Do not spend the money kept in your loincloth, o
merchant
O merchant, be aware of other's women/wife
Other women will captivate you, o merchant..

The above songs are the early evidence of Bhawaiya folksong expressing women's feelings towards their beloved and experiences they encounter with the dispersion of their men. Women's encounter with society and their men, their own mind, bodily experience, desire, melancholia will be discussed with reference to Bhawaiya folksongs and Love in the written Bengali music tradition in the following chapter. The relevance of the aforementioned songs and the selected songs discussed up next in this thesis, their implications, juxtaposed theoretical renditions and deliberations will be exemplified to a possible extent in the next chapters.

3. The Rendition of Bhawaiya Love, Desire, and Women in Bhawaiya Folksong

Analyses are inevitable before syntheses. In this context, it is expected that the sources of generalizations will be found through the analyses of the various aspects of the folksongs. Before delving into the analyses, it is important to explore briefly the terminologies going to be used here. I will focus on how Love, Desire and the Women itself are there in the Bhawaiya folksongs. I will then take a selection of Bhawaiya folksongs along based on the contents of the songs and their socio-cultural implication towards my purpose, how women are portrayed in different ways in regards to their expression of love and desire, inner feelings through the songs. The English translation of the songs can be ambiguous since those are my own but it is also about the researcher's freedom to set the context and socio-cultural meaning to the contents he/she could perceive. The politics of portrayal and debates on the idea of love and desire and their expression will be addressed to a possible extent in the next chapter.

The word 'Love' make us immediately think of a psychosomatic attraction towards other sexed people whenever we utter it. This biological tendency called 'Prem' in Bangla is only confined to the animals of all kinds having a heart. Though this biological aspect can be argued as not only the destination of love but still it is at the center of the discussion about love.¹² A recent study¹³ based on the topic "science behind the love" is conducted at Rutgers University located in the United States, revealed there are 3 stages involved with falling in love; namely lust, attraction, and attachment. Each stage involves different types of chemical reactions within the body (specifically the brain). Along with that, there are different hormones present in the body

¹² Bangla Academy English Bengali Dictionary (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993)

¹³<http://examinedexistence.com/why-we-fall-in-love-the-science-of-love/>

helping to excite all these three stages (lust, attraction, and attachment) separately as well as collectively. The general scientific explanation of finds loves as a short-stimulated chemical reaction of aminoethyl & phenyl that creates different symptoms on the body. Even from the interpretation of cosmology and spiritual presentment, it is evident that love is in the center of the creation of every kind; also in the creation of human. The Arabic word '*insan*', originated from the Arabic '*onsuun*', means human and *onsuun* means love. So there is a connection between love and origination of human. And it is the human which is regarded as the ultimate outcome of love (Kashimpuri 1974).

Bangladeshi folksongs address both the 'love' of a human; between men-women, and the love to divinity. But the Bhawaiya folksong comprises the love between human only. However, this love is basically attraction between men and women based on biophysical desire. And different encounter & retreat, sorrow & happiness, despair, lamentation etc. regarding that attraction. This love affair between the men and women is sometimes pre-marital, sometimes extra-marital and it also includes their conjugal life (Chowdhury 2001). During its centuries-long development, the Bhawaiya folksong has evolved a few basic types, with innumerable variations. These basic types will be described in due course. With a few exceptions, Bhawaiya is generally found in the upper reaches of the Rangpur district and the tracts of land that join Rangpur to West Bengal in the district of Cooch Bihar and Jalpaiguri. Bhawaiya is a love song pure and simple. Pangs of love and separation are narrated in the local dialect without poetic ornamentation. The characteristics of the land are reflected in its sharply rising and falling rhythms (Raju 2003).

Love in the Bengali Music tradition

When we utter the word 'Love', at the very first we recall in our mind its physical attraction towards opposite sex aspect in general. Thought love is not the only attraction for a human. It can also be an attraction for divinity instead. But here I will only stick to the love that occurs between men and women and its consequences. In here, 'Love' will be understood only as the physical and mental attraction between men-women and action-reaction, pleasure-pain, depression, the lamentation of separation etc. resulting from the attraction. This love between a man and woman occurs in their premarital life, conjugal life and sometimes it turns into extra-marital affair.

The ancient folklores of the tenth to twelfth century, namely *Charyapada*, *Gita-Govinda*, *Ragatarangini* are some evidence of a connection with Indian music forms of Bengali music. If we look into the tradition of Bengali music we will see, with these antecedents of Bengali folk music, it has always been concerned with earthly or human love. *Vaishnava Padavali*, another ancient collection of Bengali folk music also tells us the same. Here we see consecutive sequences of falling in love and the upshot is the union of the lovers. And after the union, there would be separation. This separation causes the lovers to pray, plead, slander etc. This rendition of love is also found in the prevalent folksongs, unlike the ancient *Padavali* the stages here are not narrated (Chowdhury 2001).

Love in the Bangladeshi folksongs is arbitrary in nature and hard to categorize or find out stages of formation of love, unlike the *Vaishnava Padavali*¹⁴. The narration of love events in Bengali folksongs draws images of the social & class identity of the hero-heroine in details. The identity of the persons in some cases is not understood from the narration of the folksongs. However, in the Bhawaiya songs, this class identity can be cracked from the women calling men (the lover) '*Moishal*', '*Naiya*', '*Sadhu*', '*O ki gariyalbhai*', '*Haluabhai*', '*Majhi bhai*', '*Saudagar*' etc. Some exceptions are '*Kala*', '*Potidhan*', '*Deora*', '*Sujon*' where the men's class identity is not revealed but their relation can be understood (Toru 2002). Moreover, the class identity of the persons can be understood also from the place where the lovers meet. For example, the daughter or wife of village peasants go to the river bank to fetch water where she would meet her men of love; most of the times they would meet '*Bhindeshi Majhi*' (foreigner boatman) or '*Sadhu/Saudagar*' (a businessman from abroad). In the Bengali folksongs the hero-heroine usually meet at the water side; in most of the folksongs we see the women going to river banks either to fetch water or to breath after a long tiring day or while in gloomy mood in the evening she would see her men on the boat and their four eyes would meet together from where the love at first sight happens.

Love & Desire in Bhawaiya

Bhawaiya songs are living records of the female world. The Rajbanshi ethnic group which is the upholder of the songs was previously matriarchal society but has changed into a patriarchal society in course of time so the songs now are sung by the men (Toru 2002). Bhawaiya folksong is full with love, attraction, and desire of the women; of them, the pain of distancing or separation has become prominent in the rendition of the songs. Interestingly the men the women fall in love with or get into a physical relationship are mostly of different occupation group whom the women meet somehow. We will see it in our venture to analyze some Bhawaiya folksongs to show how women's articulations of love and desire are portrayed in the songs.

Men usually fall in love seeing the beauty of the women; beauty is the main reason behind men's falling in love. But in women's eyes, beauty is not as prominent as in the case of men. In the Bhawaiya folksongs, it is the men who sing the songs but the songs are basically about women's experience and feelings. So it is argued that whether it can be possible to express else's experience. But in the songs, the way the feelings of happiness & sorrow, the expectation of women expressed seems truly compatible to the social reality and environment so the songs got acceptance in people. Women get attracted to the '*moishal*' or '*gariyal*' who plays the *dotara*; the tune of *dotara* brings her out of house-

*O mor moishal bondhure*¹⁵
Na bajan amon khutar dotara
Narir mon mor korilo re ghar chhara.

(Translation)
 Oh my friend moishal

¹⁴ Medieval Bengali literature; poetry often focusing on the Radha-Krishna legend. Also written *padaabali*; has the literal meaning "gathering of songs".

¹⁵ (Chowdhury 2001) Pp. 103

Don't play your wooden dotara
My heart cannot stay home anymore

The woman also feels for the maishal who graze buffalo near her house whom she sees frequently. She falls in love hearing the dotara tunes. Even songs say that the peasant's wife likes the man with dotara than her husband. Because the husband's 'haal er kamai' (wage for ploughing) only can fill her stomach, whereas the dotara tune is pabulum to her-

*Amar bari jan, o mor praner moishal re¹⁶
O moishal boishite dibo moda,
Bukkote helani diya re
O moishal bajaiben dotara.*

(Translation)

Oh my beloved moishal
Oh moishal sit on the stool
Leaning on my chest
Ohmoishal play the dotara.

But a man who does nothing but playing the dotara cannot afford to keep a wife so the woman who falls in love with that *dotara-man* tells him that she'd earn for him doing maid job and enjoy the dotara tunes in the leisure. These two songs tell us about that social condition of rural peasants where a woman is expected to be satisfied with her husband's earnings and else the husband can offer (e.g. physical needs etc.) since women are to stay home but the women in mind feel differently. They would rather do whatever they can, to have the person who'd satisfy her feelings.

Widowhood of young woman indulge her into a love affair; the widowhood and youth both considered as a special quality in seducing the men of desire. The woman narrates her physical qualities and provokes a man to love her-

*Tor kalar ujan bari, mui nari chitul adi re
Tor kalar babri re chul, more joibon hulusthul re
Tor kalar mukere hashi, moro narir dante mishi
Tor kalar jor bhuru re, moro narir komor shoru re*

(Translation)

You kala dwell on the upstream, I'm a young widow
You kala have curly hair, I have reckless youth
You kala hold nice smile, me also having nice tooth
You kala have dual eyebrow, I do have slender waist

Widowhood is still a curse on Bangladeshi women. Though the Bangladesh society sanctions widow remarriage but it is not as easy as it may appear. Polygamy is prevalent in Bangladesh. A man may marry the deceased brother's wife or the widow of some other person but there is discrimination against her. She is given a much lower status than the wife. A widowed woman often has no choice about whom she can marry. They are also stigmatized as being inauspicious and are thus left out from religious ceremonies and social activities. The death of a woman's husband distinguishes her from others in her appearance especially in dress, wearing of ornaments and other forms of adornments associated with marriage (Hossain 2012). So the widowed

woman in this song has to explain her physical attributes to attract the young man since she has physical desires that the society couldn't let her fulfill.

But, Women have always been oppressed in the society; regarded as 'Obola' or 'Durbola' which means weak. The men in such society don't even bother about what will happen if their wife discovers that he is having an affair with another woman. The following song says the woman's crush visits her neighbor girl crossing her door front but she has nobody tell this grief. Thus she would rather die; says, what is the use of her such nice physique or youth-

Kishermorrandonhon, kishermorbaron¹⁷..

.....

*More prannatho onner bari jay more angina diya ghata
O pran sajani kar aage kobo dushker kotha*

(Translation)

What is the use of my cooking, serving

....

My beloved passes my door-front to meet another woman
Whom do I tell about it.

But it is through the song she at least could express her inner feeling of pain not remaining mere Obola/Durbola as we always see them in such social setting.

Unlike pain of separation, the union of two lovers is not narrated in the folksongs. Bengali society does not allow lovers to meet and romancing in open place so there is no scope to see each other frequently and not obviously in a place where anybody can see them. Because the society keeps the door of fulfilling one's sexual desire through love open for the married couples only. Thus the love birds have to converge for romance in the wilderness very rarely. In the following song, the lovers fix a date in the darkness of night under a tree but the girl could not manage to come; the man narrates his bitter experience as follows-

*Tarik diya sokin chengrita
Boshiya thako gachhtole
Sara aite mok moshay kamraise*

(Translation)

Fixing the date didn't come, my girl
I was waiting under the tree
Mosquito bite me whole the night

In another song, a woman consoles her lover saying-

*Thako thako poran bondu
Thako poran bandiya;
Ak dine tomar moner asha deim puron koriya.
Jedin paniyamora na thakpe barite
Sedin ashiya bondu mor shoten bogolote.*

(Translation)

Wait, my beloved
Keep your desire in hold
I will meet your desire one day for sure.
The day when my husband won't be at home
Come that day and sleep with me.

¹⁶ (Ismail 2008) Pp. 104

¹⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb7PuFRH01M> (Last Accessed: 05.03.17)

While meeting covertly, the men and women gets physically involved-

*Kodom tolaj jaya koinna, goraye dil gao*¹⁸
Koto khida nagche bondu, odor voriya khao

(Translation)

Under the cadamba tree, lies the girl down on the earth
Says meet your hunger, oh my dear

This type of narration of getting physical or romancing in the wilderness only can be found in Bhawaiya folksongs.

Separation

Separation (*Birahain* Bangla) is called the best part of a love affair because one can realize his/her beloved person's value in life only in absence. The lure for the lover or desires to have him/her is seen in its best form in the time of separation. Biraha songs are basically of the description of the hardships and longings of a woman whose husband or beloved leaves her for whole a year or years. Sometimes it is in the form of a lamentation by the lonely one. Be that as it may Bengali Bhawaiya of separation must be of considerable antiquity; it has already been pointed out by various authors that it evidently reaches as far as back as to those days when Bengali merchants, in the course of their trading activities, made voyages to distant countries such as Ceylon (Khan 1987). The husband for whom the woman longs, is most of the instances called 'sadhu', i. e. the merchant. But Kathryn March (1997) finds many images of the pain of separation in Tamang songs of Nepal; which evoke a clear, complex chain of reflections on the human existence, especially about the place of memory, desire and worldly attachment. In Tamang narrative and song, those things for which one might feel the pain of separation when they are gone are recalled to mind with desire, that is simultaneous to "want," "need" and something come to mind. And she marks the desires as sensory pleasure (March 1997: 135).

Bhawaiya of separation is usually comparatively long. In the human love, the grief or sorrows of women due to separation or distance is more or mainly presented through the folksongs than of the men. Be it is the conjugal life or in the case of extra-marital or pre-marital affairs women always are found yearning as per the folksong tradition. Even the women want to suicide declaring the distance as unbearable. In the male dominated society women frequently get ditched by their lovers. Men move onto another woman or migrate to another place after having short time affairs with a woman. The most famous Bhawaiya says-

*Tomrageile ki ashibenmormahutbondhure?*¹⁹

....

Shottokoriyakon re mahutghorekoyjonnarire..

(Translation)

Will you come back oh my mahout friend?

....

Tell the truth oh mahout how many wives you have back in the home..

About hundred years back in the south Asian region the mahouts used to take the king's elephants in places where they can graze them. During their stay in a place for months, they met local women and built a relationship. They had to leave the place so to back to the king's palace after some months leaving the woman back. In that moment the woman would ask if he has wife/wives back in home in doubts because in that case, the mahout may not come back. Usually, the mahouts didn't go back to the place they left once as it was not possible being in such profession thus the woman had to lose their beloved. In such situation, the women only could sob or yarn in pain of losing their beloved. This event is illustrated in the above song but at the same time, the woman asks if the husband has a wife back in home just to be sure he'd come back or not. The above song's next stanza says-

Shotti koriya kon re mahut ghore koyjon nari re..

(Translation)

Tell the truth oh mahout, how many wives you have back in home..

This assertion of the woman can be indicative to the idea that women of Bhawaiya are not weak as they are seen or shown in other folksongs Bangladesh as well as neighboring areas. Elements of loneliness is not strong in the character like the Bhojpuri folksongs and others depict women longing for migrated husband from loneliness whereas the Bhawaiya women indulge into extra-marital affairs ranging from incest to adultery.

Adultery

The society limits women's sexuality through marriage system but the women are often dissatisfied with their husband's performance or in their absence the women wants her paramour ('*Changra bondhu*', '*Shona Bondhu*' or '*Nagor*') to come in her home while her husband is in the abroad. The husband has gone to abroad but is not coming back for years; how long the wife can wait! She cannot tolerate it anymore; wants to burn the husband's house and flee with the paramour in the darkness of night-

*Maug morata boidash chhara re*²⁰

Nagor, agun naguk chale re

Aij aite paleya jamo re nagor

In the song, a woman who is deprived of sexual pleasure is expressing her inner feelings. Same is applicable to the widowed young women. In the following song, a widowed woman seduced by a young man asks why did he adulter a chained woman by marriage at the same time she asks him to go back for the time being and come at night under the cadamba tree-

*Banda chhilo mor narir mon, dilen aulia*²¹

Alkar mone tui akone firiya ja,

Somoymoto ashis bapoi

Kodomtolay mui thakim boshiya

The adulteration that takes place in absence of the husband either being in abroad or died the main reason behind these is uneven marriage. Women being disloyal to their husbands

¹⁸ (Uddin 2003) Pp. 113

¹⁹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqRTwazpZ4>
Accessed: 06.03.17)

(Last

²⁰ (Toru 2002) Pp. 58

²¹ (Ismail 2008) Pp. 72

portrayed in the folksongs, demarks the unsatisfied sexual relation of the husband-wives, at the same times, wish for a man of their choice who could be friendly and satisfy them. But a woman cannot express the wish, her mother in law, sister in law and infant stands in between the desire. As the following song says, lover of the wife comes to meet her in the night but she could not go outside the room because her mother in law and sister in law were awake in the next room and her infant son cried out when she was about to leave-

*Noler bera lade bondhu purbaduware ashi
Nauaner jole mor ango gelo bhasi.
Shashuri nanandir gahr swami mahakal
Dudher sawal kandi uthe theksilo jonjal.*

Another Bhawaiya song shows the women also can indulge into the adulteration for the sake of their children unlike the above song; whereas in the above song we see the woman regarded her child as an obstacle to her sexual relationship. It is mind striking that woman can behave in the entirely opposite way; she doesn't only think of her own self. The song says if the Kabiraj²² can heal the woman's child she would sleep with him-

*Jodil sawail bhalo hoy
Tomar sathe genu hoy.
Bhalo koria deken sawail narir..*

Incest is another aspect of the adultery. In the following songs, we will see women having extra-marital sexual relationships with close relatives to fulfill sexual desires. One such song is-

*Ai bhaignajudiamar hao
Bhaigna koletuillanao
O shonarbhaignare..
Pagol oilamolpoboyoshe*

(Translation)

If you like me oh my nephew
Take me on your lap
Oh my dear nephew
I became crazy for you in this unbearable youth

The woman here seduces her nephew (husband's side); asks her to drag her on his lap. The young woman is crazy for the young nephew as her husband is the old man whom she doesn't like or maybe the husband cannot satisfy her sexual pleasure. Similarly, in several songs we can see women falling for their father in law, brother in law and the husbands also seduce their nephew's wife, sisters daughters etc.

Women having a special relationship with husband's younger brother is been a culture in Bengal society since very long back. The reason is may be Indian society allowed a man to marry his brother's widow after a certain period of time. They have a 'joking relationship' approved by the society. In the Bhawaiya songs, we see, the women calls her brother in law (known as *Devar/DewraI*) as '*bhaberdewra*' which is because they have a romantic relationship with their devar. In the following song, the woman calls her devar

as dewra before everybody else but the song says her dewra is her lover at the night as she calls him 'aiter bondu'-

*Diner dewra aiter bondure malle jatikul
Tok dekiya mor jobotir mon hoilre akul.*

From these few examples, it can be said, Bhawaiya folksongs portray woman's love, desire relating to their body which surpasses the hearty feelings. Women's intention is questioned here as love subsumes desire. In the following chapter, I will try to put light on the very point, why women are portrayed in such way? What is the basis behind the portrayal? I will try to fathom the social reality in it.

4. Women's experience, agency, portrayal in the folksongs

This chapter focuses on the ideas related to women's agency and the politics of portrayal discussed in academic readings. My analysis is based on an examination of the songs discussed in the previous chapter which I culled from anthologies of Bhawaiya folksong and digital sources. I will try to connect those with discussions available in different published literature of folklore. As a new student in the field of folklore I have the scope to put forth my thirst of inquiry; 'Because of familiarity in form or content, folklore has an immediacy with which students can readily identify, tending to further inquiry' (Haut 1994: 51). Though far from complete, I hope the selection provides a basis for the present study and its conclusions. I acknowledge the limitation of doing so; several flaws can be there but it is also true that researchers and the readers may have ambiguity in the interpretation of the same content and the meaning can be different from the field.

The songs are selected because they deal with women's common wishes, their unexpressed emotions, unfulfilled desires, hopes, and disappointments, and their reactions to their social environment since my study is restricted to the songs that depict women's wishes, feelings, emotions, unfulfilled desires, and reactions. The songs described here to give a variegated picture of the women of North Bengal. They do not depict only a conventional stereotype of women's desires and feelings, they also portray the women as ebullient and capable of expressing her emotions freely and with an abandon which obviously not seems to be true since 'Music contributes a vital ingredient in the cultural reconstruct of emotion' (Chatterji 1999). The songs tell us about the women's longing and wishes, their frustrations, and predicaments that accompany different facets of life; lay bare their status in the family and in the society. Some describe them as submissive and acquiescent, others depict them as bold, daring and rebellious.

Stereotype of the women finds its confirmation in the folksongs but also its refutation, for on occasion the women a nonconformist who is disdainful of social constraints, as someone who is prepared to challenge the established authority of social norms and customs, and is willing to forcefully articulate the injustice and inequities to which she is subjected. While she can be docile tough and indomitable as well. Women's folklore is so expressive of women's attitudes, values, anxieties, and worldview that it can be of considerable importance in interpreting society and women's roles within it. Folklore may even serve as a

²² Folk medicine practitioner.

corrective to overtly express male opinions about women and their place and outlook (Jordan and de Caro 1986).

This thesis, however, presents an analytical reading of the select songs, Suggests women of the Northern Bengal are deprived of their social agency. Dev Pathak (2013) sees in the case of Maithili women that, their songs, characterized by melancholia, emotional upheaval are sources of social criticism of dominant kinship structure; it seems same in the case of women of the North Bengal, as the songs also render an account of the women's experiences of desires and love affairs shaped by the social system of marrying off and determination of sexual relationship. As we see in the following song that a young married woman asking her son-in-law to grab her on his lap which indicates to her unfulfilled desires due to unmatched marriage with a man of the huge age difference. But this relationship in the social condition is regarded as incest and severely tabooed. So the sexual relationship of the Bhawaiya women is shaped by the social structure of marrying off a young woman to elderly man which leads her to such relationship that is not acceptable by the social setting-

*Ai bhaignajudiamar hao
Bhaigna koletuillanoo
O shonarbhaignare..
Pagol oilamolpoboyoshe*

Against the backdrop, the songs themselves are often redolent of strict societal structures and social norms. The exploration and analysis of a body of folksongs in which women feature as either protagonists or antagonist paints an insightful, sometimes exaggerated picture of the rigid gender roles that are so prevalent. Many of the songs evoke a great deal of sexism towards which many women are impervious. Whilst acknowledging that decorum and femininity may well have characterized the societies in which these songs were created and transmitted, it cannot go unnoticed that women were 'victimized, marginalized, trivialized, jeered at' in a number of the song's images that may appear irritating and unsettling to some contemporary listeners or analysts.

Looking for cultural truths in songs, scholars are in danger of reducing texts to ethnographic artifacts, overlooking the subjectivity and agency of performers (Narayan 1997). Women's "voice" refers not just to the spoken word, but also to perspectives on social relations that frequently go against the grain of representations stemming from dominant (male) groups (Gal 1991:178 cited in Narayan 1997). Srivastava (1991) in 'Woman as Portrayed in Women's Folk Songs of North India' says the portrait of a woman as depicted in these songs is often at variance with the conventional stereotype of an obedient, acquiescent, and conformist woman that is conjured up in one's mind. This article highlights the very important safety-valve function of these folksongs in which women are afforded an opportunity to express their bottled-up feelings and their longings in a socially acceptable form.

Other related work on North Indian folksongs has been done by many writers. These authors have dealt with folk songs from various angles, but none have discussed them specifically from the woman's point of view. They touched upon women's conditions, but only briefly, and has left many aspects related to women's emotions untouched; and, have

studied folksongs only in an anthropological and cultural context. Some have given only a general view of folksongs and have not dealt with them from the woman's point of view; mentions the names of a few types of women's songs, but do not give any texts or discuss women's feelings as expressed in this songs. These discussions focus mainly upon those that describe domestic rituals and tradition. How a woman is portrayed in the folksongs and what desires, wishes, and aspirations she cherishes, what frustrations and injustices she suffers, is a subject that has received little or no attention in the literature.

Against this backdrop, I sought to present an account of the Bhawaiya woman as portrayed in the songs sung by the man of North Bengal. Women's hidden desires, expectations, tender pangs of love, pain etc. as articulated in the Bhawaiya folksong is so deep but the performer and author of the songs are men similar to the Vaishnava poets where they felt the inner feeling of the women. And the men become successful in articulating the women's experience because the *Rajbonshi*²³ people are regarded as their repertoire of Bhawaiya which is a community that is thought to be transformed slowly from a matriarchal society to present patriarchy. This information about Bhawaiya folksong sets the trajectory towards my thinking about the women's position in a society articulated or portrayed in folksong. The woman, whose songs frequently feature love as their principal theme, is often seen as limited in her activities. The home is a common setting, and cleaning, looking after infants or going for a pleasant walk are her typical movements. When men are the central figures of the songs, plots are often humorous, and rarely involve melancholy or grief, and home settings or domestic housework are equally uncharacteristic. Such views are excited when observing the sharply contrasting male characters of the songs, whose voices and activities appear much more liberal and dynamic. Men are often assigned with professions (seen in the Bhawaiya folksong) such as *Gariyal*, *Mahut*, *Baniya* and appear frequently in sociable settings. But in Bhawaiya we can see women aspiring to earn wage to feed her expected dotara-man who has no income but the attractive quality of making pleasant tunes-

*Ki mok laage haal er kamai
Ami nari pushibo tomay
Barani baniya re..*

Emotion is central to the desire of the women. Before experiencing the emotional twists and turns of a relationship, however, the woman needs to find her man. Much of the traditional repertoire explores themes of a woman's desires to marry, or court a gentleman. For many of the women in the songs, to be 'left on the shelf', denotes dishonor. Emotion has represented a tantalizing subject for social scientific inquiry because it appears to tell us about our true selves; the self that, after all the thinking and interacting are done, feels the welling-up of rage, the tender pangs of love, the black emptiness of despair. Folklore opens up (imagined) private spaces, where beloved women do freely speak to loving men (Gold 1997). Additionally, since songs provide a medium for expressing emotions that are taboo topics in everyday conversations subjecting these

²³ Indigenous community of Coch Bihar who also migrated to another parts of North Bengal.

texts to close scrutiny allows us a glimpse of people's intimate worlds. In cultures that do not openly discuss inner emotional states, songs are the shared tradition through which emotions are expressed, thus providing a medium for the expression of what might be taboo in everyday conversation (Narayan 1986).

Since songs are pedagogical, critical, and interrogative, they offer abundantly rich source material for inquiry (Jassal 2012: 2). Songs make it possible for us to understand the organization of maleness and femaleness in relation to a patriarchal society. As the song suggest how dominant ideologists are not merely compiled with, accommodated, and reinforced but also resisted and interrogated, they also enable us to address the question of agency. Since songs are integral to people's life in rural settings, the light they shade on caste, kinship, and marriage, work cultures, gender, power, sexuality, family life, patriarchy, and, the forms of agency and constraint operating within the same framework turns them into a resource for anthropological research (Jassal 2012).

Veena Das (1988) in 'Femininity and Orientations to the Body'²⁴ suggest that "as the lawful wives of men" women subscribe to the "entire male discourse on female sexuality" but as "outsiders" they are perfectly willing to subvert it. Circularly, their subversions are nevertheless, put to the service of patriarchy. But what we see in most of the separation songs that woman yearning for private intimacy with the male she has around her other than the husband is fully mingled with her desires as the husbands are mostly aged or out of home for business. In the case of Bhawaiya, we also find this true. The women in the songs are seen to call the men available in their surroundings to fulfill her bodily desires even if that is tabooed and there be several hindrances e.g. their sister-in-law and mother-in-law awake in the next room or infant child may wake up any time-

*Noler bera lade bondhu purbaduware ashi
Nauaner jole mor ango gelo bhasi.
Shashuri nanandir gahr swami mahakal
Dudher sawal kandi uthe theksilo jonjal.*

Jassal (2012) talks about Agency in women's folksongs that, the songs suggest not only that women are influenced by the larger social and political structures but also that their actions, in turn, impact these structures. As Sherry Ortner has argued, "human beings make society just as society makes them." Yet if, in the process of reproducing society, society is also transformed, a notion of agency that is socially, linguistically, and culturally constrained is a more effective one when trying to understand how women are sometimes complicit with, while also making accommodations for reinforcing, the status quo- often all at the same time (Ahearn 2000). Jassal quoting Ahearn, suggests that instead of passively taking in the songs we might also fruitfully look for how the kinds of meanings that might emerge are constrained, that is how these meanings are socially mediated and "intertextually situated within a bounded universe of discourse". Since women's agency might be perceived as potentially disruptive to the social order, it comes to as no surprise that at different points in the narrative of the songs we encounter a various reference

to women's agency and the need to fear, denigrate, channel, and control it.

In the selected songs, the most prominent motif is the sexual motif. There are images of sexual desires, betrayal, disappointments and fantasies. The 'sexual' is culturally produced in these songs through a set of metaphors. Apart from expressions of sexual desire, songs voice sexual vulnerabilities of the migrant's left-behind wife. Since the men are absent, women get sexual proposals from other men. In the songs, the woman's brother-in-law is the usual seducer. The women in Bhawaiya folksongs voice their anxieties regarding migrant men's alternative sexual/conjugal arrangements at migration destination.

The desperation and longing for a man encountered in the songs put into practice through the use of rather absurd analogy. The measures to which a woman will go to secure herself a man for her own sexual fulfillment seem endless. The woman's life is often far from smooth, her anticipation of a happy relationship filled with pleasure sometimes interrupted by the call of duty. In the case of the melancholic account of feelings; her heart aches, hallows, and cries, and she expresses anger towards the man. The woman then recounts her lover 'wiping her flowing eye' and pronounces that will be married when he returns. This often seen in the imagery of separation in the context of migration of the men or setting out for business purpose. Here, then, several issues are being raised. The woman's naivety is striking, for she seems to fall rapidly in love and willing to wait for her husband return without question. She openly trusts him, and her whole life appears to revolve around him and his return. She does not seem to involve herself in any other activities and does not seem able to function without him. But what Bhawaiya suggests is the women not necessarily wait for the husband all the time. Her desires may uplift to a possible extent that she doesn't hesitate to elope with a young man setting fire to the straw roof of her house (of course meaning metaphorically) or she would meet her aspirant lover in the midnight and involve in sexual intercourse under the big tree in the darkness even if these covert meeting of the lovers is not any ordinary occurrence in a rural social setting, it may have serious impact if bare public-

*Kodom tolay jaya koinna, goraye dil gao²⁵
Koto khida nagche bondu, odor voriya khao
And,
Thako thako poran bondu
Thako poran bandiya;
Ak dine tomar moner asha deim puron koriya.
Jedin paniyamora na thakpe barite
Sedin ashiya bondu mor shoten bogolote.*

Finally, it remains to be noted that the women in Bhawaiya folksong are that category in the social arena which is not a mere inactive agent in the society. The way they are portrayed has social reality in North Bengal society. Thus folklore put forth the question of homogenizing women.

5. Epilogue

The whole dissertation revolves around the singular question, how women in the Bhawaiya folksong is presented in regards to their articulation of desire. To do so, I have

²⁴ Cited by Gold (1997)

²⁵ (Uddin 2003) Pp. 113

deliberated the backdrop of the study as for how the study is significant and tried to put forth the ideas and significance of studying music in sociology, the potential of folklore and its methods in studying women. Following the idea of researching through music, I tried to present a definitional discussion of folksong as a branch of folklore, and also tried to give a brief account of the genre of love in the Bangladeshi folksong culture, especially in Bhawaiya. Then I ventured to explore my idea of fathoming the portrayal of women's desire in Bhawaiya folksong and tried to set the context to my idea. Also tried to put the terminologies in Bangladeshi context and socio-cultural settings. To do so I used a selection of songs from anthologies of Bhawaiya and other digital media based on my vested interest. In the next, I opted to bring the academic discussions and arguments regarding the agency and politics of portrayal of women in regards to the select songs and the socio-cultural implication of Bhawaiya women. Throughout the discussion, I tried to argue the position of women as portrayed in Bhawaiya folksong that women cannot be seen as a unilineal category in the society.

Born in Rangpur and having lived there more than half of my life, I have the privilege of observing rendition of Bhawaiya folksong to grow my interest in music and studying them from the native point of view after graduating in anthropology. Love or desire is such inborn human instinct that is neutral of place and time. Nature of it may be changed with times, with the evolution of human thinking and perception towards it but that instinct has been there in every stage of human civilization. So the songs, especially the folksongs created throughout the time, will not be stopped no sooner. Of the Bhawaiya folksongs I have known so far, it is through folksongs that women give vent to their passions, their frustrations, their anger, and their love. It is through them that they voice their grievances and show their hurt. The folksongs provide vignettes through which we can look into the complex phenomenon we call culture. Folksongs are a rich source for understanding the place of women in our society. It is interesting to note that, the women in the Bhawaiya folksong are seen as perplexed by the pulsating desire which is dynamic, sensitive and devoid of fear. The feeling of love in women's life seems to overcast their whole existence in the Bhawaiya folksongs.

The select songs, with translation, articulate the support for the key argument of this thesis. Another aim of the thesis is to understand women's emotions which are best approached through the language of the songs discussed here. Abu Lughod and Lutz argue that "the singer's artistic technique, which involves deviating from the code of grammar as well as the social code, is a strategy for challenging that which has cast her out" (Jassal 2012). Close readings of some of the songs point to similar strategies.

The current shift in folklore studies toward viewing folklore as a process rather than as a product has led folklorists to look at it in context, in the hope of answering questions about what folklore means to the people who use it. Coming at a time when there has also been a rising awareness of women's issues and women's studies, this shift has meant that folklorists have begun to look at women performers, their tastes, their repertoires, and their use of folklore and at the meaning of women's folklore in the context of women's lives and circumstances (Jordan and de Caro 1986).

Influenced by this Idea, I ventured to explore how women in Bhawaiya folksong and their articulation of desire is been portrayed to address the current shift in folkloric studies of the women as a category to not treat it as a product of cultural studies rather as process by examining the activities of the women, their agency as being the repertoire of folklore and the meaning they can give to it. I tried to fathom the potential of recent tendency of the women studies with their lives and circumstances which raise awareness to the folkloric studies of society.

Anthologies of Bangladeshi folklore were not only a source of folksongs collected from the region but also helped me understand how a researcher's epistemological position is determined through her/his social location. I have tried to capture the multiple images of Bangladeshi women depicted in Bhawaiya folksong. Bhawaiya folksongs, however, go beyond the articulation of desire of the women, unlike other folksongs. Women are still facing emotional, social and material insecurity which manifests in their folksongs. Women's subjectivity, agency, and helplessness often have been subjected in the research.

It is evident that folksongs operate as 'small windows' of protests. Extrapolating idealistic stories of protests, based on our own politics, would tamper our academic exercise. Songs are meaningful in their contexts, performance, and aesthetics. These meanings are important as they index lives in certain perspective, politics, prosody and place. At the same time, these meanings are universal when we place them in larger socio-economic histories and processes such as migration. Questions of authorship of not only songs but also language emerge as an important concern. While situating the study in the language and cultural region 'Bhawaiya', there is a movement for standardization and institutionalization of Bhawaiya language, as till now, it has remained in the oral domain. Sheltering and scheduling Bhawaiya would mean improved institutional support. However, one could enquire the modalities of 'schooling' Bhawaiya. An investigation of politics, processes, players and pedagogy of Bhawaiya can be an important contribution.

The present study has focused only on songs sung in the context of desire and expectation of the women in Bhawaiya folksong. However, Bhawaiya folksongs and cultural imaginations exist beyond this limited context. Thus, a detailed study of Bhawaiya folksongs in different contexts and life processes is important. The most important pointer to these conclusions is, although intentionally seeking to create the perfect society, folksong would eventually divide it, and, though admittedly taking some time, women's voices would find their places in the songs. 'Women as repositories of Bhawaiya folksongs' offer critical insights. The song which talks about women's experiences, on what ground is sung by men? Can be a separate topic of dissertation. The main impulse to a further development of the Bhawaiya could be, how sex roles, social identity, community attitudes, and sex-specific performance contexts may affect the verbal art of women and men? But due to resource constraints and various limitations, I could not focus on it. Social location of the women in Bhawaiya can also be researched further.

There has been subtle critique with reproduction of folksongs in digital forms such as music videos found on Youtube and CDs. Bhawaiya songs seem to have authorial

signatures in their reproduction and distribution. One can map several features in this commercial transformation. One immediate feature is that of 'place'. Songs produced and exchanged in a rural, agrarian milieu are reproduced and sold in urban locations and folksongs are often identified by its singer-performers. This can lead a researcher towards provoking thoughts that how the reproductions controlling female sexuality, and the controlled sexuality can lead to sexual betrayal often seen in the visual articulation.

The conclusion I suggest should be drawn is that a very important limitation of folksong must be mentioned, namely that it survives by purely oral tradition. It has been counted by researchers of this field as a vital limitation towards any study of folksong and my vested interest was to inquire how Bhawaiya folksong unlike the other folksongs of the region is portraying women's experience.

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