SONGS OF DEVIANCE AND DEFIANCE

SUBJECTIVITY, EMOTIONS AND AUTHENTICITY IN BHAWAIYA FOLK SONGS OF NORTH BENGAL

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TABLE OF CONTENT

ACKNOWLEDGMENT **1**

ABSTRACT **3**

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION **4**

PRELUDE 4
INTRODUCTION 5
Folk Songs in The Margins of The Identities *7*
The Embodied Emotions of the Marginalised *7*
Becoming a woman of Bhawaiya *8*
Emotional Atmosphere of Folk Songs *8*
Management of Folk Songs *8*
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH AND RELEVANT LITERATURE 9
An Addition to Postcolonial and Subaltern Studies *9*
An Addition to The Transnational Feminist Studies: *11*
An Addition to The Field of Psychological Anthropology *12*
CONCEPTUAL FRAMES OF THE RESEARCH: 14
Subjectivity, Becoming-woman and Assemblage *14*
Emotional Atmosphere *21*
Actors of Authenticity *21*
'FIELDS' AND MY SUBJECTIVITY AS RESEARCHER: 14
METHODS 36
Archival Research *36*
Ethnographic Fieldwork and Bhawaiya 'Sites'. *38*
Interviews *39*
Group Discussion *40*
Textual Analysis *40*
ETHICAL CONCERNS 41
CHAPTER OUTLINE 42

CHAPTER 2: IDENTITIES AND *BHAWAIYA* IN THEIR SUBVERSIVE MARGINS **46**

INTRODUCTION 46
THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES IN THE HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY: 49
Colonial era *49*
Post-colonial era *66*
After 71: West Bengal and Bangladesh *71*
SUBVERSIVE MARGINS OF THE IDENTITY MARKERS 72
CONCLUSION 75

CHAPTER 3: *BHAWAIYA* IN THE CONTEXT OF FOLK SONG GENRES IN BENGAL **46**

INTRODUCTION 78
FOLK TRADITIONS AND SEXUALITY: 79
Bhawaiya: Deviant and Worldly Desires of Women *84*
Bhatiali: The Song of The Tides *89*
Baul: The Spirit of Bengal *90*

Challenging the Hierarchy 97

Reconstructing Genres through Embodied Emotions and Experience: 98

Conclusion 102

CHAPTER 4: SUBJECTIVITY OF DEVIANT, DEFIANT AND DANGEROUS WOMEN 78

Prelude: “You are a dangerous woman!” 104

Introduction 105

Re-examining ‘female victim male writer’ idea: 106

Who made the songs?........ 106

Imagined past, imagined subjectivity: 114

Who is making the songs now?........ 116

Collective voices of women 121

Voice in negotiating norms: To be or not to be a ‘dangerous/bad' woman: 122

Becoming-woman through performance:........ 131

Intersubjective Negotiations 135

Conclusion 137

CHAPTER 5: EMOTIONAL ATMOSPHERE IN PERFORMANCES AND PRODUCTIONS 104

Prelude 139

Introduction 141

Experiencing the emotional atmosphere 142

Music that Hypnotises........ 143

shadhusongo and Merging the Individual into Atmosphere 146

The Object of Deviant Emotions 151

Performing in Desperation 153

The Atmospheric Emotions: 155

Emotions in Folk Reproduction 161

Female Factor in Urban Folk and Emotions of Deviance and Defiance 162

Subversive Emotions of Poor Urban Women 169

From Sexual Agency To Sexy Pop 170

Emotions in Performative Folk Festivals 172

Fluidity of Subject-Object Binary 173

Conclusion 174

CHAPTER 6: DEBATES OF AUTHENTICITY AND NATIONAL ICON 176

Prelude 176

Introduction 177

Problem of defining ‘authentic’ folk songs 179

Folk song versus Mass songs in people’s song movement 180

Authenticating authorities in Bangladesh: 183

Aesthetic project of the vernacular elite: 184

The Islamic moral guardian 186

Alternative musical quest:........ 189

Urban Folk in the margin 193

Nation-state and Corporate synthesis: 198

Critics by the aesthetic authorities 200

Authenticity in Precarity 203

Defying the authority with deviant elements:........ 206

Conclusion 207

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION.......... 176

INTRODUCTION 210
A BLIND SPOT IN THE IDENTITY BOUNDARIES.......... 211
FOLK SONGS OF LIVED AND EMBODIED EXPERIENCE 213
ON BECOMING FEMALE SUBJECT.......... 214
EMOTION OF DEVIANCE AND DEFIANCE 216
NEGOTIATIONS OF AUTHENTICITY 217
CONCLUSION 220

BIBLIOGRAPHY 210

LIST OF IMAGES[1]

IMAGE 1: MY FIELDWORK AREAS (THE BLUE MARKS) AROUND THE COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT IN INDIA AND RANGPUR DIVISION IN BANGLADESH 29

IMAGE 2: MY RESEARCH FIELDS IN BANGLADESH AND INDIA 29

(KOLKATA (CALCUTTA), COOCH BEHAR, DINHATA, RANGPUR, LAMANIRHAT, KURIGRAM, ULIPUR, CHILMARI, DHAKA)..29

IMAGE 3 : ONE PART OF THE COLLECTION OF THE OLD INSTRUMENTS OF RONY SARKAR. 108

IMAGE 4: ONE OF THE REHEARSALS OF *BHAWAIYA* IN RANGPUR SHILPAKALA ACADEMY CAMPUS 112

IMAGE 5: THE ORGANISATION RUN BY BADOL. IN THE LEFT THERE IS THE ORPHANAGE, AND IN THE RIGHT THE HOUSE OF BADOL, THE 1ST FLOOR IS THE STUDIO...133

IMAGE 6 : THE BAMBOO BRIDGE AND THE SINGERS WAITING IN NILOY'S YARD...153

IMAGE 7: THE SINGERS IN NILOY'S HOUSE...154

IMAGE 8 : ALEYA'S HOUSE FROM OUTSIDE, THIS IS THE EXTENSION WHERE SHE LIVES WITH HER HUSBAND. 157

IMAGE 9: ALEYA'S PRECIOUS POSSESSION OF GRAMOPHONE RECORDS AND CERTIFICATES. 158

IMAGE 10: KANGALINI SUFIA IN HER HOUSE IN SAVAR, DHAKA, SINGING IN FRONT OF ME, AS THIS IS HER ONLY MEANS TO EARNING. 167

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[1] All images were taken by the researcher.

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ABSTRACT

Bhawaiya is one of the most popular folk song genres to Bengalis. While all Bangla folk songs express the emotions and the stories of the most marginal people, *Bhawaiya* is significant for expressing the female passion grounded in day to day material reality through the stories of the female subject of the songs. The passionate lyrics of *Bhawaiya*, when expressing love and desire for a woman's lover, are not always bound to marital or 'legitimate' sexual relations. In this research, through the lens of these songs, I wanted to locate those emotions that are often seems deviant but at the same time can defy the normative control, to construct the female subversive subjectivities. To situate *Bhawaiya*, I re-examined the generic borders between *Bhawaiya* and other main Bangla folks song genres that were constructed through the rise of Bengali nationalism to see how *Bhawaiya* existed in the margins with subversive emotions connected to those identities. Through my ethnographical research of the '*Bhawaiya* people', such as singers, producers, researchers in the main *Bhawaiya* areas, I see how those emotions are evoked through performances and how they made connections between the performers and the listeners. Since the contemporary reproduction of folk songs genres is difficult to compare with the original traditional forms due to the technological changes and appropriation by artists and their different interests, I also examined how these changes create an emotional atmosphere that affects the singers and the listeners. The appropriation of folk songs by contemporary singers has also raised heated debate about authenticity. I analysed how, without having the authority over authenticating the folk songs, the marginal singers and folk song producers create a vast market for the songs that are often considered deviant. These songs, despite being considered deviant by the authorities of Bangla folk songs, can challenge the authorities of authenticity debate. Through these aspects, I examined the subversive possibilities within Bangla folk songs for the people on the margins tracing the construction of the perils and pleasures of sexual subjectivity through a variety of Bangla social-cultural fields.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

PRELUDE

“নদীরে...... ও মোর তিস্তা রে
O river, O my Tista river

তোর যেমন থৈ থৈ বেলা সেই মতন মোর পিরিতের জ্বালা রে
I am burning with love just as your tide swells in raptures

ও মোর তিস্তা রে
O my Tista

জ্বালায় জ্বালায় শরীর ঐ মোর খাঁ খাঁ করে
I feel the emptiness in my body with that burning desire.

I first heard this hauntingly beautiful Bangla folk song in 2009, at a crossroads in my life. Its fusion of melody and lyrics comparing uncontrollable desire and despair to the overflowing tide of the river Tista managed to articulate emotions that I struggled to express. Connecting my emotional state to the melody and lyrics of a song was not new to me. I found that music, learned and enjoyed from my childhood, shaped my emotional structure. In the same way, when I heard this song by the famous folk singer Nirmalendu Chowdhury, it became an expression for the emotional dissatisfaction in my life. The song made me search for more songs of this type and I found numerous Bangla folk songs with similar metaphors and tunes evoking similar emotions. The theme of melancholy and burning desire for the departed lover is typical of Bangla folk songs, albeit composed in different genres and with different metaphors.

Although generically this song is situated in the border area between *Bhawaiya* and *Bhatiali* (the two main genres of Bangla folk songs), I rediscovered *Bhawaiya* through this search and was surprised to find that the numerous song lyrics of *Bhawaiya* actually express something very different than what the dominant definitions of *Bhawaiya* or Bangla folk songs would suggest. I noticed that the lyrics of *Bhawaiya* could express a casual and expressive dissatisfaction with the institution of marriage without the moral and ethical condemnation that normally surrounds this discourse. The overwhelming emotions of *Bhawaiya*, with the female subject of the songs, defy the normative social boundaries for women, bridging the gap of understanding between my personal struggle and that of the academic feminist paradigm. The unapologetic declaration of the dissatisfaction of marriage expressed in *Bhawaiya* gave me the missing piece of the puzzle of my own inequitable union. Its unashamed emotional phrases thus allowed me to gain perspective on my own situation.

It made me curious to delve into the *Bhawaiya* folk songs and to find subjects within the songs whose experience and encounters of marital oppression (and its passionate transgression) are grounded in a material reality with detailed descriptions of the day to day lives of women and their passionate desires. My research interest – locating the female voice in *Bhawaiya*, is therefore rooted in my own subjective experience of *Bhawaiya* music.

INTRODUCTION

In this research, I aim to locate the elements of deviance, expressed through the words of the female subjects of the Bangla folk songs, especially the *Bhawaiya* folk songs and to examine the possibilities of these female subjectivities and voices. In Bangla folk music genres, *Bhawaiya* has the most marginal roots. Although it is not celebrated as the most prestigious one, it remains enormously popular, especially in North Bengal. *Bhawaiya*, which emerged in the Rajbangsi community of North Bengal, is famous for expressing the desires (often sensual) of women from a specifically marginal subjective position. The idea of 'embodied or sensual love' expressed through the lyrics of the *Bhawaiya* songs, often in the form of the deviant and 'illicit' relations beyond norms, is usually a reaction to oppressive marital circumstance. It has been assumed that most of the songs, performed by both men and women, were written by men, although the lyrics express suffering, resistance and desire of the female subjects of the songs and became popular with women of the area. While *Bhawaiya* is particularly characterised by this, many other Bangla folk song genres share similar expressions of passion through the female subjects of the songs. I will use *Bhawaiya* and similar folk songs and their lyrics as a gateway to explore the representation of deviant female desires and their subjectivities that transcend mainstream gender, religious, and national boundaries.

The folk songs have served not only as one of the symbols of the authentic essence of Bengali national and cultural identity but also as the blueprint of the emotional architecture that conditions subversive subjectivity and sexuality. My research focuses on this dynamic, examining how aspects of folk songs, especially *Bhawaiya* and its popular reception and reproduction, interact with and transcend colonial and post-colonial nationalist identity formations. I will examine the *Bhawaiya* folk songs that evoke the emotions of love, which are often deviant and through the performance and reproductions of which can defy the dominant discourses serving the structural power relations.

I began my research looking at the construction of the 'folk' genres in the context of the Bengali cultural renaissance – an aspect of late 19th Century Bengali nationalism. Despite the considerable effort made to construct identities based on gender, religion and culture, the subversive existence of these folk songs shows that the boundaries of those identities were never completed, and remain fluid in everyday life. Through my fieldwork, I examine the experience of singers, songwriters, musicians and producers in rural and urban settings, studying their interpretation of the lyrics and the performances, which illustrates the dynamics between normative discourse and material reality by linking the deviant lyrics with the lives of the people as part of their subjectivities. The female subject, expressing her passionate desire and longing, can connect the listeners with their embodied emotions and can create the temporal subjectivities, not bound to the biological gender. The songs are the thread for this research by which the stakeholders are interconnected with fluid subjectivities and emotional atmosphere. I also examined the emotional connection between songs and the singers to locate the elements of defiance in the agency of women to challenge the idea of the 'voiceless victim women' of Bhawaiya. Moreover, I aim to look at the dissemination of the folk songs to a larger market in the form of 'authentic tradition' on the one hand, and the transgression of 'authenticity' by popular reproduction and reception on the other. Authenticity in this context is also germane to discussions of the emotions of deviance and defiance, invoked in the lyrics and perceived by the listeners. My subjective experience and the critical theories of subjectivity provided the conceptual framework for the research. My objective was to connect my ethnographic experience with the subject I studied, that is embedded within the Bhawaiya and other folk song traditions, and to connect them with critical reflections on subjectivity, emotion and authenticity. Through this connection, I aim to examine the negotiation between danger and satisfaction of sexual subjectivities, concerning the Bangla folk songs, constructed through different socio-cultural moments.

CENTRAL OBJECTIVES

The central concern of this research is to look at those songs and their reproductions that have the potentiality to provide a form of emotional architecture conditioning marginal/female subjectivity, interfering with the normative gender, religious and cultural boundaries constructed by power relations. The objectives of the research are directed at the following areas of concerns.

FOLK SONGS IN THE MARGINS OF THE IDENTITIES

I aim to locate the potentially subversive voices and emotions that exist in *Bhawaiya* and other folk songs within their normative historical context. My objective is to look at whether the voices of the female subjects of the songs provide a cognitive tool of express desire that subversively slips through the boundaries of identities, i.e. Bengali, Hindu, Muslim, Bangladeshi, Indian, and Bengali and Muslim women constructed in the historical context. Situating the subversive existence of the female desire expressed in folk songs can be examined by the creativity and transgression of the margins of identities constructed through the political and historical trajectory in Bengal, especially across the *Bhawaiya* areas.

THE EMBODIED EMOTIONS OF THE MARGINALISED

All folk songs are the cultural products which convey the voices of the most marginal people, but *Bhawaiya* is considered to be the genre with the most 'down to earth' stories of everyday experience. I have examined the day to day, embodied emotions expressed in the *Bhawaiya* songs and situated them in comparison to other folk song genres. The generic forms of Bangla folk music are defined and maintained by factors of geographical place, elements (that is profession, musical instruments, religious or spiritual practices) and also by way of life. For example, while *Baul*, the most popular musical genre in Bengal had been celebrated for the philosophical/spiritual essence and esoteric way of life of the practitioners, other folk songs like *Bhawaiya* or *Bhatiali* are defined by the geographical and material reality of the musicians. I aim to deconstruct the boundaries of these folk song genres through their commonalities in connecting the voices of defiance with the embodied emotions and material experience of the women/subaltern, to challenge hegemonic norms.

BECOMING A WOMAN OF BHAWAIYA

My third objective is to see how the 'deviant voice' of the songs of the female subject and performances transcend the physical gender of female sexuality and desire. My objective is not to see these songs as a pure representation of female subjectivity, but rather a combination of its manifold possibilities. Men expressing women's desires, pain and rage in the folk songs can be seen as something beyond the gender binary and can challenge the 'male writer, women victim' binary. I aim to examine whether *Bhawaiya* songs, with their explicit descriptions of female desires, when written and performed by men, can be seen as a performative act in the constant reconfiguration of gender relations. The act of men and women writing and performing songs that describe the day to day events and passions of a woman's life, written in her own subjective voice, can be considered a performative act to blur rigid gender roles by 'becoming-woman' of *Bhawaiya*. I want to explore the possibilities of becoming 'female'/marginal subjectivity unbound from the biological body of a woman.

EMOTIONAL ATMOSPHERE OF FOLK SONGS

My objective here is to see how the emotionally deviant lyrics of *Bhawaiya* and other folk songs and their contemporary reproductions create emotional atmosphere connecting singers and their audiences across vastly different lived experience and even through the virtual sphere. In analysing this atmospheric emotion, it is crucial to examine how the emotions in those songs work to formulate passion and resistance through their reproduction in different bodies, genres, and realities. I will explore the songs incomplete and interrupted emotional formulation that connects with the various actors, and creates an affective atmosphere of passionate desire, pain and anger.

MANAGEMENT OF FOLK SONGS

Finally, my objective is to examine the authenticity debates about *Bhawaiya* and other folk songs and their cultural ecology, especially regarding folk songs as a 'national' tradition that serves both national and corporate interests. This can be analysed from a reflexive deconstruction of anthropology's longing for authenticity, by dissecting the politics of authenticity in relation to its multiple stakeholders. I aim to examine the discomfort of the state and corporate sponsors with the deviant elements of folk songs. The dilemma between 'authentic tradition versus deviant alternative' led me to unpack the process of managing 'appropriate' emotions, and the counter-hegemonic possibilities of alternative reproductions by urban young activist artists and the urban poor.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH AND RELEVANT LITERATURE

If studying people is the essence of anthropological research, ‘a genre of folk songs’ as a topic of ethnographic inquiry might seem to hide the actors behind their cultural product. My aim is, therefore, to bring the actors back to the centre of an investigation in which *Bhawaiya* folk songs provide a lens of examination to shed light on the subjectivities and agency of ‘*Bhawaiya* people’. Through the lyrics, performances, reception and reproductions, my aim is to analyse the emotional architecture of these actors, within the field of psychological anthropology. However, the scope of this research is not only limited to the field of psychological anthropology but also explores the overlapping fields of post-colonial and feminist studies as I will explain further in the following subsections.

AN ADDITION TO POSTCOLONIAL AND SUBALTERN STUDIES

Post-colonial theorists have shown that colonial norms were administrated not only through the law and institutions but also through the colonial hegemony of civilising the natives in order to legitimise colonial rule (Chakrabarty 1992; McClintock 1993; Stoler 2002b). However, in the dominant post-colonial scholarship, there is less emphasis on sexuality as one of the core pillars that strengthened the colonial discourse serving its materiality (Stoler 2002b). Ann Stoler’s (2002) emphasis on sexuality in colonial relations gives my research an influential background, but as the agency and subjectivity of native women in that historical context was not emphasised in her analysis, I want to focus on female agency, and how the expression of sensual love contextualises the ordering of sexuality in colonial versus nationalist debates.

In British colonial India, oppressive patriarchal Indian customary traditions for women served as a valid excuse for colonial/Christian moral superiority and interventions. However, these interventions were challenged by the natives, becoming a battle between white and brown men (Spivak 1999). In the two layered indigenous and colonial discursive battle, the agency and subjectivity of the women was completely absent (Mani 1987). My research is influenced by the two-fold position Lata Mani (1987) takes to dismantle those binary images and to reconstruct female subjectivity. Therefore, through the codification of marriage in the colonial era, flexible forms of sexual union have been excluded and redefined as ‘adultery’, of being the ‘other’ of marriage (T. Sarkar 2001). I want to examine the lyrics of

Bhawaiya which give us an alternative picture, showing the ruins of the previous forms of marital flexibility with their subversive and creative existence which is more than simply the 'other' of marriage. This subversive existence adds new possibilities to post-colonial studies.

Moreover, The emphasis on the 'post' in post-colonial studies doesn't always provide a path to see the continuity in colonisation, from where the term de-colonisation becomes more relevant. Decolonised feminist analyses highlight the continuous dichotomy between women of colour and Western/modern colonisation with the intersectionality of gender, race and class (Crenshaw 1990; Lugones 2010; Mohanty 2003b). Especially in Bengal, I place marginalisation not exclusively in the 'post' of post-colonial but rather to analyse it as a continuous process in the contemporary dilemma of the Nation-state.

The term 'subaltern,' introduced by Antonio Gramsci, was appropriated by the subaltern studies group to explore the historiography's silenced 'other' and their political movements and resistance (Guha 1997; Gramsci 1992). Gayatri Spivak (1885) later appropriated the project to locate subjectivity beyond political mobilisation. She argues that, if the scholar of subaltern studies is not critical of their own academic discursive construction of subaltern consciousness, it is impossible for them to hear the voices of the 'silenced'. It is here that Spivak's (2008) work becomes relevant to my research as she situates subalterns in a contextual space, in opposition to the Nation-state and civil society, not as an identity, but as a condition that constitutes the popular. Moreover, her approach makes sense as she merges the subaltern investigator with the social context and proposes the reflexive subject-object analysis, which is very relevant for situating my subject-position in my ethnography. Following Spivak, I will focus on elements of subjectivity, through the 'voice' of subalterns in Bangla folk songs as possible elements leading to transgress power structures, but that 'voice' is not always bound to the specific body of actors. This is where the post-colonial literature and psychological anthropological concepts of self and personhood come together with a unique approach to consider subjectivities, where the idea of subaltern is not enough to encompass all the aspects of marginality that the female subjects of *Bhawaiya* possess. Despite the conceptual rigor provided by Subaltern Studies, I want to use the term marginality, instead of subaltern as it better describes the unstable conditions that many of the actors must negotiate in their day to day reality. This could be an addition to Subaltern studies, but more importantly, through identifying the subversive emotions that rage against marital oppression and the existence of extra-marital desires among subaltern women, it will strengthen the intellectual enquiry that places marginal subjectivities at the centre of post-colonial investigation.

Moreover, Ratna Kapur (2000) used the term ‘sexual subaltern’ to examine “how sexual speech and the performance of the sexual subaltern in law can serve as transgressive spaces of desire and pleasure” (334) in a post-colonial context which interested me as it seems very relevant to what I’m exploring here. However, she uses the term ‘sexual subaltern’ defined as the opposite of heterosexual, married, monogamous, reproductive and non-commercial sexual orientation. Therefore, her exclusion of heterosexual women from the category of ‘sexual subaltern’ leaves no room for my research to see the women of *Bhawaiya* as sexual subaltern. Despite her useful critical analysis of sexual subaltern, it led me to move away from the binary of normative/non-normative sexual identities or practices and to instead focus on the power relations as the main factor in marginality rather than the definitive boundary of sexual orientation or practices. In my arguments, I will focus on the process of othering caused by the multiple indicators of marginality, on the ‘subalternity’ or marginality as the element that consists of the identity, not the identities themselves.

AN ADDITION TO THE TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST STUDIES:

My research aims to connect these dots of dominant colonial, nationalist and orientalist narratives to contribute to transnational feminist studies by challenging the ‘voiceless and victim’ image of Third World women, with a critique of marital ethics concerning other forms of sexual relations. The depiction of so-called Third-World women as victims, in need of rescue by Western second wave and liberal feminism, has long been challenged by black, post-colonial and Third-World feminist critiques. Those critiques have mostly focused on the women’s movement and collective struggles of non-Western women by bringing the experience of women of the marginal world in feminist critics (Mohanty 2003a). In response to this, the call for transnational feminist solidarity and ideas like ‘strategic essentialism’, ‘situated knowledge’ and ‘intersectional feminism’ showed ways to avoid the eurocentrism of white feminism (Crenshaw 1990; Harding 1991; Haraway 1988;). In that context, the contemporary feminist focus on gender, performativity, queer theory and ideas of embodied subjectivity provide conceptual tools for a transnational feminist studies. However, these concepts, are not rigorously examined to understand the experience of Third World women, where it seems most relevant. Recent sexuality and queer studies are providing sharp analytical tools to critique heteronormative sexuality and homophobia, but as such, women within heterosexual relations are not considered as sexually subaltern subjects. Critique of marriage has also, lost its importance in feminist scholarships. In this context, with the re-examination of stereotyped claims about gender oppression and silenced women of the Third World , it is important to see the potentially subversive agency against marital oppression by these women. There is a wide range of research available on sexuality in European historical contexts and the anthropological representation of sexuality in 'other' cultures. However the scholarly effort to understand sexuality, subjectivity, resistance and agency of Third World women from a feminist perspective is still very insignificant, hence the contribution that may be made by this research.

In this context, my research aim is influenced by Spivak's (1981) proposition of contextualising French feminist sexual difference theory in a global frame, which poses the possibilities of double vision: against sexism and for feminism, by deconstructing phallocentric interpretation and reconstructing multiple, heterogenous fluid sexual female subjectivities. It influenced my research to look at the folk cultural production, reception and adaptation by deconstructing the generic borders and reconstructing the fluid 'female' subjective position in opposition to the phallocentric singular subject. Therefore, my research aim is to contribute and create a scholarly understanding not only of the subjectivities of Third World women but also, have the potential to contribute to the contemporary feminist approach to embodiment and affect and new material feminism (Barad 2003; Bordo 1986; Braidotti 2003; Coole and Frost 2010; Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Grosz 1991). I aim to contribute a rigorous anthropological study embedded within the interdisciplinary fields of feminist critiques and post-colonial studies throughout my doctoral project.

AN ADDITION TO THE FIELD OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Studying emotions in anthropological research carries the baggage of modernist and Western individualist notions of the human psyche. With questions over its scientific legitimacy, anthropology tended to avoid emotion in favour of cultural manifestations of rationality, reflecting the binary in

Western philosophical thought designating emotion as a matter of psychology (Casey and Edgerton 2008). More recently, anthropologists who focus on emotions tend to explain it as culturally constructed and symbolically produced (Geertz 1975). The cultural/symbolic/cognitive versus natural/universal/absolute debate, like in many other fields of knowledge, occupied anthropological research in studying emotions for a long period (Casey and Edgerton 2008; Leavitt 1996). Later, anthropological terms have moved from a constructionist approach towards a more dynamic approach in the correlation between nature and culture and often explained emotion as embodied cultural artefact (Rosaldo, Lamphere, and Bamberger 1974). Emotion as active embodied elements of thought paved the way to see that culture and biology are related and determinant to each other (Moore and Moore 2007).

Incorporating post-colonial analysis of power structures in social conditions and feminist new material analysis of the body and sensuality, the psychological anthropologist’s recent focus to view subjectivity as a connection between body and social conditions is where my research can contribute (Csordas and Harwood 1994). While understanding feelings in line with this approach relates to the contemporary turn in affect theory, I want to be closer to the socio-cultural situations of emotions (Coole and Frost 2010; Dolphijn and Tuin 2012; Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Therefore, in my research, I use the idea of embodiment as the core of subjectivity that connects the body to the cultural situations. Here I consider ‘sexuality’ as the ‘existentialist ground,’ as Csordas (1994) puts it, for my research about the expression of defiant and deviant emotion in the songs, to fulfil the sexual desire and to keep it alive, despite the danger of doing so under patriarchal control. The subversive subjectivities with elements of material experience and embodiment constructed through lyrics, instruments, singers, and listeners can add to the field of emotional anthropology in understanding subjectivity.

Moreover, Saris (2008) argues that, “simultaneous presence of seemingly different forms of subjectivities” (309) is something that added to the interests in looking at culturally-constituted persons and selves in psychological anthropology. It also opens up the space for my research to locate the different identity constructions through the colonial and post-colonial process of Bengal, composing various forms of subjectivities within selves. By looking at the formation of identities and their creative subversion in the margins expressed through the Bangla folk song, my research can contribute to bringing the feminist critique of body and post-colonial understanding of subjectivities in the field of phycological anthropology.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMES OF THE RESEARCH:

On the matter of defiance and deviance of Bangla folk songs, I see deviance as a feminist aspiration when it means the deviation from expected gendered emotions for women. The deviation from prescribed patriarchal and hetero-patriarchal idea of womanhood needs a certain sense of resistance and agency of the women. I, therefore, see defiance and deviance connected and complementary. I examined the agency expressed through the songs and performances of the women to defy the norm in three areas. They are: the voice of the female subject of Bhawaiya and the temporal subjectivities it creates, how do the Bhawaiya and Bangla folk songs carry, create and connect these emotions with the bodies of the participants and the debates around the authenticity of the 'voice' of Bhawaiya and folk songs. In this section, first I will discuss the conceptual frame I used to analyse deviance and then I will consequently discuss the three sections I mentioned.

DEVIANCE AND DEFIANCE

The deviance theory in sociology and criminology was founded on the Victorian binary between public vs. private, sexual subject (man) vs. object (woman) idea, that focused on prostitution and promiscuity as forms of women's deviation (Franzese 2009). The initial feminists critique of the deviance theory was that it sees social deviance from a male perspectives (Forsyth and Copes 2014). However, acknowledging female sexual pleasure from the 'deviant' trope needed a radical shift of that perspective, to turn the table, to claim 'deviance' when it refers to female sexual subjectivity. It requires a double vision of against sexism and for feminism by claiming female sexual subjectivity. I therefore moved away from the functionalist deviance theory by examining 'deviance' as female sexual subjectivity and a form of resistance to the phallogocentric ideas of sexuality. Here, 'deviance' refers to the deviation from oppressive norms for women by reversing the negative connotation of it.

For claiming sexual subjectivity, French feminists were famous for proposing a psychosexual reclamation of the female body and pleasure to create women's discourse by rejecting the singular, phallogocentric, fixed subject formation (Irigaray 1985; Kristeva 1982). For Luce Irigaray, the female subject "is neither one nor two, rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two." (25). In search of this multiple subjectivity, Helene Cixous (1994) therefore, positions herself as a multiple 'I'. For her, "pure I. Identical of I-self does not exist...I is never an individual." (xvi). Subjectivity, therefore, according to Cixous is multiple, changing, a carrier, not individual, not clearly separate from the people who surround us.

Despite the fact that the French psychoanalyst feminists' provide a radical path towards reclaiming female sexual subjectivity, according to Spivak (1981), by universalising psycho-sexual emancipation of all women, they excluded the history and politics and homogenised the complexities and lived experience of heterogenous Third World women. However, Spivak proposes a rather more important learning from French feminism, which is to identify "the effacement of the clitoris" by the "uterine social organisation" (183) and to reverse the functionalist perspective of 'division of labour' that presupposes women as 'reproducer of labour' and normalizes it. For her, the suppression of female sexual pleasure independent from the reproductive system, is a form of clitorectomy and can be symbolised as the "ideologico-material repression of the clitoris as the signifier of the sexed subject that operates the specific oppression of women" (183). She, therefore, proposes an analysis that will consider "discontinuity, heterogeneity, and typology" that will "not necessarily escape the inbuilt colonialism of First World feminism toward the Third. It might, one hopes, promote a sense of our common yet history-specific lot" and "such a heterogeneous sex-analysis would disclose is that the repression of the clitoris in the general or the narrow sense (the difference cannot be absolute) is presupposed by both patriarchy and family" (184). Inspired by Spivak's argument, in this research, my investigation of the sexual subjectivity of the women of Bhawaiya, within its own trajectory of colonialism and nationalism, situates the women's agency to express their desire through the lyrics of the Bangla folk songs that often disregard the legal bond of marriage and therefore, pose the possibilities to bypass the "uterine social organisation" of marriage. I consider this process as the defiance of oppressive marital relations by the deviant emotions.

SUBJECTIVITY, BECOMING-WOMAN AND ASSEMBLAGE

Central to the enquiry of female sexual subjectivity is the trajectory of the concept of subjectivity from French psychoanalytic theories influenced by the Lacanian approach to poststructuralist feminist analysis of subjectivity. This trajectory provided strong theoretical insights for anthropological investigation, especially for psychological anthropology to go beyond the individualist idea of the self. However, while the French psychoanalytic feminists provide a conceptual rigor to go beyond the fixed identity categories and the possibilities of multiplicity of female identities, according to poststructuralist critique, it bears the risk of dismissing the defiance of the gender binary by sexual marginalities other than women (Butler 2004) and does not provide a conceptual path to see it in the intersections of multiple power relations (Hemmings 2005). In my research, French psychoanalytic feminism provided the foundation for locating the 'woman' of the songs and being the 'woman' through performances and reproduction creating a multiplicity of femaleness, but it is not sufficient to explain how that temporal subject intersects with other forms of power relations. One way to look at it is through the deconstruction of identity politics by feminist and queer theories and another way is to locate the relationships through post-colonial analysis of subjects/subjectivities. In my research, I aim to bring these two perspectives together in the psychological anthropological analysis of embodied subjectivities.

I used the concept of subjectivity here to locate emotional elements in the *Bhawaiya* lyrics in connection with the author, performers, and reproducers of the music to construct temporal subjectivity. The term subjectivity, as used here is beyond the term 'self' or 'persons' (M.-J. D. Good et al. 2008). In this research, through *Bhawaiya* and similar other folk songs, I see the subjects as not bound to the gender binary. In other words, instead of looking at the gender identity from the perspective of biological gender and sexual orientation, my aim was to look at the performative identity that is temporal and fluid and which is critical to identity politics. Here I used post-structuralist critiques in feminism and queer theories that problematise the identity politics constructed by essential/universal categories, arguing that rather than fixing identity before taking political actions, identity can be constructed 'through the deed' (Butler 1990, 142). Judith Butler's (1990) theory of performativity established that gender is not a noun, it is an act, with the reiteration of performance: "gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence….. gender is always a doing" (35). This gender performativity of 'doing gender' is relevant to see how not only the female, but the male folk singer can sing like a victim woman and also, like an angry female lover who scorns, uses slur words, and defies the marital norms. This opens up more emotional aspects of this performativity. The reiteration of the ‘female’ emotions of ‘becoming woman’ of *Bhawaiya* by a cisgender man, requires the reiteration of the female gendered role.

While Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity can be useful to examine the gender trouble in performing *Bhawaiya*, the process of becoming-woman of the *Bhawaiya* can be analysed more in-depth with the concept of ‘becoming-woman’, appropriating the idea of ‘becoming’ of Deleuze by Rosy Braidotti (2003), as the process of constructing multiple subjectivities. The multiple subjectivities of the feminist subject is ‘becoming-woman’ which is according to her, a “fundamental step in the process of becoming, for both sexes” (49). For this research, Braidotti’s appropriation of sexual difference theory with the Deleuzian (2004) idea of ‘becoming’, can be an analytical tool to understand the creation, reproductions of performances of *Bhawaiya*, by both sexes, as a process of ‘becoming-woman’ of the songs. Here, I am indebted to Braidotti’s (1993) reading of sexual difference theory beyond the biological body, where I focus on the idea of ‘becoming-woman’ of *Bhawaiya* to locate a fluid, female, temporal subjectivity. However, despite how this ‘becoming’ troubles the gender binary it is not intended as feminist, and yet I do not want to dismiss the feminist possibilities that may exist in this unintended becoming.

With Lila Abu-Lughod’s warning that the recent academic interest in intended politics was a ‘romance of resistance’, I am wary of quickly concluding that the existence of female desire in the lyrics that can evoke deviant emotions in opposition to the marital norm constitute feminist resistance. Through her research on Bedouin women’s resistance, Abu-Lughod argues that giving too much importance to resistance can obscure structural dominant power relations. She rather proposes to “learn various local and everyday resistances in the existence of a range of specific strategies and structure of power” (Abu-Lughod, 1990, 55). Abu-Lughod’s argument was not to reject the idea of resistance; rather she proposes to examine resistance as a tool of diagnosing power. Given her warning, I am hesitant to use the term resistance and instead use defiance with the deviant emotions of the women, that do not challenge the patriarchal marital oppression of the women, but rather, create a space through which to ventilate and reproduce their anger and desire.

Moreover, the romantic investigation of resistance of the women of Bhawaiya to challenge the patriarchy can also be problematised by representing 'real' woman and their day to day 'reality' as the objective truth that Julie Stephens (1989) criticised by connecting feminist projects in subaltern studies collectives. She argues, "in a discourse so connected with challenging the very process by which traditional 'images' of women are produced, it is surprising to find that feminist texts blind to their own image-making and laying claim to accurately portray 'real' Third World women." (Stephens 1989: 93). While Stephens' criticism opens up the danger of depicting the 'reality' of resistant women, Susie Tharu argues, that Stephens didn't position herself anywhere in the game and her selection and evaluation of the feminist movement in India is reduced and didn't relate the facts and struggles of everyday feminist life, and instead became entangled in many other contexts, such as nationalism (Tharu 1989). I found that both of the critiques have significant value and explored that layers of structural power relations work in every encounter of 'reality' in the field as Stephan argues. At the same time, I am aware of the danger of falling into the pitfall of the good vs. bad, resistant vs. conformist binary image making of the women I encountered. As a researcher, I situate myself within the field of the complex power relation. In my ethnographic fieldwork, I encountered the layers of factors determining the reality of the women who were participating in this research while interacting with myself. Even the forms of participation, from interview to performance, from casual encounter to musical rehearsal, changed the 'data', therefore, the reality. I did not aim to collect any positivist data, since the data was always partial, but not relative. This partiality doesn't disqualify its objectivity rather provides feminist objectivity (Haraway 1988).

This complexity also deals with the question of authenticity of the female sexual subjectivity as resistance. To resolve the matter of the grey area regarding authentic resistance or deviance through sexual subjectivity, I saw the agency of the women negotiating multiple layers of power relations. The negotiations are neither absolute resistance, nor conforming to the norm. The process can be compared to what Jasbir Puar (2005) used, as assemblage. Puar, who drew from Deleuzian concepts of assemblage, emphasised how the embodiment of context with subject, rather than fixed identity enables thinking beyond identity categorisations, focusing on the dynamics of power relations. This can be a very useful conceptual tool with which to explore the transgression of the identities constructed through the historical process in Bengal, from colonial reaction to nationalist imagination. The identities constructed around religion, nationalism, Bengali culture and gender never coalesced into completed identity categories despite numerous efforts of normative narratives. The deviant desires of *Bhawaiya* are indicators of this. The ‘voice’ of the female subject of *Bhawaiya* can be seen as an assemblage, entangled with the situation of the performances, singers, and listeners, and which according to Puar, is not an identity or entity with substance, but rather “dissipate(s) time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency” (128).

This expression of the female subject of the songs as assemblage can also be analysed in line with Anna Tsing’s (2015) use of the terms precarity and assemblage. For her, “Assemblages are open-ended gatherings. They allow us to ask about communal effects without assuming them. They show us potential histories in the making……Patterns of unintentional coordination develop in assemblages.” (23). When the male performer sings a song in which the narrative voice of the song is that of a woman expressing her passion, anger or despair, this creates a situation where the participants and audience are affected by the emotion of the woman. In this way it can be seen as an assemblage. Although Tsing intended to connect the human and non-human forms of life, locating the entangling assemblage as a life situation in the capitalist ruins, in my research, the songs can be seen as the ruins of the flexibility of marital ethics, the site where the assemblage of emotions gather. She situates assemblage as beyond categories, which in this case are the fixed gender, religious, cultural identities, “If categories are unstable, we must watch them emerge within encounters. To use category names should be a commitment to tracing the assemblages in which these categories gain a momentary hold.” (29). Following Tsing, I see the categories of male singer, female emotions, in the momentarily hold, where the emotions create a precarious subjectivity. Here, my use of the term ‘assemblage’ is not strictly Deleuzian, but is instead influenced by the appropriation of the term by Jasbir Puar (2005) and Anna Tsing (2015). I want to argue that this appropriation of ‘assemblage’ can help us to look critically at gender in *Bhawaiya* by focusing on the process of exclusion, marginalisation and subversion rather than losing our way in the labyrinth of naming and un-naming identities and their ‘intended’ resistance.

The ‘voice’ of the female subject of *Bhawaiya* can be seen an assemblage, entangled with the situation of the performances, singers, and listeners.

While the fluid subjectivities constructed by *Bhawaiya* can be analysed by the poststructuralist critics that I discussed above, I want to keep a foothold in psychological anthropology to remain empirically grounded. This enables me to fill the gap between overly theorised writings on subjectivity and the under-theorised writings, descriptive of social experience and emotions (M.-J. D. Good et al. 2008, 3). Anthropology’s dissatisfactions with psychology’s universalised and Eurocentric depiction of ‘self’ and ‘person’ led its interest in subjectivity to be grounded in the everyday experience of socio-cultural situations (Casey and Edgerton 2008). Geertzian’s (1957) emphasis on the ‘symbolic’ uniting of psychological and cultural themes, in parallel to Levi-Strauss’s (1979) theory of signification on formation of subjectivity creates a unique foundation for analysing subjectivity in anthropological investigation, famously articulating a cultural approach to subjectivity and a subjectivity-oriented theory (B. Good et al. 2007). This entails examining the intersubjective connections and power relations between social, cultural and political institutions, from local to global and in the everyday life of the anthropological subject (Marcus 1986; Fischer 2003; Ortner 1999; Rabinow 1978; Rosaldo 1989; Stoler 1995; Taussig 1986; Tsing 1993).

In order to connect the social, cultural, political institutions to everyday life, I aim to theoretically situate my research in between the analysis of cultural structures, the day to day materiality and emotions. My focus on subjectivity moves around the ‘voice’ of the female subject in *Bhawaiya* and its emotional connection between the lives of the agents of *Bhawaiya*, the song, lyrics and the instruments. This process is also entangled with emotions by the singers, musicians, performers, listeners and researchers within their grounded reality. I therefore, am not focusing on the social/cultural construction of agency in social science, neither the psychological focus on individual self, and making of person (2015), rather in the connection between them, situated in the real life. This also brings the study of performative subjectivity into the sphere of anthropological analysis. The subjectivities constructed by the lyrics, instruments, performers and listeners can be temporal, but at the same time the linguistic parts of it exist inactively through the lyrics which can become an active element of emotions through their reproduction and reiteration. This requires an understanding of subjectivity, that is not solely created through ‘cultural construction,’ but an ability to connect its emotional and psychological forces, bridging the gap between anthropology and psychology, body and mind, materiality and construction. Bringing together the concepts of assemblage and ‘becoming the woman’ of *Bhawaiya* through the anthropological understanding of subjectivity, I see subjectivity beyond identity categorisation, with multiplicity and within intersubjective relations. Experience, body and senses are the locus of these subjectivities (Csordas and Harwood 1994), evoked and connected by the lyrics and tunes of Bangla folk songs. The ‘doing’ genders here is fluid and troubles the gender binary but is not representative of ‘doing the actual resistance’ to marital oppression. However, the expression of sensual desire to break those oppressive rules, invokes a new subject with a ‘voice’ to complain about situations that the singer or listeners might not otherwise critique.

EMOTIONAL ATMOSPHERE

The relationship between emotion and art, and more specifically with music, is being studied from psychological perspectives in terms of the relationship between stimuli and responses (Eerola and Vuoskoski 2013; Budd 2002). However, considering the relationship purely as stimuli and responses, reduces the significance and historical complexity of this tradition in relation to the emotional experience of the listener. To locate the emotional interrelation with the folk songs, I find that Scheer’s (2012) concept of “emotion-as-practice” (205), influenced by Bourdieu’s (1977) ‘practice theory’ and Michel Rosaldo’s (1974) idea of construal “emotions as embodied thoughts” are useful. To examine emotional practice from an embodied perspective, Scheer (2012) searched for a term “less binding and more conscious than “habitus”” (216), which is relevant in understanding the emotions that Bangla folk songs carry and convey. She analysed the emotional norms that inform “the sense of what is "proper" feeling in the performance and reading of emotional expression” (216). For Bangla folk songs these emotional norms are described, defined and suggested by numerous books, articles and in the interviews of my research. However, in practice, the emotional blueprint does not work the same way as the emotional norms suggest. As Scheer (2012) argues, “that emotions not only follow from things people do, but are themselves a form of practice, because they are an action of a mindful body…. a definition of emotion must include the body and its functions, not in the sense of a universal, pristine, biological base, but as a locus for innate and learned capacities deeply shaped by habitual practices.” (220). This approach of analysing emotions is useful to examine bodies and their affect.

Feeling, as an incomplete state, shaped by the cultural products had been described as a “structure of feeling’ by Raymond Williams (1954). In his film manifesto, he argues, that the structure of feeling remains unarticulated, but through art it can be realised and communicated as a whole experience (Williams 2019). His idea of ‘structure of feeling’ emphasises the connection of the feelings through art, and a space for the inner dynamic of creating a new thought in a social discourse. He distinguished between thought and feeling as the latter is not articulated, but can be connected through art. It can be seen as a step away from the totalitarian constructionist approach of cultural theories to the analysis of embodied senses.

The contemporary affect theory, in this context, can be more effective in re-examining the atmospheric emotions, which are close to Williams’ ‘structure of feeling’. It goes beyond the social/individual or inner-outer binary, and creates the atmosphere in a more dynamic relation with different bodies as Scheer (2012) suggests, out of which affects emerge (Seighworth and Gregg, 2010). Eve Kofosky Sedgwick’s (2003) influential idea of affect situated the body and biology at the centre of analysing emotions. For many scholars, the term ‘affect’ provides that space, while ‘emotion’ cannot. As Pedwell and Whitehead (2012) argue “affect thus cannot be reduced to either ‘discourse’ or ‘emotion’, but rather exceeds these categories; it is a material intensity that emerges via the ‘in-between’ spaces of embodied encounters” (117).

However, the ‘affective tern’ to social analysis and anthropology has gone through many directions, including the post-deconstructionist path that defies the power relations as Clara Hemmings (2005) criticises. Therefore, I want to locate the emotions of *Bhawaiya*, with the analytical tools of affect theory, while also being grounded in Sara Ahmed’s (2014) proposition on the politics of emotions, by using the term emotions rather than affect, as the term emotions not only has a more social resonance to the everyday life, but also for how it situates ‘affect’ in culture and politics. Sara Ahmed (2013) problematised the approach of considering emotions as contagion in affect theory that is influenced by the work of Silvan Tomkin (1981), by which emotions are seen as something that unchangeably connects the bodies, “a property, as something that one has, and can then pass on, as if what passes on is the same thing”(10). She argues that the object of emotions changes and takes shapes while circulating. It changes with its symbolic meaning and the ability to create emotions in connecting bodies.

For her, “affects tended to be used a little bit too much at the level of an encounter between bodies” while she wanted to “talk about histories that preceded and directed this encounter and emotion” (Schmitz and Ahmed 2014, 97). As an anthropologist, I prefer the word ‘emotions’, because I want to use words that are familiar to the subjects of my ethnography and that have resonance with them. Through this term emotion, we can locate the performative act of gender by ‘becoming-woman’ of *Bhawaiya*, where female emotional situations were historically internalised through performances that evoke bodily affect. This gives me the space to discuss not only the situational and temporal emotional atmosphere connecting bodies, but also connecting histories or the perceptions of the past in the present for the practitioners of *Bhawaiya*.

The emotions in Bangla folk songs are most commonly referred to in Bangla as *bishonnota*, or *akuti*. The cultural sense of *bishonnota* is a tricky word to translate. It could be melancholia, but with a sense of the pleasure of loss (Mookherjee 2007). Similarly, the term *akuti* could be translated as longing, but with a sense of desire and desperateness. Bhawaiya was defined many times to me as the song of ‘nari moner akuti’ that can be translated as the ‘women’s longing’ for their loved ones or to express their loss. Seemingly, these emotions are classed and gendered. While in the literary and middle class Bengali circle, the terms can be used with a softer expression, in the subaltern folk song production, it can express a sense of raw anger and desire. The same word referring to the same emotions can be different in a different socio-cultural situation. These songs evoke the emotions of melancholia, loss, anger or desire, and can be seen as the object of the emotions that stick to the bodies while in movement. How the singers and listeners ‘feel’ with their sensual and material emotions, is a part of the cultural politics (S. Ahmed 2013). The weeping singer of folk songs transmits the emotions to the listeners and makes them cry which creates an atmospheric emotion, not bound to bodies and fixed identities like gender. However, not everyone in the situation cries, and even for those who do, what causes the tears might not be the same. As Ahmed (2013), it can feel, “like a thickness in the air, or an atmosphere. But these feelings not only heighten tension, they are also in tension. Emotions in their very intensity involve miscommunication, such that even when we feel we have the same feeling, we do not necessarily have the same relation-ship to the feeling.”(10–11). The emotions evoked by the songs, are cultural, historical, political and at the same time embodied.

I also used the feminist new-material tern on body, to locate the embodied emotions inscribed on the songs and to offer a re-categorisation of generic boundaries of Bangla folk songs by deconstructing the mind-body binary that creates hierarchy within the genres. The overlapping commonality of the materiality and day to day experience of women in the lyrics and performances can be used to deconstruct the generic boundaries between the Bangla folk song genres, and reconstruct the embodied emotions that the song carries and reproduces. In this research, the song as the object of emotions carries the emotions and connects the bodies, with their own subjective position grounded in both a temporal and historical context. Mookherjee (2008) showed that, for Bangladeshi nationalism, “nationalist emotions are evoked by linking representations of nature, space, earth and mother” (42). The emotions evokes by the songs are inseparable from the gendered nationalism, and the materiality of nature.

However, the same performances in a different set up, with a different composition of people might create different emotional atmospheres. To analyse this, the atmospheric emotions need to be understood in relation to the body and environment beyond the static structure of feeling. I found it to be what Ruth Finnegan (2003) proposed for the study of music form an anthropological perspective in anthropology of emotions, to focus more on the experience, using the example of Steven Feld’s ethnography of ‘Sound and Sentiment (1990) where he analysed New Guinean Kaluli’s “music not as text but as interwoven into all the associations that the Kaluli learn to feel between "birds, weeping, poetics, and song." …. the complex sonic world in and through which the Kaluli live, the ways they describe and experience it” (188) In analysing the atmospheric emotions, I will use the term emotional atmosphere, which is useful in keeping us grounded to the connectedness between bodies and atmosphere. For this, I will examine the *Bhawaiya* song’s expressiveness, performances and reproductions in a broader frame to see how the atmospheric emotion connects and transmits, but also how it might have more dynamic relations with the materiality, i.e., the bodies in the collective.

ACTORS OF AUTHENTICITY

The quest for authenticity is integral to the discussion and research of folk songs and traditions. It was in the foundation of anthropology’s original quest to explore primitive culture, in which the folksong was valued as the representative text of emotions of those cultures. The legendary folk collector and anthropologist Alan Lomax (1968) used the term ‘folk’ interchangeably with ‘primitive’. According to Lomax, “if music is the language of feeling, the age-old traditions of folk and primitive music may stand for formative emotional patterns that have persisted and affected human behaviour during all history. As citizens of one world and as social scientists, we must help to find avenues of growth for all mankind’s musical languages” (927). This romantic aspiration of one world, which was influenced by Western thought in the early period of anthropological study not only created the significance of fieldwork in the search for an empirically authentic culture, but it also gave space to develop a relativist critique of authenticity. As Fillitz and Saris (2012) argue, “the empiricist orientation of method (finding out what really was out there), the very-often individually jarring quality of fieldwork, and the theoretical background of the discipline intersected in a mutually revealing way ”(2).

This led to the critique of the empiricist modernist quest in conventional anthropological fieldwork of exploring and writing static culture that is not connected to global politics (Clifford and Marcus 1986). With the contemporary critique against documenting authentic and ahistorical homogenous culture, anthropology’s search for authenticity turned to the dynamic, contested and interconnected quest with the idea of multi-sited fieldwork. This led to a reconceptualization of the idea of ‘the field’ as not bound to a geographical place as representative of a culture (Marcus 1995).

In contemporary times, the search for authenticity turned towards the politics of authenticity in relation to the nation-state and commodification of authentic cultural productions. To represent the authentic culture, the nation-states not only “produce, regulate and protect cultural properties, they are also manipulated by traders, consumers, craftsmen, officials and artists” (Fillitz and Saris 2012,16).

While in the broader sense, anthropology’s interest in authenticity has been shifted towards the politics of authentication, constructing the folk song in folklore studies has had its own disciplinary journey towards the search for authenticity. Regina Bendix (1997) identified the romantic motivation of searching for an authentic cultural form, that in one way provides a different escape route from modernist corruption *“satisfying a longing for an escape from modernity*” (7), but on the other hand, for the disciplinary validation, it needed the scientific guarantee of authenticity. For this reason, she called this authenticity project as “simultaneously modern and anti-modern” (7). However, Fillitz and Saris (2013) argue that this is rather a mode of continuing a modernist agenda, complicated and diverse and seemingly rejecting the modernist narrations that can be studied by ethnographic fieldwork, whilst situated in the local moral worlds, through the production of cultural stories. It explains the search for longing in iconic folk culture, while escaping modernist corruption and can also be identified as a romantic modern escape that can be in negotiation with the interests of the nation-state and corporates, which I am going to examine in the research.

Moreover, as Fillitz and Saris (2013) argue, the production of authenticity is not homogenous or binary, with the effect of globalisation and the idea of diversity, the strategies of producing authenticity are much more diverse. The quest for authenticity *“*embedded in creative activities of social agents where to articulate their longing for ‘being-true-to-oneself’ that in effect produces cultural stories in particular fields (21). The educated, young urban folk song enthusiast, the authenticating authority of folk songs, and the people’s mass cultural demand and sense of belonging to folk music are entangled in that process which raised the question of authenticity of folk songs and led to the problem of defining it. Saris (2013) addressed this problem of alienation by revisiting Sapir’s (1924) article “Culture, Genuine and Spurious” and pushing for a more complex understanding of ownership towards cultural products. He argued, “For Sapir, a subject either shares a sense of ownership towards the cultural form that her material-spiritual labour has helped to make, or she feels that these forms are external, if not actually oppressive. For which, ‘how’ does the cultural production internalised and controlled by the subject, is important to understand why the authentic production of one era, can be experienced as spurious in another era.” (Saris 2013, 32). This analysis helps me to argue that, different agents’ interests and sense of belonging to the cultural products as ‘folk songs’ are more complicated by one or binary interests. ‘Authentic folk songs’ is impossible to define, and it is not my agenda to do so, rather the definitions are attached to the process of authentication by multiple factors, situated in a complex network of power relations and the interests of the subjects. Authentication of ‘folk songs’ is not only a matter of singular or homogenous authority, it is inherently reflexive to the subject who belongs to it, and how they internalise it as a tradition of their own. For which I see the hegemony of authenticity by the state and its apparatus and the counter-hegemonic potentiality of alternative and marginal folksong productions against it, in making the dynamic field of assemblage.

Here I want to use the concept of assemblage in the same way as Anna Tsing (2015) “that is, a mosaic of open-ended assemblages of entangled ways of life, with each further opening into a mosaic of temporal rhythms and spatial arcs.” (4). She used the term ‘polyphonic assemblage’ in the peripheries of capitalist production, which seems close to the situation of contemporary dynamic production of folk songs, that are neither definitive within any genre of Bangla folk songs, or even in the definitive border of folk song itself. The entangled and multidimensional interests and production of folk songs and the fierce debate about their authenticity, work in the process of negotiation between different actors, while the alternative and deviant production of folk songs are in negotiation with the Nation-state, the corporates and middle-class moral authority of folk songs. While the actors entangled in the negotiation are numerous and it is impossible to categorise them, it is possible to locate the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic trends. While Veena Das (2004) argues that the creativity of the margins is a necessity for the rule of the centre through which the anthropologist can provide a better understanding of the state apparatus, through my research, I see the creativity and possibilities of marginality as being more than that. I see the voice of the subaltern through the songs, as more than the ‘other’ of the self, or as the exception to the rule. Instead, following Anna Tsing (2015), I see the possibilities of life in the ruins. Defying the middle-class moral authority from the margins of the society can be seen as the negotiation of the marginalised, with a possibility of counter-hegemony that the state and corporates are forced to deal with.

In the contemporary Bangla folk musical scene, the old definitive generic boundaries are difficult to find in everyday reality anymore, rather, they are mainly used to signify ideas of authenticity. In the rise of urban folk music from a precarious cultural industry, the tunes, lyrics and emotions of folk songs reflects that precarity, but it also exists in a more fluid way in the margins. Not in constant flux, but rather consistently ready to take a new form of composition in every new situation of writing, singing, composing and performing. The ‘voice’ of the female subject of these songs, is situated not only in the margins of patriarchal and classed society but also in the margin of normative discourses. The persistence and popular existence of the deviant voices in the folk songs and the discomfort of the authenticating authorities in dealing with it, leads this research to situate all these actors in an open-ended assemblage of power dynamics.

‘FIELDS’ AND MY SUBJECTIVITY AS RESEARCHER:

In order to achieve the objectives of my research, I considered *Bhawaiya* as my preliminary field, which is a dynamic site combined with physical and historical locations. This ‘field’ is not only a geographical place; the geographical ‘site’ of the present is embedded with its ‘location’ of time in the past, i.e. the late nineteenth century. My field *Bhawaiya* is a prism, constructed of the people, place and time period through which I aim to observe subaltern/marginal/female subjectivity and sexuality in Bengal. *Bhawaiya* folk songs are the main traditional folk product of North Bengal which exemplifies its culture. Therefore, my research site was primarily based in North Bengal which is situated in the northern part of the Indian state of Bengal and the country of Bangladesh. The location of ‘North Bengal’ cannot be found on maps of Bangladesh or India but it still exists and makes sense to the Bengali people. This existence is more historical, linguistic and cultural rather than geographical. For both sides of Bengal, the other part of it, is the ‘other’ of themselves as Bengalis, composed of many imagined stereotypes, tensions and at the same time, a sense of belongingness. This ‘field of North Bengal’, like its main cultural product, the *Bhawaiya* musical tradition, transcends the borders between Indian and Bangladeshi and transmutes into the imagined geographical community of North Bengal. The ‘fields’ of my research are overlapping geographical, cultural and religious categories, centred around *Bhawaiya*- are similar to Bourdieu’s idea of fields. As according to Bourdieu (1993) to put it simply, field is where actors and the institutions are located in relation to power relations. I will examine these power relations and the negotiations between them, including myself situated in the field as a researcher (Hilgers and Mangez 2014).

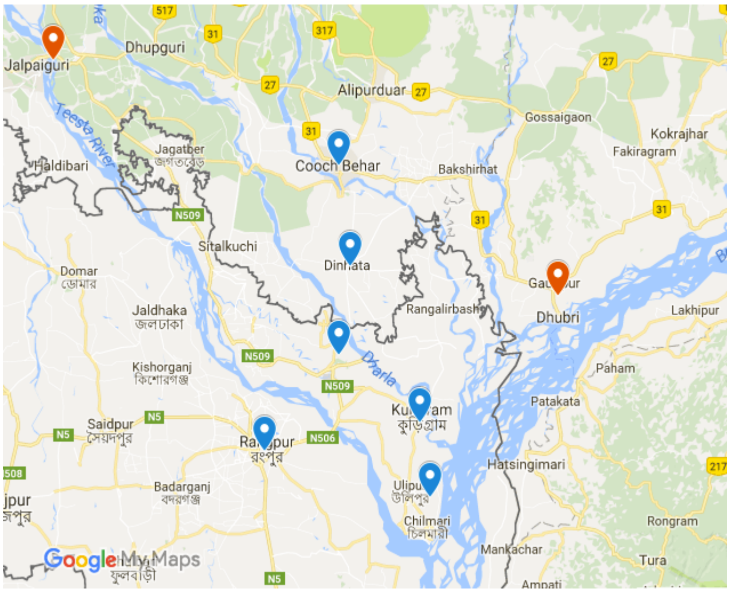

Image 1: My fieldwork areas (the blue marks) around the Cooch Behar district in India and Rangpur Division in Bangladesh

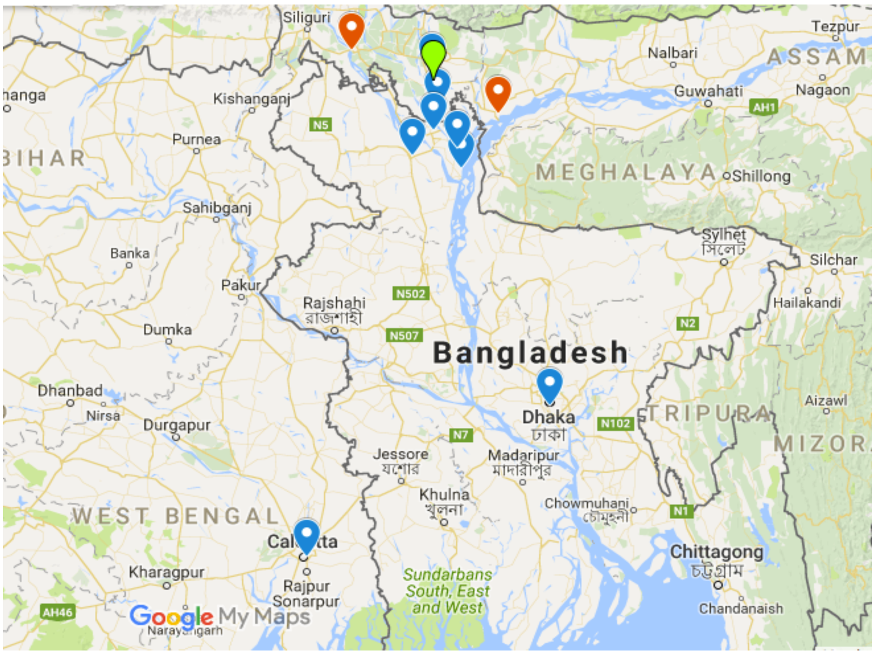

Image 2: My research fields in Bangladesh and India
(Kolkata, Cooch Behar, Dinhata, Rangpur, Lamanirhat, Kurigram, Ulipur, Chilmari, Dhaka)

There are many stories and disputes about the origin of the *Bhawaiya* folk musical tradition, which are part of the debates about the identity of the politics of language and culture of the area. Debate also surrounds the definition of the *Bhawaiya* musical tradition and the blurred demarcation between it and other folk genres. However, Cooch Behar is generally accepted as the genre's place of origin, by both its residents and most *Bhawaiya* researchers. The history of Cooch Behar before and within the colonial era supports this idea. However, the borders of the Cooch Behar area changed with the creation of the international borders by the partition of 1947. The kingdom of Cooch Behar used to cover a much broader area compared to the present-day district. Pre-partition, it included almost all the areas which today, are outside its border but which are still considered central to the musical tradition.

Most researchers would agree that, after Cooch Behar, Rangpur in Bangladesh became the cultural centre of *Bhawaiya*. However, since it is the folk tradition of the poorest peoples who resided in the more rural areas, the more remote areas around Cooch Behar and Rangpur are also considered to be important *Bhawaiya* areas. For example, Jalpaiguri and Dinhata in Bengal (India), Gauripur in Assam (India), Kurigram, Lalmonirhat and Chilmari (Bangladesh) became important breeding grounds for this musical tradition. Later the 'centres' of *Bhawaiya* spread through the wider Bengali population as a result of recordings made in the capitals: Kolkata and Dhaka. However, the people associated with *Bhawaiya*, who live in these two capital cities, are the most elite *Bhawaiya* people, and they possess the knowledge and power to be the representatives of Bhawaiya to the outside world (that is both greater Bengal and abroad). I travelled to the most remote districts of the *Bhawaiya* tradition in both countries. These were Dinhata, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat and Chilmari alongside the two central areas of Cooch Behar and Rangpur, in addition to this I interviewed some of the most significant elite *Bhawaiya* figures living in Dhaka and Kolkata. From the capital city to the most marginal and remote areas, the interviewees varied from the highest to the lowest in terms of economic, social and cultural status. I looked at the real living situations of areas that spread through North Bengal connecting the ideas and affections found in the text of the song lyrics. I talked with the contemporary urban and elite musicians at the 'centres' as well as the people of the *Bhawaiya* areas who were associated with the songs to investigate how they are interpreted and reproduced by the contemporary musicians, within an historical context.

For my fieldwork, I first went to Kolkata from Dublin with my 9 years old daughter on the 10th of April 2016. From there we travelled to our pre-booked accommodation. Arriving in Kolkata after three years of living in Europe allowed me to recognise sociological and cultural features of Bengal with the distance and clarity that time and geographical distance allows. I was born and raised in Bangladesh, though my father is originally from West Bengal which is a counter story of the dominant narrative of migration in response to the partition of Bengal in 1947 (As most of the migration flow was thought to be from Bangladesh to India).

As a Bangladeshi child, I was raised with the stereotypical view of Kolkata as being a place filled with mean, self-centred people, the opposite of the kind, hospitable 'other' Bengalis of Bangladesh. This presumed understanding of the people of Kolkata, irresistibly piqued my curiosity to determine the legitimacy of this claim. My gaze in the field was a reflexive one, very conscious of the 'others' gaze on me. My appearance to the Bengalis of Kolkata, accompanied by an English speaking child with a strange mixture of a Bangla and an Irish accent, made it difficult to fit us into the available categories of identities in the field. There is an image of a foreign researcher, which is: white, mostly male and accompanied by a local co-researcher or a team. I did not fit in this description. I am neither foreign, nor local. This in-between-ness put me in a state of constant anxiety to make my intentions clear. The parts of the description of my identity while introduced in the field: 'coming from Ireland (Europe)' put us into a hierarchical status, but 'originally from Bangladesh' usually put us in the opposite. However, in Kolkata, my identity as a scholar was the key to creating a common ground between myself and the interviewees as they then perceived me to be in the same class and status. This common ground led to a building of a rapport which resulted in greater clarity and ease in communication.

After about a month, I went to live in Cooch Behar. It is the norm in South Asia, especially in Bengal, to go to a place with the help of a powerful network embedded within that society. I did not do this as I did not want to create 'news' in the local community surrounding my visit. I perceived that this would create obstacles to my participant observations. However, without a powerful surrounding network, there were difficulties in gaining trust, but at the same time this made the power dynamics more visible. Having grown up with my father, my Bangla accent is very similar to the West Bengal accent (as the West Bengal dialect was considered the 'standard' Bangla), which helped to disguise my identity in the field initially. Also, my appearance, and that of my daughter, did not fit into the stereotypical image of Bangladeshis usually held by West Bengalis, who would expect women from a Muslim majority country to be dressed religiously. Also, I became aware of the intimidation that might be created by my educational position, but my apparent naivety about networking actually helped me to gain access. As Eriksen (2001) explained, “we are all perceived more or less as accidental clowns or just socially inept in unfamiliar surroundings” (33).

Class identity played a big role as well. We (my daughter and I) stayed with a struggling Hindu middle-class family as paying guests in a room on the third floor of their house that had previously been used by one of their sons. The son moved into his brother’s room to accommodate us. The father of the family was an employee of a public servant, an acquaintance of one of my uncle’s, whom I had never met. As I was a guest of the household owner, I was treated with unforgettable hospitality by his family. Living with a typical middle-class family helped me to situate myself in the middle of the class hierarchy in the community which was useful in navigating the comparatively visible class tensions within Cooch Behar.

I received support from an influential reporter living in the community to help me to make contacts more easily. However, there was a religious aspect that I had to take into account. Our host was a practicing Hindu and for their social image, they requested that I disguise my religious identity. There were visible trust issues between Hindus and Muslims in Cooch Behar. I had to confirm that I was not a practicing Muslim, and that I did not have any problem adjusting to their day to day religious practices, i.e. eating a vegetarian meal once a week, and the presence of a Saraswathi deity in our room. The reporter, who was a Muslim, helped to protect me from some religious tensions and later explained the complicated situation for the Muslims in Cooch Behar.

As a Bangladeshi in Bengal (India), the dynamic of my subjectivity and belonging-ness was rooted in the history of this area**.** In Cooch Behar, as a border district, an extensive portion of the people had migrated from Bangladesh during partition. The memories of lost land, wealth and the good old days of the migrated Hindu Bengalis surrounded us. The warmth and unforgettable hospitality of the family with whom we were living in Cooch Behar was a counter narrative to the stereotypes, which helped me to supplant the assumptions of self-centred Bengalis. The family we stayed with were one of the families who had migrated from Bangladesh and they expressed a sense of belonging with Bangladeshi people. For them, we were the *otithi Narayan* (God in the form of guests).

After a few months of fieldwork in Kolkata and Cooch Behar, the terror attack in Gulshan, Dhaka occurred on the 1st July 2016. This led to the situation in West Bengal becoming tense as some of those who planned the attack were said to be in hiding in West Bengal. All the border districts were under pressure from the state of Bengal to monitor any Bangladeshis residing in the area and to verify their stay. I began to receive strange, abusive phone calls while I was in Cooch Behar, in which the caller would ask me what my intentions were in being there. Although my research did not have any direct connections with the current political situations, a general mood of ‘distrust’ became apparent. Therefore, I changed my fieldwork plan by leaving Cooch Behar earlier than was planned, and took the opportunity to explore the dynamics of the renowned *Bhawaiya* areas of Lalmonirhat, Rangpur and Kurigram in Bangladesh. I was told by many of the informants that these areas are essential for situating *Bhawaiya* in a historical context and in doing so, helped one to understand the trajectory of the *Bhawaiya* genre.

In order to explore this, I went to the *Bhawaiya* areas of Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Ulipur and Chilmari, after the celebration of Eid in Bangladesh. These places belong within the Rangpur division and are considered the authentic *Bhawaiya* areas of Bangladesh. Since *Bhawaiya* is considered the song of the most marginal and poor people, the more remote an area is, the more 'authentic' and rich in the tradition it is considered to be. I used Rangpur and Kurigram as bases for exploring these areas. I talked with the most significant singers, researchers, organisers, and songwriters of the region. The whole area, although divided into districts, is representative of one *Bhawaiya* community, where all the members are connected socially and culturally. There is, however, evidence of the existence of group politics within this tradition and which manifest itself in debates about ‘authenticity’ in the *Bhawaiya* tradition.

Despite the tense atmosphere following the terrorist attack, I felt relatively protected by my connections with the local law enforcement in Bangladesh. As a university teacher, I was treated respectfully in the field whilst in Bangladesh. Hence, I was feeling comparatively more secure as there were no issues of distrust from the people around me or from the administrations for being a foreigner. This time, in the field in Bangladesh, my identity was not ambiguous, as it had been in Cooch Behar. Rather, it was clearly on the side of the powerful, in terms of religious and cultural/intellectual privilege. It was therefore not easy for me to recognise tensions within minority groups, especially where the Hindu musicians were concerned.

I interviewed several Hindu musicians. Although the recent religious tensions were occasionally mentioned by them, the support they received from the Muslim majority was also emphasised. It was not possible for me to know the reason for this emphasis, whether it was influenced by my Muslim/powerful identity or based in reality. However, an incident would occur that would remind me just how dangerous the current political climate was, not only for the religious minority groups, but for anyone who was practicing music that is considered inappropriate from an fundamentalist Islamic perspective.

During my stay, I visited some *Bhawaiya* organisations. One of them is an NGO funded by Norwegian artists. Like most similar organisations they were recently threatened in an ‘open letter’ from Islamic militants. The man who runs this organisation told me that the militants tried to attack them only fifteen days before my interview but they failed due to the swift arrival of the police. It was very striking that most of the people who ran the liberal and cultural organisations were continuing to work, despite the sense of paranoia and instability. They were alert, but not afraid to stop what they were doing. However, the recent violence had disrupted their plans for their annual 'Eid Reunion' programme of cultural events, which usually consisted of a much longer programme of events after Eid.

The Dhaka attack added to the religious tensions along the border. Being Muslim and at the same time, not maintaining a Muslim lifestyle had two different meanings in the two Bengals and within the Hindu and Muslim communities. In Cooch Behar and Kolkata it was considered a sign of ‘progressiveness’ while in the rural areas of Bangladesh it was considered a sign of ‘audaciousness’. The constant negotiations included ‘covering or not covering the head’, and handling the curiosity about my personal life.

My field experience in West Bengal was in line with the experience of Mookherjee (2015), as she used the term ‘looking glass borders’ as defined by Amitabh Ghosh to express this cross border discourse. She further examined, in her research, a narrative of ‘lack and excess’ of Bangladesh to the West Bengali’s. Mookherjee explains these images as the dilemma of lack (lack of liberalism) and excess (excess hospitality, warmth, Jamdani Saris, Hilsha fish and lots of good food). Along with this, Bangladesh is seen as a conservative place, populated by a backward population of Hindu hating Muslims (Mookherjee 2015). My field experience explored this dilemma of the looking glass border in both ways. For me, I experienced ‘otherness’’ in both Bengals, divided by borders and definitions of their identities.

The salient dynamics of my reflexivity in the field was thus the complexities of identities. Being a Muslim, Bengali, female researcher, gaining access to the field that is protected by the male gatekeepers was difficult. It determined the quality of data and how each participant positioned themselves with me and defined their participation in the interview. There was a constant negotiation of my identity in the field. On each day of interviews, I had to carefully plan my appearance according to the assumed religious sentiment of the participant. The clothing and appearances of the women of the area are one of the main factors by which trust is determined and established in the field. It was especially vital for my apparently ambiguous identity that does not easily fit any of the available definitions, i.e., Western researcher, Bangladeshi Muslim woman or Bengali mother. Additionally, without a ‘proper’ (supposedly male) companion accompanying me, I was told many times by the participants that I was being too brave in travelling to the remote field ‘alone’. My presence, therefore, also sometimes created distrust, amazement or curiosity. In the field, my subjectivities shaped by these constant negotiations were seemingly small things, but that can be vital to the findings of the ethnography.

METHODS

The central questions of the research guided me to be creative about the search methods for answers, as opposed to the unproblematic approach of simply 'being there' in the field (Des Chene 1997, 78). In taking this approach, my research design was influenced by the recent critique of anthropological location, and the problems associated with taking the rigid idea of 'the field' for granted (A. Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 1995; Malkki 1992; Des Chene 1997). The research methodology is influenced by Marcus's idea of multi-sited ethnography which situates 'the field' within the colonial history of the area that includes textual analysis, historical and archival ethnography in ethnographic fieldwork within the *Bhawaiya* areas in two phases.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

In fulfilling my first and second objectives of understanding what *Bhawaiya* is and how it came to exist along with its deviant elements within the norm, it was deemed that archival and textual analysis by situating it within the colonial and nationalist historical context, as well as in the inter-genre boundary, were most useful to follow. My archival research is influenced by Anne Stoler's (2010) idea of archival ethnography and Jean Comaroff's (1992) idea of historical imagination as an anthropological method. I examined colonial documentation of domesticity and sexual practices, not only for the evidence of the fact but to understand the production of colonial knowledge. As Ann Stoler (2002) proposes, I tried to approach the archival material "not as sites of knowledge retrieval but of knowledge production, as monuments of states as well as sites of state ethnography" (90).

I examined online archival documents of collections from colonial authorities such as surveys, gazetteers and early documentation of the people in North Bengal to explore the origin of the Cooch-Rajbangsi community and their linguist-cultural influences. In doing so, I hoped to understand the changes made by the reconstruction of urban Bengali cultures, the marginalisation of *Bhawaiya* folk heritage and its language through the modernisation and standardisation of the Bengali language during the colonial period. I also found some digitalised archives about the people of Cooch Behar, which clarified the complicated effect that British colonial rule had in Cooch Behar. The archival documents of the marginalised, complicated and indirect colonial rule in Cooch Behar, helped me to deconstruct the idea of a homogenous 'Bengali' culture in 'West Bengal'. It shows the evidence of the exclusion of the Rajbangshi culture and language from the rise of Bengali nationalism in the nineteenth century. All these pieces of archival materials together illustrate the resulting marginalisation of the geographical area and its culture.

Besides the online archival research, I researched in the British Library in London, to find the physical documents relating to the colonial laws and news about marriage and sexual deviances during the British colonial period. My focus was the deviance from monogamous marriage, documented and categorised by terms like 'polygamy' or 'adultery' and what this distinction means for normative gender roles. The "sustained engagement with those archives as cultural artefacts of fact production, of taxonomies in the making and of disparate notions of what made up colonial authority" (Stoler 2002a, 91), is the methodological approach I was using. In the archives of the British Library, the colonial/legal discussions of 'polygamy' and 'adultery' within the legal sphere, was the cultural artefact that I was using to gain a more prismic view of the reflective attitudes within that era.

I consider the merits of these cultural artefacts in my projects in two ways. First as the negotiations with a supposed monogamous heteronormative norm, focusing on the significant difference between cases of men and women. This difference illustrates the double standards of sexual norms and how both men and women try to find ways, though very differently, to deviate from colonial 'norms'. And secondly, the artefacts complete the picture of a deviance of sexuality when compared to the lyrics of the *Bhawaiya* during that period. The *Bhawaiya* lyrics expressing the sensual desire of women from that period (as documented in the Rangpuri Rajbangshi dialect in Grierson's collection) which are considered the first published lyrics (1903) completed the picture of a parallel existence of the subaltern voice expressing sexual deviance, even within the context of the emerging new forms of patriarchy. I found some *Bhawaiya* lyrics, expressing anger and scorn to husbands who were practicing polygamy but which was sympathetic to the affairs of the married women. There is a clear contrast between the legalisation of men's polygamy and criminalisation of women's 'adultery', in the late colonial law. The archival research also helped to situate *Bhawaiya* with the other genres of folk songs and to deconstruct the generic boundaries.

On the basis of my findings during archival research, I started my ethnographic fieldwork. While in Kolkata, I was also engaged in archival research in the National Library to locate *Bhawaiya* in the emergence of the Bengali public sphere in 19th century Bengal.

ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK AND BHAWAIYA 'SITES'.

To understand the 'voice' and subjectivities of the women of *Bhawaiya*, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork. The *Bhawaiya* community is not a stable, static community, bound to one area, which can be observed on a day to day basis over a long period of time, as is expected from a proper 'anthropological' field (Malkki 1997). The identity of *Bhawaiya* people and the territory of *Bhawaiya* are not identical, a situation which is complicated by the construction of the transnational border, many layers of historical events and violence, and the imagined local and national identities of the population. *Bhawaiya* areas are situated on the borders of those many identities and political markers that contradict the placing of boundaries by territorialising 'the field', according to the conventional anthropological idea of the field (Malkki 1992).

Primarily, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the main *Bhawaiya* areas: Cooch Behar in West Bengal (later named as Bengal), India and the Rangpur Division in Bangladesh, along with the capital cities of both: Kolkata and Dhaka. My field ethnography was planned in two phases. My goal from these two phases of fieldwork, was to learn how the singers, researchers and the *Bhawaiya* community interpret and explain the affection which is expressed in the songs and how the deviant desires have been dealt with and performed.

In the first phase, I conducted my fieldwork with the *Bhawaiya* people, travelling through the remote *Bhawaiya* areas. My initial plan was to conduct mostly participant observation of the day to day lives and languages of affection used by the singers and others in the community. However, the field reality was not favourable for this type of 'observation' of day to day lives. Therefore, I attempted to see how these places and people relate to the lyrics of the songs. I could neither live/stay with any musicians, nor had I access to their mundane domesticity. Moreover, the imagined past and material reality of the world described in the *Bhawaiya* songs no longer exists, but what does exist is the language and its context, which I tried to engage and participate with. I took singing lessons for a few weeks from one of the famous *Bhawaiya* singers in Cooch Behar, which helped me to understand the process of being a *Bhawaiya* singer in contemporary times, which is different from the imagined *Bhawaiya* singers of the past. In the second phase, I focused on the appropriation of *Bhawaiya* by mainstream musicians in the urban centre, in Dhaka. The main focus of the second phase of my fieldwork was to understand the appropriation of *Bhawaiya* and Bangla folk songs in general by musicians of the centres and by the urban elites.

INTERVIEWS

My fieldwork strategy mostly consisted of unstructured interviews with the participants who were involved with *Bhawaiya* in various ways. My interviewees ranged from people related to the *Bhawaiya* as a product of the cultural industry, like singers, producers, writers and the festival sponsors or organisers. The ‘people’ of *Bhawaiya* varied from very important ‘elites’: descendants of the legendary singers, researchers, and collectors, to the marginalised and poor singers who are considered the ‘authentic’ *Bhawaiya* people. For the sample, I used key informants for purposive sampling. To handle the bias for it, I researched the subjective positions of the key informants through my previously known reliable sources and tried to select key informants, from opposing political/social groupings, as this is vital for the singer community. I strictly tried to keep the sample as varied as possible to obtain diversified opinions. Therefore, the participants varied and were inclusive of almost all the variant socio-economic groups who contribute to the *Bhawaiya* tradition. My research sample included singers ranging from the most successful to newcomers and from the very wealthy to those living in extreme poverty. They varied, geographically, culturally and according to class, gender, religion, marital status, political ideology and success. In India, there were three key informants, one of whom is an elite performer, and the other two belong to two opposing groups within *Bhawaiya* who practice and promote subtle differences in style. In Bangladesh, the cultural groupings are usually linked to the state political parties. Hence, it was tricky to work with opposing groups, as I had to be careful not to disclose my other associations. Also, for clarity, it creates an obstacle to be very close to anyone for this as an impartial, neutral stance is a prerogative.

For the second phase of my fieldwork, where I was focused more on mainstreaming *Bhawaiya* I conducted in-depth interviews with contemporary Bangladeshi musicians whose works are influenced by *Bhawaiya* and folk songs in general. I selected the musicians based on their work and communicated with them through third party contacts of mine. Although my interviews were unstructured, I would generally begin by asking about the authorship of Bhawaiya and its affectionate language.

GROUP DISCUSSION

I conducted a few group discussions, some of which were planned but not organised as a research method, but rather as an '*adda'*, a Bangla term which refers to a casual gathering for a friendly discussion. Although it was explicit that it was arranged for my research, this informal discussion created a comfortable and friendly atmosphere and thus resulted in rigorous open-ended discussions. Some of them were recorded, some not, as not all the members of the group discussion gave consent.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

After the fieldwork, I gathered the interviews, collected publications by the participants, and song lyrics and did a thematic analysis. The illicitness of love and affection - the stories of the affairs of married women with men, dominate *Bhawaiya* songs and have been subjected to much research and analysis. This illicitness is vital and cannot be ignored. The lyrics of *Bhawaiya*, then became the object of explanation and performance in interviews and the object of analysis for articles, books, and magazines. It not only remains a matter of intertextuality because intertextuality suggests that we focus solely on overlapping one 'text' with another as a special form of discourse distinct from ordinary conversation, as this tends to obscure the discourses' social origins (Irvine 1996, 131). Therefore, to emphasise on the discourses of the social origin of the lyrics and its analysis, my methods of analysis was interdiscursive as it is the analysis of the particular mix of genres that mediates between linguistic analysis of text and social analysis of social events and practices (Fairclough 2003, 218). Reading the secondary materials for analysis, interdiscursivity is important in understanding the idea of love in the song lyrics and its social analysis. I am using critical discourse analysis (CDA) for this. Here, the texts (the song lyrics, analysis of the songs and the interview) located in relation to the same social practice (extra marital and sensual love) differ in the discourse from which they are drawn (Fairclough 2003, 127).

I connected these four genres of texts (lyrics, analysis, interviews, performance) along with their contexts, in the inter-discursive analysis. Several times, during the interviews, the respondents wanted to perform the songs and to be recorded. The conversations overlapped with their performances, especially when the interviewees explained the song lyrics by singing and playing instruments, hence heightening the inter-discursive analysis, where the song lyrics, performance and the interview interplayed. For interdiscursive analysis of two interviewees, I added the dynamic between interviews, the lyrics they are referring to and the published writings of their own. I also added published texts of ethnomusicological analysis by another who is a very significant contemporary commentator. He is a singer, and a member of the parliament Bengal, whom I failed in my efforts to contact. These texts are significant because of how their ethnomusicological analysis can be placed in the interplay between the song lyrics and their interpretation. I considered these texts within their socio-cultural, economic and political context and I used the song lyrics to compare the same songs analysed in different ethnomusicological versions and how they were performed both in the interviews and during rehearsals.

ETHICAL CONCERNS

I was interviewing people of different class, gender, religion, culture, language and professions as well as interests. This variety of background created varied responses about my research. To present a very objective description of my research and make them fully understand exactly what I was looking for, was quite impossible. Moreover, my research objectives and approaches were sometimes too ambiguous for them to grasp as they did not fit within the usual research goals that they would have been familiar with. I usually described the focus of my research as: ‘how the emotions are presented and inscribed in the *Bhawaiya* songs from a gender/female perspective’. However, I was aware that, although this was the simplest and most comprehensible description of my topic and approach, it had been translated very differently to many of my participants. This situation raised the question of ethics as I was becoming aware that my ‘interpretation’ and observation probably would not fit with their expectations of my research and it might disappoint them.

For example, the issues of ‘illicit’ or ‘vulgar’ elements of the songs were mostly avoided by the participants in the interviews. When most participants discussed them, outside of a few exceptions, they contextualised them as the negative aspects of *Bhawaiya*. This was the case with even the most influential figures I interviewed. My position and analysis however, is very different from theirs, a fact central to my research which might not be well received by the participants. However, it should be noted that those ‘vulgar’ or ‘illicit’ elements are sometimes positively presented in many of the articles about *Bhawaiya* published in the local journals and other studies. It also reflects the intertextual dynamics of oral interviews and written analysis. Although most of my participants gave me verbal consent to use their names, in this thesis, I used pseudo names to give anonymity to those who I thought might be effected by the analysis.

There was also anxiety amongst some of the respondents concerning their musical careers, which often they had pursued against the explicit wishes of their family. As a result they refused to grant permission for the audio recording of their interviews. In some cases, I had to prove to them that I had not recorded them. Moreover, in order to maintain their anonymity, I felt that pseudonyms were not enough to hide their identities and I had to be more ambiguous when writing their stories. In some cases, I restrain myself to write their stories in this thesis.

Generally speaking, when writing about the respondents, I maintained their anonymity where possible, especially where their being recognised would create tension. However, in the case of the leading authorities and figures, anonymity was neither possible nor meaningful. It should be noted that, with the exception of a small number, most of the respondents were enthusiastic about being recorded and for their names to be published. It was assumed by them that this might help their singing career. Therefore, the sole determinant of my use of pseudonyms is my consideration of possible consequences for them. My ethical position was determined by my own subjective evaluation of the sensitivity of their data and information. However, I strictly adhered to the guidelines of the ethical committee where consent issues were concerned.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The next chapter is about situating the identities constructed through the colonial and post-colonial context, where my subjectivities are also embedded. I will discuss how this ‘Bengal’ is historically fragmented, heterogeneous and dynamic where its political trajectory and identity formations are concerned. Subjectivities of myself are an accumulation of identities constructed through layers of historical moments and symbols of Bengali-ness, Muslim-ness and the idea of women in broader Bengal. Bengal and its immensely complicated history are constructed from intersecting religious, cultural, linguistic and gender identities. The reason to analyse the construction of linguistic, religious and cultural identities was to locate its margins. Ultimately, I want to examine the subversive elements of *Bhawaiya* in the margins of the identities. As a cultural product, it has existed throughout the historical process and has carried the sexually subversive emotional elements until the present day, slipping through the borders of ideal identity markers. In order to examine this subversive existence, I will start from the British colonial and Indian/Bengali nationalist encounter by bringing up the relevant post-colonial discussions to tease out the construction of Bengali-Hindu-Muslim dynamics and to situate Bengali women within this mapping. Ordering sexuality was at the core of this process and I will explore this with reference to several prominent pieces of post-colonial literature. I will also focus on the multiplicity of the process and will shed some light on the margins of the borders, where the expression of sexuality or its subversion could exist. This chapter, in short, will consist of a discussion centred around the construction of identities and its nuances and subversions through emotional expression.

In the third chapter, to situate *Bhawaiya* in the context of Bangla folk music, I will explore and deconstruct the generic border of *Bhawaiya* with other Bangla folk songs and reconfigure them according to marginal subversive voices. I will discuss the folk songs and their interpretations not only from the perspective of nationalist narratives but also from alternative discourses. In this analysis, my focus will be on sexuality and affection. I will situate *Bhawaiya* songs in the general context of folk culture in Bengal, and focus on its speciality and significance in voicing female desire, which has led me to reconfigure the borders of the genres regarding the voice and embodied experience. I will also discuss the assumed hierarchy between the genres based on the material versus abstract binary, especially in relation to *Baul*, the most famous Bangla folk musical genre. The ideas and reasoning for this hierarchy will be critiqued. Through this, I will explore the deviant desires from the female subject's position that co-exist with the normative narration of identities and customs regarding sexuality and affections.

Chapter four and five are both about examining the subjectivities constructed through the song lyrics, performances and production by becoming the woman of *Bhawaiya* and other folk songs and through the emotional atmosphere the songs create. However, in chapter four, I focus on the empirical experiences of the *Bhawaiya* people and how the songs connect to their lives. By doing so, I will also see the interdiscursive construction of subjectivity in negotiating the social norms. Through this connection, I aim to examine the negotiation between the perils and pleasure of sexual subjectivities, concerning the Bangla folk songs, constructed through different socio-cultural moments. I will investigate the voice of *Bhawaiya* by examining the authorship, as well as the imagined subjectivity of the voice of the songs that connects with contemporary performers. In order to locate the female subversive voice, I will deconstruct the biological gender boundary and situate the marginal female voices beyond it. Becoming the woman through performance will be the point of departure from the biological gender boundary. By transgressing the biological boundary, I am not proposing an abstract dis-embodied voice, rather the female subject voice in *Bhawaiya* and the other folk songs are embodied, knitting emotion, body and materiality together. By analysing the 'becoming-woman' of *Bhawaiya*, I will examine the subjectivities arising from it.

While chapter four is the empirical basis of intersubjective negotiations concerning the 'voice' of *Bhawaiya*, in chapter five, I will examine the emotional aspects that *Bhawaiya* and other folk songs create in different situations, expanding from performances to contemporary song productions. The different types of atmospheric emotions that the participants feel varies within different musical experiences. However, they are neither entirely dependent on the lyrics and their cultural meanings nor do they form a temporal atmosphere separate from the cultural situation. They can be temporal, but situated historically. The emotions of folk songs not only work through their actors, i.e. singers, performers and connect to their listeners, with the instruments and environments, but they also create the process of becoming the woman of the songs with the embodied-atmospheric emotions and experience.

In chapter six, I will focus more on the contemporary debate of authenticity in folk musical appropriations, and the negotiations with the state and corporate powers for recognition. The folk songs of Bengal are often claimed as the foremost national cultural tradition of Bengal. I will discuss the contemporary dynamics of the corporate interests and nationalist interventions that wish to purify the deviant elements from the folk music tradition concerning the current political atmosphere. I will discuss the nationalist versus Islamist debates about folk songs in the rise of political Islam in recent years, discussing their similarities in terms of hegemonic ‘purification’. At the same time, I will discuss the counter-hegemonic trends of folk song appropriations by young urban artists and poor folk musicians against them. I will discuss how these stakeholders and their interests consist of an assemblage regarding the issue of authenticity.

Chapter seven will be the conclusion of my thesis whereby I will connect the main research questions with the findings of *Bhawaiya* and Bangla folk musical traditions in general and their ability to construct defiant voices with their deviant words. I will also conclude my thesis by identifying the limitations of the research and the further questions that arise from it which can open up topics for new research in the future.

CHAPTER 2: IDENTITIES AND *BHAWAIYA* IN THEIR SUBVERSIVE MARGINS

INTRODUCTION

ওহ কী ও...... বন্ধু কাজল ভ্রমরা রে
Oh my dear love, as dark as bee

কোন দিন আসিবেন বন্ধু কয়া যাও কয়া যাও রে ......।
Before you go let me know which day you are coming back

যদি বন্ধু যাইবার চাও
If you really want to go

ঘরের গামছা থুইয়া যাও রে
Leave your scarf here

বন্ধু কাজল ভ্রমরা রে ......
My lover black honey bee…..[2]

I cannot remember when was the first time the longing tune of *Bhawaiya* took me out of the world of an intense emotional sphere. It was probably during my adolescent years, when an overwhelming sense of fear and loss often left me emotionally puzzled. There was a very popular television program that taught children to sing, run by the famous *Bhawaiya* singer Ferdousi Rahman, the daughter of the pioneer *Bhawaiya* figure Abbasuddin Ahmed.[3] As a child, I was fond of the TV program and through it I learned that song and also learned how to break my voice as if mourning and crying while singing *Bhawaiya*. The tone was created as it was originally composed mostly by the bull-cart driver riding on a muddy road. I was in love with the melancholic tune of *Bhawaiya*. I felt I could connect with the weeping tune of *Bhawaiya* created by breaking the voice — especially when I was dismissed or ridiculed by my friends and family for being too emotional. I internalised *Bhawaiya*'s emotional tune within the identity boxes I was continually trying to fit in. I was born in a Muslim, religiously aristocratic, but financially struggling family, in a North Bengal town of Bangladesh in the late '70s, but I was raised in the city of Dhaka. As a woman, I grew up with lessons on how to be a *lokhhi/Lashmi* (good) girl. My father migrated to Bangladesh from India in reaction to the `Hindu-Muslim riot' in the '60s. My paternal ancestors were *Pir* (Muslim religious preachers). They claimed to have migrated from Iran and settled in a village of West Bengal until the end of the British colonial era. European education was not permitted initially in our paternal family at that time and considered polluting for a proper Muslim. However, by the generation of my grandfather, British education was introduced to the family. My father was educated in college and began his career as a bank officer. His middle-class, urban cultural Bengali-ness learned from Calcutta (later named Kolkata), was part of my childhood pride. As his daughter, we learned to speak 'standard Bangla'. However, our 'perfect' Bangla dialect made us a target for neighbours and pupils in school. They used to call us '*ghoti*'[4] secretly. I did not understand the meaning of it initially, but assumed that it referred to my difference from them that restricted our ability to 'fit in'. Our childhood was surrounded by books and magazines published in West Bengal, India. Although not financially wealthy, my father's cultural capital gave us the status of Bengali elites in the suburban area of the capital city Dhaka. We were raised reading the Tagore collection, Sharat Chandra, Bibhutibhushan, and Bankim Chandra's novel[5] and the famous literary magazine *Desh*. We also listened *to Rabindra sangee*t (Songs of Tagore) and *Nazrul giti* (songs of national poet and songwriter Nazrul Islam). I wanted to learn dance, but it was not encouraged — with the excuse that in a family whose ancestors were Islamic preachers, girls should not be dancing. Instead, I trained to be a singer as being able to sing is a form of cultural capital for Bengali girls. Singing lessons were departmentalised into three main areas: *Rabindra sangee*t, *Nazrul giti,* and *Lok giti* (folk songs). It is a part of the Bengali middle-class culture to own a harmonium. Being able to sing with it was considered a virtue of a good Bengali young lady. I was raised in this culture, just like many other typical middle-class Bengali Muslim children in the late ‘80s.

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[2] One of the most popular *Bhawaiya* songs, collected and recorded by Abbasuddin Ahmed.

[3] Abbasuddin Ahmed was the first elite educated Muslim singer who patronized *Bhawaiya* songs and made HMV record of the songs. He is considered a legendary figure in Bangladesh for his work promoting *Bhawaiya* and *Bhatiali*. He is originally from Cooch Behar and later moved to Bangladesh. It was due to his devotion and promotion that the marginal folk song genre of *Bhawaiya* entered middle-class living rooms in the twentieth century. The first *Bhawaiya* song recorded in HMV in 1939.

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[4] A derogatory word used to refer to people who are originally from West Bengal.

[5] One of the significant religious reformist movements in colonial India, initiated by the Hindu Bengali elite literary figures in the 19th century as an outcome of what is called the "Bengali Renaissance'. While Hindu is a polytheistic religion, the movement advocates for a monotheistic version of it, focusing on one god as 'Brahma.' From the famous Tagore family, the father of Rabindranath Tagore, Debendranath Tagore was one of the founders of the movement, and this doctrine carried out by other Bengali philosophers Raja Rammohan Roy. Despite the fact that this doctrine was against caste hierarchy, it was limited to the elite, European educated class, the Bengali Brahmins.

I was a typical urban-Bengali-Muslim-Bangladeshi girl, from North Bengal, living in the capital of Bangladesh. My subjectivity was situated in the combination of those identities and the emotional elements I internalised: the sophisticated and elite way of expressing emotion from *Rabindra sangeet*, revolting and resisting passionate lyrics of Nazrul, and deeply passionate lyrics of love and longing and tune of folk songs, especially *Bhawaiya*. I was confined by those identities and emotions wrapped up in music. I was linguistically and culturally Bangladeshi Bengali, religiously Muslim, emotionally searching for the passionate soul of Bengal, influenced by the songs and literatures. Through the formation of myself, *Bhawaiya* was a part of my emotional subjectivity. By deconstructing this subject and locating the historical process of the construction of each of these identities I internalised, in this chapter, I will analyse the historical construction of the idea of Bengali-Muslim women. As an inseparable part of this research, I will also analyse where I belong in the colonial and post-colonial Bengal and post-independence Bangladesh.

The Bangla folk song genre *Bhawaiya*, exists in the margins of the political, linguistic, cultural, religious and gender identity boxes constructed through colonial and post-colonial situations. This chapter should be considered as the historical context of the existence of Bhawaiya in the margin. Bengal and its history are immensely complicated with the backdrop of intersecting religious, cultural, linguistic and gender identities. The reason to situate the construction of linguistic, religious and cultural identities, is to locate the margins where *Bhawaiya* existed. This will allow one to see how it carries the sexually subversive emotional elements that slip through the borders of ideal identity markers — made with enormous political, religious and cultural effort.

Therefore, this chapter is divided in two main sections. In the first section, I will discuss the construction of identities in three historical eras: colonial, post-colonial and after the independence of Bangladesh. In the second section, I will locate the margins of those boundaries of identities where *Bhawaiya* folk songs existed, upholding a female subversive 'voice', which will be analysed more elaborately in the next chapters.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES IN THE HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY

The legacy of the identities I carry was constructed in the late 19th century during the colonial era and the era immediately following, generally called the Bengali Renaissance. British colonial reform, and in response, the emergence of Bengali nationalism, was the foundation of the construction of religious, cultural-linguistic nationalist identities. In turn, they were linked to the new patriarchal construction of gender relations in India and especially in Bengal. The Bengali Renaissance was started by the homogenisation and Sanskritisation of Bangla language and unification of the plurality of cultural forms. In result, the true spirit of rural Bengal was invented (Sen 2014). The second set of identity formations occurred as result of the partition of Bengal, when the British colonial era ended. The third happened when the anti-Pakistan sentiment emerged in East Pakistan, resulting in the creation of the country of Bangladesh. After Bangladesh's War of Independence, the Bengali Muslim Identity emerged by celebrating suitable cultural products. These historical shifts of identities further complicated the already contentious relationships between religious, linguistic and cultural identities and the subversive existence of *Bhawaiya* in their margins.

COLONIAL ERA

My father, while surviving the massive Hindu-Muslim migration and riot in 1947, could not manage to find Kolkata as a place of belonging, nor India as his own country. According to him, his Muslim identity was seen as an obstacle for being a proper 'Indian' and Bengali. My father moved from Kolkata, took a job in a bank in North Bengal, Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) leaving all of his ancestral linkages. The small town of North Bengal was considered backward, compared to Kolkata in the '60s. When he got married to a village girl, my mother, my father was treated with great respect by my mother's family for his sophisticated presence and very posh Bengali accent of West Bengal. My mother was from

North Bengal, situated in Bangladesh. Her day to day languages had influences of local north Bengali words that were considered inelegant. My father was careful to teach us the ‘appropriate’ Bangla that the Bengali renaissance invented, instead of my mother’s local and ‘deviant’ Bangla. We were not very close with my father; he was like a patriarch and assumed an aloof presence in the household. My mother is the one who used to deal with all the household matters. We used to see him sitting in the living room with a book, mostly published from West Bengal. The superior Bengali status, with the elegant Bengali accent that my father carried to the small village of North Bengal, was rooted in the history of the Bengali Renaissance. As the careful manager of ‘standard Bengali’ in a marginal north Bengal district, my father was the ideal image of superior Bengali literacy sophistication to us. This standardisation was a product of the Bengali Renaissance excluding local dialect and words as ‘deviant’. My father, as an elegant Bangla speaker, not only maintained the linguistic boundary, but also resettled the conjugality, constructed by Bengali nationalism and the idea of Lakshmi/lakkhi Bengali girl. This is the foundation in which my family and upbringing are rooted.

In this section, I will discuss how in the British colonial era, the standard linguistic form was invented by the Bengali literary revival, through which the Hindu identity became the main actor of this nationalism; marginalising Muslim and other religious and cultural forms. Moreover, it was in effect of setting the new boundary between private and public. Muslim women started to be considered as backward and the folk cultural elements were restricted to the Hindu *andarmahal* (household). The Hindu goddess images became the symbol for representing Bengali women, and the folk elements that humanise the god-goddess stories started to be filtered. In the whole process, the new identities related to religion, culture, and linguistic nationalism emerged in the colonial era, and my subjectivities carry these legacies.

The invention of Elegant Bangla

Bengali nationalism emerged via British colonial education policy in the nineteenth century, which aimed to create a new class of *bhadralok* (gentleman) of the middle-class to support British rule. To do so, the education reform suggested by Macaulay's minute (1835) emphasised English language and literacy education over technical; as literature would create “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect" (Macaulay 1835), to serve the colonial administrations.

The British colonial administration worked on the already existing language and education system, replacing them according to their needs (Azim and Roy, 1995). The pre-colonial official language was Persian followed by the Mughal empire, but the language of education and literature was Sanskrit, which was being replaced by English. According to the colonial education policy, to create mimic Englishmen to support the colonial administration, proposed by Macauley's (1835) minute, the two main colleges established for educating the natives were the Hindu college and Sanskrit college in Kolkata. Hindu college was for the upper-class urbanised Bengalis, who were the best target for making mimic Englishmen according to the education policy were favoured in British education system. The Sanskrit college was for the upper caste Hindus, not necessarily the urbanised one, where Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar[6] used to teach. Parallel to the mimic project, Bengali, as a language of writing literature and education, was framed and constructed by the emerging Bengali educated urban elite. Vidyasagar and his proposal, 'Notes on the Sanskrit College (1852),' was one of the most important instruments in this transformation. Azim and Roy (1995) argue, his proposal kept the value of literature intact, similar to Macaulay, but the medium proposed was Bengali where the philosophical aspects would be drawn from the West towards constructing new Bengali literature as a process of nation-making, from "within the British colonial project and transcending its purpose of designing mimic Englishmen" (67). For Vidyasagar, creating an elegant, expressive and idiomatic Bengali would require exceptional Sanskrit scholars who are all well versed in the English language and literature. This was the inception for the written based sanskritised and modernised Bengali literature produced by the educated class. This New Bengali literature served British colonial administrative tasks as Macauley (1835) proposed, but it also created a national self. According to Azim and Roy (1995), this is how "Bengali is being devised as a carrier of Western knowledge" (14).

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[6] Vidyasagar was one of them, who formatted the Bengali language with grammar and rules for teaching British administrators. His task was to teach Bengali to the British. Therefore, he was the one who was giving it a formal shape of Bangla to further the cause of colonisation (Azim and Roy 1995).

If Vidyasagar was the instrument for the framing of Bengali language in a formal and Western-modern way by the Sanskrit scholars, Dinesh Chandra Sen was the pioneer that reconfirmed its tie to the Hindu tradition. Yet, both seem to be united in excluding non-elegant literary elements from Bengali language and literature. Dinesh Sen's pioneer book, 'History of Bengali Language and Literature' (1911), can be seen as a reinvention of Bangla language, by making it only a descendant of Sanskrit, and dismissing the multiple layers of other influences in it. This is also true for making the Indian/Hindu national identity based on only Sanskrit. He was not happy about the Prakrito, Persian and many other indigenous and 'foreign' elements of Bangla language, and claimed that these elements were making the language vulgar. He argued the Brahmins preferred Sanskrit over Bangla by treating it as a language of the lower-class and a form of vulgar expression, but the Muslim ruler, on the contrary, promoted Bangla. He also argued that this was done to connect to the masses and to contest Sanskrit Hindu elitism. They patronised translation of Persian and Sanskrit text, i.e., the Hindu tale *Ramayan*, *Gita* to Bangla. Their promotion resulted in Bangla being awarded its formal higher status (Chandra Sen 1911).

We can see that the Bengali Renaissance leading to the rise of Bengali nationalism linked to the Sanskritisation of Bangla. Through Sanskritisation, Bangla was reconstructed as a descendant of Sanskrit, rather than a language of the marginalised people mixed with non-Aryan apparently 'vulgar' words and expressions. This historical process explains the exclusion of Rajbangsi, the language of *Bhawaiya*, along with many other forms of linguistic elements from Bangla. The contemporary language movement in Cooch-Rajbangsi resists the marginalisation of their language, culture and identity (Wilson and Bashir 2016). Through my fieldwork, I encountered the process of reinventing the Rajbangsi language for the people of Cooch Behar, and North Bengal. Sir George Grierson, in the Linguistic Survey of India (1903), categorised the Rajbangsi language as a dialect of Bangla. However, Francis Buchanan classified Koch–Rajbangshi as Mongoloid, which is different from Hindi and therefore, of Sanskrit influence (Buchanan 1819). The early 20th century activists and educators of Cooch Behar struggled to resist the Bengalification of North Bengal and to retrieve its glory by claiming the *Kshatriya* association of Coch-Rajbangsi people that aimed for a new form of Sanskritisation — in conflict with the Bengali Brahmins — by attacking the findings of Buchanan. However, recent political tendencies in this area claim an identity separate from Bengali, focusing on their language and culture, following Francis Buchanan's theory (Nandi 2014, 571). These different forms of resistance all aimed to build a struggle for identity and recognition that was excluded in the process of Sanskritisation of the Bangla language.

Exclusion of Muslims in Bengali/Hindu Romantic Nationalism

The invention of the philosophically Anglo influenced and structurally Sanskrit-Aryan-styled standard Bangla language was a result of a poetic form of romantic patriotism, making Vidyasagar's dream come true. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2004) analysed the foremost figures of 19th century Bengali literature to show that Bengali-ness became more than a linguistic ethnicity — it was a form of anti-colonial nationalism through literature. It served as a political project to build a national spirit through the reinvention of the medieval Bangla literature and a romantic nationalist past. For that purpose, Chakrabarty (2004) argued, this was to "act as an antidote to all the mundane interests that otherwise divided the Bengali people — the Hindus from the Muslims, the lower castes from the upper castes, and the elite from the masses." (660). For this agenda, being Bengali was not only being an agent of nationalism, but it also meant being a master of Bangla literature. Literature and its selective romanticism, therefore, became the essence of Bengali-ness, which I also carried through the training from my father. When I was 13 years old, my father went to West Bengal and brought back a trunk full of books of the leading literary figures of 19th-century Bengali Renaissance. The complete edition of Rabindranath Tagore, Bankimchandra, Sharat Chandra, Bivutibhushon Bondopaddhay and translations of the European classics in Bengali, published in West Bengal, India. I had internalised these elements of romantic Bengali literary works, filtered from any old 'vulgar' or sensual, emotional expression. Comparing myself to Macauley or Vidyasagar's proposals, I was becoming a Muslim North Bengali in blood, but a Hindu-Bengali nationalist in mind.

The homogenisation of Bengali-ness through literary romanticism was intended to thread together all the differences. However, Chakraborty (2004) showed that the romantic aspiration of the main literary figures of the Bengali Renaissance excluded all the different voices within Bengal, and Hindu *bhadralok* (gentleman) became the actor and agent of this Bengali-ness. Partha Chatterjee (1993) analysed the construction of Hindutva as a national identity and shows how the nationalists call to have a history for the glorious past of Bengal was the sign of the nationalist conscience of Bengali erasing the contribution of Muslims and making them as the enemy of that glory. Chatterjee (1993) analysed the Indian textbook history where British rule had been glorified for defeating Muslim rulers, and that was followed by the Indian nationalist call for reclaiming the past. This was the impetus to construct a Hindu elite nationalist ideal in response to the history of colonial superiority. In consequence, subaltern voices had no place in it.

However, despite the assumed silence in the Hindu Bengali nationalists' imaginations, Sonia Amin (1996) showed that, in the 1902 census, more than one thousand Muslim graduates were documented working as administrators. There were tensions between their lifestyle and identity. She also argues that, despite the tension, the Muslim male and female writers in the first half of the 20th century used the term *bhadralok,* like the Hindu elites, and the new Muslim identity was gaining ground (Amin 1996). The only source of Muslim influence in literacy education that came out of Bangla at that time was Kazi Nazrul Islam's work, especially his songs. Although both Rabindranath Tagore and Nazrul were critical about organised religious practices, they eventually became the symbol of the divided religious nationalist imagination. Huq (2011) argues, "the branching out to Nazrul and/or Tagore is part of the complex and variegated ways in which both Nazrul and Tagore have occupied spaces in the political and national imaginary" (226). Contrary to Tagore, Nazrul was born into a poor Muslim family, struggled for survival, and was considered as more revolutionary (Murshid 1993). Because of his humanist songs, he was often considered Kafir Kazi (infidel Kazi) by the orthodox Muslims.

However, later, Nazrul was picked up as the representative of the separate Muslim nationalist identity by overlooking his religiously revolutionary and unorthodox works. His Muslim identity became the priority (Huq 2011). Moreover, not only his Muslim-ness, his works were also significant as they included all the non-Aryan forms of words, that were already accused of being foreign by Dinesh Sen (1911). Nazrul's songs had Persian and Arabic words, along with the language of rural Bengali people, different than Tagore and Bengali-Hindu literary figures, which had also made him different to the Hindu-Bengali nationalist discourse.

As one of the centres of British Raj, Kolkata, the rise of Bengali nationalism, with its Hindu influence marginalised not only Muslims — especially in the Muslim majority of East Bengal — but also many other indigenous groups and their cultural-linguistic elements living under very different political dynamics within broader Bengal, especially in North Bengal. The need for making mimic Englishmen was not present in Cooch Behar. The Rajbangsi dynasty had a solid European connection, but the European educated middle-class had not emerged there like colonial Bengal, as the administration did not need to be educated in English. The administration of Cooch Behar was conducted by the royals, in the same way as before, despite the indirect control of the British raj. A significant socio-cultural movement was the *Kshatriya* movement, which struggled to upgrade their caste, only in reaction to the Bengali *Brahmin* elites and their marginalisation by the new Bengali identity. However, after the British era, from a semi-sovereign Hindu state, Cooch Behar became merely a district of West Bengal and a margin of Bengal.

New Women and Differentiation of Public and Private

On the one hand, liberal British literature creates the urge for romantic and liberal non-conformist thinking within the elite Bengali literary class; a result of the Bengali Renaissance in the late 19th century. And on the other hand, the reaction to this instigated a revival of Hindu conservative nationalism within the educated Hindu elite, that Tanika Sarkar (2001) called 'revivalist-nationalist' cultural resistance among other anti-colonial resistances in the latter half of the 19th century. The liberal literary romantics and the religious revivalists eventually came together on the issue of anti-colonial nationalism with a resolution for the division of social spheres: *Ghar/Bahir* (Home/Public), between the material and the spiritual sphere (P. Chatterjee 1989). For this, they argue, it is not necessary to imitate all aspects of the West, but only its material elements; as they claim that the spiritual aspects of the East are superior to the West. Therefore, the material/spiritual separation was needed. The material world was considered the domain of the male, the public. The home is the essence of the 'spirituality of India,' and woman as its representative must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world. The redefinition of public and private in this context shapes the anti-colonial nationalist patriarchal gender relations that aim to homogenise the immensely heterogeneous gender relations.

Yet, this reinvention of public and private does not necessarily dismiss the diverse and dynamic debates around them. Rather there are several oppositional arguments around the topics of conjugality. Charu Gupta (2005) showed that the Hindu publicists did not maintain a ‘separate sphere’ the way historians identified. Rather, “it appears heterogeneous and internally inconsistent in everyday spatial politics“ (123). She argues that private debates were very much discussed in public, intervening laws, and became a matter of the public sphere. Gupta (2005) argues that, although the British colonial intervention in family law was criticised and resisted by the revivalist nationalists, applying strict laws against adultery and deviance from marriage was encouraged by them. Gupta (2005) argues that marriage became the utmost important institution for social coherence, it was not considered a civil contract, but a religious and family tie for life, “any attack on the aims and ideas of marriage was seen as immoral and wrong. Love was unstable and temporary, marriage gave it dignity.” (125).

While *ghar* (home/family) and its spirituality became a core for upholding the long lost glory of the Indian past, colonial critics of ‘barbaric’ Indian traditions, like Sati[7] and child marriage, became points of reservation for the revivalists. This put a heavy burden on family roles and marriage norms and practices for the Bengali nationalists. In response to British colonial condemnation of Indian oppressive customary traditions for women, Bengali nationalists projected as “superior form to Western women, and low-class women” (P. Chatterjee 1989, 622). The new women (*bhadramahila*)[8] became the symbolic bearer of religious purity and superior spiritual images of India/nationhood. A liberal secular education was introduced for men, but the women’s curriculum did not give up the Hindu virtue for the wife to treat her husband as God.

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[7] An old Hindu tradition where widows, especially the elite women from prestigious families, were expected to sacrifice their lives in the same fire lit for the cremation for their dead husband to prove their chastity and fidelity and to keep the honor of the family.

[8] The *Bhadramahila* (women) of these new liberal elites and Bengali nationalists formed in a dilemma between the liberal modernist idea of companionship and Hindu sacrificing wifehood. Whereas the romantic companion as wife imported by the European educated Bengali men’s emancipation, it was also debated and risky for the Bengali society (Raychaudhuri 2000). The debate didn’t have a complete result, but the discourse of Bengali *Bhadramahila* emerged from it.

The rise of Hindu women and their spiritual domain as a nationalist symbol, marginalised Bengali Muslim women as backward. The Bengali nationalist project always considered them 'other' and not properly Indian (M. Sarkar 2010). Mahua Sarkar (2010) in her book, analysed the discourses about Muslim women in history as to deconstruct this 'otherness'. She explained that Hindu customs and ideology that created this 'otherness' were associate with Indian nationalism and liberal Western ideas, which created this exclusion. She says that the discursive and material contexts have historically presented Muslim women as victims, invisible, and mute.[9]

In the British colonial context, Amin (1996) argued with Partha Chatterjee's reasoning that the home was protected in the Muslim community in a similar way to the Hindu nationalist. However, it wasn't totally successful for Muslim as well as for Hindu women, the private became increasingly public. Amin argues that the shadow of *Brammo* reform influenced the image of Muslim ladies through the idea of the Muslim identity of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Amin 1996)[10]. She showed that the status of those Muslim women were depicted by Nousher Ali Khan Yusufzai in his study *Bangio Musalman*, where they were described as, "the daughters of the gentle Muslim family (in Bengali: *bhadra Musalman poribarer kanyagan*)" (Amin 1996, 6). This study legitimised the term *Bhadramahila* for Muslim women; the same used for Hindu women. Moreover, the Sharif (elite) Muslim Bengalis were against this reform (26), the Deoband[11] tradition excluded Lalon's[12] songs and Ghalib's[13] sensual poems. However, despite that, Lalon's songs were transferred and domesticated into the Bengals Bhadra culture (Amin 1996, 26).

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[9] See more, Saba Mahmood (2011), Lila Abu Lughod (2002).

[10] One of the significant religious reformist movements in colonial India, initiated by the Hindu Bengali elite literary figures in 19th century as an outcome of what is called the "Bengali Renaissance'. While Hindu is a polytheistic

[11] A specific school of thought in Islamic education that expanded in colonial times in India.

[12] Fakir Lalon Shah, alternatively called as Lalon Fakir was the most famous and one of the most influential folk philosopher, songwriter and mystic poet in Bengal in British colonial era.

[13] Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib was one of the most prominent Urdu and Persian poets in the last days of Mughal Empire. His poems are famous for his unorthodox position on the religions and romantic poems.

Lokkhi/Laksmi Meye: Hindu Goddesses and Muslim women

Dipesh Chakrabarty (2004) shows that to secure the spiritual domain of the Hindu wife, *Vishnu*'s wife goddess *Lakshmi* has become the ideal of "women as an educated homemaker (*Lakhmi*) where the antonym of it is *Alakshmi"* (7). Dipesh analysed the idea of,

> "*Alakshmi* (she is either without formal education, or, educated but derailed: *bibi*, *memsahib*, *boubabu*, *beshya*, and ultra-modern) with the definition of Manmohan Basu's book on Hindu rituals. *Kulostree* (wife, sexually faithful, and elite) versus *kulota/beshya* (sexually derailed and declassed or whore) was the binary for good and bad women, that constructed through this historical situation"(11).

Chakrabarty (1992) shows how, "*beshya* (whore), and *memsahib* (European lady or Bengali women living like them) became interchangeable" (12). They are the images of 'free' women, encouraged by Europeans, but not endorsed by Indian nationalists. He analysed the idea of '*griha lakshmi'* where the ideas of *griha* (home) and *laksmi* are coupled together to uphold the concept of 'new women.' Especially in the case of Bengal, the warrior images of the goddess *Kali* were gradually left out of regular female imagery. Beautiful and terrifying, *Kali*, the divine mother-nation-goddess, with her errant sexuality, who was fighting to retrieve the long lost glory, was replaced by the victorious goddess *Durga* (T. Sarkar 2001). Sarkar (2001) argues, *Durga*, contrary to Kali, although a warrior goddess, looks more like a smiling and sacrificing married mother, protecting her children. Recently, *Durga* also referred to the multitasking women, fetishizing their double burden. Still, before that, '*Lakshmi*' became related to the daily lives of women in India and an ideal standard for Bengali femininity.

Interestingly, the god couple Radha-Krishna and their love affair remains a central theme for most of the folk songs that express affection/desire beyond social rules. Sometimes they have been used through folk songs to metaphorically express irresistible desire over social pressure and normative practices, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Here we can see that, although the New women's ideal became *Laksmi*, other Goddesses and their images were also used on different occasions by different interest groups. In an ideal situation, Bengali women should be like *Lakshi.* Still*,* while family-nation-spirituality is in danger, to fight against that danger, she is expected to be like *Durga*, a sacrificing mother. On the other hand, in the liberal imagination, *Radha* is the perfect lover and companion, although her ‘illicitness’ is avoided. Hindu goddess images became the images of different types of Bengali women-hood in different situations. The ‘new women’ was the ideal for 19th century educated Bengali Hindu women to follow with all of the imagery of the goddess. Still, in reality, the agency of those women did not always fit with the prescription.

Besides the trunk-full of books brought to us by my father from Kolkata that enlightened our upbringing with Hindu flavoured Bengali cultural elements, I also got a few books from my relatives about the Muslim female pantheon to follow. One of them was the biography of Ayesha, the most learned and intelligent Muslim female pantheon with a great political influence. However, over the year, with the rise of Islamisation, Ayesha as role model for Muslim girls faded away, while Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad and a docile image, became as a source of reference for ideal Muslim girls. However, despite these female Muslim role models, in Bangla language, *Laksmi* –– althougha Hindu goddess –– nevertheless became the reference for submissive, obedient, well mannered, Bengali girls of all religions. ‘*Lakshmi’/lokkhi* (In Bangla, it is pronounced *lokkhi*, the English version of writing *lokkhi* became *laksmi*, which is the Sanskritised style of the word) was the synonyms of ‘good,’ familiar to every girl while growing up. It was sometimes used for little boys as well to refer to good mannered Bengali speaking people despite referring to a Hindu goddess. Being a *lokkhi meye* (good girl) was the goal of my childhood too. And for that, I was expected to be a well-mannered, polite, and elegantly speaking Bengali girl. The exclusion and inclusion of goddess images was constructed as a nationalist response to the colonial intervention. These icons were used not only by the Hindu practitioners, but by all Bengalis, regardless of their religious beliefs. The love between Radha and Krishna is a deeply embedded metaphor for lovers in Bengali culture, amongst all religious people and all of their folk cultural productions. I will analyse this metaphor in the next chapter.

Voices of *Bhadramahilas*

To locate the writings of women is to emphasise their agency, Tanika Sarkar (2001) tried to explore how female writings began to contribute to issues of Sati, widow marriage, and child marriage in the colonial era. Tanika Sarkar (2001) shows the resisting voices of women against child marriage in various middle-class women's writings at that time. Sarkar discussed the writing of the first Bengali women's biography, '*Amar Jibon'* (my life) by Rassundari Devi, who secretly learned to read and write. She wrote the biography while education was forbidden for women, with the superstitious excuse that education would make her a widow. Tanika Sarkar (2001) showed that Devi was praised as an icon of motherland by the reformer Dinesh Sen, for her writings as an icon of the motherland. The preface of Devi's book, written by Rabindranath Tagore, praised her virtue as housewife, which was accomplished through overcoming that obstacle towards education. Tanika Sarkar (2001) compared Rashsundari Devi's transgression with the transgression of Radha for divine illicit love for Krishna. Sarkar showed that her secret learning, reading and writing of an autobiography concerning her religious Vaishnavite God, constructed her subjectivity. However, Tanika Sarkar (2001) argued, her writing was not a direct speech-effect specifically associated with the women's world. Her prose moved away from everyday life, and she was silent about her conjugality and sexual life, as many other female writers of that time. Discussions of romantic love and courtship were rare in these female writings.

In contrast to Devi's writing, Amin (1996) argues that — in regards to feminist writings of Muslim women — Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain and Shamsun Nahar in particular, were rebellious comparing to the construction of the Hindu 'new women'. Mahua Sarkar (2010) analyses the writing of Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain as one of the most radical feminist voices in early twentieth century Bengal. Begum Rokeya was not only critical about the Islamist imposition of the veil but also about colonialism (M. Sarkar 2010). Mahua Sarkar (2010) shows that, in Rokeya's understanding, the seclusion of women through the Islamist practice of the veil "was a symptom of women's subordination, not necessarily a cause" (17). She continues about Rokeya's arguments:

> "simply abolishing the practice without making access to adequate education and the opportunity to work for a living available to women might help men in their quest for a "liberal/modern" self-image and adequately "modern" companions, but it would achieve

> precious little in terms of helping women gain economic and psychological independence, or self-respect" (17).

Therefore, Rokeya's criticism was directed towards a "certain normative vision of femininity – docile, inactive and ultimately serving to strengthen male dominance both at home and in the world – that was underwritten by middle/upper-class privilege" (M. Sarkar 2010, 15). Rokeya's writings were different in comparison to the new Bengali woman's voice. However, Rokeya's feminist understanding was shadowed by the dominant narrative of her interpreters, and she started to be referred to as only an 'education reformer' for women (R. Ahmed 2011). The rebellious elements of her thought and radical feminist stance were later meticulously excluded from her image. Therefore, the Bengali nationalist narrative successfully excluded Muslim women as an oppressed and backward homogenous category.

Romantic Love and Bengali Women

Although the new Bengali-ness and its victorious past were invented in the format of European orientalist romanticism, personal relations remained in the discomfort zone for the Bengali literary and nationalist elites. The nationalist resolution of colonial criticism rests upon the idea of the home and required a vast area of debates and arguments about Hindu marriage and conjugality related to: the age of marriage, duty/role of the wife, polygamy of men, widowhood and the idea of love within marriage (T. Sarkar 2001). The redefinition of marriage in that context, required a new focus on the issues of conjugality.

However, issues related to love and romance between couples before or alongside marriage remain taboo in this elite literary discourse, even within the writings of women (Raychaudhuri 2000; T. Sarkar 2001). Here the *Ghar-Bahir* (public-private) and material-spiritual binary took a new twist. Although the public sphere was male and material and the home, as women's place, spiritual and superior to the material, the idea of romantic love is nevertheless quite controversial. For men, the love for the country (i.e. establishing the 'spiritual India') is considered superior, while individual romantic love for a person is 'ordinary,' material, and inferior (Chakrabarty 2004). Therefore, love outside of the personal sphere is superior and when it is personal and individual it is considered to pollute the purity of *ghar*. The idea of *ghar* was reinvented according to elite Hindu customs and was considered a sacred domain. The

Hindu custom of arranged matrimony by family, was threatened by the desire to find a spouse through romance and courtship. Romance, if at all accepted, remained in the educated elite discourse and for married couples; it was to flourish only after marriage, not before, and certainly not outside of marriage. Raychaudhuri (2000) shows that the idea of *Brammocharjyo*[14] and the priority of serving the country over family was portrayed as the duty of a real man by the rise of puritanical *Brammo* idea influenced by Victorian/Christian morality associating sex with sin. For the nationalists, love needed to be more than material, more than 'ordinary,' love for the country or love that connects the spiritual companionship rather than material and bodily desire. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2004) points out that this romanticism was needed to build a romantic idea of *Swadesh* (own country) for nationalists, to customise the concept of romantic love more than desire, as a form of devotion to the country.

Bengali society expressed the discourses and practices of love within the newly emerged elite through prose and articles; where debates about Sati, widow marriage and female education were the main topics of discussion. Discussions about sexuality concerning the idea of love was rare. However, Raychaudhuri (2000) shows that hints of these practices, driven by sexual desire and deviance, could also be found in the biographical memoirs and novels of both men and women. These works hint at the experiences and ideas of sexual explorations in this historically very uncertain time (Raychaudhuri 2000). However, female voices that claim their sexual desire and bodily materiality would be challenging to find and to imagine in the new emerging Bengali elite and nationalist sphere.

Disassociation with Popular Culture

Romantic love as a European concept and popular cultural folk ideas of love and desire as part of the 'derailed' lower-class emotions were the grounds for excluding these expressions from a pure image of the 'new women'. Although newly educated women writers had begun to emerge, Tanika Sarkar (2001) shows, these writings are difficult to see as the authentic female voice; as the educated women who could write, went through Western modernist rationalist education, which shaped their subjectivity (T. Sarkar 2001). On the other hand, the popular cultural forms, mostly oral, that were brought to these women's lives by the lower-class women, seem quite different from the female *Bhadramahila*'s writings. The 'new women' was disassociated from the nineteenth-century popular traditional folk cultural products like doggerels, poems, proverbs, and songs. In the nineteenth century, the disassociation of newly emerged *bhadramahila* from women folk artists made by middle-class men, silenced their voice and desire for expression (Banerjee 1989, 26). These reforms and debates agreed on the need to disassociate the elite women from the "pernicious influence of certain prevailing literary and cultural forms on Bengali women" (128). The fear that the spiritual 'purity' of the 'new woman' could be threatened by the cultural products brought by lower-class, made the Bengali *bhadralok* worried. Banerjee (1989) showed that these forms of folk cultural products, like doggerels, poems, songs, and theatrical performances mainly conveyed by the women who were outside of the Bengali modernisation of new women or colonial missionary education. Banerjee (1989) argued:

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[14] Celibacy for the path of Hindu god Brahmma, a state where one keeps themselves pure and spiritual, away from sexual union or marriage.

> "Significantly, in nineteenth-century Bengal in general and Calcutta in particular, this popular culture had a wide female audience, ranging from the lower caste and lower-class self-employed women of the marketplace to the wives and daughters of the *bhadralok* in the sheltered andarmahal (domestic sphere of elite Bengali) or zenana (secluded quarters for women)" (128).

Her analysis is important as it shows how the elements of the folk cultural products that were seen as a 'pernicious influence' to the new women hint at the existence of *Bhawaiya,* with its deviant forms at that time.

Banerjee (1989) showed that the Hindu *bhadramahila* were the primary audiences of the religious songs performed by lower-class female artists and singers in the homes of elite Bengalis. They express the story of goddess Durga or god pair Radha Krishna, by comparing their emotions with day to day human life. Durga's departure represented by the sorrow of the separation of a mother and daughter or the love affair of Radha Krishna is deglamourised through the rustic young couple in their adulterous and incestuous relations (T. Sarkar 2001, 136). Also, the doggerels primarily originated in the daily experiences or social situations of working women, often in the form of anger or satire against the husband who cannot provide for or beat their wives. It became clear that the mundane life of women and the de-spiritualised story of the goddess as expressions of female sufferings and desire were treated as polluting elements for the new women and became the target of the *bhadralok* campaign against them.

In domestic life, I grew up with such dynamics. My mother was raised in a village of North Bengal in Bangladesh in an extended family with lots of children. Since she was one of the older children, she had the duty to do the housework in close association with the maids and the poorer women who came to help to manage the harvest. She also used to have a close association with neighbours and other low-income families in the surrounding area. On the contrary, coming from a hierarchical Muslim family from West Bengal, my father was strict about maintaining the boundaries of social status, which was, by default, applied to my parents' domestic norms. However, my mother never followed his strict limits and continued to maintain a close alliance beyond her class boundaries whenever he was not around. Her association with lower-class women was not considered a cultured thing to follow for us. Therefore all my childhood, I saw two different scenarios in our home: while my father was home, every rule was meticulously maintained. Still, all day when he was at work, the door of our house was rarely closed and my mother was difficult to find at home. The boundaries of home and outside, public and private, were much more flexible in the absence of my father. The conjugal dynamics of my parents are rooted in the invention of new women and their disassociation from the lower-class women during the rise of Bengal nationalism.

The Dilemma of Vulgar Popular Culture and Spiritual folk

Nevertheless, not all elements of folk and popular cultural production were considered as polluting by the *bhadralok*. While the new women was dissociated from deviant cultural forms, some folk cultural traditions were celebrated and included in elite cultural products. A filtration was at work for reinvent the culture in order to use spiritual Bengali-ness for a nationalist purpose. The process of selection of the folk traditions excludes the sexual/sensual and material/bodily elements while upholding the spiritual factors as superior to body and materiality.

Chakrabarty (2004) analysed Dinesh Sen’s work and argued that Sen emphasised finding the spirituality in ‘folk’ literature to bridge the gap between illiterate mass with the educated elites and convey a homogenous sense of spirituality. Later Bengali literary guru Rabindranath Tagore’s interest in folk traditions took a different shape, but still used them as an antidote for constructing the spirituality of authentic India. Chakrabarty (2004) argues Tagore shared Sen’s idea of folk songs by depicting them as the “umbilical cord” (661) that ties the past, present, and future of Bengali people. For this reinvention of the history of spiritual India, *Baul* was picked up from all the folk music genres and celebrated as a symbol of the spirituality of folk and authentic India (Urban 1999a).

I will explain how ‘spirituality’ was emphasised over the materiality of folk songs through the exclusion of the day to day experience of women and their voices in the next chapter. Here, I will focus on how it has been interpreted and constructed as a resource of Indian spirituality to serve the ‘umbilical cord’ that creates this timeless Bengali-ness, according to Tagore. Tagore was a leading figure in the elite literary circle of the 20th century and was influenced by *Baul* tradition. Through his influence, *Baul* became “the product of a number of diverse social and political forces of late 19th and early 20th century Bengal” (Urban 1999a, 15). Urban (1999) argues that conservative religious groups did not welcome the spiritual practices and rituals of *Baul*. Its esoteric rituals were considered immoral in the eyes of mainstream society. But at the same time, *Baul* and their songs have been romanticised and became the representative of Bengali people, and their "folk spirit, consists of simplicity, freedom, and humanism" (16). Urban (1999) argues that to fit into the nationalists imagined ‘spirituality’ and symbol of Bengali-ness, “it also had to be significantly altered and transformed — purified and 'deodorised', as it was, such that its more offensive, anti-social and sexual elements were de-emphasised and even excised altogether”(16).

Interestingly, that was the version of *Baul* I learned from my social upbringing. The sexual part of it was so meticulously filtered and excluded that I was completely unaware of it. It was surprising for me to discover the 'immoral' traditions and practices of *Baul* through the Islamists' attack on them in recent days — just as my research interest grew on *Bhawaiya*. However, despite the erasure in the middle-class discourse, there were numerous works and researches done about these esoteric sexual practices of *Baul,* but the discomfort and silence around this topic are also salient, which I will explain in the next chapter. Nevertheless, before discovering the sexual aspect, *Baul* songs were a symbol of devotion and affection to me, as portrayed by the Bengali *bhadralok* discourse compatible with Tagorian influence. While Bengali and Indian nationalism became coloured exclusively with Hinduism, *Baul* had a very complicated relationship with Islamic tradition as well, which was also ignored in this reinvention.

POST-COLONIAL ERA

While Bengal was a vast area where people shared a similar language and culture, British colonial rule ended up dividing the Indian subcontinent into two parts according to religion, which caused the partition in Bengal. Two nation-states were created following religious identity: India for Hindus, and Pakistan for Muslims. But Pakistan was the country which had two geographically separated parts, West Pakistan (now Pakistan) and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). West Bengal (now Bengal), where Bengali Hindus are the majority, remained part of India and the remaining Bengal, where the majority of Bengalis are Muslims, became part of East Pakistan. After the partition, the situation in newly formed East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) started to change in a different direction.

East Pakistan, West Bengal, North Bengal

As I explained earlier, although the invention of Bengali nationalism was inherently Hindu flavoured, there was a parallel identity formation that exists as Bengali Muslim *bhadralok*. But after the end of the British era, their existence was denied even more. Partition and communal violence significantly divided the identity of Bengali speaking people. It was becoming impossible for the Bengali's of West Bengal to imagine Muslims as Bengali. Whereas in Pakistan, Bengali Muslims were the majority but became politically marginalised.

Bangaal-Ghoti Binary

During my childhood when we were being called '*ghoti*', it initially seemed like a slur. Later I realised it was mainly a way of ridiculing the 'elitist' attitudes of West Bengalis. The Hindus of West Bengal claim to superiority was contested by the term. It was mainly used in West Bengal to refer to the Hindu's of

West Bengal, by the Bengali migrants from East Bengal, after the partition. After partition, the Hindu Bengalis who migrated to West Bengal from East Pakistan were called *Bangaal,* as opposed to Bengali. And the Bengali Muslims living in East Bengal (East Pakistan) were not even considered as Bengali by the West Bengalis. The term signified that these people are not sophisticated like the West Bengalis, they are country people, illiterate, and they speak in a rural accent, not the standard Bengali (Shamshad 2017). Following the partition, a massive number of Hindu migrants from East Bengal created tensions in West Bengal. So it was not only the Hindu-Muslim tension, even within the Hindus the East Bengali migrants, and original West Bengali Hindus had their cultural conflicts. The migrants from East Bengal were called *Bangaal*, as opposed to Bengali, sometimes with a derogatory connotation, especially for those who migrated during and after the independence of Bangladesh (Mookherjee 2010). Bandyopadhyay (2008) argues, the Bengalis who migrated East — with their shared memory of the lost homeland, their collective experience of suffering and struggles to make a living — resisted the derogatory labelling, and called the West Bengalis '*ghoti*', which in turn led to a *ghoti-Bangaal* conflict. The difference of *ghoti-Bangaal* was identified by the "dialect, manner, food habit, rites and rituals, appearance, attitude towards outsiders" (385).

However, the land of East Pakistan continued to be considered as Bengal, in the discourse. Shamshad (2017) argues, "historically, the terms E-Par Bangla (Bengal on this side of the river) and O-Par Bangla (Bengal on the other side of the river) were used by the Bengalis to refer to the eastern or western side of Bengal based on the river Padma, as the marker. After Partition, that marker changed, and now "E-Par Bangla and O-Par Bangla signify Bengal on 'this side' and 'the other side' of the international border between Bangladesh (East Pakistan that time) and West Bengal" (386).

East Pakistan: First Bengali, then Muslim

The geographical, cultural, linguistic and economic gap between the two territories of Pakistan resulted in a movement of resistance in East-Pakistan to be freed from the dominance of West-Pakistan. A pivotal moment came in 1948, when Urdu was declared as the state language of Pakistan and East Pakistani (now Bangladesh) Bengalis became furious and resisted the decision. This uprising of the language movement became more prominent especially from 21st February, 1952, when a few of the protesting students of Dhaka University were shot by the police.[15] This event made the anti-Pakistani ethno-linguistic political conscience stronger in East Pakistan. Islam started to become the secondary identity and the cultural identity as Bengali became the priority. The resistant Bengali nationalist ideology was emphasised in language and culture. This Bengali nationalism was not Hindu flavoured like the original one, rather more secular and anti-Pakistan in nature. The dissociation from Pakistan for the struggle of independence needed a distance from the Islamic religious identity, which resulted in the emergence of more secular Bengali nationalism. To uphold the difference from Pakistan, nineteenth century elite Bengali identity had to be reproduced. Huq (2011) argues, "Tagore's work had the power to validate a collective identity of the East Pakistanis through means other than Islam" (227). In East Pakistan, the religious identity had to be avoided in favour of the need to focus on Bengali as a separate cultural-linguistic identity and as the unifying one. Huq argues, the Pakistani state, considering Tagore's work to convey separatist cultural elements, suppressed it, i.e., banned Tagore's songs on national radio, the festive commemoration of Tagore's birthday, and there was even discussion about banning Tagore's work in the literature curriculum in the university; all of which made his work "a symbol of resisting Pakistan and for upholding Bengali-ness" (227). Singing Tagore's songs and wearing *tip*[16] and shari, as opposed to the Pakistani *Salwar kameez* for women, became the signifier of secular Bengali Nationalism and an act of protest to Pakistani religious-cultural dominance. Secularism was established by denying Muslim-ness and wearing traditional Hindu signifiers as a Bengali cultural symbol as opposed to a religious one (L. Karim 2004). Although different from its ancestral Bengali identity, because of the mixture of the Muslim folk tradition of Bengal, the new Bengali identity formation was achieved through singing and upholding the cultural symbolism of Rabindra Sangeet (Songs of Rabindranath Tagore). Nayla Kabeer(1991a) highlighted the same inspiration of Bengali identity in her work, showing that these cultural markers were significant to uphold for those Bengali Muslim women to emphasise Bengali nationalism.

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[15] The continuation of the Language movement created political tension. The students of Dhaka University were protesting and planned a strike and demonstrations on February 21 throughout East Pakistan. To stop them, the Pakistani government banned all assemblies and demonstrations under section 144. Violating this, thousands of students from collages and university gathered in Dhaka University on 21th February morning and started the demonstration. Police, in response to this, shot at the demonstration and killed 5 students, including a nine-year-old boy. This changed the course of the movement and eventually both Bangla and Urdu became the state languages of Pakistan. Since then every year 21 February has been observed to commemorate the martyrs of the Language Movement in Bangladesh and from 1999, by UNESCO, 21 February was adopted to celebrate the international mother language day.

[16] Tip, the colored dot on the women's forehead which is part of the traditional dress in Bengal, although practiced by all religious women in the Indian subcontinent for beautification, it was linked initially to Hindu rituals.

War of Independence and the Songs of Freedom

In the course of the nine months of the war of Independence in '71, the history of Bengali speaking people took a sharp turn towards a new Bengali nationalism with the birth of a new nation-state: Bangladesh. This latter form of Bengali nationalism, despite upholding the Hindu symbols as secular, was carefully distanced from India, as to maintain the demand for a separate state (L. Karim 2004). This new Bengali nationalism constructed a historically and culturally specific Bengali Muslim identity, moving away from its previous form of Bengali nationalism that emerged in response to colonial rule. It was a complex mixture of language and religion. It developed to distinguish itself as linguistically and culturally different from Pakistan and religiously different from West Bengal. Those two differences are both politically essential for keeping the national identity separate and from both India and Pakistan to justify the demand of an independent nation-state of Bangladesh in 1971.

To create these specific Bengali nationalist emotions for the Bangladeshi nation-state, the songs broadcast from the *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra* (Free Bengal Radio Centre) played a vital role. It was a radio broadcasting centre established during the declaration of independence, just after the Pakistani military attack on 25th March, 1971. While before the war, playing and listening to Tagor's songs was considered an act of rebellion; through the war, many other patriotic songs — that captured the revolutionary spirit of the war — became sources of the nationalist spirit. The new songs, along with the songs of Nazrul, were considered more revolutionary and rebellious and served to promote specific nationalist emotions in the spirit of war ("Songs That Won the War" 2017). The songs also fit into the Bengali Muslim nationalism that was required for a separate nation-state. The radio broadcasting was managed by refugee artists and musicians from Bangladesh. With its most popular political satires, it developed a distinct style with the old Dhaka Bangla dialect to communicate with the mass Bengali Muslim majority that was different than West Bengal's standard Bangla dialect. These wartime cultural products and songs became the foundation of a new Bengali nationalism for Bangladesh, different than the Hindu flavoured original Bengali nationalism.

This new Bengali nationalism also upholds the Bengali folk musical tradition, in particular for its refashioning of the *Baul* tradition and positioning Lalon as its icon (Urban 1999a). Lalon Fakir became a "Bangladeshi cultural hero as a symbol of independence of Bangladesh" (17). The national anthem written by Tagore was influenced by Lalon and was a signifier of the new Bengali nationalism needed for the independence of Bangladesh. Not only *Baul*, this new Bengali nationalism was heavily influenced by the other more embodied folk song genres, i.e. *Bhawaiya* and *Bhatiali*.

North Bengal and its Marginalisation

The political scenario in North Bengal was very different to West Bengal and even from East Bengal. Cooch Behar, an independent dynasty known initially as Kamrupa, is populated by the Rajbangsi people. Their language and culture are considered Rajbangsi, not Bangla. It remain as the only sovereign Hindu kingdom even when the Mughal dynasty ruled most of India and the British Raj established its capital in Calcutta (now Kolkata), defeating the Mughal empire of India. The Rajbangsi dynasty sought British military help for protection from Bhutanese invaders in 1773. Through the Anglo-Bhutan war and the settlement in 1864, Cooch Behar continued as a native princely state ruled by the Koch Kings under the supervision of the British Raj until the independence of India from the British colony (Nandi 2014). The Cooch Behar state of that time included almost all the *Bhawaiya* areas; some of which are outside its border today. After the end of the British raj, the king of Cooch Behar handed over state control to India, and it became a mere district of the state of West Bengal (now Bengal). Therefore, for the Rajbangsi, the 'independence' of India was not an 'independence,' but rather an acute marginalisation of Cooch Behar and its language and culture. As a result, the anti-colonial sentiment which fuelled Indian/Bengali nationalism and influenced the creation of a new kind of Bengali woman was not very strong here. Bengali versus Cooch-Rajbangsi remains in a dynamic conflict throughout history, after the independence of India, which is often referred to as the separatist movement in political discourse. The establishment of the Rajbangsi Bhasa (language) Institute in 2014, is one of the results of this movement for reinventing a tradition to resist political and cultural marginalisation.

Moreover, the standardisation of Bangla, by excluding words other than Sanskrit, left the Rajbangsi dialect even more marginalised — even the emotions the words carry were considered deviant. With the rise of Bengali nationalism, new sexual norms were imposed in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, marginal areas of North Bengal continued to allow space for crossing normative sexual bonds through marriage. This situation might have created space for non-monogamous and flexible/blurred conjugal relations for both men and women in marital and family laws.

AFTER 71: WEST BENGAL AND BANGLADESH

The linguistic/cultural nationalism of Bangladesh raised by the plea to free Bangladesh from Pakistan was a class-specific phenomenon. The cultural nationalist elite was disassociated from the mass population of the country (Karim 2004). The linguistic/cultural emphasis on creating Bengali nationalism eventually lost its urgent appeal in the political sphere after the independence of Bangladesh. Karim shows that many Muslim Bangladeshis had a ‘suspicion’ about India’s role in fighting against Pakistan to support Bangladesh in the liberation war, and they were careful enough to keep their difference from the Indian Hindutva movement (Karim 2004). Therefore, in Bangladesh the secondary status of religious identity in the ’70s shifted through the emergence of Islam in the political sphere, which was propagated in order to keep the separation from India and Hinduism; especially after the murder of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. From the 1980s, the ideology of Salafist Islam was spread by *Jamat-i-Islam*[17] political influence, and they created many women’s groups to organise social gatherings regularly to spread and strengthen Islamist knowledge, usually called ‘*Jamat’* (Kabeer 1991a). From then on, the proper appearance of Muslim women and ‘*porda*’ (*hijab*, or the veil) became an issue of debate.

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[17] The Islamist (Salafist) political party from Pakistan, who were against the independence of Bangladesh. The party was inactive for a few years after independence. Still, later, with the support of the military government, it re-established from the ’80s using the religious sentiment of the masses.

Changes in women's dress code again became the marker of these contested identities. Huq (2011) argues, the 'assertion' of the Muslim self was becoming more and more visible and debates around the behaviour of proper Muslims gained public attention and discussion.

As a Bengali Muslim woman, I carried the baggage of the identities of being a Bengali-Bangladeshi-Muslim-liberal woman, constructed in that historical process, situated in the network of their 'others,' with the sense of less-Bengali-ness by the more-Bengalis of West-Bengal. Therefore, although I was often indirectly teased by being called '*ghoti*,' after processing the initial shock, it also became a source of pride. Being different was not so hard, as nurturing this sense of pure Bengali dialect and the literary-cultural education I inherited from the Bengali renaissance through my father, are the source of privileges in formal interaction.

The tension between E-par-Bangla and O-par Bangla and their assumed identity category was salient in my fieldwork experience, although it was not something very explicit. In my fieldwork in India, I often surprised those in my surroundings with my 'standard Bangla' and my not-so-Islamic outfits, which I received as 'compliments.' Although *Bhawaiya* music reflects the Bengali-Rajbangsi-Rangpuri dialect, most of the musicians spoke to me with the 'standard' Bangla. On several occasions, while I was in West-Bengal, I heard (with a tone of compliment) that I do not 'sound' and act *Bangaal*, after I revealed my country of origin. I was asked a few times in Cooch Behar whether I am Bengali or Bangladeshi. These two identities are mutually exclusive, especially in the normative mind of the people in West Bengal, even now.

SUBVERSIVE MARGINS OF IDENTITY MARKERS

The construction of identities and their binary, i.e., Bengali/*Bangaal/ghoti*, Bengali/Hindu, Bengali/Muslim, Hindu/Muslim women, were historically created with great effort through discourse as the identity prescriptions to follow. Yet, in day to day life, we do not always fit into those identity boxes. My subjective dynamic and field data proves that this blurred boundary of identities is one of the central factors that allow for subversive or deviant sexual elements to exist. Although memoir, autobiography, and discussion do not always express the deviant desire in historical formations of identities; in the lyrics of songs or in literature, we can find more hints for exploring the dynamics of everyday life. While they may not be considered factual, they produce and reproduce emotions as active ingredients of identity, often transgressing the boundaries of identity markers. *Bhawaiya* songs and their lyrics can catch those active ingredients of the emotions working through the gender, religious, cultural, linguistic, and political identity borders.

Political or cultural/religious/linguistic borders are important for understanding the location of *Bhawaiya* and its subversive emergence. *Bhawaiya* is one of the primary signifiers of the cultural identity of North Bengal. The border between direct British rule and indirect economic control through the local kingdom in North Bengal left some spaces for the rural people to maintain their lives without significant changes. Bhawaiya existed in the margins of the identities. The existence of the lyrics of *Bhawaiya* — in contrast with the Hindu nationalist reformation — can give us a broader picture of this subversion.

Moreover, as I discussed earlier, the language of North Bengal also remains in the margin of Bengal. It is a mixture of many non-Aryan, Dravidian, Mongolian, and Persian/Arabian elements that were filtered to create the standard Bangla. The rise of Indian/Bengali nationalism in response to colonialism did not have much influence on political and cultural identity here. Instead, the rise of Bengali nationalism marginalised Rajbangshi culture and practices. Although *Bhawaiya* is now considered a genre of Bangla folk song, it emerged from the blurred border of Bengali and Rajbangsi language and culture. This blurred borderland between Bengali and Rajbangsi is one of the central factors that allowed for subversive or deviant sexual elements to exist in *Bhawaiya* song lyrics.

The deviant desires that emerge from the monogamous marriage in *Bhawaiya,* differed from the idea of 'polygamy' or 'adultery' that emerged in the late nineteenth century and which redefined the normative gender roles and a new notion of conjugality in the dominant narrative of India/Bengal. The history of colonialism and the emergence of Bengali nationalism explains how the concepts of 'adultery' emerged, and how the idea of the plurality of sensual desire subsided in the dominant narratives. These are important because, as I discussed earlier, Bengali nationalist narratives and discourse, in response to colonialism, excluded the multiple and marginalised cultural elements of Bengal and instead propagated the idea of a homogenous Bengali culture. Tanika Sarkar (1997) shows that in the last half of the nineteenth century, the emergent ‘public sphere’ was more inclusive of the lower-class, as indicated by the vast number of cheap Bengali publications. By analysing those, she argues that ‘adultery’ became the ‘other’ of Hindu conjugal sexuality. Although she shows the resisting voices of women against child marriage in various middle-class women’s writings, the issue of ‘adultery’ remains unmentioned as it is ‘immoral.’ They were also disassociated from the rural/folk cultural products carried out by the lower-class women in the newly constructed home of elite Bengalis. ‘Adultery’ as the ‘other', as Tanika Sarkar (2001) explained, doesn’t have any agency other than strengthening the ‘self.’ However, the illicit desire of women in *Bhawaiya* has agency and somewhat acceptance, whether it is symbolic or not. It show’s a different narrative of ‘adultery’ that is not as the ‘other’ of marriage, rather a transgression of it with its subversive voice directed towards the normative sexual role. Sarkar shows how this highlights a blind spot of that ‘public sphere’. I am not defying Sarkar’s argument about a public sphere, instead I am using her argument to situate *Bhawaiya* lyrics on the margin of the public sphere and locate the female desire for ‘illicit’ relations in the blind spot of the border.

While Tagore’s songs were influenced by *Baul* music, the other legendary poet and songwriter of East Bengal, Kazi Nazrul Islam, became fond of other folk songs, especially folk songs from north Bengal, i.e., *Jhumur, Bhawaiya*, and *Bhatiali* folk music. Therefore, Bengali folk music began to be adored by mainstream Bangla musicians and audiences, and soon recordings were being made for gramophone records. The women’s voice, apparently unheard and silenced from the nationalist and colonial discourse, existed through *Bhawaiya* and other apparently ‘deviant’ folk cultural production carried out by the lower-class women. Its reproduction by the middle-class/elite musicians carried the artefacts of deviant and defiant emotions of the lower-class women to middle-class living rooms. Those emotions had been connected with bodies and constructed the subversive subjectivities, which I will explain in the fifth chapter. The subjectivity of women in *Bhawaiya* is significantly different from this idea of the 'new women.’ Although ‘she’ is subaltern, the appeal of her expression of desire enables her to transcend the boundary between the lower-class field and the upper-class' living room. By the early twentieth century, this crossover had been achieved, and it has survived since the late nineteenth century, with its explicit descriptions of female desire existing in contrast to Bengali nationalist narratives about women.

Following the partition of Bengal, the *Bhawaiya* area of North Bengal was also divided by religious identity. The legendary Abbasuddin Ahmed, was born in Cooch Behar, but after partition, he moved to Rangpur, Bangladesh. Following Abbasuddin Ahmed, *Bhawaiya* became a significant folk tradition in Bangladesh. The recorded *Bhawaiya* songs quickly became part of the elite class' cultural elements. The recording was vital, as first of all, it eliminated the risks of the contentious contact between upper-class women with lower-class singers in the making of new Bengali *bhadramahila*. Second, it was accepted and celebrated as a musical genre by the elites, despite it previously being considered lower-class.

Moreover, since it is the folk tradition of the most marginalised peoples, who reside in the remote rural areas, the more rural areas around Cooch Behar and Rangpur are considered to be the authentic *Bhawaiya* areas. The dilemma between the centre and the margins complicated around the idea of authenticity and recognition. The more marginal the songs are, the more authentic they appear. However, this authenticity negotiates with a recognition that depends on the centre. The rural authenticity of *Bhawaiya* negotiates with its urban representative form as a symbol of national tradition through its production, regulation, and protection by the nation-state. This negotiation also allows room for creativity in the margin. Das and Poole argue (2004), marginality allows for creativity and enables strategies for engaging with the state. However, they say that the creativity of the margins is the 'other' of the norm and serves the purpose of being the 'exception' to the rule (4). For them, the creativity and plurality in the margin and the state are indeterminant to each other: the margins allow for resistance, and despite the states order and border making process they are not only a subject that is managed and controlled by the state, but also flow outside of that control. This is where I want to situate *Bhawaiya* and its deviant emotions. It is certainly not outside of normative control, but rather a subversion from within. It is not just the 'other' of the state, instead it is in negotiation with the state for its authenticity, which I will be discussing in chapter six.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I located the time and place where the genre of *Bhawaiya* existed, with its subversive elements, in the making of the normative political, linguistic, and gender identities in the historical context. *Bhawaiya* survived in the margins of those identity boxes that were carefully created from the colonial era. It had been marginalised by the standardisation of Bangla language and literature, by the creation of Hindu-Bengali nationalism. The new definition and boundary of *ghar-bahir* (public/private) were also formed in this process, where the anomalistic elements for folk songs were restricted from entering inside the household. The boundary between the lower-class female folk singers and the upper-middle-class Hindu wives was tightened by the invention of Bengali nationalism, which upheld the burden of the spiritual superiority of Hindu India, of the Hindu woman. The Hindu goddess metaphor was widely used for expected behaviours of women, not only for the Hindu women but beyond the religious boundary amongst all Bangla speaking people. The voice and subjectivity to express desire, even in the writings of the newly educated Hindu women, were not very visible. Whereas, some Muslim women, although considered victims and passive in that nationalist narration, raised their feminist consciences by criticizing the social order. At the same time, in the newly emerged public sphere, which had flourished with Bengali nationalist and Bengali literature, the dilemma between the profane elements of folk cultural products and the refining of them became an issue of debate. Identity formation continued and took a twist after the end of the colonial era through the partition of Bengal, the repeated Hindu-Muslim riots, and the tensions surrounding this situation. The derogatory *Bangaal* identity, and to contest that, the cultural capital of standard Bengali, musical lessons from Tagore became part of the lives of middle-class Bengali women. Added to this were the new tensions of the war of independence of Bangladesh and the identity dilemma of Bengali versus Muslim, which remains a source of tension in the political discourse and cultural representation. In those processes, folk songs were purified of their ‘vulgar’ expressions and used to uphold the national spirit. At the same time, in parallel to this, folk songs and cultural products existed and also remained popular in the margins of the society and in the identity borders. This is where the prescription of the identity is contested by the day to day materiality.

As Bengali Muslim Bangladeshi, my religious and linguistic-cultural identity has been constructed historically by the same process of colonial, post-colonial, and nationalists narratives of identity prescriptions and also contested and shaped by the cultural products associated with it. It is a composition of identities that are connected with the songs and literature I have encountered, the day to day material life, and the emotions embedded in it. *Bhawaiya* tunes carry the deviant and defiant emotions woven in the lyrics of the material and mundane day to day events.

Therefore, it can be argued that, the historical context of *Bhawaiya* is situated in the blurred political and cultural margins between Bengal and Rajbangsi, between the Muslim and Hindu communities and between the British Raj and Hindu kingdom. And now, the entire *Bhawaiya* areas are divided by the international border between Bangladesh and India after 1947. However, *Bhawaiya* existed in the excluded sphere of the historical construction of Bengali nationalism regarding the idea of the new woman, Hindu spiritual wifehood, Muslim women, and the debate of the Bengali/Bangaal dilemma. Bhawaiya remains within the lower-class women and men in their aberrant cultural expression that was excluded from ‘standard’ linguistical words and dialects. It existed between North Bengal — as the marginal Hindu state on the border of colonial control — and in contemporary times it exists in North Bengal transcending the border of both Bangladesh and India. What I want to argue is that female subjectivity in *Bhawaiya* and its subversive sexual desire could exist because of the ambiguity of *Bhawaiya*'s location on the margin.

CHAPTER 3: *BHAWAIYA* IN THE CONTEXT OF FOLK SONG GENRES IN BENGAL

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will introduce the *Bhawaiya* musical tradition and compare it with the other main Bangla folk song genres to re-examine their definitive boundaries. Bangla folk songs are divided into generic categories that are named according to the various folk musical traditions, i.e. *Baul, Bhawaya, Bhatiali, Murshidi, Jari, Sari,* etc. However, regarding practices and institutional establishments, the most prominent Bangla folk song genres are *Baul, Bhatiali* and *Bhawaiya*. Searching for the significance of *Bhawaiya*, in this chapter, I will discuss these three genres of musical traditions; specifically in relation to the female subject of the songs and the emotions that they generate. Through my research I have discovered that the differences between these folk song genres — mostly constructed by interpretations made in the process of categorisation — ignore their similarities, especially where sexuality and female desire is concerned. My focus therefore will be on a reconstruction of these generic borders, not according to the essential differences attached to the songs, with the hierarchical meaning, rather by the subjectivities of the songs and their lyrics that express female desires. In doing so, I will re-examine the idea of the sensuality/spirituality binary.

To locate *Bhawaiya*, I will situate *Bhawaiya* songs in the historical context of folk culture in Bengal. Through this, I will explore how the deviant female desires and emotions in *Bhawaiya* and other folk song genres, generally express dissatisfaction about imprisonment in an unsatisfying marriage. For this analysis, my focus will be on sexuality, affection and day to day experience. I aim to explore the expression of desire for sexual fulfilment by either entering wholeheartedly into marriage or by transgressing it by examining the lyrics of *Bhawaiya* and the historical context whereby elements of folk songs became a deviant cultural form. I consider these elements as representative of female experience and the desire for deviation from normative gender roles and marital morality. I will discuss folk songs and their interpretations both in nationalist narratives and in alternative discourses to understand and critique the hierarchy assumed in the material versus abstract binary, especially with the *Baul* tradition. I will examine the assumed superiority of *Baul* genre for the matter of philosophy and spirituality by deconstructing those ideas. Following that, I will compare interpretations of folk songs, their generic boundaries and their assumed hierarchy. I will examine how the 'deviant' elements of *Baul* and *Bhawaiya* were dealt with by the different interest groups. Lastly, I will reconstruct their similarities with embodied emotions and the experience of the female folk singers.

FOLK TRADITIONS AND SEXUALITY

This chapter is not driven by the aim to explore the historical truth of *Bhawaiya's* origin, rather, it is an analysis of how the genre acts as a window to female desire and experience; as constructed through the historical context of the myth and materiality of rural Bengal. Most of the *Bhawaiya* experts (the researchers and the singers) that I interviewed mentioned the '*pala gaan*' (folk musical and theatrical performances) as the origin of most of the folk songs of Bengal, which would concur with Barma's (2004) analysis. These public performances were based on religious/mythical stories, mostly concerning god and goddess (Barma 2004). *Pala gaan* covers *kirtans, panchali, kavi* songs and many others which are influenced by the myth of the love of Krishna and Radha and other gods and goddesses (Banerjee 1989). The story of god Krishna is part of *Vaishnavism* of Hindu religious belief derived from the devotion of god *Vishnu* whose devotees are known as *Vaishnav*. Vishnu has several incarnations, one of them is Krishna (Bezbaroa 2004). Vaishnavism has many sects and cults, and there are differences amongst the sects in their practises of praying and worshipping Krishna (Bezbaroa 2004). There are also differences in interpreting the story of Radha-Krishna.

In Bengal, the influence of Vaishnavism is incorporated into the *Tantra* and *Shakta* cult of Hinduism, which focuses on the love between the divine couple Radha-Krishna as described in Jayadeva's famous text *Gita-Govindan* (Chandra Sen 1911). This text expressed the love between Radha-Krishna with the use of sexual and erotic symbols (Entwistle and Bakker 1981, 27). These poems became very popular, especially when they were translated into Bangla in the thirteenth century as '*Shrikrisnokirton*' by the poet Baru Chandidas. His poems about the love of *Radha-Krishna* later became representative of the *Sahajiya* cult which was influenced by Buddhism (Entwistle and Bakker 1981, 27). '*Shrikrisnokirton*' was part of the series of *Mangalkabyos* by the Bengali folk poets which depicted the stories of both Aryan and local indigenous gods and goddesses. They express the contemporary situations that led to the secularisation of the religious myths and reflect the mundane lives of rural Bengalis (Banerjee 1987, 1197). This is also true for the poems of poet Baru Chandidas's piece '*Shrikisnokirton*', which depicts and celebrates non-monogamous and embodied love.

The erotic descriptions of lovemaking between Radha-Krishna in Chandidas' poem is significantly different to the description of their love in other Hindu religious interpretations. There are many versions of the love-story between Radha-Krishna. The interpretation and use of this love story in most of the folk songs follows the poems of Baru Chandidas, which is: Krishna was brought up in *Vrindavan* by the cow-herding family of Yashoda and Nanda Raja. Radha and Krishna grew up in the same village and became soul mates. Krishna was a very mischievous child but was considered attractive and alluring by the cow-girls (*gopi*) of the village. They would become hypnotised by the sound of his magical flute playing. However, Radha was the prettiest and his favourite amongst them. The relationship of young Radha and Krishna was playful, full of wit, charming and mischievous. Later they became lovers. Their love was hidden from society, as Radha got married to someone else. Later Krishna left Vrindavan to become King of Mathura. There he had many wives (Chakrabortty 1984). The element of their 'illicit' affection was described in detail in the poems of Chandidas by celebrating secrecy and 'adultery'. Krishna was polygamous, whereas *Radha* was married to another man while carrying out an affair with Krishna. For Radha, the desperate desire to meet Krishna whilst ignoring her marriage and her in-laws restriction was the most celebrated theme in the poems (Parekh and Saint Poet 2005).

From the 15th century, there was a huge flow of songs, dramatic performances, paintings and oral storytelling influenced by Vaishnavism, which spread across Bengal. This reflects not only the reaction against the official Brahminic hierarchy but also is characteristically more secular and influenced by non-Aryan symbols (M. Sarkar 2010). In parallel to the Hindu religious narrative, the folk interpretation of the love between Radha-Krishna was celebrated amongst the margins of society incorporating all religious believers, including Muslims and Buddhists. They became the ideal of lovers in real life — stripped of their superior spiritual image. The *Kirtans* (the songs about the love of Radha-Krishna) in particular are very different from the Hindu religious story written by the pundits in Sanskrit regarding the story of God Krishna (Banerjee 1987, 1197). Banerjee argues:

> “The divine pair is deglamourised through the imagery into a rustic young couple often in a daring adulterous and incestuous relationship — expressing the same fears and hopes, wounded pride and blissful consummation that are the lot of ordinary mortals in love. Stripped of omnipotent divine qualities, Krishna and Radha are brought down to earth and turned into vulnerable human beings, as sensitive to pain and pleasure as any mortal” (134).

The adaptation of the story of the Radha-Krishna love affairs was used as a metaphor to express female love, passion, grievance and anger by the female poets and performers of folk songs and tales (T. Sarkar 2001). Amongst them were the *Bostomi*s (also called *neri*), the female widowed Vashnavites who became significant in this folk cultural scenario (Banerjee 1989). Banerjee argues, women with nowhere to go (like the widows of the Brahmins, old prostitutes, women who had been deserted by their lovers and banished from home and women attempting to escape prostitution), found their place in Vaishnavism. This allowed them freedom and the means of earning through,

> “singing and begging from door to door. It also allowed them to avail of the privileges that were out of reach for rich and middle-class Bengali women of the time and some, who had learnt to read and write in their homes, taught the girls in the *andarmahal* (the household of elite, considered the place of women) of the *bhadralok*.” (134).

These *neri Bostomi*s and poets expressed not only the stories of the love affair of Radha-Krishna, they also expressed women's grievances in their contemporary society using the Radha-Krishna story:

> “Radha's complaints about an elusive Krishna dallying elsewhere with his mistresses, could be easily recognised as the bitter admonitions of a Bengali wife hurled at her profligate husband (a subject which was the staple of numerous contemporary social novels, poems, plays and farces)” (136).

The popularity of the mythical Radha-Krishna love affair, which was expressed in a day to day material context and imbued all forms of rural folk tales, songs, paintings and oral storytelling became an issue of concern for the Hindu *bhadralok* (elite) in the nineteenth century during the construction of the Bengali Renaissance that I discussed in the previous chapter (T. Sarkar 2001).

Similar descriptions of female traveller/beggar musicians can be found in the writing of a key ethnomusicologist of that time, Nihar Barua (2000) from Assam[18] where *Bhawaiya* is a significant folk song tradition. Barua's writings showed a similar picture of society, where wandering singers, including female singers, had a special place in society. They had access to the *andarmahal* (private sphere of the household) of the elite *Jamindar*s as well as the remote villages. Nihar Barua not only learned *Bhawaiya* from them, she also learned dance and other genres of folk music, relating to different occasions and rituals, i.e. songs for worshippers, especially the songs of '*Hudumpuja*', and '*modonkamer puja'*, wedding songs, etc. According to her writings, she collected the women's songs by going from one Goalpara village to another in the 1920s. Nihar Barua also learned many songs and dances from the servant women of her household and in particular from a beggar woman named *Okrur Pagli*, (Pagli meaning 'mad woman' in Bangla). Okrur was a regular guest at Barua's Jamindar house. She would always introduce herself as 'the princess' and would perform songs and dances for the household. Although her close relations with those poor women was not considered 'proper' to her family, her exceptional characteristics and the support of her liberal father and husband allowed her to continue associating with them throughout her life (Barua 2000).

Although from Banerjee and Barua's analysis we can see clear connections and similarities with Bengali folk song genres across Bengal, in the West, East, North and even in Assam; Barma (2004) argues that *Bhawaiya* music from North Bengal is influenced by the predominance of *Saivism* in the ancient area of *Kamrup*, where the god *Kamdev* (*the god of sex*) is worshipped rather than Radha-Krishna of Vaishnavism. The myth is that Kamdev once disturbed *Shiva*'s meditation by putting lustful thoughts in his mind. In retaliation, Shiva incinerated Kamdev, reducing him to a pile of ashes. Following a long period of prayer by *Rati* (Kamdev's wife), *Shiva* was appeased and he returned *Madan* to his form of

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[18] Nihar Barua wrote about her experience with the women singers and dancers, from which she learned the *Bhawaiya* songs. Nihar was one of the first self-learned ethnomusicologists from the very prestigious Jamindar family (considered the royal family, then part of the greater Rangpur area of undivided Bengal, now within the Assam state of India). Her father was very progressive, and all of her siblings became pioneer artists, filmmakers and singers. Her niece Pratima Pal Barua is n ow a legendary *Bhawaiya* singer.

Kam-roop (In Bangla *Kam* means sex, and *roop* means form or face). Burma (2004) argues that the area was named Kamrup after this legend. According to Barma (2004), because of this mythical influence of Kamdev, the "real life sex-oriented love, not the unworldly heavenly love, has been deeply-rooted in the songs of the area" (232).

Barma identified the mundane sensual aspect influencing the idea of love in *Bhawaiya,* which explains an unashamed sensual love that is different from the spiritual idea of love present in Vaishnavism. However, from Banerjee (1987) and Barua's (2000) analysis, it is clear that, even the 'spiritual' aspect of the love between Radha-Krishna present in the Vaishnavism, was ignored in numerous folk traditions, especially by the female folk singers and poets in Bengal and Assam. Instead, the adulterous and sensual aspect of the love of Radha-Krishna is celebrated in numerous forms in folk traditions in Bengal. That explains the widespread 'deviant' stories and words in the 20th century genres of folk music, including *Bhawaiya*, which caused anxiety for the Hindu *bhadralok* (Banerjee 1987). It can be argued that, like their common origin '*pala gaan'*, the expression and emotions related to sensual and mundane love influenced most of the genres of folk songs.

Even outside of the folk song tradition, the humanisation of Radha-Krishna is deeply embedded in all forms of mundane expression in the Bengali culture in which I grew up. Krishna's name (more specifically his nickname, *Kala*) is used to describe pleasure-seeking, flamboyant male lovers, and Radha (or her nickname as *Rai*) to describe the passionate female counterpart. This comparison exists not only in Bengali, but in all the languages that exist in India. The mundane image of this divine pair, is very different from their interpretation in Hindu religious practise and also to the image of Krishna depicted by international Hare-Krishna movement. To Bengali women, Krishna/Kala is the alluring lover from next door who has a hypnotic effect on girls, especially girls like Radha, who would defy everything for love. This sensual and humanising love affair of the god pairs is one of the most common themes for love songs in all Bangla folk song genres; reflecting the mundane emotions of Bengalis and even beyond, including *Bhawaiya*, despite the influence of Kamdev in Cooch Behar.

BHAWAIYA: *DEVIANT AND WORLDLY DESIRES OF WOMEN*

In order to locate this historical context, it is worth exploring the 'perception of the origin' of the folk song genre, as it shows how the past is imagined from the present. Most respondents in my research cited stories of female deviance and desire from the past as being integral and obvious aspects of the genre, when asked about the history of *Bhawaiya*. This shows the imagination of the past in their present conception of *Bhawaiya*. Take for example the explanation of one of the respondents, Rony Sarkar, about the origins of the *Bhawaiya*, who explained that early *Bhawaiya* songwriters were 'unsocial' and for their entertainment they imagined women expressing sensual desire with 'vulgar' words through their songs. For the most part, he tried to defend it by normalising it as part of the 'lost' past, which places the story in a safe space free from the judgement of the present day.

In contrast, Shamrat Ahmed, an N.G.O administrator and a *Bhawaiya* enthusiast, explained that, this is the only genre where it is possible to present a woman's extra-marital affair sympathetically and without being judgemental. He told me a story about an affair of a woman he knew. While her husband was living elsewhere, she had an affair with a local man, which led to her marriage ending in divorce, after she left her home to be with her lover. Shamrat told me that a songwriter he knew wanted to write a *puthi*[19] about this incident. Shamrat encouraged him to write a *Bhawaiya* song instead. His reason for that was,

> *If he writes a puthi about the story, he will have to be judgmental about her, as puthi usually ends with a moral lesson, but with a Bhawaiya, this would be impossible, as the style of Bhawaiya will prevent him from being judgmental. He will have to write from the woman's perspective, which creates compassion and sympathy for the woman and her passion.*

This says a lot about *Bhawaiya* and the space it creates for the passion of women, that even if it is deviant to the social norms, the perspective of the woman is prioritised, creating support and sympathy for her.

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[19] Puthi referrers to hand written manuscript in Bangla, from pre-print era of old religious or folk tales, mostly connected to the Sufi Islamic tradition (Khatun 2012). 'Puthi path' means, reading the tale and generallyit has a special style. Puthi path usually read by the elderly and respected religious people of the village about stories that end with a moral lesson for educating the villagers

While Shamrat wanted to emphasise *Bhawaiya* as a space for female deviant emotions, a few others did not do so, rather they tried to express the necessity to filter these elements, which I will be discussing in a later chapter. Barma (2004) explained these elements as part of the reality caused by the patriarchal marital system in which young girls were forced to marry older men or if a woman was widowed, she had to restrain her sexuality for the rest of her life. These situations led women to express their sexual dissatisfaction through the *Bhawaiya* lyrics, hence giving them some sort of release (Barma 2004). A local historian, Ranajit Deb, who published many books about the history of Cooch Behar, reconstructed the social and cultural past of the area as 'non-civilised'. According to him, the flexible morality regarding marriage and sexual relations gave space for the people to express their desires through folk songs that remain popular and acceptable to listeners.

Jasmine Buli is a researcher who has published a book about Mohesh Chandra Roy, one of the most famous *Bhawaiya* singers. She described *Bhawaiya* to me as "*the song of the most marginal people and of female despair.*" She also told me that, the 'down to earth' descriptions in *Bhawaiya* were grounded in the lived experiences of women. She used this song as an example:

তুই মোর নিদয়ার কালিয়া রে
O, my own ruthless dear kalia

ও মোর কালিয়া দয়া নাই তোর প্রাণে রে
Kalia, you do not have any kindness in your heart

আঙ্গিনা সামটিয়া, ঘর না লেপিয়া ঘর না মুছিনু রে
I cleaned the yard, did not sweep the floor of my room

ও মোর কালিয়া বেড়াইয়া নাই মোর ঘরে রে
O my dear Kalia is not coming to see me.

ছ্যাকা না পারিয়া, কাপড় ধুইয়া কাপড় শুকানু রে
I washed my shari, and dried it

ও মোর কালিয়া পিন্দিয়া দেখাইম নই কাকে রে
But for whom will I wear this

ভাত না চড়েয়া ভাত না রাধিনু ভাত না বারিনু রে
I did not cook rice and did not dish it out

ও মোর কালিয়া খাওয়াইয়া নাই মোর ঘরে রে
My dear Kalia is not in my home to eat

বিছানা ঝাড়িয়া বিছিনা পারিনু, মুসরী তানানু রেও
I made the bed, and hung the mosquito net

মোর কালিয়া শোয়াইয়া নাই মোর ঘরে

But my Kalia is not here to sleep in it.[20]

This song shows the life of a woman who is missing her absent lover, expressing her emotions through household chores. According to Buli, because of this focus on the mundane experiences of women, *Bhawaiya* is considered hierarchically lower than other spiritual folk songs, and is thus not culturally prestigious, despite its enormous popularity. The assorted materials I have collected (books, memoirs, leaflets, newspaper reports and booklets for *Bhawaiya* festivals) all reconfirm this same idea on *Bhawaiya*'s 'down to earth' attitude towards the real and sensual emotions of women. The first published *Bhawaiya* song, collected by Sir Grierson and published in 1903, in the "Linguistic Survey of India" was about a young girl, who is craving the fulfilment of her desire to marry.

পরথম যৌবনের কালে না হইল মোর বিয়া
আর কতকাল রহিমু ঘরে একাকিনী হয়া
রে বিধি নিদয়া।
হাইলা পইল মোর সোনার যৌবন, মলেয়ার করে
মাও বাপে মোর হইল বাদী না দিল পরের ঘরে
রে বিধি নিদয়া
বাপক না কও শরমে মুই মাওক না কও লাজে
ধিকি ধিকি তুষির আগুন জ্বলেছে দেহের মাঝে
রে বিধি নিদয়া

পেট ফাটে তো মুখ ফোটে না লাজ শরমের ডরে
খুলিয়া ক'লে মনের কথা নিন্দা করে পরে
রে বিধি নিদয়া

Part of the song from Grierson's (1903) translation is:

At dawning youth I was not Hymen favoured,
How long still am I to remain single at home?
O fate marble-hearted!
The full-bloom flower of my golden youth yields to Malaya's softest breeze,
My parents have become my foes in not sending me to another's home bound in ties hymeneal,
O fate marble hearted. (187)

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[20] This song was collected and sung by Abbasuddin Ahmed.

The term ‘*biya’* in the first line of the lyrics refers to marriage in Bangla. Griersons’ translation is not translated word for word, but ‘Hymen favoured’ is the closest to the meaning of *‘biya’* in this song where the girl is expressing her eagerness to have her first sexual experience.

On the other hand, Barma (2004) explains the song as:

> “The woman in the bloom of youth and not been given to marriage in the prime of youth, which is gradually being withered away. Her parents are not in a position to arrange the marriage. The youthful woman cannot even express her mental feeling to anybody out of shame and fear. She feels like running away with the man of her choice marrying him and spending the conjugal life in peace and happiness. She will not mind even if people speak ill of her and despise her for this act"(232).

While Barma’s (2004) interpretation explains the literal meaning of the song, the subtle eagerness to have sexual fulfilment expressed by the word ‘marriage’ in the song is not emphasised. The word marriage has an open meaning in *Bhawaiya* tied with the text and its context. In some of the lyrics, it is described as a path to sexual fulfilment. At other times, marriage is considered an obstacle for being with her lover. For example, in the following song, the woman who has both a husband and baby, desperately desires her lover, even hoping for her husband’s death so that she can be with him:

এপারে আমার বাড়ি ওপারে বন্ধুর বাড়ি
My house is on this side and my dear friend’s house is on the other side

মধ্যে হইল ক্ষীরল নদীর খেওয়া
Khirol river is in the middle

ওরে কাজল ভ্রমরা গরুল রাখোয়াল রে
O my dear honey bee, the shepherd

মুই নারী কলে বাচ্চা ছাওয়া
I have baby on my lap

বালুতে রান্ধিনু বালুতে বারিনু
I cook on the sand I dish out on the sand

জলে ভাসাইয়া দিনু হাড়ি
I float away the pan

ওরে বিয়ার সোয়ামি মইলে মাছ ভাত মুই খাইমরে
I will eat fish and rice when my husband will die

ও বন্ধু মরিলে হব আড়ি

If my friend dies I will lose everything[21]

In other cases, when the woman is expressing the desire to meet her lover, sometimes it is in the context of an oppressive marriage. For example:

আবে ও মোর শ্যম কালা কার আগে আমি কব মোর দুঃখের কথা
O dear, to whom I will tell the story of my sorrow

ওরে কায় মোর দরদি হবে এ দুঃখ আমি কব কাকে রে
Who would have empathy for me?

ওরে বাপে মায়ে মোর দিসেরে বিয়া পাগলা সোয়ামি দিয়া রে
My parents married me to a crazy man

পাগলা সোয়ামি মোর ঘরে থাকেএক দিন না হাত দেয় শিতানের বালিশে রে
The crazy husband stays home, but never even touches my pillow

শাশুড়ি ননদের খোঁটায় মোর শরীর হইল কালা রে
The scorns of my in-laws are making me sick

যখন কালা তুমি বাজায় বাঁশি তখন আমি রান্ধন রাঁধি রে
O dear, I was cooking while you were playing the flute

ভিজা কাষ্ঠ চৌকাত দিয়া কান্দন ধুমার ছলে রে[22]
I cry hiding under the smoke that I created with the damp wood

Despite the debate about the origin story and the justification of the 'erotic' elements of *Bhawaiya*, there is a common consensus about the musical tradition that upholds and celebrates the day to day material life of women. The expression of the women's emotions are not only linked to their bodies and sensuality, the songs include details of their day to day lives such as household chores, like cooking and cleaning and the professions of their lovers, i.e. garial (bull-cart driver), or Mahout (elephant tamer). Thus, in *Bhawaiya* the carnal emotions and love expressed through metaphor is based in real life experience and does not hide under the guise of spirituality (Barma 2004).

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[21] This *Bhawaiya* song is collected and recorded by Dhiren Sarkar.

[22] This song is collected by Nihar Barua.

BHATIALI*: THE SONG OF THE TIDES*

Mustafa Jaman Abbasi, one of the leading authorities of folk music in Bangladesh and the son of the legendary Bangla folk singer and promoter Abbasuddin Ahmed has argued that “if someone knows *Bhatiali*, they would know Bangladesh” (quoted in Lorea 2014, 60). *Bhatiali* is mostly popular in the Eastern area of Bangladesh and is mostly concerned with the lives and emotions of the people of riverine areas, whereas *Bhawaiya* is mainly focused on the lives of the *garial* (bull-cart drivers) or the *mahut* (elephant tamers) of North Bengal. The word *Bhati* in Bangla means riverine areas, thus *Bhatiali* lyrics correspond to boat-men and the imagery of rivers and tides.

However, the historical context shows more complex influences and connections between these folk traditions, which transcend regional differences as both of them claim to originate from *pala gaan*. The generic boundaries between *Baul*, *Bhawiaya* and *Bhatiali* are more flexible than their assumed differences. Kuckertz (1975) argues that *Bhatiali* and *Baul* have the most in common lyrically and musically. However, the music, themes and subjects of *Bhatiali* and *Bhawaiya* are also very similar. Both genres are concerned with the passion, desire and pain of women separated from their lovers (Centre 2010). Other themes they share is criticism of the institution of marriage and the complicated relationship between the female subject of the songs with her mother-in-law or sister-in-law (Centre 2010). However, Rongili Biswas, the daughter of famous folk singer and promoter of *Bhawaiya*, Hemango Biswas, told me that despite the similarities in themes, the metaphors in *Bhaitiali* are less direct than those in *Bhawaiya*.

The main differences mentioned by most of the respondents were based on geographical location. *Bhawaiya* is the folk song of North Bengal, which encompasses an area on both sides of the India/ Bangladesh border. *Bhatiali* is mainly from East Bengal in Bangladesh. Other genres like *Gamvira*, *Jari*, *Sari*, *Murshidi*, *Dhamail*, *Khet o Niranir Gan,* etc. are of course also popular in these regions (Dutta 2013). However, *Bhawaiya* and *Bhatiali* are the most popular in these areas. They were both popularised by Abbasuddin Ahmed. While popularising these songs over the course of his migration from Cooch Behar to the riverine area of North Bengal in Bangladesh, Ahmed also popularised *Bhatiali* with *Bhawaiya*. Therefore, it can be said that the border between the genres concern the geographical conditions, more than the emotions the ‘voice’ of the songs. The female subject and her love, longing and dissatisfaction with marriage overlap in these two main folk song genres. This commonality leaves space for the reconfiguration of the generic boundaries between them, according to the voice of love and desire that is so often deviant.

BAUL: THE SPIRIT OF BENGAL

Amongst the main folk song genres, *Baul* is the most famous, most discussed and criticised musical tradition in Bengal. *Baul* is synonymous with the idea of Bengali folk songs due to its popularity abroad and its assumed philosophical connotations. Numerous times during my research I faced this assumption, *Baul* and Bangla folk songs were presented as interchangeable when discussing my research topic. The idea of *Baul* has been historically constructed, used and reproduced for nationalist narratives as well as to transgress normative hierarchical practice (Urban 1999). From the 1960s the idea of *Baul* spread to the Western musical tradition through Bob Dylan's interest in the genre, which sparked a new trend of 'Western *Baul*' (Ferrari 2012). Bob Dylan performed several concerts in association with Purna Chandra Das Baul and records have been released by many other Western musicians influenced by or associated with *Baul* (Capwell 1982). Due to this kind of attention and exposure, *Baul* became interchangeable with and representative of all Bangla folk music in the public consciousness, both nationally and internationally.

In the secular Bangladeshi mind, *Baul* is synonymous with the pure spirit of Bengal, which denounces orthodox religious practices, yet is close to the symbols and ideas of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. At the same time, for its assumed 'controversial' sexual practises, it has generated huge curiosity and criticism both locally and globally. There have been numerous research projects on the different traditions and aspects of *Baul* philosophy, which I will draw upon to analyse how the idea of *Baul* has been used by both nationalist and subversive sub-cultural traditions. Compared to *Baul*, *Bhawaiya* is less well known and less celebrated internationally but it is hugely popular within the national sphere. Although most of the scholars would agree that there are very few commonalities between *Baul* and *Bhawaiya*, I have found that there are connections worth exploring, where sexuality is concerned. In particular the issue of *Baul* sexuality, as dealt with by the nationalist narrative, shows similarities between *Bhawaiya* and *Baul*.

The Construction of *Baul* Images

Baul, as it exists in the present, is defined by scholars as a very significant philosophical and religious practices, which came into being through the combination of the Hindu *Tantrik* sect, Buddhist *Sahajia* sect, Vaishnava-*Sahajia* sect and Indo-Persian Islamic Sufism (Capwell 1986; Dimock 1991; Dasgupta 1994; Urban 1999). Most scholars of *Baul* also believe that it is a very old tradition based on an old mystical tradition dating to at least the 17th century. Urban problematises this claim (Urban 1999), arguing that what we characterise as *Baul* in the contemporary sense is neither homogenous nor based in a very old tradition, but is rather a modern construct (Urban 1999). He argued that, wandering mendicants, musicians, singers, mad mystics and holy men linked to sects of various names, i.e. *Aul, Baul, Sain, Fakir*, *Sdhebdhani*, *Kartabhaja*, and *Kisoribhaja* were common in Bengal. These sects were considered to deviate from normative social life, this status became especially salient in the late eighteenth century. According to Urban, the word *Baul* as used to describe a separate sect did not exist before the late 18th century. Given the long history of the Vaishnavite, Buddhist and Sufi traditions in which devotees leave their home/household in order to embark on a spiritual quest, it is not surprising that this became an option for the poor to survive and perhaps thrive in society. The constructed image of *Baul* was a product of the emerging Bengali nationalism in the 19th century, which called for a resurrection of the ‘true spirit’ of Bengal through its folk traditions. However, the inclusion and celebration of the *Baul* tradition was tricky because of its negative image due to their esoteric sexual practices. The positive image of *Baul* was introduced by Rabindranath Tagore, who was the greatest Bengali literary guru and national icon in modern times (Urban 1999b). However, Tagore avoided the heterodox, deviant aspects of *Baul* regarding body imagery and sexuality, instead focusing on the spirituality of the songs from a humanist point of view. He did not consider the lyrics worthy of higher philosophical significance other than the poetic expression of a humanist view of mankind, which was similar to his own. Tagore used the melody of the most famous *Baul* guru Lalon Fakir’s song to compose the national anthem of India. Urban points out that Lalon Fakir, ironically never actually called himself a *Baul* and never mentioned the word *Baul* in any of his songs (Salomon1995; Urban 1999). Following Tagore’s endorsement, not only the image of *Baul* in the imagination of the Indian middle-class was elevated, there was a tendency to represent Lalon Fakir closer to the Hindu traditions to fit him into Hindu/Bengali nationalism (Mamun 2011). This, along with the curiosity from

Western counter culture, created a very rapid change in the tone surrounding *Baul* and how it was perceived (Lorea 2014, 60).

It is convincing that the idea of *Baul* was constructed through the emergence of the need to invent a tradition for Bengali nationalism in the 19th century. However, this doesn't change the fact that what consists of *Baul* traditions in the current sense, was present in numerous and heterogeneous practices among the lower-class, as Banerjee discussed (Banerjee 1989). The construction process of the image of *Baul*, took those heterogeneous images and homogenised the idea of *Baul* as an esoteric and humanist folk musical tradition.

After the partition of Bengal and the establishment of Pakistan, *Baul* once again became a useful symbol to uphold secular cultural identity of East Pakistan in its struggle for independence from West Pakistan. Urban (1999) argues:

> "Epitomised in the new Bangladeshi hero, Lalon Fakir, the *Baul* was re-fashioned once more, to emerge, not only as a symbol of the simple beauty of the Bengali peasantry, but now as a symbol of the independence of the East Bengali people in their struggle against political tyranny and social oppression" (17).

Moreover, in the new political situation, there was a tendency to represent *Baul* closer to Muslim traditions by claiming Sufi/Muslim identity of Lalon (Mamun 2011). These representations were also contested. On the one hand, the *Baul* image has been created from the available lower religious sects and practices by the educated elite's romanticizing of the free, unfettered spirit of Bengali folk culture in the service of the national quest. One the other hand, the actual *Baul*s have often been persecuted for their alleged immorality — their deviant sexuality from late nineteenth century to the present day – – by both Hindu and Muslim religious interest groups (Salomon1995, 268; Urban 1999).

It can be argued that *Baul* has an ambiguous image which has been used to help construct national identity and at the same time it has become a symbol of alternative and subversive practices against social hierarchy: a symbol of counter culture for urban intellectuals. The contemporary lives of the *Baul*s, dating back to the late 19th century, reject all conventional social institutions and religious orthodoxy. This makes them attractive to the middle-class intellectuals, poets and singers as idols of resistance against social hierarchy. According to Lorea (2014), "the urban élite, fascinated by *Baul*s' hippie appeal, rural cosmopolitanism, a misunderstood sexual permissiveness under the cover of *sādhanā*, and community participation in smoking marijuana, became enthusiastic neophytes on this path" (68). Moreover, as Ferrari (2012) argues, "Such practices have attracted the attention (whether genuine or lurid fascination) of scholars, orientalists, bourgeoisies, counterculture movements and the media industry. This has in various ways contributed to the process that led to the *Baul*s' 'rehab'" (24).

Philosophy and 'Spirituality' of *Baul*

I heard a lot about the philosophical and spiritual aspects of *Baul* while growing up. It was also spoken of very highly in Bangladeshi intellectual circles in terms of its spirituality, which often left me uncomfortable because I could not understand the discourse around it. Since I could rarely connect myself with the spiritual/material hierarchy, I did not want to get involved with the spiritual quest of *Baul* that I heard around me. However, my research on *Bhawaiya* eventually lead me to connect *Bhawaiya* with *Baul*, and through this research, I could identify the discomfort I felt about this spiritual hierarchy and the masculine discourse surrounding it. As Knight (2005) identified, because *Baul* is imagined by the Bengali elite/*bhadralok* as being situated in the male sphere, female *Baul*s struggle to fit in (Lisa I. Knight 2011). During my research, I came into contact with some cotemporary middle-class urban musicians whose music is influenced by *Baul*, especially Lalon. One of them is Maqsoodul Huq, a famous rock star from the '90s in Bangladesh, who officially became a *Baul* by going through the oral *Baul sadhana*. He has publicly expressed his annoyance concerning the inquisitiveness of scholars about the sexual practices of *Baul,* without considering the philosophical context of the traditions. For him, "Bauls are Poets, Philosophers of all things relating to Indian Yoga. Yes, they are Tantric but one has to understand what Tantra is. Baul is so much more than sex and so is Tantra" (Haque 2007, 101). He wanted to focus on the poetics of *Baul*, as Tagore did, rather than their sexual practices, but without denying the inherent sexual practices influenced by *Tantric* traditions. Conversely, the Tagorian *Baul* poses a different perception of mysticism; one that is more acceptable to elite audiences, where it is presented in a more puritanical order which focuses on the spiritual beauty of the lyrics, but omits sexual and other practices assumed 'deviant'. Hence, they became "the typical product of a stereotyped mystical India. If esotericism and erotic rituals as well as ritual use of intoxicants are known, this, apparently, is not an issue" (Ferrari 2012, 32).

The debate about the sexual rituals of *Baul*, their different interpretations and the discomfort this caused to those trying to fit them into a tidy nationalist narrative is comparable to the same phenomenon surrounding *Bhawaiya*. Having said that, most *Baul* scholars would not connect the two genres on the theme of sexuality, as there are fundamental differences in the way they view sexuality. In *Baul*, the sexual rituals are thought to be connected to spirituality, whereas in *Bhawaiya*, the desires expressed through the female subject are clearly material and earthly. However, while this comparison is interesting, I will not focus on the essential difference in the content of the Baul songs and practices, but rather, the interpretations made by scholars, nationalists, and urban romantics.

In those representations, sexuality and rituals are undeniably and sometimes uncomfortably a big part of the *Baul* tradition. However, most scholars view the sexual rituals as spiritual practices, rather than ‘merely’ physical or instinctual. This shows a clear binary and hierarchy between sensual/material/physical and spiritual/philosophical. The opinions of most of the elite musicians were in line with the majority of *Baul* researchers, where spirituality and hierarchy are concerned. Almost all of the *Baul* enthusiasts with whom I talked emphasised the ‘spiritual’ aspects of *Baul* sexual rituals as evidence for its superiority to the other folk genres — confirming the hierarchy involved. For example, Arif, an activist and singer who works in an NGO, told me that he prefers *Baul* songs to those of other folk song genres as for him “*the Baul songs are deep, their lyrics are ambiguous and abstract, they can go beyond the personal experience to abstraction*.” The superiority of spirituality and abstraction over sensuality and experience is almost unchallenged in this discourse.

In opposition to this dominant discourse, I am not denying the *spiritual* aspects of *Baul* sexuality, instead, I would like to challenge the idea of ‘spirituality’ in these representations. To represent the idea of God and spirituality in the *Baul* tradition, requires the understanding of God within the subjectivity of the researcher, more specifically, the uncritical presupposition of the idea of an existence of God in the researchers mind. According to Haque, “the concept of God as popularly understood or prevalent in normal parlance among theist, polytheist or even monotheist is non-existent among Bauls.” (Haque 2007, 54). He also argues that, *Baul’s* worship God in Man, rather than God of Man” (Haque 2007, 60). His argument challenges the uncritical assumption of God in the scholarly interest of *Baul*.

It has been argued that the *Baul* tradition is the deviant form of all local religions, especially Vaishnavism, Sufi Islam and *Sahajia* Buddhism. However, McDaniel (1992) argues, that among the *Baul*, there are different sects, linked to the different religious traditions:

> “For Bauls of Tantric Buddhist background, god is the union of prajia (female perfect wisdom) and upaya (male compassionate action), in the blissful state of mahasukha. For Bauls of Vaisnava background, the male essence is Krishna, lord of playfulness and appreciator of love, and the female essence is Radha, whose state of mahdbhdva or intense ecstasy of love and passion is beyond the understanding even of her beloved Krishna. For Sakta and Saiva Bauls, the couple is composed of the god Siva or Isvara, who dwells in the sahasrara cakra at the top of the head, and the goddess Sakti or Kulakundalini, who dwells in the malidhara cakra at the base of the spine. In order for them to unite, the goddess must rise along the spine to the dwelling-place of the god, where they shine like the sun. All of these are understandings of the deity as a divine couple. It is an egalitarian notion of the divine, reflected in the divinity of both males and females on earth” (33).

While the idea of the union of lovers explained here is quite similar to the position of most scholars, and indeed the *Baul*s themselves, the use of the concept of ‘deity as a divine couple’ described by McDaniel, can be controversial. ‘Divine’ in Bangla translates as ‘*sworgio*’ (heavenly). This term does not exist in the same way in the *Baul* tradition and would not be used by them to describe the commonly understood idea of divinity or heaven according to Haque. For Haque (2007), “Baul are spiritual beings having human existence, not human beings having a spiritual experience” (52). His definition can lead one to consider the idea of spirituality differently to how it is usually thought of by the modern subject. This philosophy denies a view of spirituality as something that human beings can achieve, instead proposing spirituality as the essence of the human being. The spiritual aspect of *Baul* is not the spiritual quest of modern rational man seeking absolute and abstract truth ‘out there’, rather it turns towards human corporeality as the basis and seed of truth. For Haque, “Baul do not believe in any special deities, symbolisms, shrines, or revered place of worship.” With the explanations of McDaniel (1992), it can be said that the different sects of *Baul* imagine the sexual union through *sadhana*, following religious figures and myths. However, their imagination does not necessarily follow exactly the same representation of these figures, as described in the original religious text. In the Vaishnava text, Radha and Krishna are the divine couple and through their union they became one. It can be argued that, in

Baul practices, the deities are presented as a metaphor of the lovers who achieve true love through *sadhana*, rather than as divine characters to connect with.

The modernist mind-body binary and the hierarchy of spirituality over physical love is prevalent in the analysis of *Baul* traditions, by many scholars. For example, Mazumder (2014) redefines the body and sexuality as platonic. When analysing the songs of Shah Abdul Karim, lust is defined as an emotion to be conquered :

> “Perhaps the most important songs of Abdul Karim are related to the man’s libido, which often misinterpreted or misquoted, refers to perversion, but in ancient times it was a means of platonic and eternal love. Accepted or unaccepted, it had been considered as the most utilitarian way to get the self-purification. We find such opinion in T S Eliot’s The Waste Land where the people of waste land are indulged in such fruitless sex. In his song “Kaam nodir torongo”, he says not to fear seeing the force of lust. One should conquer lust for one’s self purification. He can get the final destination of mysterious island of the Sufis” (312).

The sexual *sadhana* in *Baul* traditions is interpreted by Mazumder (2014) as “more than sexual”. Here sexuality is referred to as ‘libido’ or ‘lust’ and the aim is to conquer it. Whereas the *Baul* sexual ritual is a spiritual practice since the body is already spiritual. For them, non-reproductive sex can be the ultimate union of lovers, which according to Mazumdar is ‘fruitless’. In my understanding, from the discussion with Haque, in *Baul*, the sexual act refers to the ultimate union as the ultimate love. If it is to refer to the divine, that divinity resides in the body not in the abstract, rather in experiences through the senses — love here is sensual and embodied.

I want to argue that, the uncritical use of terms like ‘mysticism’, ‘spirituality’, ‘absolute truth’, ‘absolute reality’, ‘divine’, ‘the idea of God’ and ‘eternal love’, to describe the goal of Baul sadhana is derived from the uncritical assumption of the Cartesian mind-body dualism which is inherently contradictory to Baul beliefs about the body (Ghosh 2016). Without challenging the mind-body binary of Western modernist thought, the idea of the physical body in Baul tradition, is almost impossible to understand. This is the main impediment which prevents scholars from grasping the idea of embodiment of mind and body (Bordo 1986). Applying this Cartesian dualism, which values abstract divinity over corporeality, is an easy way to deal with sexual rituals of *Baul*.

CHALLENGING THE HIERARCHY

To challenge the modernist binary opposition of mind/abstract versus material/body, Irrigaray's (1989) 'Eastern turn' drew from the 'in between' position of the men-women binary to make love possible through a re-reading of Diotima's speech in Plato's republic. It is close to the *Tantric* model of embodiment where the body is the centre of a union made possible by the convergence of male and female energy (Roberts 2004). Due to *Tantric* influence, this idea is similar to the idea of the body in the *Baul* tradition. According to Roberts (2004), this idea challenges the Eurocentric binary of mind and body and the bias against body by the superiority of mind, as he argues, "fear of the unruly body has been widely exposed as one of the governing drives of Western culture. But in an Irigarian ethics, as in *Tantra*, the body is the very source and possibility of becoming" (10). In the *Baul* sexual practice, the emphasis is always on love, rather than sex, but the idea of love does not exclude sex. Whereas, in the modernist understanding these two things are different, derived from the Cartesian dualism.

Moreover, the idea of gender, in *Baul* sexual ritual, is very different from the Cartesian dualism of mind/body (Ghosh 2016). The couple who conduct *sadhana* are referred to as feminine and masculine forms. *Naribhab (femaleness)* and *purushbhab* (maleness) are the forms of femininity and masculinity. These forms are not determined by their biological gender, as the both *Naribhab* and *purushbhab* can exist in the male and female body. Through their union, they complete each other. This union of love happens in the way Irigaray proposes, challenging the gender binary and identifying maleness and femaleness as forms present in every human being. The non-binary gender identity is so intrinsic in *Baul* ideas that it does not have to be developed through the Western epistemological traditions problematisation of the binary.

The binary thinking in Western thought is inherently masculine and poses the superiority of the mind over the body, by associating the body with nature, close to women, an object to be controlled in opposition to mind as culture, closer to man or thinking subject (Bordo 1986). Clearly, *Baul*'s view of the body relies upon its materiality and at the same time challenges the idea of material-spiritual hierarchy. Here the body is not passive and the mind is not its only active agent, rather they are entangled and determinant of each other. The concept of the body in *Baul* is similar to new-material feminist idea of body materiality which Karen Barad (2003) proposes: "Bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena" (823). The *Baul* idea of body and embodiment is close to that; it is neither material, nor discursive, but rather can be both at the same time.

Moreover, the *Baul* idea of materiality can challenge not only the mind-body duality but also the fundamental duality in modernist thought: material-abstraction. Jeanne Openshaw (2004) argues that the idea of 'Bartaman' (the present) in *Baul* philosophy is a metaphysics of presence, not 'present' in the usual sense. Openshaw (2004) argues the idea is fundamentally non-dual, not divided by the present and past, not even divided in terms of the individual body and identity, and is postmodernist in the sense that it is:

> "Opposing an historically or originally essentialism, notions of 'non-dual' substance are affirmed, especially in the context of refuting distinctions between person and person. Substance or matter (bastu) not necessarily exclusive of subtle aspects such as mind, emotion and consciousness[…]some bartaman-panthis as an anti-structural device to subvert divisions among human kind." (13).

Through her argument it can be said that the *Baul* idea of sexuality not only challenges the mind-body dualism, but also broader epistemological binary thinking between: male-female, material-discourse, experience-abstraction, culture-nature and spirituality-sensuality of Western modernist thought and shows an alternative perspective of gender fluidity and embodiment.

RECONSTRUCTING GENRES THROUGH EMBODIED EMOTIONS AND EXPERIENCE

The claim that *Baul* sexuality is spiritual and in *Bhawaiya* it is material, can be deconstructed through the embodied idea of emotion. In this way, the notion of sexuality in *Baul* and *Bhawaiya* can come together through a new configuration of generic boundaries. This leads to a possibility whereby one may deconstruct the generic boundary and reconstruct it according to emotion and sexuality embedded in material experience. Moreover, this material body and sexuality can be connected with the idea of love, more specifically with the idea of carnal love. Unlike *Bhawaiya,* which is only a folk song genre, *Baul* is a complete lifestyle. *Bhawaiya* does not have any ritualistic practice surrounding the idea of love as the *Baul* tradition has. However, not only the *Baul* tradition focuses on the experiences of the senses and body, *Bhawaiya* also expresses embodied emotions with metaphors from living experience, thus both genres can be connected by the embodied emotions and lived experience of sexuality. In this section, I want to explore the similarities between these two genres by examining female embodied experiences.

Moving on to the lived experience of the singers, I want to draw on some of my research findings here. My questions to the musicians was very open ended in order to enable them to talk about whatever they wanted to in relation to their singing experience. Notably, I heard long stories from many of the rural/poorer female singers and musicians describing their career struggles. Radharani from Rangpur, invited my daughter and I for lunch. I later realised that her daughter who lives nearby, skipped work to cook for us in the yard with an open coal cooker, to make the food more delicious. After lunch, she took me to her room, we sat on her bed, and she started to talk about her life story. As was the case with most of the rural women I met, she was eager to tell the stories of her struggle. I found that these marginal women emphasised their own lived experience and a love for music as the motivation for singing.

This was in contrast with the urban/elite singers and songwriters who placed more emphasis on defining the spiritual side of the folk songs, and replacing lived experience with the idea of abstract emotion. A famous elite female singer, who is a teacher at a private university in Dhaka and a member of an influential *Bhawaiya* family talked about the 'women' of *Bhawaiya*' as either the passive victims of rural Bangladesh or as women from the patriarchal 'past' society and distanced herself from them completely. The poorer women tended to be open about their personal stories, whereas the elite, urban and middle-class singers rarely connected their own experiences to musical genres. This led me to identify the class dynamics which gave authority to elite singers to speak for others and to define the genre's problems and characteristics. It reminded me of how emotions are dehumanised when removed from lived experiences by disciplinary categorisation (Kleinman and Kleinman 1991). Kleinman (1991) argues that professional authority allows us to slice off the experiences from their lived context and put them in categorised boxes of emotions. The emotions inscribed in the folk lyrics, connected with the lived experiences of the marginal/subaltern singers, can be sliced up by researchers or elite/middle-class urban musicians or spokespersons as objects of analysis. As an anthropologist, I am also at risk of this dehumanisation, therefore I wanted to focus more on lived experiences in connection to the folk song genres, rather than the definitive and abstract boundaries of genre.

However, since my own ethnography was mainly aimed towards the *Bhawiaya* people and their lives, Lisa Irene Knight and Hanssen's ethnography helped me understand the day to day lived experience of *Baul* women. Knight (2005), based her ethnographic research on the *Baul* women to show the inconsistencies between the idea of *Baul* philosophy in the *bhadralok* minds and the actual material practices of them. While many scholars have shown the feminist aspects of *Baul*: their celebration of menstrual blood and female sexual powers (McDaniel 1992; Ghosh 2016), Knight (2005) examined how *Baul* women respond to these various constructions of gender and *Baul* identity in the intersections of expectations held by *Baul*s and potential patrons and how this impacts *Baul* women. She argues, "Baul women often move between contexts in which they have considerable freedom and those in which they act on local gendered codes of conduct… I argue that *Baul* women negotiate their identity, position, and life choices in light of contradictory views on and expectations of appropriate behaviour for Bengali women and for Bauls." (1). Moreover, according to Hanssen (2018), despite the supposed power of consuming bodily fluids for their health, the *Baul* women live with a constant worry about their health, which shows the "discrepancy between prescriptions taught by gurus and everyday behaviour" (13). Knight (2005) also argues that the position of women in the *Baul* community is marginalised as: "Despite the importance of women among *Baul*s, scholarly and popular discourses on *Baul*s marginalise *Baul* women by depicting the ideal *Baul* as male." (1). *Baul* women often struggle to fit in with the *bhadralok* ideas of *how they* should behave. Additionally, they find it difficult to conform to normative gender norms such as marriage, child bearing, etc. which are innate to both the *Baul* community and the wider society. From her arguments, it is clear that despite the excitement of the scholars about the feminist possibilities of *Baul* philosophy, the day to day reality of *Baul* women, involved in negotiations with normative gender roles, is not so different from non-*Baul* women.

Knight (2005), through her ethnographic experience with some of the famous *Baul* women, showed that the idea and the image of *Baul* in the *bhadralok* imagination is male — *Baul* women must negotiate to create their space. This is especially salient for one of the most famous *Baul* women in Bangladesh, Kangalini Sufia, who despite being famous, remain economically in extreme poverty and in constant negotiation with the state and other sponsoring institutions. I met with her for an interview in her home.

Another elite musician had warned me beforehand of her clever, manipulative behaviour (i.e., clever ways to get money). When I arrived at her house, located in Savar, outside of Dhaka, I found a broken hut built on a piece of land given to her by the local authority. I could tell from the extreme poverty she was living in that her music was the only means of survival for her and her family. She writes songs that do not always deal with the spiritual philosophical aspects that *Baul* songs are expected to. For example, one of her most famous songs is about blaming her lover for her miserable life: "*poraner bandhobre, buri hoilam tor karone. Koto kosto koira ami kamoi rojgar koira ani, tobu tor mon pailam na*." (Oh my dear friend, I got old because of you, I struggled to earn money for you, but still I did not get your affection). I will discuss this song further in the 6th chapter. In her thesis, Knight (2005) showed Sufia's constant negotiation with mainstream institutions. Despite this, Knight (2005) was told that Kangalini Sufia was not a 'real Baul' as "real Baul lives under a tree" (112).

Because of the heterogeneity of *Baul*'s philosophical explanation within the different sects of *Baul* themselves, this hierarchy between materiality and spirituality does not always match with the *Baul* idea of union. Moreover, despite the enthusiastic explorations of scholars about the alternative / egalitarian sexual practices and humanistic philosophical lyrics of the *Baul*, the *Baul* women are not free from gendered social norms and are often marginalised by the ideals imagined by the elite.. *Baul* lyrics do not necessarily reflect the day to day struggles and negotiations of women, unless they are written by fierce and struggling women like Kangalini Sufia.

In the dominant *bhadralok* narrative, *Bhawaiya* is considered a musical genre about the pain and love of women, which is grounded in materiality, while *Baul* music has more of a male and spiritual, philosophical image. At this point, comparing the lyrics, definitions and most importantly the lived experience of the female singers of *Bhawaiya* and *Baul*, it can be argued that, under this dominant narrative, there is always a flow of negotiations of female voices, which express the day to day sufferings and dissatisfaction with normative gender roles that can connect these two genres together.

With the claim of embodiment as the anthropological paradigm by Thomas Csordas (2002) here, I want to use the feminist analysis of the body (Barad 2003; Haraway 1988) to understand ethnographic embodied experience centring sexuality as the 'existential ground' of the folk songs of Bangladesh, where most of the main folk song genres can be united (Csordas 1990; Csordas and Harwood 1994).

This sexuality as the ‘existential ground’ for the folk songs, not only challenges the mind-body binary, but also cognition versus emotion, abstraction versus materiality and philosophy versus experience binaries, through which *Baul* songs used to be considered superior in the *bhadralok* mind as the bearer of abstract philosophical and rational theory. While *Bhawaiya* (and to some extent *Bhatiali*) are all about the emotions of women and thus considered inferior. Following Csordas who considered embodiment as the existential ground, I see the day to day emotions and the embodied experience of the folk song practitioners, connected to their songs, as ‘the existential ground’. By challenging these binaries through a focus on day to day experiences, I propose a common ground where embodiment can be seen as the “indeterminant methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world” (Csordas 1994, 12). The sensual and deviant lyrics of *Bhawaiya* (sometimes in *Bhatiali)*, or the esoteric sexual practices of *Baul* can be the elements of the ‘mode of presence and engagement’ as part of embodiment and the basis of reconstructing a new generic boundary.

CONCLUSION

Rooted in the trend of humanising the mythical lovers and their sexual desire, *Bhawaiya*, the main folk song genre of North Bengal, has a common origin story with the other regional folk songs of Bengal. I want to argue that the three main Bangla folk song genres: *Bhawaiya*, *Bhatiali* and *Baul* have their regional, and topical dissimilarities, but they have more in common than the definitive boundaries made and reproduced by the authorities. *Bhawaiya* as a folk song genre, does not have an essentially definitive or authentic generic boundary, according to the way it has been described and distanced from other Bengali folk song genres by researchers and promoters. To some extent it is a little more accepting of day to day emotions and stories in containing metaphors from lived experience. Most of the time these are expressed through the female subject of the songs and her deviant desire. Despite the regional differences, there is a similar tendency in many of the *Bhatiali* songs — though typically these tend to be based in riverine areas. Conversely, the most researched and discussed folk song genre is *Baul*, which essentially consists of the idea of a different way of life, with esoteric rituals of sexuality which can challenge Western/modernist binary thinking. However, the idea of *Baul*, is also heavily constructed by national, international and elite narrations where sexual aspects are either overtly emphasised, or filtered and ignored out of embarrassment. Through these representations, the

Baul idea of body and mind is often misunderstood by the Western modernist scholars, who had difficulties in dealing with the inferior connotations of carnal love in comparison to spiritual love, without considering the inherent non-binary thinking in the *Baul* tradition. This awkward discomfort often led them to downplay the aspect of the body in the *Baul* way of life.

Moreover, the lived experience of the female *Baul* often consists of struggle and negotiation to fit in with these nationalist, internationalist and elite/*bhadralok* narratives of *Baul*, simply in order to survive. This gave me an opportunity to connect all three of the main Bengali folk musical genres through the lived experiences of the female practitioners and the elements of deviant emotions that exist in each genre. To reflect this, I propose, a reconfiguration of generic borders, by material lived experience, which challenges the hierarchy of spiritual love over carnal desire. It also challenges the 'definition' of the urban practitioners who try to maintain the pure boundaries of *Bhawaiya* to keep the authentic traditions intact; traditions which never exist in the same way in the life of the practitioners. In short, I argue for a deconstruction of the generic borders of the main Bangla folk songs and propose a reconstruction of them from the perspective of the 'female voice of desire' which is grounded in the real day to day, material, sensual and embodied lived experience.

CHAPTER 4: SUBJECTIVITY OF DEVIANT, DEFIANT AND DANGEROUS WOMEN

PRELUDE: 'YOU ARE A DANGEROUS WOMAN!'

Arriving for fieldwork in Kolkata I had the uncanny sensation of being close to, but not quite, home. I fit neither the familiar trope of the novice anthropologist out of their depth or the native ethnographer. I was nervous in every conceivable way. Facing both the physical shock of the climate, which took me from 5-degrees Celsius to 35 degrees, but more importantly, a cultural shock. The cultural shock was expected for my daughter, but for me, it was entirely unexpected. Having been raised in similar social frames of gender, class, religious roles and stereotypes, I was acutely attentive to the tensions between my personal attitudes or 'presentation of the self' (Goffman 1978) and those encouraged in this social fabric. At home in Bangladesh, I had created an academic and progressive niche —my achievements protected me. In Kolkata, where I had to introduce myself and where it is normal to ask a middle-aged woman about her husband's profession within the first few sentences of an introduction, it was tricky for me to explain that I was divorced and a single mother to my nine-year-old. Even in progressive urban middle-class circles of Kolkata my status was unsettling. I was told that I was a 'dangerous woman.' Although this expression was intended as a kind of praise, in some cases it invited more interest than I wanted to deal with. Overwhelmed, I struggled to keep a wall around my personal life while discussing apparently deviant emotions in *Bhawaiya*. I knew that I had to find proper ways to negotiate my identities and flow with stereotypes. Before entering the marginal areas in my field, Cooch Behar and later Rangpur as well as Lalmonirhat, I sorted out how to approach my research topic, without being labelled as a dangerous woman. I learned to present myself according to a stereotypical identity I assumed and continued to cultivate while interacting with the people of my field. It was not always successful. I continued to socially negotiate with my dangerous woman identity by presenting myself as friendly as possible. However, my position sometimes helped me to talk about deviance and the resistance of woman in *Bhawaiya* and brought me in proximity to the lives of female singers.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the empirical base for the examination of the connection between singers and listeners, through lyrics and performances. This connection evokes the subjectivities of the singers and listeners by becoming the woman of *Bhawaiya* with the defiant and deviant emotions expressed in the songs. Whereas in the next chapter, I will analyse this becoming-woman in relation to the emotional atmosphere created by the performance and other forms of reproduction of the songs. In this chapter I will specify how these deviant and defiant female subjectivities are brought into negotiation with the idealised notion of Bengali women. Such an account will be developed by connecting song lyrics, performances and the singers' agency situated in their lives. In order to connect the lyrics with the lives of the singers, I will examine the idea of authorship and locate the 'voice' of the female subject of the songs. I will present the various interpretations of the authors and their gender identity through my ethnography. It is often assumed that most of the songs are written by men, although the lyrics express female suffering, resistance and desire. In the dominant discourse about *Bhawaiya*, the idea of the ‘female victim, male writer’ is quite established, and usually came up in the first few minutes of the discussion with many of my respondents. Through my research, I realised that this was a framework through which the deviant aspects of *Bhawaiya* could be presented in a manner more palatable to Bengali social norms. I found numerous examples that challenge this assumption and by which the authorship of the songs and their fixed gender identity can also be deconstructed. I hence explore the voice of *Bhawaiya* through the lyrics and their interpretations by my participants, as well as the imagined subjectivity constructed by songs that connect with contemporary performers. However, I found many conflicting interpretations of the female character telling her story in the songs. Through these conflicting views, I will deconstruct the biological gender binary and reconstruct the marginalised female voice to challenge the idea of an authentic voice. Writing songs about the stories of women in the first person, and becoming women through performance, will be addressed as a point of departure from the biological gender binary. By transgressing the binary, I am not proposing an abstract or dis-embodied voice, but rather that the female subject voice in *Bhawaiya* and other folk songs are embodied — knitting emotion, body and materiality together. Through this, I will conceptualise deviant desire in Bangla folk music as an expression of defiance.

RE-EXAMINING 'FEMALE VICTIM MALE WRITER' IDEA

Who writes the songs and for whom is the central theme of my enquiry on deconstructing the voice of *Bhawaiya*. The connection between authorship and the idea of an authentic *Bhawaiya* voice resonates with the nationalist vision of tradition, as well as the traditional anthropological quest of searching for authenticity (Fillitz and Saris 2013). I want to distance myself from both of these search by arguing that the authenticity of the voice of *Bhawaiya* cannot be explored in terms of any fixed identity. Rather it is a matter of fluid and multiple subjectivities, mostly focused around the emotions expressed and experienced by women in the lyrics of *Bhawaiya*. These subjectivities are not attached to any specific physical body but connect with bodies through the lyrics' metaphorical description of the body and its desire and pain. These temporal subjectivities, evoked by the songs, are neither abstract, nor bound to a physical body, but rather flow between bodies with emotions. Following Csordas (1994), I look at how experience and emotions connect with songs as the locus of subjectivities and as intersubjective relations between bodies.

Moreover, examining the actual authors of those songs are crucial because with traditional folk songs, the authors and their gender identities cannot be located. Although, the idea of the author in the imagination of the *Bhawaiya* practitioners and researchers is analytically important. In my interviews, one of the main themes was whether authorship of *Bhawaiya*, was male or female. At first, most of the respondents replied that it is men who wrote these songs, as per the main assumption. However, when I asked their thoughts on whether men can write a 'true' representation of women's passion, this brought up interesting and diverse explanations, showing cracks in the 'male writer' assumption.

WHO MADE THE SONGS?

The origin story of *Bhawaiya* is always about the present's understanding of the past. To understand this imagined and representative past, I combined my ethnographic experience with archival research into the origin story of *Bhawaiya*. I wanted to see how the imagined origins of *Bhawaiya,* in discussions with *Bhawaiya* performers, matched research by historians and colonial administrators.

"It's all about men's fantasy of women."

According to Rony Sarkar (82), the female voice of *Bhawaiya* is overrated. Many of my contacts mentioned Rony Sarkar as a scholar who devoted his life to *Bhawaiya* folk songs. He could be described as an 'organic intellectual' involved in Marxist politics throughout his whole life, working at the grass-root level. Later he concentrated on folk music. He helped document *Bhawaiya* songs and singers with Ranajit Deb, a researcher who published several books on *Bhawaiya*, Cooch Behar and their history. However, none of this provided him with a comfortable standard of living. His son, now the primary earner, is taking care of the whole family, and does not like his devotion to music and politics.

I got his contact from one of my key informants and called him on his phone. Living in a remote village in Cooch Behar, he told me on the phone: "*ask anyone my name, they will show you the house*." When I arrived at the bus stop that's what I asked to the autorickshaw driver and he brought me to his house. His house consists of a few small separated huts connected with yards covered with harvested crops and vegetables. I sat in the living room — made up of a bed and three couches — and later he took me to the place where he works. That was a room full of old *Bhawaiya* songs written in torn, discoloured paper and letters, half-eaten by rats, along with a small collection of old instruments and costumes from village play performances. He wished to make a museum of all these one day. His son is in the army and away from home, but his daughter-in-law was there and brought me some home-made lemonade to cool me down in the burning hot weather. She was also a *Bhawaiya* singer but according to Rony Sarkar, "*she doesn't go to sing everywhere, only to the reputed/respectful calls, mostly in radio, she has her sons that she needs to take care of."*

His house has been a meeting place for people devoted to *Bhawaiya*. Despite his esteemed position he struggled financially, with no recognition either from the elite political sphere or from the *Bhawaiya* authority. I listened to his stories of folk songs — his magical storytelling blended with sarcasm and frustration — about the mean and competitive culture in the *Bhawaiya* singer community.

Image 3 : One part of the collection of the old instruments of Rony Sarkar.

Rony Sarkar rejected the idea of the ‘female voice’ of *Bhawaiya*. He explained that he was writing a book about women in *Bhawaiy*a, wherein he would dismiss the centrality of women in *Bhawaiya.* Although he was a *Bhawaiya* songwriter, he never wrote love songs, focusing instead on political satire. He explained that early *Bhawaiya* songwriters were ‘unsocial,’ in their rejection of social norms. Since they had to go beyond the village, staying days and nights in the woods, they developed their own forms of entertainment by making songs which were considered deviant. According to him, these songs entertained the most marginal people and their sensual and vulgar depictions of love were excluded from the elite cultural sphere. Eventually they gained acceptance from the legendary Abbasuddin Ahmed and other fellow musicians of the early twentieth century.

As Sarkar explained his hypothesis about men’s fantasies about women, I came to understand how his position was influenced by a common assumption among *Bhawaiya* practitioners and researchers that only men wrote *Bhawaiya* songs. However, as I discussed in the third chapter, ethnomusicologist Nihar Barua (2000) from Assam, had quite a different analysis of this narrative. I came to know about Nihar Barua not only from her own writing, but also from Joya Chowdhury who was a friend of her niece, legendary *Bhawaiya* singer Pratima Pal Barua. I heard stories of Nihar Barua from Joya Chowdhury about how she collected women’s songs by going to the remote Goalpara villages. In her writing, Nihar Barua (2000) addressed the songs’ authorship and their expression of sensual desire in an objective and sympathetic way. She raised two important questions about *Bhawaiya*: why were the ‘immoral’ elements of the songs sometimes avoided but never banned in a conservative society; and how have these supposedly male songwriters convincingly conveyed the voice of women? These two themes were also the central enquiry of my research. For her, it was the village poets who were able to bridge the gap between men and women, bringing out the secret and passionate desires of women. The poets from whom she collected those songs were both men and women. In her analysis, the song lyrics and their interpretation thus depended on her own subjective position — a position very different from Rony Sarkar. Nihar Barua’s writings are hence the historical texts that I want to deconstruct, in the historical context that she was writing (Barua 2000).

“How can I repress my lustful youth?”

According to Nihar Barua, the poets who composed the songs were psychologists of female desire, or *joibon:* meaning ‘youth,’ but in reference to the sexual elements of female youth. *Joibon/joubon* is the erotic form of youth that is difficult to repress, expressed through the poet’s words. Nihar Barua gives one female poet’s song as an example:

“আজি কি দিয়া বান্দিয়া রাইখবো রে...।
আমার এ নয়া যৈবন রে
সোনা না হয়, রুপা না হয় যে- মালা গড়ায়ে গলায় দিবো
টাকা না হয় পয়সা না হয় যে – যৈবন বাক্সে তুলিয়া থুইব
আরে তামা না হয়, কাসা না হয় যে তাক ডোরে উঠি থুইব
মনি না হয়, মানিক না হয় যৈবন আঁচলে বান্ধিবো

Nihar Barua (2000) explained it: “How can I repress (tie up) my new lustful youth *(joibo*n)? It’s neither gold nor silver, which I could make a necklace out of and put around my neck. It’s neither cash, nor coins that I put inside my locker. It’s neither gem, nor jewel that I can tie up in my *ancho*l[23].” (6-8).

The sentiment created to express female sensual desire with the word *joibon* is central to *Bhawaiya,* according to Nihar Barua. Although, this does not necessarily confirm that they were written by women only. In her book she also talked about different types of folk songs and rituals created and performed by women apart from *Bhawaiya*, for example, *Pujar gaan* (songs for different types of religious worships) and *Biyar gaan* (wedding songs). She refers to the creators of the songs as poets. From her writings, we get the idea that although the lives of men and women were different, because of the coercive patriarchal systems, the songs came from poets who transcended gender with compassion and expressed the feelings of women. She argues that even the adulterous desire of women, expressed with intense emotionality, were not socially scrutinised or rejected by the listeners, but rather connected to with compassion. From the lyrics of these poets, female desire gained acceptance through beautiful and emotional words. Here we can see in the lyrics that women are presented as sexual subjects rather than male objects of desire. We can see that these poets did not have any fixed gender, they could be both (Barua 2000, 67).

When female adulterous desire expressed with compassion gets emotional approval from a wide range of listeners including men and women both — when it became timeless and accepted as a style and as a specific folk song genre — it becomes harder for it to be dismissed anymore as ‘male fantasy of women,’ as Rony Sarkar had wished. Moreover, it also defies the passive victimhood of women, who cannot express their stories, but rather depend on men to tell their stories of sufferings. I argue, *Bhawaiya*’s popularity and receptions signal more than that ‘male fantasy o women’.

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[23] Anchol is the part of the *shari* that hangs from the side of the shoulder and is often used to keep valuable things tied up, along with its many other uses.

“Bhawaiya is the medium of female desire.”

When I was in Rangpur, I met with Shamrat Ahmed, an NGO officer in Rangpur, Bangladesh, a self-patronised freelance researcher of *Bhawaiya*. I heard about him from my key informant in Rangpur, as a *Bhawaiya* enthusiast who published a book about *Bhawaiya*. When I called him, he assured me that I came to the right place for my research. One quiet afternoon, I went to his office, a small building consisting of three rooms. Because of his position in the national NGO, he is well known and influential in the area, although he is known to be associated with the opposition party BNP, which was not very powerful at that moment. He enthusiastically told me his passion for *Bhawaiya*. He was delighted to have come across a ‘real’ scholar interested in *Bhawaiya* — I assume that by real scholar he meant a scholar from a Western university and having a similar passion as him for *Bhawaiya*. He published a book about *Bhawaiya* and referred to himself as “*Bhawaiya pagol”* (crazy about *Bhawaiya*). He claimed that most of the famous *Bhawaiya* songs from the earliest period should be considered as collected and that many claims of authorship are false given that these songs were actually collected through oral tradition. He told me that he collected most of the songs from the fields where village women were known to sing them. I was surprised by his statement and asked him twice, as it contradicts the popular perception of male writers. Shamrat explained that male singers were more interested in performing *Puthi and Kirtan* in *Pala gaan* in the local bazar, while *Bhawaiya* songs can be heard in the oral traditions from women. As a songwriter, he claims to follow the style he learned from these women singers and strives to express the raw desire of women in his songs.

“It is more than individual authorship, it is collective.”

The popularity of these songs signals the approval of the deviant desires of women. In Rangpur, Bangladesh, I had an informal group discussion with a local singer community who were gathered for their regular rehearsal in the Shilpakala Academy campus. Nasim, one of the main organisers of the regular rehearsals, told me that “*authorship is a rather new phenomenon initiated as a means of remunerating individuals who sing on radio or TV. But for the folk songs it is neither possible, nor should we locate who wrote the songs, as the songs are collective*.” However, as Nasim said, for the collected songs, remuneration for the songwriters get wasted. So many singers make up the name of the songwriters and this in turn creates confusion and misunderstanding amongst the community. They might not have an individual author and the songs are passed on from one person to another.

Image 4: One of the rehearsals of *Bhawaiya* in Rangpur Shilpakala Academy campus

One of the other participants raised another point about the 'female' voice of *Bhawaiya*. As *Pala gaan* (the local street play) inspired a number of the folk songs, including *Bhawaiya*, he argues that the 'female voice' could be representative of the female character depicted in the play. However, it might have gained popularity through listeners and thereafter became a genre with styles where the female first person is the subject of the songs, telling her emotions and stories. Therefore, to fit into this genre, whoever makes a new song, whether it is male or female, tries to fit it to the style of a female first person story and express female oriented sufferings, anger, scorn, or desire. This hypothesis, whether it is true or not, shows the common style of *Bhawaiya*, with female emotions and stories, whose author (and their genders) as indecisive. It is constructed through collective authorship, that goes with the International Folk Music Council's 1954 definition, which emphasised on the community production rather than individual composer, transmitted orally (Elbourne 1975). By definition, then, the songwriter category, and the idea of intellectual property rights is mutually exclusive with the idea of folk songs.

Therefore, *Bhawaiya* can be seen as a collective voice approving female desire and deviant emotions and as a subversion of coercive and patriarchal marital and gender norms.

"It was from the time when one's father's identity was not important."

The deviant emotions and transgression of marital norms was explained to me by Ranajit Deb, who published several books about the history, society and culture of Cooch Behar as well as a collection of songs and list of *Bhawaiya* singers. Rony Sarkar worked as his assistant to provide identification of many of the songs and singers. He lives in Cooch Behar town and I went to meet with him one evening to hear from him directly. His account in person turned out to be slightly different from the poetic description of the imagined history of *Bhawaiya* written in his book. For him, the Cooch society used to be matriarchal, where a father's identity was not important for inheritance. However, according to him, *Bhawaiya* expressed the life story and emotions of the poorer people not the wealthy ones, who did not care for social norms. The songs were from the time when a father's identity was not very important for a child. Women could get a *thaykna swami* (alternative husband) if her husband left her or died and the women could become *Sangalu* (wife, but more like a mistress) to the new husband.

His depiction of the imagined past seemed rather indifferent in person, if not negative. However, in his book about *Bhawaiya* it was romanticised. The love between a man and a woman was represented and appreciated in poetic language. He argues that the love story depicted in *Bhawaiya* lyrics originated from worldly love between a man and a woman, but when it takes the form of an art, personal emotions go beyond the individual — not owned by the lovers anymore — becoming unworldly (Deb 2015). He also argues that in the past, women were powerful enough to dominate and the songs reflected this social position as an emotion and story. In a separate chapter in his book devoted to explain adulterous love in *Bhawaiya* songs, named 'Bhawaiya gane biye o Dampotto bohirbhuto prem', he justifies the adulterous desire of a young wife whose old husband could not satisfy her or a wealthy husband who ignored the wife's needs. He argues, "it is undeniable that these songs ignored social norms and celebrates adulterous desire" (Deb 2015, 133). Throughout his book it is not only a reasoning for the existence of the adulterous desire of women that is clear, but also the prevalence of female voices, which is salient in his analysis. Such a take does not fit into the popular belief in the passive female sufferer and the male composer who brings her voice into song.

My ethnographic experience with Ranajit Deb shows a deference towards adulterous emotions in two different situations. On the one hand he expressed his position on the past matriarchal society, where the father was not needed, as being ‘uncivilised’. On the other hand, he justified adulterous love by upholding the poetic description of love, by ‘upgrading’ worldly love to the ‘art’ of love by excluding the personal emotions in his book. By emphasising the ‘art’ of *Bhawaiya* songs, it was not necessary to connect with the personal stories of the woman around these songs. In fact, detachment from personal emotions seemed to be the way to appreciate the songs. This position is a form of modernist abstraction, a method influenced by the material-abstraction binary and can be challenged by the idea of embodiment.

IMAGINED PAST, IMAGINED SUBJECTIVITY

According to legendary ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax (1968), “folk songs may be recognised in the discourse of a culture simply because it is more redundant at more levels than any other form of utterance.”(274). Lomax’s folk music collection is one of the biggest archives of folk music that includes Bangla folk songs too. For him, folk song texts are part of the cultural discourse that is accepted and celebrated by that specific cultural norm. Lomax (1968) argues,

> Given the highly redundant nature of folk song and the fact that song is usually a group communication device serving to focus the attention of groups, to organise them for joint response, and to produce consensus, it seems obvious that the texts of songs will be limits to those matters, attitudes, concerns, and feelings on which the community is in maximal accord. If this is not the case, a song is not likely to hold its audience and it probably will not pass into oral tradition, where acceptance mean that consensus has taken place over and over again through time. Thus in theory, song texts ought to be heavily loaded with normative cultural indicators. (275).

Lomax's (1968) hypothesis that songs embody cultural norms could be constructively developed through the feminist historian Joan Scott's (1991b) method of historical reconstruction. Scott criticises evidence as the foundation for locating 'true' histories of the past and proposes for the discursive construction of experience. Such a construction involves the use of literary forms, "to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced" (792). She upholds the importance of literary sources for historical reconstruction, not as a factual evidence of reality, but rather to deconstruct the text which carries certain meaning of an idea in a historical period. In this sense, *Bhawaiya* lyrics can be considered as an artefact for reconstructing the past. While the lyrics are open to interpretation, they carry the emotional footprint that dominant and normative discourse excludes as immoral or punishable. *Bhawaiya* can be seen as the voice of women expressing their agency through an imagined past. Whoever created the songs, and in whichever situation, the acceptance and popularity and silent approval of the adulterous emotions of women inscribed in the text of *Bhawaiya* songs is an indicator of the presence of the desire in the real situations it emerged.

The past — a site where the songs of *Bhawaiya* emerged, were accepted, celebrated and reproduced — is conjured through the imagination of present minds. This imagination is connected with their experience, the texts produced in the historical trajectory including the lyrics of *Bhawaiya* and their contexts. Examining *Bhawaiya* through this lens, I tried to explore a form of 'voice' of the female subject presented in the lyrics as interpreted by the participants in my research. Additionally, I ethnographically explored the experience of *Bhawaiya* people: their contextual varieties along with the ethnomusicological interpretations of writers and the archival materials of the period in the imagined past. I examined female subjectivity through the defiant and deviant emotions expressed through the lyrics of *Bhawaiya* following the method of 'historical ethnography', which involves the collection of fragments (Comaroff 1992). Here, the emotions and story of the female subject of *Bhawaiya* is not created or reproduced either by a specific biologically gendered identity of an author or by individuals. Subjectivity of the author, therefore, is collective than individual and thus multiple. Deviant sexual desire can be the existential ground for a study examining whether this collective voice constructs a subjectivity that can blur biologically gendered identity. Therefore, I aimed to connect this imagination with the contemporary lives of the singers and songwriters.

WHO IS MAKING THE SONGS NOW?

Moving on from the imagined past to contemporary authorship, I tried to get a clearer grasp of the songwriters' perspectives for creating *Bhawaiya;* with its established forms, and the connection of the emotions evoked within them to the lives of the songwriters. For example, there are some timeless *Bhawaiya* songs, recorded in the early 20th century, when its popularity spread through the elite class. Then there are the contemporary *Bhawaiya* songs, produced by the *Bhawaiya* singers and songwriters about their life and living more generally. I wanted to investigate the lived experience and feelings of the female musicians through the songs they sang or wrote. Yet, I was told by one of my key informants in Cooch Behar, a journalist and an established *Bhawaiya* singer, that female songwriters are rarely found. Regardless, I found several famous female singers who wrote their own songs.

"Whatever I want to say, I say it through my songs."

I was introduced to the famous *Bhawaiya* artist Aparna, and I started to visit her in her home in Cooch Behar town. She is one of the most established female *Bhawaiya* singers in contemporary Cooch Behar. Aparna is not only a singer; she writes her own songs. She told me her life stories as a singer and her struggle and lifelong commitment to *Bhawaiya* songs. According to her, her songs are her voice: "*My songs are my words and the language of my own feeling*." She said that not only are her songs about her feelings, but she also wrote songs about the stories of other women in her life, her mother, sisters and girlfriends.

> *I wrote a song about one of my girlfriends who was not able to get married. I wrote, 'the spring is coming and going but the flower is not* blooming' *(*she laughs). *Not only did I write a song about her, I prayed for her marriage, being a devoted Hindu, not only did I pray to my Thakur, I fasted with Muslims, and went to the Muslim majar.*

Aparna was a busy singer and never forgot to mention how much money she earned from her singing for which she was always trying to make new songs. I started to go to her home whenever she gave me time and started to take singing lessons from her. Aparna also told me that only after everyone sleeps and everything becomes quiet, after two in the morning, she could write. She told me that this was the time when she was able to express her feelings through lyrics. For instance, she wrote about the pain she felt for her mother, who was a young widow living in a male dominated society, where men always wanted to take advantage of her.

Aparna was very friendly and welcoming. On one occasion, while laughing out loud, she told me the story of one of her songs that she wrote and performed. It was the story of her sister, more accurately the story of her brother-in-law who got married for the second time after leaving her sister. She said that she was so angry that she expressed her scorn through the lyrics and sang it in public while he was sitting in the audience. She laughed, "*although it was very clear to everyone what was going on with the story I was telling, no one could object to bringing the family dispute in public*."

Authorship of *Bhawaiya* is a very easy issue to solve for Aparna, she told me:

> *The way I write songs from the stories I hear and feel, that's how old songs were written too. There are so many songs that are exclusively written by women, like the biyar gaan, pujar gaan, sadol gaan, saitoler gaan, monosar gaan, soyari melar gaan, all the songs are women's songs*.

"When women create songs about deviant feelings and desire, they do not want to claim that it was their story."

Not all female singers are fierce and vocal like Aparna, which explains why most of the contemporary *Bhawaiya* songwriters are male. Female songwriters are indeed rare, especially in Bangladesh. I only found one other female songwriter in Bangladesh and she did not feel very confident to claim herself as a songwriter or to sing the songs she has written. While discussing this with one of the respondents in Bangladesh in an informal manner, the singer Shah Alam said to me:

> *We think that the songwriters are male, we assume it, but who knows, maybe they are written by women, but they just could not say it publicly that they wrote the songs. Probably because of the patriarchal society, when women create songs expressing their desires, they do not want to claim that it was their story. Probably that's why we assume that they are all written by men, you never know how these female voices come through a man's writing.*

Shah Alam's observation contributed to the asymmetry of the female expression and feelings following normative gender identity. Shah Alam also said, "*even if they are written by man, the format, style of*

Bhawaiya is something that makes a man to think like a woman if he wants to claim that as Bhawaiya. And since that's the traditional style established in Bhawaiya to sing with female subject, in first person, the contemporary songwriters also following the same template." Shah Alam's observation opens up another aspect of the 'female sufferer, male writer' notion. It shows the possibilities of expressing desire and resistance while negotiating with gender norms.

"I talk with it in the language of my soul."

Observations by Shah Alam show the potentials of women to forge paths of life beyond the patriarchal constraints imposed upon them. Amina, a middle-aged singer and poet, is a perfect example of that agency. I heard about her from another *Bhawaiya* singer. She gave me a time to meet her after she came back from her work and before her husband came back. When I went to meet her, she looked excited and happy to know that I came to talk with her as a '*Bhawaiya* singer' but told me not to mention this to her husband as he did not like her singing. I did not have to say anything to get her talking about her struggle, it felt that she is eager to tell her story, but at the same time, she was very anxious and scared that her story might cause trouble in her marriage. The dilemma of expressing and at the same time hiding reminded me of Shah Alam's observation about female authorship of *Bhawaiya*. Amina wanted me to tell her fascinating story of struggle, but she did not want to publish it or let people know about it. After talking to her the first day, I heard from another singer that she became very worried about the things she told me and upon hearing this I went to her and assured her of her privacy.

As a middle-class working woman, Amina expressed her feeling — with a soulful and melancholic voice — that she could express her pain and sorrow only through her writing. Despite the very strong opposition from her husband, she continued her singing with the hope that one day she would make him accept her singing career. She is one of the women I found during my fieldwork who struggled to their very core to balance their love of singing with the social norms and expectations that raged against it. She did not give me consent to record the interviews with her but agreed for me to take written notes. She told me the story of her struggle to build a singing career. Her detailed story of fighting each and every obstacle showed how strong willed she was. While taking me to her room where she sang and wrote, she told me: "*Let me introduce you to my closest friend, this harmonium. I talk with it in the* *language of my soul."* She gave me her book of published poetry where, according to her, she wrote her passions in her very own voice. She also played some songs for me that she had written when she was full of rage, sorrow and desperation. She expressed a strong will to transcend the borders imposed upon her through social norms. However, she did not allow me to record or to use the lyrics and poems. My experience with Amina was overwhelming and I could feel how conflicted and confused she was. With all my heart I tried to guarantee the confidentiality of her voice. She was a woman who was eager to express her feelings but scared to do so and therefore disagreed with my using of any of her songs, poems and detailed stories for my research.

"I do not have to write Bhawaiya songs to express my emotions, most of the songs are similar to my pain and emotions."

While Amina was conflicted in her dilemma between a love for singing and her family — Parul Roy, a lower-middle-class singer from Kurigram, Bangladesh managed her singing career and family efficiently. I heard about her from Ananta Kumar Dev, an elderly and respectable *Bhawaiya* singer and researcher. Ananta told me, "*you can find the true soul of Bhawaiya in Parul's voice.*"

Parul Roy was a busy working mother with a life full of struggle. She had two children and taught at a local secondary school. She lived at her in-laws' house and her parents and sisters lived nearby. She would drop off her children at her parents' house before going to work. I met her in front of her school after she finished work. We got into a rickshaw and she took me to her parents' home, her younger daughter (17 months old) jumped on her lap and Parul started to breastfeed her. We walked back with her and her two daughters to the in-laws' home. She introduced me with pride as a scholar who had come to talk about her singing. Her mother-in-law accompanied us while I talked to her. It did not seem proper to her mother-in-law to leave her alone with me even though the sitting room was not separated from the rest of the house with a door.

When I asked her whether she wrote any of her songs, she and her mother-in-law both laughed, and Parul replied: "*I do not need to write the songs by myself. Most of them are about women like me with similar feelings. All the stories are our stories*."

Parul explained how she managed to get her singing lessons even when she didn't have any money to pay for them. She said that she used to work at her guru's house, followed his orders and was ready to work as his maid — all simply to take lessons. According to Parul, her guru was so kind that he never exploited her and always protected her by treating her as one of his children. She went on:

> *Because of my love for Bhawaiya and passion for learning it, I worked so hard that I barely had any time to play during my childhood, and not that I wanted to play either. I wanted to sing, and I want to sing for as long as I can breathe.*

When I came back from her house, she walked me to the rickshaw and told me:

> *The life of a woman is not easy, it's all struggle. But I never let myself feel sad about it. I feel blessed that I have all I wanted from my life and I struggle to keep them in my life. When you struggle for something you love, it's worth it.*

Parul was energetic, young and struggling, but she seemed very happy and proud of herself. Her face lit up when she told me about what made her feel content and satisfied with her life. Her positive energy was infectious, and I brought those feelings back with me.

"Now-a days, we write songs about rickshaws or mobile phones."

Bhawaiya songs are not only a vehicle for female emotions, they are filled with symbols and metaphors that reflect the everyday reality of the female protagonists. While the traditional *Bhawaiya* form is a female in the first person, there are no restrictions on creating new forms of stories. In Goalpara *Bhawaiya* songs the male lovers are mostly *mahut* (the elephant tamer), while in Cooch Behar and Rangpur they are mostly *garial* (the bull-cart driver). These professions do not exist anymore. The living experience is far away from the life of *mahut* and *garial*. Yet, one of the songwriter respondents Moloy Das said that they write songs that match with the contemporary lives of marginal people and stated, *"the lovers of songs are the rickshaw drivers, auto drivers or grocery shopkeepers flirting and sharing mobile phone numbers with female passengers or customers.*" One of the songs he was writing 'miss call', featured a female first person cursing the one who is giving her 'missed calls.' For him, the old folk song metaphor of Krishna's flute transformed with the new metaphor of 'miss call', but the feelings remain the same, it is the same symbol of longing to meet her lover and becoming angry and cursing because of her inability to do so.

"Why would men sing a song of women?"

Although the female first person used to be one of the essential formats in *Bhawaiya* songs, duets are becoming more and more popular. This resembles the old style of *Pala gaan* with a story or theme, depicting a debate or dialogue between the female and male counterpart. For one respondent, the female centeredness of *Bhawaiya* sometimes became the problem. When she tried to select a song for her male student to sing, she could not find any songs with a male in the first person. For *Bhawaiya* it was never considered a 'problem' to perform a song for a man until very recently and with very few people. Another respondent, who was trying to invent a different form of *Bhawaiya,* also expressed this issue. For him, very recently, one or two song producers encouraged him to write more songs in the male first person. They said, "*why would a man sing a woman's song? Why not talk about men's desire instead of women's?*" This clearly shows that *Bhawaiya*'s performative 'gender trouble' concerns the way both genders inhabit female roles when performing songs. Such a troubling of gender roles was accepted over the years with its subtle subversion and appreciated and praised as a 'tradition' of female centeredness and 'voice', but recently became an issue for being 'misfit' to the gender binary. This question shows how the correction of this 'gender trouble' in *Bhawaiya*, is becoming *the* question of debate for the genre in the contemporary situation.

COLLECTIVE VOICES OF WOMEN

While the majority of contemporary songwriters are male, many of my female singer respondents who write their own songs are not always very well known as songwriters. Although it is not the main trend, their agency and satisfaction for being able to express their words through songs very clearly came out in the interviews. It has become clear through my fieldwork that *Bhawaiya* songs, whether created by men or women, convey female passion grounded in daily struggle. The women I interviewed were neither just passive victims nor dependent on men to write about their emotions. *Bhawaiya* is the sphere through which female emotions are reproduced, whether it was produced by men or women. However, the songs are not all about suffering and pain but consist of sensual desire, anger and scorn that the women of this area feel in their daily lives. The gender performativity here is reproduced through the songs, that do not conform to the ‘victim woman’ image, but rather shows their agency and struggle in the gendered oppression they face in their lives. Moreover, *Bhawaiya* as a generic folk song style, provides a space for deviant desire to defy the norm for the women, by telling the story with a female first-person voice. Where *Bhawaiya* can be seen as the object or vehicle of gender performativity, the authorship of *Bhawaiya* constructs a ‘gender trouble’ to that performativity, by the reiteration of female emotions by author of ambiguous biological gender. The authors of the songs can be both men and women, but through the female storyteller, it is difficult to know the gender of the author. If the male lyricist wants to write *Bhawaiya* songs, he expresses female passion from the female perspective even if this passionate desire goes against social norms.

However, the contemporary *Bhawaiya* trends not only started to conform with gender norms by questioning this female centeredness, but also through the capitalist laws of cultural production. The copyright system for intellectual property imposed on the *Bhawaiya* folk songs a compulsory ‘songwriter’ category. Each *Bhawaiya* song became the cultural product of an individual. This individuation has alienated the songs from their traditional collective authorship. Despite this, the *Bhawaiya* has generic boundaries that do not allow individuals to be very creative within it. Not only do the boundaries preserve the emotions of women expressed through the metaphors of day to day lived experiences, but also a permissive tune for the love of women, irrespective of marriage. Legitimate marital boundary do not restrain the woman of *Bhawaiya* from expressing desire for the lover while still being considered sympathetically. The female first person and her ‘voice’ still remain the main trend in the lyrics, despite the recent trend of appropriation.

VOICE IN NEGOTIATING NORMS: TO BE OR NOT TO BE A ‘DANGEROUS/BAD' WOMAN

In most cases, when I explained to my research participants with my information sheet that the focus of my research is women and their emotions, it translated to them as the ‘sufferings of women.' The narrative of ‘women as a victim of patriarchy' without mentioning the word patriarchy was common, because of the predominance of development discourse that is based upon the foundation of ‘victim women' of the Third World , and the corresponding aim to ‘empower' them (Karim 2004; Kabeer 2005; Khandoker 2011). Notably, the educated and male participants unquestionably agree with this discourse about the ‘subjugation of women’ but keep the idea far from their lives.

In the interviews, the responses and reactions of female participants vary when asked about connections between their lyrics and their own life. Some of them expressed their sufferings and their struggles to become a singer, some did not, but a subtle silent agreement about the difficulties they are facing and struggling with, became clear. However, connecting the emotions of the songs with the lives of female singers raised a class issue. The idea of the ‘subjugation of women' in the imagination of the past, and in the reality of poor, lower-class or uneducated women was commonly agreed upon by middle and upper-class women. However, the continuous dilemma between upholding the ‘good woman/wife' image and the passion for singing was explicit and vital with most middle-class female participants, even though they placed the story of the woman in the lyrics far from their reality. However, while one famous female singer I interviewed had to give up her singing completely, another famous contemporary singer prioritised her passion for singing over anything else — ignoring all the stigma of being a bad woman. Besides these two extreme poles, for most middle-class women I interviewed, there was a constant dilemma of choosing between family and career, or between being a ‘dangerous/bad or good' woman. Most of them, prioritised family, but tried to create their own space within it. These constant negotiations with the power structure were clearly visible in many cases.

Sacrificing singing for a good marriage

Munni, a once-famous female singer I interviewed, had to give up her singing completely. She told me that her husband was an upper-class Brahmin and only allowed her to sing during a *puja* (Hindu religious festival). It was difficult for me to meet with her, as her husband did not want her to talk to outsiders about her singing. Finally, Manik Chandra, who is one of my key informants, managed to arrange a meeting with her. As Manik was well established and well mannered, he had access to the houses of most female singers in Cooch Behar. However, Munni wanted Manik to be present in the meeting. She told me her life story, of how from her childhood she became a child star of the village and how thousands would come to see her sing on stage. She recalled the memory with wet eyes, with a smile of sorrow. She said she had been missing singing badly. Sometimes, she played her harmonium when her husband was not around, stating: "*Whenever I hear a Bhawaiya song playing on the radio or somewhere, I just cannot stop crying. The Bhawaiya tunes make me so unbearably nostalgic that I have to stop doing whatever I am doing to hide my tears*."

She emphasised that she never had a bad reputation because of singing. No one even called her a bad girl, even though everyone knew that she used to perform the whole night because they were public performances. Her teacher, who encouraged her singing when she was a child, was like a guardian and protector for her. She lost her father when she was a child, and she not only managed to continue her education until high school by performing on stage, but also to provide for her family. She recalled times when there was no food in the house as she could not earn enough money during the off season of stage performances. She knew that she could not have a 'good marriage' in that situation. Therefore, when she got a marriage proposal from a *kuleen* Brahmin, despite the fact that he was much older than her, she did not hesitate to say yes. From day one of her marriage, her husband stopped her from singing. Initially, he did not even let her sing on her own. Munni said that, after a while, he became a bit flexible, and eventually, when her children started to go to school, she managed to get a harmonium. From then, she started to sing inside the home. Later, her husband also permitted her to sing publicly, but only at religious events, as that is not considered disrespectful. But he does not like *Bhawaiya* songs as they are all about love. When I asked her about her future dream, she replied, "*when I will be old enough to ignore the respectability issue, I hope my husband would allow me to sing*."

However, she told me that she was happy in her marriage. Besides the restriction of her singing, her husband is very caring and provides her enough to live a comfortable life. Without him, she could never live in a brick-built three-story house, or own ornaments, or have her children educated in the best schools. Financial and social stability is what she achieved by sacrificing her singing. She gave an example of her childhood friend Purnima, who married a *dotara* (a musical instrument used in *Bhawaiya)* player and songwriter. Purnima is still singing, but in order to marry the man, she had to run away from home and cut off all communication with her family for life. Since she ran away with her lover, she has a bad reputation, and her family disowned her. Her financial situation is still very dire because her singing career is not stable, and it is becoming even harder to make a living through it.

“Bhawaiya is my life, I can do anything for it.”

However, while Munni gave up her singing completely, there are other cases, where the female singers ignore everything for the love of singing. Aparna is one of them. As mentioned earlier, she told her story of how she made her way to where she is now through her determination to sing *Bhawaiya*. In a small town like Cooch Behar her dominant presence in *Bhawaiya* is rather an unusual one in the society. She lives in a three-story house, not a mansion, but she earns enough money from singing to provide for her family. She is so famous that money comes without her even asking for it. Neighbours and female guests gather on the bed of Aparna where she practices and teaches singing to the other girls (including myself). On the way to her bedroom we had to go through another room, where I first met her with a few other women who were hanging out with her. The next day, she took me to her bedroom where she keeps her harmonium, her crests, framed certificates, and pictures of various stage performances with many famous people. She has a desk there as well, where she sometimes sits for writing songs. She did not talk much about her husband but told me that he was supportive of her singing career and never tried to stop her, as he knew that even if he wanted to, he couldn’t do it. Every time I went to her house, if her husband was there, he briefly greeted me and went back to the sitting room to watch whatever he was watching. She did not talk about her personal life in detail but told me that her son was not mentally well, which is one of her main concerns. I went to her home several times, I started to learn *Bhawaiya* from her. She offered me some whisky that she keeps besides her bed. This was very unusual, as drinking alcohol carries one of the worst social stigmas, especially for women in India and more so in Bengal. In a small town like Cooch Behar, it is even more stigmatised. Drinking alcohol is a very effective criteria with which to stigmatise a woman as ‘bad’ but Aparna did not care. “*Do you not fear for your reputation*?” I asked her. She laughed, “*I keep my bottle of alcohol with me, openly. I am not afraid of anyone. if I was, I could not be here where I am now. I do not walk putting my two feet in two different boats.*”

However, I heard a lot about her from others in her town. Once, Rony Sarkar told me with a dismissive smile that, she was not a good woman. However, his daughter-in-law Sulekha told me that she was an example of a woman who sacrifices everything for *Bhawaiya*, “*If I could be like her, then I would also be on the top like her, but I chose to prioritise my children.*” She told me that Aparna’s son neither liked her singing career, nor her associations with so many outsiders, as he has to hear bad things about his mother. Eventually this broke his relationship with her. Aparna is another example of a ‘dangerous’ woman who denied being bound to the idea of ‘good woman’ and instead decided to be devoted to her passion for *Bhawaiya*, sacrificing the normative life expected for woman. She does not care about her bad name or being treated as a ‘dangerous’ woman. She is vocal and resists the normative expectation that denies her passion and she live the life that she dreamed of.

"Everything has good and bad sides; I do not do anything that would entitle someone to say bad things to me."

However, unlike Aparna and Munni, all the other female singers do "walk with their feet in two different boats,” which Aparna refuses to do. Aparna embodies the Bangla phrase “*dui noukay pa diye chola”* referring to a dilemma between two opposite directions. It shows that while women singers are somehow celebrated by audiences, as most of the *Bhawaiya* songs are about criticising bad marriages and the pursuits of female protagonist to live their dreams; the singers' lives reflect a similar reality — their family life and careers are actually mutually exclusive. Family is something that always creates an obstacle for their passion for singing and they continuously have to negotiate between the two. While this is the most common scenario and struggle of working women, almost everywhere, the deviant aspect of *Bhawaiya* adds a new dynamic to it.

I went to interview Maloti, a newly married singer living in the home of her in-laws, with her mother-in-law and husband. Although I explained to her what my research and my interview was about and indicated that it is between herself and I, her husband sat with us for the first half an hour without saying anything. She passed the consent paper and information sheet I gave for her to check with her husband. He read the papers but did not say anything. Maloti was talking about how she is treated by everyone with respect as she never plays songs that are not socially appropriate. She was clearly referring to songs with sensual language and was upholding her honour within the discourse of the ‘respectable woman' by saying that. After a while her husband left the scene and was replaced by her mother-in-law who came in with some snacks. She sat quietly with us until Maloti started to sing with her harmonium.

If the interview with her is to describe as an interaction between intersubjective communication, the presence of her husband or her mother-in-law can be seen as surveillance, and influenced Maloti’s behaviour. Her interaction under surveillance was much more guarded, very formal, and most of the time, silent. But when she brought her harmonium and started singing in between discussion, she was much more relaxed and informal. When I asked about the songs at that time, she told me that she could not talk about these songs without singing, and she explained the songs in-between singing.

Maloti was not a very responsive participant in general. However, my observation of her ‘non-responsiveness' was mainly because of the presence of her husband and her mother-in-law. After he left, she became more comfortable talking. However, she became much more expressive and sometimes sarcastic later while she was singing. The interview with Maloti is significant because, within the two hours of conversation with her, I saw her interacting with me in three different situations. The first one is the interview in the presence of her husband or her mother-in-law, the second one is in the absence of them, and the third one is being interviewed while performing her songs. Under surveillance, she presented herself as a proud singer, with an emphasis on respectability. At the same time, she tried to uphold her husband's superiority by passing him the consent forms and asking for the English version with the excuse that her husband understands English even better than Bangla. In post-colonial Bengal, knowing English is one of the fool proof signs of being more educated and classier.

In the second case, the interactive power relations work between Maloti and me. She is an educated middle-class woman whose father was a famous *Bhawaiya* figure in Cooch Behar. Since she was roughly the same age as me, to avoid any intimidation towards myself, I started to make fun of my bad singing voice and my naivety about *Bhawaiya* and folk songs in general. After a while, this interaction made her comfortable, and she also started to make funny remarks while suggesting to me that I should have a new man in my life, after learning that I was divorced. She told me, "*why should women have to suffer to uphold the image of the good woman; you are young and pretty, why would you waste it*?" which goes in line with the common stories and position in most of the *Bhawaiya* songs. This formal to informal switch is very important for understanding her conscious agency in constructing her subjectivity by presenting her identity as a ‘good woman' while also questioning it when it comes to other women.

However, Maloti, like most other middle-class educated singers, did not connect the woman of the song to herself. For them, it is the story of the poor, suffering, victim women from which they distanced themselves in everyday life situations. However, through performances, it is possible to connect to the story and the emotions of the woman of the song.

When an elite ‘dangerous' woman sings for poor women

"*So, you want to see the subjugation of women in Bhawaiya*." Rashida summarised my research interests after I tried to explain my research topic. She assumed my research was to study the sufferings and subjugation of women through *Bhawaiya,* as this is the common and dominating trend of research in the development paradigm in Bangladesh. She came from an elite family with a connection to the upper-class network of politicians, businesspersons, and scholars; she received numerous awards for her singing. She herself is a professor of literature and all her life she had been famously or infamously subject to rumours about her personal life for not following the ‘appropriate' path to be a ‘good woman,' who would prioritise the family. She also made fun of this rumour in front of me. She is considered as one of the ‘dangerous' women in the society who is subject to praise as well as negative and positive remarks, to which she is indifferent. I was told by her ex-colleague that, only because she is so smart, she is always subject to numerous rumours and attacks, but she did not care for any of these. Her posh accent, assertive, and authoritative presence with me confirms this.

She does not connect the ‘voice' of the *Bhawaiya* subject in the lyrics with herself. For her, the ‘woman' of the *Bhawaiya* songs are the helpless victims of the patriarchal system. However, she told me that whenever she sings, she thinks about her grandmother, as a symbol of a woman from rural Bangladesh. Her grandmother, despite being a housewife of a village zamindar (landlord), maintained very close connections to the poor women. Rashida recalls her memory of her grandmother from her childhood, listening to the poor women who would come to tell their stories of suffering: bad marriages, marital oppression or the polygamy of their husbands.

Bhawaiya songs for her are about the stories of a woman like her grandmother who got married and had to move to her in-law’s house when she was a child, or about those poor, helpless victim village women. She does not connect herself with the powerlessness of those women, but she was willing to talk for them. She does not feel and act as the representative of the victim or voiceless woman, rather she is okay with the image of the ‘dangerous' woman that surrounds her, but she feels sorry for the poor suffering woman when she sings. The dilemma of not being able to see the ‘resistance' voices, from which the *Bhawaiya* songs that she sings originated from, but at the same time, endorsing her rebellious reputations made me curious about her. Her negotiation with the normative gender expectation and distancing herself with the so-called poor, subjugated, and helpless woman brings out the dynamics of gender and class and their intersectional negotiations.

INTERDISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF SUBJECTIVITY

The interviews I had with the subjects of the research are not representative accounts of their lives. They are momentary interactions that have many dimensions, situated in the multi-layered power relations between me and the respondent, between the interdiscursive interaction of texts, performances and interviews. Talking about deviant emotions was not easy in interviews. Even talking about love sometimes makes the interviewees uncomfortable, although it is an inevitable topic of discussion in *Bhawaiya* culture. In most cases, the respondent discussed it with metaphorical words like abeg (affection), akuti (longingness), or onuvuti (emotion). Talking about love, deviant or not, becomes easier when they sing or perform the songs, but is easiest to discuss in writing. However, explaining this element in writing differed depending on the writer's normative positionality and understanding when they explain it in person. So, there is a clear deferral of the idea of illicit love from interviews to performance and to writings, which I aim to analyse as an interdiscursive deferral.

This interdiscursive situation of overlapping interview and performance was visible with Maloti, especially when she was performing and talking with me in-between singing. When I asked her about the connection between her songs and her life, she said that she could not talk about the lyrics without performing. She said that "*only by singing, with the tune, you can get the real meaning of the songs, the real emotions come through this*.” When she brought her harmonium and played songs to explain the passion inscribed on those songs, she explained — while smiling about the metaphor of the songs — how the woman expressed pain about waiting for her lover, with the metaphor of the dried flower. She was telling me that she becomes the women of the songs when she sings, and only then she can explain the emotions of the women of the songs.

Maloti, who claims to be respectable to everyone with her careful selection of ‘appropriate' songs for the programs, and by keeping herself away from the “not so respectable social situations,” — e.g. only playing certain venues — explained with approval and performed a song about a woman craving sensual youth at some point of the interview. The translation of one small part of the song lyrics are:

দৈয়ল রে – কার জইন্যে রাখিবরে সোনার যৌবন।।
O kind heart, for whom I will keep the golden lustful youth

লাজে নাই কই দৈয়লরে, দৈয়ল বাপ মায়ের আগে
I feel ashamed to say it to my parents

তোলা মাটির কলা যেমন রে দৈয়ল হলপল হলপল করে
The way the plant of fertilised soil grows swiftly

ঐ মত মোর সোনার যৌবন দিনে দিনে বাড়ে রে
In the same way my golden youth is overflowing.

Also, for her, *Bhawaiya* songs are not only about the sufferings of women but also about rage and anger. In many lyrics, the women direct slur words at the lover who is not paying proper attention to them. She says, “*cursing comes from anger, which is the flip side of love.*’” Notably, she did not identify these slur words as vulgar. Like Aparna, who took pride in telling the story of the song that criticised her sister's husband for remarrying, Maloti utilises the musical form to convey emotions otherwise unacceptable for a women.

Moreover, the meaning of song lyrics also depends on interpretations and the interactive situation. One of the most famous and heart-wrecking songs of *Bhawaiya* indicates an extramarital affair. The lyrics of the song are:

ওকি একবার আসিয়া, সোনার চান্দ মোর যাও দেখিয়া রে
(O dear lover, at least only once come to see me)

ও দিয়া ও দিয়া যান রে বন্ধু, ডারা না হোন পার
(You are wandering around but are not coming to me)

ওরে থাউক মন তোর, দিবার থুবার দেখায় পাওয়া ভার রে..
(I do not want anything else but to see you)

কোড়া কান্দে কুড়ি কান্দে, কান্দে বালি হাঁস, ওরে ডাহুকি কান্দনে ও মুই ছাড়নু ভাইয়ার দ্যাশ রে..
(All the birds and animals are crying as I left my brothers’ village)

আইলত ফোটে আইল কাশিয়া, দোলাত ফোটে হোলা

(The flowers are blooming on the fields)

ওরে বাপ-মায়ে বেচেয়া খাইছে সোয়ামি পাগেলা রে
(My parents sold me to a crazy husband)

লোকে যেমন ময়নারে পোষে পিঞ্জিরাত ভরিয়া
(The way people keep their pet bird in the cage)

ওরে ওই মতন নারীর যৌবন রাকিছং বান্দিয়া রে.
(I kept my female youth inside a cage)

Before the line of the song tells about how the parents of the girl sold her to the crazy husband, one cannot understand that this is a song about the affair of a married woman who desires her lover and accuses her father and brother of marrying her to a crazy husband. This song is hugely popular, and in most cases, the illicit connotations are avoided. However, Ranajit Deb and Burma used this song as one of the examples of an expression of desire beyond marriage (Barma 2004; Deb 2015). Assuming that the ‘illicit' emotions expressed in the lyrics are well established, I thought this popular song could be used to initiate a discussion about love beyond marriage. However, when I asked about this song, one middle-class respectable female *Bhawaiya* singer Nira, explained to me that the song was sung for the husband who departed, and she is calling him ‘crazy' because he left her; whereas Ranajit, in his book, understands the woman is suffering from the departed relations with her lover — when he passes her house, her heart breaks. Imprisoned in her husband's house, her only hope was her lover (Deb 2015, 175).

However, the idea of love the song expresses creates the same appeal — whether illicit or not — when sung and performed. Only when they became the object of analysis by contemporary writers, did the forms of ‘love' become objects of scrutiny from the authors’ perspective. Thus, the passion of love inscribed on the lyrics has been judged/scrutinised and categorised by the ‘story' of the song, as to whether it is illicit (porokia) or not, then fit them in those categories of love and analysed from their own normative historical positionality.

BECOMING-WOMAN THROUGH PERFORMANCE

Positionality and emotions vary according to text and interview — for performance, it takes another level. Through performance, the singer becomes the woman of the songs, constituting a form of temporal subjectivity. While performance studies emphasise symbols and representation (Cull 2005), Ruth Finnegan argues, the emotions embodied in the experience of musical performances should consider meaning beyond textuality and symbolic representation and even social construction; a turn towards bodily experience and the overcoming of the mind-body duality is proposed (Finnegan 2012). I, in turn, aim to see the embodiment of the subject of *Bhawaiya* by the singers and as the process of becoming the woman of the song. Here I follow Cull's (2005) suggestion for a Deleuzian idea of becoming in performance studies that challenges the false binary between acting and being a true self; i.e. 'being' and not 'being', but rather becoming, as it "constitute attempts to come into contact with the speeds and affects of a different kind of body, to break with a discrete self" (Cull 2005, 7). Through performing the songs, the singer is not only 'acting' the role of the woman in the songs; rather, the emotional connection that affects the performer's body shows a process of becoming the woman of the song.

"When I perform the song, I become herself."

Maloti in her day to day life, and in my discussion, distanced herself from the woman subject of Bhawaiya. She did not connect her life with the song lyrics, but for her, performing the songs require one to perform the voice and stories of the first person of the songs, stating: "*If the story doesn't match with me, I imagine someone I know, with this type of story and go there, become herself*." The sufferings, despair, or desire of the women in songs are not far from her life. It's very common, very much connectable. This temporal subjectivity of becoming the woman of the song, only becomes salient through the connection of the songs with the performer, while otherwise in another situation, her interaction with me constructed a different subjectivity where it became almost impossible for her to talk about the emotions inscribed in the songs of *Bhawaiya.*

Man, who becomes the woman of the song

My fieldwork on Bhawaiya people and area led me to experience many musical gatherings. They ranged from formal to informal *adda*, from regular rehearsals, to actual performances on stage. On one of these occasions the rain was pouring, and I went to the foundation of Badol, an informal orphanage where he teaches Bangla folk songs to children alongside their education. The office for the foundation was outside his house, his house being part of the larger building where the kids live. He was not there, and I had to wait for him in the office, which consists of two small rooms and a garage. There were three staff working, but according to them, their work schedule is flexible, and all of them are either singers or songwriters or musicians that play instruments.

The foundation runs as an NGO in a very remote village of Lalmonirhat district of Bangladesh funded by some Scandinavian artists. The office was just opposite a small alleyway of the house where Badol lives and the extension of the house where the orphanage is, with a big metal gate. Because of the rain, all the paths were muddy and when Badol came he took me to his home, which mostly consisted of a room with a bed and some couches where he and his family sleep. I wanted to talk with him about his work, but he insisted that I have lunch first with them and then go to the regular after-lunch rehearsal in the studio on the first floor of the house. Badol showed me his whole house compound, separated by a small yard and joined by a small toilet, on one side his room and the studio on top of it, and one the other side, the orphanage. There was also a guest room where the Norwegian artist, who Badol calls mother, occasionally stays.

Image 5: The organisation run by Badol. In the left there is the orphanage, and in the right the house of Badol, the 1st floor is the studio

After the interview, the three female children (from aged 10 to 16) of his orphanage — that he refers to as his children — sat together as part their regular practice in the studio with the musicians and songwriter members of the organisation. All of them sang, and they were expecting me to record their songs. Badol performed last, with a song that talks about a young wife, crying and complaining to her grandmother as her husband got married again and brought the new wife home. As Badol was singing, he choked into tears. He continued to play the harmonium and by the time he tried to control himself he had to skip a line or two; wiping his eyes with the gamcha (a multi-use cotton towel that men wear in rural Bengal) and singing the rest of the song. The atmospheric emotions, which I will be discussing in the next chapter, uphold the pain of the woman of the song, and Badol initiated this pain in his voice and performances, by becoming the woman.

Here I want to locate the possibilities of agency in performativity as a practice of reiterating gender norms (Butler 2010; Mahmood 2006). I examined the performance of becoming a 'suffering woman' by a man (Badol), with the concept of 'becoming-woman'. I take the idea of becoming from Deleuze and as developed by Rosi Braidotti (2003), as the process of constructing multiple subjectivities. For Braidotti, "the reference to 'woman' in the process of 'becoming-woman,' does not refer to empirical females, but rather to socio-symbolic constructions" (45). This subjectivity is subversive as it poses a challenge to the normative signs of masculinity to which Badol is expected to conform. As Braidotti (2013) argues:

> The becoming-woman is subversive in that it works actively towards the transformation of the signs…...hence the imperative to become a woman as the first move in the deterritorialization of the dominant subject (also known as the feminisation of Man) (53).

It is the process of becoming the woman of the song through performances. Here I see the subjectivity of 'becoming-woman' as a first step towards challenging the gender binary that reduced woman to the 'other', to a sub-category of being. Upending such a reduction would take as its ultimate goal the creation of a nomadic subjectivity, following Braidotti (2013). According to Braidotti (2013), "the becoming-woman is necessarily the starting point in so far as the over-emphasis on masculine sexuality, the persistence of sexual dualism and the positioning of woman as the privileged figure of otherness, are constitutive of Western subject-positions" (50). Braidotti connects the Deleuzian (2004) idea of Becoming with Irigarray's (1985) idea of sexual difference to propose her idea of becoming-woman, which I found very relevant to a context where the temporal subjectivity of the performers are connected to the songs with the body of the performers.

In my research, becoming women of the songs is the moment when temporal female subjectivities go not only beyond their biological gender identity, but also beyond the subjectivity that refers to individual personhood — creating not only an interdiscursive situation within the performance, but also a collective atmosphere for fluid, female, temporal subjectivities. Importantly, this temporal subjectivity enables the emotional contact between bodies, which is neither collective nor individual (Ahmed 2013) — I will return to this emotional contact in greater details in the next chapter. Here the female subjectivity I am trying to locate is neither grounded in an individual sexed body nor in the symbolic dimension of the lyrics. With the connection to the subject of the lyrics the performers and listeners can become the woman of *Bhawaiya* by going beyond their gender identity.

Intersubjective Negotiations

Inconclusive power dynamics — more complex than the intersection of class and gender — came out of my interviews with women from different backgrounds in my research. Such dynamics can be seen as an intersubjective negotiation. Talking on behalf of the voiceless victim is something that requires distance and superiority; a position elite female singers and middle-class/elite male respondents tend to take. However, this tendency is neither conclusive nor fixed: the responses of a subject depends on the situation and even the medium of communication — variations occur within the given interdiscursive situation. Therefore, class and gender cannot be explained by intersectionality alone, as it presupposes the fixity of identity — of class and gender roles — which I could not impose on the subjects of my research. The subjectivities of the elite women cannot be reduced to their gender and class attributes as essential and fixed substances. Rather, they are entangled in an assemblage, “a cacophony of informational flows, energetic intensities, bodies and practices that undermine coherent identity” (Puar 2018, 133).

The agency and voice of women cannot be heard in the discourse of the ‘suffering woman', but this voice, sometimes very conscious and shared, sometimes subtle, is present and salient in the middle and lower middle-class female singers; especially as most of them are in a constant negotiation to minimise the oppositional constraints between their family responsibility and passion for singing. The social pressure to be a good woman prescribes normative expectations within situational discourses. The norm here suggests certain practices for a woman to be ‘good' or to be ‘dangerous.' Most of the female singers live in between those two binaries, which signals a dynamic space in-process. Their agency as an intelligible subject does not go beyond the norm, as not following the norm is still refereeing to the norm in relation to it (Butler 2004). However, it shows the constant negotiation with the norm, that constructs their temporal subjectivity, not something fixed or absolute. *Bhawaiya* lyrics add another dynamic within this process. The performance creates an intersubjective interaction between the woman of the lyrics and the performers, providing a justification for challenging the norm. The sexual desire that is expressed through the songs does not fulfil the actual desire, but it can invoke a subject to voice that desire and critique the oppressive marital situation they otherwise wouldn’t. Here *Bhawaiya* becomes a tool for the voice, sustaining a creative space for female subjects. These women negotiate with it and are constantly trying to push their normative boundaries in favour of their passions that challenge the discourse of passive victims, of merely subjugated women.

Aparna and Amina, in writing songs and poems, Sulekha voicing her desire to be a singer, or Parul for doing anything to keep singing, or even for Munni, who still dreams to sing again, are not the ‘poor' helpless women Rashida sees or as Rony dismissed. It is clear that the *Bhawaiya* still offers spaces to voice deviant emotions of women sympathetically, in the metaphors of love, whether it is illicit or vulgar or not. The tune and lyrics of this expression connect the female singers I interviewed. Their acceptance of theses emotions and negotiation of their actions with the normative gendered expectations that would deny those emotions, shows their agency. In negotiating between being a good or dangerous woman as they pursue their passion for singing, their voice and agency became salient in my research.

CONCLUSION

That *Bhawaiya* is a folk song that expresses the feelings of women's hearts is well established in the discourse around it. In many books, research papers, leaflets and publications, this is how the song genre is usually defined. The woman of the song in the lyrics speaks in the first-person and tells her story, which is filled with emotions that are often deviant. These entail intense sensual passion, anger, rage, and sometimes scorn, mostly in relations to her marriage, in-laws, or her passion for a departed lover. Considering the context of the society, this narrative deviates from normative expectations of womanhood. However, the woman subject who symbolises the social norms, expectations and even permissiveness is fictional. The fictional voice makes it easier to gain sympathy for her deviance, also making it difficult to locate its authorship. The deviant desire, whether it is inside or outside of marriage, receives its sympathy through the fictional voice of the woman, and the anonymity of the real woman. Nevertheless, it does not deny the existence of the real woman in those situations. Moreover, it is so close to the lives of women that women connect their emotions to it and popularise it. Moreover, when connecting the lyrics to the real living situations of the female singers, I found ample instances of constant deviance from the expected gender norms. The 'dangerous' woman in *Bhawaiya* becomes the inspiration for deviating from the idea of the 'good woman’. This in turn, challenges the assumption about poor women as voiceless victims. As it is a folk tradition that was shared through oral singing, original authorship is also impossible to locate. However, through my research, I was more interested in exploring the idea of original authorship and the imagined past in the mind of the present. The singers, performers, researchers construct that past subjectively. This is part of the subjectivity I aimed to examine. To complement that, I tried to look at contemporary authorship. In both situations, although it is assumed by default that the songwriters are all male, my research findings contradict that assumption. Neither in the past nor the present, were male singers the only songwriters of *Bhawaiya*. I argue here that the female voice of the woman in *Bhawaiya* as a tradition and as a generic style, enabled all the writers, of all genders, to construct a female voice expressing emotions with the metaphors of her day to day material reality. Considering the 'voice' by the biological gender of the author became irrelevant here as it transcends it. The generic style and the popularity of *Bhawaiya* regulates the female emotions through the subject of the songs, dictates to authors of all genders how to express a story of a woman in the first person, and with a voice of resistance. The contemporary female songwriters take it as an opportunity to speak out about the inequality they face, the pain they endure, or the dreams they wish for; that might not represent the reality of their lives, but indicates their agency to push the normative boundary towards their emancipation. I argue, therefore, that the woman of the *Bhawaiya* lyrics represents subversive subjectivity, a subjectivity constructed through the writers and performers, which can be felt by the audiences of the performers. This is the process I call becoming-woman with temporal and affective subjectivity, transcending the biological body of the singers, instrument players, or listeners. If the lyrics preserve the voice, it becomes a reality through performances and constructs a temporal female subjectivity that consists of deviant desires, love, anger, or pain. Female subjectivity is constructed within the composition of lyrics, performances and material environment. This subjectivity is neither concrete nor singular: it is fluid and transcendental and defies the normative boundaries of gendered emotion.

CHAPTER 5: EMOTIONAL ATMOSPHERE IN PERFORMANCES AND PRODUCTIONS

PRELUDE

পরাণের বান্ধব রে, বুড়ি হইলাম তোর কারণে,
O dear friend, I became old (female gender) only for you.

কতো কষ্ট কইরা আমি কামাই রোজগার কইরা আনি
I bring my hard earned money

তবু তোর মন পাইলাম না,
But still I am not getting your heart

কোদালে কাটিয়া মাটি, হাতুর দিয়া পাথর ভাঙ্গি
Worked as labourer with spade, I break the stones with hammer,

মাথার ঘাম পায়ে ফেলি, তবু দুঃখ গেল নারে,
I sweat from my head to feet, but my sorrow did not go away

বুড়ি হইলাম তোর কারণে,
I am getting old only because of you

চা বাগানের একলা জীবন, মর্ম ব্যাথাও দিলে কেমন
My lonely life in the tea garden, with so much hard work and pain

পিঠেতে বাঁশের ঝুড়ি, সবুত নাইয়ের পাক্কি কুঁড়িরে
I work with the cane basket on my back, I picked up tea leaves and buds

বুড়ি হইলাম তোর কারণে
I am getting old (female gender) only because of you.

I had a coincidental encounter of this song performed by a female *Baul*, Kangalini Sufia, at an International Women's Day rally in 1997 when I was just a 1st year undergraduate student. She was invited to perform this song at Ramna Park[24] where, by chance, I was present along with a shooting crew of a television series about the urban middle-class's second generation following the war of independence. The director of the series spontaneously took the opportunity to record the actors dancing to the songs that Kangalini Sufia was singing. This encounter, being an urban middle-class university student represented in this television series, and dancing with Kangalini Sufia at this rally, led me to be a fan, particularly of her fierce spirit, which was also evident in her contribution to raising female subjective voices through her songs. After a year or two, I rediscovered lower-class female singers' voices of deviance in contemporary folk song production. I heard one of my girlfriends signing the following 'obscene' folk song:

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[24] One of the central parts in Dhaka city, close to Dhaka University.

সোনাবন্দু তুই আমারে ভোতা দাঁও দিয়া কাইটা লা
Oh dear lover, cut me with your blunt machete

পিরিতের খ্যাতার তোলে জাপটায় ধইরা মাইরালা
Smash and kill me under the blanket of love

আমি একটা জোয়ান নারী, আর কতদিন সহ্য করি
I am a young woman, how many days will I wait?

মনে চায় টাইন্যা ধরে নিয়া জাইগা বেলতলা
I feel to grab you and bring you under the Bael tree

কয়দিন ধইরা খালি বাড়ি
For some days the house is empty,

চল গাড়ি পাম্পে ছাড়ি
Let's start the pump of the car

ভাবী আইতে ক'দিন দেরী
Sister-in-law will come after a few days

তোর কাম তুই সাইরালা
In the meantime, do your job. [25]

Hearing the lyrics I could not believe my ears. My middle-class morality of being a Bengali Muslim girl was hurt by this very direct, illicit sexual urge that the singer was making. Music was an inevitable part of me being a middle-class Bengali that connected with appropriate emotions of love, and it has boundaries. The available genres of music for the Bengali middle-class that I used to listen to did not have lyrics with any direct sexual connotation. This was probably the first time I heard Bangla music with an explicit sexual urge presented in it. Later, I realised that the folk songs I grew up hearing, had their sexual aspects filtered or avoided in middle-class discourse, which I explained in chapter three. For me, just like the middle-class discourse, folk songs were about immense emotional longings. The idea of sexuality did not easily fit with that emotionality. It reflected a sharp contrast between middle-class musical taste and the song I had just heard. The two songs break my orientation of musical ear as the sample of deviant and defiant songs sung in the poor people's cultural circle. It was the late 90's and this was the time when Momtaz Begum, a poor folk singer from rural Bangladesh, who used to sing with her father as a child, and her record breaking popularity was emerging with surprise to the middle-class cultural discourse. Her popularity and success changed the music scene and she became the cultural icon of the rural and lower-classes.

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[25] This is a part of the song, translated by me.

INTRODUCTION

Bangla folk songs are not simply artefacts from the past. There is a continuity of emotions attached and reproduced through the production of folk songs in different situations. The middle-class idea of love creates a binary between body and mind and divides the feeling between sexuality and romantic love, between the senses and the thoughts. The idea of a mutually exclusive binary between sexuality and emotionality that dominates the Bengali *bhadralok* morality was not easy to erase. The songs which are considered 'spiritual' are regarded as having a higher status within folk songs. It goes with longings for folk songs in middle-class listening practices. Therefore, in the third chapter, I deconstructed the idea of spirituality and sexuality in traditional folk song genres and proposed a new generic criteria according to the lived and sensed experience of women, where emotions and sexuality, body and mind blended in the same emotional atmosphere. However, in broader perspectives, from rural to global level in the last three decades, the established boundaries of folk genres became even more complicated in the contemporary music scene. The rapid changes in technological situations transformed the music industry of Bangladesh, where my research expanded to. The emotions evoked by Bangla folk songs are not only limited to in-person musical performances, but also through different media which were going through rapid technological changes. Moreover, with the global and technological changes, a significant change was happening in the cultural scene from 90's and onward. The deviance and defiance of those two very popular folk songs expressed by a female subject are representatives of that change that intrude into my moral bubble and pushed me towards the feeling beyond the acceptable normative emotions.

In this chapter, I will examine the emotions Bangla folk songs evoke through reproduction in different situations, from the most marginalised to elite, from local to global and in different media. For this, firstly, I will explore the emotional atmosphere of the folk song from personal/private performances to stage performances and examine the material aspects of the meaning of folk songs and its emotional blueprint. Secondly, with the help of relevant research and my fieldwork data, I will focus on the generic borders and the emotional aspects of the folk songs in relation to the technological changes in the medium of musical reproduction. I will also explore the affective blueprint of those songs that are no longer limited to the generic boundary of *Bhawaiya*, *Bhatiali* or *Baul*. I will instead discuss the new generic style came up with urban production and their class dynamics in relation to folk songs. I will examine the emotional transition through the folk songs as the object of emotions, connecting bodies and thoughts in combination with class and material dynamics.

EXPERIENCING THE EMOTIONAL ATMOSPHERE

In my fieldwork, the performances I had experienced not only constructed the female temporal subjectivity that I elaborated in the previous chapter, but also they showed a process of emotional atmosphere connecting songs, performers and audiences. Different types of performances had different emotional atmospheres. Here, as the emotional atmosphere, I meant a situation that is temporal, creates emotional contact, but which is not separate from its context. Although it is momentary, it connects all the relational subjectivities rooted in the historical relations between the participants. The emotional atmosphere here is not homogenously collective, nor individually different, rather they can be differed through the bodies with affect. Here I am going to describe musical performances in order to examine the emotional contact and atmosphere between bodies.

In the context of Bengal and the traditional folk musical genres, the musical performances are hugely varied. There are songs that are performed for weddings, funerals, or just at house parties, or any social gatherings, not necessarily only by professional musicians. There are other types of more public performances by musicians, on stage or *shadhusongo*[26] with *Bauls*. I did not experience *shadhusongo*, which is a part of the *Baul shadhana* (ritual), and is a rare experience for 'outsiders' like myself. However, I talked with people who had been through this experience and I will discuss their experience from their own perspective. Besides that, in my fieldwork, I had been through many in-person casual performances and rehearsals. Moreover, I have numerous experiences of being in such musical gatherings as it is a part of the cultural set up I brought up, where I felt the atmospheric emotional attachment with the participants during and before my research with my friends and respondents. From the musical gatherings and in-personal musical performances of folk songs I will discuss the emotional atmosphere that they create through the music.

MUSIC THAT HYPNOTISES

One of the participants in my research who used to occasionally be present in the social gatherings that I used to attend, shared a similar passionate contact to these musical gatherings. Faria, differentiated between the musical *adda* (hangout) with friends and one of her experiences of being at an exclusive audience of folk music at an event. For Faria, the musical gatherings with friends we used to have, created a nice atmospheric moment, but that is the least Bangla folk songs can do for us. For her, Bangla folk music can create a much more mesmerising atmosphere, which has the power to take control over one's emotions and inspire one to act accordingly even if it is to go beyond the normative boundaries. She recalled a hypnotising musical experience of her life with Bangla folk, which made her to break a normative boundary. The story is about 20 years ago, when she was only 18, she came to Dhaka from her home district to sit for the entrance exam at the university and stayed in the university dormitory. While staying there, she met a boy, Alam, who could sing the Bangla folk songs wonderfully. She told me that, "*I fell in love of the songs when he used to sing*." After a while, Alam, invited her to spend a night with him on a ferry journey from Dhaka to Barishal and back, on the river, where he could sing for her the whole night on the deck of the ferry. She could not resist the invitation and sneaked out with him just to listen to his music. It was not a date for her; it was an uncontrollable invitation for her just to listen the music. For her that night she had a mesmerising moment, listening to the songs about the river, with the sound of the tide. He sung the *Bhawaiya*, *Bhatiali* and *Baul* songs, for her. One of the songs he sung was so hypnotising that she felt that she herself became a part of the song. The song is:

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[26] It is a musical ritual among *Bauls*, performed with the assembly of *Bauls* from different places, usually for 3 days continuously.

হাওয়ায় টানে উত্তরে আর জলে টানে দক্ষিনে
Wind drags the boat in North and the water drags to South

রঙ্গিলা পাল হওয়ার সাথে প্রেম কইরাছে গোপনে।
His colourful sail is having affair with wind secretly

হাওয়া জলে টানাটানি, নৌকা পরে দিধায়রে
The boat is in dilemma between the water and the wind

রঙ্গিলা পাল তুইলা মাঝি ঘুমায়রে
The boatman continued to keep up his colourful sail and sleeps on[27]*.*

Faria had a boyfriend that time, and when the song finished and the night had passed, she admitted to me that she felt a bit guilty for spending the night with Alam on the ferry deck. She assumed by Alam's invitation that he might actually fall in love with her. And since she agreed to that, he made a move towards her which she did not like and she stopped him from advancing. For Faria, it was only the songs that he used to sing that she fell in love with, nothing else. For her, "t*he real man and the man who sings were not the same*." She felt bad afterwards and when she came back and she had to deal with her guilty feelings. The first thing she did was to tell her boyfriend about her adventure. However, recalling that memory after almost 20 years, she felt happy and delighted that she broke the boundary and went with him and experienced such a wonderful moment.

The song that was attracting Faria, was about the dilemma, which was expressed in the metaphor of wind and water and the in-between-ness of the boat. Where the boatman is the metaphor of rational consciousness, and in many other variations of the song the word 'boatman' interchangeably used as *mon* (mind or consciousness), who decided to 'sleep on', not interfering with the emotional torment. The attraction of the music sung by Alam, which led Faria to sneak out and spend the night on the ferry deck, listening to the music, possibly was depicting the same emotional dilemma that she was in. When she told me the story, this is the first song she mentioned, and it is possible that this was the song that influenced her most.

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[27] The song is in Bangla, translated by me.

Faria is a film-director and she was a student activist of a left political party. She is from a middle-class family in Khulna. From this economic class, she is neither subaltern, nor elite. However, she can be considered a member of intellectual elite who have cultural capital by being a filmmaker in current Bangladesh. Although at that time, she did not have that cultural capital, her agency and desire to go beyond the normative boundary and be adventurous is neither representative of common Bangladeshi middle-class women, nor totally exceptional. According to her, Bangla folk songs indicate that Bengali women have the desire to go beyond the normative boundaries for love and passion. What happened to her when listening to the boy's songs, is the story most of the folk songs are about: the uncontrollable desire of a woman to go beyond the social norms because of the alluring invitation of the lover.

The temporal subjectivity that she was attached to on the night, she referred to as 'the man who sings', not the 'real man'. It shows that the atmospheric emotions it creates can have different impact between the people in that atmosphere. From the description of Faria, it is clear that, how the singer and listener 'feel' on that very moment, was not the same. For Alam it was possibly an expression of his affection to Faria, but for Faria it was mainly the song and the emotions it creates momentarily. The atmospheric emotions where they were in, was thus temporal, but not disconnected to the cultural constructed meanings where they lived in. The emotional experience Faria told me about, is neither only followed by the text/lyrics of the songs, nor only the relativist cultural moment; they are more complex and embedded with the experience. The mesmerising experience that Faria described of listening music about the dilemma between deviant emotion and rational conscience expressed by the metaphor of tide, boat and sail, on the roof on the ferry for whole night, is similar to that. It is the environment, the sound of the tide and river, the night sky and the music altogether, which makes the experience of this music. It is neither only evoked by the lyrics, nor any fixed culturally constructed emotions that left out senses. As Finnegan (2003) argues, "the processes are too multisided to be reduced to one-dimensional cultural constraints" (188). The musical experiences Faria describes above are multisensory, overlapping with thought, embodied affect, and personal creativity (Finnegan 2003).

SHADHUSONGO AND MERGING THE INDIVIDUAL INTO ATMOSPHERE

The gathering of *Baul* for their training called *shadhusongo* is very different than the informal gathering and music of the amateur singers that Faria was describing. What exactly *shadhusongo* is, is a matter of debate and I personally never experienced it. I heard about it from the participants who experienced it. It is mainly the assembly of the *Bauls* as a means of learning and inheriting the tradition. According to Maqsoodul Haque, it is the second most important institution in a sense of organised practice among *Bauls*. He defines it, as "Regular conclaves or assembly of the wise i.e. masters in music, spirituality as well as day to day social matters of common concern. Scriptural discourses sets the tone of each shongo and they can last anywhere from three to seven days, depending on the weather, circumstances or overall socio-political-cultural situation prevailing at any time. Discourses and singing goes on non-stop, and *Bauls* irrespective of caste, creed, religion or sex live and eat communally during the period of the Shongo."(Haque 2007, 164)

The *Baul* tradition of *shadhusongo* is the practice of oral education of a holistic life practice and philosophy, passed from guru to *shisya* (disciple); music is said to be only one part of it. Maqsoodul Haque (2007) explains it as an institution, a practice with a set of rules and traditions that are strictly maintained. Within the intellectual circle of those who are into *Baul* philosophy among my participants in the group discussions, I heard debates regarding what should be treated as the authentic form of *shadhusongo*, if all the participants are not practicing *Baul*, or whether or not it is possible to carry on the holistic *Baul* philosophy and lifestyle in the capitalist modernist era. I did not have any chance to participate in *Baul shadhusongo*, as it was not my research focus, and with its complexity this has to be a topic of a whole research. My discussion of *shadhusongo* thus is limited and mainly focused on the experienced told by my respondents of being there.

One of the most significant Bangladeshi singers who brought *Baul* music to the international level in the contemporary musical scene, is Anusheh Anadil. She is a talented musician and her band 'Bangla' was directly influenced by Lalon Fakir. *Baul* and Lalon are in a way synonymous in Bengali culture, although not all Baul songs are written by him. He is the guru of only one school (*ghar*) of *Baul*, amongst hundreds, but he is considered the philosopher of *Baul* music, and his songs are called *Lalongiti*. Most of Anusheh's songs are *Lalongiti*, and she had been through sahdhusongo, in her language, for searching her soul. She is not only an 'alternative' singer, but a social activist of many political issues. She is from an elite class background, and she has her own fashion line named '*Jatra*' (journey) that follows the themes of rural Bangladeshi cultural motifs.

For Anusheh, articulation of the experience of *shadhusongo* is something beyond the capability of language. It was a connection that cannot be explained, an experience of merging many souls together, and came into being with many forms, but with the same essence. It is a kind of sameness that goes beyond all the boundaries of class, gender or race. For her,

> *In shadusongo like that, when you sing together from the early morning to late night, eat and sleep together, you feel intense with the atmosphere, that you do not have to take any substance to get high. There is something trance-inducing elements in the routine that takes you in that meditative intensity*.

She described herself as 'a paradoxical mess' in a Tedx talk, independently organised in Dhaka and recorded in September 2013 (*Melting Feminism, Religion and Revolution with Folk Music: Anusheh Anadil at TEDxDhaka* n.d.). In that talk she described herself not just as bipolar, but 'many-polar' - mother, lover, sceptic, rebel, daughter, dreamer, poet, designer, singer – an idea expressed in a song that she sings:

তোমার ঘরে বাস করে কারা ও মন জাননা,
O dear heart, do you know, how many of you's live in your home?

একজনে ছবি আঁকে একমনে ও মন
There's one who is concentrating on drawing,

আরেকজনে বসে বসে রং মাখে
Another one is sitting there and paint herself.

আর সেই ছবিখান নষ্ট করে কোন জনা, কোন জনা
And there's another who destroys the picture

তোমার ঘরে বসত করে কয় জনা?
O dear heart, how many of you's live in your house?

এক জনায় সুর তোলে এক তারেও মন
There's one is making tune in one string,

আরেক জন মন্দিরাতে তাল তোলে
And here's another playing with mandira,

ও আবার বেসুরো সুর ধরে দেখো কোন জনা, কোন জনা
Another one is singing out of tune

তোমার ঘরে বসত করে কয় জনা?
O how many of you's live in your house?

রস খাইয়া হইয়া মাত, ঐ দেখো হাত ফসকে যায় ঘোড়ার লাগাম
There's one who is drunken and lost control,

সেই লাগাম খানা ধরে দেখো কোন জনা, কোন জনা
And there's another who takes control of it.

তোমার ঘরে বসত করে কয় জনা
O dear heart, how many of you's live in your house?

This song is a metaphorical description of multiple selves within someone. This song points to the multiplicity of subjectivity celebrated in French sexual difference feminist philosophy. As Helene Cixous (1994) says, "this is why I never ask myself "who am I?" (qui-suis-je?) I ask myself "who are I?" (qui-sont-je?)- an untranslatable phrase. Who can say who I are, how many I are, which I is the most I of my I's?" (xviii). Cixous clearly proposes subjectivity that is not individual, but rather plural, open-ended, and changing, e.g. *herself* is always *herselves*. Therefore according to Cixous, "we are carriers of previous generations, we are, without knowing it, heirs, caretaker" (xvii). Subjectivity therefore, according to Cixous, is not clearly separate from the other people who surround us, reflecting the same idea as Anusheh tried to explain as *Baul shadhusongo*. In Anusheh's Tedx talk title, she suggested an idea of feminism, which she did not make clear in her talk. I asked her what she meant by 'my melting feminism'. She told me that her feminism is what she feels as woman. For her,

> *Woman are told that you are half or less, but we are both, we are both genders, man needs to learn to be woman, but women do not need to learn. Women can bear son, so she can see everything. She can connect with both. They can see any other life, as an extension of herself, not other. There's no separation between lives.*

Her idea of 'extension' not 'other', possibly derived from the *Tantric* influences that she has had, as well as from her *Baul* experiences, is challenging the binary opposition of 'self versus other' in Western thinking. She described her journey as from 'me' to 'us', as singing together in harmony with invisible connections that exist between everyone. That was the initial topic I talked to her about when I met her for this research. She explains that togetherness and connection with a story that she experienced while in a *shadhusongo*. For Anusheh, *shadhusongo* is a trance-inducing experience, beyond explaining with words. She recalls one memory of her *shadhusongo*, that she had in the early days when she was roaming around to find the true meaning of life. When she was a young adult, she abandoned her opportunity to live in the first world - Canada, but came back to Bangladesh to find her soul, and was wandering around and got attached to the *Baul* philosophy. It was the story from her early musical career when she went to a *shadhusongo*, with a few other famous *Baul*, in a microbus to Kustia. One night, as she described:

> *So on a third day in shadhusongo, there are times when I knew me or my ego is not singing anymore. I cannot explain who is that singing, but I can tell that it wasn't me. I was singing and singing, and crying and I do not know what was I doing. There were thousands of village people, some are dancing some are crying. The strange things were happening. At some point I was so overwhelmed that I took a break to freshen up and to understand what's going on, why am I doing like this. To find a place to wash my face, I was walking in the dark and I could not tell where were I, and I went to a mosque and a mullah invited me to use the washroom and then I found a tea stall to have a cup of tea. Then I saw a mad man, with crazy hair, wearing a torn leather jacket, probably collected from the bins or something like that, running towards me. I cannot say the exact word of what he said, but what I felt that he said addressing me 'mother' that, he listened to me. He was saying, "when they were singing, I was thinking where is my mother's song, the mothers' voice? Then I heard you." I felt that, what I was feeling, he felt the same. We hugged each other, we were crying together, for what we do not know. Then he left. I went back to the stage and I was searching for him from the stage, but could not find him. Then when I came down from stage, I kept searching for him. When I was getting on to the microbus with my other fellow Baul singers, suddenly a boy around 12-13 years old run to me, and stopped us from leaving, and gave me a flower and told me, "that madman is me, and flower is also me". No one can explain this. I tried to find the meaning of it. If I want to explain it intellectually, I cannot find any meaning from it. But at some point I felt that, it is something about the point when we all get totally empty: zero. The madman is that empty, there's no ego in him. And the child, he is also empty, he doesn't have an ego, and identity. And I felt that, it was the egoless self, that can be same. We were same at that very moment. The sameness only possible for that state, it's possible when the one splits many forms. I cannot explain, but what I believe is that, artist always try to find a place, where they can transcend their ego, where the oneself disappear.*

This is the transcended state of self where she feels connected to others. She believes that we all are connected with similar thoughts and imaginations, but we cannot always feel it. A similar description of this trance-inducing experience of *shadhusongo* also described by Faria. For Faria,

> *The experience of shadhusongo is a spiritual journey, but that is not something outside, it is inside, to understand through the songs, when everyone get together in the situation of shadhsusogo it creates an atmosphere. It creates the collective journey to find the inner god within ourselves. It creates a vibe, a connection between bodies*.

Shadhusongo is a very significant practice among *Baul*s. It creates a musical atmosphere to organise the connection of the practitioners in order for them to merge into these connections by giving up the individual ego divided into bodies. In so doing, the atmospheric emotions is meant to defy the individuality, which both Faria and Anusheh experienced through music. However, the transcending atmosphere could also be connected to the historical context from where our thoughts and emotions are constructed. As Sara Ahmed (2013) argues, “I have experienced numerous social occasions where I assumed other people were feeling what I was feeling, and that the feeling was, as it were, ‘in the room’, only to find out that others had felt quite differently..…Given that shared feelings are not about feeling the same feeling, or feeling-in-common, I suggest that it is the objects of emotion that circulate, rather than emotion as such. My argument still explores how emotions can move through the movement or circulation of objects. Such objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension.” (10–11)

Due to Ahmed’s (2013) argument, I am sceptical of “feeling the same” in the atmospheric emotions that can be described as shared feeling, but just like the other object of sharing, the object of emotions, i.e the song is shared here. However, that does not necessarily mean that the relationship with the object of emotions and the shared emotions are felt ‘the same’ between the bodies that are experiencing the songs, overcoming the complex subjectivities we have.

THE OBJECT OF DEVIANT EMOTIONS

Similar to Faria, who described her emotional drive to break the normative social boundary by sneaking out and spending the night on the river to listen to folk music, Rimi, another struggling middle-class woman, living in Dhaka but originally form Khulna, expressed similar emotional experiences that appeared to be stimulated by Bangla folk songs. She described the impact of Bangla folk songs on her emotions and feelings. During her childhood, she first heard the famous *Bhawaiya* song, "*O ki o kajal bhromora re*", and it is the melancholic tune and passion was so intense that it became a powerful invitation towards unknown, "*it is not that I imagined any lover or something, but the blown away affect that love and passion can do to someone when they are in love, shook my core*." Rimi told me that singing was prohibited in her home when she was a little child, and listening to folk music was tricky because there was only one radio owned by her grandfather. After the news ended it used to be locked down again to save the battery, but her mother tried to get access to that radio before it was locked down and listen to songs when her grandfather finished listening the news. She said that she knew it was love songs and, even though she was only a small kid, she somehow knew that listening to that song was a brave act by her mother. But surprisingly, her mother used to beat her up for singing those songs. She called it a dilemma. She elaborated,

> *It seems controversial that my mother and other young female relatives were secretly listening to the songs, going out to cinema or might even having affairs, where they are not considering the social obstacles, in calculation with their obstacles, trying to break the boundaries as much as they can, but do not want to take too much risks. Their life is limited, within that limit they were trying to get as much as they can, but she might not want this to her child to break the rules not only from the well wish, but also to maintain the status quo for herself or not to get into the trouble. Their resistance was not open, rather subtle, to have something without shattering the social structures.*

By analysing her mother's dilemma of resistance within subjugation, Rimi not only explained her mother's agency, but also her analysis showed her own awareness and critical thinking. Rimi recalled her childhood memory of living in her village and being a witness of the life of a rural area. Many men she knew, could play the flute. In a rural village, after the sunset, those men would start to play. The tune could travel far away and it had a hypnotising effect on women - making them feel the uncontrollable passion of love. Traditionally, it is like the myth of Lord *Krishna* playing the alluring flute that drives *Radha* crazy in love and this story had been celebrated in every folk tradition in Bengal. Rimi said that, the folk songs or music through the flute were the vehicle of passion of those village men and women. For Rimi, *Bhawaiya* and many other folk songs with female subjects can be directly related to the lives of those women trapped in the domesticity and in the dilemma of it, rather than the women who goes out for work in urban settings. Most of the songs are about social obstacles and the desire of going beyond those obstacles with intense passion. In her childhood, she witnessed women around her, having extra-marital affairs with sexual and passionate encounters, similar to the stories of the woman in the folk songs. Most of the houses in her village were without any extended boundary walls. The small rooms were connected by yards and to go from one room to another, or to go to the toilet, one had to get out of the roof. Due to this openness of not having a gate of the house, it was easy to have affairs.

While she was emotionally blown away by *Bhawaiya* in her childhood, that emotional effect did not stay the same when she was growing up. Especially when she became active in leftist politics. The political readings and cultural activities became the priority rather than romantic love and its passion. However, in her late 20's and early 30's, her relationship with her partner brought her back to the reality of women's life in Bangladesh. Dealing with marital inequality and the patriarchal attitude of her partner, connected her once again with the folk songs. She found that by singing the songs with an emotional tune, she was getting back those emotions. According to her, "*these are the songs when I sing, I felt the emotions of love and longing in my whole body, my body feels the emotions with the tune, this is the difference between singing and just listening*."

For Rimi, clearly the Bangla folk songs are part of her life and important elements of her emotions. These emotions are also embodied, it affects her body. But she situates her embodied emotions with the history and politics he grew up and lives. The emotions that constitute her subjectivities are, therefore, neither limited to her body, nor completely socially constructed, but situated within the connection of the body and cultural politics.

PERFORMING IN DESPERATION

I went to Dinhata from Cooch Behar to meet my contact Niloy. I got to know him through Rongili Biswas. For Rongili, Niloy is the real gem of *Bhawaiya*, who knows how to create magic playing Bangla *dhol* (a type of drum). Niloy invited my daughter and me to his home, a rural village of Dinhata. We took a bus from Cooch Behar to go to Dinhata, where Niloy was waiting at the bus stop to take us to his house. While going to his house via a bridge made of bamboo we could see from the other side of the bridge that three women wearing colourful *sharis* - probably the best ones that they owned - were sitting in a row. They were sitting in the yard of Niloy's house, waiting for me. There were three male musicians as well, sitting on a bench in front of the women. It was a very hot day so it was difficult to stay indoors. I introduced myself and told them what my intention was, and about my research. They nodded and did not ask any questions. Although most of my questions were directed to the female singers, they were mostly answered back by the male singers unless I insisted on getting answers from the women.

Image 6 : The bamboo bridge and the singers waiting in Niloy's yard

Eventually we were taken inside the room, where most of the space was occupied by two beds. Everyone sat there and I got the idea that the female singers were called to Niloy's house for performing on the occasion of my visit. The main thing they wanted was for me to listen and record their singing. In between the songs, I discussed their lives, and it was all very clear that being recognised as a singer by the 'artist card' that was given to them by the government was the only thing they had on which to survive. Music is the means of achieving the ‘artist card’. With the card, they can get a nominal monthly payment that is nowhere near to survival level but still helps to live within the confines of acute poverty.

Image 7: The singers in Niloy’s house

I felt depressed and helpless. The unavoidable distance of class was very obvious between myself and them, no matter how much I tried to bridge the gap by acting like them or talking in their dialect, or pushing my daughter to go out in the field to move around with Niloy’s girl of her age. It was impossible to make a true communication that was not determined by the class difference. While I was listening to their songs, sung one by one, Tapati, Rokeya and Binu, which were all about longing and featured the weeping sound of *Bhawaiya*. I felt that, they wanted me to know their struggle and suffering. Moreover, they wanted me to not only be a witness of it, but also to support them, which made me helpless because, while it seemed to them that I had the power to do so, actually I did not have any. Between the songs, Rokeya told me that her husband does not like her singing but, since she has the artist card and it brings in a nominal amount of money, her husband is not stopping her from singing.

The longing tune of *Bhawaiya* became the reflection of the poverty and marginality and, at the same time, the desperate desire to overcome this became noticeable to me. I ‘felt’ this longing. It was the contact between those poor singers, musicians and myself while listening to the music that created an emotional atmosphere where I as a researcher felt the longing that is situated within the undeniable class and gender dynamics, including the historical belonging of being Bangladeshi or a Bengali women, versus being (and being treated as) an elite researcher. The atmosphere connecting us, made us feel the longing, but because of our very different backgrounds and context, it did not homogenously affect our bodies and minds.

THE ATMOSPHERIC EMOTIONS:

I had an experience of atmospheric emotion of 'becoming-woman' of *Bhawaiya* of a man called Badol which I described in a previous chapter As I analysed in the previous chapter, the pain of the girl was transmitted to Badol, and he choked up with tears and had difficulties singing the song. He continued to play the harmonium as he tried to control himself, wiping his eyes several times, and finished the rest of the song with a weeping sound. There was a girl from the orphanage, Hena, sitting beside him, who he introduced as his sister. She was looking at him sadly, then wiped her eyes too, and then kept listening to the song, looking at the floor and continuing to wipe her eyes through the rest of the song. There was another girl, Sabina, who was playing mandira, who looked sad but did not cry. There were three other musicians, playing *dhol, tobla* (a pair of drums commonly used for South Asian music) and *dotara* (the main string instrument for *Bhawaiya*), who kept playing sadly. I was sitting in front of them, recording, and feeling lost and sad, not because of the sorrow of the girl expressed in the lyrics of the songs, but because of the sorrow that Hena and Badol were expressing. I felt emotionally connected with them as they were feeling the connectedness with the story of the girl in the song. It derived from an encounter between bodies, which were present at that scene, in addition to the instruments that were played, and also the histories and context that directed these (Schmitz and Ahmed 2014).

However, I had another significant and similar emotional experience when I went to meet Aleya, a once famous singer whose life, success and failure are dramatic and tragic. Aleya is an example of the iconic women represented in *Bhawaiya*, passionate and stubborn, and who tries to negotiate the gendered norms expected of her. Her life story, expressed by her and by others, seems to show her strong will to negate the social expectations and pressure. Being a Muslim girl, when she was only twelve or thirteen years old, she made her acceptance in the society initially by singing '*gazal*' (considered the high standard of music of Islamic Sufi tradition). Later, she became popular as a *Bhawaiya* singer, and most of her popular songs expressed very sensual desires of women. However, when she was at the height of her popularity, she fell in love with a songwriter and *dotara* player and married him, going against her family. This action marked the beginning of her tragic life. From then on, with fierce enmity from all of her family members, she struggled to be with the love of her life and also tried to keep her singing devotion. Moreover, the financial severity left its mark on her personal life. While her husband was dressed like a Muslim Mullah, he was accused of being a fundamentalist, which supposedly destroyed her career in the Hindu majority West Bengal. On the other hand, for Islamic religious reasons, her sons, to whom they are depended on, do not approve her singing. Aleya doesn't speak much, but her moody, proud and passionate expression is very significant. She is a woman who did not compromised with her passion, which caused her suffering and poverty, but remained stubborn. Her agony expressed with the song performance coincides with the 'suffering' image of women, but she also transcends it with her agency. Her uncompromising life, comes with misery, but still it could not bend her down, according to Mijanur.

I was told about her, by Mijanur, a Rajbangsi linguist activist and local public intellectual, who has a very good relationship with Aleya. When I expressed my intention to meet with Aleya to Mijanur, he hesitated, saying that Aleya was not well and it was difficult to communicate with her. But he promised me that he would take me to her house soon. After few days, when I again told him, he gave me a time and he took me and my daughter on the back of his motorbike from his house to meet with Aleya. On the first day, after contacting her with her husbands' phone, Mijanur took us through extremely muddy ways about two feet wide, in between two paddy fields, called *ayeel* in Bangla, to a very remote village. Aleya was not at home. While we passed her house, which is basically an extension of her son's house, I saw that it clearly indicated her extreme poverty. After the Ramadan fasting, she and her *dotara* player, song-writer husband, along with others practiced *Bhawaiya* in a neighbour house because she could not afford the harmonium and her sons did not like her playing music at home.

Image 8 : Aleya’s house from outside, this is the extension where she lives with her husband.

It was an overwhelming experience in the place where she was rehearsing, because of the eagerness of her husband to show off her success, interrupting the normal conversation and even the proper introduction with them. Aleya was quiet, in contrast with her husband’s desperate showing off of her artefacts from the high time of her career, i.e. the gramophone record, the prizes from the government for the lifetime achievement, the paper-cuttings. Her sad but stubborn face ignored all the things that her husband was saying. It put me in an awkward position as I felt helpless in face of the very clear expectation for me to support her. Aleya did not say anything to me. She looked sad and a bit indifferent. However, when she started to play a famous song about asking a foreigner’s visit to northern Bengal, she customised the lyrics with description of us to welcome us. She addressed me as the sister from Bangladesh, and Mijanur as the brother from Gidaldah.

It was an overwhelming welcome to me, where I was feeling that I was taking advantage of her vulnerability and giving a false hope that they inferred from my elite appearance. After few songs, she started to perform a song about a deserted female lover, who could not get rid of the *maya* (love, caring and illusion) for her lover, which caused her misery. She expressed her suffering and urged her lover to come to see her dead body in her last day. The lyrics of the song are:

আরে ও মোর প্রাণের কালা, এ কি মায়া লাগাইলেন রে আমার হৃদে
Oh my kala (nickname of Krishna) of my soul, what is this maya (illusion/love) that you put in my heart?

তোর কালার পিরিতের মায়ায় সদাই কাঁপে মোর নারীরই হিয়া রে
With the passion of the love of you, the woman in me and the my body shakes

চোখের জলে মোর বুক ভিজিয়া যায় রের
My tears flow down and wet my chest

Image 9: Aleya’s precious possession of gramophone records and certificates.

While she was singing the song, the characteristically longing tune of *Bhawaiya* and the passionate lyrics together made her cry, her tears were flowing down her cheeks. As I described earlier, at that moment, she became the woman of the song. This emotional atmosphere affected others too, and I saw Mijanur was wiping his eyes as well. The emotions affected me too, but not only due to this one song. The combination of the other songs, the warm musical welcome, the desperate and tragic situations of hers and the passionate songs, meant that I felt I could connect with her despite her silence and her husband’s desperate attitude.

Later, when we were coming back, Mijanur explained to me that the story of the song is analogous to the life story of Aleya, and it is inevitable for Aleya not to cry while performing, as her life is very close to the women of the songs of *Bhawaiya*. The acute poverty of Aleya, and the desperateness of her husband to uphold her again for the betterment of their life, indicated her a tragic life story, which was revealed over time by the interview of the second day with her and her husband, and by the other respondents. Being Muslim in a Hindu majority society, and being stubborn and passionate, and one who followed her heart, were identified as the causes of her tragedy by Mijanur who supports her in many ways.

To understand Aleya's negotiation with gendered norms, I want to use the concept of agency along with Saba Mahmud's conceptualisation as not just by the ability to subvert the norms, but also in which individuals work on themselves to become the willing subjects to negotiate with the historical and cultural situation through which a subject is formed (Mahmood 2006). Aleya is a woman who negotiated the norm and tried to challenge it, where her agency became salient. However, she was also one who faced the consequences of breaking the normative expectation. Although she remained almost silent, I felt, *Bhawaiya* is the one, through which she speaks. She can customise the lyrics with herself, with her situations, and can construct her own voice. Through which the woman of the song and Aleya construct female subjectivity, by being the woman of the song.

The helplessness of not being able to do anything in response to the untold expectations of the female singers - Binu, Rokeya or Tapati - at Niloy's place, as well as Aleya, was overwhelming for me (although Aleya was apparently not expecting anything from me). However, Aleya welcoming me with her song, and her 'being' the woman of *Bhawaiya*, touched me. I could feel the longing in her song. The emotions I felt were clearly dependant on relations of power between myself and the other participants, audiences and singers and musicians. But it was also about the music, the tune, the lyrics and the weeping singer, which altogether created an atmosphere. Here the atmosphere of the in-person performances that I was witnessing, "generated by bodies of multiple types affecting one another as some form of 'envelopment' is produced. Atmospheres do not float free from the bodies that come together and apart to compose situations." (S. Ahmed 2013, 4). This atmosphere was ambiguous, and in-between of bodies, subjects and objects. It is neither individual nor collective, rather in-between.

This atmosphere, is not the same for the all the participants, as it varies with our subjectivities. As Sara Ahmed (2013) argues, "emotionality as a claim about a subject or a collective is clearly dependent on relations of power, which endow 'others' with meaning and value" (4). I felt that I could connect to Aleya only with her songs as she was not talking at all. The imagination and thought of her life were a part of the emotional contact I had with Aleya. It was the thought that constitutes the emotions which agrees with Ahmed (2013) as, “the emotional contact involves the subject, as well as histories that come before the subject.”(5). Aleya’s longing and desire for her lover by singing establishes an uncanny connection between myself and Aleya through our intersubjective connection of being a woman, despite the invincible differences in historically constructed power relations knitted in our subjectivities. The transcendental atmospheric experience of *shadhusongo*, that Anusheh described is another example of that. However, the emotional experience I had with Tapati, Rokeya and Binu in NIloy’s house, showed that the power relations between us were at work with the music. Similarly, with Aleya, it was an open ended connection between our bodies and thoughts, grounded in the power relations.

Not only the songs as an object of emotions affect the bodies; for Anusheh, the songs are also derived from the environment. The songs symbolise the connection between the rivers going towards the sea and the people who live by the rivers as part of that journey. She told me, *“Separation from lovers, and longings for him, is the essence of Bangla folk songs, I think it is especial of the delta region of Bangladesh, like the rivers, the moment of separation of thousands flows of rivers are just going to end and to be with the sea. I think that has something to do with the songs of our country*.”

According to her, this environment is inseparable from the emotions of the people and the songs on this area. The songs, environment and the people and their emotions are determinant to each other’s. It remined me Linda Finnegan’s argument to go beyond the textual analysis of music and to focus more on the embodied experience with not only between the binary of body-mind, but also with the environment and cultural feelings as part of the artistic expression, as they are also part of the transcendent experience of music (Finnegan 2003). The emotions stick to each body with the connection of the songs, but differently. It creates emotional atmosphere, by which bodies are affected, but not affected in the same way. As Anusheh told me, “*when I finish singing, I am done with the feeling, then the feeling floats to other bodies who listens, they do not feel like the way I felt, even I myself do not feel the same afterwards*”, the emotions never remain the same in this journey, it changes according to every bodies it affects. I want to argue that every musical experience varies with the situational differences in environment, it is a composition of experience of the social and cultural thoughts and feelings, like the polyphonic assemblage as Tsing (2015) argues.

EMOTIONS IN FOLK REPRODUCTION

Moving on from in-person atmospheric musical experience to the emotional content of contemporary folk songs reproduction demands a more fluid and dynamic analysis of its connection to the emotions of the listeners. On the matter of the modern production of folk songs, I first encountered the term 'remix' in my early adulthood. Although there was sharp criticism about them in my cultural circle, I admit that I quite enjoyed some of the folk remixes reproduced by some Bangla bands. There are two class-specific trends for the remix of contemporary folk songs that Mohammad (2014) analysed. One is 'urban folk', whose main audiences are from lower-class backgrounds, and another is 'folk fusion', a style derived from an amalgamation of 90's Western-influenced, modern pop with a folk essence (Mohammad 2014). Mohammad argues that, in the last three decades, the migration of rural workers, especially the relocation of cheap female labour caused by the garment industry boom, has created a demand for folk songs consistent with a shift from rural to urban life. The new 'urban folk' genre consists of folk tunes combined with new lyrics that reflect the sentiment and issues of the urban poor, including emotions stemming from a rural people trying to fit into urban settings. This new trend breaks down definitive boundaries assumed between established folk song genres. Various metaphors and stories reflected in song subjects have also changed. As Mohammad (2014) argues, "The love-seeker boatman from the folk songs has transformed into a smart locksmith in the urban folk music's metaphor; the cart driver into a rickshaw-puller…… the urbanisation of signifiers in the popular metaphors we experience in urban folk music is not arbitrary, but rather explains the reinvention of the postmigration self of the rural poor living in the city (415).

The themes that Mohammad identifies in urban folk, all go under the umbrella term 'longing', which is considered a core feature of Bangla folk music. Most of my respondents identified that longing by various names of emotional themes, such as *akuti* (earnestness), *bicched* (separation) or *maya* (illusion or affection). On the contrary, 'folk fusion' is the result of young elite musicians' enthusiasm for folk songs mainly driven by an identity crisis, relating to the longing for authentic cultural symbols in political and cultural spheres which I will be discussing in the next chapter.

FEMALE FACTOR IN URBAN FOLK AND EMOTIONS OF DEVIANCE AND DEFIANCE

Another core feeling, not usually mentioned by researchers and in general discussion because it is not comfortable in middle-class discourse, is deviance. The sexual urge, often considered deviant and expressed through metaphor, is also expressed differently in contemporary folk song remixes, with the ambiguous words closer to the experience of urban life. Although Mohammad (2014) did not identify deviance and defiance as central themes of the songs, he identifies the resisting possibilities of these songs. For him, along with the nostalgia for the home village and the struggle to adjust in an urban setting, the repetitive melodies that are constantly played either in the tea-stalls or around their slums as the background to daily chores, serve two political purposes. One is the: ‘’Self-suggestive attempt to keep memories alive, by playing the same old record, so that urban poor’s dream to return to the village can never be forgotten, such repetitive melodies could reassure the neighbourhood (the powerful ‘other’ in the city) that nothing exotic is playing in here – hence, nothing has really gone beyond the scope of their knowledge and control.”(415).

According to Mohammad, this is a form of resistance to the ‘symbolic violence’ of the city. However, he did not discuss the notion of vulgarity, one of the most common criticisms of the urban folk trend debated in middle-class discourse. The song I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, was one of the most heard songs of the ‘urban folk’ genre. It would be difficult to find any Bangladeshi Bengali who did not hear that song during the rise of this musical trend. However, due to its overtly sexual lyrics, it is not discussed, and the singer, Nargis Akhter, remains non-existent to all the studies and discourse about contemporary Bangla folk songs. Although Muhammad is arguing that a cultural resistance of the urban poor exists in their music, he does not discuss the gendered aspect of it, considering the context of the massive flux of female migration caused by the rise of the garments industry from the 90’s. Given this context, the massive popularity of the genre can lead to an exploration of deviant emotions expressed through female subjects in the songs. I will, therefore, discuss three very popular female folk singers who came from marginal background and will explore their songs, which are full of deviant emotions that defy the normative gender role.

Momtaz Begum

As I mentioned in the last paragraph of the Prelude of this chapter, Momtaz Begum is the single most famous singer of what is called ‘urban-folk’. Her popularity made her a legendary figure and a national ‘icon’ of Bangladesh by the early first decade of the 21st century. Momtaz can be seen as an idol representing the aspirations of migrated urban female factory workers from rural villages. She produced more than 700 songs in these 20 years and created a record in the mainstream music industry in Bangladesh. Her popularity made her a member of parliament when she became active in politics in the country for two terms. Her reputation was not limited to female audiences. Instead, her bold performances and spontaneous songwriting ability that incorporates stories, metaphors and emotions close to the lives of lower-class (derived from her long term experiences of performing ‘nari-purush pala’[28]), she established her position in the heart of the rural/lower-class, non-elite or uneducated men and women.

She was a daughter of an impoverished folk singer, Modhu Boyati. The biographic film ‘Momtaz’, where Momtaz performed as herself, showed her journey from acute poverty to the ultimate success. The film can be considered the dramatic version of her own life story targeted to the same audiences as her songs: not only the urban poor but also the lower-class people all over Bangladesh. The first scene of the film depicts some village elites coming to take baby Momtaz from her mother since her father apparently sold her even before she born. As the result of intervention from her brother and a ‘Pir baba’[29], the villagers could not take her away from her family. Eventually, poverty, the ill health of her father, and Momtaz’s love of singing led her to the path of a singing career. In the trajectory of the film, the ‘public secret’ stories of her relationships were dealt with sympathetically. When she was only 14 or 15 years old, her first marriage to her guru, 45-year-old Abdur Rashid Boyati was a means of escaping from the social stigma of being an unchaste woman by singing around and poverty. Whereas from Boyati, it was shown as the romantic-sensual affection that was initially shocking for her. Despite her unwillingness, she was forced to agree to his proposal of marriage as singing with him was the only source of income for her family. However, eventually Boyati’s moodiness and negligence led her to sing alone, relating the lives and emotions she encountered in simple terms. The scandal about her love affair with Romzan Ali was denied in the film as the reason of her divorce. Rather, the cause was presented as sexual harassment from the village elites, forcing her to leave the village. Also, her husband's interest in woman was shown as an additional reason of her divorce. However, the film included a dramatic twist from her tragedy to success. From her struggle and humiliations because of her 'non-proper' lyrical songs with day to day simple emotions with crude languages to record-breaking success with the help of her longtime fan Romzan Ali. Romzan Ali helped her to release cassettes with her songs that eventually made her hugely popular celebrity of Bangladesh. She married Romzan Ali, and within two decades she had been called 'The Music Queen' of Bangladesh, becoming one of the most celebrated and legendary singers in Bangladeshi history and representing 'the singer of the people'.

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[28] Pala Gaan is considered the origin of most Bangal folk songs. Traditionally it is referring a performance on the stage with two singers involved in a dialogical debate. Amongst the topic of the debate ‘nari-purush’ is ne of the most popular pala, refers to the debate between men and women.

[29] ‘Pir’ is the religious leader or master in Sufi Islamic tradition. In Bengal, they are often called as ‘Pir baba.’

Momtaz's bold presentation, spontaneous musical talent (that sometimes led her to make a song within a minute just before the recording), and her ability with the language and metaphors used for day to day lives, made her the icon of an specific genre: what Muhammad called 'urban folk'. Her first record breaking success was about the pain of seeing her lover with his wife. As Chowdhury suggests, the catchy phrase of the song, "*bukta faitta jay*"(my chest is exploding), although originally referring to 'heartbreak' commonly used by Bangladeshi lower-class people, is translated to the male listeners as the metaphor of her voluptuous breast. Reference of heartbreak with the connotation of physical appeal made this song hugely popular to both men and women. In the report of the Daily Star, one of the major daily newspapers, Arman R. Khan (2014) reported that, "heartbreak in simple but bold ways that can be relatable by a large portion of the audience. Add her uncharacteristically powerful, unabashed [considering the demure style of singing that has been the norm for female singers here], well-tuned vocals to the catchy tunes, and you have a winning combination."(Khan 2014)

One of her more recent record-breaking songs, where she used rap featuring Pritom (who is considered a middle-class music director), is called 'Local Bus' as a metaphor of lover. The lyrics are about accusing the lover, who has initially invited the woman with great interest and affection, but who just wants to get rid of her as quickly as he can when the ride ends. A part of the song is:

নিজের ভাল বুঝিস রে তুই, পথে পথে ঘুরিস রে তুই
You understand that you move around on the road for your own good

আমানতের খেয়ামত কইরা করস রে সর্বনাশ
You ruin the credit of the deposit

আমি কান্দি তোর দুঃখে, তুই ঘুরস মনের সুখে
I cry with your pain, and you wander around happily

কার দিকে নজর দিয়া আমারে হাই কোর্ট দেখাস
By whose influence are you are threatening to take me to court?

শুধু ডানে বামে ঘুইরা ঘুইরা হইছে ফাঁপর বাজ
You became deceptive by moving around left and right

বন্ধু তুই লোকাল বাস, বন্ধু তুই লোকাল বাস
Dear friend, you are a local bus

আদর কইরা ঘরে তুলস, ঘাড় ধইরা নামাস
You invite me home affectionately, and then kick me out

ক তুই কই যাবি, গাড়ী তোর আমার চাবী
You asked where do I go, your car was my key

মিটাইয়া মনের দাবী পরে কইচ হাবি যাবি
And then when you are satisfied, you talk bullshit

ও তুই মনের কথা বুঝলি না, আমারেও গুনলি না
You didn’t understand my heart, did not appreciate me

জনে জনে একই প্রেম তুই কতবার বিলাশ
You will give the same love to how many?

ওহ তুই দেখলি শুধু ফাইদা রে, আমারেও গুনলি না
You only saw your benefits, did not appreciate me

দেখলি না সেই আদরে
Did not see me with affection

ষোল আনা বুইঝা রে তুই অন্য দিকে চাস
After receiving everything, you started to look at someone else.

The lyrics are very close to the emotions and experience of the female textile factory workers who use one of the most hectic, crowded and cheapest bus services in Dhaka, commonly called ‘local bus’. Comparing the betrayal of the lover with the local bus, which reflects the life of the migrated garments workers who live in the margins of the city, explains the massive popularity of the song.

Kangalini Sufia

Although Momtaz Begum is considered the icon of this genre, it is not defined only by her. Rather, the emergence of ‘urban folk’, which has grown beyond the urban poor sphere, started much earlier than Momtaz. The song I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, sung by Kangalini Sufia, shows something that none of the scholars talked about. It is about the defiance of the social norm that dismantles gender stereotypes. In the song, a female worker earns money to please her lover, but even after the hard work she cannot get his love. The song fundamentally challenges the male breadwinner idea of middle-class domestic discourse. Moreover, not only does it challenge the stereotyped romantic aspirations of a man working hard to earn money to please or win his female lover, it also challenges stereotypes of female laborers with fine fingers suitable only to the garment industry. The song depicts the invisible female laborer doing highly intensive physical work with hammer and spades, work that women have long been participating in.

Kangalini Sufia is as fierce as her song. To describe her, according to Knight (2005), “Adjectives like determined, passionate, and probably even defiant are more likely to come to mind.” (118). Her name Kangalini (female beggar), is a name given by one of the most celebrated artists of Bangladesh, Mostofa Monwar. She was born in a Hindu family and got married at a very early age to Sudhir Haldar. She later converted to Islam and took a Muslim name, Sufia Khatun (R. Karim 2009). Anusheh Anadil mentioned her as one of her true inspirations. For her, Kangalini’s defiant attitudes, which openly claim her sexuality, can blow away any middle-class morality. Anusheh also mentioned that the relationship with herself is not always smooth, but they have been friends for years with a very affectionate tie.

Image 10: Kangalini Sufia in her house in Savar, Dhaka, singing in front of me, as this is her only means to earning.

Kangalini Sufia is openly critical about the social expectation of women to be submissive to the husband. She expresses her disgust about marital inequality and, speaking from her own experience, as Knight (2005) describes she “is quick to say that behaving well as a young woman did not lead her to a happy marriage life.”(118). Kangalini’s presence is always defiant and assertive. She had been the head of her household and earning money for it her whole life. She is strikingly smart but, despite all her negotiations with sponsors and radio and television, she remains in acute poverty. It was shocking for me to find her house in the outskirts of Dhaka without even a road or alleyway to enter it. Approximately two feet of space between two walls of other buildings was the only the way to get to her house. When I asked about her livelihood, she answered that singing is her only way to earn money and when there is no food in the house, she goes to the powerful authorities and sings few songs until they kindly give her some money. She expected the same with me, and I tried to meet her expectation, but it kept me ashamed about not being able to help her more. I felt that her seemingly manipulative attitudes and behavior, which I’d heard about from some of the participants, evidently is her only means of survival. While Kangalini Sufia earned many national and international awards and wrote more than 500 songs, yet, quite contrary to Momtaz, she remained in acute poverty and now fighting for her life after having a severe brain stroke.

Nargis Akhtar

While Momtaz, despite having the connotation of ‘vulgar artist’, became widely popular and created a position of influence undeniable to the middle-class, and Kangalini Sufia, despite living in acute poverty, remained a respected and celebrated defiant female artist, Nargis, with a similar background and several record breaking albums and songs, could not transcend beyond the lower-class and ‘vulgur’ status. The explicitly sexual song ‘sona bondhu’, which I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, was Nargis’s most popular hit in the beginning of the generic expansion. In the late 90’s that song came to my ear in an university classroom - in the middle-class educated sphere - even before Momtaz. At that time, I did not know who the artist of the song was, but my friend presented it as Momtaz’s song, as she was known as the icon of this new ‘secret, vulgar, lower-class’ folk musical genre. Some of Nargis’s songs are openly sexual but many of her albums are similar to the other folk singers’ albums, with similar themes, and it is difficult to differentiate her with other folk singers.

Getting in touch with Nargis was impossible during the whole time of my research. It feels like her songs are everywhere, but she just does not exist. I found many of her albums in several famous and established music company’s YouTube pages, with millions of views and humiliating, pervasive comments about the songs. I asked one producer about her and he responded, “*Who is Nargis? I do not know any singer named Nargis*”. Despite the fact that her album was published on his company’s YouTube page, he denied her existence. None of the producers and musicians, especially those who are within the middle-class, apparently know her. Finally, one producer, who published many of her albums online, acknowledged her as a very good singer, and admitted that his own production company initially became successful with her album. However, with my insistence on having her contact, he finally gave me a phone number that was supposed to be her sisters, but I found that number never worked.

According to the producer, she could not maintain a positive image, as Momtaz did, indicating to Nargis’s addiction and overtly sexual lyrics. Being ‘not so pretty’ was also mentioned as a reason for her unsuccessful career. However, it is clear that despite millions of views of her songs on YouTube, song royalties never reach her and she remains unsuccessful, a virtually non-existent artist with an array of songs, yet one so popular that almost everyone in Bangladesh, a country of over 160 million, has heard throughout their lives. Nargis and her most popular song is an example of Taussig's (1999) idea of 'public secret', an actively not-knowing knowledge. It is everywhere, but no one knows about it, "generally known but cannot be spoken…knowing what not to know, its strategic absence" (50). Any issue regarding sexuality is one such public secret. In the discussion of folk songs, sexuality was never mentioned directly in any of the conversations I had with any of the respondents in my research. The sexual urge of certain songs was mentioned along with many other names of emotions. Piriti (love) can be considered as the umbrella term for it, usually referring simply to love, but often including more than that. The sensual and desperate connotation attached to it includes the bodily feeling. Especially when it is expressed as '*piriter jwala*' (the sensual desire of love) it often refers to the bodily urge that does not distinguish between romantic love and sexual desire.

SUBVERSIVE EMOTIONS OF POOR URBAN WOMEN

The songs that Mohammad (2014) calls urban folk, Chowdhury 2000) explains as subaltern's songs (*Nimnoborger gaan*). He argues that these subaltern's songs are the evidence of sexual subjectivity of women who defy the expected gendered norms or, more specifically, the heterosexist objectification of women (Chowdhury 2000). Chowdhury's (2000) claim driven my initial interest to examine that sexual subjectivity of the subaltern women with ethnographic investigation. While Mohammad linked the flux of the migration to the rise of urban folk music, the most significant change was the growing number of female workers in the garments industry, which he did not connect in his analysis. The development discourse emphasises on 'empowerment' linked to the number of female factory workers as the marker of economic independence (Kibria 1998; Naved, Newby, and Amin 2001). Despite growing financial independence, migrated female workers remain vulnerable to sexual harassment, poor working conditions, health issues and personal lives interlinked with the transnational labour exploitation (Siddiqi 2000). However, it is important that being able to go to work, earn money, and live in urban settings has resulted in a transformation in their lives, that even changed the pervasive gender norms like child/early marriage, and the images of breadwinners (Naved, Newby, and Amin 2001; Kabeer 1991b).

Within the studies done to examine the ‘empowerment’ and changing social norms, there is the tendency of scholars to see female workers as either the victims of transnational exploitation or as financially ‘empowered’ women. The quantitative measurement of ‘empowerment’ or the victimisation of the female migrated workers, both approaches are incapable to understand the elements of defiance in them. However, from a middle-class or elite background, it is difficult for a researcher to overcome the undeniable barrier of social class in order to get close to the feelings and emotions of these female workers. As according to Spivak, the subalterns cannot speak within the Western academic discourse, which has made it impossible for scholars to hear the voice of the them (Spivak 1999). In this context, the cultural products they enjoy and the songs they listen to, say a lot about their experience and emotions. For outsider researchers, it is quite impossible to know whether the defiance of gendered norms suggested in these songs comprise a true representation of their lives or not because the gendered and classed discourse work like a barrier to this communication. But it can be argued that the day to day life and struggle of those urban poor women within changing gender and sexual norms, and the emotions to which they can connect themselves, are reflective of the rise of urban poor people’s folk songs. These songs can be the link between the female migrated working class women and the fierce female voices. The popularity of the songs of Kangalini Sufia, dismantling the male breadwinner idea, depicting female workers’ living experience and anger for the male lover, are quite symptomatic of the rise of the female garments workers. Similarly, Momtaz Begum as the cultural icon and her bold songs, the deviant expression of Nargis evidently show the deviant and defiance of female voices of urban poor. Despite the acute vulnerability and struggle they are living with, the songs can be a vehicle for them to express their sexual agency and anger, that is neither possible to be voiced in a normal discussion, nor representative of open practices. However, the popularity of these songs indicates the existence of that voice, which is neither given from the top by the developmental ‘empowerment projects’ nor the middle-class academic evidence of ‘subaltern consciousness’ that Spivak criticised. However, the songs popularity and acceptability can be hints of resisting emotions and voice.

FROM SEXUAL AGENCY TO SEXY POP

In parallel to the garments industry boom, the neo-liberal impact caused drastic changes in the audio production industry and its production technology, which shaped the folk songs and their reception dramatically. The 90’s were a booming time for marginal musicians to grow with very quick production of cassettes and their fast-growing popularity. The changing scenario of production from cassette to CD and then to virtual free music, not only changed the listener-performers' expectations but also emotions related to the songs. After 2000, another trend added to folk-fusion was the rise in fame of composers. Habib, Fuad and Taposh, exemplary of this trend, are mostly 2nd generation immigrants, living or having lived a big part of their lives in the Western music scene. They are recomposing the old famous songs with new musical instruments, and often mix two or three famous songs together. This composer branding of old popular Bangla songs in a new format, is considered to be internationalisation of these songs. These famous fusion composers also started to make folk-remix of some songs originally sung by marginalised urban-folk singers with Western instruments. Availability of these songs in virtual sphere, i.e. in YouTube, made the difference between the urban folk and folk-fusion blurry.

Fuad Al Muktadir is one of the most successful composers in this trend. In an interview with him published in Daily Star, one of the main English newspaper of Bangladesh, he was mentioned as the pioneer of a unique style blending genres of folk, rock, pop and electronica in the mid 2000's, which became very popular to young listeners in and outside of Dhaka (E. Karim 2019). He has numerous remix tracks of all-time favourite Bangla music, among which I found Nargis's most infamous song that I mentioned above, sung by another famous female middle-class mainstream singer. Uploaded by random channels, Fuad's version of this song has a few YouTube videos, in some of them the cut pieces from totally irrelevant Western/English soft-pornographic music videos added with the audio[30]. In parallel to that, Nargis's original song with traditional instruments also has several music videos on YouTube, uploaded not only by random channels, but also by established music producers, with 'vulgar' visuals performed by lower-class Bangladeshi performers[31]. The two versions of the same song targeted to a different class of audience nevertheless show the similar or overlapping pornographic interest inherent in the song.

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[30] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v37oFK-08E0 access 28th August 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLo5Y5WULqg access 28th August 2019.

[31] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBSDUEcDKnc access 13th October 2019

These songs of poor women, when reproduced by high class music composers, supersede the class boundary of it. This class transgression, with the help of marketing and globalisation, creates the tension of 'decency' of Bengali women, that can be seen as the new form of the old tension of Bengali *bhadralok* in the rise of Bengali nationalism that disassociated lower-class cultural elements from the domain of *bhadramahila* that I discussed in the second chapter.

EMOTIONS IN PERFORMATIVE FOLK FESTIVALS

Parallel to the popularity of these female folk singers with their numerous hits in the last three decades, was the rise of corporate sponsored festivals expanded from the centre of Dhaka to the remote villages in Bangladesh. Amongst various examples, the biggest one is the Dhaka International Folk Festival, started in Dhaka from 2015 with artists from different parts of the world. These folk festivals, consisting of a mixture of different types of folk songs, artists and courtiers, is not similar to the intimate musical gatherings of folk songs that can create an emotional atmosphere. Rather, the international folk festivals are gatherings of people, with varied expectations and purposes to fulfil. They became a places for all the citizens of Dhaka to go to, as there is an acute scarcity of entertainment for them. This situation rarely can connect audiences with the musicians in atmospheric emotions. It was described by many of my respondents using the metaphor of *Bazar*, a place where many people come with many different interests. At the first festival, as Chowdhury told me, Momtaz was booed by the audiences and, from pornographic interest, they expected her to sing the song "*bukta faitta jay*" which has the sexual connotation that I explained earlier. That made her disappointed, and after a polite protest, she discontinued her performances. This instance shows a deferral of emotions that Bangla folk songs; many of my respondents claim to have. It does not evoke emotions homogenously to the listeners, instead works on a complex inter-determinant sphere between performers and audiences. The connection that the folk songs make is dependent on the particular situation, with a specific moment with a particular audience. Still, that situation is not alienated from the structural issues of class and gender. It is instead an accumulations of institutional power relations, emotional atmosphere that the songs create, and subjective feelings.

FLUIDITY OF SUBJECT-OBJECT BINARY

The popularised folk lyric in rap style pop-song reduced the female sexual subject of folk songs to the 'call' for a sexual object. The objectification of Nargis's or Momtaz's song in public performances and YouTube remix videos, opened up rather an interesting dimension of the fluidity of subject-object binary. Similarly, it overlapped and blurred the boundaries between female desire and male pornographic interests. While these old folk lyrics can be seen as expressing female sexual agency and emotions, but it is not a 'pure' form of resistance or identity. Moreover, it actually dismantles the subject/object binary, especially with the process of popularizing these songs with marketing and music industry. Sexual objectification of women and femininity is embedded within the commodification of women's bodies. However, the idea of man-the-subject and women-the-object in popular culture is challenged by feminist media studies. In the dilemma between commodity and consumer, where women are not only the commodities as well as consumers, but also they actually dismantled the fixed boundary between these two (Thornham 2000). The distinction between commodity and consumers, like subjects and objects of desires as the identity of women, cannot be essentially differentiated; they overlap and are continuously changing.

The female sexual subject versus female objectification binary also can be challenged with a different idea of body in psychological anthropology, where according to Csordas (1994), "Body as the source of subjectivity, and mind as the locus of objectification" (9). He argues that one's own body is not an object to oneself and in a similar way, the bodies of others are not, but in which circumstanced the objectification might occur, is the problem of the anthropology of the self (Csordas 1990). With Csordas's question in mind, I want to argue that, stripping away one's perception of another self from their body can result in objectification, but that is not itself an objective truth, rather a temporal and subjective perception of objectification of the other's body. This problem can be challenged by considering the body as the locus of subjectivity with emotions and senses, inseparable within intersubjective co-presence with others. Since the body is not fixed, rather interacting between materials and symbolic (Barad 2003; Haraway 1988; Rosaldo, Lamphere, and Bamberger 1974), it also can be the sphere of resistance and subversion from the simultaneity of subject/object position with emotional connectedness in intersubjective relations with other bodies.

CONCLUSION

Bangla folk music in contemporary times developed a very complex field of its appropriation and performances. They play an important role in assuring the sense of belonging with the cultural root in contemporary times. The emotions created by different types of performances in different moments, but it situated historically. While *Baul shadhusongo* creates a transcending atmospheric emotion for the practitioners, it does not necessarily create the same emotions for all. In a similar way, the same music sung in the informal gathering also evokes emotions and creates an emotional atmosphere that can be very different from *shadhusongo* or folk festivals. The emotional atmosphere created by Bangla folk song, creates shared feelings, but it does not share in the same way; the differences of feelings are constructed by the thoughts and it affects the bodies. The emotional atmosphere of every song, its performances and listening affects temporally, but it bears the history of it. It is constructed through the thought of the emotions but affects the body with senses. It involved imagined emotions of belongings composed with embodied affect by the tune and lyrics. Those emotions are not just contagions, but also imagined. Through the senses and thoughts with the music of the performers and listeners, Bangla folk songs in various situations creates a sense of belonging to the Bangla speaking people, with the emotions of love, especially sensual passion, longing, but in many different way, the mind, body, environment and songs work together to produce this emotion and transfer it.

Not only the in-person musical experience but also the musical production via cassettes and other technologies bears and creates the emotions with it and affects the listeners every time those songs are played. Through this, the songs connect the listeners' emotions and day to day lives. The garments industry boom and the flux of migration from rural to urban, especially female workers, created a change to the social and cultural norms, for which the rise of new song genres that mix urban-modern instruments with folk essence, established compatibility with the lives and emotions of the workers.

Within them, fierce female voices constructed by the folk music icon of this new trend and their popularity creates an especial space for the female workers. The lyrics, often explicitly expressing deviant and defiant emotions, which is not compatible with the middle-class idea of folk song and their assumed spirituality. Famous singers like Momtaz, Kangalini Sufia or Nargis, could express emotions in relation to the female subject of the songs with which the female workers create a negotiated space for expressing the emotions compatible with the changing material reality.

The emotions Bangla folk songs carry and reproduce are embedded in a complex relation of the nostalgia for lost land and lost identity, not only for the urban poor who migrated in Dhaka but also for the urban middle-class and Bengali community living abroad. The folk tunes and their invitation to women to break the normative boundary for love not only evokes the desire to the listeners, but it also constructed through the reality of people's lives and their day to day subversive agency that negotiates with the norms. As Rimi explains, the rebellious desire of women overwhelmed by the emotions Bangla folk song creates does not necessarily shatter the rules, but it keeps the hope alive. The emotions it creates is not independent of the marginality of class and gender, but rather it provides a tool to negotiate it. Passion for singing is not the only emotions for most marginal musicians that *Bhawaiya* and other folk music evoke. For many of them, music is the means of survival and linked with desperation. However, that does not necessarily dismiss the passion for music either. For which the marginalised musicians are in negotiation with the market and ever-changing situations.

While the female subject of the song can be the subject of desire and the voice, it can also be objectified by the pornographic expectations of the male listeners. Considering body as the locus of subjectivity can challenge the objectification of body, therefore, the subject-object divide, can be blurred. While there is a constant and fluid simultaneity between subjectivity and objectification of women, the bold lyrics expressing and reproducing deviant and defiant emotions of women can be seen as a 'voice' of the marginalised women, that is almost impossible to hear within academic and intellectual discourse.

CHAPTER 6: DEBATES ON AUTHENTICITY AND NATIONAL ICONS

PRELUDE

On the 5th of April, 2011, in the Rajbari district of Bangladesh, there was a gathering of Lalon followers of *Baul* in the house of a Lalon devote Mohammad Fakir. In the course of the evening the house was attacked and 28 *Baul*s were dragged to the local mosque. There they were forced to confess and apologise for their allegedly deviant anti-Islamic practices. Their hair and moustaches were shaved by the attackers. Later a few *Baul*s rallied for justice and Mohammad Fakir filed a case against the attackers with the police. The men were allegedly members of the Awami League, the ruling party who are considered liberal and more progressive than the other main parties. According to a report published in Kaler Kantho — one of the leading newspapers — on the 8th of April, one of the attackers accused the *Baul*s of un-Islamic activities, playing instruments, praying in a way that was not in accordance with religious rules and having 'fun' with women, which made the Mullahs of the area angry. Approaching them initially because they wanted to talk to them, they eventually ended up attacking them.

This incident attracted the attention of the national media, shocked liberal and cultural groups and ignited protests. The liberal cultural groups published statements, organised rallies and many newspaper columns condemned the attack as 'Islamic fundamentalist'. As a member of that bubble, I was also shocked and saddened by the news and participated in the protest. It was shocking that apparently benign, humanist folk musicians like *Baul*s, who are celebrated as the icons of the true spirit of Bengal, who never set themselves in opposition to any religions, could be attacked by the members of an apparently progressive political party of Bangladesh. The news was shocking precisely because of this popular image of the party as apparently liberal Bengali nationalists who are against religious fundamentalism. This hints that the power relations between the *Baul*s and the local authorities and beyond are much more dynamic and complex than is generally believed.

INTRODUCTION

While folk songs are used as one of the authentic symbols of Bengali national identity and celebrated, through corporate support, mainstreaming the folk songs are tricky as certain elements of them are subversive to the interests of both capital and the state. Hence, what should and should not be considered the proper and authentic folk song tradition, is a constant debate and one of the central concerns for stakeholders in these identity constructions. The debate of authenticity is as old as the construction of those songs as folk tradition. They are part of the process of excluding and including the elements according to the different interests. Defining a people's tradition as 'folk' had been long contested. Moreover, during complicated political moments in Bangladesh, folk songs became an instrument in the search for one's own identity and soul. As authenticity is fundamentally an emotional and social-moral quest (Bendix 1997), the romantic modernist search of 'being true to oneself' is not separate from the sense of longing to their own culture. The concerns for authenticity are connected to both these inner and outer spheres of the stakeholders of Bangla folk songs, which I am going to discuss in this chapter.

In the third chapter, I discussed how the genres of folk songs sometimes became interchangeable as *Baul* traditions and were filtered and constructed through different historical moments, which diversely employed it as the symbol of the true essence of Bengali rural culture. In contemporary times, the rapid changes of technologies, globalisation and corporate sponsorship have created new dynamics for these inventions and filtrations. Searching for authentic folk songs as the true essence of the Bengali national spirit was not only driven by the interests to build Bangladesh as a nation-state, but in the context of globalisation and the rise of neoliberal capitalism, they have also become crucial for contemporary political discourse in Bangladesh. The debate on the authenticity of folk songs became even more salient with a rise in popularity for 'folk' through music, linked with an identity crisis in the country, in contemporary times. From the '80s, with the changing political culture in Bangladesh, the invention of folk tradition became part of a search for cultural identity. Globalised consumer culture led the folk tradition to slowly become the symbol of longing; not only for those on the margins but also for the urban middle-class. Yet, this process was complicated by the recent rise of Islamism. In this chapter, I will discuss the interrelation and the dilemma between these political, religious, corporate and cultural factors that created the rise of 'folk' in the musical scenario during the last three decades. The search for authentic folk songs is central to these stakeholders, but situated very differently, serving different purposes. These fields are constructed by numerous overlapping agents and interests, which I will be discussing in this chapter.

To do so, I will discuss the idea of authenticity and its importance both in anthropology and in defining folk songs by the folk song organisers. Following that, I will discuss the agents of authenticity for Bangla folk songs and how their negotiations were dominated by the idea of authenticity, from different perspectives. For Bangla folk songs, defining what constitutes the authentic folk song tradition of Bengal, involves a discussion not only about the nation-state but also the market. Both of them manipulate and negotiate with popular beliefs and aesthetic demands, as well as the longing for cultural-religious identities. These manipulations and negotiations complicate the debate on what constitutes authentic folk tradition. As a result, the quest in this chapter is no longer for authentic culture, but rather about the process of constructing authenticity as entangled with the stakeholder's sense of belongingness to their 'authentic tradition.' On the one hand, we find the nation-state and its purification process — i.e. selecting the 'appropriate' folk songs to fit their idea of the national essence — on the other a corporate authority that authenticates folk songs according to market demand. Bengali nationalist aspirations and Islamic morality are influential to this association between the nation and corporates.

On the other hand, the cultural production from the masses and urban educated young folk enthusiasts for their folk remixes has also raised questions about authenticity and has led to the problem of defining it. These agents have created a negotiated sphere between the dominant hegemonic nationalist-corporate forces and the counter-hegemonic force of the subversive popular folk productions. In this negotiated sphere of authenticity, I aim to examine the possibilities of resistance and defiance to the dominant idea of authenticity by marginal folk productions. Although these categories are reductive, they are helpful in understanding the main trends. In reality, these are immensely complex and have their internal varieties, without any definitive boundaries.

PROBLEM OF DEFINING ‘AUTHENTIC’ FOLK SONGS

The debate surrounding authentic folk songs begins with the problem of defining the boundary of folk songs. The problem of defining folk songs is not exclusive to Bangladesh. The disciplinary debate about authenticity has influenced musical organisations at the international level. For example, in 1981 the International Folk Music Council (IFMC) changed their name after thirty years, to the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM) broadening their focus beyond their narrow definition of folk music as 'music made by the illiterate people of a literate society.' The definition of folk songs and their production (even having been expanded from the definition above to include music rooted in traditions) remain blurry and problematic to define around the world (Bohlman 1988). The definition that the International Folk Music Council (IFMC) adopted in 1954 is:

> Folk music is the product of a musical tradition through the process of oral transmission tradition are: (i) continuity which links the present with the past, (ii) variation which springs from the creative group; and (iii) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives.
>
> The terms can be applied to music that has been evolved from rudimentary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by popular and art music and it can likewise be applied to music which has originated with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten living tradition of a community.
>
> The term does not cover composed popular music that has been taken over ready-made by a community and remains unchanged, for it is the re-fashioning and recreation of the music by the community that gives it its folk character. (Elbourne 1975, 11)

In addition to this, the idea of oral transmission within a few generations of an old tradition, and anonymity of the composer remains the clearest claimant for the authenticity of folk songs (Elbourne 1975). This definition has been contested; the idea of oral transmission has been complicated by print media. It has been argued that documenting the songs through print and audio recordings, terminates the natural and artistic flow of the tradition through memory and invalidates the acceptability of the emotions that the song expresses in the society (Elbourne 1975). In other words, the folk songs are considered to be contaminated by the process of recording and are no longer worthy of admiration as they were not transmitted through memory, resulting in a degradation of their emotional authenticity.

As we can see through these debates, the change of the name of the International organisation of Folk songs is significant as it indicates the failure of one of the largest institutional authorities in authenticating folk song traditions.

In the organisation's 1975 yearbook, E.P Elbourn (1975) discusses the failure to clearly define folk. He problematises the two approaches for defining folk songs. One is more focused on the musicological perspective that considers folk songs through its interior style, elements and characteristics. The other is a more culturist and folklorist perspective derived from anthropology and folklore studies, which is focused on the context of the tradition rather than the tradition itself. These two approaches are not clearly separable in the authenticity debate of Bangla folk songs. They are discussed in terms of the internal musicological perspectives used to authenticate the folk songs; criteria mainly derived from the musicians, practitioners and producers. However, what Elbourn called as the external debate from anthropological and folklorists perspectives, the question of what is 'folk' and who has authority to authenticate the Bangla folk song is not explored critically. The problem of alienation and decontextualization by the recording of an oral tradition is not very widely discussed in Bangla folk song scholarship, except for the recent debate about the differentiation between singing and practice of *Baul* music. However, the authentication of folk songs from a musicological perspective depends on the authority of the musicians and is fundamentally connected to the question of who gets to define folk songs and why.

FOLK SONG VERSUS MASS SONGS IN PEOPLE'S SONG MOVEMENT

The difference between folk songs and popular songs as a mass cultural product is crucial to its essential definition. Popular culture is seen as the opposite of folk culture as it is not 'authentic' and produced for mass consumption (Strinati 2004). Moreover, popular music has been seen as a capitalist instrument of the 'culture industry' in opposition to classical and avant-garde music, as theorised by Adorno and the Frankfurt school (Strinati 2004). This idea of popular music as an instrument of capitalism and lacking authenticity influenced the Kolkata (then Calcutta) centric people's song movement and their incorporation of folk songs in the late 20th century.

Bengali nationalism rose in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) through the language movement from 1952, distancing the region from the rising Islamic homogeneity in West Pakistan. Meanwhile, in Calcutta, the communist party played an influential role in the rise of the 'peoples song movement' which originated from nationalist and anti-colonial political aspirations but moved towards socialism. It was intended to bridge the gap between elite cultural productions and the mass audience (Roy 2006). Calcutta became the centre of the song movement and a melting pot of artists and enthusiasts from across Bengal. Coming from Sylhet, Hemango Biswas, Nirmolendu Chowdhury and Khaled Chowdhury were especially influential in the scene and became prominent figures for introducing folk elements to the movement. They also established 'The Folk Music and Folklore Research Institute,' in Calcutta in 1963 and published the first anthology in 1967 entitled, *Folkmusic and Folklore: An Anthology* edited by Hemango Biswas with editorial assistants, one of whom was Khaled Choudhury. The anthology featured contributions from many eminent artists and researchers, including works by Rabindranath Tagore, Grierson's collected folk songs, and an article by Pete Seeger. The middle-class artists and activists of the communist party used folk songs as an attempt to raise the political consciousness of the peasants and the masses. Despite being divided in separate countries by this time, a Calcutta centric folk music institute published this anthology devoted to the folk songs of the 'north-Eastern region', which loosely covers both Nepal and Bangladesh. Biswas's (1967) anthology was a response to the crisis that "set in the form of its gross commercial distortion and consequent falsification." (5).

Biswas's (1967) concern over the distortion of the folk song tradition came from his views on authenticity. His book *Ganer Bahirana* (1959) was one of the initial inspirations for my research on *Bhawaiya*. According to him, his motivation in writing the book was to identify the cultural problem, which is not separate from the economic and political problems of the time (Biswas 1959). As a Marxist, his inclination towards folk music was not separate from his political position and his critical opposition to the impact of consumerism on folk songs. On the one hand, his strong opposition to the urban mass production of folk music was in line with Adorno's critique of the culture industry. On the other hand, he used the term '*Bahirana*'[32] to describe the folk song culture and to oppose the idea of 'gharana'[33] of classical Indian music. For folk songs, he favoured an alternative to the elitist classical tradition by proposing *Bahirana* (public) as the opposite of *ghar* (home), where folk music belongs, and which is somewhat opposite to Adorno's idea of high art. Therefore, although Biswas was against the mass production of folk music, he was also critical of elitist classical traditions. His sharp critique of contemporary folk songs was related to not only the alienation of the songs from their regional traditions, but also derived from a musicological perspective. The use of traditional instruments, melodies and words with regional dialects, uncontaminated by modern words, was how he defined authenticity in folk songs (Biswas 1959). He also expressed his annoyance with the cultural authority of Calcutta that maintained a customary cultural snobbery by filtering folk elements that they considered inappropriate (Bhattacharya 2013).

However, later Khaled Chowdhury, problematised this approach as the middle-class sponsored music movement targeting common folk. Discussing the lyrics of Hemango Biswas' song, he states (quoted by Roy 2006), "*'O chashibhaia, tor sonar dhane bargi name* (O peasant brother, dacoits are descending on your golden paddy-) does not connect to the real peasants life, as they never address another peasant as 'brother', and neither complain about their poverty as in the 'communist-sponsored' songs."(77).

Roy argues that the communists who sponsored songs to motivate the masses were solely driven by their Marxist and secular ideology. They had not taken into account the religious beliefs and emotions of the people and as a result they failed to attract the masses (Roy 2006). Later, the debate between Salil Chowdhury, one of the legendary musicians and activists for people's songs and Hemango Biswas, about the translation of folk songs took the concerns of authenticity and distortion of folk songs to a much deeper level. Salil Chowdhury was interested in mixing Western tunes with folk lyrics, whereas Hemango Biswas was against it. Salil Chowdhury wanted to reach the largest audience possible with his protest songs, and as such, he was happy to use contemporary Western instruments to make them catchier and more appealing. Chowdhury's reasoning follows Mursic (2013) as he argues that mass cultural production, although criticised by Adorno as a culture industry, is not simple and homogenous and at a practical level mass cultural elements can become the means of a counter-hegemonic resistance. Salil Chowdhury's use of Western tunes and instruments was intended to unite more people in the cause of political struggle, which can be seen as the counter-hegemonic use of mass production. The fierce debate around the authenticity of Bangla 'folk remixes' in the contemporary cultural scene, with their use of Western instruments and tunes dates back to this debate.

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[32] Hemango Biswas's idea of Bahirana, as opposed to classical gharana' is derived from another kind of authentic search for the rural, primitive, soul of Bengal, that has been used for the cause of Bengali nationalism

[33] In Indian musical tradition, Gharana refers particularly to classical music, which has specific rules and traditions and refers to a specific school of tradition that comes from one guru.

AUTHENTICATING AUTHORITIES IN BANGLADESH

As in West Bengal, the authenticity of *Bhawaiya* and folk songs, in general, is the most salient issue for the middle-class and elite practitioners and singers in Bangladesh, that I interviewed. In Bangladesh, the trajectory of the authentication of the folk song grew differently from the Calcutta centric folk song movements. The political and historical construction of folk songs intersects with two different trends of authentication: the longing for authenticity at the individual level and the discourse of authenticity in the cultural level. Here I will attempt to discuss the relationship between them, as "the interconnecting and combining cultural elements within spaces of interstices, be it at an individual level or at the one of the social, collective entity*"* (Fillitz and Saris 2013, 10). I argue that it is a field of negotiations, not only of these two interconnecting factors, but also for many other layers of social interest, to construct authentic folk songs in a particular moment.

The cultural landscape in post-war Bangladesh was different from the one in which the communist-secular 'folk' that West Bengal was invented. In post-war Bangladesh there had been a more complicated political situation with the formation of the nation-state (as analysed in chapter two). Post-war Bangladesh was politically vulnerable and intellectually vacant after the assassination of selected intellectuals by Pakistan. This led to a hostile political discourse around the division between Bengali and Muslim identities. This process became even more evident through the contest of religion versus culture, ‘pro-liberation’ versus ‘anti-liberation’, Bengali versus Bangladeshi and Islam versus Liberation War in the elite discourse which did not reflect the lives of the religious Muslim majority, for whom the cultural and religious identities were not necessarily mutually exclusive. The secular-liberal nationalist narratives — provided by the elitist Bengali aesthetic project and influenced by middle-class educated Bengalis — failed to connect with the majority of the population who endorsed both Islam and anti-Pakistani Bengali sentiments (Hoek 2013; L. Karim 2004; Schendel 2009). Following the 1975 assassination of the President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the military governed the country until 1989, which created a crisis of identity for a generation who rejected the Muslim versus Bengali identity binary, feeling that they could not relate to the debate.

However, folk music, as a national icon, continued to be constructed and debated through the Muslim versus Bengali identity debate in the political and cultural discourse, despite both of the identity markers co-habit in the day to day lives of the Muslim majority of Bangladeshi people. On the one hand, the elite cultural projects and nationalist aesthetics were far away from popular interests and imaginations. On the other hand, the killing of the country’s most promising intellectuals, filmmakers, writers and journalists left a vacuum within the intellectual and cultural mind of the nation and also failed to provide any cultural alternative to resist slow Islamisation. In this situation, folksongs functioned as an alternative, counter-hegemonic cultural icon, which the younger generation could use to pursue the cultural quest for their true identities outside of the Muslim versus Bengali nationalist debate.

AESTHETIC PROJECT OF THE VERNACULAR ELITE

Loosely, the first claimant of authenticating authority of folk songs is what Lotte Hoek (2013) calls the “aesthetic project of vernacular elite”, which remains an important source for ‘Bengali-ness’ to follow (19). Lotte Hoek (2013) showed the accusations of obscenity levelled against Bangla cinema mainly targeted the lower-class people and their cultural demands. The cultural authority of the agents of this ‘aesthetic project’ is influenced by West Bengal’s cultural ideas and Bengali nationalism, which holds an anti-Muslim essence. ‘*Moner Manush’*, the biographical film of Fakir Lalon Shai, directed by Goutam Ghosh is a good example with which to understand this cultural-ideological interest group. It was based on the novel by Sunil Gangopadhyay, a famous Bengali novelist from the Indian side of the border, who followed the *bhadralok* idea of Lalon. The film was made as a co-production between India and Bangladesh and received an Indian National film award. In the middle-class and elite sphere, the film was celebrated. In a review published in the *Times of India*, the critic Priyanka Dasgupta gave credit to the filmmaker for his clever depiction, “to show eroticism and the concept of free sex keeping in mind the constraints of acceptance in a prude society and the bindings that the Indian Board of Film Certification might have” (Dasgupta 2010). Director Goutam Ghosh, writer Sunil Gangopadhyay and the reviewer Priyanka Dasgupta represent the idea of the eroticism and ‘free sex’ in *Baul* philosophy as it exists in the Bengali *bhadralok* mind (Knight 2011; Urban 2001). However, the scene that refers to sexuality in the film shows that Lalon is sexually excited in the company of his partner who was selected by his guru Siraj Shai. He is struggling to control his instinct, by saying that, *“The body is aroused according to the law of nature, but if the mind is not aroused, the proper union will not be possible.”* [34] Sexuality is presented here as something physical to be conquered and separate from the mind that needs to be aroused as well for proper union. The assumed hierarchical binary of mind/body and spirituality/banality that *Baul* traditions are against, was avoided in the dialogue and the analysis (Rahee 2009).

As I discussed earlier in chapter three, the *Baul* tradition was contested from the beginnings of its construction as a national icon. In order to fit in with the Bengali nationalist imagination, their esoteric sexual rituals had to be filtered and purified. This filtration also created a dilemma of selecting the ‘appropriate’ folk song genres to be promoted. As I discussed in chapter three, dealing with the idea of sexuality in *Baul* philosophy has always been a crucial topic. On the one hand, the idea of esoteric sexuality in *Baul* philosophy fuelled the alternative cultural activists’ and intellectuals’ excitement; on the other hand, in the middle-class moral discourse it was erased. While the *Baul* genre is so synonymous with folk songs that it has been used as a catch-all term for all genres, it has simultaneously been treated cautiously in the formal discourse and nationalist narrative where *Baul* is referred to as just another folk genre amongst others.

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[34] The original dialogue: “শরীর জাগে শরীরের নিয়মে, কিন্তু মন যদি না জাগে তাইলে কি প্রকৃত মিলন হয়?” Translated by myself.

THE ISLAMIC MORAL GUARDIAN

The second authority to authenticate and influence folk songs is the culture of religious morality. There was a rise of elite Islamic morality from 1975 following the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the weakening of Bengali nationalism. The attack on *Baul* that I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter is a simplistic example of the chronic Islamisation and growing tension between religious values and folk cultural elements. It is complex and intertwined with many other forms of power struggles in the political sphere, most of which are avoided by the mainstream media. The 'fundamentalist attack' was an attempt by the local Awami League MP to use the Islamic sentiments of his men to provoke them to attack the *Baul,* with a subtext of land grabbing. The accused attacker is also a member of the Awami League, which in popular perception is the upholder of the conscience of the liberation war, and thus the guardians of Bengali nationalism which was supposed to be secular (or anti-Islamic) in nature. The discourse of the 'rise of Islamic fundamentalism' is the most straightforward explanation for this attack, thus discouraging the curiosity of national and international liberal-progressive readers about the more complex power relations and corruption under the surface.

This attack is a simple example of how nationalist political power and Islamic morality has historically worked hand in hand in Bangladesh. The rise of Islamic sentiment can be traced to the '80s when the main political parties tried to use the people's religious sentiment for their political gain. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has favoured alliances with radical Islamist political parties, and by using the religious sentiment of the people, gained support to defeat the Awami League and to form a government from the '90s. From that point on the Awami league also began to use the religious sentiment of the people and later made political alliances with many other religious parties. Using the religious sentiments of the majority, the two parties competed in the political sphere to be seen as the more Islamic. In this scenario, the apparently liberal-progressive-secular Awami league is in constant negotiation with Islamic morality and values to achieve trust from the Muslim religious majority. Here, the process of Islamisation is not independent of negotiation within a political sphere that has seen the recent rise of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh, and the complex negotiation between Islamist anti-Western sentiment. The current political sphere is thus a complex web of power relations constructed through negotiation and bargaining with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and nationalist political parties. In this web, Bangla folk songs are often used as the icon of the Bengali essence, but at the same time are often accused of immorality and subject to a kind of scrutiny and purification that is similar to the aesthetic authority of Bengali nationalism.

In *Baul* discourse, issues of sexuality have always been a source of tension. In formal conversation, it is always avoided, even by alternative folk enthusiasts', until I actively enforce its relevance in our conversations. It became clear to me that, following the Dhaka attack, with the rise of Islamisation, it is even more risky to talk about. Anusheh expressed her deep worry about the contemporary influence of Islamisation, telling me that, "*even in the recent Pala gaan traditions, the effect of Islamisation is very salient and many of the Baul practitioners these days sing in the style of preaching Mullahs".* According to Anusheh, this is inherently contradictory, as Mullahs, practising fundamentalist Salafism, issue fatwas against music, as music with instruments is considered un-Islamic for them. Anusheh told me that there are many *Bauls* who changed their tone about religion drastically to fit in with the current political climate and to survive the rise of Salafism.

Reducing *Baul* to just one of many genres was one strategy to deal with the challenges presented by the rise of Islamism in Bangladeshi nationalism. However, all the other genres were also being subjected to purification and scrutiny from the authorities of authenticity. The depiction of *Baul's* ideas about sexuality as spiritual, reflecting elite and middle-class *bhadralok* values, was one form of filtration. *Bhawaiya*, on the other hand, was covered up with the ideas of *biraha* (longing) and female subjugation. The victimhood of women is comparatively easy to fit into the comfort zone of the middle-class and elite authorities of folk songs and contemporary Islamic morality than the ‘voice’ of the desire of woman of *Bhawaiya*. As such, this is the lens through which these sections of society view the *Bhawaiya* songs. However, most of the research participants from comparatively middle to lower-class backgrounds admitted that *Bhawaiya* is very open and direct about female passion and desire, and in most of the books written about *Bhawaiya,* extramarital affairs and sensual love are defined as essential ingredients of *Bhawaiya*. Nevertheless, in a formal discussion with *Bhawaiya* authorities, these are often reduced to the 'sufferings of women', with the women themselves reduced to passive victims.

The son of the most influential authorities on Bangla folk songs Abbasuddin Ahmed is Mustafa Jaman Abbasi. He is a figure who has the authority to define folk traditions and is also enthusiastic about upholding Islamic standards of morality. He is openly against the *Baul* rituals, and thinks that there are elements in *Bhawaiya* that need to be filtered as they do not convey the beauty of love — they are ugly. In describing the first recording of *Bhawaiya* songs in HMV, he told me that "*there were some songs that were not beautiful, rather vulgar and we had to stop them from being recorded.*" When I asked Mustafa Jaman Abbasi about the women of *Bhawaiya*, he told me that *Bhawaiya* songs are created by the men who cry for the suffering of the women they love. When I told him about my research topic, he suggested that I should write about the suffering and the subjugation of women in society. According to him:

> *This is the story of women who have been completely shattered, (treated) as subhuman or animals. Their songs are Bhawaiya,….these are the songs that will not make you happy on television or at a concert, these are songs that come from the very core of human beings. Those songs are the best which tell of the saddest thought, as the poet says. Now these women's songs were not written by women, I wrote it in my books that they are written by men; men like us, who weep for their women. I weep for my mother, I weep for my sister, I weep for my other relations who have been subjugated by society for hundreds of years.*

Not only Mustafa Jaman Abbasi, but for most middle-class and elite singers and promoters in Bangladesh, the lyrics represent the tale of suffering women, written by men. I deconstructed this idea in chapter four and argued that the narrative that situates women in the songs as only passive victims is reductive, as that victim image is preferable to the deviance and defiance of the female subjects otherwise expressed in the songs. While *biraha*, or separation is indeed one of the main topics of the lyrics, the middle-class interpretation of *biraha* or *bicched* is not what most of the songs are about. The meaning of *biraha* or *bicched,* as used in *Bhawaiya,* is closer to the desire to fulfil a sexual urge, as many times conveyed by the phrase *'piriter jwala'* (the burning sensual desire of love) in the lyrics of *Bhawaiya* songs. The desire here is deviant and resistant to marital and patriarchal oppression and does not match with the comfortable, romantic description of woman-as-passive-victim and male-as-rescuer who is sympathetically singing for them.

ALTERNATIVE MUSICAL QUEST

The third trend in the authenticity debate is about alternative folk songs, namely folk fusion. Rahee, a singer and activist, told me that the excitement felt by the 90's middle-class urban generation of musicians towards folk songs, (which according to Mohammad is broadly called folk fusion, or empathetic folk as I discussed in chapter five), was about more than the material interest of reaching out to a larger market of poor listeners — it was about a search for identity. Faced with the dilemma of the Bengali versus Muslim identity crisis, the new generation needed to find their place in culture and needed to re-invent the tradition of the folk song. It was in this environment that Lalon akhara[35] attracted more and more people searching for this new sense of belonging. Rahee told me that the crowd at the bi-annual *shadhusongo* in Kushtia grew from hundreds to a hundred thousand between 1995 and 2010. It is evident that since the '90s, there has been a growth in interest in 'folk culture' within the urban middle-class of the 2nd generation since the war of independence. The reason for the participation of people was not only due to corporate sponsorship of festivals, but more than that, according to Rahee,

> *There was an identity crisis in the '80s and '90s in our generation. Folk became a way to connect with the past. Rural symbols like gamcha become popular, for example. This cultural identity crisis was linked to globalisation, as well as the religious, linguistic and cultural identity. The socialist bloc had come to an end. The popularity of 'folk' in the middle-class and the romantic aspirations for Kustia's Lalon akhara emerged within this philosophical emptiness and a crisis of identity. Momtaz's success happened at that time.*

However, Rahee problematised this hype as a superficial escape from ordinary life. For Rahee, the cultural elements categorised as 'folk' in the nationalist discourse are part of his real life and the environment he grew up in. He did not realise until he came to Dhaka that the cultural atmosphere he internalised as his own, is categorised as 'folk'. The process of decontextualising it from the lives of rural people and placing them in the category of 'folk' made it 'other' of the norm, which is in line with Fillitz and Saris' (2013) arguments about romanticising folk as the other of 'modern', within the modern framework.

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[35] Akhara usually refers to the assembly of *Bauls* for their training. The word which probably came from Sanskrit, means (Haque 2007) a place of practice with facilities of education where usually the pupils stay and are trained. This term in contemporary times is specifically used to refer to practice and education in the *Baul* way of life and philosophy.

Rahee told me that he would prefer to call them public cultural products instead of ‘folk’:

> *I see a political problem in the categorisation of these cultural products. It is not folk in the Western sense. I cannot invent any single category to refer to them. Traditional tales and songs that hold and bear the cultural history might work, but I refer to those as public cultural products, (jonosongskritir upadan, jono ebong folk, lok, ek na). What is existing in the present that is also part of it, but is still taking form. The form that already shaped and emerged, I would refer to as the public cultural product.*

What Rahee refers to as the political problem is the problem of representation and othering that anthropologists have long been critiquing: decontextualising the selected elements from their origin, labelling them as folk and using them as symbols of national/cultural identity. The alienation of the cultural product from its origin and the debate about contamination, are best understood by the production of meaning by the subject as part of their political struggle at a specific historical moment. Moreover, referring to ‘folk’ as a public cultural element broadens the definition, and the issue of authenticity becomes more fluid. By critiquing the representation of ‘folk’ as national culture, Rahee’s struggle and ownership of his participation in this production are significant to the production of the meaning of ‘folk’ as well. The meaning that Rahee wants to create as an alternative to ‘folk’ is not only more democratic, but also more open to definition.

Rahee’s argument about the distinction between the public cultural product and ‘folk’, is not new. As I discussed earlier, the debate about the terms ‘mass music’, ‘people’s music’ and ‘folk’ were the burning issues in the Calcutta centric communist people’s song movement in the late 20th century. They were also the main factor behind the International Folk Music Council’s (IFMC) decision to change its name to the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), in 1981. According to Khaled Chowdhury, the reason of the failure of the Calcutta centric people’s song movement, and their attempt to create a cultural movement with a communist influence was ‘an ideology-cultural dichotomy’. The dichotomy is that while the Bengali left ideologically wanted to be close to the masses, in their day to day practice, they remained culturally elite. As an activist, what Rahee was proposing was instead the opposite to that dichotomy. Rahee criticised the contemporary ‘folk hype’, favouring a traditional way of life, that is, for him not only limited to singing but also attached to practice (Rahee 2009).

To historically contextualise Rahee’s arguments, it is crucial to analyse the political and material changes in post-war Bangladesh and the neo-liberal restructuring of society that began in the '80s, from the ’80s, to understand the changing political discourse. From the ’80s, on the one hand, there was a political shift from restricted capitalism towards open market globalisation. This shift was made possible by the military-controlled government endorsing the World Bank’s structural adjustment policy. Transformation also took place with the change from an agricultural-based economy to a garment’s factory-based economy. This transformation resulted in internal mass migration accompanied by political repression. On the other hand, the vast increase in the demand for female workers slowly changed the dynamics of gender norms in the lives of these women, resulting in new forms of vulnerability and at the same time resistance (Siddiqi 2000). Along with that, popular movements arose to resist environmental destruction by the oil companies which, combined with student resistance, and the garment union unrest formed a culture of resistance that was not compatible with elite nationalist aesthetic projects (Hoek 2013).

Following the reintroduction of the democratic government in the '90s, a new nationalist identity was introduced by the elected ruling party BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Pary) as ‘Bangladeshi’ combining Muslimness and Bengali-ness together and more importantly prioritising state/citizenship in the making of national identity over religious or cultural elements. A Bangladeshi national identity seemed obvious, inclusive and worked well to counter the opposition party Awami League’s Bengali nationalist identity that was prioritised for the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan. However, despite the apparent obvious and inclusive introduction of “Bangladeshi’ identity over Bengali, it remains a highly politicised identity symbol in challenging secular Bengali identity and the Awami League’s political ideology.

Therefore, the Bengali vs Bangladeshi identity contest would soon become the symbol of Awami League vs BNP, the two-party political identity contest.

Parallel to the political identity contest, influenced by a culture of resistance, a new generation of youth developed a distrust in both the Islamic and Bengali nationalist secular ideologies. Having rejected both, an interest rose in Western-influenced pop/rock band music scene (Schendel 2009a)'. This style of music went beyond acceptable ways of singing, which were limited to a few categories of music, namely: classical music, Rabindra Shongeet, *Nazrul giti* and *Lokosongit*, that I went through as well. Despite the massive success of the '90s band music scene (Western influenced pop/rock, usually refers to as band music), its audience was for the most part limited to urban middle-class youth. According to the folk music producer Swapon, only 20% of Bangladeshi music listeners followed modern band music in the cassette and CD era, the rest of them were the folk music audience. Therefore, Western influence was not enough to provide a sense of belonging for that generation, and the music industry could not ignore the mass majority of the audiences' devotion to folk songs. For this reason, many bands and music artists turned their attention to 'folk' tunes, as they needed to rely on their own alternative cultural icons to construct their ideological belonging within Bengali culture. Lalon and his *Baul* songs provided this space.

Belonging to Lalon for that reason were evident in a group discussion titled "Lalon in the city" (Nogore Lalon) organised by the Centre for Bangladesh Studies — an organisation that Rahee works for as general secretary. In the discussion, the participants shared their experiences and thoughts about Lalon. All of the participants belonged to the young urban educated middle-class. They shared their thoughts about Lalon, and how they are attracted to his ideas. From their discussion, it was evident that while Lalon is considered a person of admiration and devotion by all of them, they are conflicted about his philosophy. The question of the authentic practice or knowledge about Lalon is vital since his songs are considered his philosophy. However, all of the songs are metaphorical and subject to interpretation. Such ambiguity was confusing to the young people who want to love Lalon and his ideals. In addition to Rahee's comment about the identity crisis of the generation from the '90s, it was clear that the disappointment in both Islamist and Bengali secular nationalism also drove this younger generation's interest in Lalon and *Baul* movements.

Rahee’s song production is named *Metal Jari*: a combination of Western metal and Bangla folk song genres. This combination of two very different genres creates a new genre which is not definitive. However, as a subject, he considers himself a part of the process, a stakeholder, through which the ‘public cultural product’ is reproduced. According to Rahee (2009a), being true to oneself as a devotee of Lalon, is not only a matter of singing his songs but also practising his ideas in life. Similarly, Anusheh’s return to home in search of the soul, leaving the shiny invitation to live in the Western world, represents this longing. Her designer line, *Jatra* is known for its promotion of local folk crafts, with some of the designs influenced by colourful ‘rickshaw paintings’. Her longing aligns with an emotional search for identity and belonging, that is neither homogenous nor individualist.

The journey towards authenticity in this era of diversity does not go for any singular ‘invention of tradition’ of bonded and pure cultural form as Hobsbawm and Ranger (1986) would argue, but is rather somewhat hybrid and multiple, as observed by Saris and Fillitz (2013). Rahee and Anusheh’s singing are thus part of their activism and life world — driven by the quest of searching for an alternative to the modern. It is counter hegemonic to the dominant Bengali vs Muslim ideological and political identity debate that has remained the most salient issue in the political discourse of Bangladesh, since its birth.

URBAN FOLK IN THE MARGIN

In parallel to the three above mentioned authorities of folk songs, the fourth and the biggest influence in Bangla folk arose in the last three decades, from the margins, as ‘urban-folk’ (Mohammad 2014), which I mentioned in chapter five. Mohammad (2014) argues that from the 1980’s the growing population in urban areas, especially Dhaka city, resulted in a new style of song production to keep up with the cultural demand of the poor, who had migrated from rural areas. This was the second flux of migration after the war of independence, mainly created by women moving from rural villages to feed the booming garment industry’s demand for cheap labour. These new factory workers were the primary audience for this ‘urban-folk’. Notably, marginalised singers produced these songs themselves for the marginalised people who listened to them. Although this new musical expansion in market and audience is usually referred to as ‘urban-folk’ by entertainment journalists, is also referred to as ‘folk’ or ‘*Baul’* by the producers and consumers. These terms are often used interchangeably by both the producers and listeners, despite the specific generic borders that have been defined by *Baul* scholars and practitioners.

While the young elite folk enthusiasts’ folk-fusion and the urban-folk production of the urban poor ignite debates about authenticity, these trends are not exclusive to Bangladesh. In the context of the Bangla music scene — although these two trends are both referred to as the deviant form of folk labelled as folk-remix by the authenticating authorities — they have their social-cultural as well as musicological differences. Here I am focusing on their socio-cultural aspects instead of musicological, despite their overlapping influences. While most of the folk fusion of the young urban elite consists of reinterpretations of famous old folk songs, urban-folk is rather instantaneous and original productions from marginalised poor singers, reflecting their lives and struggles. Despite the fact that the puritan folk song authorities criticise both remix trends, elite folk-fusion is considered a somewhat higher standard for many elite authorities because of the sophisticated composition and recording. Urban-folk, follows traditional tunes and creates new metaphors of expression to transcend the current dilemma of urban lives of the lower-class without having sophisticated musical instrumental support and standard recording. Momtaz Begum, with her enormous popularity, became the representative and the genre-defining icon for this trend. Momtaz, like many other urban-folk artists, became singers organically, through the rural folk cultural atmosphere from where they started to sing. Most of these poor singers consider themselves as folk/Baul singers, not from a musicological perspective; instead, this identity is part of their life, as practice. They follow the traditional tune associated with ‘folk songs’ in general. Their authority and belonging towards folk songs is somewhat organic, unlike the authorities of the elite folk musicians, who have the power to define what is a folk song and what is not.

According to Mohammad (2014) the main themes of the songs of that time, which became very popular amongst the new urban audiences included: “the discovery of the city, nostalgia, and the hope for return” (411). Mohammad (2014) argues that urban folk is a genre situated ‘in-between’ the past life in the village and the complexities and reality of the urban present, reflecting the hybrid identity of the urban poor. The themes of nostalgia for village life, the struggle to adjust in an urban setting and the repetitive melodies constantly played either in the tea-stalls or slums of the working classes, can be seen to serve two political purposes. For Mohammad the,

> "self-suggestive attempt to keep memories alive, by playing the same old record, so that urban poor's dream to return to the village can never be forgotten, such repetitive melodies could reassure the neighbourhood (the powerful 'other' in the city) that nothing exotic is playing in here – hence, nothing has really gone beyond the scope of their knowledge and control."(415).

Their music consists of a nostalgia for village life and the desire to preserve it in the hostile city environment, by keeping the authentic tunes alive in an alienated and decontextualised life. Scholars and journalists are calling it 'urban-folk', but for its audiences and producers, it is simply the same old *Baul* or folk music, indifferent to the authenticating debate of the authorities, but creating the most significant trend in Bangla folk music in contemporary times. One of the songs from this genre, sung by Shah Alam Sarkar in 1999 and Momtaz Begum in 2000 was translated by Mohammad (2013):

The bus will never run if the tyres are punctured.
The world will run down the fuel of time.
The bus operates with the gears of mood and the brakes of conscience.
The lead carpenter is now your knowledgeable driver.
Those headlights of yours will someday extinguish;
Your battery is down, don't you realise this?
Think for a while, son, if your mouth-horn is silenced
No switch will make it work again.
Your two indicators, right and left, are serving you more and more.
You've got two conductors with you who are employed by the government.
Loaded with too many souls, you got on the highway, regardless.
But to penalize you, the automobile court is coming up ahead now.
At the junction of three senses, near to the town of desire,
The brakes of your conscience suddenly fail and your bus is in an accident!
The traffic sergeant, also working for the government, arrives at the scene as the angel of death.
Very soon you'll have to leave this earthly place! (5)

The vast market of this genre had to adjust and survive the rapid changes in the technology of music production. In the last few decades, these technological changes in audio production have changed the audiences of folk songs and their receptions dramatically. It spread through Dhaka city to the most rural and marginal areas, as well as to the diasporic community, all over the world. However, the folk singers and the struggling audio production companies who are the primary producers of those songs were severely affected by the switch from audio-cassettes to CDs at the end of the millennium, as it required more capital and investment. This transition left the few established production companies, who survived, reliant on elite urban listeners. Only those marginalised singers who already had established careers with elite production companies could continue producing songs and albums. This trend limited poor folk singers' ability to grow, but at the same time, some of them were becoming icons of contemporary folk song productions. However, at the end of the first decade of the new millennium, another shock to the audio market was the purchasing of music by multinational phone companies for ring tones, which Bangladeshi audio companies missed out on. Moreover, from approximately 2007 to 2010, new memory card technology destroyed the music industry, reducing the number of registered audio cassette production houses from 169 to roughly 10-15. Local shops could copy a few hundred songs onto a memory card and sell it very cheaply, almost killing the industry. This was protested by the audio-visual companies, and it was eventually stopped. However, in contrast with the destruction of the music industry, the memory card system made it easy for the listeners to listen to the songs and made the poor singers even more popular. From around 2011, the memory card business came to an end as streaming became easier through better internet connections provided by the phone companies and YouTube became the primary medium for listening to music in Bangladesh. Through YouTube, the old studio production companies are growing their businesses once again.

One of my respondents, who is a producer of folk songs, told me of his journey in the music industry. Swapon Das is the son of Shuvo Chandra Das, a musician who played with one of the famous folk singers, Abdur Rahman Boyati.[36] Swapan started his production company in 1994 with two cassette albums of Nargis, which became hugely successful. Those two albums topped up many established singers during that time which led her to record a further 10-15 albums. At this time, Nargis' songs were even more popular than Momtaz. Later, Momtaz's album (1995) topped up Nargis' record that led her way to the elite audio companies. However, according to him, 80% of the people of Bangladesh used to listen to *Baul gaan* in the pre-YouTube cassette era, which switched to the opposite after the internet. The rural people of Bangladesh must have access to smartphone and internet connections from the mobile companies to listen to music that they are not already familiar with — hence, folk song listening was reduced drastically.

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[36] Abdur Rahman Boyati (1 January 1939 – 19 August 2013) was a legendary folk singer in contemporary Bangladesh. He received one of the most prestigious national awards "Ekushey Padak' for his contribution.

However, Kaiyum, another producer, did not entirely agree with that. For him, in Bangladesh folk songs and their tunes dominated the music market and most of the people still prefer to listen to them. Moreover, YouTube is the only way for Bangladeshis living abroad, especially the vast workforce that migrated to the Middle East, to access this music. Given that the Bangla speaking population is the seventh-largest language group in the world, Bangla folk music is spreading virtually. Not only on YouTube, Momtaz and many other folk singers' albums are now available on Amazon Music, Apple Music and many other online apps.

The market and its demands didn't only effect the lyrics and tunes of metropolitan folk culture, but also the activities of rural poor artists. Urbanisation not only brought a new flow of female workers to the capital, the technologies of the mobile phone, memory cards and YouTube also changed the practices of music. The remix or fusion of folk songs feeds the changing taste and lives of both the upper-middle and lower-class. Moreover, the online availability of folk music not only expanded its market from local to global but also spread the same way through social class. The middle-class Bengali, living abroad, attends similar musical gatherings to those in Bangladesh. The immigrant Bengalis, with their diasporic emotions, place particular emphasis on the imagination of belonging and negotiations with the dynamics of the Bangladeshi/Muslim identity, becoming ever more complex and subject to deliberate construction in the context of this hybrid cultural sphere. The diasporic Bangladeshi community is varied, but there are questions about what it means to be a Bangladeshi abroad (*Bidesh*) and what their connections to home (*desh*) are, which is not only imagined but also heavily dependent on the cultural and social capital and the material reality of the cultural network they use to survive (Kibria 2011; Eade 2006; Hossain and Veenstra 2017). Social media use has added another critical dimension here. The online connection with *desh* (home country), feeds the quest for belonging and bonding with the community (Hossain and Veenstra 2017). The comments threads of the YouTube videos of those folk songs show increasing engagement from the Bangladeshi/Bengali people living abroad in the form of praise, criticism, and lewd comments. The popularity of the songs for immigrant Bengalis' has justified many huge concerts abroad, particularly in Dubai and London, where Momtaz and other folk singers have performed. Moreover, in social gatherings, music sometimes plays a big part. As a Bengali, living abroad, I have experienced a few musical gatherings of the Bengali community, where YouTube karaoke added a new dimension to communal singing, creating an atmosphere of homesickness and a nostalgic sense of belonging. However, despite the enormous expansion of the popularity of this ‘urban-folk’, the lives of the singers and producers remain precarious because of the rapid technological changes and lack of clarity in the systems of intellectual property rights. The songs pose a challenge to the authenticating authorities, but their producers and singers remain ever struggling and without any actual power.

NATION-STATE AND CORPORATE SYNTHESIS

What is apparently the fifth authenticating authority of folk songs, is actually a negotiated sphere between all other sources, mentioned above, with the nation-state and corporate interests; as they are the most potent authenticating institutions. While the Bengali nationalist aesthetic project had been the most dominant in that sphere for a long time, the rise of Islamic morality was incorporated into the political sphere. The interest of the nation-state is determined by the political party in government. Furthermore, because of the use of religion as political motive, Islamic morality remains an influential authority. However, corporate interest negotiates with the profitable reality of the massive market for urban folk songs and the demand supported by the folk fusion of the urban younger generation for them as well. Therefore, the undeniable size of the market for 'urban-folk' became a space of negotiation for its performers and producers. However, as the nation-corporate mingle represents all the stakeholder's interests, the marginal folk musicians and singers represented in this sphere are sometimes a form of tokenism in which their elements of deviant resistance are filtered to match with the status quo. Reducing *Baul* to a mere song tradition and one of a list of folk song genres while excluding the defiance and deviant elements from other genres like *Bhawaiya*, are a way of incorporating and preserving them as national cultural icons.

One example of this joint venture of the nation-state and corporate partnership is the opening ceremony of the International Cricket World Cup in 2011, hosted by Bangladesh. It was a significant moment for Bangladesh as a nation-state to represent itself to the world, and as such those musicians selected to perform at it were chosen by the national authority. Momtaz performed on the stage along with two other legendary elite female singers, Sabina Yasmin and Runa Laila. Momtaz's selection surprised many, but it was justified by her record-breaking popularity which has made her the 'music queen' of the Bangladeshi public. She performed her most famous song *Nantu Ghatak*, on the same stage where Bryan Adams would also perform. In Momtaz's song, the first person female subtly tells her story of dissatisfaction with her husband. She sarcastically says that she married her husband because of the convincing words of the *ghatak* (the matrimonial agent) who assured her that he is a wonderful guy, comparing him to a fireball, metaphorically suggesting his sexual ability to please her. Interestingly, in the middle of the song, she sings that although he has an outstanding reputation, he is not worthy, and he does not have feelings for her. However, the catchy phrase of the song that is repeatedly uttered is "the boy is like a fireball" (*pola to noi se to aguner gola*). This hides the disappointment with her husband and focuses on the remark of the *ghatak,* comparing him to a fireball. The repeated emphasis of the phrase with the connotation of his sexual ability and ignoring later words showing the disappointment of the female subject of the song, has made the song hugely popular, and safe enough to be a representative for Bangladeshi cultural identity.

The corporate-sponsored folk festivals are another example of nation-corporate association. Under the umbrella of 'folk', all genres come together in the large folk festivals, amongst them the International Folk Festival is the biggest one, which started from 2015, and is sponsored by a few multinational corporations. Not only rural and urban, but international folk singers perform at this international festival. This festival is becoming one of the most prominent authorities for authenticating folk songs and singers in Bangladesh. Who gets to be selected, when and for how long, provokes heated debate, dissatisfaction and anger. For example, Anusheh withdrew herself from the first international folk festival when the three prominent poor *Baul* musicians that she recommended were ignored. She told me that two of them were asked to perform only one song each and Kangalin Sufia's performance was cancelled, with the reasoning that the Indian singers could not finish their singing in the one-hour slot that was allocated to them. As a result, despite Kangalini Sufia travelling from Savar to Dhaka with her poor health and financial constraints, she could not perform. In protest, Anusheh withdrew herself. She also boycotted the second folk festival, as the organisers had not kept their word to her. Anusheh had requested that they finish the folk festival with Bangladeshi folk singers, and they had promised to design the whole programme with her, incorporating all the folk song traditions. However, she told me that the organisers changed the program design and closed the festival with a performance by an Indian classical singer, resulting in her withdrawing herself from the second festival as well.

The International Folk Festival is a powerful authority in authenticating folk songs. It is never an unanimous process, instead of a sphere of constant debate and negotiations. The Lalon festival organised by Lalon Akhara in Kushtia, now also receives corporate sponsorship. Maqsoodul Haq expressed this as an unavoidable fact of liberalism which, despite the subversive and resistant elements of the folk song genre, to survive, they have to depend on corporate sponsors, and through this, the deviant and defiant elements of the folk song tradition have to be compromised.

CRITIQUES BY THE AESTHETIC AUTHORITIES

Despite the national-corporate token patronisation of contemporary folk song trends, the authenticating authority and Bengali nationalist *bhadralok* sentiments most often are sharply critical of folk remix and fusion. Rongili Biswas, the daughter of Hemango Biswas, pointed to this as nonsense, referring to the debate between her father Hemango Biswas and Salil Chowdhury, that I mentioned previously, which led her to take a strong position against folk remix. I visited her in her home, which was her late father's house. She takes care of her late father's possessions and hopes to turn the house into a museum someday. She is passionately engaged in the debate surrounding the authenticity of folk songs, *Bhawaiya* and the current remix trend in Bangladesh and the state of Bengal. She is an economist and a singer. For Rongili Biswas, the authentic *Bhawaiya* is to be maintained through the use of traditional instruments, played traditionally, and by being authentic to its original tune and atmosphere. As I expressed my inability to judge the quality of these songs, Rongili Biswas suggested that I prepare my ear so that I will be able to judge authentic folk songs during my research. By way of demonstration, she played a few songs that she thought would be necessary for my research and asked my opinion about them. She expressed her intense frustration about the distortion of folk songs with modern-Western instruments.

The main instrument of *Bhawaiya* is the *dotara*, a stringed instrument made with four strings with two tuning pegs, which is why it is called *do-tara* (two strings). Traditionally, the strings used to be made with cotton/fabric, but nowadays, metal strings have become more popular. Rongili is firmly against this change, as for her, it is not possible to create the original sound for *Bhawaiya* with metal strings. For Rongili, authenticity in *Bhawaiya* songs means that outsiders cannot change them: changes have to come from within the community, without any external influences. As a musician and like her father, she emphasised the *bahirana* as the regional-cultural atmosphere that is not contaminated by modern Western outsiders and consumerist market influences — all of which are not appropriate nor fair to the folk cultural traditions. For her, to make a proper fusion, someone has to have proper expertise, education and training in all the musical traditions they are making the fusion of, which is rare in the contemporary folk fusion trend. For her,

> *There are village talents who cherished that tradition of Bhawaiya for decades. Someone needs to know that to understand and to get in to its originality, to its essence, instead what is happening now, not only in Kolkata but also in Bangladesh, in the name of fusion, is nonsense. Anyone who has an ear for the original music of Bengal would know how lame these fusions are. Someone has to study Bhawaiya profoundly and then they have to have the talents to do the fusion. Otherwise, it will fail. It does not mean that Bhawaiya will not change, but it has to change by the hand of the people who know it in the first place, it cannot be imposed from the city in the name of modernisation. The change is acceptable when some outsider does not influence it. In the name of change, what is happening now, is a distortion of the tradition.*

While Rongili Biswas upholds a strong position in the debate on authenticity for the tradition of *Bhawaiya* against the popular remix trends of folk songs, Moushumi Bhowmik, an eminent singer from Bengal, India — who has collected and recorded folk music throughout the Bengali speaking areas — differs regarding the changes in folk song tradition. For her, folk songs evolve organically, and all the factors for the changes in contemporary times are part of that. She feels that these are not possible to control, and neither should we try. I talked with her briefly, mostly about her project 'The Travelling Archive,'[37] when she was voicing her suspicion about the strong critique against appropriating folk songs.

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[37] Travelling Archive is the name of the project run by famous alternative Bangla singer Mousumi Bhowmik and recorder and sound designer Sukanta Majumdar. It is mainly a shared archive space of field recordings of folk songs from all over Bengal, in Bangladesh and the state of Bengal in India, which began in 2003.

However, she elaborated on her position on the ‘authenticity’ of the folk musical traditions in more detail later, following the death of one of the most popular contemporary musicians, Kalikaprasad Bhattacharya[38] from Bengal, India, in 2017 who appropriated folk songs in his band, and fuelled the debate around it. On “The Travelling Archive” website, she shows examples of how the same song is sung differently by different people. She argues that folk songs can change depending on the circumstances of the moment. Folk songs spread from one person to another orally, which changes them, and in this way they capture different times; when we hear that we also get that many times at once, but when a song has been recorded, it captures the moment and freezes it. Whoever learns the song from the recording they learn it like that, but there might be someone who sang the same song without listening to the recording, they will sing and can hear the song differently. She argues that we cannot force these changes (Bhowmik 2017). Rongili Biswas and Mousumi Bhowmik are seemingly situated on the opposite sides of the debate, but there are many other dynamics to it. In Bangladesh, despite the widespread negative connotations of ‘remix’ or ‘fusion’ of folk songs, they have been hugely popular, which Din Mohammad (2004) argues is a result of the vast migration from rural Bangladesh to urban areas as part of the garment industry boom. Despite being massively popular, Momtaz Begum is not only still considered ‘deviant’ by many of the *Baul* and folk musicians and scholars, but also she was never truly accepted and appreciated by the ‘*bhadralok’* — the elite Bengali middle-class cultural sphere — and was often treated as a ‘vulgar artist.’(Mohammad 2014). As Arman Khan (2014) reported, ”the pernickety high art connoisseurs remain largely ignorant and unappreciative of her talent and are even judgmental at times, because her songs (particularly the lyrics) are considered ‘crude’ according to their standards. And even for some who like Momtaz's music, it remains a guilty pleasure, as they aren't willing to be made fun of by others.” (Khan 2014).

As I described in chapter five, at one of the Folk festivals, Momtaz was booed by the audiences, as she was singing a song that she thought appropriate for the biggest folk song festival in Bangladesh.

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[38] Kalikaprasad Bhattacharya, originally from Assam, was one of the popular singers from Bengal, India who established his band Dohar, and re-recorded the famous Bangla folk songs with fusion.

However, the audience, hoping for a titillating experience, expected her to sing *Bukta Faitta Jay*, a song with a more sexual connotation. Chowdhury described that on that occasion, she asked the audience to listen to the song that she thought appropriate before singing a song according to the audience's demand, but after being humiliated, she stopped her performance and left the stage. This instance clearly shows that despite her enormous success, and political power (she was a sitting MP at that time), her marginality persists for the middle-class authority who continue to treat her as their “guilty pleasure” (Khan 2014). However, her protest against their demand is consistent with her bold agency and capacity for resistance.

AUTHENTICITY IN PRECARITY

After I met with Rongili, I went to Cooch-Behar, where, according to her, I would find the soul of the *Bhawaiya*. Following the contacts that she gave me, I managed to meet with her favourite *dhol* player Niloy, who had received several awards and recognition from the centre, Kolkata, as well as having performed with Rongili. He was a quiet man and arranged a gathering of *Bhawaiya* artists in his house in Dinhata to introduce them to me. There were a few female *Bhawaiya* singers, although they did not exclusively sing *Bhawaiya*. The generic border was not very important to them. There were a few male musicians, one of which did not usually sing *Bhawaiya*, he only sang religious songs for religious occasions (Kirtan). I asked them what they thought about changing trends in folk music. It was clear from the discussion that being able to sing and receive recognition and remuneration was what they were concerned with. Singing was their means of survival. Distorted reproductions, in the name of fusion or remixes, was not their primary concern as long as it was not affecting their livelihood. None of the singers, I spoke to in Dinhata, had any strong position on sticking with the traditional instruments and tunes. Later I met many other marginal *Bhawaiya* singers, and none of them complained or were concerned about ‘remixes’ or authenticity; rather issues of survival were mainly raised in these encounters. In Cooch Behar, when I was talking with a *dotara* maker and *Bhawaiya* singer, I asked him about the difference between cotton-fabric and metal strings for the *dotara.* He smiled and told me that the cotton-fabric is a thing of the past, they are not durable and everyone wants to go for the metal strings instead. In trying to survive in the dire poverty of the village, marginal folk singers were mostly concerned with more immediate challenges. It is not that they were passive agents in the debate around authentication. Instead, I argue that their survival interests and concerns reflect their precarity.

Authentication is linked with power. Not everyone has the authority to say what an authentic tradition is and is not, as it requires power to exclude and include (Mursic 2013). However, I am not proposing to dismiss this term altogether for its specialist nature, as Mursic proposed. Instead, following Fillitz and Saris (2013), my interest is to see the process of authentication and situate it in the negotiation between interconnected stakeholders. The process of authenticating the folksong mutually authenticates the authenticator, as well as the object, which was authenticated (Bendix 1997). When one assumes that the original and uncontaminated *Bhawaiya* is the most authentic, it also refers to its marginality. It is assumed that the more marginal the singers are, the more authentic they would be, as the centre does not contaminate them, and their voices and style would reflect the tune of the regional culture. The irony is, in the time of globalisation and the internet, it is instead a middle-class, romantic aspiration. While 'marginality' is one of the criteria of the authentic *Bhawaiya* tradition, the marginalised musicians and artist are not the authority of that authentication, rather, they are the representatives of the authority and are always trying to fit into the romantic aspirations of authentication to survive. Further, the changing scenario of technology in music production has left singers and producers in a constant struggle to adjust. Not only have the expectations of the listener-performers changed, but so too are the emotions related to them.

Focusing on Bangla folk music, especially *Bhawaiya* as the field of my research requires me to look at the interconnection of the complex power relations between the institutions and the actors and between the historical changes and how people related to it adjust and accommodate their creativity within these circumstances. To examine the interconnection of the complex power relations between the historical changes in the institutions and the creative adjustment of the actors to it, I examined Bordieuan (1977) idea of habitus, where the actor's agency in relation to the structural changes are the "practices produced by the habitus, as the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations, are only apparently determined by the future" (71). While the Bordieuan idea of habitus allows us to focus more on agency, it also allows space for actions that are not entirely dependent on habitus in a particular situation, which is not always predictable (Scheer 2012). However, in this contemporary era of late capitalism, I found it requires more than that, as the structure is not the same to all the people in the same habitus as Bourdieu (1977) would suggest: "the homogeneity of habitus is what — within the limits of the group of agents possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation) implied in their production — causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted" (80). The constant changes in production companies and the consequent pressures to adaptation, left no room for its participants to take any system for granted. For instance, Swapon expressed his fear of uncertainty in his business that is currently solely dependent on YouTube. According to his experience, the difficulties faced adapting to these new technological changes would result in the survival of only ten percent of the production companies.

While the production companies are adapting to the virtual sphere, the marginal singers remain far behind. The production companies record one song from the singers by giving them one-time remuneration, and the profit they make from YouTube is independent on that. The singers are not receiving royalties with each view. In many cases, the producers are not receiving them either when they deal with YouTube via agents. It shows a layer of negotiations with agencies dealing with YouTube that is not directly benefitted by the numbers of views and subscribers as it is with many channels who do not depend on agencies and directly make videos and upload them by themselves. The technological knowledge, as well as cultural and educational capital based on their social class, gives them the privileges that the marginalised producers and singers do not have. In the ever-changing situation with neoliberalism's virtual face, the profession of marginal folk singers and producers is precarious. It led me to see this precarity as, "life without the promise of stability…... a life to live in ruins" (Tsing 2015, 2, 6). *Bhawaiya* and other folk songs existed, struggled and survived in the ruins of these neoliberal capitalist changes, with subversive emotions, connected to the precarity of the musicians and producers on the margins.

These folk songs carry the deviant voices that trouble the nation-corporate associations and their aesthetic and moral agents. It also creates a space for creativity through fusion: a form of reproduction reflecting the changing taste within different classes and new situations, more than the creativity of margins that Veena Das (2004) proposed as the 'other' of the state. I want to examine this folk fusion as an assemblage, in the sense that Tsing (2015) used the term, "patches of livelihood come into being as assemblages. Participants come with varied agendas, which do their small part in guiding world-making projects" (132). For Tsing (2015), the concept of assemblage is "an open-ended entanglement of ways of being" (83). Therefore, inspired by Tsing (2015), I see possibilities in assemblages to withstand the blows of capitalism. Through assemblages, I hope the folk songs remain in the ruin of historical trajectory and capitalist forces, create space to construct sexual subjectivity with the emotions and desires of marginalised singers.

DEFYING AUTHORITY WITH DEVIANT ELEMENTS

In the late '90s the quickly growing market for urban-folk was rather subversive in allowing for a significant new way of creating a mass cultural product in parallel to high cultural art forms. Using these technologies enhanced marginal voices, opening new political potentials. I therefore wanted to investigate the complex ways marginal voices and subjectivities can be located in the context of technological change that M. I. Franklin (2002) proposes. Franklin (2002), compares the similarities between Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' and Walter Benjamin's idea of popular culture, to conceptualise potentials of resistance through technologically mediated popular culture. As Franklin (2002) argues, "both Benjamin and Haraway provide important entry-points and substantive insights into the psychic-emotional and political economic tension between how new ways of (re)presenting the world technically can actually challenge rather than reproduce the status quo" (617). In the nostalgia for their old authentic life, the urban poor, appropriate folk tunes for the new urban scenario with the help of technology and the market, hence allowing the political possibilities of the margins to be heard and to resist what Mohammod (2014) calls symbolic violence. As this rapidly growing market spread through rural areas, and the same rural populations migrated abroad, the quest for their folk tunes became a major trend. This can be seen as a challenge to the status quo of the authenticating authority of folk songs.

Moreover, by questioning the Frankfurt Schools pessimistic idea of mass culture and the dismissal of its political possibilities, in opposition to high culture, Andreas Huyssen (1986) argues, both Adorno and Horkheimer were aware of the supposed naive spontaneity of the term 'mass culture' as automated culture emerges from mass, and thus they used the term 'culture industry'. However, not only did they overlook the gendered notion of mass culture, they mystified mass culture as feminine (Huyssen 1986, 47). Therefore, he argues the notion of feminine mass culture was constructed not only as the opposite of masculine 'high culture' but also inferior to it. For example, modernist art is valued for the absence of the subject and everyday life, while mass culture is the opposite and is imbued with the everyday experiences of life, but as such is termed inferior and not proper 'Art'. Moreover, it is relevant in understanding the gendered binary between abstraction and embodiment wherein the abstract is the symbol of high culture and embodiment is inferior to it (Bordo 1986; Csordas 1990). The tension created by the folk songs is because of their explicit reference to the sexual desire of women, which apparently made them 'vulgar'. Despite being criticised as vulgar, they have pushed their boundary towards the mainstream music industry and created an undeniable space for claiming authenticity. The elements of these songs are both deviant and defy the authenticating authorities with their undeniable popularity and expansion.

CONCLUSION

In classical anthropology, the written studies of the authentic culture are based on ethnographic first-hand experience. The folk song as the primitive artefact allows access into the culture and the authentic emotions of the society being scrutinised and thus has been recognised as an important resource. The issue of authenticity in folk songs became debated when the critique of writing about culture problematised the ahistorical, bounded description of culture. It raised questions not only about the anthropological quest for authentic culture, but also the authenticity of the elements, such as the idea that folk songs as the cultural text of emotions preserving acceptable emotional expression. With this critique, the contemporary question of authenticity invests in how to explore some cultural elements, such as how folk songs become the icon of authenticity for culture. For this, I re-examined the definitive boundary of folk songs and the authenticating agents and their interrelations. The problem of defining folk songs raised in the international sphere about how to differentiate them from mass cultural production, and people's cultural elements.

When considering the impossibility of making this boundary, it is useful to look at how a subject or agent feels about certain cultural forms, i.e. folk songs, as this gives a different perspective of ownership of the cultural form even in the time of mass cultural production. Going from this premise, authenticity of a certain cultural form relies upon the interconnection between the inner and outer sphere, the interaction between a subject being true to themselves while searching for their true soul in cultural forms, and the outer structural authorities who wish to define true and authentic cultural forms. I analysed five different agents of authentication in contemporary Bangla folk songs from this perspective, each of them contributes to the debate around authentic folk songs.

I analysed how a romantic aesthetic nationalist project with a sense of *bhadralok* morality and the rising Islamism with its own sense of morality, engaged in the authenticating process through constant filtration of the deviant and resistant elements from folk songs. I found that these two agents are apparently situated on opposite sides in the Bengali versus Islam identity context, but their filtration has overlapping similarities. While the aesthetic nationalist representation of Lalon, *Baul* and folk songs aspires to link them with superior spirituality rather than mundane and day-to-day lived experiences; Islamic morality, conversely, is devoted to the reduction of *Baul* to a mere folk song category and the exclusion of the deviant expressions from *Bhawaiya* and other folk songs. On the contrary, to resist the dominant cultural-political-religious discourse, the urban alternative musicians, activists and enthusiasts are devoted to exploring the wholistic philosophy and practices in search of the authentic pre-colonial *Baul* tradition not only in search for soul, but also in creating a counter-hegemony to challenge the dominant discourse.

However, the issue of sexuality remains deviant to all who discuss or claim authenticity. In all of these trends, the idea of sexuality remains a source of discomfort and has been dealt from different perspectives. In parallel to this, the rise of unsophisticated urban-folk songs by the marginalised singers and producers pose a challenge to those authenticating authorities through their undeniable expansion of the market. Despite the resisting deviant elements of this urban-folk, the nation-state and the corporates had to incorporate them. Even though in a token form, the urban-folk made its space as a representative of the essence of Bengali-ness. The national-corporate sphere remains a negotiated place for all those authenticating agents. However, despite the precarity and marginality of the marginal singers who often considered as the source of authentic folk songs, they are not in the position of an authenticating authority. Although the marginality and precarity of the folk singers and producers and the aesthetic authorities seem mutually exclusive, they create a dilemma in the authenticity debate.

There is a sharp critique against the folk remix and urban folk singers, with the accusation that they pollute the traditional form and morality. However, at the same time, their undeniably deviant and defiant existence creates discomfort for the authenticating authority of contemporary Bangla folk songs.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

Bhawaiya folk songs were my research topic, but as a field of research it was not possible to draw a definitive boundary around them. My thesis did not aim to collect folk songs to preserve a cultural text as early ethnomusicologists would; neither was it a historical quest to disclose *Bhawaiya*'s origin and growth. In my research *Bhawaiya* serves as a thread to link the social relations, history, and emotions that it contains and connects. I analysed the words of the apparently deviant emotions in these songs and examined their potential to defy normative gender and national-religious-cultural identity politics. Although in popular belief Bhawaiya originated in North Bengal, my field was not limited to any geographical site of Bhawaiya, since as a song genre it was impossible to define its geographical boundaries. Inspired by Marcus, my ethnographic exploration of the field of *Bhawaiya* propelled my trajectory of tracing its cultural form (Marcus 1995) from margin to centre, from past to present, from subaltern to elite, from personal experience to technical reproduction. The fluidity of the genre often resulted in it being inseparably blended within the broader boundary of Bangla folk songs. In my fieldwork, the research focus expanded from North Bengal, India and Bangladesh to their capitals Kolkata and Dhaka and beyond the national boundaries to a virtual sphere. However, since the dissemination of contemporary folk song production is immensely complex, I primarily linked this contemporary expansion to the Bangladeshi folk musical scene.

My thesis is that three broader themes are knitted together in shaping the possibilities of defiance through the anomalous words of *Bhawaiya* and Bangla folk songs. The three themes include the voice of the woman subject of *Bhawaiya* and the temporal subjectivities it creates; the emotion that *Bhawaiya* and Bangla folk songs carry, create, stir up and connect with bodies; and the debates on authenticity that are inseparable within *Bhawaiya* and folk songs. I also found that these three themes are intersecting and entangled with each other. Through these three themes, my aim was to examine the feminist possibilities of constructing female subjectivity through deviant emotions that challenge normative authorities. Bangla folk songs, especially *Bhawaiya* are known for expressing female emotions like suffering, desire, anger in relation to the passionate love of their life. Despite often being deviant in the normative discourse, the lyrics of *Bhawaiya* can acceptably uphold these emotions, which can be seen as a voice of the woman of *Bhawaiya* and used as the tool to speak against the patriarchal inequalities that cause women's suffering. The deviant words of the woman subject of *Bhawaiya,* and other folk songs, are neither true representations of facts, nor effectively acceptable acts, but regardless the songs offer possibilities of keeping these emotions alive. This can be done by reproducing and making connections through the temporal subjectivities they create through writing, performing and listening to the songs. Notably, neither the emotions of women nor the female temporal subjectivity the songs create is limited to a biological gender binary. Folk songs exist in a place of constant negotiation for the people of *Bhawaiya,* who engage with their subjectivities and emotions. Negotiations are also stirred up by debates on authenticity and the power relations between the authenticating authorities. The music genre becomes a combined sphere of normative hegemony of identity politics and at the same time a counter-hegemonic site for rejection and defiance. The feminist potential in this is that the songs provide a space for the female voice to express desire and anger, as a subject. The subversive agencies of women that *Bhawaiya* carries and connects facilitates a social imaginary where women are not reduced to an object of desire or a mere victim.

A Blind Spot in The Identity Boundaries

The historical context from which *Bhawaiya* emerged is the complex ground of the anti-colonial nationalist identity construction in Bengal. Bangla folk songs were used as a symbol of the essence of the Bengali rural soul with the rise of the Bengali Renaissance in the beginning of the 20th century; especially after the first non-Western Nobel Laurette Rabindranath Tagore, the literary guru of Bengal, showed his admiration for *Baul* songs and Lalon Fakir. The rise of Bengali nationalism was a filtration process where a variety of elements were excluded, including the deviant elements of folk songs. In constructing Bengali nationalism, folk elements were picked up as national symbols, but also filtered and purified of their deviant elements, including esoteric sexual practices and the philosophical aspects that were not compatible with the modernist quest of that era. In addition, through the construction of the idea of *bhadramahila*, the day to day connections and dependency between the elite Bengali woman and the poor folk singers who used to beg at their houses, has been dissociated. The idea of strictly divided private and public spheres was needed to uphold the superiority of the Indian home, which represents the heart of spiritual India — a sphere the woman of the house was expected to be responsible for. During the construction of this ‘new woman’ identity, an emphasis was put on dissociating any connection with deviant practises and the songs and lives of poor women.

The other elements that were excluded from Bengali nationalism — through the Sanskritisation of the Bangla language and its standardisation in the colonial era — are the diversity of linguistic expression of Bengal. This also resulted in excluding the expression of emotions through words. This was vital, especially for the Rajbangshi language where *Bhawaiya* songs originated.

At the same time, when Hindu spirituality became the symbol of this Bengali nationalism, it excluded Muslims. Although the elite Muslims kept using the term *bhadralok* and for Muslim women, *bhadramahila*, and despite the progressive feminist voices present through many Muslim women’s writings, from the very beginning of Bengali nationalism Muslims have been stereotyped as regressive. This original binary of Bengali versus Muslim identity re-emerged after Bengal was partitioned for religious reasons. To resist the domination and oppression of geographically, culturally and linguistically far away West Pakistan, East Pakistan (Bangladesh) prioritised linguistic-cultural Bengali identity over religion, which strengthened the anti-Islamic essence of Bengali nationalism. However, after the bloody war of independence in Bangladesh, the debates on Islam versus Bengali binary identity remained crucial in political and cultural spheres: Islam was used for political purposes and slowly grew in importance in the majority of people’s lives.

However, through all these filtration and exclusion processes of Bengali nationalism, *Bhawaiya* and the deviant elements of all the folk song traditions of Bengal still flourished. *Bhawaiya* remained subversively present in the margins of religious, cultural-linguistic, and political boundaries of identity. Here I argue that since borders and margins demarcate norms, these margins are blind spots of the patriarchal public sphere and hence provide opportunities for subverting normative social space. Acceptance of *Bhawaiya*’s ‘illicit’ passion, its production and reproduction, together with its subversive existence, was influenced by its marginal location.

FOLK SONGS OF LIVED AND EMBODIED EXPERIENCE

Bhawaiya folk songs are considered to be one of the three main institutionalised folk song genres of Bangla folk songs, commonly called *Baul*, *Bhatiali* and *Bhawaiya* — amongst numerous folk song traditions. Through the process of institutionalisation, the essential differences between them was defined. However, in practice, they share not only similar tunes and styles, but according to most researchers, come from the same performative genre '*pala gaan'*. The difference between *Bhatiali* and *Bhawaiya* is mostly defined geographically; although, as Rongili Biswas told me, *Bhawaiya* lyrics are much more direct and the story of the woman is mostly linked to her day to day material life and emotions — in *Bhatiali,* it is a bit more indirect. In *Bhawaiya*, the female subject of the songs talks in the first person and tells her story; most often about a passionate love for a departed lover or anger about her marriage and in-laws. These voices do not fit properly into the narratives of oppressed and passive women victims of patriarchy, as the subject of the songs are the agents of their own emotional defiance and deviance. On the other hand, *Bhatiali* is more aligned with rivers, with metaphors of tide, with passion. However, as I analysed in chapter three, these two folk song genres have more similarities than differences. Although the deviant words and emotions of defiance in *Bhawaiya* are often avoided, they are undeniably present. *Baul* songs are considered very different from all other folk song genres and are given superior praise for being spiritual. In the rise of Bengali nationalism, *Baul* songs of Bengal were picked up and constructed using numerous similar trends entangled in the lives of rural people of broader Bengal and It was especially needed to filter the esoteric sexual ritual in the *Baul* tradition in order to reduce it to a folk song genre. The idea of embodied sexuality in *Baul* traditions usually interpreted as a 'spiritual' quest, using the modernist mind-body dualist approach to analyse the *Baul* philosophy. The material versus spiritual hierarchical binary of modern Western thought dominated in this construction, which still remains unchallenged. However, the day to day life of *Baul* women is very different than the *bhadralok* idea of spiritual superiority of *Baul* tradition. To fit in to that male *Baul* image, despite the feminist possibilities in *Baul* traditions that many scholars explored, the lived experience of female *Bauls* are in a constant negotiation with normative gender roles, which are not so different from non-*Baul* women.

By analysing the generic boundaries between the three main folk song genres, and their similarities, I propose a reconstruction of their generic borders through the material and lived experiences that challenge the hierarchy of spiritual love over carnal desire. The idea of embodied emotions can link all the Bangla folk song genres and support a feminist reconstruction of their essential difference by challenging the nationalist and modernist interpretation of folk traditions. Through the voices of deviant emotions, I proposed a reconstruction of their generic boundary from the perspectives of the 'female voice of desire' which is grounded in real, day to day, material, lived and embodied experience.

ON BECOMING FEMALE SUBJECT

It was generally accepted that *Bhawaiya* songs were originally written by subaltern male rural workers who had to go away from the village to pursue work as either a bull-cart driver or an elephant tamer. When they had to stay away over-night, for their own entertainment, they used to make these songs from the story of the women in their lives, who couldn't express their own sorrow and desire. However, through my research, I showed that this idea could be easily challenged. I discovered that the tradition's origin story was not homogenous, but also imagined and constructed to fit into the contemporary ideas of the past. It supported the idea of 'women as victim' and 'men as saviour' and created a comfortable way of explaining the deviant and defiant elements of those songs. The folk song traditions are collective cultural products, and contemporary ideas about the individual authorship of intellectual property rights are incompatible with them. The notion of individual authorship does not align with folk songs, especially when the author and their gender identity is also impossible to locate. I showed in the research that both men and women made, sang and orally disseminated folksongs.

It is significant that the story of *Bhawaiya* is almost always the story of a woman expressing her desire to meet her departed lover, often showing and illicit affair beyond marriage, or an expression of anger for the oppression of in-laws, from the subject position of an 'I'. The woman subject of *Bhawaiya* is not real but symbolises the permissiveness of the defiant and deviant emotions of real women. The defiance and emotional deviance in the songs maintain their acceptability because of the fictionality of the woman's stories. However, those fictional stories are so close to the lives of women, that they automatically connect with those who feel the same way. Through writing, making, performing and listening, the songs not only voice emotions, *Bhawaiya* lyrics and tunes create female subjectivity by connecting those emotions with living bodies. Further, it is not only that many of the songwriters were and are female, but also that their agency is visible even if they are not the writers of the songs. The deviant emotions of love, or the anger towards the husbands and in-laws, do not fit into the image of mute, passive and suffering women. Moreover, from my fieldwork, I witnessed, the agency of many *Bhawaiya* women, in their negotiations and constant struggles to expand their space, limited by normative gender boundaries, while remaining hopeful in changing them. Through my research, I deconstructed the 'male writer, female victim' image, which is used as a comfortable explanation for *Bhawaiya* songs in the normative and *bhadralok* discourse and I also showed that the women who are writers, singers or listeners of all folk songs, are in a constant negotiation with normative boundaries. Their agency is compatible with the stories of the woman in *Bhawaiya* and other folk songs lyrics. The deviant emotions in the songs supports a defiance of the normative boundaries where the women are agent and subject, not the passive victims who cannot tell their own story, given their dependence on men to do so. I argue, neither the authors, nor the singers who uphold the songs by 'being woman of *Bhawaiya*' are bound to the biological body of a woman, but are rather a part of the process of 'becoming-woman' through these emotions. And by becoming those women, they can biologically be of any gender, as the temporal subjectivities created through the voice of the songs are female.

By 'female', I refer to the sexually marginalised through a combination of sexual difference theory with the concept of subalternity and propose a redefinition of the term 'sexual subaltern' that is not defined by the essential identities of sexual orientation or practices, but by the power relations between the sexual agents. The subaltern here is the opposite of a phallocentric sexual agent, they are a multiple and fluid sexual subject. This 'female' does not reinforce the male-female binary, but rather connects the femaleness of any biological body or being, countering masculine and phallocentric sexual oneness. I reconstructed these 'female' subjectivities and created a fluid transformative subjectivity, following Deleuze's emphasis on the undoing of the gender binary (Braidotti 2003; Deleuze and Guattari 2004; Bankston 2017). I argue that through the songs, the songwriters, performers, singers and listeners construct this temporal subjectivity of becoming-woman of *Bhawaiya* through emotions of defiance and deviance. The feminist potential of this subjectivity is that it challenges the passive victim image of women, through the idea of a constantly negotiated agency. It also proposes a more fluid subjectivity of 'becoming woman', that is not bound to the biological binary of gender

The fluid subjectivity of 'becoming-woman' of *Bhawaiya,* connects bodies through the emotions it carries, which makes contact in an emotional atmosphere. The subjectivities it creates are linked with the emotional atmosphere that it creates and connects to the stakeholders. On the one hand, they are temporal, but on the other hand, they are constructed through the reality of people's lives and their day to day subversive agency negotiating with norms. While the subversive desire of women, overwhelmed by emotions, does not necessarily shatter norms, it keeps the desire to overcome them alive. These temporal subjectivities are not inactive because the emotions the songs create are not independent of the marginality of class and gender, but rather provide tools to negotiate them with.

EMOTION OF DEVIANCE AND DEFIANCE

As discussed, the emotional blueprint that *Bhawaiya* carries is not only limited to this genre, but diffuses into and overlaps with other genres of folk songs; from the most remote performances to the capital city and the virtual sphere. *Bhawaiya* and other folk songs evoke emotions though their reproduction in different situations: from the most marginalised to the most elite, from local to global and in different media. Especially in contemporary times, Bangla folk songs have become very complex and their generic borders have become undetectable through contemporary reproduction with modern instruments and technological changes that not only stir up debates about authenticity, but also the emotional effect created. The different types of live performances, listening and singing can create different emotional effects on different bodies, in not exactly the same way that the lyrics of the songs suggest. However, they are not completely independent of the lyrics and the tunes. Moreover, the emotions created by different types of performances in different situations do not only connect the intersubjective bodies in a specific moment, but are also situated historically. During the musical gatherings, everyone is historically constructed within the combination of all the subjectivities. Influenced by Sara Ahmed's (2013) argument that emotion is a form of cultural politics and world-making, I do not only dismantle the social and individual binary in the study of emotions through sociological and psychological ideas, but want to argue that the folk songs connect the bodies to an emotional atmosphere that is not felt in the same way by everyone present in the atmosphere; as the processing of emotions are also part of the thought process that is linked to structural power relations. At the same time, the emotional atmosphere is not like a thing that passes from one body to another without change. It sticks to the bodies with their differences in subjectivities produced by social power relations, but this subjectivity is not a fixed ‘being’, rather it is always a process of ‘becoming’ and is therefore temporal. The female subject of the song can be the subject of desire and voice, but also can be objectified by the pornographic expectations of the male listeners. However, that does not dismiss the agency of the women expressing their love, desire, anger or scorn and the possibilities of becoming the woman of the songs, through its listeners and performers. I argue the emotions of folk songs work in-between being, while the singers, performers and listeners sing. This connects with the state of becoming-woman in extent: the emotions change and move through the being and creates the process of becoming.

NEGOTIATIONS OF AUTHENTICITY

The subjectivities constructed through the folk songs, by becoming the woman of the songs, through the emotions inscribed, raised issues about authenticity. The authenticity of the songs is part of the debate about authenticating the appropriate emotions to feel, pass on and reproduce. For which the question of authenticity remains entangled in every aspect of Bangla folk songs. To address the issue, I discussed the trajectory from the idea of authentic cultural elements in classical anthropology to the contemporary critiques of the idea of an ahistorically bound culture. In classical anthropology, the study of folk songs has traditionally been a part of the quest for authentic culture and treated as a cultural text of emotions. Criticising this method, the contemporary question of authenticity in anthropology invests in how some cultural elements, such as folk songs, become the authentic symbol for the culture and how their boundaries are controlled by authenticating authorities. I thus re-examined the definitive border of folk songs and the authenticating agents and their interrelations. In defining folk songs, the emphasis is on being a tradition that is reproduced orally and selected and modified by the collective memory of the people of a culture.

Folk songs can be differentiated from mass culture in that they exist outside the sphere of mass capitalistic production and marketing. The connection with their original roots became the most significant characteristic in this definition. The idea that if a tradition is disassociated from its origin and is reproduced by a market, it will no longer depend on memory, thus the validity of emotions in the culture will be lost and cannot be considered as the cultural text of emotions. However, in reality, the boundary is blurry as no cultural production is outside of the capitalist market now. According to the definition of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), the songs produced by individual composers but rooted in the living tradition of a community and uninfluenced by popular culture can be considered folk songs. This brings up the problem of differentiation between popular culture and folk songs. If songs are produced by culture, not for the market for mass production, this culture can retain the rights to these folksongs, but at the same time, contemporary Bangla folksongs will be impossible to find if they are not recorded for market production.

In this context, I explained the different ideas of alienation that Saris used to explain the debate on authenticity for cultural elements. Using Sapir's approach on genuine and spurious culture to emphasise the difficulties around the ownership of the tradition even in the era of mass cultural production (Saris 2013). The process of authenticity comes through the interconnection between inner and outer spheres. An interaction occurs between a subject being true to themselves and searching for their true belonging in cultural forms. With this perspective, I analysed five different agents of authenticity in contemporary Bangla folk songs, situated in the power relations with national-corporate hegemony, and the rejection of them through the production of a counter-hegemony. However, it is only for the purpose of analysis, that this categorisation is reductive and entangled with numerous heterogenous agents.

On the one hand, the romantic aesthetic Bengali nationalist and *bhadralok* discourse of authenticity historically worked to define and filter the folksong traditions, and on the other hand in the rise of Islamic morality in Bangladesh, the process of Islamisation of folk songs influenced another rigorous filtration. These two trends are situated in the binary of historical Bengali versus Muslim identity construction. Yet, their filtration and definition of authentic folk songs has worked in a very similar way: excluding deviant words and emotions that defy the normative and dominant nationalist-religious identity constructions. The esoteric sexual rituals in *Baul* tradition had either been avoided or excluded from this filtration. They consider *Baul* as simply a song tradition, by decontextualising its practice and philosophical aspects. Moreover, the deviant words and defiant emotions of *Bhawaiya* had been filtered by these two authorities and the woman subject of *Bhawaiya* is represented as the passive victim of patriarchy whose story is voiced by the male saviour-writer.

Conversely, rejecting the dominant nationalist debate of Bengali versus Islam identity crisis, the next generation (after the war of independence), became interested in the folk song tradition as part of the quest of searching for identity and true soul. This generation of urban, educated young people were mainly driven to discover the *Baul* philosophy — amongst all other folk traditions — because of its alternative and hippie appeal, already known worldwide by 'Western Baul' (Urban 1999b). However, since *Baul* philosophy is very different from the modern-Western way of learning, an authentic quest for Lalon and *Baul* for the urban educated young became a matter of debate.

In the meantime, the most widespread influence of Bangla folk songs grew from the '90s with the rise of internal urban migration during the garments industry boom in Bangladesh. Marginal people from the village brought their folk tunes and lyrics that reflected the transition from rural livelihood to urban complexities, with new metaphors and words for the emotions of loss and longings for their old way of living and feeling. Their simple down to earth words and apparently raw compositions made it possible to produce cassettes in a very short time. Their popularity and market expanded beyond the middle-class music industry. The lyrics of these songs are often deviant and sexualised, and sometimes fiercely express anger and sarcasm, from a female subject position. One of the icons of this genre is Momtaz Begum whose lyrics express the emotions of love, despair, deception and desire from her day to day experience — unashamedly. Her songs are extremely popular with both male and female listeners. Sometimes, despite the fact that most of her songs are fierce with female passion, few of her songs are sexualised by male pornographic interpretations. These songs are called *Baul* to the subaltern singer, producers and listeners, although *Baul* researchers and scholars would disagree with that definition. However, as I discussed earlier, the construction of *Baul* as a tradition was part of a historical selection process that includes many similar forms, for which it can be argued that the idea of '*Baul*' is different between scholars and many marginal folk music practitioners, producers and listeners. For scholarly purposes Mohammad (2014) called this new genre 'urban folk'. The expansion of the market for urban folk inspired a young, enthusiastic, educated generation as well; folk tunes became one of the biggest trends for this generation and came to be called folk-fusion. Both types of folk reproduction were mixed with Western instruments and ignited an authenticity debate from the first two authorities authenticating folk songs: the Bengali aesthetic project and Islamist morality.

However, despite heated debate and criticism, the undeniable popularity of both the subaltern urban folk and urban educated folk fusion, the most powerful agent of authentication, the Nation-state and corporate representation included them through the folk festivals from rural to international level. As the most potent authenticating authority, the nation-state and corporates started the negotiation between national symbolism and popularity. Due to this, Momtaz, the icon of the urban-folk genre, was chosen as a national icon. However, while Momtaz and her popularity were undeniable, many other fierce female folk singers could not manage to make space in the nation-state and corporate authenticating sphere. There remains a constant negotiation between the hegemonic identity constructions of the authenticating authorities and the counter-hegemonic defiance of alternative musical trends.

CONCLUSION

This research, which initially started with the enthusiastic exploration of female subjectivity through a genre of Bangla folk songs, uncovered an overwhelming number of research spheres. I was reminded of the famous Bangla phrase '*kecho khurta saap*' (finding snake to dig for worms), indicating a much deeper and more vast option than the initial goal. I encountered numerous aspects that needed to be explored critically. However, in order for me to focus on my specific objectives, I could not expand on all of the information my research revealed, and to only skim these ideas would not do them justice. Here I want to mention a few important aspects from my investigation that could encourage future research.

There are important studies which have been done to understand the legalisation of marriage in the colonial era, which had established more flexible practises of conjugality, especially the formation of Hindu marriage and conjugality (T. Sarkar 2001; C. Gupta 2005; Basu 2011; Majumdar 2009). As a shared colonial past, the history of the legalisation of marriage in the British Raj can be applied to Bangladesh's historical context. However, as Bangladesh was a Muslim majority and marginal to the Calcutta centric colonial reform, the transformation of marriage legislation in Bangladesh was complicated by the practice of polygamy and flexibility in divorce allowed in the religion. Given that both of these factors are considered symbols of regression for women, the colonial legal intervention was viewed as an unquestionable good. As for one of my respondents, the flexibility of marriage was seen as a savage practice, while folk songs from that time indicate there was a space for women's deviance within marriage, which can actually be seen as the expression of defiance of the marital oppression of the women. Although I showed these possibilities of defiance, my research was not a historical reconstruction. I felt that, from a post-colonial and a feminist perspective, a historical exploration of the dynamics of the flexibilities of marriage that the folk songs indicates before the legalisation of marriage is needed and encourages new fields of research.

On the one hand my research is inspired by the principles of Subaltern Studies, despite differences about on the idea of resistance and insurgencies. On the other hand, the topic of sexuality is a timely burning issue in scholarly investigation (I. Chatterjee 2012) to which my research is intended to contribute. Through my research, I found many gaps connecting subalternity and sexuality where scholarly investigation is needed. Many scholarly works have been focused on different sexual orientations and practices in the Indian context that challenge hetero-sexual binary thinking. However, I proposed a reconceptualising of subaltern sexuality not only to define subaltern sexuality by sexual orientation and practices, but also to explore the power relations complicated by sexual becoming. This reconceptualising might include women in heterosexual reproductive sexuality as well as men, by challenging the essential identification of sexual being. From this perspective, it opened up possibilities of new research not only for sexuality studies, but also feminist and post-colonial studies, using ethnographic investigation. Especially in the context of Bangladesh, the study of sexuality is severely limited. In my research with *Bhawaiya*, I focused on how 'female' subjectivity challenges the gender binary, however many other folk song genres and traditions can be a source of investigation for more fluid ideas about sexuality. Where numerous studies had been done on *Baul* traditions, a rigorous ethnographic exploration challenging the modernist *bhadralok* ideas of *Baul* is limited. As the focus of my research was not about the *Baul* traditions, I did not do any ethnographic field work about them. Moreover, numerous other traditions bear the dynamic ideas of gender-bending and fluid sexuality of the subaltern, which are in need of proper scholarly investigation. Moreover, the theoretical frame I propose through my research involves looking at the dynamic power relations of sexuality and gender fluidity through the lens of folk songs and traditional symbols. Such a research interest is not limited to

Bangladesh, opening up a scholarly scope for the analysis of many societies, wherein my further research interest is expanding.

Moreover, the contemporary virtual market, in complicating marginal cultural production, challenges old debates between mass culture and popular cultural production, providing ample areas for further study. The virtual sphere opened up a new formation of power relations and cultural products carrying and connecting emotions to the subscribers and listeners. In my research, I only touched on this aspect, but this field needs a more focused exploration.

Not only scholarly works, but different mediums of art can also be an important contribution for challenging nationalist and normative narratives around gender. I argued in the thesis that Bhawaiya and many other Bangla folk songs exists in-between identity borders and narratives. However, not only this approach can lead researchers to explore more cultural products for their counter-hegemonic possibilities, I hope it will also encourage artists to create new cultural productions that may challenge fixed gender narratives. There are many creative works already being produced in this sphere — I already mentioned and analysed alternative folk musical productions by Anusheh and Rahee. By the time I finish writing this thesis, I discovered a few more folk fusions with rebelliously feminist elements. However, not only the music, but also other creative works like film and drama can contribute to creating a counter-hegemonic sphere. There are already a few films that contributed an alternative picture to the ‘passive’ victim image of women in nationalist narratives and I hope this thesis will encourage more artistic production incorporating folk elements to challenge those narratives.

Last but not least, further consideration that this thesis provides is the deconstruction of ‘deviance’ as a form of defiance. It creates a path for a scholarly quest to see ‘deviance’ without its negative connotation and as a possibility to defy oppressive systems. In an oppressive social, political and legal system that nurtures systematic (hetero)sexism, racism and xenophobia, being ‘deviant’ can be seen as an act of protest and a useful tool for subversive political acts. It is significant, given the current political situation threatening democratic rights worldwide, in particular to Bangladesh. With the recent human rights violations in Bangladesh — including forced disappearances and legal actions against freedom of speech — it is becoming impossible to critique the government and all oppressive values and systems. In this situation ‘deviance’ can be seen as a political act as well as an excuse to silence the resistance by the government. Even scholarly works that challenge conservative values can be a target of the government and can be labelled as ‘deviance’. Through this thesis, I want to challenge this by reconstructing ‘deviance’ as a form of resistance.

To conclude this thesis, I argue that Bhawaiya and Bangla folk songs are a sphere of constant negotiations between many stakeholders’ internal sense of authentic tradition in connection with an outer structural identity politics. The emotions of the subject in the songs can provide a space for female agency that can challenge the comfortable ‘woman victim, man saviour’ idea. I hence argue that Bhawaiya and Bangla folk songs exist in the marginal blind spot of the dominant binary narratives of cultural-national and gender identification and thus have the potential for the construction of sexual subjectivities that negotiate risk and fulfilment in different socio-cultural contexts.

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