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Echoes of Silence: Tradition and transgressions in folk songs of mithila

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Abstract
This article explores the critical yet often overlooked role of women in the creation, preservation, and transformation of folklore. Moving beyond the perception of women as passive custodians of tradition, it highlights their active engagement in shaping folk narratives through lullabies, songs, rituals, and oral traditions. These expressions, often performed in domestic or communal female spaces, offer sharp critiques of patriarchal structures and articulate women's lived experiences, desires, and resistances. By foregrounding emotional labour and everyday struggles, women's folklore presents an alternative cultural archive that challenges dominant historical and literary discourses. The article argues that folklore serves as a dynamic site of negotiation, where women both reproduce and reinterpret tradition, thereby asserting cultural agency in subtle yet powerful ways.

Keywords: Women's folklore, oral traditions, gender and culture, folk songs, feminist historiography, patriarchy, cultural agency, alternative epistemologies, emotional labour, everyday resistance

Introduction
Folklore is broad term that includes rites, rituals, customs, songs, traditions, proverbs etc. any kind of study of folklore will involve one or all of the above mentioned genre of folklore. The folklore has been characterized by Richard M Dorson into four categories: 1. Oral literature, verbal art, expressive literature, 2. Social Folk customs that includes group performances, 3. Performing arts like dance, drama etc. and, 4. Material culture like techniques, skills that are transmitted through generations [1]. The term folklore itself was first used by William Thomas in 1846 in place of, 'Popular Antiquities', which was until then used for folk. He called it the lore of the people that includes manners, customs, ballads, superstitions, etc. of the older times [2]. Usually the knowledge passed on through a non-literature medium is categorized as folklore. A.K Ramanujan believes that Indian culture the oral and written are deeply intermeshed into one another and the transmission and the transmission medium may change along the way [3]. So defining folklore has proven to be difficult for scholars and the most elaborate definition is given by A. Taylor. He says that Folklore is the material that is handed on by tradition, either by word of mouth or by customs and practice [4]. William R Bascom made an important contribution to the definition by elaborating that Folklore is an ongoing process to express information and belief within the folk groups through communicative means [5]. The functional aspect added to the definition talks about the idea of community and folk group. The folk expressions are a field of collective memory where classical does not get to dictate the terms and conditions. This work attempts to trace the sites of contuinity and change in Maithili folk.

[1] Dorson, Richard M (ed). *Folklore and Folk Life: An Introduction*, Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 27.
[2] Brunvand, Jan Harold (ed). *American Folklore? An Encyclopaedia*. New York, Garland Publishing Inc, 1996, p. 445.
[3] Ramanujan, A.K. *Who Needs Folklore: The Relevance of Oral Traditions to South Asian Studies*, University of Hawaii, 1990, p. 532-549.
[4] Islam, Mazharul. *Folklore, the Pulse of People: In the Context of Indic Folklore*. New Delhi. Concept Publishing Company. 1985, p. 116
[5] Bascom, William R. "Four Functions of Folklore", The Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 67 no. 266 (Oct-Dec 1954), p. 333-350.

The songs of Mithila carry genres marking their events, festivals and is often divided based on the social group. The everyday life lived through the folk songs across social groups seem heterogenous and yet reflect some sense of unity of meaning. The songs carry important social affairs like meeting, separation, life, death, union through marriage and worship styles. The folk articulation has two distinctive categories that carry all the genres into them, the songs of everyday life and the songs associated with performance of rituals. These songs are a medium used by women. Through these songs women present their desires, sentiments, wishes, aspiration, distresses and respond to their social surroundings hence it is a massive part of cultural life. The women are the custodians of the folk forms in Mithila, it stands testimony in the verbal expression. The songs selected below are in no way a study of the folk songs in itself, the study picks up selected examples to reiterate the points where the folk form of songs reaffirm the notions of continuity and change, along with social negotiations of women.

Rites of passage marked by songs

While there are songs marking the seasons, celebrating festivals, the songs marking the rites of passage constitute a major part of folk songs. The folk of songs of Mithila the songs of festivals have a very unique presence, it is the rite of passage that dominates the cultural life. The rites of passage are the events that mark a person's life that brings about change in the identity of a person, transition in the stage of life, and the end of life. These are life cycle ceremonies that includes, birth, marriage and death primarily [6]. The songs marking these events therefore display emotions. They are a medium of amusement, recreation, aids to ritual performances, cultural pedagogical tools, they express social protest etc. Therefore related to cycle of life and lived experiences women starting with birth of the child presents women not as agencies but its their bodies that become the sites of manifestation of patriarchal norms as bearers of bloodline in birthing sons. They are the carriers of patriarchal requirements where their individual personality becomes secondary and it finds outlet through their expression in folk songs. It marks the stamp of continuity, as they serve as medium to carry the patriarchal system in their capacity as procreators also registers they pain and anguish.

It starts with the first of the cycle, marking a person's life that is the beginning of it, which is the birth of a child. The rituals attached to birth of a person are sacred, emphasize the importance of protection for the mother and child and are celebratory in nature. The rituals are prenatal, natal and post natal. It is the post natal phase where the child has been born that has a dedicated genre in songs in Mithila called *Sohars.* Sohars can be found all over Bihar. These songs are sung in anticipation before the birth of the child and also sung after the birth. So, the first kind carries the description of cravings of food items, wish for a male child to gods and goddesses, behaviours of family as experienced by the to be mother, preparatory description of welcoming the child etc. While the post birth songs and are called *Khelauna* [7] and are celebrations of birth, marked with blessings and good wishes for the child's health and future.

The prenatal songs carry the folk knowledge of traditional plants with medicinal qualities that may benefit a woman:

जाहक हे पया पूरब बनिजवा, सौंठ, पीपर, गुड़ आनिह,
जाहक हे पया उत्तरे बनिजवा, लोढ़ी, सलौठी, खल आनिह।
हे पया हम त ककरो न बोलैब,
अपनही कुटब, अपनही पीयब, अपनही दरद निजैब
सासु ऐती घूरी फरी जैती, गोतनी पैंचा सधइती,
ननदो ऐती सोहर गैती, मांगती होरिला बधइया।
हे पया, हम त ककरो न बोलैब । [8]

(The pregnant woman is asking her husband to visit the trader in east and north and buy ginger, fig, jaggery, pestle mortar, grains etc. She tells him that she will seek no one's help. She will crush the medicine alone, drink them on her own and cry of pain alone. Mother in law will come, roam around and leave, sister in law will come ask for gift of the occasion, and co-sister will come and use up the loan taken for this purpose, soil ask no one to come)

The above song mentions fruits and herbs that are essential to the health of a woman who has just about delivered a child, a form of traditional dietary knowledge preserved through folk reflects in the song. The same song then signals at the selfish nature of the relations (in laws) and subsequent distrust shown in the lines of the song. She is ready to go through the hardship of using mortar pestle right after child birth than to call on her mother in law, co sister and sister in law. This song reflects the social struggles of a woman in husband's household. Her helplessness even in her position where she has just performed the supreme task for the family, i.e. bore a child is evident. The folk songs are a window to the process of negotiation undertaken by these rural women in their immediate social space on daily basis.

In the moment of child birth itself the importance of a woman and the kind of care she is going to receive was based on the gender of the child she was going to bear, or if she can bear a child or not. The negotiation power of a woman who had a son for the family would relatively be more than a woman who had a girl child or no child at all. Manu smriti says that women were created to be mothers, while men to carry the family line. Man offers the seed to his woman who is the field [9]. Fertility was directly related to the respect a woman gets in the society, it was the most essential prerequisite to be a wife. Manu in describing the role of women is descriptive of the boundary, a woman is to operate within. Yajnavalkya says that a woman needs to be protected, maintained because she will provide him with sons [10]. Hence any delay or inability to produce sons is a matter concern, anxiety and misery to a woman. It is to be elaborated in another song:

[6] Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*, London, Routledge, 1960, p. 2-7.
[7] Choudhary, Roy P.C. *Folklore of Bihar*, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1997, p. 122-124.
[8] Singh, Anima. *Maithili Lokgeet*. New Delhi. Sahitya Akademi, 2015, p. 169.
[9] *Manusmriti*. IX.96
[10] *Yajnavalkya Smriti*.I.3.78

बारह बरस जब बीतल तेरह चढ़ल रे,
पया हे सासु मोरा दै उल्लहन ननदो गरियावे रे
गोतनी हंसे बिकरार सबै धन बचत रे
पया रे यहे वरह केर बात जहर पीसी खायब रे [11]

(A woman expressing her distress and desperate state to her husband says that she is taunted by her mother in law, abused by the sister in law, while the co-sister mocks her that all her wealth is preserved due to her barenness. She says that it has been twelve years and thirteenth is ongoing of her being married to him, if she doesn't bear a child now, she will consume poison).

The helplessness of a woman in folk songs is indicative of not just social status of a woman but of it being dominant and prevalent enough a misery that it finds place in songs. Queens too are subjected to the same standards when it comes to her ability to bear children. Infact queens more than the regular folk are expected to bear sons, inability to bear sons can expose her, to be taunted by the lowest of the low of the society, irrespective of her stature [12].

ललना रे ताहि तर बेटी जनम लेल, पुरुष वपक्ष भेल रे
कथीऐ ओढ़न, कथीऐ पहिरन,कथीऐ पथ भोजन रे
ललना रे कथीऐ जराएब सोड़री घर पुरुष वपक्ष भेल रे
गुदड़ी ओढ़न गुदड़ी पहिरन कोदो पथ भोजन रे

(A mother asks her infant, why she chose to be a girl, opposite of men. She says how u will be taken care of, where will your food, clothes etc. come from. To which in the song she replies how tattered cloth for clothes, millets for food is how she will survive).

The song is representative of how girl child was least bit desired, and the choices made for her are only for survival hence she needs to learn to adjust and compromise from birth itself. Birth of a girl child often would lead to no celebration, no respect to the mother until she bears a son, girl children are not taken care of, if they are not ignored.

The songs of birth give an interesting peek into the beauty standards of the period, or atleast the preferences of the time. Probably a fuller body was considered suitable for child birth and any other kinds of body in pregnancy was seen as a risk. Specially a thinner body would lead to concern over its ability to bear children.

The following lines give a good insight into the same:

एक या हम धनि पातरी दोसर गरभ संओ रे
ललना रे तेसर पया केर दुलारी दर्द कोना सहब रे
कथी ले हे बाबा बियाहलनी देलनि ससुर घर रे
ललना रे रहीतों में बारी कुमारी दरद नहीं बु झतों रे [13]

(The song describes how her body is thin and she is pregnant. She is worried that she may not be able bear the pain as she is also pampered. She further complains to her father and asks him why he married her and sent her off to inlaws house, had she been unmarried she would not have to bear such a pain.)

The woman's inability, the pain and suffering of a woman is not a consideration in the social requirement for a son in patriarchal system. Hence the classical texts are usually silent on the matter while the folk presents their fears, anxieties and the compulsion of bearing a child as their prime duty. As elaborated above the classical texts like Manusmriti, Yajnavalkyasmriti, Mahabharat talk about the laws related to inheritance, qualities of a good wife, mother, importance of child birth, all which is explained from philosophical point of view. While the folk songs express the real experiences that are human, alive and experiential aspect of the philosophies. When studied parallel to the classical texts, the folklores present a very powerful and nuanced tool to study the changes in social customs and beliefs, on ground negotiations, sites of protest, class struggles.

The songs show how the castes had their respective roles in the performative rituals related to rite of passage. From birth of a child to death, castes like dhobi, dom, barber is mentioned in these folksongs.

दौड़ी दौड़ी जाऊ पया डगरिन बोलाऊ अंगने में
नारी छिलवायब अंगने में
दौड़ी दौड़ी जाऊ पया नौनी बजाठ बोलाऊ अंगने में
नह टोंगवायब अंगने में
दौड़ी दौड़ी जाऊ पया धोबिनिया बजाठ अंगने में
कपड़ा धोआएब अंगने में [14]

(The mother asks her husband to call on the woman from lower caste to trim the umbilical chord of the child, wife of the barber to trim her nails, washer woman's wife for washing clothes-all which are part of rituals and celebration post birth of a child).

Examples of such scenarios where women belonging to certain castes are called upon to undertake their caste specific duties in rituals. It is a site where women confirm to the caste related roles through their folk expressions. Like in marriages the following songs is sung by women:

गे धोबिनिया गे तोरा अजब खयाल
धोबिया के जनमल नूआ खंचे गेल
बाहमन के जनमल पोथी लै के गैल
धोबिनिया ने तोरा अजब खयाल
नौनिया गे तोरा अजब खयाल
नौआ के जनमल केस काटे गेल
बाहमन के जनमल पोथी पढें गैल
नौनिया गे तोरा अजब खयाल
धोबिनिया गे तोरा अजब खयाल [15]

[11] Singh, Anima. *Maithili Lokgeet*. New Delhi. Sahitya Akademi, 2015, p. 144.
[12] Deva, Indra. *Folk Culture and Peasant Society in India*. Jaipur, India, Rawat Publications, 1989. p-155
[13]Anand, Vibhuti. *Geetnaad: Maithili Lokgeet Abhinav Sankalan*, Patna, Murlidhar Press, 1997, p.150
[14] Anand, Vibhuti. *Geetnaad: Maithili Lokgeet Abhinav Sankalan*, Patna, Murlidhar Press, 1997, p.150

(The song taunts the women of their caste for having acting out of character, they are reminded of their prescribed duties as per their caste. Dhobi/washerman/is for washing clothes, barber for hair cutting, and they must not forget their place).
Marriage is a very important rite in every culture. It has religious sanction, it ensure lineages and inheritances making it a legal necessity, it has socioeconomic importance, that makes it most premiere of the rituals performed through life.
After the birth related songs the most important ritual is the marriage of a person. The man woman union was considered sacred also encompassing and guiding the moral grounds for the society [16]. The scriptures claim that marriage rites had basic purpose, it was to enable a man to fulfill his religious duty, as an unmarried man is considered incomplete for ceremonies of the worldly life. The concept of *Ardhanarishwar*, further exemplifies the belief that half male and half female is what symbolizes the conjoint parenthood [17]. Signaling the process of procreation, an important necessity for continuity of the human race. The duty to procreate is often described as debt to be repaid by a male heir to their father by continuing the family line. The couples are bound to each other through the rituals for seven life cycles, in other words it is reflective of the intensity of the importance of institution of marriage in the society [18].
The folk ceremonies and rituals related to marriage in Mithila are based on *Grhyasutra* that also honoured the local variation subject to tradition and customs.
While there are songs marking every big and small ritual during a marriage it is the kohabar that is of significance to this study. Hence in the cultural life of Mithila marriage the Kohabar was an important, sacred and symbolic space, interestingly enough it is also a space for entertainment, fun that acts as stress bursting exercise for the women folk. In the first phase of marriage ceremony when the bride and the groom sides are undergoing the set of rituals on their respective side, they are in their individual capacity taken to kohabar after haldi, infact a girl is not allowed to roam around freely and is made to restrict herself in the kohabar ghar, and after the marriage is complete the bride and the groom both are brought to this room at the girls house. Once the girl reaches the marital home Kohabar is again the first place she is taken to with her husband. This room is often her room with her husband post marriage. Therefore kohabar witnesses all the womanly expression and is also witness to all of verbalisations of it in folksongs.

When the boy is welcomed in the Kohabar at the girls side post marriage, the songs mark the welcoming tone

चलु चलु बाबू राम पैर में पहिरु खड़ाम
चलु करू आराम कोहबर घर में

बियाह भ गैल वीरान राती भ बिहान
सखी सब करे घसमान कोहबर घर में
घर में शोभ सुंदर पलंग झलके हीरा मोती रंग
सारी सरहोजी संग कोहबर घर में [19]

(Walk dear ram, wear your wooden slippers, and come to the kohabar room to rest.
The marriage ceremonies went all night, its morning now. The friends are waiting in the kohabar room, ruining the place in their excitement, the room is decorated with bed, and it shines like diamonds and beads. Walk to the kohabar with sister in law and friends).
The songs are specific enough to concentrate on the groom, respectfully offer him space to rest, to have fun. The family in the song ensures that the groom is accompanied by people from the household with whom he can show comfort and ease, almost every one named are of the same generation indicative of the same age group. The songs highlight the important status and place, a man, specially a groom enjoys in society.

कउन बाबा बनल ऐहो बनसार घरवा हे जनकपुर कोहबर,
कउन अम्मा लखल पुरइन हे जनकपुर कोहबर।
आपन बाबा बनल ऐहो बनसार घरवा,
एहब अम्मा लखल पुरइन हे जनकपुर कोहबर। [20]

(What father decided this room/house oh Janakpur's Kohabar, which mother wrote and painted oh Janakpur Kohabar. Your father decided this room/house, your mother wrote/painted the Kohabar.)
The song here once again highlights the importance of Kohabar. The marriages would typically start with matchmaking. The marriages were arranged by the parents as per the caste, community alignment of the prospective bride and groom. Along with the social category the typical scrutiny would also include appearances, personal conditions, financial or economic status of the families and background in general. Some folk songs in Mithila infact mention criterion for choosing a groom [21]. Once the family has been scanned, *Panjis* are matched ensuring no chances of incest and ensuring purity of blood. So much was the obsession with *Panji* matching for the validation of

[15] Singh, Anima. *Maithili Lokgeet*. New Delhi. Sahitya Akademi. 2015, p.271.
[16] Sholapurkar, G.R. *Religious Rites and Festivals of India*. New Delhi. Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan. 1990, p. 123.
[17] Roy, Ramashray. *Samskara in Indian Tradition and Culture*. Delhi, Shipra Publication. 2003, p. 91-94.
[18] Achari, Sri Rama Ramanuja. *The Hindu Sacrament of Marriage*, Sinha Publication, p. 7.
https://www.srimatham.com/uploads/5/5/4/9/5549439/the_hindu_sacrament_of_marriage.pdf

[19] Anima, *Maithili Lokgeet*.2015, p. 238.
[20] Singh, Anima. *Maithili Lokgeet*. New Delhi. Sahitya Akademi. 2015, p. 247

[21] पहिने देखब वर तहखन धन धाम,
बहार भीतर घू म देखब मकान।
जकर धया हे सयान,
जाति पाँति माय बाप कुल खानदान,
गाय बैल भैंस देखी खेत खरिहार

As mentioned in, Singh, Anima. Mithila Lokgeet. New Delhi, Sahintya Akademy. 2015, p.210.; though the time period of the origin of the song is not known, it may be stipulated that the song enters the folk expression due to the prevalence of the practice in the region.

marriages that the boundaries set by the brahmin and Kayastha Community used it to control membership of the community through it [22].

Therefore equally auspicious task of painting the kohabar was a popular task and the painters were considered important, it was a task women took pride in. It was a task that was reserved for the elder ladies who were in tern only assisted by the younger lot. It is almost in all the songs that only elder women of the family have been mentioned as the artist of kohabar.

कोहबर लखे चली सासु सुनइना ओ जनकपुर कोहबर,
कोहबर लखू हे चत लागी हे जनकपुर कोहबर। [23]

(The mother in law goes to write the kohabar, oh Janakpur Kohabar. Write the kohabar with concentration, oh Janakpur Kohabar),

The Kohabar songs carry the role of kohabar and the space. It is painted in the room where there newly weeded brides would be sleeping hence the mating is described in the songs at times in playful manner and at times the songs have teachings for the bribe as to what to do in kohabar:

बड़ा भारी जुलुम कैलों हे मैना,
नारद पर वश्वास कैलों।
गौरी के संताप दैलौं नारद पर वश्वास कैलों।
दांत टूटल केश पकड़ल वर के,
कोना परिची आनि लैलों।

(Singh, Arunima. Maithili Lokgeet, 2015, p, 13.) meaning gauri's mother is upset after she has the first look of shiva. She refuses to give her daughter to him. The match is made by the middle man to an older man who has broken teeth and grey hair.) For detail see, Singh Rameshwar. "Maithili Marriage"; Thakur, Upendra. History of Mithila; Jha. Genealogies and genealogists of Mithila.

कोहबर कोहबर सुनिए माई हे
कोहबर कौन रंग होय
ब ा भरी लखूं नव कोहबर
वैह रंग कोहबर होय हे
ओहि कोहबर सुतला दूल्हा से फलाना दूल्हा
पीठ लग सूतू सुकुमारी
मुंहमा उधारी जब तक लै हिन दूल्हा
की जे की उभरते देल हे [24]

(The song here is a dialogue between mother and daughter. The bride, who is a daughter asks her mother as to what colour is the kohabar. The mother responds that she has painted it red and she must sleep back to back with her groom in it. Do not show your face until he uncovers it himself)

The songs mark the purpose and space of the kohabar but some songs also have playful nature to them when they describe the act of consummation of marriage in the space.

कथी के खाट कथी के म चया
लाल हो कथी के त कया
सोने के खाट, रूपे के म चया
लाल हो मखमल के त कया
सांझ भेल सांझौती के बेरिया
लाल हो मलन के बेरिया
भोर भेल चूह चूहिया बोलल
लाल हो बिच्छुरन के बेरिया
टूटी गेल खाट टूटी गेल म चया
लाल हो फाटल नव त कया [25]

The song here presents playful nature of the lovemaking between the bride and the groom. The song start with question: what is the bed, small bed and pillow made up. The bed is made up of gold, the smaller bed is beautiful, and the pillow is made of velvet. It is the evening, the hour of the meeting, in the morning when birds chirp it is the time to separate. At dawn the bed and the smaller bed is broken and the pillow is torn.

The playfulness of the women in the songs indicating sexual connotation, teasing is not restricted to kohabar songs, it can be found in almost all the aspects of folk songs celebrating love, man woman union. Paintings of the lower caste called Godhana also finds its place in the songs of the women. It in particular reflects the same, the song is symbolic of pain, longing, and poverty along with sexual connotation:

भंसा बैसल तोहे गोतनी बारतिन,
देहो गोतनी गोधना कौ ड़या रे जान।
हमारू पास गोतनी एगो ना कौ ड़या,

[22] At one point the obsession of the Brahmin community with Panji registration reached such a height that endogamy was no longer possible, as a result the system was adjusted. The original system required only the Brahmins of registered Mula could marry each other, it was a way to control the identity if Brahmins and Kayasthas. The declining number of marriageable partners withing the higher ranks of Brahmins led to extreme form of polygamous marriage. It reached to a point of social evil by the eighteenth century leading to Maharaja of Darbganga taking measures to stop it. The polygamy led to older men marrying younger girls and such practices are gain reflected in the folk songs like:

बड़ा भारी जुलुम कैलों हे मैना,
नारद पर वश्वास कैलों।
गौरी के संताप दैलौं नारद पर वश्वास कैलों।
दांत टूटल केश पकड़ल वर के,
कोना परिची आनि लैलों।

[23] Singh, Anima, *Maithili Lokgeet*.2015, p. 246

[24] Singh, Anima, maithili Lokgeeta.2015, p. 243

[25] Singh, Anima, maithili Lokgeeta.2015, p. 240

मांगू गइल पयवा बारिताबे रे जान।
जुआ खेलइत पयवा बारताबे,
देहो पयवा गोधना कौ ड़या रे जान।
गोधना दरदिया सुंदरी तोहे कोना सहबई,
मंगइछ हो गोधना कौ ड़या रे जान।
गोधना दरदिया पयवा घड़ी रे पहरवा,
तोहारो दरदिया सारी रतिया रे जान। [26]

(Sitting in the kitchen co-sister is flaunting, she got her husband to give her cowries. I don't have a single cowrie to my name, when I ask for it, my husband shouts at me. He was busy gambling. Oh Love! Ask him to atleast give a little cowrie for my godhana offering. Oh beauty! How will u bear the pain of Godhana. I am only asking few cowries for godhana my dear, the pain of godhana lasts only a few moments but the your pain lasts all night)

Godana in particular reflects the same time and again, the song mentioned below is symbolic of pain, longing, and poverty along with sexual connotation:

भंसा बैसल तोहे गोतनी बारतिन,
देहो गोतनी गोधना कौ ड़या रे जान।
हमारू पास गोतनी एगो ना कौ ड़या,
मांगू गइल पयवा बारिताबे रे जान।
जुआ खेलइत पयवा बारताबे,
देहो पयवा गोधना कौ ड़या रे जान।
गोधना दरदिया सुंदरी तोहे कोना सहबई,
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गोधना दरदिया पयवा घड़ी रे पहरवा,
तोहारो दरदिया सारी रतिया रे जान। [27]

(Sitting in the kitchen cosister is flaunting, she got her husband to give her cowries. I don't have a single cowrie to my name, when I ask for it, my husband shouts at me. He was busy gambling. Oh Love ask him to atleast give a little cowrie for my godhana offering. Oh beauty how will u bear the pain of Godhana. I am only asking few cowries for godhana my dear, the pain of godhana lasts only a few moments but the your pain lasts all night).

Tantra is a non Brahminical practice in its origin. Its origin and existence lie outside the Vedic-Brahminical framework and hence outside of the rigid caste hierarchies [28]. While the Brahminical texts, practices excluded women, shudras, outcastes, the tantra was inclusive of women and outcastes [29]. The use of Aripana and tantra is evident in the folk songs too, that presents to us the ever evolving folk space dominated by women. It is an evidence of change [30]. It may be recorded, as women specific protest through adaptability and it may also be interpreted as syncretic evolutions of local social belief that permitted the infiltration of tantric practices into mainstream society, especially in the worship of goddesses [31]. The women became the upholder of such practices through the household rituals like Aripana and fasts. Mithila, took pride in being a seat of high Brahiminical order with its contribution in legal philosophy, political treatise and commentaries and yet the women adopted tantric practices defying both, the Brahiminical order and typical classical tantric tradition [32] that operated on guru shishya traditions. The women collectively carried it, practiced it and passed it on to younger generation through careful training. The folk songs carry in them the symbols that are painted in the walls and on the floor even out of the kohabar. Very rare mention of the term Aripana is found in songs every once in a while, even though the art form is used in all the ritual performances of the women marking festivals and auspicious worships of gods and goddesses.

अरिपन देल सखी ओ शची रानी
हाथ कलम मसीहानी
चारु डीसी लखलनहीं इरिची मरी चया
माँझ ठा कदमक गाछ
ताहि तर ओछौलन्ही लाल पलं गया
सेज भर बिरिचल फूल

A woman in the above songs requests her friends to paint Aripana with a pen, colour all the four directions make a tree (kadam), and perform a ritual to guard the bed. Also lay flowers all over the bed.

The folk songs of Mithila stand testimony to the use of Tantra with songs like:

देह बाँधबा के मन्त्र
अंग बाँधो, बान बाँधो
औघड़ बाबा, कमर बाँधो
भैरव बाबा, गर्दन बाँधो
ते लया मसान, कपार बाँधो
चल जो गनी, छू मन्त्र
आ अँचछा माई [33]

(Give me a mantra to protect the body, bind the limbs, bind the body tightly, Oh Aghor baba, protect my waist, Oh

[26] Singh, Anima, *Maithili Lokgeet*.2015, p. 371
[27] Singh, Anima, *Maithili Lokgeet*.2015, p. 372.
[28] Brooks, Douglas Renfrew ''Encountering the Hindu 'Other': Tantrism and the Brahmans of South India,'' Journal of the American Academy of Religion 60.3 (Fall):1992, p. 405–36.
[29] https://www.embodiedphilosophy.com/tantra-the-next-wave-in-yoga-2
[30] Chakrabarti, K. *Religious process: the puranas and the making of a regional tradition*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 288-300.
[31] Menon, Usha and Shweder RA. "Power in its place: is the great goddess of Hinduism a feminist?". In Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M Erndl (Eds.). *Is the goddess a feminist? The politics of South Asian goddesses*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000. pp. 151-165.
[32] White, David Gordon. *Tantra in Practice*, Princeton, Princeton University Press. 2000, p. 3-36.
[33] Singh, Anima. *Maithili Lokgeet*, New Delhi. Sahitya Akademi, 2015, p. 401.

Bhairav Baba Protect my neck. Oh Spirit of the cremation ground, protect my head. Let the yogini spirits move and seal it with the sacred matra. Come oh powerful mother).
The words are clear indication of Mithila's folk tradition carrying the imprints of tantra. Such practices, the folk songs elaborate were not limited to rituals. It was used to deal with natures curses to villagers, like for catching poisonous snakes:

साँप पकड़बा के मन्त्र
इल्ल बाँधों, कल्ल बाँधों, बाँधों लोहवाला साईं।
पढ़ाओं पीला सरसों,
निकालों म णवाला साँप,
छू मन्त्र, आ अँचछा माई। [34]

(Bind and secure, Oh Lord bind and protect. Chant over yellow mustard seeds, call forth or make appear the serpent with the Mani. Activate the command Mantra. Come powerful Mother Goddess).

भूत प्रेत छोड़इबाक मंत्र
जाहर माई देवी दक्खिनवाली,
भवानी देवी, गाम के देवी,
जल बन्हौं, जलक काया बन्हौं,
भूत बन्हौं, प्रेत बन्हौं,
बाभन के बन्हौं, बान बन्हौं,
हनुमान केर पहरा। [35]

(Mantra to get rid of evil spirit, Oh Jahar Goddess, the one who resides in the south direction, Bhawani Devi, the protector of the village, bind the water and bind the watery form. Bind the ghost, bind the wandering soul, bind the learned Brahmin's curse, bind the arrow and place Lord Hanuman as guard).
Similarly the Aripana art marks the festivals and worships of gods and goddess, the fasts of the women also finds its place in the folk songs. Tantric tradition reflects the exalted position of women of women the sites that usually believed to be impure and unholy like menstruation blood signified was regarded as sacred. Tantra seeked to unleash the tremendous power that is associated to so called unholy substances related to woman's body in the mainstream texts [36].

गौरी पुजै चलली स खया जनक नगरिया हे
जनक नगरिया हे स खया, म थला नगरिया हे।
फूल, बेलपत्र लए, गंगाजल नीर लए,
गौरी पुजै चलली जनक नगरिया हे। [37]

(She goes to worship Gaura with friends in the city of Janakpur, the city of Mithila. Carrying flowers, belpatra leave, holy water of ganga, she goes to worship in Janakpur city.).

हे भवानी, दुख हरु मा, पुत्र आपन जानी कै
दइ रहल छै क्लेश भरी बीच वस्मय आनि कै [38]

(O Goddess Bhawani remove my sorrows, consider me your child. You are giving me lot of suffering causing me astonishment and confusion due to it).

गौरी पुजै चलली स खया जनक नगरिया हे
जनक नगरिया हे स खया, म थला नगरिया हे।
फूल, बेलपत्र लए, गंगाजल नीर लए,
गौरी पुजै चलली जनक नगरिया हे। [39]

(She goes to worship Gaura with friends in the city of Janakpur, the city of Mithila. Carrying flowers, belpatra leave, holy water of ganga, she goes to worship in Janakpur city).
Some songs give us a insight into gender roles like that *sama chakewa* where women collect and elderly women involve younger female siblings to sing and recite stories of *sama* like:

सामा खेलय गइलहु फल्ला भइया के अंगना,
दलवा लइ गइल चोर,
एक मु ी खरझ हो, भइया सेहू फूँ क करह ए जोत [40]

(In my brothers courtyard I went to play sama, my basket and all my dolls, the thief stole away. Light fistful of straws, oh brother! Spark the light and catch the thief).
The song is a clear indication of sister's dependence on brothers for protection, they call on them to catch the thief. It is a marker of and an opportunity for bonding between siblings. The festive months are the most striking feature of rural Mithila. The festivals find space for witnessing kinship networks in sanskaras like *janeyu*, deaths, and marriages each of these songs strike at the caste barriers and at the same time reiterates the importance and significance of social structure. For example a song marking *janeyu* ceremony, a process of declaring a male child's coming of age marked by wearing of scared thread through a ritual performed by a Brahman it says:

बकलेल बाब्हना, चूड़ा-दही चटाय, अइल हमार अंगना,
चउरा देहल जाएं, दौरा देहल जाएं, ढेलेल अंगना,
एक रात नोन लेके, करेज छठ के खेलखन [41]

(An idiot Brahman greedy for flat rice and curd, came over to our courtyard. We gifted you with rice and lentils, you hoarded them away, a bit of salt makes you crib about, not expected of you).

[34] Singh, Anima. *Maithili Lokgeet*, 2015, p.402.
[35] Singh, Anima. *Maithili Lokgeet*, 2015.p. 404.
[36] Hugh, B. Urban. *The power of Tantra: Religion Sexuality and the Politics of South Asian Studies*, I.B. London, Tauris &Co. 2009. Pp. 53-54.
[37] Singh, Anima. *Maithili Lokgeet*, 2015, p. 37.
[38] Singh, Anima. *Maithili Lokgeet*. 2015, p.126.
[39] Singh, Anima. *Maithili Lokgeet*, 2015, p. 37.
[40] Singh, Anima. Maithili Lokgeet. New Delhi. Sahitya Akademi. 2015, p.126.
[41] Singh, Anima *Maithili Lokgeet*, p. 178.

Conclusion

The folk songs presents a unique popular culture mirror to the socio-cultural fabric of Mithila that seems to have been going through a period of restructuring and eventually will give Mithila its unique identity. The exploration of Mithila songs offers a deep insight into the socio-cultural transformations that took place during the 14th and 15th centuries through the lens of the popular culture. The intricate art of Mithila served not merely as decoration but also serves as vibrant narrative of societal shifts, reflecting the intertwined identities of class, gender, and tradition. While political treatises and elite literature reflects change from a narrow perspective, the folk lore and folk art embodied the voices of the masses and castes, particularly women, who transformed domestic spaces into canvases of expression and ritual. They highlight the significant role of women in preserving and propagating the art forms, emphasising how their lived experiences and spiritual expressions shaped an artistic expression that transcended mere aesthetics. The nuanced distinction between various caste identities as reflected in these artworks highlights the historical reality of Brahminical dominance, while it also presents a window to lower-caste narratives through figures like Raja Salhesh. This art form not only served as a medium of visual representation but also as a subtle form of resistance, offering an insight into the complex social structures that governed daily lives. It becomes important to recognise the significance of folk art in understanding cultural heritage and social relations. The study of Mithila art may be out of the scope of this work but even a cursory look into various styles creates a deeper appreciation for the wisdom embedded in its motifs and teachings, affirming that art is indeed a reflection of life's deepest truths and cultural identities.

The folk songs too give us a peek into the socio cultural life of the region. The women can been seen as custodians of culture through these songs. They express their joys, sorrows, expiences, and concerns through these songs. The patriarchal set they operate under and the negotiations they undertake are evident through these songs. The agency and the autonomy enjoyed by the women in expressing, challenging and communicating forms their identity and govern their lives.

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21. **पहिने देखब वर तहखन धन धाम**,

    बहार भीतर घूमि देखब मकान।

    जकर धिया हे सयान,

    जाति पाँति माय बाप कुल खानदान,

    गाय बैल भैंस देखी खेत खरिहार
22. At one point the obsession of the Brahmin community with Panji registration reached such a height that endogamy was no longer possible, as a result the system was adjusted
23. Singh, Anima, *Maithili Lokgeet*.2015, p. 246
24. Singh, Anima, maithili Lokgeeta.2015, p. 243
25. Singh, Anima, maithili Lokgeeta.2015, p. 240
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